[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

HOSEA-MALACHI

HOSEA

[Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.6-7)

DISCOURSE 1142

GOD CORRECTS AND RECLAIMS HIS PEOPLE

[Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.6-7). Behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

THE generality of mankind are very incompetent judges of the dispensations of Providence. Indeed, for the most part, they quite mistake their nature and tendency; and draw conclusions from them which the Scripture will by no means justify. They suppose that prosperity is a token of Divine love and approbation; and that affliction, on the contrary, is a mark of God's displeasure. But an inspired writer assures us, that "we cannot know good or evil by all that is before us." Considering, however, that we are prone to forget God in our abundance, and that the rod of correction is the means whereby thousands are turned to God, we have reason rather to esteem affliction, at least as the more needful, if not the richer, blessing of the two. Certain it is that there are multitudes now in Heaven, who owed their first serious impressions to some heavy chastisement; and who must forever say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Nor can we doubt but that the good of mankind is one principal end for which God puts the cup of sorrow into their hands.

A remarkable proof of this we have in the passage before us The Jews were continually provoking God to jealousy, by depending on alliances with heathens, and worshiping their idols God, ever slow to anger, and delighting in mercy, used all possible methods to reclaim them He had tried what kindness would effect, and had found no success He now determined to take the rod; and sent them word by the prophet, that he would punish them for their offences; but that the end of their punishment should be to reduce them to a happier and better state: "Therefore," says he, (because you are so bent to follow your own evil ways) "behold, I will hedge up," etc

In these words we see,

I. What means God uses to reclaim his people—

Though God could effect his purposes instantly, by a mere act of his will, yet he is pleased in general to accomplish them by means suited to the end In reclaiming his people,

1. He obstructs their ways—

In their unregenerate state they run on, like others, in the ways of sin But when his time is come, he instructs them either by temporal calamities or by spiritual convictions

In the common course of events he deprives them of health, fortune, friends; or perhaps by their own imprudence brings disorders or distress upon them.

These trials, however, of themselves have only a momentary effect; and therefore he accompanies them with the secret energy of his Spirit, convincing them of their guilt and danger, and making them tremble through fear of his eternal judgments He "meets them as an armed man," so that they dare no longer to "rush on upon the thick bosses of his buckler."

Thus he "hedges up their way with thorns," and makes their progress in sin very difficult and painful.

2. He disappoints their endeavors—

God saw the Jews bent on forming alliances with Egypt and Assyria notwithstanding all his warnings to renounce them He therefore sent them into captivity in Babylon, where they could have no communications with Egypt or Assyria; and thus "built up a wall, that they could not find their former lovers."

Thus we have our idols which we are prone to follow, notwithstanding all the troubles or convictions that are sent to wean us from them. Perhaps the world is the object of our affections; and we weary ourselves in the pursuit of its honors or emoluments. God therefore secretly blasts our endeavors, as he did those of his people of old [Hag. 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai. 1.6); [Hag. 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai. 1.9); and thus shuts us up as it were, unto himself, that we may seek him as our portion. Perhaps our great idol is self-righteousness: we desire to "establish a righteousness of our own," instead of relying simply on the righteousness of Christ. God therefore leaves us to our own feeble efforts, that, by our repeated violations of our own vows and covenants, we may be constrained to look from ourselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, if we persist in breaking through "the hedge," he will interpose "a wall;" that "when we follow after our lovers, we may not overtake them, and when we seek them, we may not be able to find them." If smaller difficulties will not answer his end, he will send greater, until he has accomplished his whole will concerning us.

These interpositions, however, operate in a rational way; as will be seen by considering,

II. What effects he produces on their minds—

Where calamities are sent without grace to sanctify them, they only harden those whom they ought to reclaim. But when the grace of God co-operates with his providence, it works in his people,

1. A sense of their guilt in having departed from him—

They could once sin without any fear or remorse: at most, they only viewed sin as an opposition to God's will: but, when the Spirit of God has opened their eyes, they see it as an act of spiritual adultery; and they begin to feel as a woman would, who, after having departed from a kind and loving "husband," was just returning to a sense of her duty. How would she blush at the remembrance of her conduct! how would she be ready to doubt whether her husband would ever receive her again, and whether it were possible for her ever again to be the object of his affections! Thus a soul rendered truly sensible of its obligations to God the "husband" of his people, feels a proportionate degree of shame in having departed from him, of shame mixed with self-loathing and self-abhorrence [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.25).

2. A consciousness of their folly in having lost his favor—

It once appeared folly to serve God: but now this sentiment is reversed. Even in the days of their unregeneracy they had a secret thought, that the godly, whom they despised, were happier than themselves. But, when divinely instructed, they see that they have been "feeding upon ashes, and that a deceived heart has turned them aside [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 44.20). If ever they have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," they cannot fail of looking back with grief on the blessedness they have lost [Galatians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.15). They confess that "once it was better with them than now;" that, in departing from God, they "forsook the fountain of living waters;" and that, in seeking happiness in the creature, they "hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13)."

3. A determination of heart to return to him—

They no longer say, "We will follow after other lovers verse 5;" but, "We will return to our first husband." They view God as their rightful Lord, to whom they are bound by every tie; and, with indignation against themselves for their past conduct, they say, "Other lords besides you have had dominion over us; but by you only will we make mention of your name [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.13)."

The whole of this effect is strongly exemplified in the prodigal son—

The prodigal departed from his father, and spent his substance in riotous living. God, intending to reclaim him, sent a famine into the country where he had taken up his residence. (However casual this might appear, it was ordained of God for his good.) He would not regard this "hedge," or return to his father while he could get any other support. He therefore hired himself to a citizen of that place to feed his swine; and when almost famished, preferred the husks which the swine ate of, to the bread he might obtain by returning home. God seeing this obstinate reluctance in him, so ordered it, that, notwithstanding he had spent all his fortune there, no man should have pity enough to relieve his wants. At last, constrained by necessity, and stopped as by "a wall," the prodigal is induced to return to his father's house, where he finds a reception beyond all expectation kind and gracious. Thus misfortune upon misfortune, or conviction upon conviction, are sent to us, until, distressed on every side, and disappointed in every attempt to extricate ourselves, we are "made willing" to return to God.

We may learn from this subject,

1. The depravity of man—

We never seek God, until we are constrained by his providence and grace to do so: and, to the latest hour of our lives, we need hedges and walls to keep us in the way of duty. What an astonishing proof is this of our utter alienation from God, yes, of our enmity against him! Let us blush and be confounded before him.

2. The end of trials—

They "spring not from the dust," but are sent for our good. They are like the angel that met Balaam [Numbers 22:22-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 22.22-33); and our obstinacy in breaking through these obstructions would have repeatedly subjected us to the sword of vengeance, if our God had not still exercised mercy and forbearance towards us. Let us then "hear the rod, and him that has appointed it [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.9)."

3. The happiness of a religious life—

No one ever gave himself up truly to God without finding that "his ways were ways of pleasantness and peace." No one ever declined from him, that did not suffer loss in respect of present happiness, as well as of his future reward. Let all professors then "be sober and watch unto prayer;" that instead of saying, "It was once better with me than now," they may "make their profiting to appear unto all," and be enabled to say on every succeeding day, "It never was so well with me as at this present time."

[Hosea 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.14-15)

DISCOURSE 1143

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH PENITENTS

[Hosea 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.14-15). Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her: and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.

WHOEVER is at all conversant with the holy Scriptures, must know, that they are, in many parts, highly figurative. If we examine many of our Lord's expressions, and indeed some whole discourses, we shall see, that they were unintelligible to those who interpreted them only according to their literal meaning; because they were intended to be understood in in a mystical and spiritual sense: hence our Lord took occasion to inform them, that the words which he spoke unto them were "spirit and life." This is yet still more observable in the prophetic writings, which almost always must be taken in a mystical, as well as literal sense; and indeed in many places, as Bishop Lowth has well observed, the spiritual meaning is more true, and more immediately intended, than the literal. This, I apprehend, is the case in the passage before us. God has been declaring, what he would do in order to reclaim the ten tribes from their idolatries; that he would "hedge up their way with thorns, and make a wall, so that they should not be able to find their former ways," I. e. (as it is more fully set forth in the ninth and following verses) that he would deprive them of all their national blessings, and deliver them into the hand of their Assyrian enemies: then, in my text, he adds, "Therefore (it should rather be translated, 'nevertheless') I will allure her," and so on. He had, in verse 7, mentioned, that in consequence of the obstructions which he would put in their way, they should be brought to see their sin and folly, and to say, "I will return unto my first husband:" and now he proceeds to declare, how he would deal with them, when they should be brought to that frame of mind; that he would allure her, and give her the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." Now this has never been literally accomplished: for, if we except about twelve thousand Israelites, who accompanied the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in their return from the Babylonish captivity, none of the ten tribes have ever yet returned to their native country. We must therefore look for a spiritual sense to this passage: and here we have the authority of an inspired writer to interpret it, as relating to the conversion of the Gentile world, and the deliverance of God's chosen people from a state of bondage to sin and Satan. Paul, in [Romans 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.25), speaking expressly on the call of the Gentiles, quotes the last verse of this chapter in Hosea, and declares that this prophecy then received its completion. We may therefore without hesitation consider the passage as declaring the manner in which God deals with his penitent and contrite people, when once the Church, or any individual in it, is so wrought upon by temporal calamities or spiritual convictions, as to say, "I will go and return unto my first, my rightful husband." God says, as in my text, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her; and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." In declaring from hence how God will deal with his returning people, we may observe, that he will encourage them,

I. With present comforts—

The readiness of God to receive sinners is not discovered in anything more than in his mode of dealing with them in their return to him: if there be only "some good in them," he is sure to notice it with some testimony of his approbation: in proportion as they advance towards him, he makes greater advances towards a reconciliation with them: and when he sees that they begin in earnest to seek his face, he will cause them to abound in consolations. "He will allure them:" we must not suppose that God will really deceive any one; but yet there is a sense wherein he may be said to "allure" men: he will conceal from the view of penitents such things as might alarm and terrify them: he will feed them, while they are yet babes, with milk; and will withhold the stronger meat, which they are not yet able to digest. There are many things which he will say to them at a future period; but from which he diverts their attention at present, as from things which they cannot receive: and thus he leads them gently, as their strength will bear. He now also in a peculiar manner reveals himself to the soul, and fills it with heavenly delight. The sinner coming first to a sense of God's favor, is borne up, as it were, on eagles' wings: he seems to be breathing a purer air; I had almost said, to be living in a new world. His sensations are so entirely changed, that one may, almost without an hyperbole, call him "a new creature:" from being dead as to all spiritual things, he begins to enjoy a spiritual life: from being in total darkness, he is "brought forth into marvelous light:" from dreading God's displeasure, he feels "his love shed abroad in his heart." Now therefore he supposes he never can lose the savor of these things: "Am I a dog," thinks he, that I should ever more offend this gracious Being, who has thus freely forgiven all my trespasses? Alas! little knowing what depravity and deceitfulness there is in the human heart, he concludes that he shall now bear down all before him: the corruptions of his own heart seem to be so mortified, as to be almost extinct: the world now is as nothing in his eyes: and Satan himself, formidable as he is, now appears to be "bruised under his feet." Perhaps he has learned, as it were by wrote, to acknowledge himself weak, frail, and inwardly depraved; but the frame of his mind is like David's, when he said, "My mountain is so strong, I shall never be moved." Thus does God allure penitents: nor is this any more than what is necessary at the first; for their habits of sin are deeply rooted; their attachment to the things of time and sense is very strong; and the opposition they will afterwards meet with from the world, the flesh, and the devil, is so powerful, that they need all possible encouragement; they need time to get strength; they need to taste the sweetness of religion now, in order that when they come to endure the cross, they may be able to testify, from their own experience, that religion, with all its difficulties, is an incomparably better portion than the world. This was remarkably exemplified at the first publication of the Gospel: the three thousand converts "continued daily with one accord in the temple, and ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people." The favor of man they had very little reason to expect: but God saw fit to keep his infant Church for a little time from persecution, in order that their happiness might have no alloy, and that they might grow in strength, and be able to endure it afterwards, when it should come upon them: and thus he allured them, as it were, to a steady and resolute adherence to his cause.

Further, God says, "I will bring her into the wilderness." Many able and judicious Commentators translate these words somewhat differently, "I will allure her after I have brought her into the wilderness:" and this I should suppose to be the more proper rendering of the words, because the sense is then clear; namely, "After having afflicted her for her sins, I will comfort her on her return to me." But, if we retain the present version, we must understand the 'wilderness' to mean, not a state of affliction, but a state of solitude and retirement: and this makes very good sense, and exactly agrees with the experience of young Christians. When God allures them in the manner we have before represented, they immediately forsake the company of the world, and seek their God in retirement: they now love solitude; they now never feel themselves less alone than when alone: nor would they forego their secret fellowship with God for all the world. There are many seasons when they would account the presence of their very dearest friend to be a grievous interruption. But, however true the words are in this sense, I apprehend the other to be the better version of them; and therefore passing by this, we observe further, That God will speak comfortably to those whom he thus allures. He makes his word now to be exceeding precious to their souls: he opens their understandings to understand it; and they begin to hear God speaking in and by it: and O! how delightful are the promises! With what eagerness do they embrace the promises! With what unspeakable pleasure do they now apply them to themselves! Under a sense of guilt, they now see that they may have pardon for sins of the deepest dye: under a consciousness of their own insufficiency for anything that is good, they see here in the sacred records an inexhaustible treasure of grace and strength. In every situation and circumstance of life they find, that there is a word suited to their condition: they hear the voice of God in the promises; and by these he speaks indeed most comfortably to them. There is somewhat peculiar in the original words; literally translated, they mean, "I will speak to her heart:" and this is very properly rendered, "I will speak comfortably to her;" for God speaks to the outward ears of thousands to very little purpose: he invites, but they are not entreated; he promises, but they are not comforted: but, when once he speaks to the heart, then comfort flows in apace, and "they rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified."

Thus we see how God, alluring the sinner, and speaking comfortably to him, leads him on by present comforts. We proceed to show, how he encourages him,

II. With future prospects—

He who is born of God, is indeed born to a great inheritance: nor is he in danger of expecting too much at the hands of God; for, as he has said in general, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it," so he says in the passage before us, "I will give her vineyards from hence, and the valley of Achor, for a door of hope." You will call to mind what was observed in the beginning of this discourse, that this passage was never literally fulfilled, and that Paul has explained it in a spiritual and mystical sense: and this we now repeat, lest our construction, or rather our application of it should appear fanciful or forced. Vineyards were a very important part of the produce of the land of Canaan; insomuch, that when the spies went to search out the land, they brought back a cluster of grapes upon the shoulders of two men, as the best proof of the fertility of the soil. When the Lord therefore promises to give his people "vineyards from thence," he means by it a supply of every temporal blessing, which he will bestow upon them from the very instant that they thus return unto him. If therefore we apply this spiritually, we may understand by it a supply of all spiritual blessings, which God will grant to his people from the time that they come to him with real penitence and contrition. Just as when our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," (by which he meant all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit,) so, I apprehend, when God says in my text, "I will give her vineyards," he means every kind of temporal and spiritual blessing. It is added further, "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Achor was a very rich valley, so called from the circumstance of Achan being stoned there. It was the first portion of the promised land that came into the possession of the Israelites, and this was to them a door of hope; it was a ground of assurance, that they should in due time possess the whole land, it was, as it were, a pledge, whereby they were taught to expect the fulfillment of all the promises. Here then we see the meaning of the passage before us, according to the spiritual interpretation of it, God promises to his people the richest spiritual blessings; and teaches them to consider all which they here possess, as a pledge only of what they shall hereafter inherit. Now it is by this prospect of receiving all spiritual and eternal blessings, that the young Christian is encouraged to proceed.

First, He has a prospect of all spiritual blessings. The believer soon finds, that, if he will be faithful to his God, he must forego some worldly advantages; and sacrifice every interest that stands in competition with his duty. Now this to our earthly hearts is no little trial, those who are insincere cannot stand this test, like the young man in the Gospel, they may wish for an interest in Christ; but, if they must sell all in order to obtain it, they will rather part with Christ and his benefits, yes, if for a season they make a profession of godliness, they will at last, like Demas, prove by their conduct that they are "lovers of this present evil world." But, as an antidote against this poison, God promises that he will give better riches, even "durable riches and righteousness;" and, that the blessings which he will bestow, shall far more than counterbalance anything which can be lost for him, and thus he inclines the soul to suffer temporal loss, in expectation of greater spiritual advantage; and (as did the saints of old,) to "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance." The Christian also, after a little time, begins to find that he has many sore conflicts to maintain; that he has enemies on every side; that he has temptations without number; and that he has in himself no strength, either to withstand one temptation, or to overcome one enemy. Under such circumstances, he would soon faint and be weary, but that God has engaged to support him in every trial, and make him conqueror over every enemy. But when he knows, that "his strength shall be according to his day;" that there shall be "no temptation without a way to escape;" and that every conflict shall produce an abundant increase of grace and peace; he is willing to engage his enemies, under a full assurance, that, while God is for him, he need not regard any that are against him. He has already found the blessedness of serving God: he knows, by his own experience, that God "never is a wilderness unto his people;" that he is a gracious master, who richly repays them for whatever they may do or suffer in his cause. Having therefore experienced this, he looks forward with confidence: having obtained grace in past trials, he expects assuredly, that it shall be given him in future difficulties: having tasted how gracious the Lord is, he expects to receive yet richer communications of peace and joy: he looks upon everything he receives as a pledge of something future.

In addition to spiritual blessings which he hopes to receive in this life, he has A prospect of eternal blessings in the life to come: his increasing conformity to the Divine image is a door of hope, that he shall one day be "holy as God is holy:" his increasing happiness gives him a lively assurance, that he shall before long be free from every care, and be happy as the angels that are around the throne: so also the sweet communion which he enjoys with God in secret, those discoveries of his glory, and those communications of his love, are as earnests, that he shall one day see God face to face, and "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand, for evermore." Now this contains somewhat of the Christian's experience, when first he comes to God through Christ: he is led on at first by present comforts; and, as he proceeds, his prospects open; so that in an assured expectation of grace sufficient for him, and of a crown of glory at the end, he "goes on, conquering and to conquer."

We will now conclude with an ADDRESS—

1. To those who may now be enjoying their first love—

The prophet observes,; that the time of espousals is a time of love [Jeremiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.2); and in the letter to the Church of Ephesus, mention is made of a first love; by which is meant, that peculiar earnestness and delight in Divine things which are often to be observed in young converts. Now it may be, that some of you who are here present have just begun to taste the joys of religion: you have peace with God in your consciences; and can scarcely think of anything but the goodness of God to your souls. I would to God this might always remain; or rather, that it might increase more and more; and that you might so learn divine lessons in prosperity, as not to need to learn them in a more humiliating way! But this is very rarely the case: the deep things of God are scarcely ever learned in this way: in general, God, after a season, leaves the soul to discern its own depravity, and to feel its utter helplessness: and, in order to humble it in the dust, he suffers the latent corruptions of the heart to spring up, and thus to harass and defile the soul. Not that God acts thus from any pleasure which he takes in mortifying the soul: I am persuaded he would rather overcome us by love, because "he delights in the prosperity of his people:" but this is the way in which he punishes our past sins, and our present neglects; he suffers those very sins, which most dishonored and provoked him in our unregenerate state, most to grieve and perplex us after our conversion: and every secret backsliding he punishes, by withdrawing in a measure his restraining grace; so that, as the prophet says, "Our own wickedness corrects us, and our backslidings reprove us." You must not wonder, therefore, if this should be your own experience: and this I say, not to damp your joy, so much as to keep you from abusing it. Strange as it may appear, our hearts will sometimes take occasion, even from religious joys, to puff us up with pride, or to lull us into security: and wherever pride or security is, no doubt there will before long be a fall. Remember then, that these comforts which God vouchsafes you, are to be an occasion of gratitude, but not of pride; "a door of hope," but not of presumption. When once you begin to presume upon your attainments, and to think that less diligence, less watchfulness, and less fervor will suffice, be assured, that the blessings you so abuse will be withdrawn: you will find, that your gifts, your graces, and your comforts, will decline. Be on your guard then against "leaving your first love:" be sober, and watch unto prayer: and, if you find but the first beginnings of decay, O! flee to the Savior; flee to him as for your lives: if you feel yourselves sinking, cry to him, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" and endeavor, "as you have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so to walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

2. Those who have "left their first love"

Perhaps you will ask, "Who are they? and how shall I know whether I be of the number?" Beloved, this is no hard thing to know. It is true, there may have been some abatement with respect to rapturous or ecstatic feelings, while yet your love remains as firm as ever: but yet all who are really walking near to God, find the text realized in their own experience. God allures them by the consolations of his Spirit; he seals his promises on their hearts: he enriches them with gifts and graces; and he opens glorious prospects to their view. If therefore, instead of being thus allured, your spirit is become dull; if, instead of finding the promises precious to your soul, they scarcely ever dwell upon your mind, or administer any solid comfort; if your gifts or graces, instead of increasing, decline; and if, instead of looking for, and longing after, and hastening to, your heavenly inheritance, you are becoming more forgetful of it, and ready, as it were, to take up your rest in earthly things, You are the man: whoever you are, "I have somewhat against you;" "You have left your first love." O! "turn and repent, and do your first works." See what has caused this declension in your soul: see what there is that troubles the camp: and O! put away the accursed thing: if you have given way to a worldly spirit, watch and pray against it: if pride have defiled your soul, humble yourself for it before God, and beg for grace, that you may "be clothed with humility:" if passion be your besetting sin, pray that you may "put on meekness as the elect of God," and be adorned with that "meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price." If sloth be the enemy that has cut your locks, and shorn your strength, up, up, and be doing: in short, whatever it be that has caused your declension, sacrifice it, though it be "precious as a right eye, and necessary as a right hand." "Cease to do evil, and learn to do well: put away the evil of your doings." I know indeed, that you cannot put it away of yourselves; but I know at the same time, that, until after it be put away, God will not shed abroad his love in your heart, nor can you look up with comfort and confidence to him. "Turn you then unto your God, from whom you have deeply revolted;" and know, that he is a God ready to pardon: "he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely:" he will give you the earnest of his Spirit in your hearts, and fill you with joy in expectation of the full inheritance. O beloved! say with the Church of old, "I will go and return unto my first Husband; for then it was better with me than now:" and you will find, that, as "he hates putting away," so "he will cast out none that come unto him."

[Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.19-20)

DISCOURSE 1144

GOD BETROTHING US TO HIMSELF

[Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.19-20). I will betroth you unto me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth you unto me in faithfulness: and you shall know the Lord.

THERE are various figures used in Scripture to represent the care which God will take of his people: but that which is the most endearing, the most honorable, and, perhaps I might add, the most frequent, of any, is a marriage covenant. The Old Testament abounds with expressions to this effect. Jeremiah has whole chapters addressed to the Church as an adulterous wife, and inviting her to be reconciled to her divine Husband. Hosea not only delivers messages in similar terms, but was actually commanded to take an adulteress (I. e. either one who had been so, and was now penitent, or one who, though chaste at the time of his union with her, afterwards proved abandoned) to be his wife, in order that he might be a visible sign unto the Jewish nation. By this, Jehovah, having for a season put away his people for their unfaithfulness, here makes known to them his purpose to restore them yet again to his favor. Let us notice,

I. How God contemplates the restoration of his ancient people—

He considers himself as standing in the relation of a husband to them—

He had chosen them, and set them apart for that end [Ezekiel 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.8); He acknowledges himself as still bearing that relation to them [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.5). And complains of their unfaithfulness to him in terms peculiar to that relation verse 2–5; And urges their return to him by the consideration of their duty to him under that relation [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.14).

Among men, such a restoration of the offending party would be inexpedient [Jeremiah 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.1); but God both can and will do it in perfect consistency with his own honor. He tells us, He will do it "in righteousness," having accepted the sacrifice of his only dear Son in their behalf [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.21-22). He will do it "in judgment," having from all eternity determined so to act towards them [Ephesians 1:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.8-11). He will do it "in loving-kindness," having "loved them with an everlasting love [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3). He will do it "in mercies," having freely forgiven them all their trespasses [Romans 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.27). He will do it "in faithfulness," seeing that "his gifts and calling are without repentance [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.29). And, that he is determined to do it, he makes clear by a threefold repetition of his purpose, "I will betroth you, I will, I will:" and, because it seems a stretch of mercy beyond all reasonable hope, he says," I will even betroth you in faithfulness."

He further declares that in this his renewed connection with them he will far exceed all his former mercies—

His former espousal of them issued in their being repudiated: but this shall be "forever [Jeremiah 31:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.31-33)." And, whereas their former knowledge of his character was very imperfect, they shall now have such discoveries of him as they had no conception of before; they shall behold all his perfections as harmonizing in this stupendous act of mercy [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.21), and all "his glory as shining in the face of Jesus Christ 2 Corinthians 4:6."

But "is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:" and to them also does my text refer: so that, to enter fully into it, we must further notice,

II. What glad tidings are here announced to the Gentile Church—

To the Christian Church does Paul expressly apply this prophecy, saying, "God says in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God [Romans 9:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.24-26)."

Now, in fact, Christ stands in the same relation to us as Jehovah did to the Jews—

He is the Bridegroom of his Church [Matthew 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 9.15); and every true Christian, as well as the whole body of his Church, is presented to him under the character of his spouse [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.2). True, we have departed grievously from him, and may justly be put away by him forever. But he authorizes his ministers to bring us back to him, and engages not to cast off so much as one who shall return to him in penitence and faith [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.37). His language to us is "Turn you, turn you; why will you die [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.11)." And so has he prepared the way for our return, that the perfections of God shall not only not be dishonored, but shall be greatly glorified, in that event. Paul takes great pains to show, that the righteousness of God will be displayed in it no less than his mercy [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.25-26); so that in it "shall mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 85.10)."

By entering into this relation to Christ, our happiness will be immeasurably and eternally enhanced—

Other unions are but for a time: but this shall be forever. "He will not cast off his people, when once he has been pleased to make us his people [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 12.22)." And he wishes us to know this for our joy. The covenant he makes with us is different from that which he made with the Jews. His covenant with them was to depend on their stability; and therefore it was dissolved: but that which he makes with us, provides for our stability itself, and therefore shall never be dissolved to all eternity [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18).

And who can conceive what discoveries of his glory shall be given to us through eternal ages? We cannot really know God now, unless we are united to him in Christ Jesus: but, when that union takes place, we, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, have all his perfections proclaimed to us, and all his goodness made to pass, as it were, before our eyes [Exodus 33:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 33.19); [Exodus 33:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 33.23). Increasing experience of his love will give us increasing discoveries of his love. Yet to the last we shall only behold, as it were, his back parts, and see him as in a glass darkly: but when once the soul is liberated from the body, "we shall see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 13.12)."

ADDRESS—

1. Be like-minded with God in reference to the Jews—

You see with what delight he views their restoration to him: and will you be indifferent about that great event? Far be it from you. The whole creation will take a deep interest in it, and express, everything according to its ability, its desire to contribute to their happiness verse 21–23; Do you also look forward to the event with ardent desire, and exert yourselves in every possible way to promote its speedy consummation.

2. Accept with gratitude the overtures now made in reference to yourselves—

In the name of Jehovah I would now espouse you to the Lord Jesus Christ [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.2); and for your encouragement I would say, that there is not one perfection of the Deity, not even justice itself, that will not be glorified in your acceptance of his offered mercy [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.9). O, think what it will be to stand in that near relation to the Deity, and what blessedness you will obtain both in time and in eternity by means of it! Methinks all Heaven will rejoice when the time shall have arrived for the marriage of the Lamb to be consummated [Revelation 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 19.7). May all of you now daily have your fitness for that blessed event increased, and in due season have your joy perfected in the full fruition of your Savior and your God.

[Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5)

DISCOURSE 1145

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

[Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5). Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.

KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world: and whatever he has predetermined in his eternal counsels shall surely be fulfilled. Often indeed is the execution of his purposes delayed until unbelievers begin to think that his word has failed of its accomplishment: but "in the evening time it shall be light:" and when the obstacles to his will seem almost insurmountable, he will glorify himself in fulfilling it beyond all human expectation. Thus he acted, when, according to his promise, he brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He suffered them to be detained until the very last day that they could be detained consistently with the truth of his promise; and then, when the Israelites themselves were almost reduced to despair, he brought them out with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. Thus also will he act yet once more towards that chosen people. They are now dispersed almost beyond the hope of conversion to God. But there is a period when they shall as universally, and perhaps too as suddenly, commit themselves to the government of Christ, as ever they did to the direction of Moses; nor is it improbable that they will yet again inhabit that very land, from which they have been driven for their iniquities.

To elucidate this subject we shall consider,

I. The event foretold in this prophecy—

The whole of the Gospel dispensation is often called "the latter days:" but here the expression refers to what is called by many, the Millennium, or the time when all the kingdoms of the world shall be converted to Christ. In that day,

The Jews shall universally return to God through Christ—

When the ten tribes revolted from the house of David under Jeroboam, they established idolatry in opposition to the worship of the true God, and set up kings of their own in opposition to those who sat on the throne of David. But in about two hundred and fifty years they were carried captive to Assyria; and from that time to the present hour they have had no king or governor of their own; and have been deprived of all opportunities of worshiping God, either according to the Mosaic ritual, or according to their own idolatrous superstitions verse 4. The "Teraphim" seem to have been images to which they resorted for the purposes of divination. However they are not wholly and finally abandoned of their God: for, when his Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, they shall take the lead in turning unto God [Zechariah 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.23), and shall voluntarily appoint the Lord Jesus Christ as their head [Hosea 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 1.11). This blessed truth is abundantly confirmed in Scripture [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.23-24); [Ezekiel 37:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.21-22); [Ezekiel 37:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.24); and the accomplishment of it will display in a most stupendous manner the unsearchable riches of God's wisdom and goodness [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.33).

In turning to God, they shall be peculiarly influenced by the Divine goodness—

The sanctions of the Jewish law were principally of a penal nature, and calculated to beget a servile spirit. Even Moses himself at the giving of the law exceedingly trembled and quaked [Hebrews 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.21). But, as formerly they feared the Lord and his judgments, so in the latter day they will "fear the Lord and his goodness [Romans 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.4);" they will marvel at his kindness in choosing their nation in the days of old: and at his patience in bearing with them during their long departure from him; and, above all, at his mercy and faithfulness in bringing them back into his Church, and manifesting to them again the tokens of his love. With these considerations they will be overwhelmed; and, constrained by his love, will become patterns of all righteousness [Jeremiah 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 33.9).

While we contemplate this stupendous event, let us improve it by considering,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

Very appropriate instruction may be gathered from it,

1. By the unbelieving world—

There are infidels who deny the inspiration of Scripture: and, even among those who profess to believe the Scriptures, there are not a few, who look upon the future restoration of the Jews to God as a cunningly-devised fable. But let both the one and the other of these persons look at this prophecy, and see how unreasonable their doubts are. Who that was not inspired of God, would have ventured to predict such events as are here referred to, namely, The continuance of the Jews as a distinct people all over the world, yet without any king or governor of their own, and without any priest or sacrifice, or opportunity to worship the true God according to their law, and equally without practicing the idolatrous superstitions to which in every period of their history they were prone? Who, I say, would have ventured to predict such a state of things as this, if he was not inspired of God so to do? And who would go on to foretell their future restoration to God, and their entire consecration to him as his willing and obedient servants? Yet has the former part of this prediction been unquestionably fulfilled. We see them preserved a distinct people to this hour; the ten tribes, from the time of their captivity in Assyria, and the other two tribes, from the time of their dispersion by the Romans. Everywhere are they distinguished by these two great peculiarities,—an incapacity to worship their own God according to his appointment, and an aversion to idolatry, to which their whole nation were so long and so obstinately addicted. This then is to the whole world an evidence, that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and a pledge, that the event predicted shall in due time be fulfilled.

2. By those who are inquiring after God—

Every awakened soul desires to know how it may find acceptance with God. And here the way of access to God, and of acceptance with him, is plainly declared. The Jews in due season will return to God through Christ, and will devote themselves to his service with filial gratitude and love. And it is in this way that every sinner must return to God. There is no other Mediator through whom any sinner in the universe can come to God: nor will any man be accepted of him, unless he surrender up himself to God in a way of holy obedience. On the other hand, no one who approaches God under a grateful sense of redeeming love, and with a desire to fulfill his will, shall ever be cast out. In fact, it is for this very end, even to produce this change in the hearts and lives of men, that God's perfections are manifested See the blessed effect on Moses, [Exodus 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.6); [Exodus 34:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.8), or his promises revealed [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1), or his blessings given [Hebrews 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.28). Let every one of you then return to God in this way: for there is not one who has not departed from him, even as the Jews themselves, or who does not need the same penitence and faith as they: and I can venture to assure every penitent and believing soul, that whoever cherishes this holy fear, shall have the light of God's reconciled countenance lifted up upon him, and experience to his joy the same blessed liberty and the same divine enlargement, as they [Isaiah 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 6.1); [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 6.5).

3. By those who are giving way to desponding fears—

Many, when first seeking after God, are ready to ask, Can it be that one so vile as I should ever obtain favor with God, or one so obdurate be ever penetrated with the feelings of penitence and love? Now I say, Look at the Jews; their wickedness, even from their first coming out of Egypt to their final expulsion from their own land, was most atrocious, even beyond that of the nations whom they were sent to extirpate. And now for the space of eighteen hundred years they have been as impenitent and obdurate as men could be. Yet behold, God has still designs of love towards them, and will before long restore the whole nation to his favor. To all their other sins they added that of crucifying the Lord of glory: and yet are they not utterly and eternally cast off. Nay, when once the Spirit of God shall be poured out upon them, they shall, contrary to the course of nature, be like a majestic river "flowing up to the mountain of the Lord's house, itself established on the top of other mountains;" so wonderful shall be the operation of divine grace upon them [Isaiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.2). Who then should despair? Who should limit the exercise either of the power, or of the grace, of God? Dear brethren, let none despair either of themselves or others; for God's mercy is open to all, and shall be effectual for all who seek it in his appointed way. I say not but that a man's day of grace may be passed even while he is alive in this world: but I do say, that no man who desires mercy, can be in that deplorable condition, because he would have been already given up by God to utter insensibility and obduracy. Only let a man come to God through Christ, and he shall find that with God there is mercy, yes, and plenteous redemption. Let any man whatever be moved by a sense of God's unbounded goodness to him, and be led by that goodness to fear and serve the Lord, and he shall never perish; but shall be made a monument of that very grace, which shall be so wonderfully displayed in the latter days, in the restoration of God's ancient people, and the consequent salvation of the heathen world.

[Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.6)

DISCOURSE 1146

IGNORANCE DESTRUCTIVE

[Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.6). My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

IGNORANCE, as it respects the things of this world, is attended with many evils. It disqualifies a man for those situations in life that require the exercise of wisdom and discretion; it degrades him in society below the rank of those who would otherwise be deemed his equals or inferiors: and it not unfrequently leads to idleness, dissipation, and vice. But ignorance of religion is of infinitely worse consequence; because it ensures the everlasting destruction of the soul. To this effect God speaks in the words before us; from which we shall be led to show,

I. The ignorance of the Christian world—

The Jews, as well those of the ten tribes as those who worshiped at Jerusalem, were called "the people of God," because they had received the seal of his covenant in their infancy, and professed to acknowledge him as their God. In like manner we, having in our infancy been baptized into the faith of Christ, may, in a lax and general sense, be called his followers, and his people. But among nominal Christians there is an awful lack of knowledge; an ignorance,

1. Of themselves—

How little do they know of their blindness! They suppose themselves as competent to judge of spiritual as they are of carnal things; though God tells them, that they cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit for want of a spiritual discernment [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.11); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.14).

How little do they know of their guilt! Do they really feel themselves deserving of God's eternal wrath and indignation? They cannot cordially acquiesce in that idea, notwithstanding they are expressly said to be under the curse and condemnation of the law [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.10).

How little do they know of their depravity! They will acknowledge, that they have this or that particular infirmity: but they have no just conception of the total depravity of their hearts; or of the truth of God's testimony respecting them, that "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually [Psalm 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 14.2-3). [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.5)."

How little do they know of their utter helplessness! They imagine that they can exercise repentance and faith just when they please, though they are declared by God himself to be incapable of themselves to do anything [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5), even so much as to think a good thought [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.5).

2. Of God—

They may have some general notions of his power and goodness: but what know they of his holiness? Do they suppose that sin is so hateful in his eyes as he represents it to be [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.13).

What know they of his justice? Are they persuaded that, as the Moral Governor of the universe, he must enforce the sanctions of his own law; and that, however merciful he may be, he neither will nor can clear the guilty [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.7).

What know they of his truth? They read many threatenings in his word; but they do not believe that he will execute them [Luke 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.17).

3. Of Christ—

They confess perhaps his Godhead, and acknowledge him as a Savior. But what know they of him as he is in himself? Do they discern his beauty, his excellency, his glory? Is He in their eyes "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely Son. 5:10; Son. 5:16."

What know they of him as he is to us? Do they comprehend anything of the breadth and length, the depth and height of his unsearchable love [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18-19). Have they any adequate idea of his tender sympathy and compassion [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.18); [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.15). Have they been filled with an admiration of his fullness, his suitableness, his sufficiency [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.30).

If more were necessary to confirm this melancholy truth, we would appeal to God's own assertion respecting us, that our stupidity and ignorance are more than brutish [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.2-3).

Lest such ignorance should be thought trivial, we proceed to notice,

II. The fatal consequences of it—

Doubtless the degrees of criminality attached to ignorance must vary according to the opportunities which men have enjoyed of obtaining knowledge. But in all men who have the light of the Gospel set before them, a lack of spiritual knowledge,

1. Tends to their destruction—

Every sin is destructive, but more especially impenitence and unbelief. And what is the occasion of these? Must they not be traced to ignorance as their true and proper source? If men knew what ignorant, guilty, depraved, and helpless creatures they are, could they refrain from sorrow and contrition?: If they knew what a holy, just, and immutable God they have to do with, could they do otherwise than tremble before him?: If they knew what a merciful, loving, and adorable Savior there is, whose affections are yearning over them, who is ever following them with invitations and entreaties, and who longs for nothing so much as to save their souls, could they turn their backs upon him? Could they help crying to him for mercy, and desiring an interest in his salvation?: If a man, feeling himself in imminent danger of perishing in the sea, cannot but avail himself of the assistance offered him for the preservation of his life, so neither can a man who feels his danger of everlasting destruction neglect and despise the salvation offered him in the Gospel.

2. Will issue in their destruction—

God himself best knows what he has ordained and decreed: and as the fates of men will be determined by him at last, to him, and to his word, we make our appeal.

We want to ascertain the states of those who are ignorant of the Gospel: God tells us plainly, "They are lost [2 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.3)."

We want to be informed whether their ignorance will not be considered as a sufficient plea for their rejection of the Gospel? God assures us, that instead of operating in that view, and to that extent, it shall itself be the ground of their condemnation [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.11).

We would gladly hope that the Lord Jesus Christ would interpose for them at the last day, to avert or mitigate their sentence. But we are told, on the contrary, that he himself will come to judgment, for the express purpose of taking vengeance on them [2 Thessalonians. 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 1.7-8).

Here we leave the matter. If you will not believe such plain and positive declarations of God, we shall in vain hope to make any impression on your minds by any feeble arguments of our own.

INFERENCES—

1. How carefully should we improve the means of grace!

The ordinances are appointed of God for our instruction in spiritual knowledge. Should we then absent ourselves from them on slight occasions? or should we be content with a formal attendance on them, while yet we derive no solid benefit to our souls? O let us remember that our all is at stake: and whether we hear, or read, or pray, let us do it as for eternity.

2. How earnestly should we pray for the teachings of God's Spirit!

Whether we be learned or unlearned, we can know nothing but as we are taught of God. In respect of spiritual knowledge, the rich have no advantage above the poor: yes, the poor have rather the advantage of the rich, inasmuch as they have more docility of mind; and God has promised to reveal to babes the things which are hid from the wise and prudent [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.5). [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.25). Let us then beg that our eyes may be opened, and that through the influences of the Spirit we may know the things which are freely given to us of God [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.11). [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.18).

3. How thankful should we be for any measure of divine knowledge!

To be wise unto salvation is to be wise indeed. All other knowledge is as nothing in comparison of this. Blessed then are they who can say, "This I know, that, whereas I was blind, I now see [John 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 9.25). [Matthew 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.16)." Yes, Believers, "blessed are your eyes, which now see:" for if ignorance is destructive to the soul, knowledge, on the other hand, provided it be spiritual and practical, will surely save it [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.11). [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.3) with [1 John 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.3-4).

[Hosea 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.16)

DISCOURSE 1147

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF BACKSLIDING

[Hosea 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.16). Israel slides back as a backsliding heifer.

SUCH is the influence of bad example, that it is extremely difficult to withstand its attractions, even at the time that we behold its fatal effects. Israel, or the ten tribes, from their first apostasy under Jeroboam, were irreclaimably addicted to idolatry. The prophet, finding his efforts vain with respect to them, turns to Judah, and entreats that they would not tread in the steps of Israel verse 15. At Gilgal and at Bethel, where God had formerly been worshiped, idols were now set up. The prophet, exhorting Judah not to go to those places, calls Beth-el (the house of God) Bethaven (the house of vanity), who, like an untamed and refractory bullock, had entirely cast off the yoke, and refused all subjection to Jehovah.

Humiliating as this account of Israel is, it is but too just a representation of the Christian world, whose conduct is utterly unworthy of the name they bear, and from whose ways we cannot stand at too great a distance.

To impress this awful truth upon your minds, we propose to show,

I. When we may be said to resemble a backsliding heifer—

We owe submission to our heavenly Master; but give too much reason for the comparison in the text. This resemblance may be seen in us,

1. When we will not draw in God's yoke at all—

Unconverted men in every age and place are rebels against God [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 5.2). [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 12.4). [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.31); [Jeremiah 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 7.24); and, though all are not equally profligate in their manners, all are equally averse to spiritual employments: the law of God is considered as imposing on them an intolerable yoke, to which they will not, they cannot submit [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7). They are indeed subjected to it against their will; but neither chastisements nor encouragements can prevail upon them to draw in it: on the contrary, like a ferocious bullock, they are insensible of favors, and they fret at rebukes [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.18).

2. When we draw in it only by fits and starts—

Many appear willing to obey God in a time of sickness [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.16), or after some signal deliverance [Psalm 106:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 106.12-13), or under an impressive sermon [Exodus 24:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 24.3); [Exodus 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 24.7). James 24, or during a season of peace and tranquility [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.21); but, as soon as ever the particular occasion that called forth their pious resolutions has ceased, or they find that they must suffer for Christ's sake, they forget the vows that are upon them, and return to their former state of carelessness and indifference [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.34-37). They renew their resolutions perhaps at certain seasons; but "their goodness is as the morning dew, or as the early cloud that passes away." Thus, like a heifer that will draw for one moment and will not the next, they are, in the strongest sense of the words, unprofitable servants.

3. When we grow weary of the yoke—

It is not uncommon for persons to go on well for a season, and yet draw back at last. They grow weary of performing their duties, of exercising their graces, of mortifying their lusts. If they maintain an observance of public duties, they become remiss in those of the family and the closet: their delight in the Scriptures languishes; their meditations are cold; their devotions formal. Their faith, their hope, their love operate with less vital energy: and their besetting sins, whatever they were, regain their strength, and resume their ascendancy. These are like a horse or bullock, which, after having yielded to the yoke for a season, becomes restive and ungovernable, and disappoints thereby the expectations of its owner.

Lest the frequency of these characters should tempt us to think favorably of them, we proceed to show,

II. The evil and danger of such a state—

We shall notice,

1. The evil of it—

A backslidden state, in whoever it is found, is exceeding sinful: but in those who have made some profession of religion, it is attended with peculiar aggravations.

It is a despising of God; of his Majesty, which demands our subjection, and of his mercy, which would accept and reward our poor services. And it is in this light that God himself frequently complains of it [Numbers 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 11.20). [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 2.30) and [2 Samuel 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 12.10). [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.13).

It is a justifying of the wicked; for it says to them, in fact, "I was once as you are, and thought I should become happier by serving God: but I find by experience that there is no profit in serving him; and therefore I am returning to your state, which is, on the whole, the happier and more desirable."

It is a discouraging of the weak. Little do false professors think how much evil they do in this way [Malachi 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.8). Many are induced to follow their example in some things, under the idea that they are innocent; and are thus drawn from one sin to another, until they make shipwreck of a good conscience, and utterly turn away from the faith.

And need we multiply words any further to show the evil of backsliding from God? Well does God himself call it "a wonderful and horrible thing [Jeremiah 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 5.30)."

2. The danger of it—

This is an iniquity which God marks with peculiar indignation [Jeremiah 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.19); [Jeremiah 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.21-22),; and never fails to visit it, sooner or later, with some awful token of his displeasure.

The first symptoms of declension lead, if not speedily mourned over and resisted, to utter apostasy [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 14.14). The disposition to backslide will soon increase, until it become inveterate, and, unless by a marvelous interposition of God himself, incurable.

The misery that will be incurred by means of it will far exceed all that would have been endured, if no profession of religion had ever been made. "If any man draw back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" he "draws back to certain anil everlasting perdition [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.38-39);" and "it would have been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn back from it [Matthew 12:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 12.45). [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.21)."

Let these consequences be duly weighed, and nothing need be added to show us the importance of "holding fast our profession without wavering."

To improve this subject, we shall,

1. Assist you in ascertaining your state before God—

Since all are "bent to backslide" more or less, it is of great importance to inquire of what kind our backslidings are, and to see whether they are merely the infirmities of an upright soul, or the revolt of an apostate. It is indeed difficult to determine this with precision; yet something may be said to aid you in this inquiry.

Examine diligently the cause, the duration, and the effects of your backslidings. Those of the sincere arise from the weakness of their flesh, while yet their spirit is as willing as ever: but those of the hypocrite proceed from a radical disaffection to the ways of God. Those of the sincere continue but a little time, and are an occasion of greater diligence: those of the hypocrite remain, and become the habit of his soul. Those of the sincere humble him in the dust: those of the hypocrite produce a blindness of mind, a sacredness of conscience, and a hardness of heart.

But though we thus discriminate for the information of your judgment, we recommend all to stand fast in the Lord, and to guard against the first risings of spiritual decay [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.9).

2. Give a word of counsel to those in different states—

Are you altogether backslidden from God? O return to him, and take upon you his "light and easy yoke!" He invites you with all the tenderness of a father [Jeremiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.12); [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.14); [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.22); he declares himself exceedingly averse to punish you according to your desert [Hosea 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.7-8); and he promises to "heal your backslidings, and love you freely [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.4)."

Are you drawing in his yoke? Bless and adore your God, who has inclined and enabled you to do so. It is his power, and his power alone, that has kept you hitherto [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.5); and therefore he must have all the praise. And in order to your continued steadfastness, reflect often on the evil and danger of backsliding; I may add too, on the comfort and benefit of serving God. Surely He is a good Master. Let but your hearts be right with him, and "none of his commandments will appear grievous to you 1 [John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.3);" on the contrary, you will find that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 19.11)," and that your labor shall not be in vain with respect to the eternal world. "Be you faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.10)."

[Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.17)

DISCOURSE 1148

THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY

[Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.17). Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.

THERE is a day of grace, wherein God strives with men by his Spirit: this past, he abandons them to impenitence and obduracy [Luke 19:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.42). The precise period of its termination is, in mercy, concealed from us; but we are all concerned to deprecate the judgment denounced against Ephraim in the text:

I. The sin of Ephraim—

Ephraim, to which Jeroboam belonged, comprehends all the ten tribes. These were devoted to the worship of the idols that were in Dan and Bethel. Nor could they be drawn from it by any of the means which God used—

Though we do not imitate them in this, we are not free from spiritual idolatry—

Idolatry is described to be a loving and serving of the creature more than the Creator [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.25). Hence covetousness and sensuality are spoken of under that term [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.5). [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.19). Now who has not yielded that love, fear, and confidence to the creature, which are due to God alone? "Who can say, I am pure from this sin?".

We have, in truth, been "joined" to idols—

Many are the means which God has used to bring us to himself. Yet we have not been wrought upon effectually by any of them. Neither mercies given, nor judgments threatened, have been able to prevail. We rather have "held fast deceit, and refused to return to the Lord our God [Jeremiah 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 8.5); [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 44.16-17)."

But this sin must of necessity provoke God to anger.

II. Their punishment—

The text may be understood as an advice to Judah, not to hold fellowship with the idolatrous Israelites. Our Lord gives a similar direction to his followers [Matthew 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 15.14).—

But it rather imports a judicial sentence of final dereliction—

This is a just punishment for turning away from God. Nor can there be a more awful punishment inflicted even by God himself. It is worse than the severest afflictions which can come upon us in this life. For they may lead to the salvation of the soul [1 Corinthians 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 11.32); 1 Corinthians 5:5; whereas this must terminate in our condemnation. It is worse than even immediate death and immediate damnation. For the greater our load of sin, the greater will be our treasure of wrath [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.5).

And there is reason to fear that God may inflict this punishment upon us—

In this way he punished the Gentiles who sinned against their light Thrice mentioned, [Romans 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.24); [Romans 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.26); [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.28). In this way he visited also his once-favored people the Jews [Psalm 81:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 81.12). [Matthew 23:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 23.32-35). Why then should we hope for an exemption, if we imitate their conduct? God has repeatedly warned us that impenitent sinners shall have this doom [Proverbs 1:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 1.30-31); [Proverbs 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 5.22). [2 Thessalonians. 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 2.10-12).

INFERENCES—

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

He has seen us cleaving to idols from the earliest period of our lives [Ezekiel 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 14.3); and though we have changed them, we have never turned unto him. In the mean time we have been deaf to all his expostulations and entreaties. What a mercy is it that he has never yet said, "Let him alone!" Yes, he has even restrained us from perpetrating all that was in our hearts [Genesis 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 20.6); [Genesis 31:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 31.29). [1 Samuel 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 25.34). How gracious is he in yet striving with us by his Spirit! Let then his goodness, patience and forbearance, lead us to repentance [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.4); and let us say, like Ephraim, in his repenting state [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.8).—

2. How evidently is salvation entirely of grace!

If left to ourselves we never should renounce our idols [Jeremiah 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 13.23). We should act rather like that obstinate and rebellious people [Zechariah 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 7.11-12). The case of Judas may show us what we may do, when once abandoned by God. God must give us a will, as well as an ability, to turn to him [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13). Let us then entreat him never to leave us to ourselves. Let us be thankful if, in any way, he rend our idols from us. If we have never yet resembled the Thessalonian converts [1 Thessalonians. 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 1.9), let us now cry unto him [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.18). [Hosea 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.2-3). If we have, let us bear in mind that affectionate exhortation [1 John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.21).

[Hosea 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.4)

DISCOURSE 1149

THE EXTENT AND CAUSES OF MEN'S SUPINENESS

[Hosea 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.4). They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord.

WHEN we exhort men to duty, they plead their inability to perform it; but their inability is, in fact, a want of inclination to serve God. Many things there are which they do not, though confessedly within their power. Of this the prophet complains in the words of our text, and traces it up to its true and proper source.

His words lead us to consider,

I. The extent of men's supineness—

Little need be said to show that the generality do not "turn to God." They are scarcely sensible of their apostasy from him. They regard serious and vital religion as over-righteous preciseness. They do not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto him"—

They do not consider their ways—

This seems a reasonable duty, and within the reach of any man: every prudent man does it with respect to his temporal affairs; nor can there be any excuse for neglecting it in more important concerns. Indeed it is not possible to turn unto God aright, unless we have first discovered wherein we have turned from him. But men do not choose to search the records of their own conscience; they find it more pleasant to rest in the presumption that all is well. To this effect God himself testifies respecting them [Jeremiah 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.36).

They do not abstain from open violations of God's law—

This is undoubtedly a step, which, every one that turns to God will take; nor, though this is more difficult, is it beyond the power of an unregenerate man: though he cannot refrain from the love of sin, he may from the commission of it. Many actually do deny their appetites, from prudential motives; yet few, if any, will impose the same restraints from a regard to God, or manifest the disposition recommended to them by Elihu [Job 34:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 34.32).

They do not avoid the means and occasions of sin—

They have found the company of ungodly men to be a snare to their souls [Exodus 34:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.12). [Proverbs 22:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 22.25), yet will they not withdraw themselves from their society. From many other things have they experienced a most baneful influence, yet will they gratify themselves in all their usual indulgences. In temporal matters they see the wisdom of fleeing from temptation From the course, or the gaming table, yet they account it needless to shun the means of spiritual defilement; but if they desired really to turn to God, could they evade the force of that question [Proverbs 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 6.27).

They do not use the means of obtaining true conversion—

They cannot but know the necessity of meditation and prayer: they are well assured that an attention to God's word and ordinances is a principal mean of spiritual advancement, yet any book is more pleasing to them than the Bible, and any employment than prayer: in seeking worldly advancement they will use the means with diligence, but all labor is deemed superfluous in the concerns of the soul.

They not only do not thus frame their doings, but they will not—

Not all the promises of God can allure, or threatenings alarm them: they are deaf to the voice of conscience, and the dictates of God's Spirit. The language of their hearts is like that of the Jews of old [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 44.16-17).

They, on the contrary frame their doings to turn as far as possible from God—

Would consideration help them? They banish it, with all books or conversation that might lead them to it. Would the turning from known sin? They indulge in it. Would the avoiding of the means of sin? They will rush into temptation. Would the using of the means of grace? They account them a servile drudgery. If they wished to injure their spiritual interests as much as possible, consistently with a good name among men, they could not adopt a surer method: the whole of their conduct unequivocally declares the language of their hearts [Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 21.14-15).

To account for this supineness, let us trace it up to,

II. The causes of it—

Persons, when convicted of evil doings, will yet affirm their hearts to be good. But can a tree be good whose fruits are uniformly bad?

The causes of this evil are justly described by the prophet:

1. They love sin—

"Whoredom" is frequently (and by Hosea in particular) used for sin in general. A "spirit of whoredom" imports an attachment to sin, and delight in it In a similar sense a spirit of slumber is used, [Romans 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.8). Now this justly characterizes the state of fallen man. It accords with other descriptions given of him in Scripture [Ephesians 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.22) and [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7); and is the fundamental cause of the supineness visible in the world. In following evil ways we glide easily down the stream: but in renouncing them we stem the tide of our corrupt nature. Hence even the first steps of turning to God are irksome and difficult; and we lay the rein on the neck of our appetites for want of resolution to restrain them. In this very manner does God himself trace up our transgressions to a deceived heart [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 44.20).

2. They are ignorant of God—

Never accustomed to reflect on God, they know nothing of him: the ideas they do form of him are grossly erroneous [Psalm 97:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 97.7). In their hearts they "imagine him to be even such an one as themselves." This is another, and a very fruitful source of their supineness. To this Paul ascribes the evil of their hearts and lives [Ephesians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.18). If they knew his power and majesty, could they dare thus to provoke him? If they beheld his holiness, could they account sin so trivial an evil? If they were apprised of his justice, would they indulge hopes of impunity? If they believed his veracity, would they so disregard his threatenings? Above all, if they knew his mercy to us in Christ Jesus, could they so trample on the blood that was shed for them? It would not be possible for them to withstand such views of his perfections. Such a discovery would produce on them the effect experienced by Paul, [Act 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.6).

INFERENCES—

1. They who shall perish at the last day must ascribe their condemnation to themselves—

It is certainly true that man is not able of himself to do all that is required of him. But it is no less true that he is able to do many things which he neglects. Nor can it be doubted but that, if he cried to God for help, he might obtain it. If he use not therefore the power that he has, and the appointed means of obtaining more, he can blame none but himself. In this view our Lord expressly declares that the fault is in our own perverse will [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.40). And God expostulates with us on the folly of our conduct [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.11). Is the gardener justified in omitting to plough and sow his ground because he cannot ensure a crop? How much less then shall we be, in neglecting the means to which God has promised success? Let us not then deceive ourselves by offering vain excuses: but turn unto our God, and plead the mercy which he has promised to us [Jeremiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.12).

2. If we would fully turn unto our God, we must have our hearts renewed, and our minds enlightened with the knowledge of Christ—

Would we heal the streams? we must cast the salt into the fountain head [2 Kings 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 2.21-22). Instead of being actuated by the spirit of whoredoms, we must pray to be "led by the Spirit of God." Instead of "abiding in darkness," we must seek to have "Christ revealed in us." Thus shall "old things pass away, and all things become new." We shall sweetly yield ourselves to the constraining influence of Christ's love: and not only turn, but "cleave, unto him with full purpose of heart."

[Hosea 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.5)

DISCOURSE 1150

THE DANGER OF PRIDE

[Hosea 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.5). The pride of Israel does testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.

ALL profess to hate pride; yet all are more or less infected with it. The very best of men are not wholly free from its influence. But, in the unregenerate, it is the governing principle of all their actions. It was one of the most distinguishing features in the character of Sodom [Ezekiel 16:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.49). The professing people of God also were led captive by it. And were brought thereby under his just and heavy displeasure. We shall make some observations upon,

I. The prevalence of this sin—

The state of Israel was not peculiar to that nation. Human nature is in all ages the same. Nor does pride manifest itself more strongly any where than among ourselves,

1. Nationally—

There is no nation that boasts more of its privileges, or that acknowledges less the hand of God in them, than Britain. If judgments come, we impute them to the misconduct of our government; and if success be given to us, we ascribe it to our own skill in arts, or prowess in arms. And though confessedly our sins are manifold, no one thinks of national humiliation: so truly may it be said of us, as it was of Israel, "Our pride testifies to our face; and we do not return to the Lord our God, nor seek him for all this [Hosea 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.10)."

2. Personally—

Behold the careless sinner. What determined opposition is there in the hearts of many to the authority of God! They will not submit to his light and easy yoke. If required to obey, they object to the command itself as severe and impracticable. If warned of the consequences of their disobedience, they make light of all God's threatenings. If urged to receive the Gospel salvation, they deride it as foolishness [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.14). The language of their heart is, Who is Lord over us? We know not the Lord; neither will we obey his voice [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 12.4). [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 5.2). That this proceeds from pride, there can be no doubt. God himself traces such conduct to this, as its proper source and principle [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.4-5). And does not this "testify to the face" of many among us? Is not this the conduct which almost universally obtains? Yes, are not we sensible that it too justly describes, if not our present, yet certainly our former, state?

Behold also the self-righteous formalist. Persons of this description have kept themselves free from gross enormities, or perhaps have reformed their conduct after having given the rein to all their appetites; but their pride rises in proportion to their imagined attainments. They look with contempt on others who are openly immoral [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.5), and bless themselves that they are not as other men [Luke 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.9); [Luke 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.11); meanwhile "they feel not the plague of their own heart." They deny the representation which the Scripture gives of their fallen state [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.17). They cannot endure to think themselves deserving of God's wrath, nor will they submit to be saved by the righteousness of God [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.3); and whence does all this originate? Surely pride and self-exaltation are properly pointed out as the spring from whence it flows [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.14); yet does not this disposition also lamentably prevail? Does it not "testify to the face" of some whom we are now addressing? Are there not some among ourselves who trust in their own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, instead of fleeing to Christ as blind, helpless, hopeless creatures? some also, who are too proud to accept salvation on the footing of publicans and harlots? yes, and some too, who will rather perish in their sins, than seek to have them purged away in the Redeemer's blood?

I am grieved to add, Behold also many religious professors. None are more puffed up with pride than some who would be thought followers of the lowly Jesus. They are conceited of their knowledge, and will bear with none who do not pronounce their shibboleth. They profess indeed to believe that their hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked; yet they will never listen to instruction or reproof: nor can they be persuaded to deny their own will in anything for the good of others. None are more ready than these to set up themselves in opposition to all constituted authorities. Jude speaks of them as "murmurers and complainers," as "despising dominion and speaking evil of dignities Jude, verse 8, 16." Nor are there any people under Heaven to whom Solomon's description of the proud man may be more fitly applied [Proverbs 30:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 30.12-13). Alas! does not this spirit also "testify to the face" of many? Perhaps there scarce ever was a period or a nation where such spurious religion prevailed in so great a degree. Surely it may well be numbered among the most heinous sins of this favored land.

Having followed the sin of Israel, what can we expect but to participate in,

II. The judgment denounced against it—

To "fall" must certainly import some heavy judgment. This threatening was not fully accomplished but in the utter destruction of the Jewish nation. Nor can we hope to escape the displeasure of God while we harbor in our hearts an evil that is so offensive to him—

This must be said of us as a nation—

We see at this moment the judgments executing upon other nations (France, Belgium, Poland, Russia) and can we hope that the cup shall not be put into our hands? Who can tell what a storm is gathering over us, or what ruin may ensue from the acts of our Government this very week June 19, 1831. Yet how few are crying to God as the occasion requires!

But whatever occurs to us as a nation, the proud individually shall surely be dealt with according to their deserts—

They will most generally fall in this world. In their own conceit their mountain stands so strong as to bid defiance to every assault. They think that they shall never be moved [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 30.6-7). But how irresistibly have the haughtiest monarchs been hurled from their throne [Daniel 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 5.20); [Daniel 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 5.23). How speedily have even the most powerful empires been brought to desolation [Ezekiel 28:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 28.2); [Ezekiel 28:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 28.6); [Ezekiel 28:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 28.8). [Isaiah 14:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 14.12-15). How instantaneously have God's judgments often marked the heinousness of this sin [2 Chronicles 32:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 32.25). [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 12.23). If they be exalted for a time they are almost invariably brought low at last [Psalm 73:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.6); [Psalm 73:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.9); [Psalm 73:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.18); [Psalm 73:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.20).

At all events they are absolutely certain to fall in the eternal world. If indeed they repented of their sin, they would find mercy with God. A broken and contrite heart he will never despise [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.17). Though he will resist the proud, yet he will give grace unto the humble. He will look on him with pleasure and delight [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.15); but nothing can ever reconcile him to "a man that walks in pride." He will surely abase the proud [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 4.37). He has irreversibly decreed their utter destruction [Malachi 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.1). Nor shall the whole universe combined prevent the execution of his vengeance on one single individual among them [Proverbs 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 16.5).

The observance of ceremonial duties will never compensate for the want of true humility—

Judah retained the forms of religion which Israel and Ephraim had cast away. Yet because Judah resembled Israel in their sin, they were to be involved in Israel's calamity The text. Thus must all, however zealous and exemplary in other respects, be brought down and confounded before God [Isaiah 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.11-12). Even a preacher of righteousness, if lifted up with pride, shall fall into the condemnation of the devil [1 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.6). The rule laid down by God himself shall surely be observed to all eternity [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.14).

INFERENCES—

1. How excellent is the Gospel of Christ!

Nothing but the Gospel ever did, or ever can, humble the soul. The law may terrify; but it is the Gospel alone that melts us into contrition. That no sooner reaches the heart, than it brings down our high looks. It turned, in an instant, thousands of blood-thirsty murderers, into meek, loving, and obedient followers of the Lamb [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.37); [Acts 2:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.41-42). And thus does it still operate on all who receive it in sincerity [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.6); [Acts 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.29); [Acts 16:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.33). Let us then listen to it with delight. Let us pray, that a sight of the crucified Savior may produce its due effect upon us [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10). And let us loath ourselves the more in proportion as we are persuaded that God is pacified towards us [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.63).

2. What need have we all to watch and pray!

There are none who are out of the reach of this malignant principle. Paul, after having been caught up to the third heavens, was in danger of being overwhelmed by it [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.7). And who among us does not find that it is ready to puff us upon every occasion? Let us remember that this ruined the very angels in Heaven. And that it must be mortified in us, if ever we would obtain mercy in the last day. Let us guard against the first risings of it in the heart; and, whenever it "testifies to our face," let us implore mercy of the Lord, that the thought of our hearts may be forgiven us [Acts 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.22). In this way we shall be preserved, though in the midst of danger; and be exalted in due time to glory, and honor, and immortality.

[Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.13)

DISCOURSE 1151

THE FOLLY OF CREATURE-CONFIDENCE

[Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.13). When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.

MEN continually provoke God to chastise them, but rarely make a due improvement of his chastisements. Instead of turning to God, they dishonor him still more by applying to the creature under their distress rather than to him. The ten tribes, when punished for their willing compliance with Jeroboam's edicts verse 11, 12. God consumed them as the moth consumes a garment, or as rottenness the bones, secretly, slowly, gradually, effectually, sought repeatedly to the Assyrians for help, instead of humbling themselves before God: but they found, as "Judah" also did on similar occasions, that their confidence in the creature served only to involve them in shame and disappointment.

Taking the text simply as an historical fact, we deduce from it two observations, which deserve our consideration.

I. Men, in times of trouble, are prone to look to the creature for help, rather than to God—

This was one of the most common and heinous sins of the Jewish nation Sometimes they relied on Egypt, [Isaiah 30:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.1-3); [Isaiah 31:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 31.1). Sometimes on Assyria (as Manahem did, [2 Kings 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 15.19) and Ahaz did on Tiglath-pileser, [2 Kings 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 16.7) and sometimes on themselves, [Isaiah 22:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 22.8-11). "Jareb" here certainly means the king of Assyria: but whether it was his proper name, or a name given him by the prophet, is uncertain. It means Defender, and might be applied to him in a taunting manner. In this view it would be a very severe sarcasm. See [2 Chronicles 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 28.20); and it is universal also among ourselves,

1. In troubles of a temporal nature—

In sickness of body, we lean, like Asa [2 Chronicles 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 16.12); on the physician. In distress of mind, we complain and murmur; but forget; to pray [Genesis 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 4.13-14). In straitened circumstances, we expect relief from friends, or our own exertions. God is invariably our last refuge.

2. In spiritual troubles—

Under conviction of sin, we betake ourselves to the observance of duties, and make resolutions to amend our lives, instead of fleeing to Christ as the refuge of lost sinners [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.2). In seasons also of temptation, or desertion, we adopt a thousand expedients to remove our burdens, but will not cast them on the Lord [1 Samuel 16:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 16.14-16). Though foiled ten thousand times, we cannot bring ourselves to lie as clay in the potter's hands; but will rest in the means, instead of looking simply to God in the use of means.

But the longer we persist in it the more we shall find, that,

II. The creature cannot afford us any effectual support—

There are circumstances indeed wherein friends may be instrumental to our relief: but they can do,

1. Nothing effectual—

The consolations which are administered by man, or by the vanities of this world, are poor, empty, transient [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13). Not the whole universe combined can ever bring a man to "glory in tribulations [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3)," and to say with Paul, "I take pleasure in them for the sake of Christ [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.10);" as soon might they enable him to stop the sun in its course, as to reduce to experience the paradoxes of that holy apostle [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.10).

2. Nothing of themselves—

It is not a little humiliating to see how weak are man's endeavors to heal either the disorders of the body, or the troubles of the soul, when God is pleased to withhold his blessing. The best prescriptions, or the wisest counsels, are even lighter than vanity itself. Reasonings, however just and scriptural, have no weight: advice, however sweetened with love and sympathy, is rejected: the very grounds of consolation are turned into occasions of despair [Psalm 77:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 77.2-3). When God says, "Let there be light," there is light: but until then, the soul is shut up in impenetrable darkness [Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 34.29).

ADDRESS—

1. Let us guard against this sinful propensity, both in our national and personal concerns—

We cannot but see how prone we are, as a nation, to rest on human alliances, and human efforts. Would to God we could correct this fatal error, and trust more entirely in the great disposer of all events!

As individuals at least, we may, and must, correct it. If we would have the blessing of God, and not his curse, we must renounce all creature-confidence, and trust in him alone [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.5-8). See David's example, [Psalm 60:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 60.11); [Psalm 121:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 121.1-2). If we would do this, our happiness would be complete [Psalm 91:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 91.1-7); [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 91.9-10).

2. Let us especially rely on Christ as the healer of our souls—

He is "the healer of the nations [Revelation 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.2)," "Jehovah, who heals us [Exodus 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 15.26);" there is no physician besides him; nor any balm, but his blood. We may use whatever means we will, either to pacify the conscience, or to purify the heart; but we shall find that they can "not heal us, nor cure us of our wound." But Christ is all-sufficient: he can in one moment purge us by his blood, and renovate us by his Spirit. To him then let us look with humble, uniform, unshaken affiance.

[Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.15)

DISCOURSE 1152

SPIRITUAL DESERTION

[Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.15). I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

MEN. when they become Christians, do not lose any of their natural feelings, but they experience many sensations both of pleasure and pain, which are altogether new, and peculiar to themselves: when God lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, they possess the sublimest happiness of which our nature is capable, "a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not:" so also, when God withdraws the light of his countenance from them, they are made to feel the most exquisite sorrow, with which no temporal affliction, no bodily anguish, can be compared. This is the sorest chastisement which can be inflicted on a godly and sincere soul: yet sore as it is, the wickedness of our hearts too often makes it necessary for us: for this will often avail to humble the soul, when everything else has been tried in vain. Hence it is generally God's last resource: he uses various other methods first, to make his people holy, and to keep them vigilant: but when they are still remiss and negligent, he departs from them, and says, "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" or dependence. Thus he dealt with his people of old: he had told them, in verse 12, that he would be to them as a moth, or as rottenness, to consume them: then, because they went to the Assyrian rather than to him for help, he told them, in the verse before my text, that "he would tear them, as a young lion tears his prey:" and then he adds, as the sorest calamity of all, and as the only one which would produce the desired effect, that he would forsake them; "I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

From these words we will endeavor to show you,

I. The nature of spiritual desertion—

They who view God's dealings with the Jews merely as a history, will lose the most important benefits which the relation of them is intended to convey. There is a striking similarity and agreement between the dispensations of Providence and the dispensations of grace; so that there can be no doubt but that the former were intended typically to represent the latter. And, in order to understand the Scriptures aright, we must interpret them according to this canon. The most sober and candid expositors have agreed in this. The desertion spoken of in my text literally refers to the abandoning of the Jews to the power of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, until they should be brought to repent of their sins: and the return which is there foretold as the effect of this desertion, had its accomplishment in part under Ezra and Nehemiah; partly also on the day of Pentecost; but principally, we expect it to be fulfilled at a future period, when the whole nation shall "look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn." But we may with the utmost propriety take occasion from it to speak of spiritual desertion, which all the Israel of God in a greater or less degree experience. In my text, God says, "I will go and return unto my place:" this is a good description of that which we call spiritual desertion. God, properly speaking, is in every place; "he fills all in all:" but yet, as to the manifestation of his presence, he is more particularly in Heaven: "He is the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity. whose name is Holy; and he dwells in the high and holy place." "Heaven is his throne; and he humbles himself when he beholds the things that are on earth." It is "the habitation of his holiness;" so that if, either for purposes of judgment or of mercy, he grant to visit the earth, he leaves, as it were, his proper place, and comes down to us. When he noticed the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, "I will go down now and see whether they have done according to the cry which is come up unto me:" and, when he was about to punish the Jews, the prophet said, "Behold, the Lord comes out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the land [Isaiah 26:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.21)." So when the Church prayed to him for the manifestations of his power, they said, "O that you would rend the heavens, and come down [Isaiah 64:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 64.1)." Thus, in the New Testament, he is frequently said to come and dwell in his people. Thus, when he visits us, he comes out of his place; and, when he withdraws those visits, he "goes, and returns to his place." Not that he is really capable of moving from one place to another, because he is alike in every place; but, with respect to the manifestations of his presence, the communications of his grace, the supports of his arm, and the consolations of his Spirit, he may be truly said to move: for neither the presence nor removal of anything can be more perceptible to the body, than the loss or acquisition of these things is to the soul. The way in which God withdraws himself from the soul, may be very fitly illustrated by the manner in which he forsook the Jews of old. The Shechinah, or bright cloud, was the symbol of the Divine presence; and that rested upon the ark between the cherubim. But when God was incensed against his people for their abominations, he gave them various warnings of his determination to forsake them, unless they should repent: he made his prophet therefore to see in a vision, what indeed all Israel, in the time of Moses, had seen with their bodily eyes,—his gradual departure. We have the account in the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of Ezekiel, to some verses of which we will refer you. In 9:3, God is represented as taking his first step towards his departure; "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house:" in 10:18, he removed still farther; "Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim," which were at that time, as we are told in verse 3, and 4, standing in the court: in verse 19, he went yet farther; "And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth, in my sight; and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above." In 11:23, God goes to a yet greater distance; "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain, which is the east side of the city." See here, how many different removes there were, before God would utterly forsake them; first from the ark to the threshold; then to the court; then to the gate; and then to the mountain; and even there he stood, if that by any means they might humble themselves, and prevent his final departure. Now thus it is in his departure from the soul: when he sits enthroned, as it were, in the soul, all is well: the person thus highly honored, is happy beyond description: his views of divine truth are clear, his apprehensions of it lively, and his enjoyment of it is unspeakably sweet and precious: having the light of God's countenance, and a sense of his favor, he has all that man can desire in this mortal state. But, when he becomes proud, or negligent, or worldly, when by any misconduct he begins to grieve the Holy Spirit, he soon perceives symptoms of the Divine displeasure: the effusions of Divine love in his soul are less abundant; his discoveries of the Deity are less glorious; his views and apprehensions are darker; his communion with God is less frequent, and less ardent; and his holy intimacy with the Deity is sensibly diminished. If he do not instantly take the alarm, and humble himself before God, and implore his pardon, he finds gradually a veil drawn between his God and him: he cannot have that access to God that he was accustomed to enjoy: he loses that enlargement of heart which he used to experience; his joys are in a great measure withdrawn: instead of abounding in praises, he finds it hard even to pray: it is comparatively seldom that he can break forth into songs of praise and adoration; and, if now and then he feel some elevation of soul, he cannot adore God for what he is in himself, but only for what he has done for us. Thus, before he is aware, his God has withdrawn himself; and, if now he do not call him back by earnest supplication, and by renewed faith in Christ as his Mediator and Advocate, he will find everything decay: the beauty of the summer will fade away, the autumnal gloom will soon succeed, and everything will quickly wear a wintry aspect: all the graces of the soul will languish, and the corruptions of the heart regain their former ascendancy. The departing sun does not more surely change the face of nature, than the departure of God from the soul will leave it destitute and forlorn: so truly is it said, "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!" But these are, as it were, the steps by which God departs from the soul; and by these marks we may judge of his increasing nearness or removal.

We see, then, what is meant by spiritual desertion—

Let us now consider,

II. The end and intent of it—

God intends our good in all his dispensations, unless indeed we have provoked him utterly to abandon us; and then he may justly cause such events as shall open a way for the exercise of our corruptions, and for the consequent hardening of our hearts: but, until he has thus given us up, he designs ail his dispensations for our good. Especially, in withdrawing from the souls of his people, he has a regard to their best interests: two principal ends which he would accomplish, are, to humble, and to quicken them.—First, to humble them; "I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence." The confession of our sins is indispensably necessary, as well for our good, as for God's glory: however God may desire to pardon, he cannot do it, unless we be first disposed to confess: it would be unworthy of his majesty, and directly contrary to his word. He has said, that "he who covers his sins shall not prosper;" and that he only "who confesses and forsakes them shall find mercy:" and his own honor is so interwoven with the abasement of the sinner, that, when Joshua exhorted Achan to confess his sin, he could use no terms more proper than these; "My son, give, I pray you, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Indeed the good of man is no less concerned in the humiliation of his soul before God; for, until he be brought to a sense of his iniquities, he has no disposition to accept of mercy: he disdains to become a suppliant for it: he denies that he stands in need of it: he thinks himself affronted by the offer of it, because the offer necessarily implies, what he is utterly averse to acknowledge, namely, that he deserves punishment. This same pride remains, in a measure, in God's people after their conversion; and though they hate it and loath themselves for it, yet, upon every fresh sin which they commit, they are but too apt to indulge it: they still feel an unaccountable backwardness to confess their sins, even though they know that God is privy to all, and needs not any information from them. When therefore God sees his people harboring this pride in any degree, he withdraws himself from them: the more they indulge this vile principle, the more he testifies his displeasure, to show them, that he will ever "resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble." He is determined "to abase those who walk in pride;" and therefore he never vouchsafes the former tokens of his love, until he has brought the soul to an open and sincere confession. We have a remarkable instance of this in David: he had grievously offended God in the matter of Uriah; but his proud heart would not humble itself before God. What was the consequence? God forsook him; and instead of speaking pardon and peace to him, he left his soul to be incessantly harassed with fruitless remorse and anguish; nor ever restored peace to his conscience, until he had humbled himself for his iniquity: thus David says, in [Psalm 32:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 32.3-4). "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; for day and night your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer." This was his state while he persisted in impenitence: but as soon as he made confession, behold the change! "I acknowledged my sin unto you, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and so you forgave the iniquity of my sin:" and he who began the psalm with such a deplorable account of his experience, concludes it with saying, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart."

A further end which God has in view is, to stir up the soul. His people are but too apt to grow remiss; and sometimes, when they profess to be seeking God with their whole hearts, they are secretly inclining to some earthly vanity. This, if suffered to prevail, would effectually alienate them from the life of God; they would soon be entangled again in the corruptions of the world; and "their last end would become worse than their beginning:" and therefore God in mercy withdraws himself from them; and hides his face, until they seek after him again with their usual ardor. In this he acts, if you will permit me for once to use a very familiar illustration, as earthly parents do: the little child perhaps is loitering behind, and amusing himself with some trifling vanity: the parent calls and commands in vain: at last the parent, wearied with fruitless calls, conceals himself; and then the child is filled with anxiety, seeks his parent with tears, and is more solicitous to keep close to him in future. This is a humble illustration, I readily acknowledge: but it is a natural one; and our Lord himself did not disdain the use of such, for the confirmation of his doctrine: if it convey to you the idea more clearly than a plain statement would, my end is answered: let it show you, what we are at present concerned to declare, the real end for which God hides his face from his children. We may however confirm this statement from the express testimony of God himself: "You shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart; and I will be found of you [Jeremiah 29:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 29.13-14)."

We come now to show,

III. The effect it will produce—

Would to God that the effect were the same on all! but, alas! there are many who are hardened by it more and more, until God "swears in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest:" nevertheless, where the proper effect is produced upon the soul, it is that which is mentioned in my text; "In their affliction they will seek me early." This part of our subject is in a measure anticipated by what has gone before: nevertheless, it is of such importance as to deserve further and more distinct consideration. Prosperity does but ill suit with our fallen nature. Not only temporal ease, but in some sense even spiritual pleasure, becomes a source of evil: not that it is so in itself; "the joy of the Lord is our strength;" but our corruption takes occasion from it to unfold itself. Sometimes a long season of spiritual delight, and peculiar manifestations of God's love, shall foster pride. Even Paul himself, from the abundance of revelations which were made to him, was in danger of "being exalted above measure," and needed "a thorn in his flesh" to keep him humble. So peculiar sensations of joy are sometimes the means of begetting security. We see daily that professors of religion are apt to look back upon former experiences, and to conclude that all is well, because it once appeared to be well: therefore God counteracts this propensity, and consults the good of his people, in withdrawing his sensible presence from them: he stirs them up to a holy vigilance against their spiritual enemies, and to a diligence and circumspection in his ways. See what was the effect produced upon the Spouse in the 5th chapter of the Song of Solomon: in the 2d verse, Christ, the Husband of the Church, is calling to her for admission: saying, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." She, not being disposed for heavenly communion with him, makes frivolous excuses: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Thus she provoked him to depart. Presently, however, she rose to let him in; but behold, he was gone: in verse 5, 6. "I rose up to open to my Beloved: I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone." And now observe the effect of this desertion: "My soul failed when he spoke: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." She then went about the city, and inquired of all the watchmen respecting him: and failing of success here, she says, in verse 8, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, tell you him that I am sick of love." This is a striking comment on the last words of my text, "In their affliction they will seek me early:" and it exactly agrees with the experience of God's people in all ages: when they, who have been favored with the light of God's countenance, are for a season deprived of it, they put away their foolish and vain excuses; they see that they must at all events get near to their Beloved; they will spare no pains; they will rather rise at midnight, than not seek him at all: they will attend the ordinances with redoubled diligence: they will inquire of the ministers, the watchmen, how they may find him: they request the intercession of the saints: in short, they will never rest, until they have regained the sensible enjoyment of the Divine presence.

Let us now come to a short application of the subject.

1. To the careless world—

My Brethren, many of you must be sensible that you never seek after God: if you pray at any time, you rest satisfied with having performed a duty, and are not at all solicitous to obtain any manifestations of the Divine presence: yes, because you have never experienced any peculiar sensations of God's favor, you are ready to think, that all hopes of such experience are groundless, and that all must be either hypocrites or enthusiasts who pretend to such things. But surely, your own want of experience in these matters is no more a ground for denying the truth of what others feel, than your ignorance of the concerns of others is a ground for denying what others know. Would to God that you would seek the Lord for yourselves! you should soon find that it is not in vain to call upon him. If you would humble yourselves, confessing your sins, and crying for mercy through the blood of Jesus, you should soon find that God is "gracious, and full of compassion, and rich in mercy unto all that call upon him:" he would be "a Father unto you; he would come unto you, and dwell with you;" he would "manifest himself unto you as he does not unto the world;" he would "shed abroad his love in your hearts;" and he would "make you glad with the light of his countenance." O, then, "seek the Lord, seek his face evermore!" Remember, it will be an awful matter to be banished forever from his presence; to hear him say, "Depart, accursed—" how dreadful! On the contrary, how delightful to hear him say, "Come, you blessed!" O "seek you the Lord while he may be found; call you upon him while he is near."

2. To the professors of religion—

How apt are you to draw back from God, instead of pressing forward as you ought to do! How do you compel him to hide his face, when he would gladly be comforting you with his presence! Ah, Brethren, know where the fault is: "He delights in the prosperity of his people:" it is wholly owing to yourselves if you do not "rejoice in the Lord all the day long." Do not then oblige him to withdraw himself; do not bring on yourselves so heavy an affliction: search, and see, what there is that has displeased him: see if the world has drawn you aside; see if pride has grieved his Spirit; see if negligence in secret duties has caused him to hide his face: and, whatever it be, confess it to the Lord; mourn over it; renew your application to the blood of Jesus; and press forward with greater diligence: so shall you "walk in the light, as He is in the light;" you shall have abiding and increasing fellowship both with the Father and the Son; and soon you shall be admitted into his immediate presence, where you shall never have one cloud to intercept your view of him to all eternity.

[Hosea 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.1)

DISCOURSE 1153

THE CHARACTERISTIC MARKS OF TRUE PENITENCE

[Hosea 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.1). Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up.

THE spiritual dereliction which the people of God have at times experienced, has ever been considered as the most afflictive of all chastisements: but it has also been the most beneficial, and most effectual. The benefits arising from it were strongly exemplified in the Israelites, who after having long withstood the united efforts of all the prophets, were on a sudden constrained by it to turn to God with sincere contrition.

The words before us are the expressions of that repentance which was excited in the Israelites by God's departure from them, and by his grace that accompanied the affliction [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.15); and they suggest to us a proper occasion to consider,

I. The characteristic marks of true penitence—

It will always be attended with,

1. A sense of our departure from God—

Unregenerate men live "without God in the world;" and yet the thought of their being at a distance from God never enters into their minds. But as soon as the grace of repentance is given to them, they see that they "have been like sheep going astray, every one to his own way," and that they can never find happiness but in "returning to the shepherd and bishop of their souls."

2. An acknowledgment of affliction as a just chastisement for sin—

The impenitent heart murmurs and rebels under the Divine chastisements: the penitent "hears the rod and him that appointed it." He blesses God for the troubles that have brought him to reflection [Psalm 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 16.7); [Psalm 119:67](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.67); and while he smarts under the wounds that have been inflicted on him, he regards them as the merciful tokens of parental love [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.75).

3. A determination to return to God—

When a man is once thoroughly awakened to a sense of his lost condition, he can no longer be contented with a formal round of duties. He reads, hears, prays in a very different way from that in which he was accustomed to do. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the one thought that occupies his mind; and he is resolved through grace to sacrifice everything that would obstruct the salvation of his soul. To hear of Christ, to seek him, to believe on him, and to receive out of his fullness, these are from henceforth his chief desire, his supreme delight Son. 5:6; Son. 5:8.

4. A desire that others should return to him also—

As all the other marks, so this especially was manifested by the repenting Israelites. This is peculiarly insisted on as characteristic of the great work that shall be accomplished in the latter day [Isaiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.3). This has distinguished the Church of God in all ages Son. 1:4. Draw me, and we, etc. The penitent knows how awful the state of all around him is, and how much he has contributed by his influence and example to destroy them; and therefore, though he expects nothing but "hatred for his good-will," he feels it incumbent on him to labor for their salvation; and, if it were possible, he would instruct, convert, and save the whole world [Zechariah 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.21). [John 1:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.41); [John 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.45).

To promote an increase of such repentance among us, we shall proceed to state,

II. The grounds on which a penitent may take encouragement to return to God—

Whatever grounds of despondency we may feel within ourselves, we may take encouragement,

1. From a general view of God's readiness to heal us—

God has not left himself without witness even among the heathen world; but has shown, by his goodness to the evil and unthankful, that he is ever ready to exercise mercy. But to us who have his revealed will, he has left no possibility of doubt: for "if he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The invitations and promises with which his word is filled, are a further evidence to us, that he is willing to receive every returning prodigal, and that he will in no wise cast out any who come unto him. On this ground the whole world may adopt the words of the text, and say, "Come, let us return unto the Lord."

2. From that particular discovery of it which we have in the wounds he has inflicted on us—

The Israelites seemed to lay a peculiar stress on this, and to infer, from the very strokes of his rod, his willingness to "heal and bind them up." They even felt an assurance that his return to them would be both speedy and effectual The text, with verse 2. Thus as soon as any person is brought to acknowledge the hand of God in his afflictions, he will improve them in this very way. Whether his troubles be of a temporal or spiritual nature, he will adore God for not leaving him in a secure and thoughtless state, and for awakening him by any means to a sense of his guilt and danger. He will begin immediately to argue as Manoah's wife; "Would the Lord have shown me this mercy, if he had intended to destroy me [Judges. 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 13.23)." Does a father correct his child because he has no love to him? Are not the very expressions of his anger to be viewed as tokens of his love [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.6), and as a pledge of his returning favor to me as soon as I shall have implored his forgiveness?

Let those then who feel the burden of their sins, remember, that it is God who has given them to see their iniquities; and that the heavier their burden is, the more abundant encouragement they have to cast it on the Lord [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.28).

APPLICATION—

1. To those who have deserted God—

Let us only reflect on the months and years that we have past without any affectionate remembrance of God, or any earnest application to Christ as our Mediator and Advocate; and we shall not need many words to convince us, that we are included in this number. But let us consider whom "we have forsaken; even God, the fountain of living waters;" and, with all our labor in pursuit of happiness, we have only "hewed out for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13)." Let our past experience suffice to show us the vanity and folly of our ways: and let us "return unto him from whom we have deeply revolted." But let us beware lest we "heal our wounds slightly." Christ is the brazen Serpent to which all must look: He is the good Samaritan who alone can help us, and who has submitted to be himself "wounded for our transgressions," that he might "heal us by his stripes."

2. To those who are deserted by God—

God does find it necessary sometimes to withdraw the light of his countenance from his people. But, whatever he may have done on some particular occasions, we are sure that in general he does not forsake us until after we have forsaken him. Hence, when the Israelites were deserted by him, they did not say, Let us pray that he will return to us; but, Let us return unto him: for they were well assured that, as the alienation had begun on their part, so it would be terminated as soon as ever they should humble themselves in a becoming manner. Let those then who are under the hidings of God's face, inquire, what has occasioned his departure from them: and let them put away "the accursed thing," and turn to him with their whole hearts. Let them rest assured, that "there is balm in Gilead;" and that, if they come to God in the name of Christ, their "backslidings shall be healed," and "their happiness restored [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.4). [Lamentations 3:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.31-32). [Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 97.11); [Psalm 147:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 147.3)." If this were the subject of a Fast Sermon, the application might be comprised in the following observations: 1. The calamities of the nation are manifest tokens of God's displeasure, and calls to repentance.—2, All the efforts of our rulers to heal our wounds will be in vain, if we do not repent.—3. A general turning unto God would bring us speedy and effectual relief.

[Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.3)

DISCOURSE 1154

THE EFFECTS OF DILIGENCE IN RELIGION

[Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.3). Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

THEY, who are strongly attached to human systems, are apt to set divine truths at variance with each other, and to wrest some from their plain and obvious meaning, in order to reconcile them with others more agreeable to their sentiments. But they, who receive the word of God as little children, will find a harmony in passages, which at first sight appear contradictory, and will derive equal benefit from the contemplation of them all. Some imagine, that, if our salvation depend wholly on the free and sovereign grace of God, there can be no need for exertion on our part. Others, on the contrary, argue, that if our salvation be to be effected by means of our own endeavors, it cannot be dependent on Divine grace. But these apparently opposite assertions are not made only in different and detached passages, but oftentimes in the very same passage. Our Lord, for instance, exhorts us to labor for the meat that endures unto eternal life, at the same time that he says, the Son of man will give it us. And Paul bids us work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and yet assures us in the very same sentence, that it is God who works in us both to will and to do. Thus the prophet represents those who are returning to God, as encouraging themselves with the thought, that though they could no more accomplish their end by their own exertions than they could command the sun to shine, or the clouds to pour down their waters, yet, if they persevered in the use of God's appointed means, they could not but succeed.

The effects of diligence in religion are here,

I. Plainly stated—

The great object of our attention should be, to gain the knowledge of Christ—

Many see no occasion at all for diligence in the pursuit of heavenly things. Others, who confess the need of constant exertion on our part, yet propose to themselves a wrong end in their labors; having no higher view than to establish a righteousness of their own. But to know Christ and him crucified, is the one mean of eternal life, in comparison of which everything else is as dung and dross Compare [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.3). [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.2). [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.8). It is not however a mere speculative knowledge of him that is thus excellent, (for we may possess that, and have the heart as unsanctified as ever) but an experimental knowledge of him, that brings the soul into a close union and abiding fellowship with him, and a transforming knowledge, that changes us into his blessed image in righteousness and true holiness [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18).

This should be sought with unremitting diligence—

It cannot be attained without frequent and serious meditation. It does not indeed, like other studies, require intenseness of application, scope of thought, and strength of intellect: it requires only that we enter into our own bosom, that we consult the records of conscience, that we apply to our souls the threatenings and promises of the Scripture, and that we live in the daily exercise of faith and prayer. This is easily compatible with any lawful pursuit; and so far from distracting the mind, and incapacitating it for action, it will give direction and energy to all our faculties. We must not however imagine that it is the work of a day, a month, or a year; it is the work of our whole lives. If at any time we think we have attained, and are already perfect, we may be well assured that we have hitherto studied to little purpose. Paul, after preaching the Gospel above twenty years, still desired to know Christ more fully [Philippians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.10); [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.12); and so infinitely does that of which we are ignorant, exceed that which any man can know in this life, that he says, "If any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know [1 Corinthians 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 8.2)." We must therefore "follow on" in the use of God's appointed means, nor ever relax our diligence, until we see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known.

Nor shall such means be used in vain—

It will be invariably found, that, while "the idle soul suffers hunger, the diligent soul shall be made fat." No person shall be disappointed for want of talents; for men shall make a proficiency, not in proportion to their abilities, but in proportion to their willingness to learn of God, and to practice what they already know [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.13-14). God, who alone can instruct us in this knowledge, will "reveal even to babes and sucklings the things that are hid from the wise and prudent." "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way." "If only we cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, if we seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures," we need not fear on account of any imagined incapacity; for God has said, "Then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for the Lord gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding [Proverbs 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 2.6)."

This encouraging truth is yet further,

II. Beautifully illustrated—

There is a beauty peculiar to the Hebrew poetry, and very frequently occurring in the prophetic writings, that important truths are amplified with figurative illustrations, and that sublime metaphors are explained by simple declarations. In the passage before us, that which is first proposed in plain language, is afterwards confirmed in two most instructive similes, each of them affording a more precise view of the manner in which the promise itself shall be fulfilled.

The simile taken from the return of day, intimates, that our success shall be certain and gradual—

Nothing but the utter dissolution of the universe shall ever stop the succession of day and night; so that the stated returns of light may be considered as a fit emblem of certainty. Indeed, God himself sets forth the immutability of his covenant by this very figure; "If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant [Jeremiah 33:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 33.20-21)." Thus certainly shall light arise upon our benighted souls, provided we really desire to behold it [Isaiah 58:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.8); [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.10). In a time of darkness we may cry, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me;" but, as the sun, even at midnight, is hastening towards us, though unseen, so are "the goings forth of our God prepared," decreed, and ready to appear. Let us but "wait, as those who watch for the morning;" and our gloom shall soon be dispelled; and "the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon us with healing in his wings."

Nevertheless we must not expect that we should discern everything at once: our progress will be gradual. The sun does not arise in an instant: there is first a little glimmering dawn; then the gilded clouds begin to wear a brighter aspect; and at last they are dissipated by the rising sun: the sun itself also rises higher, and shines brighter in the heavens, until it arrives at its meridian. Thus it is with the knowledge of Christ in the soul: the first views which the inquiring soul obtains are faint and confused; yes, perhaps, as in the early dawn, things may assume a monstrous and distorted shape: we may "behold men, as trees, walking." But gradually the mists shall be dispelled from our eyes; our organs of vision shall be purged from their film; and the glorious object, whom we desire to behold, shall be revealed to our view. But, while we are here below, we shall "see him only, as in a mirror, darkly:" we must wait until we arrive above, before we can fully "see him as he is."

The simile taken from the return of showers after drought, intimates that our knowledge shall be refreshing and fructifying—

What can be more refreshing than rain to the parched ground? How does the face of nature soon testify its gladness by an universal smile! Yet is this but a very faint resemblance of that joy and gladness, which the soul experiences through seasonable communications of Divine knowledge. Let us figure to ourselves a prodigal reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, and doubting whether so vile a wretch shall ever find acceptance with his offended Father; and, while trembling with a dread of his displeasure, surprised with the tenderest expressions of his love: will not this be a season of refreshing to his soul? Will he not instantly "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness?" Will it not be to him "as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land?" Thus shall it be with all who follow on to know the Lord; they shall have "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

Nor shall the knowledge acquired be unproductive of solid fruits. As "the former rain" prepared the ground for the seed, and caused the seed that was cast in, to vegetate; and "the latter rain" ripened and matured the grain, and made it fit for the sickle (both being essentially necessary, and abundantly productive;) so shall the knowledge of Christ be to the soul; it shall come "like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth [Psalm 72:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.6)." After long drought, the clouds may, almost without a metaphor, be said to "drop fatness:" and the knowledge of Christ, long and eagerly desired, shall make "the desert to blossom as the rose;" yes, "it shall make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert as the garden of the Lord." "Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorny bush shall grow up the myrtle-tree [Isaiah 55:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.10-13);" and the once-barren soul shall be "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory."

We may see from hence,

1. Whence it is that mankind in general are so ignorant of Christ—

The record of God concerning Christ is this; "He who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life." This is plain, express, and immutable. Yet, alas! the generality, instead of laboring above all things to attain the knowledge of Christ, will bestow no pains whatever upon it. There is no other knowledge that they profess to have without study: but this they think they possess almost by intuition. Hence, notwithstanding it is infinitely more important than any other, they continue wholly ignorant of it: they are satisfied with giving a general assent to Christianity as true, while they discern nothing of its beauty, and taste nothing of its excellence. If this knowledge were unattainable, then men would have some excuse, seeing that they would labor in vain, and spend their strength for nothing. But God has promised success to persevering diligence; "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord." Let us not then give way to pride or indolence: but let us search the Scriptures with a humble, teachable spirit, and beg of God to enlighten the eyes of our understanding: so shall we be "guided into all truth," and be made "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

2. Whence it is that they, who have attained some knowledge of Christ, are not made more holy, and more happy by it—

To maintain a steady uniform course is no easy matter. To follow on, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before, requires more humility and zeal than the greater part even of real Christians possess. Hence their attainments in joy and holiness are small, in comparison of what they might possess. Instead of minding uniformly the one thing needful, they suffer themselves to be distracted with worldly cares and pleasures. Instead of resisting their adversary, they yield to him; and give way to desponding thoughts, when they should renew their exertions with more abundant diligence. If they followed on as they ought, not only would their success be certain and gradual, but it would be accompanied with a proportionate increase of joy and holiness. Let us not then turn aside to earthly vanities, or waste our time in fruitless lamentations and complaints; but let us "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" that so our "path may be as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

[Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.4)

DISCOURSE 1155

MAN'S INSTABILITY AND GOD'S FORBEARANCE

[Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.4). O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away.

WHEREVER the Gospel is faithfully preached, some are savingly converted by it. But of those who "run well for a season, many are hindered" in their course, and many turn back again to the world. Such were they to whom God spoke in the words before us We may indeed interpret the three first verses of this chapter as descriptive of what shall take place in the latter day; and so consider the words of the text as a continuation of the complaints uttered against the Jews in the preceding chapter. But we know that there were some partial reformations, as under Hezekiah and Josiah; and therefore we may well explain the passage as belonging to the people of that generation. The word had produced some good effect among them; but their penitence was of very short duration. God therefore took up this pathetic lamentation over them; which leads us to notice,

I. The instability of man—

Man in his best estate is a weak and frail creature. But "Ephraim," (who had cast off the worship of God) and "Judah" (who retained the form but without the power of godliness) may properly be considered as characterizing two different descriptions of persons, namely, mere nominal Christians, and those who make some profession of religion. We shall therefore notice the instability,

1. Of merely nominal Christians—

However men may have shaken off all regard for God, there have been times when they entertained some good desires, and some purposes of amendment. They did not always sin with the same ease that they now do. We may appeal to all, whether there has not been some period of their life when their mind was comparatively tender, and when they felt, in some little measure, the importance of preparing for death and judgment?

But these seasons have passed away without any permanent effect; and the appearances of good have altogether vanished. Fitly therefore are they compared to a morning cloud, and to the early dew: for, as in a season of drought the morning clouds, which seemed to portend rain, are soon scattered; and the dew, which seemed a welcome substitute for rain, is exhaled, before it has penetrated to the roots, and thereby the expectations of the gardener are disappointed; so it is with them; their vows are forgotten, their consciences are become callous, and all prospect of their conversion is annihilated See this exemplified in Pharaoh, [Exodus 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 10.16); [Exodus 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 10.28); in the Israelites, [Exodus 33:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 33.4) with [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.34-37); in Felix, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 24.25); [Acts 24:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 24.27).

2. Of many who make a profession of religion—

Many, like those addressed in the text, have at some time appeared penitent, and have excited, both in themselves and others, a hope, that they would one day be faithful followers of the Lamb. But they have "left off to behave themselves wisely." "The cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things," have turned them aside; so that they are as barren and unfruitful as if they had never professed themselves the Lord's people.

How many have there been in every age who have thus "made shipwreck of their faith!" And how many among ourselves, perhaps, have declined from the ways of God, and given reason to fear that "their last end will be worse than their beginning!"

These are yet more strictly conformed to the images in the text, inasmuch as the hopes and prospects they afforded were more flattering, and the state in which they are left, is more desperate and afflictive See instances of this also in Demas. Compare Philem. verse 24 with [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 4.10). See also [1 Timothy 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 1.19); [1 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.6); [1 Timothy 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.12); [1 Timothy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.15) and [2 Timothy 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.18); [2 Timothy 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 4.4).

No subject whatever reflects more light than this upon,

II. The forbearance of God—

We must not suppose that God is really at a loss what to do, since both his wisdom and power are infinite. But the expressions of the text import,

1. That he is extremely averse to punish us as we deserve—

Our provocations against him have been such as nothing but infinite patience could have endured. He complains of us, that "we have wearied him," and that "he is pressed under us as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves [Malachi 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.17). [Amos. 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos. 2.13)." He appeals to us that he has omitted nothing on his part that could tend to our good [Micah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.3). [Jeremiah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.5). [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.4); and expostulates with us respecting our obstinacy in destroying ourselves [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.11). When there seems scarcely any hope left, lie declares that he cannot endure the thought of giving us up [Hosea 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.7-8); and, in the words before us, intimates the perplexity of his mind halting between his duty as a lawgiver, and his inclinations as a parent. Well may it be said of him, that "judgment is his strange work [Isaiah 28:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.21);" for his whole conduct towards us shows, that he is "slow to anger and rich in mercy [Nehemiah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 9.17)."

2. That there is nothing he can do consistently with his own honor which he is not ready to do for our salvation—

He cannot save us in an impenitent state: that would be a violation of his justice, his holiness, and his truth. But if we would repent, he would forgive us for his dear Son's sake: If we would pray to him for his Holy Spirit, he would renew us, sanctify us, establish us. Whatever his wisdom could devise for our good, or his power execute, he would be ready to effect, if only we would "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."

How strongly is this intimated in the tender manner of his address, "O Ephraim, O Judah," as though he spoke to every one of us severally by name: and by the repetition of that question, "What shall I do unto you?" Let a reciprocal tenderness be excited in our hearts towards him: and both the grounds of his anger, yes, and the consequences of it also, shall soon be removed.

ADDRESS—

1. Those whose goodness has altogether vanished—

How many have reason to look back with shame, and to say, "O that it were with me as in months past [Job 29:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 29.2)." Once you felt some concern about your soul; but now you are regardless of your eternal interests: once you had some prospect of Heaven; but now you have none at all. Consider what a melancholy state this is; and that, if you continue in it until you go to the bar of judgment, your condition will be most desperate forever. Be assured that God will be at no loss how to deal with you then: there will be no longer any conflict in his mind between wrath and pity: abused patience will demand your punishment; and that punishment shall correspond with your iniquity N. B. Compare [Hosea 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.3) with the text. O that you were wise, and would consider your latter end!

2. Those who are yet in a hopeful way—

Some there are, we trust, over whom the clouds are yet suspended, and the dew is yet lying with prolific virtue. O beg of God, that no wind of temptation may dispel the one, no sun of persecution exhale the other. "Remember Lot's wife:" and watch against everything that may impede your progress, or shake your constancy. Be much in prayer, that God would "carry on his good work within you, and perform it to the day of Christ." Guard as much against self-dependence as against the grossest of sins: for "God is a jealous God," and will leave you to learn by bitter experience what is in your heart, if you trust in an arm of flesh [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 32.31). period; "Trust in him only, and with your whole heart;" and he will "perfect that which concerns you," and "preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom."

[Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.6)

DISCOURSE 1156

MERCY BEFORE SACRIFICE

[Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.6). I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

THERE is a disposition in every man to substitute external observances for the devotion of the heart; and to rest satisfied with rendering to God some easy services, while they are utterly averse to those duties which are more difficult and self-denying. But God cannot be deceived, nor will he be mocked. He will look at the heart, and not at the outward appearance only; and will mark with indignation the partial obedience of the hypocrite, no less than the open disobedience of the profane. It was thus that he dealt with his people of old, "hewing them by his prophets, and slaying them by the words of his mouth," because they rested in their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, when he desired the more acceptable services of faith and love.

In this view the prophet intimates in the text,

I. The use of instituted ordinances—

The words of the text are not to be considered as importing that God did not require sacrifices at all, but as declaring his decided preference for spiritual obedience; just as our Lord's injunction, "not to labor for the meat that perishes, but for that meat which endures unto eternal life [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.27)," was not intended to prohibit the pursuit of earthly things, but only to enjoin a superior regard for the concerns of eternity.

God approves and loves the observance of his appointed ordinances—

God appointed a great variety of ordinances to be observed: but the most important among them were "sacrifices and burnt-offerings." These he honored with many signal tokens of his approbation. It is not improbable, that his acceptance of Abel's offering was marked by the descent of fire from Heaven to consume it [Genesis 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 4.4). Certain it is, that on many other occasions God given to men this testimony of his regard To Moses; [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 9.24). Manoah, [Judges. 13:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 13.19-20). Solomon; 2 Chronicles 7:1 and Elijah, [1 Kings 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 18.38); and in unnumbered instances he imparted grace and peace to the souls of his people, while they presented their sacrifices before him.

Under the Gospel dispensation he has enjoined the public administration of his word and sacraments; and has crowned the observance of these ordinances with the brightest displays of his glory, and the richest communications of his love. He has promised his presence in them to the end of the world [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.20); and that too in a manner and degree that we are not generally to expect it on other occasions.

Thus, both under the law and under the Gospel, God has abundantly manifested his regard for the ordinances of his own institution.

But the acceptableness of such services depends on the manner in which they are performed—

God looks rather to the disposition of the worshiper than the matter of his offering; and, if a contrite spirit be wanting, he values nothing that such a worshiper can present; This is repeatedly and strongly declared [Isaiah 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.11-14); [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.3); and is as true under the Gospel as under the Law [Psalm 51:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.16-17). [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 15.8-9).

To this all the Scriptures bear witness. Balaam's answer to Balak [Micah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.6-8), and Samuel's to Saul [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 15.22), and the discreet scribe's to Christ [Mark 12:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 12.33), all concur in establishing this point beyond a doubt.

These considerations may well prepare us to acknowledge,

II. The superior excellence of vital godliness—

The view here given of vital godliness deserves attention—

True religion, as it is experienced in the heart, consists in faith and love, or in such a "knowledge of God" as produces "mercy" both to the bodies and the souls of men. Our blessed Lord twice quotes the words of our text, and explains them in this very manner. was vindicating on one occasion the conduct of his disciples, for plucking some cars of corn on the Sabbath-day. What they had done was certainly allowable on any other day, but probably not on the Sabbath without some urgent necessity. Such a necessity existed in the present case; and as that plea was sufficient to vindicate David in a far more exceptionable violation of the law, and as it was acknowledged to be a full justification of the priests whose labors on the Sabbath were very great, so it was a sufficient excuse for the disciples, as their accusers would have known, if they had understood the meaning of the declaration in the text [Matthew 12:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 12.1-7). See also [Matthew 9:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 9.10-13). where our Lord adduced the same passage, in vindication of his own conduct in associating with sinners.

Such religion as is here described is far more excellent than any outward observances whatever—

1. This is valuable in itself; whereas they are valuable only in relation to the ends for which they were instituted—

A "knowledge of God," and a delight in the exercise of "mercy" to the bodies and the souls of men, renders us conformable to the image of Christ: it constitutes our fitness for Heaven, where both our knowledge and our love will be perfected. But the performance of ceremonies, as has already been shown, is worthless, if it be not instrumental to the production of humiliation and affiance, of purity and zeal. Duties which do not bring us to God, and God to us, are good for nothing.

2. This argues real conversion; whereas they will consist with the most ungodly state—

No man can know God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, or love his fellow-creatures for Christ's sake, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. He may possess carnal wisdom, together with humanity and compassion, while he is yet unregenerate: but, if he have that faith and that love which are the essential constituents of vital godliness, he must have been born again; because he could not have these things, if they had not been given him from above. But any man may be observant of ceremonies; as the Pharisees themselves were, at the very same time that they were slaves of pride, of covetousness, and of hypocrisy.

3. This invariably honors God; whereas they are often the means of greatly dishonoring him—

The exercises of faith and love are but very partially seen by mortal eyes: their sublimer operations are known only to Him who beholds the secret desires of the soul. But that which is seen, compels men to acknowledge the excellence of true religion. Even the enemies of God are constrained to reverence the godly, and to admire the grace of God in them. But an attendance on ordinances is often substituted for the whole of religion; as though God were no better than an idol, either not discerning, or at least not regarding, the dispositions of the heart. Can a greater insult than this be offered to Jehovah? or can anything reflect more dishonor upon him in the world [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.13-14).

Let vital godliness be thus contrasted with outward observances, and the text will be seen in its full import.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are regardless of even the forms of religion—

It is grievous to see how the Sabbaths are profaned, and the ordinances of the Gospel neglected. But consider, Brethren, what must be the consequence of defying God in this daring and contemptuous manner? O, that you would lay it to heart, before it be too late!

2. Those who are attentive to the form, but regardless of the power, of religion—

To those of your description, our Lord said, "Go, and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" and we repeat his words, "Go, and learn this." A clear view of this passage will undeceive you. While you are destitute of faith and love, or not living in the daily exercise of them, you differ but little from those whom we have before addressed. They are open sepulchers, that pour forth their nauseous vapors before all: and you are "whited sepulchers," that, with a fair outside, retain all that is filthy and abominable within. It is with such persons that God himself classes you now [2 Timothy 3:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 3.1-5); with such, if you repent not, you will be numbered to all eternity.

3. Those who possess vital religion in their hearts—

While the generality act as if form were all, you are too apt to act as if form were nothing. There is in this respect a great fault among the professors of the present day: they are too apt to come late to the house of God; and to be irreverent in their postures while the different parts of divine worship are performed; sitting at their ease, when they should be either devoutly kneeling in their supplications, or standing up to sing the praises of Jehovah. This gives occasion to the world to say of you, "They mind the sermon, but care not at all about the prayers." Beloved Brethren, let there be no occasion for such a censure among us. It is dishonorable to our profession; it casts a stumbling-block in the way of the ungodly; and it is highly displeasing to our God. Where real necessity prevents an early attendance on God's worship, or infirmity of body requires an easy posture, the text applies in full force: but where these things do not exist, we must reverence the institutions of God and man: and the more humility we have, the more shall we manifest it in the whole of our deportment.

[Hosea 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.7)

DISCOURSE 1157

OUR TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE COVENANT

[Hosea 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.7). But they, like men, have transgressed the covenant.

THE merciful nature of God's dispensations greatly aggravates our guilt in violating his commandments. The law indeed which he imposed upon the Jews was in some respects an intolerable burden; but in other points of view it was replete with love and mercy: for though its requirements were many, yet its provisions for the unintentional violation of its precepts were also numerous, and peculiarly suited to the character and condition of his people. He required of them sacrifices and burnt offerings; but that which he principally desired, was the exercise of holy affections towards himself, and towards each other: and while they were observant of their duties, he pledged himself to watch over them, to protect them, to bless them. But they were by no means sensible of their privileges, or duly affected with his love: on the contrary, "they, like men, transgressed the covenant."

In the margin of our Bibles, the text is translated, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant:" and this seems the more proper translation. The words which are translated, "like men," occur only in two other passages of the Bible: in one of which it is actually translated, "like Adam [Job 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.33);" and in the other, that sense is evidently most agreeable to the context [Psalm 82:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 82.7). "You shall die like Adam, whose honors were once so great, but were quickly ruined." Thus in the text also it were far better to render the words, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." It is in this sense we propose to interpret them; and in this sense they are well applicable to ourselves. We shall take occasion from them to show,

I. What covenant we have transgressed—

The peculiar covenant under which the Jews were, is altogether abrogated: and, as we have never been under it, we, of course, have never transgressed it. But we have transgressed,

1. The covenant of works—

Under this covenant all are by nature: we are born under it: and it is as much in force against us at this time, as it ever was against those to whom it was first given. It requires perfect and perpetual obedience to the two tables of the moral law: and it denounces an everlasting curse against every the smallest violation of God's commandments [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.10). It is needless to show that we have transgressed this covenant; for there has not been one day of our lives, wherein we have not transgressed it in ten thousand instances.

2. The covenant of grace—

This is the new covenant which God has made with us, to remedy our breaches of the former covenant. The old covenant said, "Do this, and live;"but the new covenant says, "Believe, and be saved." It proposes to us a Savior, who has made atonement for our sins, and wrought out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death. In, and through, Him reconciliation is offered to us; and God engages to restore to everlasting happiness and glory all who will come to him in the name of Christ.

Now one would imagine that all should eagerly embrace this covenant, and hold it fast, with a determination never to lose the benefits it so freely offers. But the fact is, that men are even more averse to this covenant than to the covenant of works. They cannot endure to depend so entirely on another for their acceptance with God. They think they can make some compensation for their violations of the former covenant, and in some way or other fulfill its conditions so as to secure its rewards. They perhaps will borrow somewhat from the new covenant, just to supply their deficiencies; but they cannot be prevailed upon to renounce the old covenant altogether, and to accept salvation by faith alone.

Let every one look back upon his past experience; and see whether he himself has not been leaning thus to something which he either has done, or has purposed to do, instead of prostrating himself at the Savior's feet, and imploring mercy solely through his blood and righteousness? Yes; whatever we may imagine, this has really been the experience of every living man; such transgressors have we been against the new covenant itself, and against Christ the Mediator of it.

3. The special covenants which we ourselves have individually made with God—

In our baptism we entered into covenant with God; and engaged to "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." At other times also, either at our confirmation by the bishop, or at the Lord's supper, or in a time of sickness, or under conviction of sin, we have resolved that we would repent, and turn unto God in newness of heart and life. But have not the practices of every day contradicted these professions? Have we not broken all our vows and resolutions? And have not the world, the flesh, and the devil, yet too great an ascendency over our hearts? Behold then, "We are transgressors of the covenant;" and we have been "transgressors even from the womb."

To discover more fully the guilt of violating the covenant, let us consider,

II. With what aggravations we have transgressed it—

The having "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" greatly enhances our guilt; since, in so doing, we have sinned,

1. Against the greatest obligations to obedience—

The obligations which had been conferred on Adam in Paradise, ought to have kept him steadfast in his obedience. He was endued with faculties superior to any other being upon earth. He was made capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God; yes, was admitted to the most familiar converse with the Deity. But notwithstanding all these favors, he transgressed. Thus have we also done. Indeed the obligations conferred on us have been infinitely greater than any which Adam enjoyed, even in his state of innocence: for God has given us his only-begotten Son, to take upon him our nature, and to expiate our guilt by his own blood. Who can ever appreciate this favor, or compute its value? The tongue of an archangel cannot fully declare it; nor can any finite mind fully comprehend it. Yet, notwithstanding this obligation, we have sinned: yes; we have transgressed against a redeeming God; and have trampled on that very blood which he shed for our redemption. O what a fearful aggravation is this of all the guilt we have contracted!

2. Against the strongest motives to obedience—

Adam had not only his own salvation, but also the salvation of all his posterity, involved in his obedience. According to the covenant made with him. all his seed, to the very end ot time, were to live in him, or in him to die. In this view it must be confessed, that his motives to steadfastness were more powerful than any which can operate on us; unless indeed we balance a regard for the Savior's glory against his concern for his children's welfare. But, however this may be, our motives to obedience are unspeakably great: the everlasting happiness or misery of our souls is now at stake: Heaven with all its glory, or Hell with all its torments, must be our portion: and upon our present conduct our eternal state depends. Now can any one reflect a moment on these considerations, and not stand amazed that ever he should be induced to violate the covenant of his God? Is it not astonishing that anything in the whole universe should prevail upon us to transgress under such circumstances, and to withstand such motives as these?

3. Under the slightest possible temptations to disobedience—

There was nothing wanting to Adam in Paradise that could at all conduce to his happiness. Nothing was denied him, but the fruit of one single tree, as a test of his obedience. And what temptation was this to him, who already possessed all that he could reasonably desire? But, slight as the temptation was, he yielded to it. And let us inquire, what our temptations are? A little money, a breath of honor, a momentary gratification, this is all that we can promise ourselves by transgressing the covenant: and what is this when set against eternity? What are we the happier at this moment for all our past transgressions? What is left to us from them all, but shame and remorse? And have we any reason to expect that the gratifications of sin in future will be more solid and permanent than those which we have enjoyed in times past? Behold then, this is the price for which we forego the hopes of Heaven, and entail upon ourselves the miseries of Hell! What desperate, what incredible infatuation!

INFERENCES—

1. How striking a contrast is there between God and us!

We violate our covenant continually upon the most trifling temptations, and that too in spite of the strongest motives and obligations to the contrary. But does God ever violate his covenant? He has engaged to receive every returning prodigal, that comes to him in the name of Jesus: and did we ever hear of so much as one whom he spurned from his footstool? He has engaged also to "keep the feet of his saints," and to "perfect that which concerns them." And can we adduce one single instance of a real saint whom he has finally, and forever, forsaken? No: he may have left hypocrites, to show all that was in their hearts; and may have punished his own people with a temporary suspension of his favors; but "he has sworn once by his holiness that he will not lie unto David," or "cast off his people forever:" and this covenant he never has broken, nor ever will. Yet what motives has he had, or what obligations have been laid upon him, to keep covenant and mercy with us? Truly none. But has he not had temptations enough to abandon us? Yes; such temptations as none but a God of infinite perfections could have withstood. Every day, every hour, every moment, we have been provoking him to anger; but he is the unchangeable Jehovah, and therefore it is that we are not consumed.

O admire then the faithfulness of your God; and abase yourselves before him, as vile, faithless, and rebellious creatures!

2. How thankful should we be for the covenant of grace!

The covenant of works made no provision for one single breach of its commands: it instantly, and irreversibly, doomed the transgressor to destruction. But the covenant of grace makes provision for all the offences that ever were committed, provided we seek an interest in it. Here at this moment we may obtain all that we stand in need of. Here is pardon for all our sins; strength against all our temptations; peace to comfort us in all trials: in short, here is grace and glory, and whatever we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity: and all is offered to us freely in the name of Jesus: we have only to believe in Jesus, and all is ours. O Brethren, be thankful for this "covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure;" and embrace it with your whole hearts. Then, notwithstanding your past transgressions of it have been more numerous than the sands upon the sea-shore, they shall all be forgiven; and you shall "stand before God without spot or blemish."

[Hosea 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.2)

DISCOURSE 1158

THE FOLLY OF INCONSIDERATION

[Hosea 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.2). They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.

IT is certain that many who have the Gospel dispensed to them continue ignorant of its very first principles, and "perish at last for lack of knowledge." But there are still more who destroy their own souls through inconsideration. They will not attend to the things they do know, or suffer the principles they have received to have any influence upon their minds. Thus it was with Israel of old: they committed all manner of abominations [Hosea 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.7); [Hosea 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.9-10), and, when God was desirous to "heal them," were bent as much as ever on the prosecution of their own evil ways verse 1; and the reason of this is assigned by God himself in the words of our text: it is justly traced to their inconsideration; the prevalence and folly of which we propose to set before you.

I. The prevalence of inconsideration—

We propose not to speak of inconsideration at large, but only as it respects God's omniscience, and our accountableness to him.

It is an undoubted truth, that God "remembers all our wickedness"—

Reason alone were sufficient to determine this point: for if God do not remember all the transactions of men, how can he judge the world?

If we would ascertain the point from matter of fact, we may notice the injunction given to Israel to extirpate the Amalekites, above three hundred years after they had committed the sin for which this judgment was to be inflicted on them [1 Samuel 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 15.2). And at the close of David's reign, a famine of three years was sent as a punishment of Saul's treachery in seeking to destroy the Gibeonites; nor was the punishment removed, until exemplary vengeance had been taken on the family of the departed monarch 2 Samuel 21:1-9.

In Scripture there is, as we might well expect, abundant proof of this fundamental axiom. God declares it, as in many other places [Hosea 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.13); [Hosea 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 9.9), so in the very verse from whence our text is taken "They are before my face." In matters of more than ordinary importance, God often appeals to men respecting the truth of his own assertions. Accordingly this is made a subject of appeal; "Is not the wickedness of men sealed up as in a bag, and deposited among my treasures," to be brought forth against them at the day of judgment [Deuteronomy 32:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.34-35) with [Job 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 14.17). Further, because he would have this truth impressed on the minds of all, he even swears in confirmation of it; "The Lord has sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works [Amos. 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos. 8.7)."

But plain and important as this truth is, men do not consider it—

No man is so ignorant as not to be acquainted with this truth. There are many indeed who will put forth atheistical sentiments for the sake of vindicating their own conduct, and silencing the accusations of conscience: they will say, like those of old, "Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 94.7);" but in their sober hours they will not hesitate to confess, that God both sees all their wickedness, and will remember it in order to a future retribution.

But the evil is, that, though men confess this truth, they "do not consider it:" they do not like to give it a place in their minds: they cannot bear to have it suggested to them. If the thought of it arise in their minds, they rush into business, or into company and dissipation, to get rid of it. That they do not consider it, is manifest: for could they sin with so much ease, if they did; or could they maintain such tranquility of mind after having committed sin? Would not the thought of God's eye being upon them, cast some damp upon their pleasure; and the expectation of a future recompense occasion some disquietude? We are sure that many of those evils which are committed under the cover of the night, would not be committed, if only the presence of a superior should be seasonably interposed. How then must the presence of Almighty God awe us, if we would but duly consider it! Suppose a poisonous draught were put into our hands, and we were informed, that, within a few hours after we had drank it, we should be racked with inexpressible agony, and in the space of one day should die through the excess of torment; should we not reflect a moment before we ventured to drink it? And supposing us infatuated enough to sacrifice our lives for a momentary gratification, should we not put the cup to our lips with a trembling hand? and after we had swallowed the contents, should we not feel some concern, some regret, some sense of our folly? Could we go away and laugh at what we had done, and boast of it, and encourage our friends to do the same? If we could not, the reason is obvious. Much more therefore should we be affected with a dread of future sin, and a sorrow for the past, if we considered who is privy to our actions, and how certainly he will remember them to our everlasting confusion.

To counteract this prevailing thoughtlessness, we will endeavor to expose,

II. The folly of it—

Such inconsideration can be productive of no good, and must be attended with incalculable mischief to the soul—

1. It will not induce forgetfulness in God—

Among our fellow-creatures our conduct may have considerable effect: and others may be lulled asleep by means of our security. But God is occupied in his work, whether we be in ours or not. He wakes, though we sleep: he sees, though we think ourselves hid from his sight: he marks, though we are regardless of him: nor does he ever feel more indignation, than when we feel ourselves most secure and composed. We may "think wickedly that he is even such an one as ourselves; but he will reprove us for what we have done amiss, and will set it in order before our eyes [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.21)." Nor is it the act only of murder or adultery that he will remember, but the look, the desire, the thought, yes "all" our wickedness, of whatever kind or whatever degree.

2. It will rob us of all the benefits we might receive by reflection—

If we did but consider that God has noted down all our wickedness, the next thought would be, How shall we get it blotted out of his book? This would lead us to see the inefficacy of our tears to wash away our guilt; and would stimulate us to inquire after that Savior, whose "blood cleanses from all sin." Thus we might obtain the remission of our sins, and be restored to the favor of our offended God. But inconsideration robs us of all this. We shall never repent of our evil ways, until we have "considered" them. We shall never seek for mercy, until we have "considered" our guilt and danger. We shall never flee to Christ, until we have "considered" our need of him. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Can a thoughtless sinner take this view of the subject, and not confess his folly?

3. It will lead us only to multiply our offences against God—

The necessary consequence of inconsideration is, that we continue to live each succeeding day and year in the same manner as we did in time past; and, in many cases, harden ourselves more and more in wickedness. If we would at the close of every day call ourselves to an account how the day had been spent, and what God had recorded concerning us in the book of his remembrance, we should certainly abstain from many sins, which we now commit without thought or remorse. Even if the Sabbath alone were spent in this holy exercise, we should be kept from rushing into perdition as the horse into the battle. But we are like a spendthrift, who, never considering how great his debts are, or how he shall discharge them, runs on from one extravagance to another, until he has accumulated a debt which involves him in disgrace and misery. Yes, we resemble a man on the eve of bankruptcy, who, knowing that his affairs are ruined, cannot endure to examine his accounts, but proceeds in the best way he can, until the fatal hour arrives, and his insolvency is declared. But, oh! what madness is it thus to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!"

4. It will certainly issue in long and painful reflection—

We may shake off reflection here; but the time is coming when we must and shall consider. God has said, "In the latter day you shall consider it perfectly [Jeremiah 23:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.20). Yes, as soon as we come into the eternal world, we shall have a perfect view of all our past wickedness: we shall see it, not as we do now, through the medium of prejudice and self-love, but as God sees it, in all its enormity and with all its aggravations. The sins of thought as well as of act, the sins of omission as well as of commission, will all be open to our view; and there will be no possibility of diverting our attention from them. God bids us now consider; and we will not: but what shall we do in that day when he shall answer our cries with this severe rebuke, "Son, remember [Luke 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.25)." 'Remember the sins committed; remember the warnings neglected; remember the mercies abused; remember the opportunities lost.' O sad remembrance! O dreary prospect of unalterable irremediable misery! Were it not then better to consider in time, when the most painful reflections will be beneficial, than to protract the period of consideration until it shall he ten thousand times more painful, and altogether unavailing?

Advice—

1. Call your past ways to remembrance—

However long since any sills may have been committed, they are as fresh in God's memory, and as hateful in his sight, as if they had been committed this very hour. Endeavor then to get the same view of them as he has. Collect them all together: and what a dreadful mass will they appear! If you could suppose them all to have been crowded into the space of one day, and yesterday to have been the day in which they were all committed, what a monster would you appear in your own eyes! Yet, admitting the enormity of each sin to have been precisely such as it was at the moment of its commission, and such as it exists at present, such is the light in which you are viewed by God. Turn not away your eyes from this painful sight: you must behold it sooner or later: if you delay to look at it, the black catalogue of crimes will still increase, and the sight of them be yet more terrible. In the name of God then, I entreat you all, "Consider your ways [Hag. 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai. 1.5); [Hag. 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai. 1.7)."

2. Seek to have your sins blotted out from the book of God's remembrance—

It has already been observed, that this may be done. Though you neither have, nor can have, anything to merit such a favor, God is willing to bestow it for his own name's sake: his word to you is, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember your sins [Isaiah 43:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.25). He even promises to "cast them into the very depths of the sea [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.19)," from whence they shall never be brought against you: yes, he "covenants" to efface them, as it were from his own memory; and says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more [Jeremiah 31:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.34)." And will you not seek this mercy? Is it too soon yet awhile for you to enjoy it? Will you not be happier in the possession of it, than in the continuance of your sins? Think how such a proposal would be received by those who are now reflecting upon their ways in Hell: would they need to be urged a second time to ask for mercy; O seek it instantly; seek it with all importunity; seek it in the adorable name of Jesus; seek it after the example of the saints of old [Psalm 25:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 25.7); [Psalm 79:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 79.8); and then, "though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be white as wool."

3. Endeavor to walk as in the presence of God—

A sense of the Divine presence will be an excellent preservative from sin. We know how careful we are of our conduct in the presence of any one whose good opinion we value: let us "set the Lord always before us [Psalm 16:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 16.8-9); [Psalm 51:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.1-2); [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.7)." in order that our circumspection may be increased, and that we may be kept as much from secret as from open sin, from sin in the heart as well as sin in the life. Let us "commune much with our own hearts in our chamber, and be still [Psalm 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 4.4)." Let us strive to keep a conscience void of offence, and to approve ourselves in all things to "Him, who searches the heart, and tries the reins." Let it be our ambition, that on every day more and more acts of piety may be recorded in the book of God's remembrance; that so he may "remember us for good See [Nehemiah 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 13.14); [Nehemiah 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 13.22); [Nehemiah 13:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 13.31) and [Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 106.4-5)." while we are here on earth, and welcome us as "good and faithful servants" when we enter into the eternal world.

[Hosea 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.8-9)

DISCOURSE 1159

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY

[Hosea 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.8-9). Ephraim, he has mixed himself among the people: Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not: yes, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows it not.

IF the body be oppressed with sickness, we inquire into the symptoms of the disorder, and trace it, if possible, to its proper cause. The same course is proper in reference to the soul, and indeed to the state of nations as well as of individuals. The prophet is representing the declining, and almost desolate, condition of the ten tribes: and, in the words before us, he marks the particular sins which had provoked God to forsake them; and the fearful consequences of their transgressions. The Israelites had, in direct opposition to God's command, united themselves with the heathen, and incorporated many of their idolatrous rites with the worship of the true God. They were even "mad upon their idols," while they were very cold and indifferent in what related to Jehovah. In consequence of this, God gave them up into the hands of their enemies. Pul, king of Assyria, exhausted their treasures by the tribute he imposed [2 Kings 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 15.19); and the king of Syria reduced their armies to a mere shadow, "making them even as the dust by threshing [2 Kings 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 13.7)." Proofs and evidences of decay were visible in every department of the state, and such as indicated approaching dissolution: yet such was the infatuation of the people, that they were as unconcerned and secure as if they had been in the most safe and flourishing condition.

It is not however our intention to enter any further into the history of the ten tribes. We shall rather draw your attention to our own personal concerns, of which theirs was a type and shadow: and we shall proceed to point out the causes and symptoms of spiritual decay.

I. The causes—

The two things mentioned in the text will be found among the most fruitful sources of declension in the divine life:

1. An undue connection with the world—

A certain degree of fellowship with mankind is necessary, in order to a due discharge of our civil and social duties. But if we mix with the world by choice, we shall go contrary to the commands ot God, and suffer loss in our souls. We are enjoined to "come out from among them, and be separate [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.2). [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 45.10-11)." God even appeals to us respecting the impossibility of maintaining with propriety any intimate communion with them [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.14-17); and our Lord characterizes his followers as being no more of the world than he himself was [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.14). But some professors of religion connect themselves more closely, and involve themselves more deeply, with the world in business, than they need to do: others associate with them as companions: and others are so blinded by their passions, as to unite themselves with them in marriage. What must we expect to be the result of such conduct? Must it not expose us to many temptations? Are we not, when so circumstanced, likely to drink into the spirit of the world, and to be drawn into a conformity to their ways? Surely the falls and apostasies of many must be traced to this source: and it will be well if this evil do not become fatal to some of us.

2. A partial regard to God—

A "cake" baked upon the coals and "not turned," would be burned up on one side, while it was altogether doughy on the other. This fitly represents the state of those who are cold and indifferent in things relating to religion, but excessively ardent in their pursuit of other objects. Yet what is more common than such a stale? Some professors are so intent on their worldly business, and have their hearts so engaged in it, as scarcely to have any zeal left for better things. Some are occupied with this or that favorite study, in comparison of which the Bible, and prayer, and communion with God, have no charms for them. Some are inflamed by politics, and are never happy but when they are declaiming upon the affairs of state. Some are so intent upon the circumstantials of religion, such as Baptism or Church-government, that they seem to think an agreement with them in their opinions on those subjects as essential to salvation as even piety itself. Some again are heated by controversy about certain doctrines, while, alas! they pay but little attention to their duties, especially the duties of humility and love. What wonder if the soul languish, when its eternal interests are thus postponed to matters of inferior importance? If we would adorn our holy profession, we must be penetrated throughout with a fervent regard to God; and all other things must be subordinated to the one thing needful.

Having traced the causes of spiritual decay, let us notice,

II. The symptoms—

Agreeably to what has been observed in relation to the Israelites, we shall mention three marks, which, in the progressive stages of decay, will show themselves in a declining soul:

1. Inward weakness—

The exercises of religion require our utmost efforts: without a fixedness of purpose, an intenseness of thought, an ardor of desire, and a resoluteness of conduct, we cannot get forward in our Christian course. But when we have declined from God, all these are proportionably relaxed. The bow is unstrung, and cannot send the arrow to the mark [Hosea 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.16). We take up the Bible; but it is a sealed book: we address ourselves to prayer; but our mouths are shut, and we cannot utter a word before God. The duties which once were easy, are become arduous and irksome. The temptations which once had lost all their force, now obstruct our way, and entangle our feet. The cross, which was once an object of holy glorying, and served only to animate us to fresh exertions, now becomes an object of terror; and instead of taking it up with cheerfulness, we study as much as possible to avoid it.

Let us look and see, whether "strangers have not devoured our strength," and whether "the things which remain in us be not ready to die [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.2)."

2. Outward proofs of that weakness—

"Grey hairs" are indications of declining strength. They are first thinly interspersed; and afterwards diffused over the whole head. Thus are the symptoms of decline small at first, and scarcely visible, except upon close inspection. They will however appear, when the inward weakness has commenced. There will be a visible alteration in the temper: a proud imperious spirit will be more ready to show itself: fretfulness and impatience will more easily arise. A change will be found in our dealings with the world. We shall be less open, less generous, less scrupulous about adhering to truth, or practicing the tricks of trade. In our families also will a deterioration of our state be manifest. There will be less attention paid to their spiritual interests. The word of God will not be read to them with such practical and interesting remarks: nor will the devotions be conducted with life; but will degenerate into a mere form. In the closet, more especially, the symptoms of our decay will be seen. Prayer will probably be a mere lip-service, and not unfrequently be entirely omitted. The sacred volume will either be glanced over in haste, or lie wholly neglected. In short, there will be no delight in God, no peaceful serenity of mind, no joyful hope of immortality. These things will be exchanged for gloom and melancholy, for sighs and sorrows, for an accusing conscience, and a dread of death.

3. Insensibility under that weakness—

Things have proceeded far when this mark appears. But it is the natural effect of sin to blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and sear the conscience [1 John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.11). [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 3.13). [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.2). Twice is it said of the Israelites in the text, "They knew it not:" they had contracted a stupid indifference, bordering on judicial blindness and infatuation. And this is the state to which many professors of religion are reduced. Others see their grey hairs, but they see them not: they have ceased to look into the glass of God's law, or to examine themselves: they have quieted their minds by some carnal expedient of business, or company, or by comparing themselves with others. Deplorable indeed is their condition! and if they be not soon roused from their lethargy, they will have reason to wish they had never been born, or never seen the light of Gospel truth [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.20-21).

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are resting in a formal religion—

Religion is a state of holy active exertion in the things pertaining to God. God says to us, "My son, give me your heart [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 23.26)." Without this, our services are of no value. Look to it then, my Brethren, that you get your hearts quickened by the Spirit of God. You must not be satisfied with seeking: "you must strive to enter in at the strait gate [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 13.24)." You must "take the kingdom of Heaven by violence [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.12)." Beg then that you may be "renewed by the Spirit in your inward man," and be enabled, so to fight as to conquer, so to run as to win the prize 1 Corinthians 9:24; [1 Corinthians 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 9.26).

2. Those who profess to experience "the power of godliness"—

Astonishing is the deceitfulness of the human heart. We all see in others defects, of which they themselves are not conscious. And can we suppose that we ourselves also are not blind to our own defects? Yes: and perhaps the very locks which we think our greatest ornaments, are full of grey hairs. Our graces perhaps are rather the resemblance, than the reality, of virtue: our humility may be affectation, our zeal pride, our confidence presumption. Let us "be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.2)." Let us search and try ourselves [Lamentations 3:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.40); and beg of God also to search and try us [Psalm 139:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 139.23). Let us be careful that we set out well, and then labor to "go on from strength to strength, until we appear before God in Zion [Psalm 84:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 84.7)."

[Hosea 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.13)

DISCOURSE 1160

GUILT AND DANGER OF AN UNCONVERTED STATE

[Hosea 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.13). Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.

SUCH is the infatuation of unregenerate men, that they always promise themselves security in the ways of sin: but it is certain that they are never more in danger than when they fancy themselves most secure: they may be well compared to a bird that is allured to a net: it hears the notes that call and invite it to the society of some kindred bird: fearless of danger, it obeys the summons: it hastens to the place from whence the sound issues, little thinking that, instead of a companion, it shall find a foe. The fowler, however, who has spread the net, sees that the unsuspecting bird is quickly to resign its liberty, and perhaps its life. Thus it is with those who listen to the enchanting voice of sin: they follow it, but know not that it is for their life [Proverbs 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 7.23); The word of Jehovah is gone forth, nor can it ever be reversed: it says, "Woe unto the wicked, it shall go ill with him;" and, "when he says, Peace and safety, then shall sudden destruction come upon him as travail upon a woman with child, and he shall not escape." To this purpose God speaks to the Israelites in the passage before us: he says, "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria: but when they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the birds of the Heaven." Having thus represented their danger in figurative expressions, he declares it plainly in the most awful terms: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me! though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me." From these words, we will endeavor to set before you,

I. The state of men in general—

To those who can see nothing but the outward conduct, there may appear to be a very considerable difference between the states of different men: the moral and decent may be esteemed exceeding righteous and good, while the openly vicious and profane are execrated as exceeding vile. And it must be acknowledged, that, as far as the conduct of these different persons respects society, there is a great difference between them; but God, who looks at the heart, and estimates everything by the respect it has to him, sees that all men are very nearly, if not altogether, upon a level; all men appear to him as "sepulchers, full of all impurity:" some indeed appear whited and outwardly adorned, while others are open, and discover all their deformity. Still, however, inwardly they are all the same.

In the first place, all "flee from him." Adam had no sooner sinned, than he lost his delight in God, and fled from the presence of his Maker. From that time, all his descendants have felt the same aversion to fellowship with the Deity: they love not the ordinances where God reveals himself to men: when God calls them, "they all begin with one consent to make excuse:" some plead their social engagements; others the pressure of worldly business; all have some plea to make; all say, in effect, I can not, or, I will not, come. In dangers or in troubles, they will rather go to the creature than to God: even under a sense of sin, they will rather flee to their own resolutions, and trust in their own endeavors, than they will rely upon the strength and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. When God calls, they turn a deaf ear to his invitations. When he follows them, as it were, by the convictions of his Spirit, they actually "flee from him:" they shake off the thoughts that trouble them; they endeavor to drown reflection in business or pleasure; and the whole language of their hearts and actions is, like theirs in Job, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 21.14)."

But the aversion to God which carnal men feel, is carried much further: they not only flee from him, as finding no pleasure, no satisfaction in his presence, but they also "transgress against him." The law is yet in a measure written on their hearts, but they will not comply with its dictates: they see clearly, in many things, that such or such a course of action must be displeasing to God, and "that they who do such things are worthy of death; yet they both do these things themselves, and have pleasure in those that do them;" choosing them for their companions, and countenancing them in their actions: nor is this occasionally only, and through temptation or inadvertence: no; it is the settled course and tenor of their lives. The commands or prohibitions of God have no weight with them: whatever is reputable in the world, or agreeable to themselves, that they do; whenever their sensual inclinations or worldly interests strongly bias them to any line of conduct, it soon appears that they have cast off the yoke of God, and that they feel no restraint whatever, except that which arises from temporal considerations.

Nor is this all: they "speak lies against God:" they declare, in the face of the whole world, that the service of sin and Satan is to be preferred before the service of God. In every transgression they commit, they virtually speak to this effect; 'This is happiness: as for obedience to God, that would be an insupportable restraint: true happiness consists in renouncing all allegiance to God, and in following our own will.' Moreover they say, like those of old, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.12);" that is 'if we serve him, we shall have no profit; nor shall we sustain any loss if we serve him not.' We must remember, that God interprets our actions; and considers men as speaking those things which their conduct shows to be the secret language of their hearts. And indeed this is strictly just; for all must allow, that actions speak more forcibly, and more truly, than words. But will not the Lord do good or evil? Will he not reward those that diligently seek him? Will he clear the guilty, and suffer them to pass unpunished? No, assuredly; "he will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked; between those who serve him, and those who serve him not [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.18)." Yet such are the lies which ungodly men are speaking against him.

Let any one say, whether this be not really the state of carnal unregenerate men? Do they not thus flee from God's presence, transgress against his laws, and, in their conduct at least, misrepresent him to the world? Let us look round the world, and see whether this be not a true picture of mankind? Let us look into our own bosoms, and see whether it do not exactly represent ourselves? It may be, that we have not been so openly immoral as others: but yet, if we will examine our own hearts, we shall see that we have been as far from any real delight in secret communion with God as the most profligate man on earth. We have been as far from sacrificing all our own interests and inclinations to the will and law of God as the most flagrant rebel in the world: nor have we, in our actions, been living witnesses for the truth of God, any more than those who have denied every word of the Bible. This then is clearly the state of all unregenerate men.

We come now to show you,

II. The peculiar sinfulness of their state—

If, without attending to any collateral circumstances, we were simply to point out the evil which is contained in the foregoing conduct, methinks the state of such men would appear beyond measure sinful: but the sinfulness of it is greatly aggravated by the consideration in my text; "Though I have redeemed them, yet have they spoken lies against me."

If we call to mind the mercies which had been given to the Israelites, we shall perceive that the malignity of their sins was exceedingly enhanced by the obligations which had been conferred upon them: they had been delivered from their bondage in Egypt, and brought to a land flowing with milk and honey. Such an interposition as this never had been known from the beginning of the world: that God should go and take an oppressed nation out of the midst of another nation; that he should reign over them as their king; that he should destroy seven nations greater and mightier than they, and establish them in the possession of their land; that he should, in ten thousand instances, step forth as their protector and deliverer, when they were reduced to the lowest state of wretchedness and misery; that he should grant them, not one redemption only, but many; this, I say, required the most ample returns of gratitude and obedience: the ingratitude therefore which they manifested, stamped a tenfold malignity on every sin they committed. But we have an infinitely better redemption given to us: a Redemption of which theirs was but a type and shadow. We have been redeemed from a far sorer bondage, even from bondage to sin and Satan; from all the curses of the broken law; from all the miseries of death and Hell. We have also been brought into a better land; not to the possession of mere temporal comforts, but to spiritual and eternal happiness; to the society of glorified saints and angels; to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading; in short, to all the glory of Heaven. This has been accomplished also for us by far more wonderful and endearing means: God has sent his own Son into our guilty world; sent him to become a man, and to stand in our stead; sent him to give his own life a ransom for us; sent him to pay down the price of our redemption; and has appointed him to bring forth every one of his redeemed; to support and guide them through this dreary wilderness, and to conduct them, with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm, to the full possession of their inheritance. O, what a Redemption is this! What obligations does this lay upon us to be faithful and obedient! And what a fearful aggravation must this be of all our disobedience! Yet, behold, we are the persons whose transgressions are so multiplied: we are they whom Christ came from Heaven to seek and save: and yet we flee from his presence: we are they, for whose sakes "he gave himself, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and yet we are continually transgressing against him: we are they towards whom he has shown such astonishing love and mercy; and yet we are saying, that he regards us not, and that it will be in vain to serve him. Ah, Brethren, is there no guilt in such a state? and shall not God be avenged of such a people as this? Do not look at your sins merely as they affect society; that is no just criterion; that is no proper test. Estimating your conduct merely in that view, you will be ready to applaud yourselves as righteous, if you should happen to have escaped the grosser pollutions of the world: but view your sins as contrasted with the love of Christ; see him dying to bring you near to God, and yet yourselves "fleeing from God;" see him shedding his blood to cleanse you from sin, and yet yourselves continuing to "transgress;" see him faithfully executing every tiling he had undertaken for you, and yet yourselves "lying against him." This is the light wherein to view your conduct. Draw near, then, and see it; ponder it in your hearts; consider it well. What offence can a servant commit against his master, or a child against his parent, or a man against his benefactor, that can bear any proportion to the smallest offence that you have committed against Christ? and yet you have offended times without number, and that too without any remorse; as though men were bound to requite your kindnesses, but you were at liberty to trample upon the most sacred obligations that God is able to confer upon you. Ah, Beloved! know every one of you, that "God sees not as man sees;" he considers things not according to man's estimation, but as they really are: and when he shall call you to an account, you will see every sin aggravated by redeeming love: you will see that, in fact, you "crucify Christ afresh, you trample under foot his blood, you put him to an open shame." And "shall not God visit for these things?" Yes, assuredly.

I will proceed therefore to set before you,

III. The danger of such a state—

You can bear me witness, my Brethren, that I delight not in setting forth the terrors of the Lord. I find it far more pleasant to be publishing the glad tidings, and to be expatiating on the fullness and freeness of the Gospel salvation: but I must not conceal from you what God speaks concerning you. Were I to be unfaithful to you in this respect, I should but betray your souls to ruin; and "your blood would be required at my hands." Attend therefore to the solemn denunciations of God's wrath against you: hear, I say, and tremble: hear, and lift up your hearts to God for mercy and deliverance: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! Destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me!" Woe and destruction comprehend both present and eternal misery. There is much woe, even in this life, as the consequence of sin. Who can tell the alarms which haunt the wicked in their secret retirements? Who can tell the apprehensions they feel at the approach of death? I know that they may "sear their consciences," so far as to become "past feeling:" and they may delude themselves with ungrounded hopes, so far as even to attain a confidence of their safety: but notwithstanding this, it is certain that "there is no peace to the wicked:" wherever they go, and whatever they do, they have no solid peace: they are either harassed with tumultuous passions, or terrified with misgiving fears. God has said repeatedly, that "there is no peace to the wicked." But let us suppose that they pass through life with tolerable serenity; what will they do at the instant of their departure from the body? Then they will begin to understand the meaning of the word "destruction:" now perhaps they listen to it with indifference; but then they cannot remain insensible to it. What terror must seize them when they behold the face of incensed Majesty! when they see that God, whose laws they have trampled on, and that Savior whose redemption they have slighted! What agony must pierce their souls, when they hear him say, "Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire!" And, when they are hurled headlong into the bottomless abyss, when they are lying down in flames of fire, and know that they must "dwell with everlasting burnings," how will they gnash their teeth with anguish! how will they curse the day that they were born! how will they curse themselves for their own folly in neglecting redeeming love! But can it be, that they who live in the state before described, are exposed to all this misery? Yes, "Woe unto them! Destruction unto them!" says Jehovah. And the apostle says, "that they who know not God and obey not his Gospel," or, in other words, they who flee from God and trample on redeeming love, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power [2 Thessalonians. 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 1.8-9)." The whole sacred volume attests and confirms this awful truth: every part of it speaks to the same effect as David, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 9.17)."

Now, my Brethren, deceive not your own souls. To what purpose will it be, to be speaking peace to yourselves, when God is denouncing "woe and destruction" unto you? If you say that you are not the worst of sinners, what will that avail you? If you say that you are honest, and just, and sober, what is all that to the purpose? This, and more than this, the Pharisee could say for himself; yet was he not hereby justified. The only question is, Do you answer to the character drawn in my text? Have you not "fled from God?" have you not "transgressed against him?" have you not "spoken lies against him;?" If you are disposed to deny any of these charges, consider with yourselves, Have you sought your happiness in communion with God;? and;, when he has said, "Seek you my face," has your heart always answered, "Your face, Lord, will I seek?" Are you not also transgressors against his law? Have you not been just now acknowledging upon your knees, that "you have done those things which you ought not to have done, and left undone those things which you ought to have done?" And can you affirm that the constant course and tenor of your life has proclaimed to all around you, that "to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole end and happiness of man?" No; "every mouth must be shut; and not you only, but the whole world, must become guilty before God." Know then that you, and that every man, while in an unregenerate state, is exposed to the wrath of God; and that that wrath will come upon you to the uttermost, if you "flee not for refuge to the Hope set before you."

We will now conclude, with two inferences from the whole:

1. What suitable provision is made for us in the Gospel!

You have seen the awful state of unregenerate men, and will be ready to doubt whether there can be any help or hope for persons so circumstanced. But thanks be to our God and Father, that he has not left us to perish in our sins! on the contrary, he has pitied us, and sent us his only dear Son to deliver us from our lost estate. Numberless as our iniquities have been, they were all laid upon the head of Jesus, our great Sacrifice: all were expiated by his blood; so that God can be "just, and yet the justifier of those who repent and believe" the Gospel. O Brethren, be thankful for this provision: be thankful that you are not only permitted, but commanded, to come to Christ for a free and full remission of all your sins. Have you "fled from" your God and Father? Behold! Jesus, his beloved Son, is come to seek and save you. Have you "transgressed against" him times without number? The blood of Jesus is shed to cleanse you from all sin. Have you in the whole course of your life "spoken nothing but lies" against your adorable Redeemer? That very Redeemer will make you to experience his inviolable truth, in receiving you to mercy, and in rejecting none that come unto him. Surely, if bread be suited to the hungry, or water to the thirsty, then is the provision set before us in the Gospel exactly suited to the wants and necessities of all who feel their need of mercy.

2. How happy are they who have cordially embraced the Gospel!

In two respects have they experienced a most blessed change; namely, in their character and condition. You have heard that the natural and unconverted man flees from God, transgresses against him, and speaks lies against him. Not so the man that is converted: he flees to God; he seeks the Divine presence; he desires the favor of God more than life, and esteems "his loving-kindness better than life itself." If any ask him, "Who will show us any good?" his answer is, like David's, "Lord, lift you up the light of your countenance upon us. "He now also desires to serve and obey God: it is his grief and burden that he cannot get rid of sin; he longs for holiness; he desires to be changed into the Divine image; he wishes to be in Heaven, not merely because he shall there be free from trouble, but because he shall be free from sin. And now, too, he is a living witness for the truth of God: he "sets to his seal that God is true:" he is not afraid to testify before the whole world, that God's service is perfect freedom, and that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward:" his whole life proclaims to those around him, that God is a mighty God, and greatly to be feared; yet that he is also a loving, merciful, and faithful God, and therefore worthy to be loved and trusted with the whole heart. You have heard also that woe and destruction are denounced against the unconverted; but there is no woe, no destruction, to the converted; but there is no woe, no destruction, to the converted soul: no; "his sins are put away from him, as far as the east is from the west:" while the iniquities of the ungodly are (as we are told) "sealed up in a bag," to be brought forth against them in the day of judgment, the iniquities that have been committed by a converted soul, are, from the first moment of his conversion, "cast into the depths of the sea [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.19);" not into the shallows, from whence they might be recovered, but into the depths, never more to be brought to remembrance. Whoever then you be, who have embraced the Gospel, rejoice, and leap for joy, on account of the blessed change that you have experienced. If your consciences testify, that you are really seeking after God, that you desire to be delivered from all sin, and that you are endeavoring to be witnesses for God in the world, rejoice; "for it becomes well your souls to be thankful." You have been redeemed; rejoice therefore in the redemption given unto you: "you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's."

[Hosea 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.14)

DISCOURSE 1161

THE PRAYERS OF UNREGENERATE MEN CONSIDERED

[Hosea 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 7.14). They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.

IT is not without reason that prayer has been called by some, the pulse of the soul: for by that more than by anything else may be discerned the increase or declension of our spiritual health. Somewhat like prayer may be offered by the most ungodly in seasons of deep distress: but their supplications differ widely from those which proceed from a penitent and contrite heart. The ten tribes, who, in despite of all the warnings given them, would go to Egypt and Assyria, rather than to God, for help, found themselves taken in the net which God had spread for them. Then they began to call upon God for help: but, the heart-searching God testifies respecting them, that they cried not unto him with their heart when they howled upon their beds.

To show how common and awful this state is, we shall,

I. Consider the prayers of unregenerate men—

It is confessed such persons often "howl upon their beds"—

In these words two things are to be noticed, namely, the time, and the manner of their prayers. With respect to the time, it is too generally found, that they who are not in earnest about their salvation, defer their prayers until bed-time: instead of transacting their business with God while their faculties are alive, they stay until exhausted nature is become incapable of any energetic exertion; and then hurry over some form of prayer, as a school-boy does his task, without feeling one word they utter. Even this is too favorable a representation of the prayers of many; who stay until they have lain down "upon their bed," and then fall asleep in the midst of their devotions. As for praying in the morning, they have no time for that: the concerns of the past, or of the present day have pre-occupied their minds; and if they offer two or three cold petitions while they are dressing, it is quite as much as their necessities require, or as God deserves. As to the manner, we may interpret the prophet's expression as importing in general, that their prayers are altogether irrational, and forced: and indeed, if we take into the account the state of the suppliants as guilty and condemned sinners, and the majesty of him whom they profess to address, their prayers are a most horrid mockery, yes, as unsuitable to the occasion as the "howling" of a dog would be. But the expression may be taken more strictly and literally: for these persons will not pray with any degree of fervor, except in seasons of great affliction. Perhaps they have suffered some heavy loss, or are in embarrassed circumstances, or have some peculiar guilt upon their conscience, that greatly disturbs them; but even then they have no disposition to spread their case before God; and so they lie down upon their beds as miserable as they can be, "howling" and whining like dogs, and perhaps wishing that they were dogs, or anything, rather than rational and accountable beings See this exemplified in David, [Psalm 32:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 32.3-4).

But, whatever their prayers be, "they cry not unto God with their heart"—

View them in their public devotions semi; they will confess themselves "miserable sinners," and implore mercy for Christ's sake at the hands of God, and desire grace from him "that they may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of his holy name:" but if they were afterwards told by their minister, that they were miserable and hell-deserving sinners; that nothing but an application of the blood of Christ to their souls could ever save them; and that, to evince the sincerity of their repentance, they must devote themselves unreservedly to God; they would show by their answers, that they neither believed, nor desired, any one of the things, which they had uttered before God.

Inquire, further, into their private prayers, and it will be found that they are not sincere in any petition that they offer. If, for instance, they were to pray that they might become true and faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus; and Jesus were to tell them, as he did the Rich Youth in the Gospel, that they must first give up all that they possess in this world, before they can be brought to love him supremely and to serve him acceptably; would they reply to him, "Your will be done?" Would they not rather plead for this or that possession, "O, spare it; is it not a little one?" and, when they found that the terms could not be lowered, would they not pray back again their prayers with ten-fold more earnestness than they at first uttered them; yes, and forego all their hope in Christ, rather than sacrifice their worldly interests?

Such are the prayers of the unregenerate, if they pray at all: but the greater part of them, except on very particular occasions, do not so much as preserve even an appearance of devotion [Mark 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 10.21-22). This shows with what lamentable propriety they speak of "saying their prayers."

We shall have a little clearer view of the worthlessness of such prayers, if we,

II. Contrast them with those of the regenerate—

In everything that is essential to prayer, the difference may be seen. Particularly they differ in respect of,

1. Voluntariness—

The wicked will pray only under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death and judgment [Jeremiah 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.27). [Psalm 78:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.34). [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.16); all their petitions are extorted by anguish or by terror. The regenerate, on the contrary, go to God willingly and cheerfully as to their father and their friend. We do not mean to say, that the godly never feel backwardness to this duty (for, alas! they too often do) but they do not indulge it; they do not rest satisfied in such a state; they condemn themselves for it as much as an unregenerate person would condemn himself for the grossest sins: and when they are enabled, in any measure, to realize their principles, they account it their sweetest privilege to draw near to God, and to pour out their souls before him: they even pant for God as the deer after the water brooks, and "go to him as to their exceeding joy [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 42.1-2); [Psalm 43:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 43.4)."

2. Constancy—

When the distresses or terrors, that instigated the ungodly to prayer, are removed, there is an end of the importunity which was occasioned by them [Job 27:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 27.10). The persons who for a while seemed melted in the furnace, are no sooner taken out of it, than they return to their usual coldness and obduracy. But a regenerate person can say, "My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed:" "at evening, and at morning, and at noon-day will I pray, and that instantly [Psalm 57:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 57.7); [Psalm 55:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 55.17)." There are seasons indeed, when he may, through the corruptions of his heart, be led to relax his diligence: but he can never give over prayer: whether he be in prosperity or adversity, he feels that he is altogether dependent upon God, both for his present and eternal happiness; and therefore he returns again and again to God, in order to maintain fellowship with him, and to receive at his hands the blessings he stands in need of.

3. Humility—

Persons may use very strong language and express a kind of indignation against themselves in reference to their inward corruptions, while yet they are not truly humbled before God: but true humility consists, not in vehement expressions, but in a tenderness of spirit mixed with self-loathing and self-abhorrence [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 42.6). [Ezekiel 20:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.43). Of this, an unregenerate man has no conception: yet it is this that constitutes the chief excellence of prayer; and without it our prayers can find no more acceptance with God, than the howling of a dog [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 15.8-9). In this view, God himself calls the services of the temple a hateful "noise [Amos. 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos. 5.21-23);" and declares that the offering of a lamb with an unhumbled spirit, is as odious in his sight, as the offering of swine's blood, or "the cutting off a dog's neck [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.3)."

INFERENCES—

1. How little dependence can be placed on a death-bed repentance!

Far be it from us to discourage repentance at the last hour. On the contrary, if we behold symptoms of it, we would in the judgment of charity conclude well respecting its issue. But it is God alone who can perfectly distinguish between the feigned humiliation of Ahab, and the sincere contrition of Peter: and perhaps, where we think we hear the supplications of a Christian, God may hear nothing but the howling of a dog. Repentance, like every Christian grace, must be judged of by its fruits: and if we would have in ourselves, or leave in the mind of surviving friends, an unquestionable evidence of our sincerity, let us repent without delay, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

2. What encouragement have all real penitents to call upon God!

As God can distinguish hypocrites in the midst of their most specious services, so can he discern the upright in the midst of all their infirmities. The sigh, the groan, the tear, the broken accents of contrition, are more pleasing to him than the most fluent petitions that are destitute of a divine unction [Psalm 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 6.8); [Psalm 38:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 38.9); [Psalm 79:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 79.11) and especially [Lamentations 3:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.56). Let none then be discouraged because they do not find a ready utterance in prayer; but let them be chiefly solicitous to "cry to God with their hearts." Then they will have nothing to fear; for God "will hear them, yes, and answer too, while they are yet speaking to him [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.24)," and "will do for them abundantly above all that they can ask or think [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.20)."

[Hosea 8:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.2-3)

DISCOURSE 1162

THE DANGER OF FALSE CONFIDENCE

[Hosea 8:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.2-3). Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know you. Israel has cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.

THERE is not a more intimate connection between any two things than between sin and misery. However specious an appearance any hypocrite may make in the world, God, who sees his heart, will sooner or later expose and punish his hypocrisy. The Israelites on different occasions professed to repent, and to return to God: but they were "as a deceitful bow," that effected not the purpose for which it seemed to be bent: on which account God commanded the prophet to "set the trumpet to his mouth," and to proclaim their speedy destruction. The prophet's testimony is then confirmed by God himself in the words before us: in which we may see,

I. The vain confidence of the ungodly—

All men have, to a certain extent, the very confidence expressed in my text. As among the Jews, so among ourselves, the grounds of that confidence are diverse, while the confidence itself is the same.

Some found it on their bearing of the Christian name. They have been born of Christian parents, and educated in a Christian country, and therefore they account themselves children of the Most High; exactly as the Jews claimed to be the children of God, because they were descended from the stock of Abraham, and had been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision. Hence we find them confidently asserting that "God was their Father [John 8:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.33); [John 8:39-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.39-41)."

Others found it on their belonging to a peculiar Church. As the Jews said of themselves, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 7.4)," so persons belonging to the Church of England esteem themselves especially favored of the Lord on that account, while all the various classes of dissenters arrogate to themselves the same high privilege, as arising out of their separation from the Established Church, and the imagined superiority of their respective advantages for spiritual instruction.

Others found their confidence on their moral conduct, and their regular observance of all the external duties of religion. But like the Pharisees of old, while their regular deportment makes them objects of admiration to those around them, they show by their whole conduct that they have only "the form of godliness without any of its power." Yet do they value themselves as standing high in the favor of God, and would be filled with indignation if their acceptance with him were questioned, or their state before him made even for a moment a subject of doubt.

Others again found their confidence on their having embraced the principles of the Gospel, and professed themselves in a more peculiar manner the followers of Christ. These are apt to consider themselves as lights shining in a dark world [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.34-37); and, with more than ordinary boldness, will adopt as their own appropriate and distinctive privilege that assertion of the ancient Church, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." Now I am far from saying that none are entitled to express this confidence; for I know that it is the Christian's privilege to possess it, and to "hold it fast even to the end." But it is far too easily adopted, and too generally entertained. For thousands who "call God their Rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer, do, in fact, only flatter him with their mouths, and lie unto him with their tongues [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.21-23);"and many of the most confident among them will meet with that repulse in the last day, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity See [Isaiah 58:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.2)."

Seeing, then, that there are so many who indulge a vain confidence before God, let me declare to you,

II. The disappointment that awaits them—

Whatever have been the erroneous standards which men have adopted for themselves, there is one, and one only, by which they shall be tried in the last day; and that is, the word of God.

Accordingly God casts in the teeth of self-deceivers their violations of his word—

The Jews, as Jews, were bound to walk according to God's law. But they had "cast off their allegiance to God, transgressing his covenant, and setting at nothing his commandments verse 1." And this is the very state of us Christians. What a covenant has God made with us in Christ Jesus, "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," and comprehending our every want, both in time and eternity! In this covenant we have the remission of all our sins accorded to us freely for Christ's sake, and all needful supplies of the Holy Spirit, for the sanctification of our souls, yes, and eternal glory also given to us as the purchase of the Redeemer's blood. But how little have we regarded this covenant, or sought an interest in it! In fact, "we have rather trodden under foot the Son of God by our continuance in sin, and counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of his grace [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.29)." And, as for the laws either of the first or second table, we have never made them the rule of our conduct, or even desired to conform to them any further than suited our own interest or convenience. In our baptism indeed we engaged to walk according to the revealed will of God; but in our whole lives we have rebelled against him, and "cast off the thing that was good."

What then can we expect at God's hands?

He told the hypocritical Jews that "their Assyrian enemies should pursue them." True, the Assyrians thought only of gratifying their own ambition; but they were a sword in God's hand to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant:" and they did fearfully execute on these transgressors the Divine judgments.

And has not God instruments at hand to inflict punishment on us? See the perturbed state of Europe at this moment Of France and Belgium more particularly, May 1831," and see how we ourselves are approximating towards it. The outrages and conflagrations which have recently pervaded our land will have been as nothing in comparison of what we may soon behold, if God give us up to that anarchical spirit which now threatens to bear down all before it: Truly the occasional prayers which have for some time been in use among us by the appointment of our ecclesiastical superiors, may yet well be continued among us, for the averting of those judgments which we have so justly merited.

Among the professors of religion, too, there is a spirit not unlike to that which prevails in the ungodly world, a spirit of unhumbled inquiry, and of dogmatic assertion, tending only to divide the Church of God, and to diffuse uncharitable feelings among those who ought to "love one another with a pure heart fervently." To what that also may grow, God alone knows. But it is a sad scandal to the Church of God, and can be pleasing to none but Satan, the author and abettor of all evil.

But there are other enemies that may pursue both the world and the Church of God: for most assuredly the wrath of God shall follow and overtake sin, whether it be found in the openly profane, or in the professors of the Gospel of Christ. "The sin of every man," whoever he may be, shall assuredly, in due season "find him out." A man's profession may have raised the admiration of all around him: but if it prove at last unsound, he shall sink the deeper into irremediable shame and misery [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.4-7).

APPLICATION—

1. Let us examine well the grounds of our confidence—

I would by no means be understood to condemn all confidence, but only to recommend a careful examination of the grounds on which our confidence is built. We may, if we will attentively discriminate between things which differ, find a very broad distinction between the confidence which is delusive, and that which is truly scriptural. As a general observation, we may say, that that alone is scriptural which is attended with holy fear and jealousy: for even Paul himself labored incessantly to "bring all his bodily appetites into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away." That which stands on a presumptuous conceit about God's decrees, and is sanctioned only by an appeal to past experience, may well be questioned: but that which is founded rather on the general promises of the Gospel, and is borne out and warranted by an appeal to the present experience of the soul, may safely be treasured up as an invaluable blessing. And if this latter appear more fluctuating than the other, let not that render it less estimable in your minds: for it is far the more scriptural and safe. In fact, Satan exerts himself to the uttermost to strengthen the confidence which is erroneous, that so his vassals may not suspect the delusion under which they labor; while, on the other hand, he infuses doubts into the minds of the upright, that they may not reap the full benefit of their confidence in God. Only let your confidence be humble, and its habitual effect be practical, and then you may say boldly, "O God, you are my God!" and may hold fast your confidence, and the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end.

2. Let us endeavor to maintain a close walk with God—

While this, as I have already shown, is the proper test of our confidence, it is also the means whereby our confidence is to be made more and more assured. "If we abide with God, he will abide with us: but if we forsake him, he also will forsake us [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 15.2)." Here we see, that, if the text is true, so will the converse of it be found true also. Only let us "hold fast that which is good," and no enemy whatever shall prevail against us. You all know how the Apostle sets all his enemies at defiance [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.33-39); And thus may we also do: for, "if God be with us, who can be against us?" Our office is, to serve the Lord. His office, if I may so speak, is to save us. Only then let us attend to our part, and we may with safety leave to our heavenly Father the execution of his.

[Hosea 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.5)

DISCOURSE 1163

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN INNOCENCE

[Hosea 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.5). How long will it be before they attain to innocence?

IT is impossible to read the history of God's ancient people, or to survey the world around us, without being filled with wonder at the patience and forbearance of God. In vain were all his mercies to the Jews in delivering them from their bondage in Egypt, and in giving them Possession of the promised land: no manifestations of his power and grace were sufficient to convince them of his exclusive right to their service, or to knit them to him as their only Lord and Savior. They would make to themselves idols of wood and stone, and transfer to them the allegiance which they owed to God alone. Yet, instead of breaking forth against them in wrathful indignation to destroy them, he bore with them, and, with tender anxiety for their welfare, said, "How long will it be before they attain to innocency?" Precisely thus does he wait for us also, who, notwithstanding all that he has done for the redemption of our souls, are ever prone to depart from him, and to fix on the creature that regard which is due to him only. Yet he is waiting to be gracious to us also, and longing for the return of our souls to him as their proper rest.

In illustration of this pathetic complaint, I shall consider,

I. What is the attainment here specified—

Perfect innocency is utterly unattainable in this life—

Once we possessed it in our first parents: but since the Fall, we all have inherited a corrupt nature; since "it was impossible to bring a clean thing out of an unclean." Nor can we by any means wash away so much as one sin that we have ever committed. Rivers of tears would be insufficient for that. Sinners therefore we must be even to the end.

Yet is there in a scriptural sense an innocency to lie attained—

Our Lord said of his disciples, "Now you are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.3)." And we too may be clean, yes so clean as to be "without spot or blemish," if only we use the means which God himself has appointed [Ephesians 5:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.26-27). There is "a fountain opened for sin and for impurity [Zechariah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.1);" even the Redeemer's blood, which is able to "cleanse us from all sin [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.7).": The Holy Spirit also will renew our souls, and make us "partakers of a divine nature [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4). ," and "sanctify us throughout in body, soul, and spirit [1 Thessalonians. 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.23),": and enable us, in the whole of our life and conversation, to approve ourselves "Israelites indeed in whom there is no deceit".

This is scriptural innocency: and this every sinner in the universe may attain. It is freely offered to all [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.1); and has actually been given to the most abandoned of mankind [1 Corinthians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.11); Nor shall it be withheld from any one that will seek it at the hands of God [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.37); God himself pants, if I may so say, to give it us: "Will you not be made clean? When shall it once be [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 13.27)." Those to whom it was offered in my text were wicked idolaters verse 4; and therefore we cannot doubt but that it will be granted to us also.

II. The expostulation respecting it—

Long has God borne with us, even as he did with his people of old—

Who among you has not harbored idols in his heart?: and whom has not God followed with warnings, exhortations, and entreaties, even to the present hour?.

And how much longer must he bear with us?

Have we not already provoked him long enough?: Or do we hope ever to enjoy his favor if we attain not to innocency?: O! delay not to seek this inestimable gift. Is it so small a matter to possess the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus' blood, and the renovation of your souls by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the entire conformity of your lives to the mind and will of God, that you will not set yourselves to seek them in the exercise of faith and prayer?: How long shall it be before you begin to seek these blessed attainments? Will you wait until old age, and give to God only the dregs of your life? Or will you put off this necessary work to a dying hour? Believe me, that is by no means a fit season for so important a work as this, and who can tell whether time for it shall be allowed you then, or grace be given you for the execution of it? The attainment is difficult in proportion as it is delayed, and what bitter regret will you feel to all eternity, if the season afforded you for the attainment of this blessing pass away unimproved, and you be called with all your sins upon you into the eternal world! I would address you all in the very spirit of my text, and say to every one among you, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. 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 unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon [Isaiah 55:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.6-7)."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who think this blessing unattainable—

Were this innocency really unattainable, God would never have so pathetically expressed his concern respecting it. But perhaps you think that the infirmities which of necessity cleave to our fallen nature are inconsistent with it. This however is by no means the case. If the heart be upright before God, then shall we be accepted of him in Christ Jesus, and "be presented before him faultless with exceeding joy."

2. Those who desire to attain it—

Be sure you seek it in the appointed way. Seek not forgiveness only, nor renovation only, nor holiness only; but seek them all in their proper order, and in harmonious operation. First, your sins must be blotted out through faith in the Redeemer's blood, next, must your soul be renewed after the Divine image by the power of the Holy Spirit, and lastly, must these blessings manifest themselves in holiness of heart and life. No one of these can be spared. And though we have placed them in the order in which they must be sought, yet will they all be given to every one, who believes in Christ, His sins will all be cast into the depths of the sea, and the moral change also be begun, which shall issue in everlasting happiness and glory.

3. Those who through mercy have attained it—

Is it true that any one in this life is authorized to conceive of himself as "innocent" before God? Yes surely; else our Savior would never have declared his own Apostles "clean." Not that any attainment, however great, will supersede the necessity of continued watchfulness: for Paul himself felt the need of "keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away:" and the proper use of all the promises is, "to cleanse yourselves by means of them from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

[Hosea 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.7)

DISCOURSE 1164

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

[Hosea 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.7). They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

MISERY is attached to sin as its inevitable consequence. This connection does not always appear to a superficial observer. On the contrary, transgression often seems productive of happiness; and obedience: to be a source of much affliction and trouble: but, whatever conclusions we may be led to draw from present appearances, we are sure that the wicked are not happy; nor have they any reasonable expectation of happiness in the eternal world. The Israelites had forsaken the true God for idols, and God warned them of the judgments which would before long come upon them: but the declaration in the text may be understood as a general position. We shall take occasion from it to show,

I. Who may be said to sow the wind—

To "sow the wind" is a proverbial expression for laboring in vain. It is applied to idolaters, because the silver and gold lavished on idols was unprofitably spent, and it may well be applied to all who seek happiness in a way of sin:

1. To sensualists—

They expect to find much comfort in the indulgence of their lusts. Hence they yield themselves up to all the gratifications of sense. But they find that such pursuits can afford them no real happiness. While they forsake the Fountain of living waters, they hew out to themselves only broken cisterns that can hold no water [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13). Solomon, with the amplest means of enjoyment, confessed this [Ecclesiastes 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.1); [Ecclesiastes 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.10-11). And we may address that appeal to all the votaries of pleasure [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.21).

2. To worldlings—

The lovers of this present world seem to follow something substantial. They hope to obtain, not a momentary gratification, but solid and lasting benefits. They promise to themselves the acquisition of ease, and affluence, and respect. But riches are justly, and on many accounts, termed "uncertain [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.17)." No dependence can be placed on their continuance with us [Proverbs 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 23.5). Our cares are also generally multiplied by means of them: but if they were more conducive to happiness now, what shall they profit in the day of wrath [Proverbs 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 11.4). What advantage has he now, who once took such delight in his stores [Luke 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.19). or he, who placed his happiness in sumptuous fare, and magnificent apparel [Luke 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.19); [Luke 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.23-24). Surely all such persons will find before long, that they "sowed the wind."

3. To formalists—

The performance of religious duties seems more calculated to make us happy. It is certain that no one can be happy who disregards them. But a mere round of services can never satisfy the conscience. "The form of godliness without the power" will avail little. It will leave the soul in a poor, empty, destitute condition. Some indeed delude themselves with an idea that it will secure the Divine favor; and, under that delusion, they may be filled with self-delight [Luke 18:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.11-12). But if God send a ray of light into the mind, these comforts vanish. A sight of sin will speedily dissipate these self-righteous hopes [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.9). Nor will anything satisfy an enlightened conscience but that which satisfies God. There was but one remedy for the wounded Israelites in the wilderness [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.14-15). Nor can a wounded spirit ever be healed but by a sight of Christ.

4. To false professors—

Many wish to be thought religious, when they are destitute of spiritual life. They perhaps are zealous for the doctrines of the Gospel, and for their own particular form of Church government. But they are not solicitous to live near to God in holy duties; nor do they manifest the efficacy of religion in their spirit and conduct. Yet, because of their professing godliness, they think themselves possessed of it, and buoy up themselves with expectations of happiness in the world to come. Alas! what disappointment will they one day experience [Matthew 25:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.11-12). What will it avail them to "have had a name to live, while they were really dead?" or to have "cried, Lord, Lord! while they departed not from iniquity?" The pains they have taken to keep up a profession will all be lost. Nothing will remain to them but shame and confusion of face.

From the seed which they sow, we may easily perceive,

II. What they may expect to reap—

"A whirlwind" is a figure used to represent extraordinary calamities. [Proverbs 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 1.27).And such is the harvest which they will reap in due season. Their calamities will be,

1. Sudden—

The corn ripens gradually for the sickle, and its fate is foreseen; but the destruction of the ungodly comes suddenly and at an instant. They indeed have many warnings from all which they see around them; but they put the evil day far from them, and think it will never come 2 Peter 3:4. Thus it was with the whole world before the Deluge. Though Noah preached to them for many years, they would not regard him; and were taken by surprise at last, as much as if no notice had been given them. [Matthew 24:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.38-39). Thus also it will be with all who reject the Gospel salvation. Solomon has expressly declared it in reference to those who sow discord [Proverbs 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 6.14-15). And Paul has asserted it respecting all that live in a neglect of God [1 Thessalonians. 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.2-3).

2. Irresistible—

Sinners of every description can withstand the word spoken by their fellow-creatures [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.49); but they will not be able to resist God when he shall call them into judgment. Then, if the whole universe should enter into a confederacy to protect one sinner, they would fail in their attempt [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 11.21). There is not anything more irresistible to man, in some climates, than a whirlwind. Yet far less power shall the ungodly have to avert the wrath of God. They will be carried to destruction as the chaff before the wind [Psalm 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 1.4-5); and call in vain to the rocks to fall upon them, or the hills to cover them [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.15-17).

3. Tremendous—

Nothing can be conceived more dreadful than the desolation made by whirlwinds. Yet this suggests a very inadequate idea of the ruin that will come on the ungodly. The raining of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah must have been exceedingly terrible. But even that was light, when compared with the vials of God's wrath which will be poured out upon the ungodly world. Who can comprehend the full import of that threatening in the Psalms [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 11.6). Who can form a just idea of the judgment denounced by Isaiah [Isaiah 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.24). May we never experience such dreadful calamities! May we tremble at the apprehension of them, and seek shelter in Christ [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 32.2).

INFERENCES—

1. How earnest should we be in redeeming time!

The present hours are given us that we may sow for eternity. Every action, word and thought is as seed that will spring up hereafter. According to what we sow now, we shall reap at the last day [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.7-8). Every moment increases our "treasure of wrath," or our "weight of glory." How should we be affected with this consideration! Let us lay it to heart, and "walk, not as fools, but as wise men [Ephesians 5:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.15-16)." And let that just expostulation shame us to a sense of duty [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.2).

2. How blessed are they who are living to God!

There is not a work which they perform for him that will not be rewarded. God would esteem himself unjust, if he made them no recompense [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.10). However small and insignificant the service be, it shall not be forgotten [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.42). Some perhaps may complain, that they cannot do anything for God, and. that they can only weep for their unprofitableness. But the sighs and tears of the contrite are "precious seed." They will spring up to a glorious and abundant harvest [Psalm 126:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 126.6). Let the humble then go on "sowing in tears until they reap in joy." Let them persist in their labor, assured that it shall not be in vain [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.58).

[Hosea 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.12)

DISCOURSE 1165

MEN'S DISREGARD OF THE GOSPEL

[Hosea 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 8.12). I have written to him the great things of my Law, but they were counted as a strange thing.

GOD, in estimating the sins of men, takes into his consideration all the aggravations with which they are committed. For instance; the warnings which have been given us against sin, the judgments with which we have been visited on account of it, the mercies that have been given to us in the midst of it, are all regarded by him as enhancing our guilt in the commission of it. Hence, in criminating his people, whom now he was about to punish, he particularly charges home upon them their contempt of his word, which he had sent to guide them in the paths of righteousness, and to encourage them in a faithful discharge of their duty towards him. In this view our sins are peculiarly aggravated, inasmuch as we have been favored with a more perfect revelation of God's mind and will. And to evince this, I will show,

I. What great things God has written to us in his law—

By God's "law," we are to understand his word in general; and by "the great things of it," are meant its fundamental truths.

Let us take a view of them, as recorded in God's blessed word—

Our fall in Adam, our recovery by Christ, and our restoration to the Divine image by the Holy Spirit, these are plainly written in every part of the inspired volume. They were made known in the Old Testament, so far as was necessary for the instruction of men under that dark and temporary dispensation. The rite of circumcision marked, that we brought into the world a corrupt nature; and the appointment of sacrifices, while it showed to all their desert of death, evinced to them the necessity of looking forward to that great sacrifice which should in due time he offered for the sins of men. The various washings also that were enjoined, gave a striking intimation of what should in due season be effected on the souls of men, through the operation of the Spirit of God. In the writings of David and the prophets, a further light is thrown upon these things: man is declared to be shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.5); and his guilt is said to be removed only through the vicarious sufferings of the Son of God, "on whom the iniquities of all mankind are laid [Isaiah 53:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.5-6)." And for the renewal of our nature, we are taught to look to that Divine Agent, who is sent from Heaven on purpose to impart it [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.25-27).

In the New Testament, these points are more fully opened: and everything relating to them is developed with all the clearness and certainty that the most scrupulous mind can desire.

Who can doubt the corruption of our nature, when we are told that "we are by nature children of wrath [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.3)." What stronger proof can we have of the necessity of believing in Christ, than the assurance that there is salvation in no other, and "no other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12)." As to the Spirit's operations upon the soul, we are expressly told, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

And are not these things justly called "great"?

Truly, in whatever light we view them, they are "great." Contemplate the mysteriousness of them. How do they, in every part of them, surpass all human conception! What shall we say to our fall in Adam, and the consequent condemnation of all the human race? What shall we think of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, for the purpose of satisfying Divine justice in our behalf, and working out a righteousness wherein we guilty creatures may stand before God without spot or blemish? What shall we say of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, making our polluted souls his temples, for the purpose of renewing our fallen natures, and rendering us meet for glory? Well may the Apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.16)." and well may every one, in the contemplation of it, exclaim, "O the depth [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.33)."—

But consider also the importance of these things. There is not any child of man, to whom the tidings of them are made known, that can be saved without an experimental acquaintance with them, and a suitable operation of them upon his soul. Under a sense of our fallen condition, we must lie low before God, in dust and ashes: under a conviction that there is no salvation for us but in Christ Jesus, we must cleave unto him with full purpose of heart: and, under a consciousness of our incapacity to do any thing for ourselves, we must commit ourselves altogether to the care of God's Holy Spirit, that he may "work all our works in us," and "perfect that which concerns us."

Say, then, whether things so deeply mysterious and so infinitely important be not great. Truly there is nothing in the whole universe that deserves a thought in comparison of these stupendous truths.

But it is humiliating to observe,

I. How they are regarded by an ungodly world—

"They are counted as a strange thing:"

1. They are neglected as unimportant—

One would imagine that the book which reveals these great truths should be universally sought after with insatiable avidity; and be studied day and night, in order to the obtaining of a perfect knowledge of its contents. But how is this book treated? It is thought a proper book for children, that they may be made acquainted with its truths so far as their slender capacities can comprehend them: but for persons of adult age it is supposed to contain nothing that is interesting; and it is laid aside by them, as undeserving any serious attention. Angels in Heaven are searching into its unfathomable mysteries with an anxiety worthy of the occasion; but men, who are far more deeply interested in them, suffer them to remain without any serious inquiry. In fact, there is no other book so generally slighted as the inspired volume; not a novel or a newspaper but is preferred before it; so little is the excellence of its mysteries contemplated, and so little the importance of its truths considered.

2. They are ridiculed as absurd—

Universally is the corruption of our fallen nature regarded as a subject calculated only to inspire gloom, and therefore injurious to the happiness of man. The salvation which Christ has wrought out for us, and freely offers to the believing soul, is reprobated as a licentious doctrine, subversive of morality. The sanctifying influences of the Spirit, also, are held in contempt, as the dreams of a heated imagination, or the pretenses of a hypocritical profession. Sin itself, unless in its most hideous forms, is not so universally despised and hated as are the truths of our most holy religion. They were so when proclaimed by prophets, and Apostles, and by our blessed Lord himself. "Ah, Lord God, does he not speak parables [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.49)." is the slightest expression of contempt that any preacher of them can expect. In truth, no man can preach them with success, without being accused as "deceiving the people," and "turning the world upside down."

APPLICATION—

How great is the blindness of the natural man!

The depths of philosophy may be successfully explored by men of studious habits and of intellectual attainments. But who, by any powers of his own, can comprehend the great things of God's law? Truly, they are "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" and the most learned man on earth, no less than the most illiterate, must say, "Open you my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.18)."

2. How inestimable are the privileges of God's people!

"They have been brought out of darkness into marvelous light;" and the "things which God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto them": Still, however, there remains a veil upon their hearts, which yet they need to have removed. "They still see only as in a glass darkly;" and must wait for a full vision, until they come to the regions of the blessed above.

[Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 9.12)

DISCOURSE 1166

MISERY OF A DESERTED PEOPLE

[Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 9.12). Woe also to them when I depart from them!

THERE is nothing so essential to our happiness as the Divine presence. With that, we may smile at all earthly trials: without it, not all the universe can satisfy the soul. This is promised to us as the greatest good that can be given to us in this world: and the withdrawment of it is threatened as the greatest of all evils [Jeremiah 23:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.33).

In the words before us, God, having denounced this judgment against his rebellious people, gives an awful intimation of the greatness of the calamity; "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!"

We propose to show,

I. How great a calamity is the withdrawment of God's presence—

As God is pleased to distinguish both individuals and collective bodies with his favor, so under great provocations he departs from them: and this is a very dreadful calamity, by whoever it may be experienced: it is so,

1. To nations—

These, as we see in the Jewish history, prosper beyond the common course of events, when God takes them under his special protection. On the other hand, they are destroyed with equal rapidity when he sets his face against them. War, famine, and pestilence are his ministers: the stars in their courses fight against his enemies: the elements enlist themselves under his banners. Universal nature rises up to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. Wretched indeed is that nation which he has abandoned to ruin! The destruction of the Jewish nation is an awful specimen and pledge of the vengeance which he will execute on those who have filled up the measure of their iniquities.

2. To Churches—

The Christian Church, when in its infancy, was honored with very peculiar tokens of the Divine presence, and, in consequence thereof, "grew and multiplied" to a surprising extent. But when the life and power of godliness had declined among the Churches of Asia, and he had often warned them to no purpose, he "took away the candlestick from them:" so that in the cities where Christ was once worshiped and glorified, his name is scarcely known. Nor need we go back to the early ages of the Church: for in many places in our own land where Christ was once preached, nothing is now heard but Socinian heresy or heathen morality. The ignorance of the preachers, the blindness of the hearers, and the unprofitableness of the ordinances, concur in establishing the melancholy truth affirmed in our text Compare [Micah 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 3.6-7). [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 6.9-10). [Amos. 8:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos. 8.11-13).

3. To individuals—

If we admit, as we must, that "God will not forsake his people [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 12.22)," still we have no evidence that we are his, any longer than we obey his commandments. If we go out from his people, it is rather a proof that we never truly belonged to them [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.19). But lamentable is the state of him who provokes God to leave him: for as soon as ever God deserts him, an evil spirit will enter into him [1 Samuel 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 16.14); yes, perhaps seven spirits, worse than ever before inhabited his soul, may take possession of him, and reduce him to a more awful state of bondage than he ever before experienced [Luke 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.24-26). Hardness of heart, searedness of conscience, and probably an abandonment of all religious profession, with painful apprehensions of death and judgment, will be the bitter fruits of such a dereliction, which at last will issue in an aggravated and eternal condemnation.

Let us then attentively consider,

II. How we may avert it from ourselves—

We cannot pretend to specify all the means which are to be Used; but we will notice some of the most important:

1. Let us abstain from that which will drive God from us—

Sin is "that abominable thing which his soul hates;" and, if we willfully indulge it, he will show his abhorrence of it, by hiding his face from us, and withdrawing from us his blessing. He has said, that his "Spirit shall not always strive with man." And it is certain, that we may "grieve his Spirit," until we altogether "quench" his sacred motions. Let us then turn, not only from open, but from secret sin. Let us "purge out that leaven, that we may be a new lump." For though God will "not be extreme to mark the unallowed infirmities" of our nature, he will show his indignation against hypocrisy, however refined it may be in its nature, or specious in its appearance [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.4-7).

2. Let us notice the very first intimations of his displeasure—

God does not utterly forsake the soul at once: he testifies his displeasure in a variety of ways, before he finally forsakes us. As, in withdrawing from his temple of old, he descended from the mercy-seat to the threshold; and then went from the threshold to the court; then from the court to the door of the east gate; and, lastly, from the gate to the mountain [Ezekiel 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 9.3); [Ezekiel 10:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 10.18-19); [Ezekiel 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 11.23); so, in his departures from Churches or individuals, he gives notice of his intention, that we may repent us of our evil ways. He ceases to manifest himself to us; he gives us up to the dominion of our former lusts; he embitters our state by forebodings of our future doom; and, when he cannot prevail, he "gives us over to a reprobate mind [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 81.11-12)," and leaves us to fill up the measure of our iniquities. Let us "turn then at his first reproof," that, instead of "taking his Holy Spirit from us," he may "pour it out upon us" in richer abundance [Proverbs 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 1.23).

3. Let us guard against secret departures from him—

It is rarely, if ever, that God leaves us, unless we first leave him. He has laid down this as the rule of his conduct; "I am with you, while you be with me: if you be with me, I will be with you; but if we forsake me, I will forsake you [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 15.2)." If we trace all our darkness and distresses to their proper source, we shall find that they originate in our own unfaithfulness. Let us then watch against a neglect of secret duties, or deadness in them, Let us "give ourselves to the word of God and prayer." Let us "stir up ourselves, to lay hold on God [Isaiah 64:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 64.7);" and, with a holy boldness, say, like Jacob, "I will not let you go [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.26)." In this way we may detain him, and secure his continued presence: or if, "in a little wrath, he hide his face from us for a moment, with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us [Isaiah 54:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.8)."

[Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 10.1)

DISCOURSE 1167

BRINGING FORTH FRUIT TO OURSELVES

[Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 10.1). Israelis an empty vine; he brings forth fruit unto himself.

IN order to judge aright of our actions, we must examine the principles from whence they proceed. Ignorant as we are of men's real motives, we invariably endeavor to discover them even in courts of judicature; and pass sentence, not so much upon their actions, as on their intentions. Nor does any one disapprove of this method of estimating men's conduct, provided only there be sufficient ground for discovering the real sentiments and wishes of their hearts. Now, if this be a proper mode of judging with respect to each other, we should certainly try our own actions by the same rule; since they will most assuredly be estimated according to this rule in the day when we shall stand before the tribunal of God.

In the words before us, God passes sentence, as it were, on the Israelites, not so much for the form and matter of their services, as for the dispositions they exercised in the performance of them. And, as he does the same with respect to us, it is of importance to ascertain,

I. When we may be said to bring forth fruit to ourselves—

By the law of our creation we should regard nothing but the glory and authority of God. But, through the corruption of our nature, we have cast off God, and exalted self into his throne. We manifest that we do this,

1. When self is the principle of our actions—

It is but too evident that unregenerate men act in an entire conformity to their own will, without ever considering the will of God. If in anything they seem to oppose their own will, they do so, not from a regard to his authority, but from some selfish principle of carnal hope or fear. If we would persuade them to any course of conduct, we find that the simple declaration of God's mind and will has no effect on them whatever; and that we must have recourse to carnal and temporal considerations, if we would succeed with them. Moreover they wish that others also should consult their will, rather than the will of God: and thus they show not only that they are a God unto themselves, but that they would gladly be a God also to their fellow-creatures; and have their will more respected than the will of God. What can be a proof of bringing forth fruit to themselves, if this be not [Colossians 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.23).

2. When self is the measure our actions—

Many are willing to be almost Christians; but few wish to be altogether so. Herod would part with many things; but not with his Herodias. The Young Man would follow Christ at all events. as he thought; but could not be prevailed upon to sell his estate, and give it to the poor [Matthew 19:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 19.21-22). Thus, if the attending at the house and table of the Lord, if the abstaining from gross sins, and the exercising of benevolence to the poor will suffice, many will be content to pay the price: but, the renouncing of all sin, and the walking in the narrow path of holiness and self-denial, are too irksome a task: and if they cannot maintain an interest in Christ on lower terms, they determine to part with him. Now what is this, but to make their own ease the measure of their obedience, when they ought to have no other measure than the word of God? whereas the true Christian wishes to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

3. When self is the end of our actions—

God's command is, that "whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.31)." But what if we be studying how to advance our own reputation or interest in the world? What if, like Jehu, we be actuated by pride, when we profess to be doing the Lord's work Compare 2 Kings 10:30 with [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 1.4). What if, even in religious duties also, we be seeking to establish our own righteousness, or to gratify only some selfish principle [Zechariah 7:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 7.5-6). In all these cases we are justly involved in that censure, "All men seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.21)."

To show the evil of such conduct we shall proceed to point out,

II. In what respects, they who do so resemble an empty vine—

The similes of Scripture, if strained and perverted, are made disgusting; but, if soberly and judiciously illustrated, they are replete with useful instruction. Now, without fear of straining this simile, we may observe, that they, who bring forth fruit to themselves, resemble an empty vine,

1. In its nature—

A vine is a proper emblem of fruitfulness; but an empty vine, in a country so famous for its vineyards as Palestine, gives one a very strong idea of barrenness. Hence, when God was complaining of his people's unfruitfulness, he compared them to a vineyard, which, alter the greatest pains and cost bestowed on its culture, brought forth nothing but wild grapes [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.4). In this view, an empty vine marks the depraved nature of those, who, notwithstanding all the labor with which they have been cultivated, remain "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord:" who, instead of being "filled with the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory," can rise no higher than self, nor do one single act that is pleasing and acceptable to God.

2. In its use—

A barren vine is the most worthless of all things: other trees may be made useful in some way; but neither root nor branch, nor even the trunk, of a barren vine is good for anything [Ezekiel 15:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 15.2-5). Such worthless creatures are they who bring forth no fruit to God. They may indeed be good members of the community; but, as to all the great ends of their creation, they are of no use whatever: they bring no glory to God; they advance not the spiritual welfare of those around them; they attain not to any measure of the Divine image. There is not anything in the whole creation that does not answer the ends of its formation better than they. Well does our Lord compare them to "salt, which, when it has lost its savor, is unfit even for the dunghill [Luke 14:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 14.35)."

3. In its end—

Our Lord has told us what will be the end of a barren vine [John 15:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.6). And shall not such also be the end of those who live to themselves rather than to God? Let our Lord determine this point also [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.30); and let "the unprofitable servant" not think himself secure on account of his freedom from gross sins: but remember that the best actions are to no purpose, if not wrought from a principle of love to God 1 Corinthians 13:1.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who resemble an empty vine—

The culture bestowed on you is worse than in vain, since it greatly aggravates your guilt. Guard then against self-deceit: and devote yourselves in body, soul, and spirit, unto God. Above all, seek to be united unto Christ by faith: for it is only by virtue derived from Christ, that you can ever bring forth fruit unto God [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.4). [John 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.4).

2. Those who may rather be compared to fruitful vines—

Occasional mixtures of self are no just ground to question our state before God: for there is much remaining weakness in the best. Nevertheless you must watch and pray against that base principle, and judge of your attainments by the degree in which self is mortified, and God exalted in your hearts.

[Hosea 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 10.12)

DISCOURSE 1168

THE DUTY OF SEEKING GOD

[Hosea 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 10.12). Sow to yourselves in righteousness. reap in mercy: break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, until he come and rain righteousness upon you.

THE figurative language of Scripture may in some cases obscure its import: but, when it is explained, it exhibits the plainest truths in a rich variety of forms, and tends to fix them on our minds by its attractive influence. We pray God that this observation may be verified, while we open the passage now before us, and consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

The three first expressions are explained by the prophet himself as collectively importing, that we should "seek the Lord:" but, separately taken, they point out the particular manner in which we should seek him:

1. In the performance of his will—

Though no man ever hopes to reap wheat, where he has sowed only tares, almost all expect to obtain Heaven, notwithstanding they have never made it the one object of their pursuit. But the Apostle guards us against this fatal error, and assures us, that we shall reap according to what we have sowed [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.7-8). Would we then have a joyful harvest in the day of judgment, let us not be provoking God by a life of sin; but turn to him in the way of righteousness; nor let us regard the duties of the first or second table only; but labor to fulfill all his will uniformly and without reserve.

2. In a dependence on his mercy—

As there are many who hope to find acceptance with God, notwithstanding they seek him not at all, so are there many, who think they make God their debtor by the works they perform; and that they can earn Heaven, as it were, by their own righteousness. But, however we may "sow in righteousness," we must "reap in mercy." Death is the wages of sin: but life is not the wages of righteousness; all our righteousnesses are imperfect [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 64.6); our best deeds are mixed with sin: and therefore we must be contented to accept Heaven as the unmerited gift of God through Jesus Christ [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.23). [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.9).

3. In a due preparation of heart to receive his blessings—

It would be in vain for a man to sow his seed on fallow ground. The very rains, which God might send down upon it, would be of no service, if the ground were not purged of its weeds, and the seed buried in the bosom of the earth. Thus neither can the soul make a just improvement of spiritual blessings, unless it be broken up, as it were, by the divine law. Until this be done, the true way of salvation will appear foolishness. To be diligent in working righteousness, and, after all, to depend on mere mercy, will be thought paradoxical and absurd. But, when once the law is brought home to the conscience in its spirituality and extent, the soul is made willing to submit to the righteousness of God; and yet is induced to purify itself even as God is pure. It was by this means that Paul was brought to a right mind [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.9); nor is there any other way of combining diligence in exertion with a humble dependence on the Divine favor [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.19). [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.4).

For the impressing of this duty on our minds, let us consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

Confining ourselves to the hints suggested in the text, we shall pass by many obvious and important arguments, and fix our attention upon,

1. The urgency of this duty—

At the proper seasons the gardener goes forth to plough or sow his ground, knowing that, if his work be neglected until the time for performing it be past, he shall have reason to repent of his neglect in the day of harvest. Let it be remembered then, that this is the "time to seek the Lord." Are we advanced in years? Surely we have no time to lose. Are we in the early part of life? What time so fit as that of youth, before our habits be fixed, or our consciences seared, or our minds distracted by worldly cares? As for aged persons, their lives must be drawing to a speedy close: or, if protracted for a while, a want of mental energy will unfit their souls for spiritual exertions. And, with respect to those who are in the midst of youth, for anything they know, there may be "but a step between them and death." If any feel a disposition to serve the Lord, this is in a peculiar manner the time for them to seek his face. The very desire they feel, is an evidence that God himself is working in them [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13), and ready to reveal himself to them: whereas, if they stifle the motions of his Spirit, they know not that the grace they so despise shall be ever offered them again [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.3). Let us then "redeem the time" that is so precious [Ephesians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.16), and improve the season which God has afforded us fur this important work.

2. The certainty of success in it—

The gardener knows, that if his seed be not watered by seasonable rains, his labor will be wholly lost: yet, notwithstanding he cannot command the showers, lie performs his labor, in hope that God will graciously send the former and the latter rain. But we have an absolute promise, that God will prosper our endeavors, and that, "to him who sows righteousness shall be a sure Reward [Proverbs 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 11.18)." Do we want a righteousness to justify us before God? He will clothe us in the unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness [Isaiah 61:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.10). Do we want an inward righteousness to qualify us for the enjoyment of his presence? He will work it in us by his good Spirit, and transform us into his own blessed image [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.26). Yes, he will "rain down righteousness upon us," giving us "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness [Romans 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.17)." Let this then encourage us; for "none ever sought his face in vain [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.19)."

APPLICATION—

Let us begin the first great work, the ploughing up of our fallow ground. We need not be told either the necessity or the reasonableness of this work in husbandry: and a very small acquaintance with the corruption and obduracy of an unrenewed heart, will supersede any attempts to evince the same in the cultivation of the soul. Only let it be remembered, that nothing but the law, opened in all its spirituality, and applied in its awful sanctions, can ever effect this work. Let us study it more and more. Let us try ourselves by it. Let us bring our actions, words, and thoughts to it as to a touchstone. Let us use it for the rooting out of all false principles, and base affections. Thus shall our seed be sown to more advantage [Jeremiah 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 4.3); and a glorious harvest await us in the day of the Lord Jesus [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.9-10).

[Hosea 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.1)

DISCOURSE 1169

CHRIST CALLED OUT OF EGYPT

[Hosea 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.1). When Israel was a child, then I loved him; and called my Son out of Egypt.

WITHOUT supposing a primary and secondary sense of Scripture, it is impossible to interpret the prophetic writings, so as to make them accord with the construction put upon them in the New Testament. Indeed, on many occasions, we are necessitated to apply them also in a spiritual or mystical sense, so as to bring out from them that full instruction which they are intended to convey. Not that we are at liberty to indulge our own conceits in explaining God's blessed word, or to put upon it any sense which a fanciful imagination may suggest; but if we follow the inspired writers of the New Testament, we are safe. The passage before us has doubtless an historical import, in relation to the ten tribes of Israel: nor can we doubt but that it has a prophetic meaning in reference to our blessed Lord. And I think the whole analogy of Scripture justifies us in affixing to it also a mystical meaning, in reference to the Church of God in all ages.

In accordance with this view, let us consider,

I. Its historical import, as relating to the Jewish people—

The prophet is reproving the ten tribes for their ingratitude to God; and in the words before us he shows them what signal mercies God had given to them, from the earliest period of their existence.

"He had loved Israel when a child"—

When Israel were yet but few in number, God had loved them; yes, when their great ancestor was yet in the womb, God had shown to him his distinguishing grace and mercy: choosing him, while Esau, the elder brother, was rejected [Malachi 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.2-3). If they looked for the true cause of this, they would find it in God, and in God alone: who had chosen them of his own sovereign will and pleasure, and "had loved them purely and solely because he would love them [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 7.7-8)." Nothing could exceed their weakness or unworthiness, at the instant when God brought them into covenant with himself [Ezekiel 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.6); and therefore they were bound to bear this in remembrance, and to requite this love with a total surrender of themselves to God.

He had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand—

God had set them apart as a peculiar people for himself. And, in demanding their liberation from Pharaoh, he honored them with the name of "his son, his first-born [Exodus 4:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 4.22-23)." And vain was Pharaoh's opposition to his will. By ten successive plagues, God subdued that proud monarch; and on the very day that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, brought them forth with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm: not so much as one was left behind: and this has been referred to, by all the inspired writers, as the most wonderful display of power and grace that ever was given to any creatures since the foundation of the world.

But let us view,

II. Its prophetic import, as relating to our blessed Lord—

It had been ordained of God, that every possible evidence should concur to establish beyond a doubt the Messiahship of Jesus—

Nothing could be conceived more unlikely than that Jesus the Messiah should be brought forth out of Egypt. He was to be born at Bethlehem [Matthew 2:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.5-6), and to be educated at Nazareth [Matthew 2:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.22-23). How, then, should it be possible for him to be brought out of Egypt? Behold, the rage and envy of Herod shall stimulate him to seek his utter destruction; and to secure it, by the destruction of all the infants from two years old and under, in all the vicinity of the place where Jesus was born. But, to defeat this murderous plot, an angel shall instruct Joseph to take the infant and its mother by night into Egypt; and there shall they be preserved in safety, until Herod himself is dead: and thus, without any design on the part of man, yes, through the murderous rage alone of this jealous prince, is the prophecy fulfilled; and the most convincing evidence is given, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

In this view, as confirming the faith of all Believers to the very end of the world, is this prophecy pre-eminently important; since it was beyond the power of man ever to imagine such an incident; and since it took place only through the cruelty of him who sought to destroy Christ as soon as he was come into the world.

Let us further consider,

III. Its mystical import, as applicable to the Israel of God in all ages—

It is well known that the whole deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a type of the deliverance of God's Israel from sin and Satan, death and Hell. Taking, then, the passage in that view, we see in it,

1. The sovereignty of his grace—

There is not a child of God, at whatever period he was converted to the faith of Christ, but was loved of God before the foundation of the world. Of every one of them it may be said, "God has loved us with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn us [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3)." To this all the Scriptures bear witness [Ephesians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.4-5). [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 1.9); And therefore, if we be God's children, we must bear in mind to whose sovereign grace alone we owe it: "We have not chosen him; but he has chosen us [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.16)."

2. The work which he has ordained to accomplish in all his people—

Every one of them does he bring out of Egypt. However long we may have been in bondage there, he looses our bonds, and "brings us into the glorious liberty of his children." See what he did for his people of old, and then you will see what he will do for us: did he cause them to go from their bondage, and to commit themselves altogether to the guidance and protection of their God? That is what he will do for us: neither sin nor Satan shall detain us any longer under their dominion: but we shall devote ourselves altogether to the Lord, to be to him a holy and a peculiar people.

3. The efficacy of his grace in their behalf—

Not one was left behind: "not one feeble person was found," at that juncture, amidst all the tribes of Israel. And shall there be one among all his people, whom he has redeemed, unable to withstand his spiritual enemies? No, not one: "It is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish." There may be a diversity in the mode of their preservation, as at the shipwreck of Paul: but not one shall be lost; nor shall a hair fall from the head of any one among them [Acts 27:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 27.34); [Acts 27:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 27.44).

ADDRESS—

1. Have any of you been called to God as from early childhood?

O, "bless God for this unspeakable gift." How much have you avoided, which might have ensnared and destroyed your souls! Truly, to be called to the knowledge of the truth in early life, is a far richer blessing than to have been called to the possession of crowns and kingdoms.

2. Are any of you brought into a state of deep affliction?

This is no proof that God does not "love you," or deal with you as "his children." Israel of old were scarcely escaped from Egypt, before they were menaced with destruction at the Red Sea. And our blessed Lord was scarcely born into the world, before it was necessary that he should be carried to Egypt, to avoid the sword of the destroyer. Indeed, you will find that God in general calls his people to trials. "John the Baptist must be in the deserts, until the time of his showing unto Israel [Luke 1:80](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.80);" our blessed Lord must be "forty days tempted of the devil in the wilderness," before he shall enter on the office to which he had been baptized [Matthew 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 4.1). [Mark 1:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 1.9-13); Paul shall be three days and three nights without sight; and even then shall go into Arabia before he enters fully on his apostolic office [Acts 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.9) and [Galatians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 1.17). Thus does God generally cause his people's faith to be tried [Hebrews 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.8); and "allures them into the wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them [Hosea 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.14-15)." if, then, your faith be tried, know that it is needful for your best interests 1 Peter 1:6-7, and that it is by your tribulations that he will further in you the work of "patience and experience and hope [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3-5)."

3. Are there among you those who have never yet come out of Egypt?

Be sure, that if you fancy yourselves children of God, while yet you have no desire to relinquish this vain world, you do but deceive your own souls. Your "faith," if it be genuine, "will overcome the world [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.4);" and "the cross of Christ," if ever its saving power be felt, will cause you "to be crucified to the world, and the world to be as a crucified object unto you [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.14)." They who are the Lord's people indeed, "are not of the world, even as he was not of the world [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.16)." I call you, therefore, to show "whose you are, and whom you serve:" as for "serving God and Mammon too, it is impossible [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.24);" and to attempt it, is an act of treason against God [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.4). the Greek. Come out, then, from Egypt and its pollutions, as God has commanded you: and then "he will be a Father unto you; and you shall be his sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.17-18)."

[Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.4)

DISCOURSE 1170

THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD DRAWS HIS PEOPLE

[Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.4). I drew them with of a man, with bands of love.

THE doctrine of Divine influences is generally considered as enthusiastic and absurd. But though we grant that there is much in it which is above our comprehension, there is nothing in it that is contrary to reason. We know not how mind operates upon matter, when we move any of the members of our body: but does any one, on this account, question the influence of volition upon our motions? So, though there be much in Divine influences that is inexplicable, we affirm, that to them must be ascribed all the good which we do. In fact, we have, in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, a very striking illustration of the way in which the Spirit of God operates upon the souls of men. In reference to that event God says, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love Compare verse 1 with the text;" and the same may be said of all who are delivered from the infinitely sorer bondage of sin and Satan.

Let us then consider,

I. How God drew his people out of Egypt—

They were not of themselves seeking deliverance. On the contrary, when Moses interposed for them by slaying one of their oppressors, and proceeded to encourage in them a hope of yet further deliverance, "they thrust him from them, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" But when God's time was fully come, "he drew them," as we are told, "by the cords of a man, and by bands of love"—

He made them to feel their sore bondage, and to cry so bitterly by reason of it, that God himself was afflicted by their afflictions. He then sent them a Savior, even Moses, whom he commissioned and qualified to effect their deliverance. By him he displayed his almighty power; and in ten successive plagues inflicted upon Egypt, (from all of which they were exempt,) he showed them, that, under the guidance of Moses, they might safely go forth from Egypt, and cast off the yoke of their oppressors. Thus he drew them by such considerations as are proper to influence a rational being: for it is impossible for a man under the pressure of grievous affliction not to desire relief, and gladly to avail himself of such aid as promises to be effectual: He drew them, I say, "with cords of a man."

Further, God put himself at the head of them, and undertook to be their guide: and, when their danger became so imminent, that they were reduced to utter despair, he opened the sea before them, and led them through on dry ground, and overwhelmed all their enemies in the waves, which had just before been a wall for the protection of his chosen people. Here "he drew them with the bands of love," as he did afterwards in all their journeys, supplying by miracle their every want, and manifesting his glory to them, and giving them a written revelation of his will and taking them for his own peculiar people above all the people upon the face of the whole earth. To them also he held forth the prospect of an inheritance. even of a land flowing with milk and honey. where they should enjoy such peace and plenty and happiness. as were unknown to the whole world besides.

Now these distinguishing favors were well calculated to bind them to him in such love and gratitude. that nothing should ever be able to draw them from him. or to damp their ardor in his service.

True indeed these means did not produce their full effect upon that generation. all of whom perished in the wilderness. excepting two. What addresses itself to our senses only. is but transient in its operation on the mind; whereas the things which are seen by faith are always present and abidingly influential and uniformly effectual. In this respect. therefore. the parallel between God's dealings with the Jews and with us will not hold good. But still the manner in which God drew them serves as "a shadow of good things to come." and affords to us a striking illustration of the way in which he will draw his people to himself under the better dispensation which we are privileged to enjoy.

To elucidate this. I will show.

II. How he will draw us at this day—

We need his influences as much as ever his ancient people did—

No man ever comes to God by any power of his own. Our blessed Lord expressly says. "No man comes unto me. except the Father who has sent me draw him [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.44)." In fact. we have not in ourselves a power to do a good act [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5). or speak a good word [Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 12.34). or think a good thoughts [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.5). "Our sufficiency for everything is of God alone;" "nor without him can we either will or do any one thing that is pleasing in his sight [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13). If any man could have exerted such a power. it would have been the Apostle Paul. But he confesses. "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and. when constrained to speak of his labors, he recalls. as it were. his words. and with holy jealousy for God's honor. adds. "yet not I. but the grace of God which was with me [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.10)." If any man think he can renew and sanctify his own soul. let him make the effort; and his own experience shall attest all that the Scriptures have spoken.

And how is it that God will work in us?—

He will draw us, even as he did them, by rational considerations, and by gracious influences, or, as my text expresses it, "by the cords of a man, and by the bands of love"

When first God begins a work of grace upon the soul, he shows to a man his fallen state, and his utter incapacity to save himself. Then He makes known to him the Lord Jesus, who has died for the redemption of a ruined world, and shows to him, that through that adorable Savior he may obtain a deliverance from all guilt and misery, and be made a partaker of everlasting happiness and glory. Now the question necessarily arises in his mind, 'Shall I persist in ray wickedness? Shall I pour contempt upon these offers of mercy? Shall I plunge my soul into irremediable and endless perdition? No: This were to act more stupidly than the beasts, and to forfeit all title to the rationality of man.' Thus is he drawn in the first instance by "the cords of a man." But in his further progress he experiences the still more influential drawings of God's love, which, as "bands," constrain him to surrender up himself a willing captive to his God. The Holy Spirit, whose office it is to "glorify Christ, takes of the things that are Christ's, and shows them to the believing soul [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.14)," and thus makes "Christ more precious to him" than ten thousand worlds [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.7). In time he enables the soul to "comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that love of Christ which passes knowledge [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18);" and by witnessing with the soul that it is an object of God's love, he enables it with boldness and with confidence to address him by the endearing name of Father [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.15-16), and to assure itself of an everlasting participation of his kingdom and glory. With such bands cast around him, the Believer is drawn to God in a way of holy obedience, and can "defy all the hosts of Hell itself ever to separate him from his love [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.35-39)." The abiding feeling of his heart from henceforth is, "The love of Christ constrains me, because I thus judge; that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14-15)."

Observe from hence,

1. What reason unconverted men have to blush and be ashamed—

They will take occasion from the doctrine of Divine influences to justify themselves, saying, 'If God do not draw me, how can I go to him?' But I ask. Have not the cords of a man been spread around you, yes, and the bands of redeeming love also, and you have burst all these bands asunder, and cast all these cords from you? Do you not know that Heaven and Hell are before you? and are you acting the part of rational beings, while you take no care to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life? And have you never heard of what Christ has done and suffered for you, and felt too the influences of his Holy Spirit calling you to repentance? Yet have you not ungratefully slighted all the love of Christ, and wickedly resisted the Holy Spirit? Tell me, then, whether such conduct do not call for the deepest humiliation before God? Truly, you may vindicate yourselves, as you will, now; but you shall stand self-condemned at the judgment-seat of Christ.

2. What reason believers have to bless and adore their God—

Though the unbeliever must ascribe to himself alone the misery to which he is hastening, you owe to God and to his sovereign grace all the blessedness which you enjoy. Had not God of his infinite mercy drawn you, you had no more turned to him, than Satan himself has done [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.44). In the view of all the good that you either possess or hope for, you must say, "He who has wrought us to the self-same thing is God [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.5)." Give him then the glory due unto his name: and look to him for a continuance of his grace, that his work may be carried on and perfected in your souls. Beg of him to fasten his bands yet more firmly about you, that nothing either within or without may break them. And endeavor at all times to yield to his attractive influences, and to comply with the first intimations of his will. And, if you be treated with contempt for this by an ungodly world, comfort yourselves with the reflection, that you are acting the part of rational beings; and that the more closely you are drawn to God in this world, the more intimately you will enjoy him to all eternity in the world to come.

[Hosea 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.7-9)

DISCOURSE 1171

GOD'S COMPASSION

[Hosea 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.7-9). My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him: yet how shall I give you up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver you, Israel? how shall I make you as Admah? how shall I set you as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together: I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger.

THE riches of divine grace are manifest in all the promises; but they are more eminently displayed in the manner in which the promises are given. God often introduces them after an enumeration of his people's sins. The passage before us well exemplifies this remark See similar instances, [Isaiah 43:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.22-25); [Isaiah 57:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.17-18). God has been contrasting his kindness to Israel, and their ingratitude towards him; in the text he sets forth their wickedness with all its aggravations: yet all this is preparatory, not to a heavy denunciation of his wrath, but to the tenderest expressions of paternal love—

I. The conduct of men towards God—

The ten tribes, since their separation from Judah, had become idolaters: yet God calls them his people because they had been admitted into covenant with him, and still professed to be his. Thus all who call themselves Christians are "God's people."

But they "are bent to backsliding from him"—

The ungodly are justly compared to an unruly heifer: they will not submit to the yoke of God's laws: their whole spirit and temper is like that of Pharaoh [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 5.2); the "bent" and inclination of their hearts is wholly towards sin. An outward conformity to God's will they may approve, but they have a rooted aversion to spiritual obedience.

Nor can they by any means be prevailed on to "exalt and honor him"—

They are "called" frequently by God's ministers; they are exhorted and entreated to return to the Most High; but neither promises can allure nor threatenings alarm them:. they turn a deaf ear to all admonitions; they will not "exalt" God in their hearts and lives.

This is almost universally the conduct of mankind—

There are a few indeed who desire and delight to serve God; they wish him to be the sole Lord and Governor of their hearts; it is their study to exalt him both in their words and actions: but these are few in every age and place; so few, that, in comparison of the rebellious, they may be said to be "none at all."

What might such persons expect at the hand of God?

II. God's conduct towards them—

How different are God's ways from the ways of man! Instead of executing vengeance in a moment,

He deliberates—

Admah and Zeboim were cities destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah; and such monuments of wrath do the unregenerate deserve to be; but God knows not, as it were, how to inflict the deserved punishment: he calls to mind that they are his people The repetition of their names, "you, Ephraim, and you, Israel," seems to import tenderness and affection towards them; he hesitates, like a parent that is about to disinherit his son; thus is he distracted between his affection for them, and his regard for his own honor Thus also in [Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.4).

He relents—

To accommodate himself to our weak apprehensions, he speaks of himself after the manner of men: he cannot endure the thought of making men the objects of his everlasting displeasure. Thus did Jesus weep over the murderous Jerusalem [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.41); and thus do the affections of our Father yearn over us [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.20).

He resolves—

Often has "the fierce anger" of the Lord been kindled against us; yet many times has he turned away from his wrathful indignation [Psalm 78:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.38); often, when his bow was bent, has he forborne to strike [Psalm 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 7.11-12); be waits, if perhaps we may yet return to him. His language to his rebellious creatures is the same as ever [Jeremiah 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.12-13).

INFERENCES—

1. How precious in the sight of God are the souls of men!

When it was necessary for man's salvation, God gave his Son: nor did he then deliberate, "how shall I do this [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.32)." neither did he relent, when he laid our iniquities on him [Mark 14:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 14.35-36); yes, he was even pleased in bruising his own Son for us This is the proper sense of [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.10). But when a sinner seems irreclaimable, every tender emotion is excited; God sustains a conflict in his mind, and cannot give him up. O that men would duly estimate the worth of their own souls!

2. How just will be the condemnation of the impenitent!

This compassion of God greatly aggravates their backslidings; and at last it will give way to wrath and indignation [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.3). Soon God will not deliberate, but decide; not relent, but laugh at their calamity; not resolve to pardon, but swear they shall not enter into his rest. Then how just will their condemnation appear! May this goodness of God now lead us to repentance!

3. How certainly shall the returning sinner find mercy!

If God feel thus for the rebellious, how much more for the penitent! Let all then seek him with humble confidence in his mercy. Let them offer their supplications like those of old [Isaiah 63:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.15).—; so shall that song of praise succeed their present disquietude [Isaiah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.1).—

[Hosea 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.3-4)

DISCOURSE 1172

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

[Hosea 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.3-4); [Hosea 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.6). By his strength he had power with God: yes, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him.…Therefore turn you to your God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on your God continually.

THE historical parts of Scripture, if duly improved, will be found no less useful than any other. The Apostles often refer to them, and declare, that the things which had occurred to their ancestors, had "happened to them for examples," and that they were recorded "for our admonition." The Prophet Hosea was reproving both Ephraim (or the ten tribes) and Judah (the two remaining tribes) for their respective sins. But having called the latter by the name of "Jacob," he thought it proper to guard them against the delusion of imagining themselves accepted of God because of their descent from Jacob, when their conduct was in direct opposition to that which he maintained. He then brings to their remembrance a very striking instance of Jacob's communion with God; and takes occasion from it to urge them to an imitation of his example.

We shall consider,

I. Jacob's victory—

In a season of great distress he betook himself to prayer—

Jacob was greatly alarmed at the tidings that his brother Esau was coming against him with four hundred men to destroy him. He therefore used all the most prudential means to pacify his brother, or at least to prevent the total destruction of himself and his family. But he did not trust in the means he had devised. He determined to seek protection from God, well knowing that no means whatever could succeed without him, and that his favor would be a sure defense.

When Jacob stayed behind in order to call upon his God, God instantly came forth to meet him. The person who is said to have wrestled with him is sometimes called a man, sometimes an angel, and sometimes God Compare [Genesis 32:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.24); [Genesis 32:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.28); [Genesis 32:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.30) with verse 4, 5. It was none other than the Son of God, "the Angel of the Covenant," who assumed on this occasion, as he did on many other occasions, a human shape: and by his condescending to come to Jacob in this manner, he showed, both to him and us, that none should ever seek his face in vain.

As for Jacob's wrestling with the angel, the prophet explains the import of that phrase, by saying, that Jacob "wept and made supplication unto him." He "stirred up himself, as it were, to lay hold on God;" and pleaded his cause before him with boldness and confidence. Assured of a successful issue, he persevered in the conflict until break of day; and when solicited by his apparent adversary to terminate his exertions, he replied, "I will not let you go until you bless me." Yet we are particularly informed, that with this boldness there was a mixture of the deepest humility; for he urged his petitions as our Lord himself did in his incarnate state [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 5.7), with strong crying and tears.

Thus did Jacob show us to whom we should go in an hour of trouble, and in what manner we should endeavor to interest him in our behalf.

By this means he obtained the desired relief—

We are told twice in the text, that "he had power, and prevailed." He prevailed with God; and by God's assistance prevailed over man. The great object of his suit was to defeat the malice, and assuage the wrath, of his brother Esau. But how should he effect this? Conciliating as his measures and his conduct were, he could not ensure success: and therefore he went to God, who has all hearts in his hand, and turns them wherever he will. He well knew, that, if once he could get God on his side, he was safe; for that "none could be against him, if God were for him." To God therefore he presented his supplication; and behold the instantaneous effect! The enraged persecutor meets him with fraternal affection, and the only strife between them was, who should manifest the greatest love.

In the exhortation grounded on this fact, we see,

II. The improvement we should make of it—

The intermediate words, omitted in the text, are merely a repetition of the same idea, that the person who had met with Jacob in Bethel, was "the Lord God of Hosts;" and that, in thus conversing with Jacob, he had, in fact, conversed with the Jewish nation, and had evinced his readiness to hear the supplications of all that call upon him. Then follows the prophet's exhortation, which it will be proper to enforce;

1. "Turn you unto your God"—

He who was Jacob's God will also be ours: he is ours by external profession, and will be ours by the special communication of his grace, if we seek him with our whole heart.

To those who are in trouble, God is the only refuge [Nah. 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah. 1.7). We may go to the creature, and obtain no benefit: but, if we make our application to him, he will hear and help us. In him we shall be as in an impregnable fortress; and if the whole human race were combined for our destruction, not a hair of our head should perish. Let every one of us then turn unto God; and we shall find him a very present help in trouble.

2. "Keep mercy and judgment"—

We may be ready to think, that as Jacob, notwithstanding his treacherous conduct, found acceptance with God, we may also live in the violation of our duty, and transgress the plainest principles of love and equity, and yet have God for our protector and friend. But Jacob's treachery was a source of innumerable troubles to him through life, and especially of those very fears that harassed him on this occasion. And we shall find, that, sooner or later, deceit will bring its own punishment along with it. Doubtless when Jacob "wept," he did so from a recollection that he had brought all these evils on himself, and had altogether forfeited the Divine favor. And to those in Hell, it will be no inconsiderable augmentation of their misery to reflect, that they brought it on themselves.

Let us then determine, through grace, that we will give no just occasion to the enemies of our religion to blaspheme, but that we will in everything keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man.

3. "Wait on your God continually"—

Whether we be reduced to such manifest straits as Jacob was, or not, we equally need the superintending care of God's Providence. We have spiritual enemies, incomparably more numerous, powerful, and inveterate than Esau's band; nor can any human means effectually defeat their malice.

Let us then not merely call on God occasionally, under the pressure of some heavy trial, or in the near prospect of death; but let us maintain fellowship with him continually, and by fervent supplication prevail with him to preserve us from all evil, and to bless us with all spiritual blessings. Let us remember, that he is our God in Christ Jesus, and that, through the aid of our incarnate God, we shall be more than conquerors over every enemy If this were the subject of a Fast Sermon, it might be improved, 1. in reference to the subject; 2. in reference to the occasion. The former of these heads might be treated as above; and under the latter it might be shown from a variety of instances (e. g. [2 Samuel 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 15.31); [2 Samuel 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 17.14). [2 Chronicles 20:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 20.5); [2 Chronicles 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 20.23). [Isaiah 37:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.15); [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.36).), that humble and importunate prayer is the most effectual method of defeating the rage or devices of our enemies.

[Hosea 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.6)

DISCOURSE 1172

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

[Hosea 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.3-4); [Hosea 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.6). By his strength he had power with God: yes, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him.…Therefore turn you to your God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on your God continually.

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[Hosea 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.4)

DISCOURSE 1173

JEHOVAH ALONE DESERVING OF OUR FEAR OR CONFIDENCE

[Hosea 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.4). You shall know no God but me: for there is no Savior beside me.

IN the Holy Scriptures, every kind of argument is urged that is proper to influence the minds of men: sometimes we are persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, and sometimes are allured by his exceeding great and precious promises. A difference is observed towards men differently disposed, and differently circumstanced: "towards some, compassion is exercised" in all its gentlest forms; while others are "saved with fear, and snatched out of the fire" with a kind of compulsive violence. But it not unfrequently happens, that where the obstinacy of men is such as almost to preclude a hope of prevailing with them, both the kinds of argument are combined, in order, if possible, by either, or by both, to overcome the obdurate soul. Thus, in the passage before us, the prophet, having represented the ten tribes as increasingly shameless in their idolatries, declares from God, that they shall pass away like the morning cloud, or early dew, and that, like chaff from a threshing-floor, or smoke from a chimney, they shall be scattered as with a whirlwind over the face of the whole earth verse 2, 3. But still, as though God repented of denouncing so heavy a judgment against them, he addresses them with tender pity; "Yet I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall know no God before me; for there is no Savior beside me:" that is, "I can never forget the relation which I bear towards you; and I am as willing as ever to bestow on you all the blessings of salvation, if only you will banish from you those rivals which have provoked me to jealousy."

In these words there are two things to be noticed:

I. The command—

In its primary and literal sense, it refers to the putting away of their molten images which they had made to worship. But the terms used are nearly the same as those by which the first commandment in the Decalogue is expressed; and therefore we must consider them as extending also to the idolatry of the heart. Indeed, idolatry is, as Paul expresses it, "a worshiping and serving of the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed forever [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.25);" and consequently, we are here forbidden to pay to any creature that regard which is due to God alone, or to make it the chief object of,

1. Our love—

In a subordinate way we may love the creature, but not so as to put it in competition with God. There is nothing in the whole universe which we should desire, or seek, in comparison of Him; nor anything which we should not willingly part with, rather than offend him: The state of our minds towards God should be like that of David, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.25)." To make pleasure, or riches, or honor, or anything but God, our chief good, is idolatry [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.19). "Whose God is their belly." [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.5). "Covetousness, which is idolatry."

2. Our fear—

Scarcely do any begin to fear God, but their acknowledgment of him is retarded by the fear of man. Those who were never ashamed of sin, and who were accustomed to commit all manner of iniquity with greediness, are filled with apprehensions lest their change of sentiment should be discovered, and they should be called to suffer reproach or persecution for the Lord's sake. But all such fear argues a forgetfulness of God [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.12-13),, who alone is worthy to be feared [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.4-5). [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 8.12-13); If we regard God as we ought to do, our answer to every cowardly thought will be, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 27.1)."

3. Our confidence—

When trials of any kind arise, we almost universally turn our eyes to the creature, rather than to God: either we look to our own wisdom and energy to deliver us, or to the favor and exertion of our fellow-creatures: we can scarcely ever realize the thought of a superintending Providence, who is able and willing to interpose for us: we are apt rather to imagine, that it would be an insult to the Most High to suppose that he will trouble himself about such trifling concerns as ours. In like manner, if our trials be of a spiritual nature, we look to our own wisdom to guide us, our own righteousness to justify us, and our own strength to obtain for us the victory over all our spiritual enemies. But in all this, we greatly dishonor God, in whom should be all our trust for body and for soul, for time and for eternity [Psalm 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 11.1); [Psalm 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 11.4); In all such creature-confidence we manifest an entire departure of heart from God, and subject ourselves to his just and heavy displeasure [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.5-6).

The equity of this command is strongly marked in,

II. The reason with which it is enforced—

Though God might well require obedience on the sole ground of his own authority, yet he is graciously pleased to assign a reason for this command; a reason, which, while it evinces the equity of the command, shows how deeply we are interested in obeying it. There is nothing besides God that can save us,

1. In this world—

Suppose that all the wealth and honor that ever were possessed by man were centered in one person, would they ward off the incursions of disease, or repel the assaults of death? Would they even secure their own continuance, so that they should not speedily give way to poverty and disgrace? In the event of any great reverse of circumstances, will those perishing vanities assuage the anguish of a broken bone, or calm the tempest of a troubled spirit? Will a guilty conscience be quieted by them, or death be divested of its sting? Disease and death have no respect of persons; nor will peace of mind be procured by high-sounding titles, or great possessions. It is God alone that can avert trouble, or sanctify it to our good. He can keep us unhurt, when thousands are falling on our right hand, and on our left: or if he see fit to send us tribulation, he can enable us to rejoice and glory in it: and as for death, he has numbered it among the treasures of his people, whom he enables to long for it, that they may be with Christ, in complete and everlasting felicity: If then we look only to our happiness in this present life, who can bear a comparison with Jehovah, as the source of it to those who trust in him?

2. In the world to come—

If the vanities of time and sense can do nothing for us in this present life, how much less can they in the life to come! There they cannot so much as purchase for us a drop of water to cool our tongue. But O! what a Savior will Jehovah be! yes, what crowns and kingdoms will he bestow on his believing and obedient people!: Behold the Rich Man stripped of all his transient joys, and plunged into that abyss of misery which once he despised! Behold, on the other hand, the once destitute and neglected Lazarus in the bosom of his God! Which of the two had chosen the better part; he who had walked in the ways of this world, and made Mammon his God; or he who had sought Jehovah as his God and portion? Truly, one glance of the celestial world is quite sufficient to evince the reasonableness of the injunction given us in our text.

This subject may be improved,

1. For our conviction—

It is an awful truth, that instead of preferring God before everything, we have preferred everything before him. Only let us compare the anxiety we have felt about created objects, with that which we have felt in reference to God, and we shall need no further evidence of our being idolaters in the sight of God. What then have we reason to expect at his hands, in the day when he shall judge the world? Let us not judge of ourselves by some of the grosser sins which are injurious to society, but by those which strike at the honor and authority of God. Then we shall see, that, instead of being a Savior to us, we have reason to fear lest he arise and plead his own cause, and become an avenger of his own insulted Majesty.

2. For our consolation—

If we take Jehovah for our God, there is not any good thing which we may not expect at his hands. The declaration that there is no Savior beside him, is, in fact, an assurance, that he will be a Savior to us, and do for us more than the whole universe can do. We may view salvation in all its bearings, and in its utmost extent; and then say "All this will my God be to me; all this he will do for me." We cannot possibly raise our expectations too high; for "he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think:" nor need it be any grief to us that there is no Savior besides him; for we shall want no other: He is almighty, and will be all-sufficient.

[Hosea 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.9)

DISCOURSE 1174

HELP IN CHRIST FOR SELF-DESTROYED SINNERS

[Hosea 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.9). O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help.

THE great mass of nominal Christians need to be informed respecting their state by nature, and the means by which they are to be delivered from it; and they who have a theoretical acquaintance with these things, yet need to be put frequently in remembrance of them, in order that they may be more abidingly influenced by the consideration of them. In the words of our text, all mistakes on these points are clearly rectified; and we are told on the authority of God himself, that,

I. Man's destruction is of himself—

Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, there are multitudes of the human race eternally destroyed [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.13-14). Their destruction too is altogether of themselves: for,

1. They will walk in the way that leads to it—

God has told them plainly that eternal misery must be the fruit of sin and impenitence [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.9-10). [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 13.3). Yet men will continue to disregard the warnings of God, and to practice the things which are displeasing to him! What then must become of them, if there be any truth in the word of God? Or whom must they blame, when they feel the judgments which they would not fear? The man, who by a poisonous draught, or by any other means, puts a period to his life, is not more the author of his own death, than these are of their own destruction.

2. They will not use the means which God has prescribed for their escape—

God has graciously opened a way for the salvation of a ruined world: he has sent his only dear Son to die for sinners, and his good Spirit to instruct and sanctify them. But men will not seek to be washed in the Redeemer's blood: they will not pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit: they will not cordially accept the salvation offered them. They are so intent on their worldly business or pleasure, that they will not afford time for spiritual employments. Is it not then utterly their own fault if they perish? A man, who having taken a poisonous draught, whether intentionally or not, would be justly considered as the author of his own death, if he obstinately refused an antidote that was offered to him: and so must they be considered as destroying themselves who neglect the means which God has provided for their escape.

3. They make use of everything ultimately to ensure their own destruction—

Whether they look upwards to God, or around them to the world, or within them to their own experience, they turn everything into an occasion of fostering their own delusions, and of lulling themselves asleep in a fatal security This truth will be seen in the most striking point of view, by the following concise statement. Men take this occasion,

1. From God himself—

From his perfections—

From his sovereignty; "If he will not give me his grace, how can I help myself?"

From his mercy: "God is too merciful to condemn any man."

From his providence—

If it be indulgent; "These blessings are proofs of his love."

If it he afflictive; "I have my sufferings in this life."

From his grace—

"He gave his Son to die for me; therefore I have nothing to fear."

2. From the world around them—

From the godly—

If they are consistent; "They are unreasonably precise."

If they are inconsistent; "They are hypocrites; they are all alike; I am as good as they; only I make less talk about religion."

From the ungodly—

"I can never think that so many are wrong, and so few right."

3. From their own experience—

If they have been corrupt; "Why did God give me these passions?"

If they have been moral; "I thank you that I am not as other men are."

If they are learned; "Cannot I understand my Bible without Divine illumination?"

If they are unlearned; "My ignorance is excusable; I am no scholar."

If they have been neglectful of religious duties; "I have done no one any harm."

If they have been observant of religious duties; they put their formal services in the place of Christ, and consider them as decisive evidences of their conversion.

Thus instead of arguing from these topics so as to stimulate their exertions, they derive encouragement from them all to continue in their sins.

But though man's destruction is of himself, we must not suppose that his salvation also is of himself: no;

II. His salvation is of God alone—

If we inquire who it is, that thus arrogates to himself the exclusive power of saving sinners, we shall find that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is "King" in Zion verse 10 with [Matthew 21:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.5) and [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.31), "besides whom there is no Savior verse 4," and who invariably claims this as his unalienable prerogative [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.22) with [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.28) and [John 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.37).

1. There is help for us in no other—

Who besides him could possibly make atonement for our sins? Man himself could never satisfy Divine Justice: Nor could all the angels in Heaven offer unto God a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of men?: None but He who was "Jehovah's Fellow" was equal to the task of expiating transgression, and effecting a reconciliation between God and man [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.19) with [Hebrews 10:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.4-10).

Who besides him could rescue us out of the hands of our spiritual enemies? He is that stronger man, who alone can vanquish our mighty adversary, and deliver us from our sore bondage [Luke 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.21); [Luke 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.23).

Who besides him can teach us the way of salvation [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.27). or incline us to seek after it [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13). or render our endeavors effectual [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.5).

We may truly say then, that as there is no other foundation on which to build our hopes [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.11), so neither is there any other name or power whereby we can be saved [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12). "Christ is all, and in all [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.11)."

2. In him there is help sufficient—

There is nothing wanting in sinful man, which is not abundantly supplied in Jesus Christ. In him there is wisdom to direct the most ignorant [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.29),—merit to justify the most guilty [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 13.39),—grace to sanctify the most polluted [1 Corinthians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.11),—and strength to render even the weakest of the human race a conqueror, yes, "more than conqueror," over all his enemies [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9). [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13). He is furnished of God for this very end [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.1), and appointed of him to this very office [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.30), and is in every respect "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 7.25)."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of their real state—

Too many, alas! are altogether ignorant of their undone state, and still more so of the guilt attaching to them as the authors of their own misery. But whether we know these things or not, it is an indisputable fact that we have destroyed ourselves, and that there is no possibility of recovery for us but in and through Christ. Let us then seek instruction on these infinitely important subjects, lest we "perish forever for lack of knowledge [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 4.6)." And let us not for one moment look for acceptance in any other way than through the Lord Jesus Christ, as though we were not self-destroyed, or there remained in us any sufficiency to help ourselves. For so destitute are we of all help in ourselves, that, if a good thought would cancel all our past iniquities, and open the kingdom of Heaven to us, we could not supply it [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.5). If ever we would partake of the felicity of Heaven, we must renounce all self-dependence, and look for our help in Christ alone [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.30-33).

2. Those who are desponding on account of it—

When men begin to see their perishing condition, and to fuel a consciousness that they have been the authors of their own ruin, they often distress themselves with apprehensions that their state is irremediable. Now the text affords a complete antidote to all desponding fears: in it God addresses himself immediately to the self-ruined sinner, and says to him, "I am your help." Whatever guilt therefore any one may have contracted, and whatever cause he may have to reproach himself, let him only consider who it is that says to him, "In me is your help," and he may instantly dismiss his fears. Let him "be strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and he shall find that, "before Zerubbabel the mountains will become a plain [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.27-31). [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.7)."

[Hosea 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.1-3)

DISCOURSE 1175

DIRECTIONS FOR AN ACCEPTABLE APPROACH TO GOD

[Hosea 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.1-3). O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our Gods: for in You the fatherless finds mercy.

FOR the encouragement of all who feel the burden of their sins, God has declared, yes has sworn, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live:" and the whole Scriptures bear testimony to that blessed truth. But, lest any should be discouraged by the idea that they know not how to approach him acceptably, it has pleased God to prescribe the very "words" whereby he would have them address him. And assuredly, if he had consulted all the weary and heavy-laden sinners in the universe, and had permitted them, or any individual among them, to dictate to him what expressions he should prescribe, the whole world could never have suggested any that were more suited to the necessities of men, or more satisfactory to their minds, than those recorded in our text.

In the words before us, we see, not merely our general warrant for returning to the Lord, but more particularly,

I. What petitions to offer—

What would any one who felt the burden of sin, and a restoration to the Divine favor, desire? What but a full remission of all his sins, and a free communication of all spiritual and eternal blessings? He would wish for pardon to be complete; because if so much as one sin were left upon his soul, it would inevitably plunge him into everlasting perdition: He would also wish for his reception to be perfectly gratuitous, because he can never do anything to merit it at the hands of God: Behold then, it is precisely in this way that we are directed to pray; "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." And let it be remembered, that this address is not put into the mouths of those only who have contracted a less measure of guilt than others, but of all, to whatever extent "their iniquities" may have abounded, and to whatever depth they may have "fallen" by them. If only we have a desire to "return to the Lord our God," we are the persons invited and commanded to return in this way.

In our text, we are further told,

II. What promises to make—

We must not imagine that we can make to God any adequate return for his mercies towards us; nor must we presume to offer anything to him as an inducement to exercise mercy towards us: nor in any point of view whatever must we promise anything in our own strength. But his mercies undoubtedly call for the best return that we can make; and they lay us under an obligation to do our utmost to please and serve him. Whatever tribute we can render to him, we should: and he here tells us what he will accept at our hands, namely, the tribute of,

1. A grateful heart—

The blood of bulls or "calves" is no longer required of us: there are other and better sacrifices which he expects us to offer, namely, "the calves of our lips," or the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.13-14); [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.23). And these are the offerings which all who are looking to him for mercy desire to offer. In fact, the more any persons are bowed down with a sense of sin, the more they are ready to say, 'How shall I praise God, if ever I should obtain mercy at his hands! If ever God should admit me to a participation of his kingdom and glory, there will not be one in Heaven that will shout the praises of redeeming love so loud as I.' This tribute therefore the pardoned sinner will delight to pay.

2. A devoted life—

To turn from sin, and especially from our besetting sins, is indispensably required of all who seek for mercy at God's hands [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.1); The besetting sins of Israel were, creature-confidence, and idolatry: they were always looking to Egypt or Assyria for help, rather than to God; and giving to dumb idols the worship that was due to him alone. These evils therefore they were to renounce; and an engagement to renounce them was required of all who desired the remission of their former sins. Thus, in approaching the Most High God, and supplicating mercy from him, we should determine, with God's help, never more to provoke the Lord to jealousy by a renewal of those sins of which we profess to have repented. Our besetting sins in particular must be searched out: and whatever they may have been, whether of a spiritual or carnal nature, we must engage, through grace, to mortify and subdue them: We must engage, in dependence upon God, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

As great earnestness is required in our prayers, we are taught,

III. What pleas to urge—

God indeed is not, nor can be, wrought upon by any considerations that we can propose: but for the stirring up of our own souls it is proper and necessary that we should enforce our petitions with becoming pleas. But where shall we find any consideration fit to be presented to the Deity? No where, but in his own perfections, or in his gracious promises. Here however we are at no loss: the compassions of our God are infinite; and may well be pleaded by those who feel their need of mercy. "In him the fatherless finds mercy:" in him, too, the guilty, as well as the destitute, find mercy. Search the records of his word; and this truth will be seen written as with a sun-beam. Mark that stupendous effort of mercy, the gift of his only dear Son to the accursed death of the cross! Mark the invitations, the promises, the expostulations, the complaints; "Will you not be made clean? O! when shall it once be?" Mark these, I say; and they form such a plea, as must satisfy the most doubting mind, and turn to transports of joy the apprehensions of every desponding soul.

ADDRESS—

1. o those who refuse to turn to God—

Alas! how many turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of Heaven! "How often would the Savior gather us under his wings, and we will not?" But, if you will not turn at God's reproof, what will you answer him in the day when he shall judge the world? Low as "you are fallen," he now is willing to raise you up: but all possibility of recovery will then be past; and you will sink yet lower still, even into the bottomless abyss of misery. "O consider this, you that forget God; lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."

2. To those who are beginning to return—

Mind that you return in his appointed way. Seek not merely a deliverance from wrath, but a restoration to the state from whence you are fallen. Look back on man in his primeval state, and see how Adam walked with God in Paradise: that is the pattern that you should endeavor to follow, and the standard to which you should aspire. Or, if he be too far removed from your apprehensions, look at the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and see how he walked in the midst of this ungodly world: and endeavor to "walk as he walked." For the remission of your sins, and your restoration to the Divine favor, let the mercy of God in Christ Jesus be your only plea, your only hope: and, for the honoring of your reconciled God, let the sacrifice of praise be continually offered to him on the altar of your hearts, and every defilement be banished without hesitation or reserve. Thus coming to him, you shall never be cast out; but shall surely be received to a participation of his favor, and to a possession of his glory.

[Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.4)

DISCOURSE 1176

THE BLESSINGS THAT PENITENTS MAY EXPECT

[Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.4). I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

MEN who have never seen the evil of sin are ready to imagine that God will not punish: under the idea of advancing the attribute of mercy, they deprive the Deity of all justice, holiness, and truth. On the other hand, when they are awakened to a due sight and sense of sin, they suppose that God can never forgive such vile and guilty creatures as themselves: they are now as prone to limit his mercy, as before they were to extend it beyond all bounds of truth and soberness. Nor is this disposition found only in one or two instances: hard thoughts of God, and desponding thoughts of their own state, are very common among those who begin to repent; and therefore God is particularly solicitous to impress us with a confidence in his mercy. When he proclaimed his name to Moses, there were a great many expressions declarative of his mercy, while there was only one that described his justice. So we shall find, that there is scarcely one threatening in all the book of God, which is not followed by some free and gracious promise. In the passage before us, he has been exhorting the ten tribes to return unto him: he has put words into their mouths, and taught them how to approach him acceptably: and for their further encouragement, he promises to grant them the richest of all mercies; "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

I. What blessings penitents may expect—

We cannot easily conceive any description of sinners to be worse than those to whom the prophet was writing: this whole prophecy is filled with the most grievous accusations against them: yet God encourages them to repent; and, on the first appearance of penitence and contrition, he sends them this heart-reviving message, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely."

The first blessing then that every penitent may expect is, that God will heal his backslidings. Sin of every kind, but more especially backsliding, makes a grievous wound in the soul. What pain and anguish did Peter feel, when he went out and wept bitterly! How deeply was David stricken, when he "roared for the disquietness of his heart!" He compares his misery to that occasioned by broken bones; and prays, that God would "make the bones which He had broken to rejoice." Yet grievous as these wounds are, God will heal them, if we be truly penitent. There are two ways in which he will heal sin: its guilt he will heal, by the blood of his Son; its power and pollution, by the influences of his Spirit.

He will heal its guilt, by the blood of his Son: there is no other balm than this: this alone can avail for the remission of sin: nothing but that which satisfied God will ever satisfy us: nothing but that blood which made an atonement for sin, can ever wash away its stain from our guilty consciences. That however will cleanse from all sin: God once opened on the cross a fountain for sin and impurity; nor has it lost any of its cleansing efficacy: the deepest wound may be healed in a moment, if it be only sprinkled with this precious blood: nor will God ever fail to impart this balm to any soul that makes application for it: "though their sins may have been as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool; and though they may have been red as crimson, they shall become white as snow."

But God will destroy the power, as well as cleanse the guilt of our backsliding: and this he will do by the influences of his Spirit. It would be to little purpose that he forgave the guilt, if he did not also subdue the power, of our corruptions: for, however frequently they might be forgiven, they would still rage with unabated fury; the wounds healed for an instant would still be breaking out afresh; nor would our souls attain to any abiding purity or peace. God therefore will cast salt into the bitter fountain of our hearts: he will "put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes:" he will give us "grace sufficient for us:" he will strengthen us to resist temptation, and to fulfill our duties: and though we cannot expect to arrive at sinless perfection while we are in this world, yet shall we be so far healed, that "no sin whatever shall have allowed dominion over us."

This then is the first blessing which every penitent may expect; the guilt and power of his sins, yes, even of his most grievous backsliding, shall be healed; and, whereas there was "no soundness in him, but (as the prophet says) wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores," "his health shall spring forth speedily," "the lame man shall leap as an deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

But is this all that the penitent may expect? No; God has in store for him a higher and richer blessing: it is great indeed to have one's backslidings healed; but it is greater still to enjoy the light of God's countenance, and to have his love shed abroad in one's heart: yet this also shall be given to every repenting sinner: God says in my text, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." God will feel a joy and a delight over the returning Prodigal; "To this man," says he, "will I look, that is of a humble and contrite spirit:" I will fix my eyes upon him for good; I will look upon him with delight; though burning seraphs surround my throne, and myriads of angels brighter than the sun encompass me around, I will look through all their shining ranks, nor shall all of them together divert my attention from the contrite sinner: "To this man will I look:" from whoever I hide my eyes, I will be sure to look on him with pleasure and delight: "I will rejoice over him with joy; I will rest in my love; I will joy over him with singing." What an unspeakable blessing is this! To have God himself delighting in us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, this is inestimable indeed! He adds moreover, "I will love them freely;" that is without any desert in them, without any reluctance in himself. Were he to wait until they had something in themselves worthy to attract his notice, they could have no hope: to all eternity they must remain poor, helpless, miserable, undone creatures: they could never of themselves entertain so much as one good thought; much less could they do anything to merit God's esteem: God therefore will not wait for anything in them to attract his regard: if only they be sorry for their sins, and bewail them before him in secret, he will love them freely; not for their sakes, but for his own; not because they are good, but because he will show forth the freeness of his grace. And, as he will love them without any desert in them, so will he love them without any reluctance in himself: he delights in the exercise of mercy: it is the very joy of his heart to manifest his mercy to all that call upon him in truth. When our iniquities compel him to give us up, then he is all backwardness and reluctance; "How shall I give you up? my affections are troubled for you." But when we desire to return to him, he never deliberates; he never says, "How shall I receive such a sinner as you are?" We may see in the parable of the Prodigal Son what is his conduct towards every repenting sinner: instead of hesitating whether he should receive the Prodigal, he ran to meet him; instead of upbraiding him, he interrupts him in his confession, and seals up his lips with kisses; instead of granting his request and making him the lowest of his servants, he treats him as his best-beloved son, clothes him in the richest garments, and kills the fatted calf for him. Thus does God towards every penitent; and were every soul as much disposed to receive mercy as God is to show mercy, there would never so much as one perish, even to the end of the world.

These blessings then may every penitent expect: God has here, as also in many other passages, expressly bound himself by his own voluntary promise; so that every penitent may expect these blessings upon the ground of God's truth and faithfulness.

But there is another ground mentioned in our text: we proceed therefore to notice,

II. On what ground they may expect them—

This part of our subject will require peculiar care and attention, lest we be misunderstood.

Observe the manner in which the last words of our text are introduced: God says, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him:" he is here endeavoring to encourage penitents; and therefore he tells them that he will do great things for them, because his anger is already turned away from them. After much and careful examination of the words, we are persuaded that this is the true sense and meaning of them; and that they are intended to convey one of the most encouraging truths that can be found in all the book of God, namely, that our repentance is a proof of God's anger being turned away from us, and that the removal of his anger from us is a pledge of greater blessings; or, in other words, that our having the grace of repentance is a ground whereon we may expect the richest blessings.

But we will explain ourselves more fully.

Repentance has not in itself anything meritorious; nor can the mere work of repentance ever afford a ground of hope towards God: to suppose that our repentance can merit anything at God's hands, or bear any part in our justification before God, would be to subvert the whole Gospel, and to render Christ's death of none effect. Satan cannot take any more effectual method to bring souls to perdition, than to make them trust in their own repentance. Let us not then be understood as though we would lead any man to trust in his repentance; for we say again, that it is impossible to take a surer road to destruction, than he does, who trusts in any repentance or righteousness of his own. But, in another sense, repentance may encourage us to hope; for repentance is a sign and evidence of grace; and grace given, warrants us to expect more grace: and therefore we say, repentance is in some sense a ground of hope: and this, we doubt not, is the meaning of the prophet, in our text. The latter part of our text is a reason for the former part of it: God says in the former part, "I will do so and so;" and then, in the latter, he tells them why they may expect him to do so and so, namely, "because mine anger is turned away from them:" he does not say, "shall be turned away," but is already turned away. Their being penitent was a proof that they had grace; their having grace was a proof that God's anger was turned away from them; and the removal of his anger from them was a ground whereon they might expect further blessings from him. To make this matter more clear, let us substantiate two things: First, Repentance is an evidence of grace: no one can doubt that, unless he supposes, that he can repent without the grace of God: but a man must be ignorant indeed to frame any such conception as that: if we believe anything of the Scriptures, or know anything of our own hearts, we must know, that "Christ is ascended up on high, to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that we must acknowledge our repentance, as well as "every other good and perfect gift, to be from above, even from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." It being therefore past a doubt that repentance is an evidence of grace, let us prove next, that Grace given, warrants us to expect more grace. The Scriptures plainly assert this; for, on what ground was Paul so confident that God would carry on the good work in the hearts of his Philippian converts, and perform it until the day of Christ? On this ground, namely, "that he had begun a good work in them:" so that, to say the least, grace bestowed is a ground of encouragement whereon we may hope to obtain more grace.

The clear indisputable conclusion from hence is, that if any man has grace to repent, he may take encouragement from it to hope that God will give him more grace: if he has so good an evidence that God's anger is already turned away from him, he has good reason to hope, that God will do more for him, that he will heal his backslidings, and love him freely.

By way of confirming this blessed truth, we will refer you to those memorable words of David [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 56.13); where you will see, that he draws the very same conclusion from the very same premises; and that too in such a way as evidently supposes his argument to be incontrovertible: "You have delivered my soul from death: will you not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living?"

Let us now conclude, with an inference or two from what has been said:

1. What astonishing consolation is here for all that desire to turn unto God!

A person may, from a discovery of his sins, be led to say, "There is no hope:" more especially those who have once "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come," if they have lost their good impressions, and turned back to the world, are tempted to despair: Satan would suggest to them, that, because they have sinned against light and knowledge, they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. But observe what care God takes to dispel our fears, and to encourage our return: he does not merely say, "I will heal their sins, but I will heal their backsliding;" thereby obviating at once all their objections. He knows how Satan will take advantage of them: that he will suggest desponding thoughts, and make them believe their sins are too great to be forgiven; and therefore God specifies the greatest of all sins, "I will heal their backsliding" their sins committed against all their own vows and resolutions, their sins committed after the greatest mercies had been given to them; yes, even those, says God, will I heal: I will wash them away in the blood of my dear Son, and blot them out as a thick cloud: I will cast them behind my back, and remember them no more; I will pour the balm of Gilead into your wounded spirits, and speak peace to your afflicted consciences. Still Satan suggests, "But you will fall again, and then your last end shall be worse than the beginning." 'No' says God, 'it shall not be so; only come to me, and I will keep you from falling; trust in me, and "you shall never fall; but an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of your Lord and Savior:" I will heal you, not only by my pardoning, but also by my renewing, grace: and so effectually will I heal your wounds, that I will even renew you after mine own image, in righteousness and true holiness.' Perhaps Satan will still urge, 'But you are not worthy;' and thus prevent your trusting in God; 'But,' says God, 'I do not look for worthiness in the creature: I will love them freely; without the smallest regard to anything in them: I will love them for mine own name sake, and "have mercy merely because I will have mercy." ' But yet Satan suggests, 'This is not for you: God is your enemy, and you have nothing to do with these promises:' but to this also God has given you a certain answer; Are you truly desirous to have your backslidings healed, and to live in the enjoyment of God's free love and favor? 'Then, says God, "mine anger is turned away from you:" it not only shall be, but is; that very desire is a fruit of my love; that little repentance which you exercise, is the gift of my grace; and you are to take it as a pledge and earnest of richer blessings; you are to take encouragement from what I have given, to expect from me all that I can give: only follow the direction I have given you, "Take with you words, and say unto me, Take away all iniquity, and receive me graciously," and I will answer the very desires of your heart; for "I will heal your backslidings, which are the greatest of all sins, and will love you freely; and, lest you should doubt this, I tell you, that, if such be the desires of your heart, mine anger is turned away from you" '.

See now, my Brethren, what rich consolation here is for every drooping and desponding soul! O cease to listen to the suggestions of Satan; cease to entertain hard thoughts of God! Only come to Jesus) and see what a gracious Savior he is; how freely he will love) how effectually he will heal. Bring all your unworthiness along with you; bring all your sins) and all your backslidings; and if only you desire to have them all healed) surely you shall soon feel the cleansing efficacy of his blood) and the renewing influence of his Spirit: and when he thus loves you, he will "love you to the end".

2. What cause of fear is here to those who are living in willful sin!

If you be not seeking deliverance from sin, even from your darling and besetting sin, surely your case is awful indeed: the anger of God is not turned away from you. No: if there be any truth in the Divine record, "the wrath of God abides on you." If you seek not to have your backslidings healed, how is it possible that God should love you? It is said, "He hates all the workers of iniquity," and, "He is angry with the wicked every day." Deceive not therefore your own souls: you backsliders in particular, who have fallen from your first love, deceive not yourselves; for, except you repent, God shall remove your candlestick, and your lamp shall go out forever. Examine well your own souls; see whether the world have not crept in; whether some accursed weeds and thorns have not choked the seed, so that you bring no fruit to perfection? If you can be easy in such a state, there is reason to fear that you are given up by God to judicial hardness: but perhaps you are not easy, yet your uneasiness does not stir you up to repent: you do not sincerely seek grace and mercy from the Savior's hands; you do not plead with him in earnest; you do not go with strong crying and tears to implore deliverance: what then can you expect, but to perish by the wounds which your backslidings have made? Still, however, there is mercy in store for you: God desires not your death, but rather that you turn from your wickedness and live. O then, "turn, and live you!" Be importunate at the throne of grace; plead with Him that died for sinners: remember, He is the Sun of Righteousness, whose beams are healing; and "the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." He is called, in [Exodus 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 15.26), "The Lord who heals you;" and he says to every convinced sinner, "If you will return, return unto me, O Israel!" "Whoever comes unto me, I will in no wise east out".

[Hosea 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.5-7)

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THE FRUITS OF GOD'S FAVOR

[Hosea 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.5-7). I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.

THERE are instances of beautiful imagery in the Scriptures equal to any that can be found in the works of the most renowned authors; they are enhanced too by the importance of the subjects they contain. In both respects the passage before us deserves peculiar attention. Imagination cannot conceive a richer display of divine blessings than God here vouchsafes to his church and people.

I. The favor which God will show his people—

The metaphor of "dew" is at once simple and sublime—

The benefits of the dew are but little known in this climate; but in Judea the metaphor would appear very significant Where the rains are periodical, and the climate hot, the dews are more abundant. Fur some time after the creation, dew supplied the place of rain [Genesis 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 2.6); and, after rain was given, it still remained of great use. The Scriptures speak of it as an important blessing See [Genesis 27:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 27.28); [Genesis 27:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 27.39) and [Deuteronomy 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 33.13); they represent the withholding of it as a calamity and a curse [2 Samuel 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 1.21).

The communications of God to his people are fitly compared to it—

It distills silently and almost imperceptibly on the ground; yet it insinuates itself into the plants on which it falls, and thus maintains their vegetative powers. In the same manner God's visits to his people are secret He comes not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the small still voice. [1 Kings 19:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 19.11-12); but he gains access to their in most souls [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.16). He cheers and revives their fainting spirits, and thus he fulfills to them his own most gracious promise [Isaiah 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.11).

Were his communications refreshing only, and not influential on the conduct, we might be afraid of enthusiasm; but his favor invariably discovers itself by—

II. Its fruits and effects—

The effects of the dew are seen by the progress of vegetation: the descent of God's Spirit on the soul also produces growth, beauty, fragrancy, fertility.

1. Growth—

The "lily" springs up speedily, but is of short duration. The cedars of "Lebanon cast forth their roots" to a great extent. Thus the soul that is refreshed with divine communications. The quickness of its growth often excites admiration. Its stability defies the assaults of earth and Hell, while it "spreads its branches," and displays its vigor in every good word and work.

2. Beauty—

There is peculiar grace and beauty in the olive-tree, and such is there in the soul that communes much with God. What a luster was there on the face of Moses, when he came down from the mount [Exodus 34:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.30). And how is the lively Christian "beautified with salvation!" His outward conduct is rendered amiable in every part. His inward dispositions of humility and love are ornaments which even God himself admires [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 3.4). He is transformed into the very image of his God [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.23-24); nor shall his beauty be ever suffered to decay The olive, as an evergreen, retains its beauty; and in this respect also is a fit emblem of the true Christian. [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 1.3).

3. Fragrancy This is twice mentioned in the text, and therefore deserves peculiar notice.—

Lebanon was no less famous for its odoriferous vines than for its lofty cedars: and does not the Christian diffuse a savor all around him [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 2.14). How animated his discourse when God is with him! How refreshing and delightful to those who enjoy his conversation See him before the sun has exhaled the dew, or the world abated the fervor of his affections; and how does he verify that saying! [Proverbs 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 16.24). How pleasing is it also to his God and Savior [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.16). Son. 4:16. In proportion as he lives near to God, he fulfills that duty [Colossians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 4.6).

4. Fertility—

The "corn and the vine" are just emblems of a Christian's fruitfulness. They often wear the most unpromising appearance; yet are they "revived" by the genial influences of the sun and rain. Thus the Christian may be reduced to a drooping or desponding state; but the renewed influences of God's Spirit will revive him. They make him "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness." They too, who "dwell under his shadow," and are most nearly connected with him, will participate his blessings If he be a master, a parent, and especially a minister, the benefit of his revivals will extend to many."

INFERENCES—

1. How honorable and blessed is the Christian's state!

Often is he favored with visits from above [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.23), and glorious are the effects produced by God upon him. The whole creation scarcely affords images whereby his blessedness may be adequately represented. Who then is so honorable? who so happy? Let all endeavor to maintain a sense of their high privileges, and to "walk worthy of the calling with which they are called."

2. How hopeful is the state of those who wait on God!

The promises in the text were given as an answer to prayer verse 2; and they are made to all, who, "like Israel," plead with God. If the dew be withheld from others, it shall descend on them [Judges. 6:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 6.37-38). Its descent shall accomplish the utmost wishes of their souls. They shall soon experience the fulfillment of that word [Isaiah 40:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.31).

[Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.8)

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GOD'S NOTICE OF PENITENTS

[Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.8). Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree: from me is your fruit found.

THE conversion of a sinner is a work of infinite difficulty; no efforts of the creature can accomplish it: none but He who spoke the universe into existence, can renew the soul: but when his time is come, the work is done both easily and effectually. As a ship, forsaken by the ebbing tide, can never be dragged along, but is easily put in motion when borne up by the returning waters, so the sinner is immoveable in his iniquities, until the Spirit of God flows in upon him: and then "old things quickly pass away, and, behold, all things become new." This observation is verified continually before our eyes: persons who have been warned and entreated for many years, and have not only withstood all the most awful and endearing considerations, but have been more and more hardened by the means used to convert them, have at last been turned to God through a secret and invisible influence upon their souls, and have become burning and shining lights in their day and generation. Such were the effects produced on the day of Pentecost, when thousands to whom our blessed Lord had preached in vain, and on whom the most stupendous miracles had wrought no change, were constrained to renounce all their former habits and opinions, and to embrace a new, a spiritual, a despised, and persecuted religion. A similar instance we have in the passage before us. If we look to the account given us of Ephraim in chapter 4:17, we shall find, that he was "joined to idols," yes, so glued to them, that neither warnings from man, nor judgments from God, could separate him from them; and therefore God said respecting him, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;" it is to no purpose to use any further means for his recovery; he is incorrigible, and irreclaimable. But, behold the change, when once God is pleased to put forth his power! When once he says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will be as the dew to Israel," "I will manifest my grace and mercy to his soul," the obdurate heart relents; the abandoned sinner turns from his iniquities, and even with indignation and abhorrence renounces his most beloved lusts; "Ephraim says, What have I to do any more with idols?" If God therefore have such pity on an impenitent transgressor, we shall not wonder at the gracious declaration which he makes for the comfort of this penitent and returning sinner; "I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree: from me is your fruit found."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be naturally led to show you,

I. The disposition of the true penitent—

The unconverted man, though he may never have bowed down to stocks and stones, is an idolater: he "loves and serves the creature more than the Creator." All indeed do not worship the same idol: one gives his heart to riches, another to honor, another to pleasure; and though all these find a higher place in our affections than we allow to God, yet each person has his favorite idol, to which he is in a more especial manner devoted: but when grace has renewed the heart, then the penitent says with Ephraim of old, "What have I to do anymore with idols?" His disposition is, To renounce all sins in general,—his besetting sin in particular; and this too with indignation and abhorrence.

He renounces all sins in general.—A person who is not truly penitent may exchange one sin for another; he may exchange lewdness and intemperance for the love of honor and ambition: he may turn from prodigality to avarice; or from indifference and profaneness to Pharisaism and hypocrisy. But he never remits one sin without taking some other in its stead; yes, he frequently puts more into the scale of pride and conceit, than ever he took out of that of sensuality or profaneness. But it is not thus with the true penitent: he has commenced a war against sin in general; he endeavors to attack it in all quarters; he knows that sin is idolatry, in that it is a preference given to the creature above God himself; and therefore, without making any reserves, he determines to extirpate sin, root and branch, if possible, and says, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

But he more particularly devotes to destruction his besetting sin.—The besetting sin of the ten tribes was idolatry: and therefore when Ephraim is brought to repentance, he is represented as fixing his eyes more particularly on that sin. Indeed this was remarkably exemplified in the Jews, after their return from the Babylonish captivity: for though, before their captivity, they could never be kept long together from idolatry, they could not after their return be drawn to it; insomuch, that when it was proposed to set up a statue of Augustus in the Temple, the Jews determined to perish rather than submit to it. Now every man has some sin which more easily besets him: and it is oftentimes a very difficult matter to find it out, by reason of the various shapes which it assumes, and the deep recesses in which it lurks. But it is a distinguishing mark of the true penitent, that, whatever he imagines to be his besetting sin, he will be more particularly solicitous to mortify and subdue it. The hypocrite and self-deceiver will plead for his darling lust; he will make excuses for it; he will cast the blame on his constitution, or his situation in life; he will palliate his guilt, and not endure to be admonished respecting it: but the truly upright soul will be exceeding glad to discover his secret enemy, and will by prayer and all other means labor to bring it into subjection.

Nor is this all: he will prosecute his lurking foe with vigilance, and cast him out with indignation and abhorrence. This is strongly intimated in the text: Ephraim does not merely resolve that he will not have any more to do with idols; but with a holy indignation against them, and an everlasting abhorrence of them, he says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" He determines never to join himself to them again: the folly and wickedness of such conduct appear to him now in such glaring colors, that he cannot endure the thought of ever relapsing into it any more. Thus it is with the true penitent: O! how does he loath the sins that have led him captive, and the secret sins that have so defiled his conscience! How does he determine, if possible, to withstand the baneful influence of his in-dwelling corruption, and to watch and pray against it! How does he aggravate the guilt of his besetting lust, until he sees it in all its vileness and deformity! How unreasonable does it appear to him to harbor such an enemy in his bosom! How does he mourn because he cannot get rid of it! How desirable does the furnace itself appear, if it may but purify and revive his soul!

Say, Believer, are not these the thoughts of your heart? Say, you that weep, like Mary, at your Savior's feet, do you not hate your sins, and yourself on account of them? Could you but bring forth the lurking foe, and slay him utterly, would you not rejoice? Is it not your grief that you can not get more complete victory over him? Is it not your shame that you are at any time deceived by him? Does it not make you loath yourself, to think how ready you are to favor this enemy, and to be enticed by him before you are aware? Are you not often filled with indignation against yourself, to think that you should ever offend your God through the solicitations of some base lust or evil principle within you? Yes, I go further, and ask, Do you not hate yourself because you can not hate yourself more? I know your heart vibrates; I know it is in unison; I know there is no discordant string; I know that these must be your feelings, if you be upright before God.

It is with pleasure therefore that I proceed to set before you,

II. The notice which God takes of this disposition—

It is impossible that there should be the smallest good in our hearts, and God not observe it: there was but "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel" in the heart of young Abijah, and the Lord noticed it, and remembered him on account of it. The Prophet Jeremiah sets this in a striking point of view: he represents Ephraim Chapter 31:18. as mourning over his sins in secret, and God as listening to him, and at last as breaking out into this soliloquy; "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus:" then, after repeating the substance of Ephraim's complaint, he adds, "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still; yes, my affections are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him Chapter 31:20." Exactly thus, in my text, God hears Ephraim saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" and he adds immediately, "I have heard and observed him;" I have had my eye fixed upon him, though he did not know it; I have attended to every word he has been saying; he has not uttered a sigh, but it has entered my ears; he has not poured forth a groan, but it has pierced my heart; he has not shed a tear, but I have treasured it up in my vial: he thinks I will not regard him, but I have heard and observed him all the while: there is not a thought of his heart that has escaped my notice; and what is more, I now say respecting him, and respecting all that shall resemble him even to the end of the world, "I am, and will be, to him as a green fir-tree; and of me shall his fruit be found."

I must here just observe, that the words of my text which are printed in different characters are not in the original, but are supplied by the translators; and that therefore the verse maybe read, and I think should be read, thus; "Ephraim says, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him: I will be like a green fir-tree: of me shall your fruit be found." The sense is the same indeed either way; only in the latter it is more clear: and according to it we have two blessed promises of God to the penitent and contrite soul, namely, that he will afford him protection, and engage for his perseverance.

First, he promises protection to the repenting sinner, "I will be as a green fir-tree." The fir-tree affords a remarkably thick shade, which cannot be penetrated either by sun or rain; so that it afforded a safe retreat, either from the rays of the meridian sun, or from the violence of the impending tempest. Conceive then a burdened sinner traveling towards Zion: see him either trembling from an apprehension of Divine judgments, even of that "fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, which God will rain upon the ungodly;" or fainting through the heat of temptation and persecution, What a reviving cordial to his soul is here! Let him come to me, says God; "I will be as a green fir-tree to him;" I will shelter him from the curses of my broken law; I will guard him from the fiery darts of Satan; I will hide him from the assaults of all his enemies; none shall hurt him: I will hide him in the secret of my tabernacle, even in my pavilion, where he shall have not only safety, but all manner of refreshing viands: "he shall sit under my shadow with great delight." Hear this, you who desire to renounce your idols; you who long to be delivered from the attacks of your great adversary, and to find a place of rest unto your souls: to you God says, "Surely I will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence: I will cover you with my feathers, and under my wings shall you trust: my truth shall be your shield and buckler [Psalm 91:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 91.3-4)." You know how our blessed Savior complains of the Jews, that when he would often have gathered them, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, they would not. O! let him not utter the same complaint against you. They indeed would not flee to him, because they would not believe their danger; but you are in danger of keeping from him through a doubt of his ability or willingness to protect you. But, O! flee to him: he is a sure Refuge: only rest under his shadow, and you need not fear: none can ever hurt you, if you be found under the shadow of his wings: he promises that he will be as a green fir-tree to you; and he will fulfill his word unto all that put their trust in him.

The other promise which God here makes to the repenting sinner is, that he himself will engage for his perseverance in the ways of holiness; "Of me shall your fruit be found." The penitent no sooner determines to cast his idols to the moles and to the bats, than fears arise in his mind, and he says, "But how shall I do this? Who is sufficient for these things?" To silence therefore all such doubts as these, God himself undertakes the work; "Be not afraid, sinner;" I will take that work upon myself; "my grace shall be sufficient for you;" I will furnish you with strength according to your day of trial; "Of me shall your fruit be found:" "I will make you fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness: the things you desire are the fruits of my Spirit; and my Spirit shall produce them in you."

Can we conceive a more comforting declaration than this? If the drooping sinner were permitted to dictate what God should say to him, could he devise anything more calculated to comfort and refresh the soul? My dear brethren, behold your God undertaking for you, not merely to bring you to Heaven, (for that would be a small matter, if you were not made holy,) but to deliver you from all your sins. Hear his gracious words, as they are recorded by Ezekiel; "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you: a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will cause you to keep my statutes and my judgments to do them." Hear again what he says to the same purpose by Jeremiah; "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not depart from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me: yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Is it possible for God to express more earnestness in your cause, or a more full determination to preserve you in spite of all your in-dwelling corruptions; or rather, I should say, to deliver you from them? O! lift up your heads, you drooping penitents, for your redemption draws near: only commit yourselves into the hands of a faithful God and a loving Savior: there is a fullness of all that you can want treasured up in Jesus; and out of his fullness you may all receive, grace for grace. He is the Vine, from whom you must receive sap and nourishment continually; "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in him: separate from him you can do nothing: but if you abide in him, you shall bring forth much fruit;" yes, you may"do all things, through Christ strengthening you." However inveterate therefore your corruptions be, fear not, but look unto Christ: instead of being terrified, as though they were invincible, let the sight of them remind you what great things the Savior has undertaken for you: instead of despairing on account of your own weakness, rather learn to glory in it, as the means of displaying your Savior's strength. Do not misunderstand me, as though I would have you glory in sin: God forbid! sin is, and ought to be, your shame and aversion: but I say again, your inability to any thing that is good ought not to discourage you, because the Apostle says, "When you are weak, then are you strong:" and therefore, while you lament your sins, you may at the same time "glory in your weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon you." Your extremity shall assuredly be the season of God's interposition: "In the mount of difficulty the Lord shall be seen;" according as it is written in [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.36). "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."

Here let us close, with one obvious reflection—

Do you not see from hence how excellent repentance is?

Whether it be viewed in its nature or its consequences, surely it is a most inestimable blessing. What can be more desirable than to be delivered from those base lusts and idolatrous affections, which rob us of our happiness, and God of his glory? If we had discarded all our idols, and were determined to have nothing more to do with them, we should have a very Heaven upon earth; especially if we found the grace of Christ sufficient for us; as we certainly should do, if we sought it humbly, and depended on it simply. God will never disappoint our expectations which are founded on his promises. If indeed we presume to limit him with respect to the time and manner in which he shall deliver us, we may be disappointed; but if we commit ourselves to him, to carry on his work in the time and manner that he sees fit, we shall never be disappointed: he will assuredly cover our defenseless heads, and make fruitful our withered branches: he will perfect that which concerns us, and fulfill in us all the good pleasure of his goodness; nor will he ever leave us until he has accomplished all the good things which he has spoken concerning us. And is this the nature, is this the consequence, of repentance? Shall every contrite soul have an experience of these things? O that God may grant us all, "repentance unto life, even that repentance which is not to be repented of!" May we thus experience the power and grace of Christ, and find everlasting rest unto our souls!

But let not those whose hearts are yet cleaving to their idols conclude themselves penitent. What repentance has the worldling, who is minding nothing but his earthly business? Surely Mammon is his God; and, until this idol be put away, there is no repentance, no salvation to his soul. Nor has the proud, passionate, carnal, worldly-minded professor any pretensions to repentance; for what repentance has he, when he is yet harboring idols in his heart? No, professor, you must be delivered from your idols; your besetting sin in particular must be lamented, loathed, and mortified: nor, until this be your experience, will you have any defense against the impending wrath of God: you may talk of Christ, and have a clear head-knowledge of the truth; but knowledge will not serve instead of repentance: you must be divorced from your lusts, your evil tempers, and everything else to which you have been glued. Christ gave himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and therefore, if you would ever dwell under the shadow of God in Heaven, see that this fruit be found on you on earth. God is willing to produce it in you: look therefore to Him; and he will be as the dew unto you; he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely.

[Hosea 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.9)

DISCOURSE 1179

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE PECULIAR TO GOD'S PEOPLE

[Hosea 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.9). Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

TO guide mankind into the way of peace, and to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to their souls, is certainly the most pleasant and honorable employment in the world: but it is an employment accompanied, for the most part, with heavy discouragements, and those peculiar to itself. If we labor to convey instruction in any branch of science, we find our labors attended with some degree of success to all: for though all make not the same proficiency, yet all reap some advantage. This however is very far from being the case when we would impart spiritual knowledge: some, blessed be God! receive benefit; but the generality of our hearers continue as ignorant and blind as ever. Many indeed get somewhat of head-knowledge; but as to any saving experience of the things we teach (and that alone is worthy the name of knowledge), few, very few, attain to it. Nor is this unteachableness peculiar to the present age: it is frequently represented in the Scriptures as a subject of lamentation, not only to the prophets, but even to God himself. How often does God call his people foolish and unwise; and, with a mixture of tenderness and disappointment, say, "O that they were wise, and that they understood these things [Deuteronomy 32:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.6); [Deuteronomy 32:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.29)." Hence the inspired writers, as though they had no expectation that all should profit from their instructions, express themselves as looking for success only among those who were endued with heavenly wisdom. Thus the Psalmist, after expatiating largely upon the goodness of God, both in his works of providence and grace, concludes the psalm Psalms 107 with saying, "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." And in nearly the same terms the Prophet Hosea, having preached no less than seventy years with very little effect, and having comprised the principal and most important parts of the Divine messages in a book, concludes the whole with these most affecting words; "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right; and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

I. Who they are that will understand divine things—

The things which the prophet is speaking of in the former part of our text, are the same which he afterwards calls "the ways of the Lord." Now we might be led to suppose that he refers to the sins against which he had guarded them, the duties he had inculcated, the punishments he had denounced, and the blessings which he had promised them in the name of God; seeing that these things are the general scope of the whole book: but he limits his own words to one particular sense, and teaches us to understand him as speaking, not so much of those ways wherein God had walked towards them, as of the ways wherein they were to walk before him: and therefore the things which the wise only can understand, are the things which pertain to vital experimental religion: and indeed this best agrees with the preceding context; for through the whole chapter, God delineates the experience of true penitents, and shows, that when he shall come down as the dew upon their souls, they shall resemble the olive in their beauty, the lily in their growth, the cedar in their stability, the wines of Lebanon in their fragrancy, and the corn itself, or vine, in their fruitfulness. These things, it must be confessed, surpass the comprehension of the natural man; and therefore the prophet adds, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things; prudent, and he shall know them."

But here we must attentively consider whom the prophet intends under the description of the "wise and prudent?" Is it worldly wisdom and worldly prudence of which he speaks in such high terms? Are these the great requisites for the right understanding of spiritual matters? Surely not; this cannot be the meaning of the prophet; for then he would directly oppose the whole tenor of the sacred writings. Carnal wisdom and prudence are universally represented in the Scriptures as most adverse to divine truth, and as the greatest obstacles to the attainment of spiritual knowledge. Hear how Paul speaks of the wisdom and prudence of this world, in [1 Corinthians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.18), and following verses; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God; for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? for, after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Then, in verse 26, he appeals to their own experience and observation; "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, that no flesh should glory in his presence." If any additional testimony were needed, we might take that of our Lord himself, who not only affirmed the same truth, but was exhilarated and comforted by the consideration of it, and made it the subject of his devoutest thanksgiving: "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." God indeed has been pleased in all ages to enlighten and convert some who were reputed wise; because he would show to all the world, that his truths, however despised, were consistent with the profoundest wisdom, and capable of enlarging the most refined understanding: nevertheless, the wise and prudent of this world have always been the foremost to reject the truth of God. None caviled more at our Lord's discourses than the Scribes and Pharisees; nor were any more contemptuous in their treatment of Paul than the philosophers at Athens. We may be sure, therefore, that such are not the persons intended by the prophet in my text?

Who then are the wise? who are the prudent? First, they are those whose understandings have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. True "wisdom is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." We have not the smallest spark of it by nature: on the contrary, we are blind; and folly is bound up in our hearts: nor unless He, who first commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts, can we ever see one ray of that divine glory which shines in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence they who are truly wise have learned that most humiliating lesson, to "become fools, that they may be wise:" they have been deeply convinced that they needed a divine illumination, and have obtained it in answer to their prayers: to them has been fulfilled that blessed promise, "All your children shall be taught of God." This therefore is the first part of the wise man's character, that he has been taught by the Holy Spirit. But a further mark whereby the wise and prudent are to be distinguished is, that they view things in their proper colors; they no longer "call good evil, and evil good; they no longer put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter;" but they see things in the light of God's word, and estimate everything, in a measure, according to the judgment of God respecting it: the body appears to them of small value, when set in competition with the soul; nor do the enjoyments or sufferings of this present world appear worthy to be compared with the glory that shall before long be revealed in them. Sin is now considered by them as a most tremendous evil, more to be shunned than death itself: and a life of holiness appears to be the perfection and happiness of man. But most of all, true wisdom and prudence discover themselves in this, that they unite their influence to govern our whole lives: "I Wisdom dwell with prudence," says Solomon. They who are truly enlightened do not rest satisfied with clear notions, but desire to have their practice conformable to the convictions of their minds: they therefore take the word of God as a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths: they strive to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long: this, I say, is the best evidence of their wisdom; for indeed it is the very beginning of wisdom; as Solomon has observed, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and as Job also says, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding Chapter 28:28."

We see then who are the wise and prudent. Not they who boast of their intellectual powers, and abound with human learning, but those who are taught of God to judge and act agreeably to the sacred oracles.

Now these persons shall have a true knowledge and understanding of divine things: the ways of the Lord shall be clear to them from their own experience: they shall know how delightful it is to live a life of faith on the Son of God: they shall understand what it is to have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: they shall enjoy that sweet security which they possess, who are instructed in the Covenant of Grace, and who know the faithfulness of a promise-keeping God. These indeed are secrets hid from the natural man; but we are assured, that they are, and shall be, revealed unto those who are spiritual: David says, (and he himself had experienced the truth of it,) "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant."

But this knowledge is peculiar to the persons above described; and this leads me to show you,

II. Why this knowledge is peculiar to them—

Two reasons the prophet assigns: one taken from the peculiar excellence of the things known, and the other from the use which different persons make of them.

The first reason is taken from the excellence of the things known—"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right." There is a rectitude in a life of godliness; there is something in it which is fit and proper in itself; something which is agreeable to the mind and will of God; something which is calculated to promote the perfection and happiness of man. The most refined reason cannot conceive anything more fit and becoming, than that He, whose loveliness and loving-kindness are infinite, should be the supreme object of our affections; or that He who is omnipotent, immutable, and eternal, should be honored, trusted, and obeyed with our whole hearts. To a carnal eye, that views only the Majesty of God, it might appear unsuitable, that the Deity should condescend to commune with such sinful worms: but his condescension and grace reflect a luster on all his other attributes, and overwhelm us with wonder and astonishment. As for the pleasantness and peace which are found in the ways of religion, or the effect of it on our hearts and lives, we have the united testimony of all who ever devoted themselves to it, that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." Indeed it is this excellency which helps the godly to know and understand the things themselves; at least it helps to enlarge and perfect their knowledge of them. The Holy Spirit first leads them to a life of godliness, and then discovers to them how fit in itself, how honorable to God, and beneficial to man, such a life is: and then this discovery confirms them in their ways: confirms them, I say, beyond everything in the world; so that though they began to walk in the Lord's ways from the fear of Hell, and from a desire after Heaven, they now walk in his ways because they are right; they now see, that to "yield themselves a living sacrifice to God is the most reasonable service" in the world: and so much is their knowledge and understanding confirmed by this discovery of the rectitude and excellency of God's ways, that they would wish to walk in them, even though there were no Heaven to reward their obedience, nor any Hell to punish their disobedience: they can say with David, "I esteem your commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way;" that is, "My soul approves the way of duty, therefore would I walk in it, and not for the sake of the reward: I hate sin, and therefore would I avoid it to the uttermost, and not merely because I am afraid of punishment: I would not be excused from my duty, if I might; nor would I practice sin, though I might do it with impunity." On the other hand, this very excellency is one reason why none but the wise and prudent can know these things. A weak and disordered eye cannot bear the light. This is true with respect to spiritual light, as well as to the light of the sun. Our Lord says, that the ungodly "hate the light, neither come to the light; they love darkness rather than light." If we draw a picture of morality, the amiableness of it will commend itself to them; but if we set before them a life of godliness, they are dazzled by it; they are hurt with it; its splendor, like that of the sun, overwhelms them: it is so high above them, that they cannot comprehend it: not having a spiritual discernment, they account it foolishness: it appears to them more like the ravings of enthusiasm, than the words of truth and soberness: they know not how to annex a proper meaning to our words: being low and carnal in their apprehensions, they cannot rise above a carnal sense of our expressions. We see therefore, that the very excellency of these things is one reason why the true knowledge of them is peculiar to the wise and prudent. Thus it was in our Lord's time: he told his hearers, that the reason they murmured at his words was, that their apprehensions were carnal, whereas his words were spiritual: "Does this offend you? The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." At another time he said, "Why do you not understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my words."

The other reason assigned by the prophet is taken from the use which different persons make of spiritual truths: "The just," he observes, "will walk in them, but the transgressors will fall therein."

Now the just and righteous, as far as they are acquainted with the ways of God, will endeavor to walk in them: they desire to reduce every truth to practice, and wish to have even "the thoughts of their hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ:" and their knowledge is wonderfully furthered and advanced by this disposition: their apprehension is quickened by the previous disposition which they feel to embrace the truth; and their memory is strengthened by the love which they bear towards it, when once it is discovered. Hence unenlightened persons, who have studied the Scriptures critically for many years, are often not half so well acquainted with them as others of very inferior abilities, who, under the influence of such a disposition, have studied them but a short time: to the one, the Bible is "a sealed book;" its contents are dark, intricate, and unintelligible: to the other, it is clear, perspicuous, and easy to be understood: the one meets with nothing but difficulties and stumbling-blocks; the other has a clue to every truth contained in it. And whence is it that the one knows the mysteries of the kingdom, while the other sees nothing but dark and obscure parables? Our Lord enables us to solve this difficulty; "If any man," says he, "will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God;" his disposition and desire to do my will shall operate in such a manner as greatly to facilitate the understanding of my word.

On the other hand, the indisposition which others feel towards the ways of God will prevent the introduction of Divine knowledge into the soul: "the transgressors will fall therein." The pillar and the cloud by which God led the Israelites, may serve to illustrate the operation of his word, by which he leads us: the cloud was a pillar of fire to give light to the Israelites by night, while it was a cloud of darkness towards the Egyptians, insomuch that they could not advance, but were obstructed in their march by means of it. Now so it is with the word of God: to God's people, it exhibits a bright and luminous appearance, so that they can walk in the light of it: but to transgressors, who do not desire above all things to be conformed to it, it is an offence: to the former it is "a savor of life unto life;" but unto the latter it is "a savor of death unto death:" yes, Christ himself, who is the sum and substance of the Bible, is to the former "a sanctuary;" but to the latter "a snare and a gin, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence," by means of which "many are snared, and taken, and fall," to their more aggravated condemnation. Daily experience shows us that the strictness and purity of God's ways are an offence unto many: they take occasion from what they hear to show their enmity against God, more than ever they would have done, if the light had not been thus set before them: Christ being set forth, they make him only "a sign to be spoken against; and thus the thoughts of their hearts are revealed." And that this vile and wicked disposition blinds them more than ever, we are sure from the testimony of our Lord: the Pharisees had shut their hearts against conviction, and then were incensed against our Lord for intimating that they were blind; "Are we blind also?" Upon which our Lord answers them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin: but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains." It is evident therefore, that the very opposite uses which different persons make of the ways of God, must necessarily, and of themselves, as well as by Divine appointment, contribute greatly to enlighten the one, while the others are confirmed in ignorance and unbelief.

Let us now conclude with an application of the foregoing truths;

1. To those who are unacquainted with the truths and ways of God—

Many, it is to be feared, there are among you, who are wise and prudent enough with respect to the things of this world, but yet are miserably ignorant of the nature and excellency of vital godliness. Your own consciences testify, that you know not what it is to have God come down as the dew upon your souls: you know not what is meant by that beauty, that growth, that stability comma; that fragrance, and that fruitfulness, which characterize the true Christian. Nay, some perhaps, instead of experiencing these things in their own souls, are hurt and offended by the very mention of them: instead of judging the ways of the Lord to be right, they are ready to condemn them as enthusiastic or righteous overmuch. To all such persons therefore, whether they be only ignorant of these things, or have taken offence at them, we must testify, that the ways of the Lord are right: whatever exception may be taken against them, they will assuredly prove right in the issue: "Wisdom will be justified of all her children." We may challenge all the world to show, that there is anything unreasonable in a life of devotedness to God, or that such a life is not calculated to make us happy. Let me therefore entreat you to seek the knowledge of these things: your not having the wisdom and learning of this world will be no obstacle to your proficiency in divine knowledge: it is spiritual wisdom that you want: seek wisdom therefore from Him who has promised to "give it liberally, and without upbraiding:" seek prudence also; for "a prudent man," says Solomon, "foresees the evil, and hides himself; but the simple pass on and are punished." But if you will not be persuaded, remember what God has said, "My people perish for lack of knowledge;" and again, "They are a people of no understanding; therefore He who made them will not have mercy on them, and He who formed them will show them no favor." Such declarations as these fully prove how awful it is to remain in ignorance: and therefore I entreat you all to improve your present opportunities. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and, with all your getting, get understanding."

2. To those who know and walk in the ways of God—

What do you owe to God, my Brethren, for the divine wisdom and prudence which he has bestowed upon you! Surely you were once foolish and unwise, even as others; and perhaps were ready to say of those who felt what you now experience, "You are beside yourself: much attention to religion has made you mad." Well, bless God that your eyes are opened, and that, though you were once blind, you now see. Yet rest not in what you have attained: you know but little yet in comparison of what remains to be known: there are heights and depths in divine things, which will be opened more and more to your view to all eternity; and the promise is, that "you shall know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" therefore seek to "grow in knowledge and in grace: while others stumble at the word, and make the ways of God an occasion of falling, do you be pressing forward; and let "your profiting appear unto all men." Pray more and more for "a spirit of wisdom and understanding;" and endeavor, with truly Christian prudence, to act up to the convictions of your conscience: so shall your knowledge and holiness advance each other, until you come to that blessed place, where faith shall be turned into sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment.

JOEL

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Joel 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.12-14)

DISCOURSE 1180

REPENTANCE URGED

[Joel 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.12-14). Now, says the Lord, Turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments; and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil. Who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God?

THE season of Lent has, for many centuries, been set apart in the Church of Christ, for the purpose of promoting in the minds of Christians a deeper humiliation before God, and of preparing them for a more profitable celebration of those mysteries which we commemorate in the Passion-week. The utility of consecrating that season to the end proposed was felt by the fathers of our Church at the time of the Reformation; and they have enjoined on all the members of our community to employ it in a more than ordinary course of penitence and prayer. But, unhappily, the superstitions of the Church of Rome, from which we separated, have excited such disgust in the minds of the generality among us, that we have run to a contrary extreme, so that at this day we put scarcely any difference between this season and the other parts of the year. Our Church expresses a regret that she is not able to enforce the rites of penance on offenders, as the custom of earlier ages had sanctioned: and if, in the stead of penance, we put penitence, I can most cordially unite in that sentiment. For, so entirely are the duties of this season neglected, that it will appear to many strange that we take such a subject as that before us, unless indeed on that day with which the season commences, and which is still observed among us as a public fast. But, in reality, the exhortation before us is suited to all seasons: and therefore, without apology, I will call your attention to it, and set before you,

I. Our duty—

All acknowledge, in general terms, the duty of repentance: and here we are led to contemplate it,

1. In its outward expressions—

"Fasting, and weeping, and mourning," are the proper expressions of penitence in the soul. But "fasting" is grievously neglected among us; and all are ready to excuse themselves from it, as unprofitable to their souls. But why should it not be as profitable to us as it was to the saints of old? Or why should our blessed Lord have given us directions for the performance of this duty, if it were a matter of indifference whether we performed it or not? The truth is, that we are as far from observing those other duties, of "weeping and mourning," as we are that of "fasting:" and hence it is that "fasting" is so little in request among us. Do but call to mind your state before God, my Brethren; and see how rarely, if ever, you have wept on account of your sins; and how rarely, if ever, you have so "looked on Him whom you have pierced by your sins, as to mourn and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10).": Yet these, so to speak, are only the outward expressions of repentance. Let me call your attention to it,

2. In the inward experience of the soul—

"To rend the garments," however passionately it were done, would be a small matter, if we did not at the same time "rend the heart." But O! what an idea does this convey! We can easily conceive, and see as it were before our eyes, a garment rent: but who can conceive of a heart torn, and rent as it were to pieces, by distress on account of sin? Yet this is the experience of one who is truly penitent and contrite: this is what God requires of us; and anything short of this he will utterly despise [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.17).

Further than this, God says to us in my text, "Turn you unto me with all your heart, even turn unto the Lord your God." And how shall I represent to you this duty? Methinks it would occupy a long space of time to enter particularly into this part of my subject. But I will set it before you, so that you may comprehend it perfectly, and in an instant. Who among you has ever seen a river that is affected with the tide? At one time you have seen the waters flowing with majestic force towards the ocean; and a few hours afterwards you have seen them returning with equal copiousness towards their fountain-head. This shows how all the powers of the soul have been engaged in the service of the world; and how they are to be employed in the service of our God. It is no partial change that will suffice; it must be entire: and all our faculties, whether of body or soul, which have been used as instruments of sin, must become instruments of righteousness unto God [Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.13)."

Now think of this, my Brethren: dismiss from your minds those partial views of repentance with which you have hitherto been satisfied; and address yourselves to this duty in its full extent.

And that I may prevail with you, let me proceed to set before you,

II. Our encouragement—

This arises,

1. From the general character of God—

See God in his own essential perfections: "he is merciful and gracious," and delights altogether in the exercise of mercy towards sinful men. See him also in his dealings with us: how "slow has he been to anger!" Against whom among us might he not have broken forth in anger a thousand times, just as he did against Korah and his company, or against Dathan and Abiram, or Ananias and Sapphira, whom he struck dead upon the spot? View him, also, when ready to execute upon us his wrathful indignation: how often has he, in his answer to the intercession of his dear Son, returned the sword to its scabbard, and "repented of the evil that he thought to do unto us!" And are these no encouragements to repentance? Can you willingly go on to insult so gracious a God, and to provoke him, until his anger break forth without a remedy, and "burn to the lowest Hell?" I pray you, Brethren, "run not thus on the thick bosses of his buckler," and defy him not thus to his face; but fall before him with the deepest self-abasement, and "seek his face while yet he may be found [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.6)."

2. From the hope which this character inspires—

God, in the preceding context, has threatened to send an army that should lay waste the whole land of Israel; and so destroy it, that the very worship of God should be set aside for want of an offering to present to him. At this day, also, he often visits sin with temporal calamities, until he has reduced us to the greatest imaginable distress. And, in reference to these visitations, it is uncertain whether God will remove them from us on our repentance, or not. David, though pardoned as to his soul, was visited with severe trials in his family. And so may we be visited: nor can we be certain, that, "though God forgive us our sins," he will not "take vengeance of our inventions [Psalm 99:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 99.8)." Yet may we hope for the removal even of these judgments: and "who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him," even such a blessing as shall bring you into a state of sweet communion with your God?

But if the question be put in reference to the remission of sins, and the ultimate enjoyment of Heaven, I will undertake, with reverence and humility, to say, "I Know." Yes, the whole word of God declares that he will return in mercy to the contrite soul; and "blot out our iniquities as a morning cloud," and "remember them against us no more forever." Even though he had given the command for our destruction, yet would he revoke it, even as he did in reference to Nineveh, if he saw us, in penitence and faith, returning to him: and though we had not an hour to live, he would hear our prayer, and take us, like the dying thief, to be with him in Paradise. This hope is founded on his perfections, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, and on the word of promise which he has given to returning penitents. And therefore I cannot but urge and encourage every one of you to humble yourselves before him, and to "seek at his hands the blessings which he is so ready to bestow."

And now let me ask,

1. Is not this repentance necessary?

Yes, for every one among you. I readily grant, that many of you are free from anything that comes under the character of gross sin: but who among you has not grievously departed from God? Who has not shamefully slighted our blessed Savior? Who has not resisted the motions of the Holy Spirit? Who has not lived for time, rather than for eternity; and to himself, rather than unto his God? Here, then, is reason enough for every one of you to weep and mourn, and to rend your very souls to pieces before God. I entreat, therefore, you who are young, and you also who are moral, to reflect on these things, and to turn to God without delay; yes, to turn unto him with your whole hearts.

2. Are not the considerations with which the duty is enforced sufficient encouragements to the performance of it?

I might have enforced the duty with far different arguments, and "persuaded you rather by the terrors of the Lord" to turn unto him. But I greatly prefer the views of God, as he is exhibited in the text. It is in this light that he is revealed to us in the Gospel; even as coming down to this earth to seek and save us, and to reconcile us unto himself in the person of his dear Son. And these considerations have a far greater tendency to humble the soul; which, if terrified for a moment by the threatenings of the law, is ready, like fused metal, to return in a little time to its usual hardness. "Let, then, the riches of his goodness and long-suffering and forbearance be duly regarded by you; and let the goodness of your God lead you to repentance [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.4)."

3. Will not the mercies offered you amply compensate for all the efforts which you may make to obtain them?

Truly, if there were but a "perhaps" that you should find mercy, it were worth all the labor of ten thousand years to obtain it. Think only what it must be, to be monuments of God's righteous indignation to all eternity; and what it must be, on the other hand, to be everlasting monuments of his grace and love. Can you contemplate this alternative, and duly estimate its importance? No: you must go down to Hell, and taste the misery of the damned, and be exalted to Heaven, to enjoy the blessedness of the saints in glory, before you can form any just idea of what is before you, either to be suffered or enjoyed, according as your state shall be found before God. I pray you not to trifle with your souls; but now, while the opportunity is afforded you, "flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life." Could you ask of Manasseh, or David, or Peter, or any of the saints, whether they wept too much; you can easily conceive the answer that would be returned you by them. To every one among you then, I say, "Begin, without delay, to sow in tears; and then expect, without a doubt, to reap in joy."

[Joel 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.26)

DISCOURSE 1181

REMOVAL OF JUDGMENTS A GROUND OF PRAISE

[Joel 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.26). You shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that has dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

MOST encouraging is that appellation whereby David addresses the Most High God: "O You that hear prayer!" It is this view of the Deity which alone keeps men from despair, and prevents this sinful world from becoming a counterpart of Hell itself. God does indeed hear the prayer of the poor destitute, and not despise their desire. Of this there is a striking illustration in the passage before us. A plague of locusts had been sent, like an immense army, to destroy the whole land of Israel. The desolation spread by them had reduced the people to the deepest distress. But God encouraged them to humble themselves before him, and assured them, that, on their so doing, he would "be jealous for the land, and pity his people." He even tells them what answer he would give to their petitions, even such an one as should secure to them the removal of all their troubles, and a complete restoration to his favor: instead of perishing by famine, they should "eat and be satisfied;" and instead of being put to confusion by him, they should "never more be ashamed" of their confidence in him.

The words thus explained, will lead us to consider in what light God would have us regard the removal of his judgments: it is to be regarded by us as a call,

I. To more fervent gratitude—

This it is, whether our trials have been,

1. Of a temporal nature—

Temporal judgments, when heavy and of long continuance, are extremely afflictive Here the unprecedented distresses of the year (1816–1817) were spoken of: and any other calamities that may hereafter occur may be mentioned; And the removal of them, whether they have been public or private, social or personal, is a just ground for joy and thanksgiving. In such a dispensation of mercy we may often behold "wonderful" efforts of Divine goodness: and our acknowledgments should be devout and fervent, in proportion to the occasion that calls them forth. As "the very land," and "the beasts of the field," no less than "the children of Zion verse 21–23," were here called upon to rejoice in the mercies given unto them, so should we call forth "all that is within us to bless God's holy name" for the blessings which we now commemorate.

2. Of a spiritual nature—

Spiritual judgments, though less generally felt, are infinitely more grievous, than those which affect only our present interests. Say, you who have been bowed down under a sense of guilt, and the fears of final dereliction, whether this be not a burden too heavy for you to bear? How should you rejoice then, and bless your God, if he has removed it from you! Surely God "has dealt wondrously with you." In providing such means for your restoration to his favor; (the death of his own Son, and the influences of his Spirit;) and in overcoming the reluctance of your hearts, and inclining you to embrace his offered mercy; say, is not this wonderful? May you not behold wonders in every step of your way? Truly then there should be no bounds to your gratitude and love. The frame of your mind should be like that of the pious Hezekiah, "The living, the living, he shall praise you, as I do this day: the fathers to the children shall make known your truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord [Isaiah 38:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.19-20)."

The removal of his judgments from us is also a call from God,

II. For more entire affiance—

While we are under the pressure of our afflictions, we are ready to think that it is in vain to call upon God. But God assures us that it is not: he tells us that "his people," namely, "those who wait upon him," shall never be ashamed Compare [Isaiah 49:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.23) with the text. They may assuredly expect from him all that they stand in need of. They shall never want,

1. The gifts of his providence—

This is abundantly declared in the Holy Scriptures. "They that fear the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good." There may be want to the lions; but there shall be none to them [Psalm 34:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 34.9-10). "Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, shall have a due supply of all needful things added unto them."

The extent to which these promises are fulfilled is little understood by those who have much of this world's goods: but by the godly man who exists by his daily labor, it is known and felt. He sees often in his small pittance such "wondrous dealings," as fill him with utter astonishment, and constrain him to cry out as Israel after the passage of the Red Sea, "Who is a God like unto you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 15.11)."

2. The blessings of his grace—

Where shall we find one contrite sinner whom God ever refused to hear? Never was there one, from the foundation of the world. "Never did God say to any, Seek you my face in vain." Not even a Manasseh, who had filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents, was rejected, when once he humbled himself before his God. And our blessed Lord has said without any exception whatever, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" and it shall prove sufficient for our necessities, even though our trials and difficulties be multiplied above the sands upon the sea-shore. The Christian's hope is firm, and "shall never make him ashamed:" for God has said, that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.17)." This is repeated with yet greater emphasis in the verse following my text, in that it is associated with an assurance that his people shall be made sensible of his presence with them, and his relation to them as their God forever and ever. This is the heritage of all who believe in Christ [Romans 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.33); [Romans 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.11), and make him the one foundation of all their hopes 1 Peter 2:6.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are under any trouble—

Whatever be your trouble, give not way to despondency; but betake yourselves to the remedy which God has prescribed, even that of "turning to him with weeping and with mourning and with fasting verse 12." Were it a mere perhaps that God would hear you after a long trial of your faith and patience, it would be quite sufficient encouragement to call upon him verse 14. But his return to you in a way of mercy is sure, if only you seek him in a way of penitential sorrow: for he will be "the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel [Joel 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.16)." Only pour out your complaints into his bosom, and your prayer shall not go forth in vain. He will give you to eat of the bread of life and be satisfied, and turn all your sorrows into joy [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.3).

2. To those who have experienced any great deliverance—

Be not unmindful of your great Deliverer, but praise and magnify him with your whole hearts [Isaiah 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.4-6); Learn also to confide in him. Fresh troubles may arise, even heavier than you have ever yet experienced: but there is the same gracious God for you to go unto; and he will hear and answer you, as in the days of old. Nor is it to this world only that he will confine the tokens of his love: he will bear you, as on eagles' wings, throughout all this dreary wilderness; and finally put you into the full and everlasting fruition of the promised land, where neither want nor pain shall be any more experienced to all eternity.

[Joel 2:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.28-32)

DISCOURSE 1182

SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH'S ADVENT

[Joel 2:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.28-32). And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days, will I pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.

IT is much to be regretted that the obscurities which occur in the prophetic writings (especially those of the lesser prophets) deter many from reading so large a portion of the inspired volume. If there are some parts hard to be understood, there are some parts plain and highly instructive: and the very figures, which from their boldness and sublimity appear intricate, will be found easy and intelligible, through the light reflected on them in the New Testament. The passage before us would, on a cursory perusal, be deemed incapable of any sober construction, or, at least, of any proper application to ourselves: but it plainly declares to us,

I. The signs of the Messiah's advent—

Numberless were the signs by which the world were taught to know the true Messiah: we here notice only two:

1. The effusion of his Spirit for the conversion of his elect—

The Spirit in preceding ages had been given to those of the Jewish nation only, and to but few even of those, and in a scanty measure; but was "afterward," that is, in the times of the Messiah, to be "poured out" abundantly, on Gentiles as well as Jews, and without any distinction of age, gender, or quality, the meanest as well as the greatest being chosen to participate this benefit. This was literally fulfilled, as Peter affirms, on the day of Pentecost [Acts 2:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.16-21). We must not however limit the operations of the Spirit to the imparting of miraculous gifts: the terms used by the prophet import, that they who should receive the Spirit should be so instructed in the mind and will of God, as to be led to "call on" the Messiah, and enjoy "the deliverance" which he was coming to effect. Nor must the prophecy be confined to the apostolic age: for Peter also testifies that the promise is to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call [Acts 2:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.39).

2. The execution of judgments for the punishment of his enemies—

As an Apostle has explained the former part of the text, so has our Lord himself that which now presents itself to our view [Matthew 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.7); [Matthew 24:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.29) and [Luke 21:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.11); [Luke 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.25). The immediate subject, to which these figurative expressions refer, is the destruction of Jerusalem: nor, whether we consider the prodigies that accompanied the siege See Doddridge's note on [Acts 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.19), or the devastation and bloodshed occasioned by the Roman armies, are they too strong to represent the scenes which occurred in that devoted city. But those calamities were only shadows of infinitely heavier judgments that shall fall on the ungodly in the last day Our Lord so blends the two events together in Matthew 24. that it is not always easy to determine to which of the two his expressions are to be referred. Then, while "the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth and the works also that are therein are burnt up," will all the despisers of the Messiah wail because of his wrath and fiery indignation [2 Peter 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.10) with [Revelation 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.7). It is indeed in the former sense only that this can be a sign to convince the world at present; but in the latter sense it will hereafter be a demonstration to the whole universe, that all which had been spoken of Christ was true.

To encourage a pledge expectation of the Messiah, the prophet declares,

II. The blessedness of those that believe on him—

The subjects of the Messiah's kingdom are characterized as "calling upon his name"—

To call upon Christ is, to give him all that honor and worship that are due to the Supreme Being. This was done by the first martyr, Stephen, and by all the Christian Church [Acts 7:59](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 7.59) and [1 Corinthians 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.2). It was that which rendered them so odious to the Jews [Acts 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.14); [Acts 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.21), and so distinguished among the Gentiles Pliny, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, stating for his information the conduct of Christians, says, "they met on certain days before it was light to sing a hymn to Christ as God." And, at this hour, it justly describes all those who are endued with the Spirit. All, without exception, regard Christ as the only source of life and salvation, and depend on him for daily supplies of grace and strength: "the life which they now live in the flesh, is altogether by faith in the Son of God."

Nor shall any of that description ever experience the calamities that were foretold as coming on the ungodly world—

The "deliverance" mentioned in the prophecy before us, doubtless referred primarily to the escape of the Christians from Jerusalem, while the Jews, hemmed in on every side, were reduced to the greatest miseries. But we must extend our views to a more important deliverance, even from sin and Satan, death and Hell: it is from these that the sincere follower of Christ will be saved, while all who reject him will perish under the displeasure of an incensed God. In this view Paul quotes the very words before us, expressly applying them to Christ as the object of our worship, and confining the blessings of salvation to those who call upon him [Romans 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.12-13). At the same time we must observe that none who comply with this direction are excluded; "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord," whatever he may have been, or whatever he may have done in times past, provided he call in sincerity and truth, shall find the Lord rich in mercy towards him.

This subject will be found of use,

1. To confirm our faith against the cavils of infidels—

There have been in every age some, who have rejected Christianity as a cunningly devised fable. But we would ask, Was the effusion of the Spirit predicted? or could the accomplishment of that prediction be counterfeited? Was the destruction of Jerusalem foretold? Did Jesus apply the very words of our text to that event, and declare that they should be accomplished before that generation should pass away? And did this also happen within the time specified, attended with such prodigies as strictly corresponded with the terms of this prophecy? Then Christianity must be of divine original; Jesus must be the true Messiah; and salvation must be, as he has declared, through faith in him. Let us then "never be moved away from the hope of the Gospel," but "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

2. To vindicate our experience against the calumnies of scoffers—

St. Peter adduces this passage in vindication of those who had received the miraculous influences of the Spirit; and asserts that, what was profanely imputed to intoxication, was indeed a fulfillment of the words of Joel. Thus scoffers of the present day deride all pretensions to the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and, without any candid examination, impute them to folly or hypocrisy. Our professions of faith in Christ, our simple dependence on him, and assured hope of salvation by him, are also deemed enthusiasm. But if we can say, "This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel," or by Peter, or by any other inspired writer, we need not regard their calumnies. If it was said to the apostles, 'You are drunk,' we may be content to have it said of us, 'You are fools.' Let us then seek more and more earnestly the operations of the Spirit, and be daily calling on the Lord Jesus for grace and mercy: so shall our experience accord with the sacred oracles, and our deliverance be completed, when the sufferings of infidels and scoffers shall commence.

[Joel 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.13)

DISCOURSE 1183

THE FINAL JUDGMENT REPRESENTED BY THE HARVEST

[Joel 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.13). Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

THIS is a remarkable prophecy of the destruction of God's enemies. The prophet summons the executioners of vengeance to come up against them The valley of Jehoshaphat, or of decision, to which they are summoned, verse 12, 14. seems to be not any particular place: It may rather be considered as an allusion to the utter destruction which his enemies (the Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Grecians, and Romans) should successively bring on each other. And it may have a further reference to the destruction of Antichrist, and of the wicked at the last day. They are represented as a field of corn; the command is given to cut them down; and the prophet instantly sees them fall; "multitudes," etc. Our Lord delivers a parable resembling this in reference to the whole world. In a similar manner we shall improve the passage before us, by inquiring,

I. What it is that ripens men for the great harvest—

There is a ripeness to which every one must attain. The wicked have a measure of sin which they must fill up [Genesis 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 15.16); the righteous have degrees of holiness for which they are reserved [Ephesians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.7); [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.13). Not that there is any general standard either of sin or holiness to which all persons must attain: There is no degree of sin to which any shall be impelled against their will; nor of holiness, which any shall be prevented from surpassing. But some are kept from more sin, and others are excited to more holiness, by the preventing of assisting grace of God; for sinners would commit more sin unless prevented, and saints attain less holiness unless excited; there are growing in the great field of the world both tares and wheat; and both are ripening for their proper end.

Sin is ripening some for vengeance—

It unfits the soul for the enjoyment of God. It renders a person meet for destruction As dry wood for the fire. See [Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.31). It creates many horrors, which are foretastes of Hell itself.

Holiness, on the other hand, is ripening others for glory—

It unfits the soul for the society of the wicked. It induces a "fitness for the heavenly inheritance." It is a source of joys which shall be consummated in glory.

The Holy Scriptures enable us to discern,

II. What are the marks of our being ripe—

Nothing can be more awful than the thought that a sinner is ripe for everlasting misery. Yet it may be justly apprehended that he is so,

1. When he is given over to a total insensibility—

Custom in sinning will harden the heart and sear the conscience. When a person is arrived at such a state, he is fitted for destruction. This is both figuratively [Hebrews 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.8) and plainly [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 29.1) declared in the Scriptures.

2. When he continues willfully in sin against conviction—

There are some who determine to hold fast their sins. These have reason to think that God's Spirit will be taken from them [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.3). They may expect to be utterly given up to their own lusts [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.28) [Ezekiel 24:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 24.13-14).

Saints, on the other hand, may be judged ripe for glory,

1. When they simply rely on the Lord Jesus—

We fix upon the lowest marks of true grace. Faith in Christ is exercised by the weakest saint. yet to that is eternal happiness annexed [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36). Of consequence, he who possesses it must be fit for glory.

2. When they sincerely desire to be conformed to his image—

There is a great difference in the attainments of different Christians, and much allowance must be made for a difference in their respective advantages; but all desire to be "holy as God is holy." "Vessels thus sanctified are meet for their Master's use [2 Timothy 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.21).

While space is yet allowed us, it becomes us to consider,

III. What shall be done when we are ripe—

When the corn has attained maturity, the sickle is put to it; thus, when our measure of sin or holiness is complete, we shall be reaped down—

Our existence in the world is entirely dependent upon God [Psalm 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 31.15)." None can shorten or protract it beyond its appointed bounds [Job 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 14.5).

The saints will be "gathered into the garner of their Lord"—

Saints, at their departure, ascend immediately to God [Luke 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.43); but in the day of judgment their bodies also will rise. They shall then be carried to their eternal home.

The wicked will be "bound in bundles, and cast into the fire"—

They, who die in sin, immediately sustain their just punishment [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.23); but at the last day their bodies also shall be restored to life. Then shall they too be collected by the ministry of angels, and receive their final doom in fire unquenchable.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ripening for destruction—

You may easily discern your real state, but who can express the misery of it? You ripen, however involuntarily, every day. Notwithstanding your security, you will quickly fall. The great gardener will easily distinguish you from the saints; and he will most assuredly, yes, eternally, separate you from them. But, through the mercy of God, you may yet be changed. Though you be tares at present, God can make you wheat 2 Corinthians 5:17. Seek then this divine change before it be too late.

2. Those who are ripening for glory—

What thanks do you owe to God for his distinguishing grace! And how well may you be reconciled to the afflictions of life! There is no event which does not promote your maturity. Look forward then for the blessed period of the harvest. Reflect on the happiness of the state for which you are preparing No Wintry blasts, no scorching suns, no worm at the root, etc. Still seek the showers of the Spirit, and the influences of the Sun of Righteousness. Thus shall you, in due season, be transmitted to the mansions of eternal bliss.

[Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.18)

DISCOURSE 1184

THE MILLENNIUM

[Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.18). It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the House of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim.

THE return of the Jews to their own land at some future period seems to be predicted so plainly and so frequently, that no reasonable doubt can be entertained respecting it. As for their future conversion to the faith of Christ, that is absolutely certain. But previous to their final settlement in their own land, there will be a violent contest with them in Palestine: but their enemies will be defeated with great slaughter: and after that will the long-wished-for period arrive, when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall turn unto the Lord, and all "become one fold, under one Shepherd."

Had the metaphorical expressions "of the mountains dropping with new wine, and the hills flowing with milk" been used alone, we might have supposed that the prediction related only to temporal prosperity, and the restoration of Canaan to that measure of fertility which it possessed in the days of old: but "the fountain coming forth from the House of the Lord" must have a spiritual import; and consequently the whole passage must be understood as designating and describing the Millennial period.

From this sublime passage we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The blessings of that day—

The terms under which these blessings are set forth, will lead us to notice,

1. Their richness and variety—

There are no terms whatever that can give us a sublimer idea of the Gospel than these: its blessings are here represented as most reviving and comforting, most salubrious and nutritious, suited to every age, and every condition of the human race.

Let us contemplate them a moment. Reconciliation with God through the blood of the cross, is the first that obtrudes itself upon our notice: and O! who can tell how refreshing this is to a weary heavy-laden soul? With this, peace is introduced into the conscience, even that "peace of God which passes all understanding." Friendship being thus cemented between God and man, the person who was until lately an enemy to his God, and an object of his everlasting indignation, is now adopted into his family, and enabled to look up with a spirit of adoption, crying Abba, Father! To the Lord Jesus Christ he now looks as his friend and his beloved; and to the Father he draws near with confidence, saying "O God, you are my God!" Now he has access to God at all times, with a liberty to pour out his heart before him, and an assurance that "whatever he shall ask shall be done unto him." Now also he enjoys an union with the Lord Jesus Christ, even such an union as a branch has with the vine, or a member with the head: and, by means of that union, he receives constant communications from the fullness that has been treasured up for him in that living Fountain of all good. The Holy Spirit is now poured out upon him as a Comforter, and is imparted in all his sanctifying operations, to mortify all his corruptions, and to transform him into the Divine image. Assured prospects of glory are now opened to him, so that he has both the earnest and foretaste of his heavenly inheritance. But where shall we end, if we attempt to enumerate one hundredth part of the blessings which the Gospel makes over to us, and which are here characterized as "hills flowing with milk, and mountains dropping down new wine?" Suffice it to say, that all the blessings of the everlasting covenant, all that Christ has purchased by his blood, and all that are made over to us in the exceeding great and precious promises, all are ours, if we are Christ's The blessings here enumerated should not be treated distinctly and separately, but collectively; and at the close of them, a few observations should be made on their richness and variety; But to declare fully their richness and variety exceeds the powers of any finite intelligence.

2. Their universality and abundance—

These blessings will not be so limited as they now are, either in the measure of their communication, or the objects on whom they are bestowed: they will "flow" in all the abundance of the most majestic "rivers," and that even "to the valley of Shittim;" which being situated on the borders of Moab, and the shores of the Dead Sea, may well be considered as characterizing the most distant and barren places of the earth. There shall not be a human being to whom its blessings do not extend: for "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The high and the low, the rich and the poor, shall equally be partakers of them; for "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers:" and with "the lofty firs and pines shall be united the humble box, to glorify the house of God's glory, and to make the place of his feet glorious [Isaiah 60:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.13)." So universal shall be the reign of Christ on earth, that "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses" which the peasants use in agriculture: the smallest vessel in the sanctuary shall be as highly sanctified as the largest; and "there shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.20-21)." "All in that day will be righteous;" and so righteous as to need no addition to their happiness from any creature-comforts: "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory [Isaiah 60:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.19-22)." It is not in respect of universality only that "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," but of depth also; for "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.26)."

O glorious period! "May the Lord hasten it, in His time!"

While we behold such a period predicted, it becomes us to consider,

II. Our duty in the prospect of it—

This is doubtless,

1. To help it forward by all possible means—

God works by means: and, however fixed the times and the seasons may be in the Divine mind, it is by the use of means that he will accomplish these most glorious events. The first advent of Christ was proclaimed by his Forerunner, John the Baptist, who by his ministrations "made ready a people prepared for the Lord." And we in like manner are to act as heralds and harbingers of the Messiah's second advent. As pioneers, we are to prepare his way. By us must his path be leveled, to facilitate his march: we must go before him, to "prepare his way, to make strait in the desert a highway for our God." Through the instrumentality of men "shall every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low; and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh see it together:" yes, "by a voice crying in the wilderness shall all this be done: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it [Isaiah 40:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.3-5) with 62:10–12."

Is it asked then, What shall we do to advance this glorious work? I answer, God has already gone out before us, and shown us what to do. The Societies which, by his gracious providence, have already been established, show in what line we may direct our efforts to the best advantage. The Bible is now translating into the different languages of men, and circulating to the ends of the earth: that is obviously the first and most important method of diffusing the knowledge of of salvation through the world. Mission Societies also are in full activity, sending forth pious men to preach the everlasting Gospel, and to explain to the benighted nations of the earth the glorious mysteries which are there revealed. At last, too, attention begins to be paid to that "people, wonderful from their beginning hitherto," the lost sheep of the House of Israel. They are the people spoken of more especially by the prophet, in the preceding context; and they are the people whom God will make use of for the bringing in the period described in our text: "the fullness of the Jews will be the riches of the world;" and "the receiving of the Jews will be to the whole world as life from the dead [Romans 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.15)." To aid these Societies, therefore, and to unite our efforts with them, and especially by prayer to bring down the Divine blessing upon them, is the most effectual way we can take to accelerate the arrival of that glorious day. And, if we should not live to see the temple raised ourselves, we shall at least have the satisfaction of having provided materials for it, and contributed towards it to the utmost of our power.

2. To seek the foretaste of it in our own souls—

All these blessings are to be enjoyed now, as well as at the period before referred to. They are all promised to us under the very same images: "Ho! every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money; come you, buy and eat; come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.1)." This invitation is given to all without exception: "Whoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.17)." Nor is it in small measure only that these blessings may be now possessed: for our Divine Master says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.37-38)." Let those who desire these blessings be in as unfavorable a state as "the valley of Shittim," they have no need to be discouraged on that account: for "God will open for them rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: he will make the wilderness a pool of water, and dry land springs of water [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 41.17-18)." What hinders then, but that we should partake of all those mercies ourselves? If we really believe, as all profess to do, that the enjoyment of them will exalt man so highly in the latter ages of the world, and bring down, as it were, a Heaven upon earth, surely we should now aspire after a foretaste of that heavenly feast; and "not give rest unto our God [Isaiah 62:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.1); [Isaiah 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.7)," until he "bring us to his banqueting-house, and until his banner over us be love Son. 2:4." To entertain an idea of the Millennium being a state of inconceivable felicity, and not to seek those graces and consolations which constitute its happiness, is a grievous inconsistency. Let all then be consistent: and now take their portion at that glorious feast which is spread for them in the Gospel, even "the feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 25.6). The particulars of pardon, peace, etc. may be here again touched upon.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think of religion as a source of melancholy—

Does it wear that aspect in the passage before us? or can language be found to depict it in more lovely colors? Truly, if the transformation of a wilderness into the garden of the Lord be a joyful change, then is religion a source of unmingled joy and blessedness. But it may be said, that repentance and mortification of sin are painful works. True; but whence do they proceed? not from religion, but from sin, which must be repented of, and must be mortified. We are diseased, and must be cured, before we can enjoy health in our souls. If we were diseased in body, and needed a painful course of medicine, or the amputation of a limb, would any one ascribe our pains to health? Health would supersede the necessity of such a process: and when the soul is brought to the enjoyment of God's presence, and the possession of his image, it shall "have beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness": Let this erroneous notion then be put away; and let religion be regarded in its true light, as an anticipation and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

2. To those who profess to regard religion as a source of joy—

You are correct in your sentiments on this momentous subject; but you must remember, that religion is a source of joy to those only who live near to God, and devote themselves unreservedly to his service. To those who give to God only a divided heart, it can administer no solid comfort. Indeed they are less happy than the ignorant ungodly world; for, while their profession keeps them from enjoying the vanities of the world, their distance from God prevents them from having any delight in him: so that there is nothing but an aching void, or a corroding anguish, in their hearts. O you professors of godliness, either follow not the Lord at all, or "follow him fully." Live near to him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope: you shall never find that "he is a wilderness to you;" but you shall have the light of his countenance lifted up upon you, and "your mouth shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while you are praising him with joyful lips."

But we trust that many do really experience all the blessedness of true piety: and they will need no exhortation to diffuse the blessings which they themselves enjoy. The wine and milk which they find so nutritious and comforting to their own souls, they will gladly impart to others. Combine then, brethren, your energies for that purpose. The whole world, except a small inclosure, is at this hour a wilderness. The Jewish people, with all their advantages, have reduced themselves almost to a level with the Gentile world: for while the Gentiles are "without God," the Jews are "without Christ, and therefore without hope" of ultimate acceptance before God. They believe not that Jesus is their Messiah; and therefore, as Jesus has said, "they die in their sins." O! rise you as one man, and hold out to them the cup of salvation; and labor by all possible means to lead them to the "living Fountain of waters," that they may drink thereof, and live forever.

AMOS

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Amos 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 2.13)  
  
DISCOURSE 1185

GOD'S COMPLAINT AGAINST US

[Amos 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 2.13). Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.

THE effect of long-continued provocations is to weary out our patience. Some few occasional offences we can easily forgive: but when they are repeated from time to time, they gall the mind, and produce considerable irritation, and stir us up, either by word or deed, to avenge ourselves. Something of this kind is represented as passing in the mind of God. We must not indeed conceive of him as if he had the same passions with ourselves; but yet he will so suit his dispensations to our conduct, that they shall bear the stamp of retributive justice, and accord, in a measure, with what is produced in the world by human passions. Hence he speaks of himself after the manner of men, in order to accommodate himself to our weak and carnal apprehensions: and, having told his people how greatly their transgressions had been multiplied against him, he declares, as one whose patience was quite exhausted, that he was "pressed under them, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."

Let us consider,

I. What reason God has for this complaint against us—

We need not enter minutely into the particular accusations brought against the Israelites of old: in a general view, they may be reduced to three; which may with equal justice be laid to our charge:

1. Our disregard of his laws—

God had given his people laws, which they violated without remorse Compare verse 6–8 with [2 Chronicles 19:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 19.6-7). [1 Kings 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 21.3-4). [Leviticus 18:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 18.8); [Leviticus 18:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 18.15). [Exodus 22:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 22.26). And has he not prescribed the moral law as the rule of our conduct? and is it not in all respects "holy, and just, and good?" Yet how have we obeyed it? Have we studied it with a view to find out the will of God? Have we been restrained and regulated by it as far as we knew it? Have we not, on the contrary, transgressed it in ten thousand instances? Have we not been swayed by the considerations of our worldly honor and interest, more than by a regard to God's authority? Where our own will has stood in competition with God's, have we not been ready to say, like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?"

Do we then suppose, that the Governor of the universe is indifferent about the observance of his laws? Or, if he be not, must he not be "fretted [Ezekiel 16:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.43)," "grieved [Psalm 78:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.40)," and "vexed [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.10)," with our rebellions, and even "broken with our whorish heart [Ezekiel 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 6.9)." Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day, on account of what he saw and heard in Sodom [2 Peter 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.8); and must not He who is infinitely holy, and who sees all the iniquity in the world at one view, be overwhelmed, as it were, with grief and vexation at our iniquities? Surely the comparison in the text rather falls short of, than exceeds, the truth: for we have "drawn out iniquity as a cart rope [Isaiah 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.18) with Bishop Lowth's note upon it," continually adding fresh materials, and protracting it, without intermission, to an unknown length; and therefore well may God complain, that "we have wearied him with our iniquities [Isaiah 43:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.24)," and that he is "pressed under us as an overloaded cart."

2. Our mindfulness of his mercies—

God particularly specifies the mercies he had given to Israel, which had only served to aggravate their guilt verse 9–11. And what innumerable mercies has he conferred on us! How has he formed us in the womb, and made us perfect in all our members; when we might have been hideous monsters, that could not endure the light of day! How has he furnished us with rational faculties, when many of our fellow-creatures are idiots, yes, less rational than the beasts! Above all, how has he endued us with an immortal soul, capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God to all eternity! How has he kept us through the helpless years of infancy, and brought us in safety to the present hour; while thousands have never lived to receive instruction, or been cut off in the midst of their iniquities! Yet in what manner have we requited him for all his mercies? Have we blessed and adored and magnified him for all his love? Have we endeavored to improve our time and faculties in his service? Have not rather the multitude and continuance of his gifts been the occasion of our entirely forgetting the Donor?

Make this your own case. If you had a servant whom you were daily loading with benefits, and yet could never prevail upon him to testify the smallest sense of his obligations to you, would you not be wearied at last, and think it right to discard such a worthless person from your service? And do you imagine that your heavenly Benefactor is not grieved at your ingratitude? Hear how he complains of it; and judge for yourselves: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me: the ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know; my people do not consider [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.2-3)." "What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Why, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.4)." Do these complaints argue no weariness on the part of God? Do they not manifest that he is "pressed under us beyond measure," and scarcely able to sustain any farther load? May we not soon expect him to say, "I am grieved with that generation; and swear in my wrath, that they shall never enter into my rest [Psalm 95:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 95.10-11)."

3. Our contempt of his blessed Gospel—

The summit of Israel's wickedness was that "they said to the prophets, Prophesy not verse 12. Now God has sent his prophets to us, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and to declare that all who believed in that Savior should receive the Holy Spirit, as their Teacher, their Sanctifier, their Comforter [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.38-39). But how have we received their message? Have we cordially embraced the Savior? Are we seeking yet daily and hourly the influences of the Holy Spirit? Are not many of us rather ready to despise the Gospel, and to dispute against its truths as over-righteous fancies and enthusiastic dreams? Do not even those who profess to embrace the Gospel, show by their lives how little they regard it in their hearts? And do not the very services which they present to God, provoke him to say, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them [Isaiah 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.14)." Is not such a contempt of his Gospel most painful to him, and most destructive to us [Matthew 21:37-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.37-41). [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.3); [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.28-29).

See then the grounds of complaint which God has against us; and say whether the assiduity of harvest-men in loading their carts with the sheaves does not too much resemble us, who are thus incessantly loading God with our iniquities, until he can bear no more? Yes, we help and encourage each other in the work, as if we were afraid that we could not otherwise heap up upon him a sufficient load.

The manner in which this complaint is made, calls us especially to consider,

II. What reason we have to be deeply concerned about our state—

Wherever we see in Scripture the word, "Behold," we may be sure that there is something worthy of our most solemn attention. And well may that word be prefixed to the declaration in the text, since an accumulating of such a load of guilt is a "treasuring up of a proportionable weight of wrath [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.5)." Let three things then be considered by all who are thus offending God:

1. God is able to vindicate the honor of his injured majesty—

Survey the universe, and ask, Whether he who formed it out of nothing, be not able to avenge himself on such worms as we are? If that be not sufficient, cast an eye into the bottomless abyss of Hell, and ask, 'Who formed it? and, On what occasion? and, Who are the inhabitants of those dreary mansions?' Or, if you choose rather to see what notices of his power and wrath you can find on earth, ask of the antediluvians, and they shall tell you; or of the cities of the plain, and they shall warn you; or of the Jews, who are scattered over the face of the whole earth, as living monuments of his indignation. As God said to his people of old, "Go to my place, which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel [Jeremiah 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 7.12);" so would I refer you to all these instances, that you may know what a God "you have to do with;" and that "him who walks in pride he is able to abase [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 4.37)." If any doubt yet remain upon your mind, go and provide an answer to that question which Job put to his contentious friends; "God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who has hardened himself against him, and prospered [Job 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 9.4)."

2. As he is able, so is he determined, to avenge himself—

God has warned us plainly, that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 9.17)." But this is not all. He is like a man bearing with indignities for a time, under a pleasing expectation, that the vengeance which he shall shortly execute upon his enemy shall be signal and complete. See with what firm determination he prepares himself for his vindictive work, "whetting his sword, bending his bow, and making ready the instruments of death [Psalm 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 7.11-13);" and swearing most solemnly by his own life and perfections, that "as soon as he has whet his sword, he will render vengeance to his enemies, making his arrows drunk with their blood, and causing his sword to devour their flesh [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.40-42)." See with what pleasure he looks forward to that period, when, like a man who has thoroughly avenged himself, his wrath shall be pacified by the entire destruction of his foe! "I have set the point of my sword against them, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: Ah! it is made bright, it is enrapt up for the slaughter [Ezekiel 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 21.15-17)." "Mine anger shall soon be accomplished on them, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted [Ezekiel 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 5.13);" "So will I make my fury towards them to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from them, and I will be quiet, and be no more angry [Ezekiel 16:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.42)." Farther, see what delight he expresses when the time for vengeance is arrived! "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of my enemies [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.24);" "I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith [Deuteronomy 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.20)."

Should not such declarations as these appal us? Should they not convince us what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God?"

3. The time for retribution is fast approaching—

When the cart is already overladen with corn, the heaping of sheaves upon it must quickly cease. And when our God is already "pressed under us," so that he can scarcely sustain any further weight, we may be sure that "the measure of our iniquities is nearly full," and that the hour of vengeance draws near. Methinks, God is at this moment saying, in reference to us, "My Spirit shall not strive with them any more [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.3)." "To me belongs vengeance and recompense: their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.35)." What a mercy is it that there is yet an hour's respite allowed us! How should we redeem the time! How should we avail ourselves of the present moment, to flee from the wrath to come! How should we tremble, lest the order should be already given, not to take us to the granary of Heaven, but to cast us into the flames of Hell!

"Behold" then, brethren! "behold," what a God you are offending, and in what danger you stand! One more sheaf perhaps may complete the load: and will you proceed to lay it on? O cease from your fatal work, and cry to your long-suffering God for mercy before it be too late!

INFERENCES—

1. What a burden ought sin to be to us!

You have heard what a burden it is to God; that he even groans under it, and is weary to bear it. And ought it not to be a burden to us who have committed it? Ought not we to be "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of it [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.28). Ought we not to feel it as an insupportable burden; "to be troubled for it; to be bowed down greatly, and to roar for the disquietness of our hearts [Psalm 38:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 38.4-8)." Turn then to God, you people; "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.9-10);" "and put your mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope [Lamentations 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.29)."

2. What obligations do we owe to Jesus Christ!

Jesus has borne the burden of our sins, not only as our Creator and Governor, but as our Redeemer. Even in the former view, he has been "grieved at the hardness of our hearts [Mark 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 3.5)," and has groaned over us [John 11:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 11.38), and found his burden almost insupportable [Mark 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.19). But, in the latter view, O what has he sustained? the guilt of all the human race! the wrath of an avenging God! Go, listen to his cries and agonies in the garden of Gethsemane! See the blood issuing from every pore of his body! Trace him to Golgotha, and behold him expiring on the cross: Ask, What was the cause? and you will find that he was sinking under the weight of your iniquities, and if He was thus overwhelmed with the load, what must become of us, if we, after all, should have to bear the curse due to our sins? Let every eye be fixed on him with humble, grateful adoration. Let every one look to his vicarious sacrifice for pardon and peace. And, as he has thus graciously "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," let us trust in him. Let us "go to him weary and heavy-laden, and we shall find eternal rest to our souls."

[Amos 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.3)

DISCOURSE 1186

REQUISITES FOR FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

[Amos 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.3). Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

IT is not always safe to judge of God, and the things which relate to Him, by the things which take place in our fellowship with men: for the distance between God and man is such as precludes all parallel between them. Yet, in a way of illustration, it is often of great advantage to consider what occurs in common life; because, from observations of that kind, we are enabled to attain a correct judgment with more facility than we could by any labored process of rational investigation. Hence this mode of illustration is frequently adopted by the inspired writers. In the passage before us, the Prophet Amos had delivered this message from God to all the children of Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities verse 1, 2." Then the prophet, anticipating an objection to this, proceeds to obviate it The text, and following context, to verse 8, are the prophet's own words, and not a continuation of his message. The not attending to this has perplexed many, and thrown an obscurity over what is very plain. He supposes an objector to say, 'Your alarm is groundless: for it never can be, that God should so act towards those whom he has chosen for his peculiar people.' To this he replies, 'There is good reason for you to be alarmed: for I appeal to you, Can there be any real friendship between persons (whether they be of the same family or not), if in their general views and habits there be no agreement? You may call yourselves the Lord's people, if you will; but, "if you walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to you [Leviticus 26:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 26.23-24);" and this he has both authorized and commanded me to declare. There is, therefore, abundant reason for you to fear and tremble. You well know, "that if a lion roar, or a young lion cry," there is a reason for it. If "a bird fall in a snare, or a snare be taken up by the owner," it is not without a reason: and "if the trumpet be blown in the city to sound an alarm," there is a reason for it. So then is there reason for you to fear and tremble: for God, who reveals his secrets to his prophets, has revealed to me his determination to punish you: and, as sure as effects, whether among the rational or irrational creation, result from causes, and may be traced to them; so surely shall your punishment follow from the indignation which you have excited in the bosom of your God: "The lion has roared: who will not fear? the Lord God has spoken: who can but prophesy?"

The prophet's appeal is indeed very convincing: for as a congeniality of mind is necessary to the existence of friendship among men, so is a conformity of mind to God's revealed will necessary to the maintenance of friendship with him;

I. In this world—

Without a correspondence of taste and sentiment, there can be no friendship among men—

We may occasionally associate with persons, however widely they may differ from us: they may even be numbered among our most intimate acquaintance. But we cannot take them to our bosoms as endeared friends. In order to such communion as that, there must be some resemblance in our general habits, both of sentiment and pursuit; something whereon we can meet, as on common ground; something sufficiently important to us both, to form a bond of union between us. Our favorite employment, whatever it be, will operate as an attraction to others similarly employed: but from persons who have no taste for these occupations we shall feel, comparatively, but little attraction. Those who are immersed in the study of arts and sciences will not very much affect the society of those who have no taste but for trifling amusements; nor will the votaries of pleasure desire an habitual fellowship with them. Still less will those in whom there is a great moral disparity affect the society of each other; the honorable with the base; the pious with the ungodly and profane. Each will form his connections rather among those who are of a kindred spirit with himself, and walk most intimately with those who love to be found in his paths.

Nor can friendship with God exist, where there is no conformity to his image—

Enoch and Noah "walked with God:" and "Abraham was called the friend of God." But in them there was a love to his revealed will, and a desire to be conformed to it. The most difficult commands from God did not excite rebellion or murmuring in their hearts. They loved holiness; and were therefore prepared to move in sweet accord with him. But, had their minds been averse to his holy ways, they would rather have fled from him, like Cain, than have walked habitually as in his presence, and sought all their happiness in him. God has informed us how hateful sin is in his sight; and what is that way in which alone he will receive returning sinners; and what is that heavenly conversation which he expects from all who come to him by Christ. But, suppose a person to think lightly of sin, and to doubt whether it have really subjected him to God's everlasting displeasure: suppose him to disapprove of salvation by faith alone, and to prefer establishing, either in whole or in part, a righteousness by the law: suppose him, further, to complain, of God's requirements as too strict, and to plead for indulgences which he forbids; can we suppose that God will come to him, and find pleasure in him; or that he can really delight himself in God? The point is clear: the diversity of their mind and will forms an insurmountable barrier to their union, and must of necessity produce an alienation of heart from each other; as God has said by the prophet, "My soul loathed them; and their soul abhorred me [Zechariah 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.8)." To the same effect he speaks also by the Apostle Paul: "What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? and what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he who believes with an infidel? and what agreement has the temple of God with idols [2 Corinthians 6:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.14-16)."

Here, then, the point is clear. The services of God and Mammon are incompatible with each other [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.24). Whichever we most affect in our minds, his servants we are [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.16); and friendship with either precludes a possibility of union with the other.

Nor is a resemblance to God less necessary for an enjoyment of him,

II. In the world to come—

There cannot, even in Heaven, be any union between God and an ungodly man—

"There is no repentance in the grave." What a man, in his decided character, is at the time of his death, that he will remain to all eternity: "As the tree falls, so it will lie [Ecclesiastes 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.3);" "He who is unjust, will be unjust still; and he who is filthy, will be filthy still [Revelation 22:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.11)." Suppose a man to have had no love for holiness here, but rather to have felt an alienation of mind from holy men and holy exercises; how can he, all at once, feel delight in a holy God, and in the employment of the heavenly hosts? How can he, who has never for one single hour been filled with love and gratitude in this world for all the wonders of redeeming love, how can he, I say, join in the songs of the redeemed to all eternity? If there were nothing more than a consciousness of his own state to affect him, he would be glad to recede from a place where there was not a being like-minded with himself, or an occupation suited to his taste. He had a dislike to the exercises of devotion here; and he would dislike them there: he fled from God's presence here; and he would flee from it there. Like our first parents after their fall, they would endeavor to hide themselves from him, instead of going forth to meet him; and Paradise itself would be to them a place of torment.

The manner in which the prophet declares this truth greatly augments its weight—

He does not utter it in a way of simple affirmation; but he makes it the subject-matter of an appeal: "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" He constitutes every man a judge in his own cause. We need not any of us be told, that to the existence of real friendship there must be a similarity of taste: those who are perfectly opposed to each other in the things that are most agreeable to themselves, can no more become united with each other, in the bonds of endeared friendship, than light and darkness can coalesce. Observation and experience prove this beyond a doubt; nor can any one be so ignorant as not to know it.

Well then, may this teach us,

1. The necessity of true conversion—

"The carnal mind," says the Apostle, that is, the mind of every man by nature, "is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7)." "A new heart, therefore, must be given us, and a new spirit must be put within us [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.26)." We must become altogether "new creatures; old things passing away, and all things being made new [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.17)." This, as our Lord tells us, is so necessary, that "except it take place we can never enter into the kingdom, no, nor ever see it [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.5)." To speak of this as necessarily attendant on baptism, is contrary to fact; for there are thousands who are baptized, as there were thousands circumcised among the Jews, who have never experienced this change. But this change must be wrought in us, if ever we would behold the face of God in peace. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit [John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.6)." The former being altogether carnal, is incapable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom: it is the latter which alone can fit us for the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly world. You well know, that if a man had no taste for music, he could not, for any length of time, feel pleasure in the melodies which, to a lover of music, afford the highest gratification. So neither can we, without a taste for the employments of Heaven, or, in other words, without "a fitness for Heaven," ever hope to participate in the blessedness of the just.

2. The importance of separation from the world—

The world wonder at the saints, for standing aloof from them; and often impute it to pride: as though the Lord's people said to them, "Stand off; I am holier than you [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.5)." But the godly, in associating with the world, do not meet on equal terms. All the sacrifice must be on their part. The world will propose to them to join in every vanity: but if, in return, they were asked to join in reading the word of God and prayer, for the sake of spiritual edification and comfort, they would regard the proposal almost as a symptom of insanity. And, if you were to wait until such a proposal were made, or even approved, by them, you would wait until the sun had ceased to run its course. It is not for nothing that the Apostle says, "Come out from among them, and be separate 2 Corinthians 6:17." There is abundant occasion for it: for friendship with them is constructively nothing less than enmity itself against God [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.4)." We must "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed in the renewing of our minds, if ever we would prove, to the satisfaction of our God, what is his good and acceptable and perfect will [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.2)."

3. The happiness of real piety—

Where the soul is really in accordance with the revealed will of God, there will God delight to "dwell, as in a temple [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.16)." To such persons "he will manifest himself as he does not unto the world [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.22);" "He will come unto them, and make his abode with them [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.23);" and "they shall walk in the light of his countenance [Psalm 89:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.15)." O! who shall adequately declare the blessedness of friendship with God?: And if in this world the saints have such great advantage, what shall they have in the eternal world? Who shall declare their felicity, when they shall stand in his immediate presence, and behold the full brightness of his glory in the person of his dear Son? If it be so sweet now to have "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.5)," what shall it be to behold the Savior "face to face [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 13.12). [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.2)." If a taste of the waters of life, though taken from polluted cisterns, be so sweet, what shall it be to drink of them at the fountain-head? Let those who walk with God in this world know, that they shall, before long, "walk with him in white," where distance and parting shall be no more [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.4); [Revelation 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.12)."

[Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.6)

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GOD THE SOURCE AND CAUSE OF ALL THINGS

[Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.6). Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?

IT is a generally acknowledged truth, that everything proceeds from God; and we have the authority of God himself for affirming it: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things [Isaiah 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.7)." The same truth was put in a way of appeal even to the enemies of God; and that, too, at a time when he was denouncing against them the heaviest judgments. As surely as the roaring of a lion betokens that he has seized his prey; or the capture of a bird that the snare had been set for him; or the blowing of a trumpet the approach of danger; so surely should the evils coming on his disobedient people mark the indignation of God against them: "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it?"

But as, on the incursion of evil, we are apt to trace it almost exclusively to second causes, and to overlook the hand of God in it, I propose,

I. To confirm the truth which is here intimated—

There is a great variety of evil in the world: but God is the author of it all. From him proceeds all evil;

1. Moral—

Of course, we are not to imagine that moral evil proceeds from him in a way of actual efficiency: for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed [James 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.13-14)." But, as no man would be in a capacity to perpetrate evil, if God did not invest him with the power, and allow him the opportunity to commit it, the Scripture uniformly represents God as concurring in it, even where the agency of men or devils is most manifest in the production of it. For instance;

In the selling of Joseph into Egypt, the envy of his brethren was manifestly the first moving cause: yet, what did Joseph say concerning it? "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God [Acts 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 7.9) with [Genesis 45:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 45.5-8)." "You indeed thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 50.20)."

In the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, we must look further than to the innate depravity of that impious monarch; for God had raised him up to the possession of royal power, that so he might have full scope for the display of all that was in his heart: yes, and he gave him up, too, to the unrestrained exercise of all his evil dispositions; as he had before declared to Moses that he would do. And thus God himself is said, in a qualified sense, to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart," yes, and to harden in like manner the hearts of all whom he is pleased thus to give up to the unrestrained indulgence of their own lusts [Exodus 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 4.21); [Exodus 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 7.13); [Exodus 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 9.16) with [Romans 9:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.17-18).

Above all, in the crucifixion of our blessed Lord, where shall we find human depravity so active and so combined as in that tremendous scene? And can we trace any part of that to Almighty God? Yes, the whole of it: for Peter says, that "Jesus was delivered up to his murderers by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.23); and that "Herod and Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel that were gathered together against him," in all that they perpetrated, "did only what God's hand and God's counsel had determined before to be done [Acts 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.27-28)."

What, then, must not be traced to God, if we are taught to refer to him such transactions as these?

2. Political—

By political evil, I mean such as arises, whether to nations or individuals, in the common course of human events.

The defection of the ten tribes from Rehoboam may well be considered as originating in the tyranny of that weak monarch, and in his following the infatuated counsels of the young men, rather than the judicious counsels of the old. But God himself declares, that it was altogether ordained of him, for the accomplishment of his own designs: "The cause, it is said, was of God, that the Lord might perform the word which he had spoken [2 Chronicles 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 10.15)." And when Rehoboam had raised an army of 180,000 men to reduce the ten tribes to subjection, one single word spoken by Shemaiah, a man of God, to Rehoboam and his army, saying, "You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me, says the Lord," was sufficient for the satisfying and disbanding of the whole army: so universally was God's agency in human affairs acknowledged by them at that day [2 Chronicles 11:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 11.3-4).

The captivity of Israel by the Assyrians might well be traced to the pride and ambition of the Assyrian monarch; as the captivity of Judah by the Chaldeans might also to the resentment and cupidity of the Babylonish monarch: but both the one and the other are traced to God himself, as stirring up the enemies of his people to execute upon them his sovereign will. Respecting the former, it is said, "The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, to carry them away [1 Chronicles 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Chron 5.26)." And respecting the latter, it is said, "The Lord sent against Jehoiakim bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight [2 Kings 24:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 24.2-3);" so entirely are men, even when following most freely the dictates of their own minds, unconscious agents of the Deity, to execute his will; "the sword in his hand, and the staff of his indignation [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.5-7)."

3. Penal—

Sometimes God is pleased to send trials in a way of paternal chastisement, as when he stirred up enemies to disturb the peace and quietness of Solomon's reign [1 Kings 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 11.14); [1 Kings 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 11.23). And he has told us, that he will deal thus with his children in every age, "visiting their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, even when it is not his intention utterly to take away his loving-kindness from them [Psalm 89:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.30-33). [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.6)." But sometimes he executes his judgments upon men in a way of righteous retribution. Go to Sodom; and behold the cities of the plain; and tell me, whose hand was there? See Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with all their families, swallowed up in the earth at the word of Moses; and say by whom was that judgment wrought? Or tell me by whose hand Ananias and Sapphira fell, for lying to the Holy Spirit? Was there any one of these evils which the Lord did not inflict and execute?

Methinks, I have spoken enough for the confirmation of this truth; and may proceed,

II. To show how it is carried into effect—

God is pleased to work in a great variety of ways: for instance,

1. By a visible display of his own Almighty power—

It was thus that he caused the sea to divide its waves, and to leave a dry path for the children of Israel; and presently afterwards to close again, and overwhelm every individual of the hostile army that pursued them. By a similar display of his power, he opened a passage also for his people through the river Jordan, at a time when it had overflowed its banks. Afterwards, in like manner, he caused the walls of Jericho to fall down, at the sound of rams' horns. In such instances as these, no means were used that had the slightest tendency to effect the end; that so his own interposition might be the more manifest, and that he might have all the glory.

2. By the instrumentality of second causes—

David was informed, that, notwithstanding his heinous sin was forgiven, it should yet be visited in this world with evils in his own family, which should embitter all his remaining days. In the conduct of Amnon and of Absalom, we see how God marked David's sin in its punishment. These sons only followed the dictates of their own corrupt hearts: but God wrought by them, and made them his instruments to punish their parent's crimes [2 Samuel 12:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 12.10-14); [2 Samuel 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 13.14); [2 Samuel 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 16.22). So, by the instrumentality of Jehu, he destroyed the whole house of Ahab, when Jehu himself desired nothing but to advance his own glory [1 Kings 21:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 21.19-24) with 2 Kings 10:10-11.

3. By the most trivial, and, as we call them, accidental, occurrences—

Who can read the Book of Esther, and not stand amazed at the trifling circumstances by which the destruction of Haman, and the consequent deliverance of all the Jewish people, were brought to pass? The Persian king cannot sleep—he calls for the records of the nation to be brought, in order to amuse him—a record of a conspiracy, that had long since been defeated, was read to him—he inquires whether the person who had discovered the conspiracy had been suitably rewarded—this, with a multitude of other unlooked-for circumstances, brought Haman to the gallows which he had erected for Mordecai, and were the means of delivering the whole Jewish people from the ruin that had been prepared for them [Esther 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 6.1-3); [Esther 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 7.10). No one can conceive how minute are the links in the chain of Providence, the failure of any one of which would have defeated the counsels of the Most High. But "his counsel shall stand; and he will do all his will [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 46.10);" and it will be found, at last, that "no one thing has ever failed, of all that he, in his eternal counsels, has ordained [Joshua 21:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 21.45)."

4. In direct opposition to all the means that are used to obstruct his will—

He will confound all the Jews by the resurrection of his dear Son. They, on the contrary, are determined to prove Jesus a deceiver. For this end, having put him to death, they roll a stone to the door of his sepulcher, and seal it with Pilate's signet, and set a watch to guard the place; that so it may be impossible, as they think, for Jesus to be taken away, or for the expectations of his followers to be realized. Had they succeeded in this effort, they had proved to demonstration, that Jesus was an impostor. But Jehovah "laughed them to scorn;" and, at the predicted time, restored the Lord Jesus to life, and "proved him to be indeed the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.4)." This was in strict accordance with what David had foretold: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed; saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. But He who sits in Heaven laughed; the Lord had them in derision [Psalm 2:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.2-4)." In a word, "He does according to his will, in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 4.35)."

Has any kind of evil then occurred to us? Let us Learn,

1. Submission to God's will—

God says to us, "Be still; and know that I am God [Psalm 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 46.10)." And if once we learn to see the hand of God in everything, what peace will it bring into the soul, even in the midst of the heaviest trials [Psalm 29:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 29.8). You will not find anywhere a greater sufferer than Job: men, devils, elements, all conspired against him. But in all his trials he saw the hand of a gracious God; and that composed his mind: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord! Shall we receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall we not receive evil [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 1.21); [Job 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 2.10)." Let us then, in all our trials, the smaller which occur in. social or domestic life, as well as in those of a more overwhelming nature, habituate ourselves to see the Lord's hand: and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 3.18)." This would greatly tranquillize our minds; and take out the sting from ten thousand little occurrences, which wound our feelings, and often pain us far more than heavier afflictions. Let us reply to the revilings of a malignant enemy, "The Lord has bidden him curse me [2 Samuel 16:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 16.10-11);" and there will be an end of all the anguish that his hostility has for a moment occasioned us.

2. Inquiry into the design of God in the trial sent us—

"Trouble springs not out of the dust [Job 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 5.6);" "nor does God afflict us without a cause [Lamentations 3:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.33)." "Every rod," which he sends, has a voice, which we ought most attentively to "hear [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.9)." Perhaps there is some sin which God designs to correct; some corruption to mortify; some grace to improve; or, at all events, some important lesson which he intends to teach us more perfectly. We should, therefore, go to God under our trials, and ask him "why he contends with us [Job 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 10.2)." "In the day of adversity we should consider [Ecclesiastes 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.14);" and be more anxious to derive benefit from the affliction, than to obtain a premature deliverance from its pressure. If we may but be purged from our dross, and come out of the furnace purified as gold, it should be deemed an ample compensation for all our pains; and should make us thankfully to acknowledge, that "God in love and faithfulness has afflicted us [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.75)."

3. Amendment of life—

This should be our object, under all the diversified circumstances of our lives. Nothing should be of any importance to us in comparison of this: nor should any pain be deprecated, which may be sent to "purge away our iniquity [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.9), and which may render us, in a more perfect manner, "partakers of God's holiness [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.10)." If our "tribulation may but work patience, and experience, and a hope that shall not make us ashamed, and prove an occasion of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts, we should even rejoice and glory in it [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3-5)." Nor is it merely the mortification of any besetting sin that we should aim at, but an entire conformity of mind and will to God. We should desire to be "made perfect through our sufferings," even as the Lord Jesus Christ himself was [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.10); and, whether our tribulation be more or less painful in this world, we should be contented to pass through it as "our appointed way to Heaven [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 14.22);" and be well pleased to "suffer with Christ, that we may hereafter dwell with him, and be glorified together [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.17)."

[Amos 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.8)

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GOD'S VOICE TO SINNERS

[Amos 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.8). The lion has roared, who will not fear? the Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?

THERE is not anything more strange and unreasonable than that utter disregard which is shown to the word of God. If we see appearances in the sky, we can form some judgment of the weather: if we take notice of common occurrences in the world, we can draw plain and obvious conclusions from them. The prophet justly observes verse 4–6, that if a lion roar, we conclude he has taken, or is about to seize, his prey: if a bird be caught in a snare, we take for granted that the snare was laid with that design: if an alarm be given in the city, we suppose that there is reason for that alarm: or if any disastrous event have taken place, we consider it as ordered by an overruling Providence. Yet when God speaks in his word, we imagine that there is no occasion for it, nor any need to regard it. But it becomes us to attend with reverence to all his messages, whether of wrath or mercy. Whatever he has revealed to us by his servants the prophets, he will surely do: and they are commanded to make known his determinations, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." Hence the prophet Amos, desirous at once to expose the obstinacy of the unbelieving Jews, and to vindicate his own faithfulness towards them, addresses himself to their consciences in this animated expostulation, this convincing apology.

To bring home his words to our own hearts, we shall consider,

I. What God has spoken to us—

There is no description of persons whose character God has not delineated, and whose end he has not determined. And it would be a pleasing task to exemplify this remark in the Divine declarations concerning the righteous: but God's voice in the text is compared to the roaring of a lion: on which account we must confine ourselves rather to his denunciations of wrath and vengeance which he will execute on the ungodly.

What then has he spoken to profane sinners [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.9-10). Alas! how numerous their classes! how dangerous their self-deceptions! how awful their end See also [Ephesians 5:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.3-6). And is not such a declaration more terrible than the roaring of a lion? Let us then hear and "fear [Deuteronomy 31:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 31.12-13)."

To self-righteous Pharisees his voice is not less tremendous. In the parable addressed to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," the preference given to the self-condemning sinner is strongly marked; and God's determination to "abase the self-exalting" is plainly declared [Luke 18:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.9-14). Yes; before God, and angels, and men, shall such characters be abased in the day of judgment, when publicans and harlots shall be admitted into Heaven before them [Matthew 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.31). Is not this a just ground of fear to those, whose hearts are not broken with a sense of sin?

But more dreadful still are the threatenings denounced against hypocritical professors of religion. Their doom is characterized as the most severe of any [Matthew 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.51); and the wrath which they heap up to themselves, while they hold the truth in unrighteousness, is beyond measure great [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 36.13). Let the proud and passionate, the malicious and revengeful, the worldly and covetous, the impure and sensual professor, hear this: and let them know, that the Lamb of God will be a lion to them, if they walk not more worthy of their high calling [Psalm 50:16-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.16-22) with [Hosea 13:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 13.6-8).

There is however one description of persons, against whom God's threatenings are more awful still. He declares that negligent and unfaithful ministers shall perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls committed to their charge. The blood of all whom they have neglected to warn shall be required at their hands [Ezekiel 33:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.6). Surely if the voice of God to others be as the roaring of a lion, to these it is rather as the voice of thunder. O, that it might be forever sounding in the ears of all who are in the service of the sanctuary, until there should not be found one negligent or unfaithful minister in the Christian church!

II. What effect it should have upon us—

With respect to ministers, should they not fear? Does it become them, in the very face of such warnings, to indulge a slothful spirit, or to withhold the truth from their people through fear of offending them? Ought they, however their hearers may wish it, to speak smooth things to them, and to prophesy deceits [Isaiah 30:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.10-11). Should they be intent on feeding themselves rather than the flock [Ezekiel 34:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.2-3); [Ezekiel 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.10); and be more studious to establish a reputation as preachers, than to save the souls committed to them? Surely, when it is considered whose ambassadors they are, and to whom they must give account, and what must be their doom if any perish through their neglect, they can never study too earnestly to approve themselves to God [2 Timothy 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.15). [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.28), that they may give up their account to him with joy, and not with grief [Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.17).

With respect to others, of whatever description they may be, it becomes them well to fear, when "the Lord God," the almighty and immutable Jehovah, speaks to them such momentous truths There is a peculiar emphasis in the name by which Jehovah is here called. See also [Jeremiah 5:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 5.21-22) and [Revelation 15:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 15.3-4). What is there that can justify any man in casting off the fear of God? Can we deny that he has roared as a lion? or are we stronger than he, that we dare to provoke him to jealousy 1 Corinthians 10:22. Or can we elude his search, when he shall summon us to his judgment-seat [Jeremiah 23:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.24) and [Job 34:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 34.22) and [Psalm 139:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 139.7-12). Or have we any reason to doubt whether he will execute his threatenings [Ezekiel 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 24.14).

Let every one rest assured, that it were far better that a roaring lion should rush out of a thicket to devour him, or that the artillery of a whole army should be pointed at him, than that one single threatening of Almighty God should be in force against him: for as his destruction is more certain, so will it be infinitely more tremendous.

ADDRESS—

1. Be not averse to hear the terrors of God's law—

Though, of themselves, the threatenings of God's word will never produce true contrition, yet it is necessary that all should know what the Lord God says concerning them, in order that they may feel their need of a Savior. In this respect, the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.24); and if, by hearing of the wrath to come, we be induced to flee from it, we shall have reason to bless the watchman that sounded the alarm."

2. Be thankful to God for the promises of the Gospel—

Blessed be God, the Gospel is full of "exceeding great and precious promises:" and "to him that trembles at God's word" these promises are made [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.2). Let not then a slavish dread of God's wrath keep us from embracing the overtures of his mercy. Let us rather flee to Christ the more earnestly, in proportion as we see our guilt and danger. The Israelites were commended by God himself for making this improvement of his terrors [Deuteronomy 5:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 5.25-26); [Deuteronomy 5:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 5.28). And, if we have Christ as our mediator and advocate, we have nothing to fear from Heaven, earth, or Hell.

[Amos 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 4.11-12)

DISCOURSE 1189

INCORRIGIBLENESS REPROVED

[Amos 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 4.11-12). Yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto you, O Israel: and because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.

THE various dispensations of providence are intended to awaken our concern for our best interests, and to bring us back to God. But the generality of mankind, satisfied with tracing events to second causes, neglect to make the improvement of them which God designs. Judgments and mercies in constant succession pass unheeded; and, instead of promoting our spiritual welfare, too frequently enhance rather our eternal condemnation. It is certain that God notices the effects which his dealings produce upon us: and, if we continue incorrigible under all the means which he uses for our good, he will sooner or later call us to a severe account. To this effect he speaks in the passage before us; where, having recapitulated the various methods by which he had sought to reclaim his people, he complains, after each, that "they had not returned unto him;" and then he bids them prepare to answer for it at his tribunal.

We may with too much reason apply to ourselves the words originally addressed to Israel, and consider from them,

I. The complaint alleged against us—

God has used various means to bring us to repentance—

In the context he specifies several judgments which he had inflicted on his people Israel, intimating, at the same time, that in the midst of judgment he had remembered mercy. His judgments had been successive, and partial, not universal, or combined. We too must confess that he has visited us with heavy calamities Here may be mentioned any that have recently happened; especially if among them can be enumerated scarcity, or drought, or mildew, or pestilence, or prejudicial lightnings; But yet "he has stayed his rough wind in the day of his east wind," insomuch that we have been like "a brand plucked out of the fire!" War, famine, and pestilence have raged in different parts of the continent; but we, though slightly affected by them all, have escaped without any material injury Written Feb. 1805.

For a long time also has God spared us from that awful pestilence which has raged both in Asia and Europe: but now has it reached our shores, and is spreading widely both in Britain and Ireland July, 1832, and carrying off multitudes with fearful rapidity into the eternal world.

But in the midst of all we have continued impenitent—

We can see nothing of national reformation. Fasts indeed have been appointed from time to time during the late war, and even on the present occasion: but it will be well if these be not numbered among our greatest sins; seeing that they have been little else than an empty form, a hypocritical service, a solemn mockery. As for national repentance, what evidence can be adduced to warrant the hope that it has ever taken place? What national sin has been put away? Have we less pride and arrogance, when speaking of our fleets and armies? Have we ceased from traffic in human blood? Does not the land groan as much as ever under the load of sabbaths wasted, oaths violated, and sacraments profaned; or, if any slight alteration in relation to oaths and sacraments have taken place, has it not been through a political concession to popular clamor, rather than from any regard for the honor and authority of God?

Nor can we boast much more of personal improvement. Are not the young as mirthful and dissipated, as if they had no occasion for mourning and weeping? Are not the worldly as intent upon their gains as if this world were their all? Do not the formal still continue as regardless of the life and power of godliness, as if the service of the heart were not required? Is there any considerable change even in the people of God? Is there much of a spirit of prayer and intercession found among them? Are they pleading, like Abraham for Sodom, or like Moses for the worshipers of the golden calf? In truth, there are few, if any, who lay to heart the iniquities of the nation, or inquire, "What have I done" to increase the sum of our national guilt?

Surely then, since we must plead guilty to the charge, we may fitly also apply to ourselves,

II. The admonition founded upon it—

God threatened the utter extinction of the Jewish nation verse 2, 3. It is in reference to this that God says in the text, "Thus will I do.": and he bids us also to "prepare to meet him,"

1. In increased calamities—

What God has already inflicted on us, is nothing in comparison of what we may expect at his hands, if we continue to provoke him. "Go to Shiloh, and see what he did to it for the wickedness of his people Israel [Jeremiah 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 7.12)." Look at the Jews at this day, whom he has dealt with "as a man who wipes a dish, and turns it upside down [2 Kings 21:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 21.12-13) with [1 Kings 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 14.10)." He has only smitten us with rods at present; but, if we repent not, he will "chastise us with scorpions:" yes, he will continue to "punish us seven times more for our sins." O that we might cease from our wickedness, before we oblige him to "come forth against us as a man of war," and "his fury burn to the lowest Hell." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

2. In the day of future retribution—

In this world God calls men into judgment in their national capacity. It is in the eternal world only that he will reward and punish the different individuals. Then all of us must appear before his judgment-seat. And if we die impenitent, every dispensation which God had appointed for our good, shall be brought forth to aggravate our guilt and condemnation. 'I sent you affliction; yet you returned not unto me: I sent you mercies; yet you returned not unto me: I gave you my Gospel to enlighten your mind, and my Spirit to affect your heart; yet you returned not unto me: I continued these mercies to you for so many years; yet you returned not unto me.' Alas! how unanswerable will be his accusations, how just his sentence, how terrible his award!

For this account we must prepare: we must be ready to meet him whenever he shall summon us: and if he call us unprepared, it were better for us that we had never been born.

There are yet two or three considerations, which we would impress upon your minds, to strengthen those which have been already proposed:

1. If you return not to God, there is no hope for you—

From one end of the Bible to the other we cannot find one word which countenances the idea of any person being saved, who dies impenitent. And should not this thought lead us to repentance? O let it have due influence on our minds! and let us be sufficiently on our guard against self-deception. Let us remember, that it is not a sigh, a tear, an acknowledgment, that will suffice: we must return unto God; we must return to him with our whole hearts: we must return in deep contrition, in lively faith, in unreserved obedience.

2. If you return to God, you will find him ever ready to receive you—

As, on the one hand, no one ever found mercy without repentance, so neither, on the other hand, was any true penitent ever rejected. Search the Scriptures; not a syllable will be found to discourage a sinner's return to God. Nations have always found mercy when they sought it earnestly; and of individuals, not one was ever rejected who turned unto God in sincerity and truth. What greater encouragement then can any man desire? There is the word, yes the oath, of Jehovah pledged, that none shall seek his face in vain. Beloved brethren, only seek him with your whole hearts, and he will assuredly be found of you.

3. Inconceivable will be the difference between those who are prepared to meet their God, and those who meet him unprepared—

Think of an impenitent sinner, when summoned into the presence of his God: how glad would he be that the rocks should fall upon him, and the hills should cover him from his sight! But this cannot be. He must appear; he must answer for himself; he must receive his doom; he must take his portion "in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." View, on the contrary, the true penitent, the humble believer: behold him coming forth with joy to meet his reconciled God and Savior: he stands before his tribunal with unshaken confidence: "he knows in whom he has believed." While the other anticipates in the frowns of his Judge the miseries of Hell, he receives in Emmanuel's smiles a pledge and foretaste of the heavenly felicity. This alone is sufficient to show the importance of being prepared. We need not follow them to their different abodes: their comparative happiness at the first meeting of their God is abundantly sufficient to enforce this exhortation upon all, "Return unto the Lord, from whom you have deeply revolted!"

[Amos 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.8-9)

DISCOURSE 1190

GOD'S CONDESCENSION AND GRACE

[Amos 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.8-9). The Lord is his name; that strengthens the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

IN our public addresses, we feel peculiar satisfaction in entering upon subjects which admit of no dispute, and on which all considerate persons are agreed. That we ought to seek after God, is universally admitted: and as that is the one duty inculcated in the passage before us, the whole scope of our present discourse will be to recommend the performance of it. In the preceding context, Jehovah, speaking to the whole house of Israel says, "Seek you me, and you shall live." Immediately afterwards, the prophet himself enforces the exhortation, and adds, "Seek you the Lord, and you shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it.…Seek him that makes the seven stars and Orion.…the Lord of Hosts is his name; that strengthened the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress:" that is, 'Seek Him, who, being the Creator and Governor of all things, possesses all power to avenge himself upon you for your neglect of him, or to give success to your feeble endeavors.'

To enforce yet further the prophet's admonition, I will set before you,

I. The character of Jehovah, as here portrayed—

Let us notice,

1. His condescension—

There is no person so low or so despised among men, but God will condescend to look upon him with tender compassion. Human beings can scarcely be conceived in a more degraded situation than the Hebrews in Egypt were: yet of them God says, "I have seen their affliction; I have heard their cry; I know their sorrows [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 3.7)." And at a subsequent period, when they were reduced to the utmost distress by the Ammonites, we are told, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel [Judges. 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 10.16)." The same compassion does he exercise towards his oppressed people in every age. So "afflicted is he in all their afflictions [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.9)," that "the touching of them is like touching the apple of his eye [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.8); and he will interpose for them, however low they be: "he will raise up the poor out of the dust, and lift up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 2.8)." Notwithstanding "he is the High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity," and "humbles himself when he beholds the things that are in Heaven;" yet will he "look upon him that is poor and of a contrite spirit [Genesis 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 17.1)," yes, and "dwell with him too, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

But that which we are more particularly to notice, is,

2. His power—

As he is Almighty in himself, so is he "the strength of his people [Psalm 29:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 29.11);" even "the saving strength of his anointed [Psalm 28:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 28.8)." "He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 25.4);" nor does he ever interpose for his people with greater pleasure than when he sees them reduced to the lowest possible state of want and misery [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.36).

Perhaps the particular occurrence referred to by the prophet may be that of the victories granted to Joash over the triumphant and oppressive Syrians. Hazael, king of Syria had so reduced the power of Israel, that "he had left to king Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen." To Joash, the son and successor of Jehoahaz, God promised deliverance from Syria: and if Joash had expressed that zeal in his country's cause, and that confidence in God, which became him, his victories over Syria would have been complete. As it was, we are told that "he took out of the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which Hazael had taken from Jehoahaz by war; that three times did he beat Benhadad, and recovered the cities of Israel [2 Kings 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 13.7); [2 Kings 13:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 13.17-19); [2 Kings 13:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 13.25)." To this event, I say, the prophet is supposed more particularly to allude. But, in the history of Israel, such instances were without number. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the destruction of Jericho by the sound of rams' horns, and of Midian by the lamps and pitchers of Gideon, clearly show, that God can save equally by many or by few, and that those who trust in him shall never be confounded.

If, on the other hand, we suppose this exercise of God's power to be mentioned with a view to awe the Israelites into submission, it may well be interpreted in that view. The whole nation, both of Israel and Judah, placed an undue reliance on their relation to God, and could not conceive that their enemies should ever be suffered finally to prevail against them. A remarkable instance of this occurred in the days of Zedekiah, king of Judah. The Chaldeans besieged him in Jerusalem: but, on Pharaoh's coming from Egypt to support him, the Chaldeans raised the siege. This departure of the Chaldean army raised the confidence of Zedekiah, that he had no just ground for fear. But Jeremiah was commanded to tell him, that the Egyptian army should soon return to their own land; that the Chaldeans should immediately resume the siege; and that, "though he had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans, so that there remained none but wounded men among them, yet should they, the wounded soldiers, rise up every man in his tent, and burn Jerusalem with fire [Jeremiah 37:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 37.5-10)."

This latter interpretation of the words seems countenanced by the menace which has been before mentioned; where the prophet says, "Seek you the Lord, lest he break forth like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el."

According to this twofold view of the character of Jehovah, we must state,

II. The ends for which it is adduced—

And,

1. As a warning to those who seek him not—

To every creature under Heaven must we declare, that "God is very greatly to be feared:" "Forasmuch as there is none like unto you, O Lord: you are great, and your name is great in might: who would not fear you, O God of nations [Jeremiah 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 10.6-7)." If he is "able to save, he is able also to destroy." In whatever fortresses any be entrenched, "their refuges of lies shall be swept away, and the flood of Divine vengeance shall overflow their hiding-place [Isaiah 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.15); [Isaiah 28:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.17)." They may in their own conceit "make a covenant with death and Hell;" but "their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with Hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, they shall be trodden down by it [Isaiah 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.18)." What is said in relation to Moab may be spoken in reference to all who cast off the fear of God; "they shall be trodden down by him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: and he shall spread forth his hands, as he who swim spreads forth his hands to swim; and he shall bring down their pride, together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of your walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust The image of a swimmer advancing himself, while with his hands he irresistibly sweeps away the waters, beautifully illustrates God's advancing his own glory in the destruction of all his enemies."

To those, then, who are living without God in the world, I would suggest this awful consideration: God is "of great power and of terrible majesty;" and when he rises up, who then can resist him [Job 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.14). or who can stand in his sight when he is angry [Deuteronomy 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 4.24). Truly, "He is a consuming fire [Psalm 76:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 76.7)." Who then would set briers and thorns against him in battle? He would go through them, and burn them up together. "Seek you, then, his face:" seek him as he is revealed to you in the Gospel of his Son: seek him as reconciled to you by the blood of the cross: seek him also speedily, and with your whole hearts: for I must declare to you, that "there is no escape to those who neglect his great salvation [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.3);" and that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 11.21)."

2. As an encouragement to those who desire his favor—

Many are ready to despond on account of their own weakness, and of the power of their enemies. But if God be our strength and our salvation, whom need we fear? "If he be for us, who, with any prospect of success, can be against us?" Hear how he chides the indulgence of a desponding thought: "Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding? He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.27-31)." Let not any one then shrink back from the contest, how weak soever he himself may be, or however potent his enemies. Aided by God, "a worm shall thresh the mountains [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 41.14-15);" and the weakest creature in the universe may say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13)." In truth, a sense of weakness, so far from being any ground of discouragement, is rather a ground of hope; because "God will perfect his own strength in our weakness." We are told that God brings down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he lays it low; he lays it low, even to the ground; he brings it even to the dust." But whom does he employ in this work? The strong and mighty? No: it is added, "The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy [Isaiah 26:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.5-6)." Whoever then you be, go forward. Though seas of difficulty be before you, I say to you, as God did to Moses, "Why cry you unto me? Say unto the children of Israel, that they go forward [Exodus 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 14.15)." Do you doubt whether success shall attend your efforts? Look at the example of David: see his triumphs, and his acknowledgments [2 Samuel 22:2-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 22.2-20). This whole passage should be cited. See also verse 30–41; and doubt not, but that if you seek God, and confide in him as David did, like him you shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loves you.

[Amos 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.12)

DISCOURSE 1191

GOD KNOWS OUR SINS

[Amos 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.12). I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins.

MANY passages of Holy Writ appear to refer to a particular people only; while in reality, they are applicable to all mankind. Whoever shall consult the passages cited by Paul in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, in confirmation of the total depravity of mankind, and compare them with the places from whence they are taken, will be particularly struck with the truth of this remark. The Prophets David and Isaiah speak of certain individuals whose iniquities were of a most enormous kind; but Paul proves from them the depravity of human-nature in general: and this he does with great propriety: for, though all persons do not run to the same extent of wickedness, all have the same propensities within them: and if persons enjoying all the advantages of revelation abandoned themselves to such wickedness, it must arise, not from the peculiarity of their trials, but from the inward depravity of their hearts. This observation was applicable to the passage before us. The prophet, or rather God by him, is addressing a people who violated all the duties of social and civil life; and is denouncing his judgments against them for the sins which they so openly committed: but the same address may be justly made to every child of man: for all are corrupt and abominable in their doings; "all of which are naked and opened before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Let us consider,

I. The information here given us—

Men conceive of God as not noticing their sins: "They say in their hearts, The thick clouds are a covering to him, that he cannot see." But he does see the sins of all mankind: he sees them,

1. In all their extent and variety—

From infancy to age his eye is upon us. Scarcely do we draw our breath, before we begin to show what fallen creatures we are; how irritable, how self-willed, how querulous, how addicted to every evil which we are capable of committing. As our powers of acting are enlarged, our habit of sinning is proportionably increased; every faculty displaying those corruptions which are most suited to its powers, and to the exercise of which it can most easily contribute. As reason expands, we might hope that it should assume the government of our lives: but it is soon overpowered by passion; and its voice, if heard at all, is lost amidst the pleasures and vanities of a tempting world. So universal is this, that all expect, as a matter of course, to behold increasing corruptions with increasing years; the exhibition of them varying with the successive periods of life: in the young, the passions pleading for indulgence; in maturer age, the desire of distinction urging and impelling us; and, in our latter years, the cares of this life, or the deceitfulness of riches, occupying all our time and thoughts. All this has God beheld; and not a disposition or desire has been hid from him.

The sins of body and of mind have been alike open to him. Each of these has its appropriate lusts: there is a "filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit," from which we are alike concerned to "cleanse ourselves." Intemperance, lewdness, sloth, have, in different men, their sway, according as education or constitutional propensity incline them. And in the mind, what an inconceivable mass of iniquity resides, ever ready to start forth into action, as occasion may require! Oh the pride, the envy, the malice, the wrath, the revenge, the uncharitableness, which show themselves in our daily life and conversation! Add to these the murmuring, and discontent, and covetousness; the self-confidence and self-dependence; and the entire devotion to self-gratification in the whole of our conduct. What an accumulation of wickedness must arise from a life so spent, when, in fact, "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is evil, only evil, continually!"

Of omission, too, as well as of commission, does he behold our sins. He tries us by the standard of his perfect law, which requires that we should love him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength; and that we should live in an entire dependence on his care, and for the purpose only of advancing his glory. But in our whole lives there has not been one single moment in which we have conformed to his law, or come near to the line which he has marked out for us. To his dear Son, also, what gratitude, what affiance, what devotion have we owed! Yet have we been almost strangers to these holy feelings; and, even at the present moment, possess them in no degree comparable to what his love to us requires. Nor have we obeyed the motions of his Holy Spirit, but rather have done despite to him every day we lived. What have the interests of our souls and of eternity demanded? Yet, in what way have we discharged the debt?

Surely, if we put together these things, we must confess that our "transgressions" have been "manifold;" yes, more in number than the hairs of our head, or "as the sands upon the sea-shore innumerable."

2. In all their heinousness and aggravations—

Our sins have been committed against light and knowledge. Though we have not known the extent of our duty to God, we have known far more of it than we have ever practiced. No one of us has been so ignorant, as not to see the importance of eternal things, when compared with the things of time and sense; and, consequently, the duty of giving them a precedence, both in our estimation and pursuit. But have we felt the same ardor in relation to them that we have in prosecuting the vanities of this present world? Alas! If we had paid no more attention to our temporal concerns than we have to those which are spiritual and eternal, we should have had very little prosperity to boast of; or rather I should say, there would have been but one sentiment respecting us, among all who knew us.

Against vows and resolutions, too, we have proceeded in this mad career. I conceive there is not any one among us so obdurate, as not to have formed some purposes of amendment. At the death of a friend or relative, or in a time of sickness, when our own dissolution seemed to be drawing near, or perhaps after an awakening sermon, we have thought that to humble ourselves before God, and seek acceptance with him, was our duty: but the impression has soon worn away, and, like metal that has been fused, we have soon returned to our usual hardness. Possibly we may have begun and made some progress in religion, and given to our friends hopes that we would really turn unto our God: but we have been drawn aside by temptation, and have "turned back with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Above all, we have sinned against all the mercies and the judgments of God. We have seen his judgments upon others, yet have not returned unto him ourselves. We have perhaps felt them in some measure ourselves, yet have made no suitable improvement of them. As for mercies, they have followed us night and day, from our youth up: yet to how little effect, as it regards our souls! That greatest of all mercies, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to die for us, one would suppose that that should have altogether constrained us to live unto our God. But that stupendous mystery has appeared to us only as a cunningly-devised fable, which might amuse us awhile, but which merited no practical regard. Indeed, if Christianity had been altogether false, few of us would have materially differed from what we have been; for we have neither been allured by its promises, nor alarmed by its threats, so as to comply with its dictates in any essential point.

Is this matter over-stated? Do we not know it to be true? and has not God witnessed it in all its parts? Yes: as he has seen "our manifold transgressions," so has he also known "our mighty sins," and recorded every one of them in the book of his remembrance.

Such is the information given us in our text: and it becomes us to consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

Certainly, in the first place,

1. We should beg of God to discover to us the real state of our souls—

We know it not, though it is so plain and palpable. We are ready to account ourselves, if not positively good, yet far from bad. The sins of which we are conscious, appear only like the stars in a cloudy night, few in number, and at great intervals; whereas, if we saw ourselves as we really are, the whole extent of our lives would present to us but one continuous mass of sins, of a greater or lesser magnitude. But who can open our eyes? Who can show us to ourselves? Who can bring us to a becoming sense of our extreme vileness? None but God. It is he alone who can open to our view "the chambers of imagery" which are in our hearts; and show us, that instead of our being, as we vainly imagine, "rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, we are indeed wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

2. We should entreat him to humble us in the dust before him—

It is God alone who can "give repentance:" he alone can take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh. Who was it that made the difference between Lydia and the other hearers of Paul? It was "the Lord, who opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken by him." And it is the same power alone that can turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And let us remember, that humiliation for sin is necessary: it is indispensably necessary for our acceptance with God. God himself has declared, that "whoever covers his sins shall not prosper; and that he only who confesses and forsakes them, shall find mercy at his hands."

3. We should look to our Lord Jesus Christ, as our only hope—

If we conceive our sins to have been only light and trivial, we shall easily persuade ourselves that we can make compensation for them by some works of our own. And it is owing to men's ignorance of their own hearts, that they so generally hope to establish a righteousness of their own by the works of the law. But that vain thought must be discarded with abhorrence. We must renounce all hope in ourselves; and "flee for refuge to that hope which is set before us, even to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that he might atone for our sins, and effect a reconciliation for us with our offended God. Be assured, Brethren, that there is no other way unto the Father than by Christ. If you were to shed rivers of tears, you could never wash away one sin; nor, if you could walk ever so holily in future, could you ever atone for the smallest sin. How then can you hope to wash away or make atonement for all your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins? Indeed, you must look to Christ as your only hope, and transfer to his sacred head the sins you have committed, exactly as Aaron transferred to the head of the scape-goat the sins of all Israel. It is in this way alone that they can ever be removed from your souls: and if not so removed, they will sink your souls into everlasting perdition.

4. We should walk with all possible circumspection before God—

Having so long exercised the patience of our God, we ought to determine, through grace, that we will offend him no more. However careful we may be, imperfection will pervade our very best services. But let it be imperfection only, and not willful sin, that God shall see in us in future. Let there be no allowed deceit in our hearts. Let us search out our duty in its full extent, and endeavor to fulfill it; attending to it in all its parts, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Let it henceforth be the one labor of our lives to "keep a conscience void of offence before God," if by any means we may approve ourselves to him, and "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

[Amos 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 6.1)

DISCOURSE 1192

CARNAL EASE AND SECURITY REPROVED

[Amos 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 6.1). Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.

ONE would scarcely conceive it possible, that the Jews, with so many instances of God's displeasure before their eyes, could indulge in security, while they were evidently, in the whole course of their lives, provoking him to anger. But the blindness both of Israel and Judah was almost incurable. The ten tribes having wholly addicted themselves to idolatry, were the first monuments of God's indignation. Yet on them the divine judgments fell at first but partially, in order that they might be stirred up to penitence, and avert, by timely reformation, their impending fate. But they continued obdurate, under all the chastisements that were inflicted on them: nor did Judah make any suitable improvement, either of the judgments inflicted on others, or of the forbearance that was exercised towards themselves. God, by the Prophet Jeremiah, complains of Judah thus: "I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also [Jeremiah 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.8)." A similar complaint was made by the Prophet Amos in our text. God had "begun to cut Israel short;" but neither did they nor Judah lay it to heart, as they should have done: they saw what had been done to nations less guilty and more powerful than themselves; to Calneh, in Chaldea; to Hemath, in Syria; to Gath of the Philistines; and yet "they put away the evil day" from themselves verse 2, 3, as though the cup of bitterness should never be put into their hands. But the prophet denounces against them the heavy judgments of God: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!"

It is my intention from these words, to show you,

I. The evil which is here reproved—

We are not to suppose that the mere circumstance of a person's being "at ease" is sinful: on the contrary, it is the privilege of God's people to enjoy that very state, and that, too, in relation both to their temporal and spiritual concerns. In reference to temporal matters, God has said, "Whoever hearkens unto me shall dwell safely, and be quiet from fear of evil [Proverbs 1:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 1.33)." And in the book of Job, Eliphaz states this point at large: "He shall deliver you in six troubles; yes, in seven there shall no evil touch you. In famine, he shall redeem you from death; and in war, from the power of the sword. You shall be hid from the scourge of the tongue; neither shall you be afraid of destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh; neither shall you be afraid of the beasts of the earth: for you shall be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you: and you shall know that your tabernacle shall be in peace [Job 5:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 5.19-24)." Nor is spiritual peace a whit less the portion of the godly: for it is expressly said, "What man is he who fears the Lord? His soul shall dwell at ease [Psalm 25:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 25.12-13)."

Yet, that there is a sinful kind of ease, is evident, from the woe denounced against it. The state, then, that is here condemned, is a state,

1. Of carnal confidence—

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria!" Both Judah and Israel were ready to place an undue confidence in the capitals of their respective countries, as being well fortified both by nature and are: and when they had been made to see how weak such fortresses were, when defended only by an arm of flesh, they would "say in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars [Isaiah 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 9.9-10)." In their outward relation to God, also, they trusted; as the reproof administered to them shows: "Trust you not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 7.4)." Because "they had Abraham to their father," they thought that no evil could befall them [Matthew 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.9).

And is not this a common evil among ourselves? What is there in which we do not trust, rather than in God? In all our concerns, whether personal or public, we lean on an arm of flesh, and find it altogether foreign to our habits to "cast all our care on God." Even in relation to our eternal interests we find it exceeding difficult to realize our dependence on God. Our own wisdom and strength and righteousness are, for the most part, the objects of our reliance, and the grounds of our ease. But the whole of this is most displeasing to God; according as it is written, "Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; but cursed is the man that trusts in man, and that makes flesh his arm [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.5); [Jeremiah 17:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.7)."

2. Of sensual indulgence—

To possess indulgences, or to use them, is no ground of offence; for "God has given us all things richly to enjoy [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.17);" But to place our happiness in them, is to provoke God to jealousy; since he ought to be to us the one only fountain and source of bliss. The Jews, whom the prophet reproves, were greatly guilty in this particular. When both the sins which they committed, and the judgments which they suffered, were rather "calling them to mourning and to fasting and to weeping [Isaiah 22:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 22.12-14)," they were living in all the indulgences of the most luxurious ease: as the prophet says: "they lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; they chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; they drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointment verse 4–6." Now this is the very state in which happiness is supposed to consist: it is universally spoken of as the very summit of human enjoyment; and is held forth as an object greatly to be envied and desired. But how different are these things in God's estimation! To all who spend their lives in such a way as this, our Lord, no less than the prophet, says, "Woe unto you that laugh now! for you shall weep [Luke 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 6.25)."

Let it not however be imagined that this woe attaches only to the opulent: for the lower classes of society are equally obnoxious to the same condemnation; while, with less refinement indeed, but not an atom less of sensuality, they gratify themselves with those indulgences which every public-house supplies. I forbear to specify their enjoyments with the same minuteness as the prophet does the gratifications of the rich: but your own minds will present you with a detail of the accompaniments of carousals among the poor, and of the gratifications wherein they consume their time, their property, their health, their souls.

3. Of selfish apathy—

Swallowed up with their vain amusements, the Jews "were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph verse 6." They laid not to heart the miseries of others; nor considered either from whom the judgments had come, or for what cause they had been inflicted. "The harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, were in their feasts; but they regarded not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands [Isaiah 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.12)." And this constitutes a very essential part of that wickedness, which a state of self-indulgent ease invariably brings with it. None feel so little for others, or for the Church of God, as those who are immersed in worldly pleasures. The chief butler, when restored to his office in Pharaoh's household, forgot the interests of the suffering Joseph; as all in prosperity are but too apt to do: so that it is well said by the apostle, "She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives [Genesis 40:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 40.23) and [Esther 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 3.13); [Esther 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 3.15) with [1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.6). In truth, such persons are dead to all holy feelings, whether towards God or man. But this is a state of grievous criminality. We ought all of us to consider ourselves as members of one body, and to have the same care one for another, every member participating in both the joys and sorrows of all the rest [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.25-26). We should all be able to make to God the very same appeal as Job did: Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? and was not my soul grieved for the poor [Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 30.25)." But in a more especial manner ought we to be concerned for the souls of men: and when we view the lamentable condition of Jews or Gentiles, or of the souls of nominal Christians, without pity and compassion, we may well tremble, as obnoxious to the displeasure of our God, as being most unreasonably and unmercifully "at ease in Zion." If we would have any evidence that we are right with God, we must be able, like Paul, to appeal to the all-seeing God, that for our perishing brethren, whoever they may be, "we have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our heart [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.1-2)."

That we may not think lightly of this evil, I will proceed to show,

II. The equity of the judgments denounced against it—

We are ready to think that nothing but gross and flagrant immorality deserves God's wrath. But the habit of the mind may be as offensive to God as any overt act whatever: and we hesitate not to say, that the evil which is here reproved, deserves the woes that are denounced against it.

The judgments which are threatened in the Old Testament are chiefly of a temporal nature. In truth, nations, as nations, are incapable of sustaining any other. But individuals, so far as they are implicated, will have to bear that wrath of God which, in the New Testament, is fully "revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.18)."

That the evil which we have been considering deserves this, will be seen, if we reflect that it implies,

1. A total alienation of heart from God—

How impossible would it be to conceive of an angel in Heaven, or of Adam in Paradise, in such a state as our text imports! Not one of them could for a moment forget his dependence on God. However crowned with comforts suited to their nature, not one of them would rest in those things as his happiness, or cease to seek his happiness in God. And, if we suppose any part of the creation reduced to a state of suffering, not one of them would be indifferent to their welfare, or indisposed, if it were in his power, to promote it. It is in consequence of our departure from God, that all this evil is come upon us; and that we resemble rather the devil in pride, the beasts in sensuality, and the very stones in an insensibility to all around us. And let me ask, Docs not such a state as this deserve the wrath of God? And is not a woe most justly denounced against it? Look at the Savior; do you find any symptom of such a disposition in him? Was not the very reverse manifested by him, when for our sakes "he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross?" If we are so far from his image, and so far from seeking his glory, as my text implies, it is in vain to hope that we shall have any part with him in the world above.

2. An utter insensibility to all the wonders of Redemption—

Among the ends for which our blessed Lord came into the world, one of prime importance was, "that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again." But the sensual life, which we have before described, is altogether foreign from this, or, rather, directly opposed to it. Shall one then "in Zion" be thus at ease? It would be bad enough for those who have never heard of redeeming love to rest in such a state; but, for those who profess to have "come unto Mount Zion," and to belong to the Church of Christ, to be thus lost to all that is good, is an abomination that merits, and will assuredly be visited with, God's heavy displeasure. If we would dwell with Christ in a better world, we must "have the mind that was in him," and "walk as he walked".

3. An entire forgetfulness of the future judgment—

Could any man living on the borders of eternity rest in such a state as is here described? What if we were to see a dying man immersed in carnal confidence, and sensual indulgence, and selfish apathy; should we think such dispositions suited to his state? Would not even an ungodly man judge it better for him to rise above the things of time and sense, and to have his mind occupied with the concerns and interests of eternity? Think, then, of an immortal being thus occupied; not knowing, but that, before another day shall arrive, he may be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ, and receive his doom, either in Heaven or in Hell, forever: is it not almost incredible that a human being of this description should be found? But so it is, even with the great mass of mankind: they "put far from them the evil day," and scarcely think of eternity until they are constrained to meet it with all its horrors. What, then, shall I say to such persons? What can I say, but "Woe unto them?" I am aware that it must appear harsh; and that it would be more pleasing to the generality, if we were to "prophesy unto them smooth things, and prophesy deceits." But we dare not do so. Our blessed Lord, when addressing such persons—even persons in Zion, who, while they "professed to know God, in works denied him"— repeated no less than seven times, in one short chapter, this solemn warning, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" and then closed his address with this terrible denunciation: "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how shall you escape the damnation of Hell [Matthew 23:13-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 23.13-33)." This, by the way, shows us what is meant by the woe denounced in my text. Yes, it is nothing less than "the damnation of Hell" that must be the portion of such self-deceiving professors. I pray you, Brethren, be not satisfied with having it supposed that you belong to Zion, while you really "belong to the synagogue of Satan." To "have a name to live," will be an awful state, if you be found "dead" at last. Indeed, if you would obtain the prize, you must "run as in a race:" if you would gain the victory, you must "fight the good right of faith:" if ever you would have eternal life, glory and honor and immortality must, to the latest hour of your lives, be the one object of your pursuit.

[Amos 7:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 7.2-3)

DISCOURSE 1193

GOD'S CONDESCENSION TO PRAYER

[Amos 7:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 7.2-3). Then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech you: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The Lord repented for this: It shall not be, says the Lord.

IT is very instructive to see, among all the servants of Jehovah, whether Prophets or Apostles, how love was blended with fidelity in the whole of their ministrations. They were constrained to declare all which "God had showed unto them verse 1, 4, 7." But did they "desire the woeful events" which they predicted? They could appeal to God that they did not [Jeremiah 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.16). The Prophet Amos had been commanded to foretell that the fruits of the earth, with the exception of those which had been gathered in, should be eaten up by grasshoppers verse 1, 2. But he immediately betook himself to prayer, and, by his importunity, prevailed on God to suspend the threatened judgment. He was directed afterwards to foretell the destruction of a part of the land by fire verse 4; and again, in the same terms as before, he interceded for the land; and obtained for it a similar relaxation of the impending calamity. The judgments had been begun to be inflicted [Amos 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 4.9),[11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 4.11); but at his request they were removed. It is probable that these judgments were also threatened in a figurative sense; and related to the invasions of Pul, king of Assyria, who contented himself with imposing a tribute of a thousand talents of silver; and that of Tiglath-pileser, who took several cities, and carried away the inhabitants captives to Assyria 2 Kings 15:19; [2 Kings 15:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 15.29). But, without entering into the history of these events, I wish to fix your attention on the repeated intercessions of the prophet, (for the repetition of them in the same words, and the repeated answer to them in the same words, render them peculiarly deserving of our attention;) and to show you from them these blessed truths;

I. That the judgments we fear may be averted by prayer—

Judgments of the heaviest kind are denounced against us—

Temporal judgments, such as those referred to in the passage before us, would be very terrible: yet are they nothing, in comparison of what we have cause to fear. "The wicked," says David, "shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 9.17)." In another psalm he is more explicit still: "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 11.6)." Who among us has not forgotten God, days without number? and who, therefore, has not reason to tremble at these awful declarations?

But they may all be removed by fervent and believing prayer—

Look into the Scriptures, and see the wonderful efficacy of prayer! If ever there was a person that had reason to fear his prayers could not be heard, it was David: because he had long known the Lord; had received the most distinguished favors at his hands; and yet committed adultery and murder, and continued impenitent for a long period, until his sin was charged home upon him by the Prophet Nathan: yet, behold, he, the very instant he acknowledged his transgressions, was forgiven. "I have sinned against the Lord," says he: and instantly the prophet replies, "The Lord has put away your sin: you shall not die [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 12.13)." Hear the prayers which he offered on the occasion: "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation [Psalm 51:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.2); [Psalm 51:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.14)." Hear with what confidence he prayed: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.7)." What! you clean! you whiter than snow? Yes, I, even I. Hear how particularly he himself notices the speed with which his prayer was answered. "When I kept silence (and refrained from prayer), my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. But at last I acknowledged my sin unto you, and mine iniquity I hid not: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and (instantly) you forgave the iniquity of my sin [Psalm 32:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 32.3-5)."

We may notice, also, the instance of Manasseh, who was perhaps the most daring in his impieties of all the human race: "He built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he reared up altars for Baal, and worshiped all the host of Heaven; he built altars for them all, even in the house of the Lord itself, and set a graven image there; he made his son to pass through the fire; he caused his subjects to do more evil than had been committed by the nations whom God had driven out before them; and to all these impieties he added this, that he shed innocent blood very much, until he had filled Jerusalem with it from one end to the other [2 Kings 21:3-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 21.3-16). Now can we suppose that such a monster of impiety as this could ever be forgiven? Yes: not even his prayer was shut out, when he besought the Lord. We are told, that "in his affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 33.12-13)." Repeatedly is this noticed in the history respecting him; "his prayer unto his God, his prayer, and how God was entreated of him [2 Chronicles 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 33.18-19);" and no doubt it is thus repeated in order to show us, that, whatever be our demerits, we shall not be cast out, if, with humble, fervent, and believing supplications, we betake ourselves to the prayer-hearing and sin-pardoning God.

The whole people of Nineveh attest this blessed truth. There was no call to repentance suggested by the Prophet Jonah: the judgments denounced by him were altogether unqualified with the smallest hope of mercy: the Prophet himself seems scarcely to have contemplated a possibility of forgiveness to them; yet were they, even the whole population, spared at the voice of their cry [Jon. 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah. 3.10).

I say then, without hesitation, to all the sinners of mankind, "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," and multiply his pardons above all the multitude of their sins [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.7). The margin.

My text leads me to notice another most important truth; namely,

II. That the weakness we feel may be urged by us as a plea—

The state of Israel at that time seemed indeed to be very desperate: for "God had already begun to cut them short." But the prophet, instead of desponding, twice urged this very circumstance as a plea with God to grant him his request: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech you! by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." And each time the success of his plea is mentioned, "The Lord repented for this: it shall not be, says the Lord Compare verse 2, 3, and 5, 6."

Now such may be our plea before God—

We are ready to make our weakness a ground of despondency before God: "How can I turn to him? How Song of Solomon 1 effect a reconciliation with him? How can I hope ever to emancipate myself from my cruel bondage?" "There is no hope:" 'I may as well continue as I am: I can but perish at last [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.25).' But all this is wrong: for God often delays his interpositions for this very end, that he may bring us to see how destitute we are of help or hope in ourselves: nor is he ever better pleased, than when, with a total dereliction of all hope in ourselves, we cast ourselves wholly and unreservedly on him. Let us once be brought to say with king Jehoshaphat, "We have no might; but our eyes are unto you;" and we may be sure that our deliverance is near at hand [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 20.12). The prophet succeeded thus.

And such success shall we also obtain—

I have said that God orders his dispensations, for the most part, so as to bring us to self-despair. Hear his own words: "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left Dent. 32:36. If there were any power in ourselves, we should be ascribing our deliverance to our own arm: but when we see how destitute we are of all strength, then are we willing to give God the glory of all that he effects in our behalf. See this in the Apostle Paul. He was assaulted with some grievous temptation, which he calls "a thorn in his flesh." Thrice he cried to the Lord to remove it: and by his repeated entreaties he obtained this answer; "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And what was the effect? His fears are dissipated; his sorrows are dispelled; and instantly he bursts forth into these triumphant exclamations: "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: for when I am weak, then am I strong [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.7-10)." Here is the great truth which I would impress upon your minds; "When I am weak, then am I strong." It is not possible to have too deep a sense of your own weakness." Perhaps in the whole world there does not exist another passage comparable to that in the Prophet Isaiah, where he represents whole mountains of difficulty to be encountered, and Israel, as a mere insignificant worm, groaning under them: "Fear not, you worm Jacob: I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff: you shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 41.14-16)." Endeavor to realize this idea. Place mountains before your eyes: then look down upon a poor helpless worm; and then see, through his exertions, the whole mountains beaten to dust and scattered as by a mighty whirlwind; and then you will have some faint conception of the truth inculcated in my text; sins, that reach unto the heavens, scattered to the winds; and judgments, deep as Hell, removed forever from your sight. Bring every threatening which the word of God contains: and to every one in succession I will say, "Respecting this the Lord has repented: and this shall not be;" "neither shall that be."

Let me now, in my application of this subject, address,

1. Those who despise the judgments of the Lord—

Many there are who look upon the threatenings of God with as little concern as if there were no truth in them; and who, like Amaziah in the chapter before us, condemn the preachers as exciting groundless fears; and say to them, "Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not your word against the house of Israel verse 10, 16." But to all such persons I must say, that the word of God shall stand, and not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fall to the ground. Look back, and see, "Did not God's word take hold of" the disobedient Jews [Zechariah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.6). Go to Assyria, and see; or go to Babylon, and see; or look upon them in their present dispersion, and see. You may put far from you the evil day; but it will come at last; and with augmented terror, in proportion as it has been despised. I call upon you, then, yes, on every one among you, to turn unto the Lord, and to cry, "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech you The Text." For where is there one among you that does not need forgiveness? or who can obtain forgiveness, if he will not ask? But, "if you will not turn to God, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore, and rundown with tears, because of the ruin that awaits you [Jeremiah 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 13.17)."

If you would ask, "How shall I arise?" gladly do I declare, that there is One able to save, and as willing as He is able. "God has laid help for you on One that is mighty:" and you shall have no want of grace or strength if only you will flee to him for support.

But this leads me to address,

2. Those who are sinking under discouraging apprehensions—

Beloved Brethren, what is that which you are saying? "How shall I arise? for I am small." Hear the answer which God gave to his Church of old. Zion of old labored under your very infirmity: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? Yes, says the Lord; even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contends with you; and I will save your children [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.24-25)." You see how readily God interposed for Israel, at the cry of Amos; and that too for an obstinate and rebellious people: and will he not hear your cry, which is offered for yourselves? Moreover, you have a better intercessor than Amos: the Son of God himself "ever lives" in Heaven, where he is gone on purpose "to make intercession for you." Put your cause into his hands: commit yourselves entirely to him, and you have nothing to fear: for "him the Father hears always." Say to him, as Hezekiah did under the most desponding apprehensions that could be conceived, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me [Isaiah 38:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.14);" and be assured, that if, with a renunciation of all self-dependence, you cast your care on Him, he will speedily interpose for your relief: "he will, in love to your souls, deliver them from the pit of corruption, and cast all your sins behind his back [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.17)."

[Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.9)

DISCOURSE 1194

THE SECURITY OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE

[Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.9). Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.

THOUGH God does not see fit to preserve his people wholly from national calamities, yet he interposes, either to lighten their afflictions or to sanctify them to their good. Daniel and the Hebrew youths were carried captive with their nation; yet were they eminently protected by that God whom they served: and Jeremiah, though not raised to any exalted station, was on many occasions marked as an object of God's incessant care and attention. The Prophet Amos was commissioned to foretell the dispersion of Israel which began in the Assyrian captivity, and was completed at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: but the God of Abraham promised by him, that he would be mindful of "his hidden ones," and deliver them from the evils to which the profligate and secure should surely be exposed.

There are now, as well as in former ages, sifting times, (if we may so speak,) both to the Church at large, and to the individual members of it: and the same distinguishing regard is still, though less visibly, manifested by God to his dear children; not the smallest of whom shall ever be overlooked. To illustrate this truth we shall show,

I. By what methods God sifts his people—

God sees that a state of perfect ease would by no means conduce to his people's welfare: and therefore he suffers them sometimes to be agitated,

1. By outward afflictions—

Persecution is the common lot of all who live godly in Christ Jesus: and this, together with other trials common to the world at large, is made use of to separate the godly from the ungodly, and to purify them from the corruptions that cleave to them in their present state. While the world smiles upon us we are too ready to seek its friendship by sinful compliances; and when we enjoy an entire freedom from troubles, we are apt to grow careless, and to relax our diligence in seeking "the rest that remains for us." God therefore causes us to he "emptied from vessel to vessel, that we may not be settled on our lees [Job 36:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 36.8-10) with [Jeremiah 48:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 48.11).

2. By inward temptations—

By far the sorest trials which Christians experience, are, for the most part, of an inward and spiritual nature: Satan wounds them with his fiery darts, and harasses them with many painful suggestions. That wicked fiend indeed desires to sift them as wheat, that he may prevail against them to their destruction; but God permits him to do it for a very different end, namely, that he may root out all their self-confidence, and stimulate them to greater exertions in their spiritual warfare. This was the effect which it produced on Peter [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.31). compared with [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 5.8); and it is with the same benevolent intent that our Almighty friend gives licence to our adversary to make his assaults on us. Doubtless such "tossings to and fro" are very distressing to us at the time; but they are overruled for good, in that they separate us move effectually from an evil world, and render us more meet for the heavenly garner.

Doubtless many who make a fair appearance, perish by these means: nevertheless we are assured of,

II. The security of all those that are truly upright—

There is an essential difference between the hypocrites and the sincere—

As chaff and corn may to a superficial observer resemble each other, so may the real and merely nominal Christian. But as there is a solidity in the corn which is not to be found in the chaff, so the truly converted person has something, which clearly distinguishes him from the most refined hypocrite: he is not contented with an appearance of religion, but seeks to possess it in truth: nor can he rest in the performance of duties; but labors to have his heart engaged in them. To be high in the estimation of men is, in his eyes, a poor matter; he would approve himself to God in all he does: nor is there any measure of perfection with which he would be satisfied, while there remained a hope and prospect of attaining more.

Moreover, God will infallibly distinguish the true professors from the false—

Man may easily be mistaken in his estimate of characters: but God will form an unerring judgment: he discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart: he weighs the very spirits of men no less than their actions: "he needs not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man:" he will discover sincerity under the most unfavorable circumstances, and hypocrisy under the most artful disguise. Abijah alone of all the house of Jeroboam had some good thing in his heart towards the Lord God of Israel, and God did not fail to notice it with tokens of his approbation, while he poured out the vials of his wrath on all the family besides [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 14.13). If we were less than the least of all saints, if we were only as "smoking flax," having but one spark of grace and a whole cloud of corruption, God would assuredly observe the latent principle, and discover the workings of his own Spirit amidst all the infirmities of our fallen nature.

Nor will he ever suffer the weakest believer to perish—

From the violence with which corn is agitated, an ignorant person would imagine that much of it must be lust with the chaff: in like manner many that are weak in faith may be ready to cry, "I shall one day perish [1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 27.1)." But God pledges himself for the preservation of every the smallest grain. lie represents himself under the image of a woman, who, having lost a small piece of silver, lights a candle, and sweeps diligently until she find it [Luke 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 15.8); and he assures us, that "it is not his will, that any of Ins little ones should perish [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.14). We have no reason then to fear: for while he continues possessed of omniscience to discern his people, and omnipotence to preserve them, we shall be as secure amidst all our agitations, as if we were already lodged in the granary of Heaven.

INFERENCES—

1. How much are we concerned to be found sincere!

There is a day quickly coming, when Christ, the Judge of the living and dead, shall sift and winnow us all. Nor will he merely cause a separation of the precious from the vile, but such a separation as shall be followed with endless happiness or misery [Matthew 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.12). Should we not then diligently inquire whether we be wheat or chaff? To what purpose is it that "the tares grow up with the wheat," and sometimes are mistaken for it, if, at the harvest, they must be separated forever [Matthew 13:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.29-30). So it will be of little avail to have been reputed Christians, if, the very instant we die, we are to take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. Let us then turn to God now with our whole hearts, that we may "have confidence before him at his coming."

2. How may we welcome afflictions, provided we be truly upright!

What are afflictions but the sieve in our Father's hand, whereby he takes us from among the ungodly, and "purifies us unto himself a peculiar people?" And shall we distrust his skill, or doubt his love? If the countryman, instructed by him, knows how to suit his threshing-instruments to the nature of his corn, shall God be at a loss how most effectually to produce his ends on us [Isaiah 28:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.26-28). Let us then leave ourselves in his hands, and submit cheerfully to the means, that we may at last attain the end.

3. How important a grace is faith!

Under the various trials with which we are harassed, it is faith alone that can keep us steadfast, or afford us any solid comfort. If we be destitute of faith, we shall be tormented with ten thousand fears: but if we be strong in faith, we shall, under all circumstances, "stay ourselves on God, and be kept in perfect peace [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.3)." However sensible we be of our own weakness and unworthiness, we shall expect the accomplishment of God's promise, and shall dismiss our fears, "knowing that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 1.12)." May we all be enabled in this manner to trust ourselves in his hands, and to wait quietly for that salvation which he has prepared for us!

[Amos 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.11-12)

DISCOURSE 1195

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS AND GENTILES

[Amos 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.11-12). In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build if as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, says the Lord that does this.

PROPHECIES are of necessity involved in some measure of obscurity; so that the full extent of their meaning cannot be seen at first, nor the precise period for their accomplishment ascertained. To many of them is affixed an apparently determinate, but really indeterminate, date; "In that day." The expression, "In that day," always refers to some signally important time, but not always to the same time: it sometimes refers to one advent of our Lord, and sometimes to another; so that we cannot determine, except by the passage itself, whether it relate to his coming in the flesh, or his coming to destroy Jerusalem, or his coming to reign in the Millennium, or his coming to judge the world. The context however will generally enable us to fix the period intended, if it relate only to one; or to specify the different seasons, if its reference be more extensive. It is with these words that the prophecy before us is introduced: and in it the diversity of their meaning will appear.

Let us consider,

I. The import of the prophecy—

It evidently has different seasons of accomplishment. It speaks of,

1. The return of the Jews from Babylon—

All the prophets who lived before that event spoke of it; to some it afforded very ample scope for the minutest predictions. By their captivity in Babylon, the Jews were reduced to the lowest state of degradation: their polity, both civil and religious, was destroyed; and there were no remains of that grandeur to which they had been elevated in the days of David. But, on their return from Babylon, things were restored, in a measure, "as in the days of old;" and their inveterate enemies of Edom became subject to them Obad. verse 18–21. This however is certainly only a subordinate sense of this prophecy; for it refers much more strongly to,

2. The conversion of the Gentiles—

When we speak of David's kingdom as typical of the Messiah's; and his enemies, of the Messiah's enemies; we perhaps may be thought to lean rather to the side of fancy than of judgment. But fancy should find no scope for exercise in interpreting the word of God: truth, and truth alone, should be the object of our research. The propriety of such representations is strongly marked by an inspired writer; who, when determining a controversy of the utmost importance to the Jews, adduces this very passage against them, to show, that God had, many ages before, decreed the reception of the Gentiles into his Church, without subjecting them to the rite of circumcision: and if that Apostle had imposed a sense upon the passage foreign to its real and received meaning, the Jews would doubtless have objected to his interpretation of it [Acts 15:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.13-17). Here then we have one sense at least, (and that the most doubtful one,) of this important passage, fixed by undisputed and infallible authority. That in this sense it was accomplished, is too plain to stand in need either of proof or illustration: we ourselves, as of Gentile extraction, are living monuments of its truth.

3. The future restoration of the Jews, and their union with the Gentiles in one universal Church—

Though myriads of Gentiles have been converted to Christianity, we are far enough from having seen "all the heathen" subjected to the yoke of Christ; yet it is of all the remnant of the unconverted heathen that the prophet speaks. Nor have the Jews been so brought back to their own land as to be driven from it no more: yet it is to such a restoration of them that the prophet refers verse 14, 15. Both of these events will take place together, or in the nearest connection with each other: "the fall of the Jews has been the riches of the Gentiles," and the fullness of the Gentiles will be as renewed life to the Jews [Romans 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.15); [Romans 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.31); then will both be united under one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ; and he, as the true David, will reign over them forever [Jeremiah 30:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.9). [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.9). All his enemies then, whether Jewish or heathen, will he put under his feet; and all the kingdoms of the world become his undisputed possession.

Nor is this a speculative subject merely, but one replete with comfort: this will appear by considering,

II. The encouragements to be derived from it—

Every prophecy admits of practical improvement; and this especially. It affords us rich encouragement,

1. In relation to individuals—

The state of multitudes is altogether as desperate as was that of the Jews in Babylon. What hope is there of the proud infidel—the abandoned sensualist—the cruel persecutor—the hardened backslider Show in each of these states how desperate their condition is.—We should be ready to say concerning them, "There is no hope:" but there is nothing impossible with God; and he who restored the Jews from Babylon, and converted so many Gentiles by the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen, can at any time reclaim the prodigal, convert a Saul, or restore a David: Let none then despair of themselves, as though they were beyond the reach of mercy; nor of others, as though God could not subdue them to the obedience of faith. Though they are "dry bones, very dry, the Spirit may yet enter into them, and they may live [Ezekiel 37:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.1-14)."

2. In relation to the world at large—

Who that sees the state of the world at this moment, would conceive it possible that truth and righteousness should one day universally prevail? Yet God has ordained that the little grain of mustard seed which has sprung up, shall become a tree that shall extend its shadow over the whole earth: If we look at the work indeed, we shall sit down in despair: but if we recollect who it is that says, "I, I will do it," we shall see not only the possibility, but the certainty, of that event. Many, from not adverting to this, laugh at the idea of missions: and many whom God has fitted for missionary labors, are afraid to engage in them. But "is there anything too hard for the Lord?" and has he not "ordained strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings?" Has he not said too, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this?" Let us then look with pity both on Jews and heathens; and, in humble hope that the time of God's effectual interposition is fast approaching, let us labor, according to our ability, to extend the kingdom of our Lord, and to advance his glory.

[Amos 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.13)

DISCOURSE 1196

THE MILLENNIAL STATE

[Amos 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.13). Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop street wine, and all the hills shall melt.

IT is gratifying to see what a harmony there is in all the prophets, in their descriptions of the glory of the latter day. The representations which heathen poets have given of what they call the golden age, are more than realized in their predictions. They appear indeed to speak of earthly things; but it is of heavenly things that they speak: and by earthly images they embody truth, and present it to our minds with incomparably greater force than it could by any other means be conveyed. The idea of fertility, for instance, in all its richest luxuriance, is calculated to make a strong impression on the imagination: it is tangible, as it were; and we can apprehend it; and, when it is set before us in glowing language, we can with ease transfer to spiritual things our perceptions with all their clearness, and our impressions with all their force. Most striking is the picture drawn by the Prophet Hosea. He represents the people uttering their complaints to the corn and wine and oil; and they to the earth; and the earth to the heavens; and the heavens to Jehovah: of them in succession conceding to the other the blessings solicited at their hands; Jehovah granting clouds to the heavens; they pouring out their contents upon the earth; the earth yielding its juices to the corn and wine and oil; and they nourishing the famished people [Hosea 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.21-23). The Prophet Joel goes further, and describes the effects produced, the mountains dropping down new wine, and the hills flowing with milk [Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.18); while the Prophet Amos proceeds yet further, and represents the productions of the earth as so abundant, that there will scarcely be time to gather them in; "the plowman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows the seed:" in other words, that the successive operations of husbandry will, by reason of the abundance, press so closely upon each other, as almost to interrupt the regular execution of them.

It is with the spiritual import of these images that we are more immediately concerned. It seems indeed highly probable, that agreeably to the promise given by Moses [Leviticus 26:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 26.5), there will be, as nearly as possible, a literal accomplishment of these things in Palestine, after that the Jews shall have been restored to their own land; (for that event shall certainly take place in the appointed time verse 14, 15;) but infinitely richer blessings await them in that day; for that period shall be distinguished by,

I. Frequent ordinances—

At the first establishment of the Christian Church, the people "continued daily in the temple with one accord, and brake bread together from house to house, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Thus also will it be in that blessed day, when apostolic piety shall again prevail throughout the Church: there will be no "famine of the word," but frequent ordinances in every place:

In public, ministers will then "give themselves wholly to their work:" they will be "instant in season and out of season:" they will live only to fulfill their ministry, and will "count their lives dear to them" for no other end. The people too will be as eager to receive instruction, as the ministers to convey it. As many followed our blessed Lord for days together to hear his word, and forgot, as it were, the very wants of nature through the insatiableness of their appetites for spiritual food; so, methinks, in that day the people will, as it were, "dwell in the house of the Lord, that they may flourish in the courts of our God."

Then also will social ordinances abound. Friends, when they meet together, will then seek to edify each other in faith and love. In families, all will look for the returning seasons of divine worship, as much as for their regular meals. Parents will "command their children to fear the Lord;" and masters will universally adopt the resolution of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In private, too, men will delight in approaching to their God, and in pouring out their souls before the throne of grace. "At morning, and at evening, and at noon-day will they pray," as David did in the times of old; yes, they will be ready to say with him, "Seven times a day will I praise you, because of your righteous judgments."

Thus in the public, social, and private ordinances there will be such a rapid succession, that the "plowman will overtake the reaper; and he who treads out the grapes, the sower." Not that temporal things will be neglected: men will "not be the more slothful in business, because they are fervent in spirit;" but they will carry the fear and love of God into everything, so that they will "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." "The fire on their altar will never go out."

From this state of things there will arise,

II. Numerous converts—

Now ministers may fish all the day, and take scarcely anything; but then the Lord will direct them where and how to cast their nets; which they shall scarcely be able to drag to land, by reason of the numbers that they shall catch. The days of Pentecost shall be revived. From a small handful of corn shall spring up a crop waving like the trees of Lebanon, and standing as close upon the ground as piles of grass upon the earth [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.16). Fresh converts shall be continually hastening forwards, as "doves flying to their windows;" yes rather, they shall be like a majestic river "flowing together to the goodness of the Lord," and that too, not as in an ordinary course, but upward, "even to the mountain of the Lord's house that shall be established on the top of the mountains [Isaiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.2)." The church itself shall be perfectly astonished at the increase; which will be so vast and so rapid, that places shall be wanting for their reception [Isaiah 49:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.18-23). In a word, "the fields will be always white ready to the harvest;" and one crop will not be gathered in, before another is ripe for the sickle."

Nor will Christianity be a mere profession then; for all who embrace it shall be distinguished for,

III. Exalted virtues—

All will then "live, not unto themselves, but unto their God; even to Him who died for them, and rose again." The fruit which individuals will then bear will not be thirty or sixty-fold, but an hundred-fold. It will appear as if all the most eminent saints that have ever lived had risen again; on which account it is called, "The first resurrection [Revelation 20:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 20.5-6)." So subdued will be all the evil passions of men in that day, that "instead of the thorn will grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier will grow up the myrtle-tree [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.13);" "for brass there will be gold; for iron, silver; for wood, brass; and for stones, iron [Isaiah 60:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.17)." It will be truly the reign of Christ upon earth: nothing but his will will be done; and it will be done on earth, in good measure, as it is done in Heaven. Godliness will then be, not an act, but a habit; so that one act of piety will be only as a prelude to another; "the very mountains dropping with sweet wine, and the hills melting" into rivers of wine.

Resulting from this state of piety, there will be,

IV. Abundant consolations—

This is doubtless intimated in our text, as in the parallel passage in the Prophet Joel [Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.18). Truly "God will then comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness will be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.3). See also 35:1, 2." The world at this time is only a valley of tears: but then "there will be new heavens and a new earth: yes, God will make all things new [Revelation 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.1); [Revelation 21:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.5)." What will be the state of men's minds at that time, may be gathered from the description given of it by the Prophet Isaiah [Isaiah 12:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.3-6); Blessed and glorious state! "The peace of all will flow down as a river," and the joy of all be unspeakable and glorified [Isaiah 35:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 35.6); [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 35.10); "God will cause them universally and without ceasing to triumph in Christ [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 2.14);" and to live as on the very confines of Heaven itself."

Improvement—

Let us inquire,

1. Whence it is that we are comparatively in so low a state?

It is manifest that religion, though perhaps flourishing in comparison of what it was a century ago, is still but at a low ebb. If we look at the ordinances, public, private, and social, they are far from being attended with that life and power that they were in the apostolic age. And whence is this? Are we straitened in our God? No: "we are straitened in our own affections;" we do not pant after the life and power of godliness, as the first converts did: and "we have not, because we ask not." O that we were more earnest and constant in prayer, forgetting all that we have received, and pressing forward for higher attainments!.

2. How we may attain a greater measure of that prosperity which the saints will enjoy in the latter day?

We must all begin with our own hearts. If all would labor for higher attainments in their own souls, the whole Church of God would revive and flourish: But an attention to others also is most desirable. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt with incredible celerity, because all, women as well as men, "repaired before their own doors [Nehemiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 3.10); [Nehemiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 3.12); [Nehemiah 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 3.23); [Nehemiah 3:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 3.28-29);" and if we labored, all of us in our own more immediate neighborhood, what might we not effect! If only we "had a mind to the work," "the work of the Lord should prosper in our hands," and the kingdom of Christ "should come with power" in the midst of us.

OBADIAH

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Obadiah 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Obad 1.1)

DISCOURSE 1197

BLESSED EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE LATTER DAYS

[Obadiah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Obad 1.17). Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

IT is curious to observe throughout the prophetic writings, that the richest promises relating to the Christian Church follow, and, I had almost said, arise out of, denunciations of vengeance against the enemies of God: the design of God being to display thereby, in a more abundant measure, the riches of his grace towards his chosen people. The great scope of Obadiah's prophecy is to warn the Edomites of the destruction that awaited them. But, regarding them as representing all the Church's enemies, by whatever name they are designated, he proceeds to declare, that the Church shall triumph over them, and, through the power and grace of Christ, be established in the full enjoyment of all her privileges. The time to which he looks forward for the accomplishment of these things is the latter day, when the Jews shall be restored to their own land, and be, in their national capacity, an emblem of the success that shall be given to the Christian Church throughout the world.

In elucidation of the prophecy, we shall consider,

I. The deliverance here spoken of—

It certainly, in its primary and literal sense, refers to the contest which shall take place, between the Jews at the time of their restoration, and their enemies who will oppose their settlement in the land of Canaan. But the spiritual sense is that which was most prominent in the writer's mind. The deliverance is certainly that which the Lord Jesus Christ had undertaken to accomplish for his Church and people Compare [Joel 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.32) with [Romans 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.13); [Romans 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.26).

This has already come to Zion—

The Lord Jesus Christ has come according to all that was foretold concerning him; and has entered the lists against the enemies of his Church, and has triumphed over them. "By his death, he overcame him who had the power of death, that is, the devil:" and having "spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them openly upon the cross," he, in his ascension, "led captivity itself captive;" and has left his people to fight only with a vanquished enemy [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.11). By his atoning blood he has delivered his people out of the hands of justice, which demanded the execution of the sentence denounced against them by the law. Having "found, and offered, a ransom for them," he has authoritatively said, "Deliver them from going down into the pit" of Hell. By his all-powerful grace, too, he has communicated this deliverance to thousands and tens of thousands, whom he has turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. To millions of prisoners he has said, Go forth, and show yourselves; and they have broken their bonds, and come forth to light and liberty.

It is also experienced yet daily—

How many witnesses are there in this place, and wherever the Gospel is preached with fidelity, who can set their seal to this blessed truth! Many can say, 'I was once a slave to sin, and led captive by the devil at his will: but now "the Son of God has made me free; and I am free indeed:" he has brought my soul out of prison, and set my feet at liberty. Nor am I any more "in bondage to the fear of death" and judgment; for "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him" '.

But it will be yet more largely experienced in the latter days—

Zion shall then lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes; and all the nations of the earth shall flow unto her, as the center of their union, and the treasury of their bliss. Then shall "Satan indeed fall from Heaven like lightning:" then shall "the prince of this world be utterly cast out." Then shall Dagon fall before the ark in every quarter of the universe: and all the slaves of sin and Satan be brought "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." Then shall the jubilee trumpet sound in every place: "the preaching of deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," will then be accompanied with such power from on high, that it shall be to all, what the trumpet of the archangel shall be in the day of judgment, an effectual call, "as life from the dead;" so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

With this deliverance will be seen,

II. Its never-failing attendant—

In no place under Heaven, but in Zion, is holiness found. The semblance of it may be seen in many places; its reality nowhere. Let us understand what holiness is—

It is not a conformity to external rights, nor a practice of mere heathen virtues; but a real conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. It is the image of God upon the soul; and an exhibition of it in the whole of our spirit and conduct. It is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and a "walking in all things as he walked".

This, from the time that deliverance is given to Zion, shall be found there—

It was the great design of our Deliverer to produce it in his Church: he "gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity:" and "he is called Jesus," not so much because he saves his people from destruction, as "because he saves them from their sins." Holiness is the characteristic mark whereby the people whom he has delivered are to be distinguished: they are "purified unto Christ, a peculiar people zealous of good works." Whoever professes to have experienced his deliverance, without being truly and universally "righteous, even as Christ himself is righteous," is declared by God himself to be "a liar [1 John 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.4); [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3); [1 John 3:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.6-10)." Believers are "his epistles" to the world, that they who will not look into the book of revelation, may see in them a living exhibition of his will. In every department of the divine life, the heavenliness of their minds, the sweetness of their spirit, and the blamelessness of their lives, they "shine as lights in a dark world:" the effulgence indeed is not equally bright in all: there are stars of a greater, and of a lesser magnitude; but in all it is manifest, both from the uniformity and continuance of their splendor, that they are upheld in their orbits by the power of God, and irradiated with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness: in a word, holiness is an essential part of the deliverance itself; and therefore must exist in every member of the Church of Christ. Deliverance, in this view, is most desirable: yet is its value greatly enhanced by,

III. Its ultimate effect—

Here the reference to the restoration of the Jews, especially as connected with the destruction of all their enemies, is more marked: "The House of Jacob shall possess their possessions;" every tribe having the portion peculiarly allotted to them verse 18–20. That they will vanquish all who oppose them, and finally be established in the quiet possession of their own land, is so plain, that it cannot reasonably admit a doubt See [Jeremiah 30:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.3); [Jeremiah 30:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.10); [Jeremiah 30:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.18-19); [Jeremiah 46:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 46.27). [Zechariah 12:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.6-9); But there is yet a higher sense in which the prophecy shall be fulfilled. The land of Canaan was typical of a far nobler inheritance, which all the House of Jacob shall possess.

Believers "do now enter into rest"—

Our blessed Lord promised rest unto all who should come to him weary and heavy-laden with their sins: and this rest he now bestows: and the Canaan which the Israelites entered into, is but a shadow of it. That "land indeed flowed with milk and honey:" but who can tell what delicious repasts are provided for the soul that believes in Christ? Who but He who possesses "the white stone, can tell the name that is written on it [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.17)." Who can adequately inform us what the peace of God is, or what "the joy of faith?" The one, we are told, passes understanding; and the other is altogether unutterable. These, with a multitude of other blessings, are even now the believer's portion; and he so enters into the possession of them, as to be able to defy all his enemies to rob him of the enjoyment of them? [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.35-39). It was not the power of their enemies, but the greatness of their sins, that expelled the Jewish people from their land: nor shall any enemy be able to prevail against us, if only we are faithful to ourselves. And, happily for us, that stability is ensured to us by God himself, who "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."

But the full possession of it is reserved for another world—

There is an inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world: and in due time they shall enjoy it in all its fullness. The believer may now look forward to it with assured confidence. Here he is a minor only; and therefore, though the heir, he differs but little from a servant: he has so much of the inheritance as is suited to his condition, and sufficient for his necessities: but in the last day he will have the very same possession of his inheritance that Christ himself has: his vision of Jehovah will be most bright; his communion with him most intimate; his communications from him most abundant: and he will know that eternity itself will be the duration of his bliss. "He shall be a pillar in the temple of his God, and shall go no more out."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who oppose the Church of God—

As in their journey to the land of Canaan, the Edomites and other nations opposed the progress of the Children of Israel; and as in the latter days there will be a confederacy of many people to prevent their re-establishment in their former inheritance; so now at this time, and indeed in every age, the men of this world "have evil will at Zion," and exert themselves in every way to obstruct the progress of all who are going thitherward. But what success had their enemies against Israel of old? or what shall they have in the day spoken of in our text? Truly the strongest of them will be only "like sheep before a lion, who will go through, and tread them down, and tear in pieces; and none shall deliver them [Micah 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.8)." Thus shall it be with those who now oppose and persecute the Church of God. We say not that the people of God will be the instruments of God's vengeance; for that they cannot be, seeing that "the weapons of their warfare are not carnal:" but this we say, that "no weapon formed against God's people shall prosper;" and that all who seek their ruin shall be put to shame: they "fight against God:" they "kick against the pricks:" and in due time a suitable recompense shall be given them. God, when denouncing his judgments against Edom, reminds them of particular evils, which, however gratifying they were to their malignant spirits at the time, they should not have committed: thus also will he bring to the remembrance of his enemies all the evils they have committed, and especially the treatment they have shown to his Church and people: and then they will find, that it would have been "better to have had a millstone tied round about their necks, and to have been east into the sea, than to have offended one of his little ones." The Lord grant, that men may no longer make Christ a stone of stumbling, lest "it fall upon them, and crush them to powder!"

2. Those who are looking for redemption in Jerusalem—

It may be that some are discouraged, because they have not yet experienced deliverance to the extent they wish: they seem to themselves as if their long and willing captivity to sin and Satan precluded them from the hope of mercy: and they are ready to say with Israel of old, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered?" But our answer is, like that of the prophet, "Yes; thus says the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contends with you, and I will save your children [Isaiah 49:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.25-26)." Be not afraid: though you are but as "a worm, yet shall you thresh the mountains [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 41.14-15);" and the weaker you feel yourselves to be, the stronger in reality you are, because God has pledged himself to "perfect his own strength in your weakness." Expect then deliverance, with all its attendant benefits: and rest assured, that none shall pluck you out of the hands of your great Deliverer. God has sworn, that "he will plant you in the heavenly land, assuredly with his whole heart, and with his whole soul:" and "what he has promised, he is able also to perform." "Faithful is He who has called you; who also will do it."

JONAH

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

[Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 1.6)

DISCOURSE 1198

JONAH REPROVED BY THE MARINERS

[Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 1.6). So the ship-master came to him, and said unto him, What meanest you, O sleeper? arise, call upon your God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

PERHAPS in all the sacred records there is not to be found a more strange and inconsistent character than the Prophet Jonah. That he was on the whole a good man, we have every reason to believe: but his spirit was on many occasions so contrary to what we might have expected to find in a prophet of the Lord, that, if we did not know from our own hearts what is in man, we should not have conceived it possible that such contrarieties could be combined in the same character. The very first we hear of him is, that he so conducted himself as to bring upon himself a severe and just rebuke from a heathen mariner. Having received from God a commission to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and there to proclaim the indignation of God against them for their impieties, he fled to Joppa, and from thence took ship for Tarshish. hoping that he should thus avoid the necessity that was laid upon him of delivering a message so replete with pain to them, and of danger to himself. But the Lord sent a storm to arrest him in his impious course: and so violent was the storm, that all hope of saving the ship by human efforts was taken away, and no resource remained to the mariners but prayer to God. While all the crew were crying to the gods which they worshiped, Jonah was indifferent and unconcerned, and had fallen fast asleep in the sides of the ship. In this situation he was when the ship-master came to him, and administered the reproof which we have just heard.

Let us consider this reproof,

I. As addressed to Jonah—

The occasion of the reproof you have already heard in few words. But there are two things which call for more particular attention; namely,

1. The state of Jonah at that time—

How can we account for his being so supine in the midst of such imminent danger? One would have supposed that he, a prophet of the Lord, would have improved that occasion for the benefit of the mariners, (as the Apostle Paul did afterwards, in similar circumstances,) and that he would have employed himself in directing the poor ignorant heathens to Jehovah, as the true and only source of all good: or if, from the low state of his piety at that time, we might conceive him to be indisposed for such an holy exercise; and that, when in an act of rebellion himself, he would be ill fitted for the office of calling others to repentance; we should at least expect him to be alarmed with a sense of his own guilt, and to be deprecating the Divine displeasure on his own soul. Yet, behold! of all the ship's company, he alone is unconcerned; and makes that, which was to all others a season of terror and dismay, an occasion for laying himself down quietly to sleep. That Peter was sleeping quietly on the night preceding his expected martyrdom, we do not wonder; because he was suffering for righteousness' sake, and knew that death would be to him the gate of Heaven. But we wonder that Jonah was able to close his eyes in sleep, when death was apparently so near at hand; and he must know, that, if he died, he would be cut off in the very act of willful transgression. But his insensibility at that time shows us, in a very striking manner, the true effect of sin; which hardens the heart, and stupefies the conscience; brutalizes the soul, and renders it indifferent to all that concerns its eternal welfare. Paul tells us this; "Take heed," says he, "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 3.13)." He speaks also of our "conscience being seared by it, as with a hot iron;" and of our being made "past feeling." Thus it was with Jonah at this time: and all who are acquainted with their own hearts, will see that this stupidity of his was the proper effect of his willful transgression. Repentance takes away the heart of stone, and substitutes a heart of flesh: and sin, in proportion as it is indulged, re-converts the heart of flesh to stone.

2. The sentiments contained in the reproof—

We are amazed to hear such sentiments proceed from the mouth of a heathen mariner: but we are convinced, that there are much stronger notices of truth remaining in the heart of fallen man, than is commonly supposed. There was not indeed in these people any distinct knowledge of Jehovah: but there was a belief in a superintending Providence, who ordered everything according to his own sovereign will, and was able to interpose effectually in behalf of those who sought him; yes, moreover, that even though we sought him only in our extremity, there still was reason to hope that he would hear our cry, and grant to us the desired deliverance. What God the ship-master had an eye to, we do not know: but supposing him, though under some mistaken name, to be looking to Jehovah, his views are precisely such as were avowed and inculcated by the Prophet Joel, when he said, "Rend your heart, and turn unto the Lord your God: for who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him [Joel 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.13-14)."

This we consider as encouraging to those who go forth to convert the heathen: we consider it as showing, that, however obscured by superstition, there are in the minds of the most ignorant heathen some notices of truth, which, if duly improved by an instructor, will greatly facilitate the admission of other truths, which can be known only through the medium of a special revelation. The existence and attributes of a Supreme Being are here acknowledged; and the duty of his intelligent creatures to call upon him is also declared: and whoever diligently improves these more obvious truths, will, we doubt not, be gradually guided into all truth. But when we behold a prophet of the Lord, who should have been a teacher of others, himself thus reproved by a heathen mariner, we blush for him; and blush also for ourselves, well knowing, how much we ourselves need to have these truths impressed more forcibly on our own minds, and how rarely they operate on us to the extent that they did on those uninstructed mariners.

With these feelings it will be profitable to us to consider the reproof,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

We are not indeed altogether in the situation of Jonah; yet we approximate more nearly to it than may at first sight be imagined.

We are all in some degree sleeping in the midst of danger—

God has given to us, as he did to Jonah, a work to do: and it is a work which we do not naturally affect: we are averse to engage in it: there are some considerations operating in our minds to deter us from it: we think it may expose us to difficulties, which we would gladly avoid; and subject us to troubles, which we care not to encounter. Hence we "flee from the presence of the Lord;" and are glad to go any where, and engage in anything, that may afford us an excuse for our willful neglect. In this state the curse of God follows us wherever we may go, his judgments hang over us, and "his wrath abides upon us." The children of disobedience, wherever they are, are objects of his heavy displeasure.

Yet, while under these circumstances, what is the state of our minds? Are we striving like the mariners, to obtain mercy at his hands? Are we not rather, for the most part, like Jonah, sunk down into a deep sleep? Yes; this is the case with the generality altogether; with the better part of us, in great measure; and with the best among us, in some degree.

Behold the generality, how careless are they and indifferent, though on the brink and precipice of eternity!: Even the more considerate part have no such activity and earnestness as the occasion calls for: And where is there one among us, who does not fluctuate in his zeal for God, and sometimes, like the wise virgins, give way to slumbering and sleeping, when we should be watching for the coming of our Lord?.

To all then may the reproof in our text be well administered—

What meanest you, O sleeper, whoever you are? Are you not in danger? Search the sacred records; and see, whether the wrath of God be not revealed against all the children of disobedience? What if you be insensible of this danger? are you therefore the more safe? Was Jonah's life the less in jeopardy because he was unconscious of his peril? Neither then is your ruin a whit the less certain, because you are not conscious of your exposure to it.

Is there any way for your escape, but that of crying mightily to God for mercy? No other way is provided: all your own efforts will be as ineffectual as the mariner's labor was. You must betake yourself to prayer; for none but an omnipotent arm can save you: there is no deliverance from your guilt, but through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, no acceptance with the Father, but through his beloved Son; no other name given under Heaven whereby you can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.

Once more—Is there not abundant encouragement to pray? Look at the promises contained in Holy Writ: see how "exceeding great and precious they are;" and then say, whether you have any reason to despond. Had you but a perhaps in your favor, it were a sufficient reason for all possible earnestness and prayer. That was all the hope which these mariners had. But you have the strongest assurances, of a "God that cannot lie," that you "shall not seek his face in vain," but that "whatever you shall ask in his Son's name shall be done for you."

What meanest you then, O sleeper? What excuse can you offer for your unreasonable conduct? Are you dreaming of future opportunities to call upon God, when, for ought you know, the ship may sink with you the next instant, and your soul may be plunged into the depths of Hell? "Arise," I say, "and call upon your God," and lose not another moment in a concern of such infinite importance.

In the mean time, use all the means that you can for yourself. "Cast out all that you have" in the world, rather than suffer it to sink you into perdition. If you had all the wealth of the universe, it would but ill compensate for the loss of your soul. Nor let it be thought that I speak to those only who are determined rebels against God: no: if there be a Jonah here; a professor of godliness, who is in a state of departure from his God, him I would more especially address. Know, you unhappy fugitive, that God will not let you pass unpunished: on the contrary, he will the rather follow you with some tremendous storm, and send you into the depths of Hell (if I may so speak) in this world, to deliver you from perdition in the world to come. "Awake then from your slumber, that Christ may give you light." Surely "it is high time for you to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Professors, "let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch, and be sober." With the exception of the terror with which they were agitated, the state of the heathen mariners should be ours; nor should we cease from our pleadings, until we are brought in safety to our desired haven. We must not give occasion for that sarcastic reflection, "In trouble have they visited you; they poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them:" no: we must pray without ceasing;" we must "pray and not faint:" and then we may be assured, that, whatever storms or difficulties we have to contend with, "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord." Only let us think upon God, and God will most tenderly "think on us:" he will maintain towards us "thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give us an expected end."

[Jonah 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 2.6)

DISCOURSE 1199

JONAH RESTORED FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH

[Jonah 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 2.6), Yet have you brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.

IT is of the highest importance to have seasons of recollection for the more solemn investigation of the state of our souls. Not a day should be closed without serious reflections on our conduct through the day. On particular occasions it would be well to commit them to writing, with a view to our future humiliation or encouragement. Jonah's example in this respect is worthy of imitation. Having received from God a commission to denounce his judgments against Nineveh, and being afraid, that, after all, God would exercise mercy towards them, and make him appear a false prophet, he declined the office that had been assigned him, and endeavored to "flee from the presence of the Lord." But a storm overtook him; and he was cast into the sea, and swallowed by a fish; and then, being preserved alive in that extraordinary situation, he thought on his ways, and cried unto his God for mercy. After his deliverance, he called to remembrance the exercises of his mind during his perilous confinement; and recorded them, for the benefit of the Church to the end of time. He tells us, that at first he began to despair; conceiving that "the Lord had cast him out of his sight." But, knowing that nothing was impossible with God, he directed his eyes towards Heaven, and prayed. His prayer was heard, and the desired mercy was given to him. This he acknowledges in the words before us: in which we have,

I. An instructive history—

Every part of this history is replete with instruction. Other parts of Holy Writ inform us of the frailties of God's people, and exhibit Noah, Lot, David, Peter, and others, in very humiliating conditions. But there is a peculiarity in the character of Jonah that distinguishes him from all others, and gives us a deep insight into the human heart. We cannot however stop to enter minutely into his character, or into the diversified lessons which his history would teach us. We shall confine ourselves to two observations, which are of a general nature and of universal importance:

1. Rebellion against God will surely bring upon us his heavy displeasure—

Jonah might think lightly perhaps of the sin he had committed, when refusing to execute the commission he had received: and he certainly was unmindful of the danger he had brought upon himself, even while all who sailed with him in the ship were in the utmost terror. But God was visiting him for his iniquity; and, in order to the discovery of it, suggested to the minds of the mariners to ascertain, by a lot, who the guilty person was, for whose sake the storm was raised. The lot fell on Jonah: and he, being impeached thus by God himself, confessed his crime; and prescribed, as the only means of pacifying the Deity, that he himself should be cast into the sea. Thus did vengeance overtake him. And shall we sin with impunity? What though we think light of our sins, and sleep in security when we should be praying to our God; does God estimate sin by our standard? or is danger at all more remote, because we do not see it? Of this we may be assured, that "evil will hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him;" and, however long we may elude its pursuit, it will seize upon us at last, as its legitimate prey. The declaration of God to every impenitent person is, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

2. Whatever effects of his displeasure we may now feel, the prayer of penitence and faith will deliver us from them—

A more desperate condition than that of Jonah cannot well be conceived See his description of it, verse 2, 3, 5. Yet from thence was he brought by the efficacy of fervent prayer verse 2, 4, 7. Be it so then; we have sinned against the Lord in a very grievous manner; and we are at this moment under his chastising hand; still "Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious? has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" No: the Lord is merciful and gracious: and, if only we have a heart to pray, we need not doubt but that he has an ear to hear. Were we at the bottom of the sea, yet if we were able to look unto his holy Temple, we should not look in vain. We might not be delivered with respect to the body; but the soul should find acceptance at God's hands, and be made a monument of his sparing mercy.

We dwell the less on the historical view of Jonah's deliverance, because we wish you to notice it more particularly as,

II. A glorious type—

We are always cautious of exceeding the bounds of truth and soberness in the explanation of types. On this account we altogether omit, what some have laid a stress upon, the idea of Christ's offering up himself a sacrifice to God for the purpose of averting his wrath from us. And we should be inclined to limit the typical import of this history to the resurrection of Christ, if he himself had not given us a more extended view of it. But, in the place where he speaks of Jonah as being "a sign" to the people, he calls him "the Prophet Jonah," and mentions the remarkable success of his ministrations [Matthew 12:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 12.38-41). We are induced therefore to consider the whole of this history as designating the ministry of Jesus;

1. In its temporary suspension—

The casting of Jonah into the sea, and his being swallowed by a fish, effectually, as it should seem, put an end to his mission. Whatever gracious intentions God had formed respecting the Ninevites, they were now, to all appearance, frustrated; so that, unless God should send to them by some other prophet, his judgments would come upon them without warning, and without a remedy.

Such was also the distressful, and apparently irremediable, state, to which the world was reduced by the death of Christ. His enemies triumphed when they saw him dead upon the cross, and committed to the silent tomb. His friends and followers then concluded, that they had been mistaken in their expectations, and that the redemption of Israel which they had looked for at his hands was a hopeless phantom [Luke 24:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 24.21). To guard them against this erroneous conclusion, our blessed Lord expressly told his disciples, that "he should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

2. Its speedy restoration—

After three days, Jonah was, by God's overruling providence, disgorged in safety upon dry land; and his commission to preach unto the Ninevites was renewed.

Thus by the resurrection of Christ were the hopes of a ruined world revived. Not only was the ministry of our Lord himself renewed, but all his Apostles also received afresh their commission to preach the Gospel to every creature. Could the Ninevites have foreseen the effect of Jonah's deliverance, how would their hearts have leaped for joy! And well may all the nations of the earth rejoice in the tidings of a risen Savior, through whom repentance and remission of sins are preached, and by whom the most abandoned of sinners may be brought to God.

3. Its ultimate success—

Wonderful indeed was the effect of Jonah's ministrations! and we may well suppose that the relation of his miraculous preservation and deliverance contributed in no small degree to the success of his mission. The people of Nineveh would necessarily conclude, that he was sent of God, and that the denunciations delivered by him would be fulfilled.

And was not this the effect of Christ's resurrection? The very point which all the Apostles most insisted on, was this: "they preached Jesus and the Resurrection:" they preached, "that he died according to the Scriptures, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." From hence the inference was clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world: and so rapidly did this truth prevail, that in one day there were converted to him three thousand souls; and, in a very short space of time, the whole Roman empire was filled with his acknowledged followers.

We may learn from hence,

1. On what a firm basis our religion stands—

The sign which above all others our blessed Lord laid the greatest stress upon, was his fulfilling of this type. Though he gave innumerable proofs of his divine mission, yet it was to this chiefly, yes, to this only, that he referred the confirmed sceptics. He said, in fact, "I shall die, and rise again the third day without seeing corruption, and shall live for evermore, to perfect the work assigned me. If I rise on the third day, then you will know that I am the Messiah: if I do not, I am contented that you shall account me an impostor." Now, brethren, you know the means which his enemies used to prevent any collusion among his disciples; yes, and how incredulous his disciples themselves were; and consequently, you are sure that he did indeed rise, and that all which God has spoken by him, or of him, is true; it is true that the impenitent and unbelieving shall perish; but that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."

2. What has been done for every believer—

Though Jonah stands alone in his particular line of experience, there is not a believer whose soul has not been in as perilous a condition as Jonah himself was at the bottom of the sea; nor one who has not obtained deliverance by the very same means, humiliation and prayer. The experience of David was not unlike to Jonah's [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 40.1-3); and that of the Church of old is painted in expressions precisely similar to those in the chapter before us [Lamentations 3:54-58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.54-58);. Happy, happy they, who have obtained mercy of the Lord, and can thus attest the efficacy of believing prayer! Let not your feelings, brethren, be forgotten; but get them written in the tablet of your hearts; and let your acknowledgments be suited to the mercies given unto you.

3. What the Lord will do for all who call upon him—

Our blessed Savior, by dying for our offences and rising again for our justification, has procured for us whatever we stand in need of. Even in the denunciations of God's wrath there is an implied promise of mercy, if we repent and turn to God. However great therefore our guilt may be, or however imminent our danger, let us remember, that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Let us remember, that "Jesus is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that, though we were as much "in the belly of Hell" as a living creature can be, our cry should come before him into his holy temple, and "he would bring up our souls out of the pit of corruption;" "after two days he would revive us; in the third day he would raise us up, and we should live in his sight [Hosea 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.1-2);."

[Jonah 2:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 2.7-9)

DISCOURSE 1200

JONAH'S REFLECTIONS IN THE WHALE'S BELLY

[Jonah 2:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 2.7-9). When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto you, into your holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto you with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

TO take a retrospect of our feelings, under circumstances of peculiar trial, is exceedingly beneficial. There are times when we realize in our minds truths which at other seasons have had no weight, and produced on us no effect. Thus Jonah, after his deliverance from the belly of the fish, called to mind, and transmitted for our good, the reflections which occupied his soul in that peculiarly awful situation, and in the near prospect of death. He here records,

I. The mercy given—

This was such as never was given to any other man, either before or since—

The history you well know. But there are some points which we must particularly notice on this occasion. He was delivered, you know, from the belly of a fish. But mark the time when this mercy was given to him: it was when he was in the very act of rebellion against God: Mark also the means: it was by a miraculous influence of God upon the fish, directing it to go to the sea-shore, and to vomit him forth upon the dry land. The occasion also must especially be noticed: it was in answer to a prayer offered from the bottom of the sea: "When Jonah's soul fainted within him, he remembered the Lord: and his prayer came in unto God, even into his holy temple."

Though we have never been in a situation like his, have not we also wonderful mercies to recount?

We have all of us, more or less, been in situations of danger, either by sickness or by accident, when we were in a state most unprepared to meet our God; and when, if we had been taken into the eternal world, we must have forever perished in our sins. On some such occasion, perhaps, we have reflected on our state, and felt our need of mercy, and cried unto our God, and obtained mercy at his hands: and here we are living witnesses for God, that "he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live".

Let us pass on to consider,

II. The conviction wrought—

Jonah had known, before, the folly of idolatry, and the wisdom of relying wholly upon God. But now he felt this in a way that he had not done before. Now too he felt, that to flee from the presence of God, as he had done, and to decline the service of his God, and to seek happiness in a way of disobedience to God, was folly in the extreme; and that the only way to be truly happy, was to serve, and honor, and obey the Lord.

And were not such our convictions, also, in the prospect of death?

None of us need be told that the creature is but a broken cistern; and that "to forsake the fountain of living waters for cisterns of our own formation, is a great evil [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13);." But, while we acknowledge this as a speculative truth, who feels it practically, so as to act upon it, and to have his life regulated in accordance with it? In a time of health, we see perhaps what is right, but do it not; nor have in our souls any fixed purpose to carry into effect the dictates of our mind and judgment. But in the near approach of death these truths assume a reality and importance which we never discerned before. Once, perhaps, we could laugh at them, as the dreams of enthusiasm, and the peculiarities of a sect: but in that solemn hour when we are expecting to be summoned into the immediate presence of our God, we bitterly regret that we have given so little weight to these considerations; and we then are convinced, indeed, that "in observing and following lying vanities we have madly forsaken our own mercies." The convict that is about to perish by the hand of the public executioner, however obdurate he has been in times past, feels this; and the public feel it for him. Would to God that, in our time of health and prosperity, we all felt it for ourselves!

The result of that conviction we shall see in,

III. The determination formed—

Now would the prophet henceforth praise his God: and, having made vows to God in the hour of his extremity, he would now pay them; and be a living witness for God, that "salvation is of the Lord" for every soul that will seek it, however deep his guilt, or however desperate his condition.

These are the determinations, Brethren, which I desire you, in dependence upon God's help, to form—

Look to the mercies given to you in the hour of your necessity, when you cried unto the Lord: look at your deliverance from death and Hell: look at a resurrection given to you, from death to life, from misery to peace, from Hell to Heaven; a resurrection like unto that of Jonah; or rather like to that which was typified by it, the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: and then tell me, whether you should not "sacrifice unto the Lord with the voice of thanksgiving," and your every word be praise: Call to mind, also, the vows which you made in the hour of trouble; how you would live henceforth, not unto yourselves, but to your God; and not for time only, but for eternity. Now, beware that you forget not the resolutions then formed. Beg of God that they may not, as is too generally the case, vanish as the early dew that passes away. They are all recorded in the book of God's remembrance; and if violated by you, in return for all the mercies given unto you, they will fearfully aggravate your eternal condemnation: Now, too, be living witnesses for God, for the encouragement of others. Show to others what a salvation you have found, and found in your lowest extremity, in answer to the prayer of faith. Who can tell what a blessing you may he to those around you? Doubtless the mercy given to Jonah was, under God, the salvation of all that great and populous city to which he preached. His miraculous deliverance gave, so to speak, an irresistible energy to his word; insomuch that all, from the king on the throne to the lowest of the populace, instantly turned in penitential sorrow to the Lord. So you, when you can say to others, "What my eyes have seen, and ears have heard, and hands have handled, of the word of life, the same declare I unto you," may he instrumental to the honoring of God your Savior, and to the saving of many souls alive.

On a review of this subject, see,

1. How wonderful are the ways of God!

Who would have thought to what even the rebellion of Jonah should lead; and how the punishing of that should lead to the salvation of his soul, and of the souls of many others? Truly, "God's ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known." But from all this we may learn never to despond; but rather, however desperate our condition may be, to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him".

2. How marvelous is the efficacy of converting grace!

See what a change is wrought in Jonah; though, indeed, far less than might have been expected. But to change our rebellious hearts into a frame of obediential love and gratitude; and to renew us in our inner man, so as to make us as lights in a dark world; this is, and must be, the effect of true conversion. See then, brethren, that you offer unto God the sacrifice of praise continually; and especially for your redemption from all the penal effects of sin, through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. See, too, that you live to God as his redeemed people, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of your life; and that you labor, in every possible way, to commend to others the salvation which you yourselves have found.

[Jonah 3:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.8-10)

DISCOURSE 1201

REPENTANCE OF THE NINEVITES A Fast Sermon.

[Jonah 3:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.8-10). Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth; and cry mightily unto God: yes, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

MEN of profane minds pour contempt on national fasts, under an idea that they can be of no use for averting of national judgments. But in my text there is abundant proof that God will hear the prayers of the contrite, and be gracious to them at the voice of their cry.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, was an exceeding large city, so large, that it would occupy a man three days to walk round it and through its principal streets. The wickedness of it was great; and God, having determined that in the space of forty days he would involve it, with all its inhabitants, in destruction, he sent his servant Jonah to advertise them of their impending ruin. The prophet had proceeded but one day's journey into the city, and behold, all ranks of people, from the highest to the lowest, having heard his message, trembled at God's displeasure, and united in humbling themselves before him, if perhaps they might prevail upon him to "turn from his fierce anger." The success of their efforts leads me to set before you the conduct of the Ninevites,

I. As a record for our instruction—

Though addressed by a perfect stranger who belonged to a despised nation, the people believed his testimony, delivered to them as it was in Jehovah's name; and, though they were heathens, unused to acknowledge the one true God, they set themselves to implore mercy at his hands, and to deprecate his threatened judgments. The king and his nobles proclaimed a fast; in the observance of which all his subjects cordially concurred: and so intent were they on a due observance of the day, that all put on sackcloth from the least of them to the greatest, and even the king himself "laid aside his royal robes, and clothed himself in sackcloth, and sat in ashes:" nor did any of them so much as "eat bread or drink water" the whole day. Even the herds and the flocks were kept without any species of food or refreshment, that by their privations they might participate in the general grief, and by their moanings produce on the minds of the penitents an increased effect.

To their fasting they added prayer: yes, "they cried mightily unto God." They were not content with formal unmeaning acknowledgments. They bewailed their guilt; they saw how deeply they had merited the Divine displeasure; and they strove by earnest supplications to ward off from themselves the judgments which the avenging Deity was about to inflict upon them. The sincerity of their repentance they manifested by an instantaneous reformation of their lives; all of them turning from their besetting sins, and engaging to consecrate themselves to Jehovah as a holy and obedient people. How many of them maintained their steadfastness we know not: but from the mercy given to them in answer to their prayers, we are led to hope that many became true servants of the living God.

Thus, at all events, they sought for mercy; and thus they obtained the deliverance they implored.

Now then let me call your attention to their conduct,

II. As a pattern for your imitation—

Sorry am I to say, that there is occasion for the same humiliation on your part, as you have seen in them—

Here the particular occasion (war, pestilence, famine, or whatever it be) should be set forth; And this I am authorized to declare, that, whatever the second causes may have been, the evil itself is from the Lord: for, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord has not dune it [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.6);?" Yes, it is a chastisement from God on account of our sins: and I call upon you not only to "believe" this, but to "hear the rod, and him that has appointed it." If we will not view the hand of God in these dispensations, we can have no hope that they shall be exchanged for mercies: but to acknowledge him in them will be the best preparation for the reception of mercies from him, and the most certain prelude to his bestowment of them.

I must add, too, that your humiliation must resemble theirs—

In a season of affliction fasting is highly proper. We see all the most eminent saints in Scripture having recourse to this under the pressure of any heavy calamity: and, in the history before us, we behold the king, and his nobles, together with all the inhabitants of a populous city, approaching the Divine Majesty with this expression of their grief and penitence. This is a fit pattern for us at this time.

But with fasting we must engage in fervent prayer. Luke-warm petitions will never find acceptance with God. We must "cry mightily unto the Lord, even with strong crying and tears," if we would obtain from him the deliverance which we so greatly need.

And, to prove the sincerity of our hearts, we must turn, everyone of us, from our besetting sins to newness of life. No fasting will be of any avail without this; no, nor will prayer be heard without it. If our humiliation be not accompanied with this, God will say to us, as to his people of old, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness [Isaiah 58:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.5-6);?" Search out then the peculiar evils which you are most accustomed to commit, and cast them off even though they be dear to you as a right hand or a right eye: and then may we hope that God will be gracious to us at the voice of our cry, and turn away from his fierce anger with which he has visited our guilty land.

If you will not thus turn unto the Lord, your guilt will be greatly aggravated—

Who were the people to whom this warning was delivered? Heathens. By whom were they addressed? A perfect stranger. What hope was held out to them of averting the threatened judgments? None at all. Not so much as a constructive promise was given them by any exhortation to repent. All the encouragement they felt was derived from a mere surmise: "Who Can Tell, whether God will turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" On the mere presumption that the exercise of mercy towards them was possible, they, at the very first announcement of God's displeasure, turned to him, as it were, with their whole hearts; and thus obtained mercy. But you, brethren, are the professed servants of God, and followers of Christ. And you have been warned ten thousand times, and that too by those whom you yourselves acknowledge as appointed of God, to watch for your souls. You have had exceeding great and precious promises also set before you, with most assured declarations from God, that no one of you shall ever seek his face in vain. Say then, whether these Ninevites will not rise up in judgment to condemn you at the last day, if you dissemble with God on this occasion, as too many of us through the whole land, it is to be feared, are doing? Look at our king and his nobles, and at his subjects throughout the empire, and say, Whether there be any resemblance between our humiliation, and that which we have noticed in these penitent heathens? In them it was produced at the very first instant: but we have been warned ten thousand times in vain. Oh! could we but see any measure of the penitence among us that was evinced by them, I should have no fear but that the judgments under which we labor should be removed, or sanctified to our greater good.

In the case before us, God, in reversing the sentence denounced against that city, might appear weak, or mutable, or unworthy to be feared: and, at all events his prophet would appear to them as a deceiver. But He was more careful of their welfare than of his own honor, or of his servant's reputation: and having produced a change in the people, he instantly changed his dispensations towards them. Not that the change was in him: it was in them only: for the removal of his threatened judgments was rather an execution, than a reversal, of his own decrees, which from eternity have been to pardon the penitent, and to bless the contrite. But in your ease there is no such obstacle in his way: for he has told you, that if you confess your sins, lie will not only forgive them, but display and magnify his own faithfulness and justice in that very dispensation towards you [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.9).

To obtain national mercies, our repentance must be national: but if there be but one among us that truly turns to God, he shall surely obtain mercy for his own soul, and be a monument of God's pardoning love to all eternity.

Let me however hope, that this occasion shall not he lost upon the nation at large: but that our fasting shall be sincere, our prayers fervent, our reformation radical, and our success complete.

[Jonah 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 4.2)

DISCOURSE 1202

THE MERCY OF GOD

[Jonah 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 4.2). I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repent you of the evil.

IN the parable of the Prodigal Son, we read of as hateful a character as can well be imagined: it is that of the elder brother, who, instead of uniting with his family in rejoicing over the recovery of the younger brother from his evil ways, took occasion, from his father's parental tenderness, to reproach him for partiality and unkindness; since, having "never rewarded his obedience with so much as a kid, he had killed for his prodigal and licentious brother the fatted calf [Luke 15:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 15.29-30);." But a far worse character is portrayed in the history before us. Indeed, it is scarcely credible, that any person of common humanity, and still less that a good man, should be capable of acting as Jonah did; even reproaching God to his face for the exercise of his mercy towards a repenting people, and making his very anticipation of that mercy a ground and an excuse for his own willful disobedience. But, beyond all doubt, the history of Jonah records a literal fact, without any exaggeration or poetical embellishment: he did, as he informs us, "know God to be a merciful God;" and he did make that very mercy a ground of wrathful indignation, and of acrimonious complaint.

The acknowledgment here made, will lead me to set before you the mercy of God,

I. As delineated by Jonah—

Jonah "knew" God to be a merciful God. He knew it,

1. From the description which God himself had given of his own character—

In answer to the prayer of Moses, God had made his glory to pass before him; and had proclaimed his name, as "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.6-7);." Here, for one single expression relating to his justice, there is a vast accumulation of rich and diversified terms to convey to our minds a just idea of his mercy; all showing, that "judgment is a strange act," to which he is utterly averse; but that mercy is the attribute, in the exercise of which is all his delight [Isaiah 28:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 28.21). [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18);.

2. From the marvelous display which had been made of it, throughout the whole of his dealings with his people in all ages—

Scarcely had the people been brought out of Egypt, before they made a golden calf, and worshiped it as the author of their deliverance. This greatly incensed God; and determined him to cut them off, and to raise up to himself another people from his servant Moses: but, at the intercession of Moses, he forgave them, and "repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto them [Exodus 32:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 32.9-14);." So, throughout all their stay in the wilderness, and in all their rebellions after their establishment in Canaan, he manifested the same compassion towards them; as David informs us: "Many times did he deliver them: but they provoked him with their counsels, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his tender mercies [Psalm 106:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 106.43-45);"

Well, therefore, might Jonah say, "He knew God to be a merciful God;" the very existence of his nation, after such long-continued and aggravated offences, being an ample proof of it.

But my chief object is, to open to you the mercy of God,

II. As illustrated in the history before us—

View it,

1. In the preservation of Jonah himself—

God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, and to proclaim to them his determination to destroy the inhabitants thereof for their iniquities; and to inform them, at the same time, that the judgment should be executed within the short space of forty days. Jonah, averse to execute the commission, fled from the presence of the Lord, and took ship, in order to go to Tarshish [Jonah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 1.3);. Commentators have invented I know not how many apologies for Jonah: for instance, that he was actuated by a jealousy for the honor of his own nation: for Nineveh, being a city of Gentiles, he thought that the going to prophesy to them would be to transfer to them an honor due to Israel alone. Others suppose that he was impelled rather by fear; since, to deliver so awful a prophecy, could not but involve him in great danger. But the real ground of his disobedience was, that which he himself acknowledges: "He knew God to be a merciful God:" and he was afraid that the people would repent; and that God, on account of their repentance, would forbear to execute his threatened judgment upon them: and that thus he himself would, eventually, be made to appear a false prophet verse 2;.

While he was going to Tarshish, he was overtaken with a storm, which reduced the ship to such extreme danger, that all the mariners betook themselves to prayer, as their only refuge. The thought occurring to their minds, that possibly the storm might have been sent as a punishment of some great offence, they drew lots, in order that they might find out the offender: and the lot falling upon Jonah, he confessed his sin, and counseled them to cast him overboard, as the only means of pacifying the offended Deity, and of saving their own lives. Thus did judgment overtake Jonah, precisely as it had overtaken Achan in the camp of Joshua: and, like Achan, he might well have been summoned into the presence of his God. But, lo! God had prepared a great fish to swallow him up, not for his destruction, but preservation: for he preserved him alive three days and three nights in the fish's belly; and caused the fish to carry him to the shore nearest to Nineveh, and to cast him on shore without any injury to his body; yes, and with unspeakable benefit accruing to his soul: nay, more; his offended God not only spared him thus, but made him in this way one of the most eminent types of Christ that ever existed in the world.

Now, if Jonah knew before that God was merciful, how fully must he have known it now! Here was a mercy so extraordinary in its kind, so blessed in its results, and so marvelous, as being given to him in the midst of his most impious rebellion, that it may well be adduced as one of the most astonishing displays of mercy that have ever been given to man from the foundation of the world.

2. In the sparing of the whole city of Nineveh—

The inhabitants of that immense city, the capital of the Assyrian empire, had filled up the measure of their iniquities [Jonah 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 1.2). But, on the very first announcement of the impending judgments, they fasted and mourned, and cried mightily to God for mercy [Jonah 3:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.4-8).—they had heard from Jonah nothing but the simple declaration, that in forty days the whole city should be overthrown. No hope of pardon had been held out to them; no idea had been suggested, that penitence, however deep or universal, would be of any avail: but they said, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not [Jonah 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.9)." And upon this mere presumption they ventured to cry for mercy. And, behold, how graciously God listened to their prayers! No sooner did he see them turning from their evil ways, than he "repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.10)." This was the very issue that Jonah had anticipated. And what an encouragement does it afford to every living man, to humble himself for his iniquities, and to implore mercy at the hands of this gracious God!

But that to which I desire chiefly to direct your attention, is God's mercy,

3. In the enduring with such inconceivable forbearance the expostulations and remonstrances of this impious man—

This act of mercy towards Nineveh, so far from exciting joy and gratitude in the bosom of Jonah, filled him only with wrath; yes, with such ungovernable wrath, that he broke forth into reproaches against God himself, on account of it. While he was in the whale's belly, he had repented; but now all his repentance had vanished, and he even vindicated before God the rebellion of which he had been guilty: and pleaded his anticipation of this very event, as a justification of it: "I pray you, Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." He even went further, and "prayed to God to take away his life;" for that, since he must appear to that people as a false prophet, "it were better for him to die than to live verse 3." How astonishing was it, that God did not strike him dead upon the spot! All the mercy that had been given to himself, Jonah had quite forgotten. It was nothing now that he had been preserved alive in the belly of the whale, and been cast uninjured upon the dry land: no, his honor was assailed; and every consideration of gratitude for his own mercies, and of compassion for above a million of souls that had been spared, was swallowed up in the apprehension that he should suffer in his credit, by reason of the revocation of God's threatened judgments. And behold how God deals with this daring transgressor! He calmly asks him, "Do you well to be angry verse 4." And when the sullen rebel goes out of the city, and sits down in earnest hope that he shall see the whole city destroyed, God takes yet further means to convince him that his anger was unreasonable, and his complaint unmerited. Truly, Jonah, you have given occasion for such a display of God's mercy as you yourself could not previously have conceived to be within the reach of possibility, or to be consistent with the other perfections of the Deity!

O, Brethren, let us see in this history,

1. What monuments of mercy we ourselves are—

Who among us has not rebelled against the commands of God; and betaken himself to any place, any company, any employment, rather than fulfill the duties to which he was averse? Who among us has not betrayed a sad indifference to the welfare of his fellow-creatures; seeking his own ease, his own interest, his own honor, when he should have been laboring rather for the salvation of those to whom he might have gained access for their good? And who has not grievously overlooked, or with base ingratitude forgotten, the deliverances that have been given to him, even from diseases or accidents that have been fatal to others, and that might have had a fatal issue with him also? Yes, who has not been unmindful even of that wonderful redemption which God has given to us, through the death and resurrection of his only dear Son?: I may add, too, who among us, when crossed in any particular object that has affected his interest, and especially his honor, has not been so vexed, as to murmur, if not directly against God, yet indirectly, being irritated against those who were the means and instruments which he employed in the dispensation that we complained of? Possibly, under some grievous trial, where our pride has been wounded, we have even wished ourselves dead, when, alas! we were far from being in a state to appear before God. Yet, notwithstanding all our provocations, here we are still on mercy's ground, when we might well have been made monuments of God's righteous displeasure! Truly, then, we may say to God, "I know that you are a gracious God, and merciful; yes, I am myself a living witness that you are slow to anger, and repent you of the evil." Yes, my dear brethren, flagrant beyond conception as was the impiety of Jonah, we, methinks, are not the persons to throw a stone at him; every one of us having indulged too much of the same spirit as he, and trodden too much in his steps. We should rather take occasion, from what we have seen in him, to humble ourselves before God; and, from the mercies given to him, to adore our God for the mercies given unto ourselves.

2. What encouragement we have to return unto our God—

If there were a mere perhaps only that we might obtain mercy from God, that alone were a sufficient encouragement to humble ourselves before God. So the Prophet Joel, using the very words of my text, informs us [Joel 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.12-14). Cite the words. Are there, then, among us those who are altogether ignorant of God, like the devoted Ninevites? I say, Humble yourselves before God, and you shall find mercy at his hands, especially if you seek it in the name of his only dear Son Jesus Christ: Or is there any professor of godliness, who, like the Prophet Jonah, has given way to sin, and grievously dishonored his holy profession? To such an one would I say, Abase yourself before God in dust and ashes. We are not, indeed, told that Jonah repented, and was forgiven; but we have reason to hope that this was the case, from his being called "the servant of God [2 Kings 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 14.25);" and if he was forgiven, who has any reason to despair? Me-thinks I see one even in as vile a spirit as he; and yet I hear God addressing him in these tender terms: "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver you up, Israel? how shall I make you as Admah? how shall I set you as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me: my repentings are kindled together: I will not execute upon you the fierceness of mine anger [Hosea 11:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 11.8-9)." Indeed, indeed, Brethren, it will be your own fault, if any of you perish. "God wills not the death of any sinner; but that he turn from his wickedness and live." I beseech you all, therefore, whatever guilt you may have contracted, never to flee from God in despondency, but to go to him, in an assured hope that he is still as gracious as ever; and that, how abundant soever have been his mercies in the days of old, they shall be renewed to you the very instant that you cry to him in the name of Jesus, who "was delivered unto death for your offences, and rose again for your justification."

[Jonah 4:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 4.5-9)

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JONAH'S GOURD

[Jonah 4:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 4.5-9). So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, until he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

WHETHER we look into the sacred volume or to the world around us, we are almost at a loss to say which is the greater, the depravity of man, or the tender mercy of our God: In the brief history which we have of the Prophet Jonah, they are both exhibited to our view in the most striking colors. Had Jonah been a professed heathen, we should have wondered less at his impiety: but being an Israelite, yes, a prophet too of the Most High God, and, we would fondly hope, a good man upon the whole, we are amazed at the very extraordinary wickedness which he manifested, and no less at the astonishing forbearance exercised by Almighty God towards him. In the former part of his history we have an account of his declining to execute the commission which God had given him to preach to the Ninevites, and, notwithstanding that rebellious conduct, his preservation in the belly of a fish. In the passage which we have now read, we see his perverseness carried to an extent that seems absolutely incredible, and God's condescension to him keeping pace with his enormities. It relates his conduct in reference to a gourd which God had caused to spring up over him, and which withered within a few hours after it had comforted him with its refreshing shade. That we may place the matter in a clear point of view, we shall notice,

I. His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd—

He was at this time in a most deplorable state of mind—

He had preached to the Ninevites, and his word had been attended with such power, that the whole city repented, and turned to the Lord with weeping and with mourning and with fasting. This, instead of exciting gratitude in the heart of Jonah, filled him only with rage; because he thought that God, in consideration of their penitence, would show mercy to them, and that, in consequence of the judgments with which he had threatened them not being executed upon them, he himself should appear an impostor. It was of small importance that there were above a million of souls in the city: the destruction of them was of no moment in his eyes, in comparison of his own honor: he hoped therefore that God would at least inflict some signal judgment upon them, sufficient to attest the truth of his menaces, and to support his credit as a true prophet. With the hope of seeing his wishes realized, he made a booth on the outside of the city, and "sat there to see what would become of the city."

Then it was that God caused a gourd to spring up suddenly, and cover the booth—

What amazing condescension! How much rather might we have expected that God would have sent a lion to destroy him, as he had before done to a disobedient prophet! But instead of visiting his iniquity as it deserved, God consulted only his comfort; yes, this very man, who was so "exceedingly displeased with God's mercy to the Ninevites, that he could not endure his life, and begged of God to strike him dead; this very man, I say, was such an object of God's attention, as to have a gourd raised up over his head "to deliver him from his grief." It should seem as if there was a contest between God and him; he striving to exhaust the patience of Jehovah, and Jehovah striving to overcome by love the obstinacy and obduracy of his heart.

In the acquisition of this gourd Jonah exceedingly rejoiced—

Had we been told that he was exceedingly thankful to his God, we should have been ready to applaud his gratitude: but he saw not God's hand in the mercy given to him: it was his own comfort only that he cared about: and in the gift alone did he rejoice, forgetful of the Giver. The idea of a million of souls being saved from perishing in their sins gave him no pleasure: but the being more effectually screened from the heat of the sun himself, made him "exceeding glad." Had his mind been at all in a right state, his own comfort and convenience would have been swallowed up in thankfulness, for the preservation of so many souls, and for having been made the honored instrument of their deliverance: but love for ourselves, and indifference about others, always bear a proportion to each other in the mind of man: and their connection with each other was never more strongly seen than on this occasion.

His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd was more than equaled by,

II. His intemperate sorrow at the loss of it—

God, seeing the ingratitude of Jonah, withdrew the gift soon after it had been bestowed—

He prepared a worm, which smote the gourd, so that it withered as suddenly as it had grown up. And where is there any gourd without a worm at the root of it? Our comforts may continue for a longer season than Jonah's; but there is in every creature-comfort a tendency to decay; and our most sanguine expectations are usually followed by the most bitter disappointments. Indeed God has wisely and graciously ordained, that abiding happiness shall not be found in anything but Him alone: and the withdrawment of this comfort was in reality a greater blessing than its continuance would have been; since the gourd could only impart a transient comfort to his body; whereas the removal of it tended to humble and improve his soul.

But the impatient spirit of Jonah only raged and complained the more—

As soon as the heat became oppressive to him, Jonah renewed his former wish for death; and, when reproved by God for his impiety, he vindicated himself in the very presence of his God, and declared, that "he did well to be angry, even unto death." Who would conceive that such impiety as this should exist in the heart of any man, but especially of one who had received such signal mercies as he, and been so honored as an instrument of good to others? But hereby God did indeed show, that the excellency of the power was of him alone, and that he can work by whoever he will. It seems strange too, that, when God appealed to his conscience, an enlightened man could possibly be so blinded by passion as to give judgment in his own favor in such a case. But man has neither reason nor conscience, when biased by his own lusts: and his very appeals to God can be little more depended on than the testimony of a man who is deliberately deceitful. But this we may observe in general, that the more there is of unhallowed boldness in any man's confidence, the more it is to be suspected; and the more ready he is to wish himself dead, the more unfit he is for death and judgment.

Thus far our attention has been almost exclusively turned to Jonah: but. that we may bring the matter home more directly to our own business and bosoms. we would suggest a reflection or two. arising out of the subject:

1. What selfishness is there in the heart of man!

One would be ready to account this record a libel upon human nature. if we did not know assuredly that it is a true history. without any exaggeration or mistake. It appears incredible. that such inhumanity should exist in the heart of man. as that he should wish for the destruction of a million of souls. only that his own word might be verified; and that he should be so vexed by his disappointment. as to wish for death and pray to God to terminate his life. Nor would one conceive it possible that a temporary inconvenience. which had in fact originated solely in his own absurd and impious conduct. should so irritate and inflame his mind. as to make him insult. to his very face. his almighty and all-gracious Reprover. But we know little of ourselves. if we do not recognize much of our own character in that of Jonah. We have had reported to us. time after time. the calamities of others and have felt no more than if the most trifling occurrences had been related: or if we have felt at all. it has been only for a moment and the tale has soon become as if it had passed before the flood. But. on the other hand. if anything has arisen to thwart our own interests or inclinations. though it has been of less consequence than Jonah's gourd. we have laid it to heart and been so irritated or grieved by it. that our very sleep has gone from us. Particularly if anything has occurred that was likely to lower our reputation in the world. how keenly have we felt it. so as almost to be weary even of life! Or if anything wherein we promised ourselves much happiness have been withdrawn from us. as wife or child. how little have we been able to say. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Alas! we have more resembled Jonah. than Job: our every thought has been swallowed up in self: and neither God nor man have been regarded by us. any farther than they might subserve our selfish and carnal ends. Let us then in Jonah see our own character as in a glass and let this view of it humble us in the dust.

2. What mercy is there in the heart of God!—

This is the improvement which God himself makes of the subject. Jonah had complained of God for exercising mercy towards the repentant Ninevites; and God vindicates himself against the accusations of Jonah. In doing this. he touches with exquisite tenderness the sin of Jonah; and represents him not as actuated by selfishness and impiety, but as merely "having pity on the gourd." What a beautiful example does this afford us, who ought to extenuate, rather than to aggravate, the faults of our bitterest enemies! His argument on the occasion is this: 'If you have had pity on a poor worthless gourd, for which you never labored, and in which you have only a slight and transient interest, how much more am I justified in having pity on a million of the human race, (six-score thousand of whom have never done good or evil,) and on multitudes of cattle also, which must have been involved in any calamity inflicted on that large city!' This argument is similar to one used in the Epistle to the Hebrews Chapter 9:13, 14, and says in effect, 'If you were right in pitying a thing of no value, how much more am I in sparing what is of more value than ten thousand worlds!' This argument, especially as addressed to the self-justifying Jonah, was unanswerable: and the truth contained in it is consolatory to every child of man. God is a God of infinite mercy: he may, he will, spare all who truly repent. Whatever judgments he has denounced against sin and sinners, the execution of them depends solely on the sinners themselves: if they repent, sooner shall God cease to exist, than cease to exercise mercy towards them. Let this encourage transgressors of every class: let it encourage the abandoned to repent; and those who profess godliness to repent also: for all need this consoling truth, that "God wills not the death of any sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live." Know then, both from his dealings with the Ninevites, and his forbearance towards his perverse prophet, that He is abundant in goodness and truth, and that where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound.