MICAH

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

[Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 2.7)

DISCOURSE 1204

BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE WORD OF GOD

[Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 2.7). Do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?

GREAT and bitter prejudices are often entertained against the word of God; as though its only tendency was to pervert the judgments of men, and to disturb their repose. Hence, when the word is faithfully administered, many are offended at it; and say, as it were, to the messengers of Heaven, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." But the real reason of their disgust is, that they will not part with those sins which the word condemns, or practice those duties which the word enjoins: "they love darkness rather than light: they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved [John 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.19-20)." If they were willing to renounce their sins, they would find the word precious and delightful to them; for it is as full of consolation to the upright, as it is of terror to the hypocritical. To this effect God speaks in the passage before us. He represents the people as saying to the prophets, "Prophesy not." Then addressing himself to them, he asks, Whether the messages which he sent them proceeded from any want of love and mercy in himself; or whether they did not arise solely from their obstinacy in sin? "O you that are named the House of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings?" Then he appeals to them, whether his word would not be a source of unspeakable comfort to them, if they would turn to him aright? "Do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?"

We propose to show,

I. Who they are whom the word benefits—

Certain it is, that all are not benefitted by the word. When it was dispensed by Him who "spoke as never man spoke," many made no other use of it than to cavil at it, and to form it into a ground of accusation against him. And when Paul labored at Ephesus for three months successively to establish the truth, many were only hardened the more in their prejudices and infidelity [Acts 19:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 19.8-9). While in every age it has been "to some a savor of life unto life, it has proved to others a savor of death unto death [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 2.16)." Those who alone are benefitted by it, are "the people who walk uprightly," or, in other words,

1. The unprejudiced—

If we come to the word of God with prejudices against any of the doctrines which it is supposed to contain, it is scarcely probable that we should receive any material good from it: for as soon as the truths which we hate are brought to light, we shall set ourselves against them, and exert all our endeavors to invalidate their force. The plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion are very commonly treated in this way. Men like not to hear of the depravity of the heart, the insufficiency of our best works to recommend us to God, the necessity of divine influences, and the impossibility of being saved without an entire dependence on the merits of Christ, and an unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service. But if, instead of reprobating these things as enthusiasm, we would lay our minds open to conviction, and submit to receive instruction from God, we should find a reality in these things which we never imagined, and an importance which we were not aware of. God has promised that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 25.9)."

2. The diligent—

Nothing is to be attained without diligence, in spiritual any more than in temporal concerns. If we read a portion of the Scripture in a superficial way, or hear it explained to us without ever reflecting on what we have heard, we cannot expect to get any good unto our souls. Our Lord has illustrated this by a man sowing seed by the way-side. Can any one doubt whether the birds will come and take it away? Thus will Satan take the word out of our hearts, if it be not harrowed in by meditation and prayer [Matthew 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.4); [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 13.19). Our Lord directs us to "search the Scriptures:" and Luke tells us, that saving benefit accrued to the Bereans from their diligence in this respect; "they were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so:" and then he adds, "Therefore many of them believed [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 17.11-12)." This indeed is agreeable to the established order of things throughout the world: for God has ordained, that while "the soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing, the soul of the diligent shall be made fat [Proverbs 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 13.4)."

3. The humble—

Pride and self-sufficiency are insurmountable obstacles to religious instruction. If the knowledge of divine truth were to be acquired merely by mental application, then indeed we might become proficients in it, notwithstanding our dependence were on our own exertions. But we are blind, and must have "the eyes of our understanding enlightened," before we can comprehend the mysterious truths of God: consequently, if we have not humility to pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we must remain in darkness, with respect to the spiritual import of the word, however carefully we may investigate its literal meaning [1 Corinthians 2:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 2.10-14). See also [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 2.1-6). We must pray with David, "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). period;" We must confess ourselves fools, if we would be truly wise 1 Corinthians 3:18. When we are willing to learn with the docility of little children, then, and then only, shall "the things that are hid from the wise and prudent be revealed unto us [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.25)."

4. The obedient—

We must have a disposition, yes, a determination, through grace, to obey the word, if we would receive any substantial good from it. If we have any secret lust which we will not part with, it is in vain to hope that the word, whether read or preached, can ever profit us. Our bosom sin will necessarily warp our judgment, and dispose us to reject whatever militates against the indulgence of it. Being determined not to obey its dictates, we shall be always ready to dispute its meaning or deny its authority. Hence our Lord lays so great a stress upon an obedient frame of mind: "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.17)." It is self-evident, that if a man be visited by the most skillful physician in the universe, he can derive no benefit from his prescriptions, unless he follow them. So it is in vain that the Scripture shows us infallibly the way to Heaven, if we will not forsake that path that leads to destruction.

The character of the persons whom the word of God benefits, being ascertained, let us inquire into,

II. The good which it does them—

But who can estimate this aright? Who can enumerate the benefits resulting from the sacred oracles when thus studied, and thus received? We must content ourselves with mentioning only a few of those blessings which will flow from the word:

1. It will teach us—

The inspired volume cannot fail of conveying information to every man that peruses it, whatever be the state and disposition of his mind. But there is instruction which none but those who "have an honest and good heart [Luke 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 8.15)." can receive; and in comparison of which all other knowledge is only as dross and dung. An insight into the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart; a discovery of the glory and excellency of Christ; a view of the devices of Satan, and of the way in which alone he can be successfully opposed; a sight of the beauty of holiness, and of all those glorious privileges that belong to the children of God, are among those invaluable acquisitions which will reward the labors of the humble inquirer.

2. It will comfort us—

They who disregard the Holy Scriptures, are often so overwhelmed with their troubles, as to seek refuge in death from the calamities of life. But the person who "draws water from those wells of salvation," finds in them an inexhaustible fund of consolation. He perceives that his trials are all appointed by infinite wisdom; that his Lord and Master drank of the very same cup before him; that tribulation is the way in which all the saints must walk toward the promised land; and that the storms which seem to menace his very life, shall only waft him to his desired haven. All the wonders of redemption also furnish him with additional grounds of consolation; and every promise is like the balm of Gilead to his wounded spirit. Such was the benefit which David experienced from the word in his trials [Psalm 119:92](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.92); and such shall be experienced by all who "make it their delight and their counselor."

3. It will sanctify us—

The word of God is that which is made the means of our regeneration; and the same is useful for the carrying on of the good work within us. The Apostles were purified in an eminent degree: and our Lord ascribes their sanctification to that as its proper cause; "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 Paul tells us, that Christ still makes use of it for that end: "He gave himself for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word [Ephesians 5:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.25-26)." Indeed its natural tendency is to effect this, because it points out to us our sins; it makes us to see the guilt and danger in which they involve us; it directs our eyes to Him who will give us the victory over them; and it assures us, that, after we have vanquished all our spiritual enemies, we shall be partakers of endless glory and felicity. Having the precepts for our guide, and the promises for our encouragement, we shall "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1)."

4. It will save us—

The word makes us not only wise, but "wise unto salvation." In this view Paul told the Corinthians that "he had preached the Gospel to them; and that they had received it, and were standing in it; by which also," says he, "you are saved [1 Corinthians 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.1-2)." And O! how many myriads now in Heaven can attest its efficacy in this respect! How must they say, 'That word taught me, when ignorant; quickened me, when dead; comforted me, when afflicted; strengthened me, when weak; and enabled me eventually to overcome all my enemies!' And thus shall all of you say in due season, provided you "walk uprightly" in a diligent study of the sacred oracles, and in a humble obedience to the will of God.

In improving this subject, we shall,

1. Guard it against misconstruction—

It is possible that the foregoing statement may be misunderstood: we would therefore suggest some brief hints, by way of explanation.

First then, it is not the word that does the good; but the Holy Spirit, by the word. If the word itself wrought anything, its operation would be uniform and universal, or, at least, in a much greater degree than it now is, and people would be benefitted by it in proportion to the strength and clearness of their intellect. But the reverse of this is nearer the truth: for the poor and weak receive the Gospel, while the wise and noble reject it [1 Corinthians 1:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.28-30). And daily experience proves, that the word then only comes with power, when it comes in the Holy Spirit 1 Thessalonians. 1:5.

Next, it is not the knowledge of the word that benefits us, but the knowledge of Christ in the word. We might be able to repeat the whole Bible, and yet perish at last. Christ must be known by us; and that, not speculatively, but experimentally: for "there is no other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.12)."

Lastly, our "uprightness" is not the meritorious cause of the good we receive, but the qualification necessary for the reception and enjoyment of what is good. Nor is this a trifling distinction; for if we be not careful to disclaim all idea of merit, we shall make void the grace of the Gospel, and deprive ourselves of all the benefits to be obtained by it [Romans 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.14).

2. Enforce it in a way of appeal to your consciences—

The text is an appeal, an appeal of God to the consciences of his enemies. We therefore boldly appeal to you, and defy any man living to answer in the negative; "Do not God's words do good to him that walks uprightly?"

Judge you, who have despised the word: look at those of your acquaintance who have obeyed the word; compare their lives with what you remember them to have been, or with what yours are at this present time; and say, whether the word have not done them good?.

But you, after all, are very incompetent judges: we therefore appeal rather to those who have received the benefit. You know what you have received: say then, whether you would exchange it for all that the world can give you? Reflect on the good you have obtained; the pardon, the peace, the strength, the holiness, the glory; and say, whether it do not exceed the powers of the first archangel to compute its worth?.

But we need not dwell on this: it admits not of any doubt: all that is requisite is, that you press forward for the attainment of more good. Let the ungodly world say, that the word has done you harm; but regard them not. Only let your growth in every thing that is amiable and praise-worthy confirm the truth in our text, and justify the appeal which God himself has made.

[Micah 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 3.8)

DISCOURSE 1205

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY

[Micah 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 3.8). Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

TO all God's servants this command is given: "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.28);" and "deliver it they must, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear [Ezekiel 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 2.7)." The prophets have set us a noble example in this respect: and the Prophet Micah in particular.

Let us mark,

I. What the sins were which he was commissioned to reprove—

Most grievous was the state of the Jewish people in his day—

All ranks and orders of men, from the highest to the lowest, were addicted to covetousness, and were ready to commit every species of iniquity for gain; princes, priests, judges, prophets, all were guilty of the grossest injustice, and made use of their respective offices only for the purpose of accumulating wealth. At the same time they professed a firm reliance upon God, and anticipated nothing but good at his hands verse 9–11. Cite the whole of this.

And there is but too much ground for similar complaints among us—

True, the conduct of our governors and judges is the very reverse of that which the prophet here imputes to the Jews. I suppose that greater integrity is not to be found on earth, than in those who hold the government, and dispense justice, and minister in holy things, among us; and we have abundant reason to bless God for the high tone of morals which prevails among them. But, if we descend to common life, we find all the same iniquities abounding in our land as were complained of by the prophet in his day. Covetousness and injustice prevail to a fearful extent among us, as do indeed the whole catalogue of sins forbidden in the Decalogue: And precisely the same self-delusion is cherished in almost every bosom. "We lean upon the Lord," just as the Jews did; and persuade ourselves that "no evil shall come upon us." "God is merciful," is a sufficient answer to every threatening contained in God's word. As for his justice, or holiness, or truth, no regard whatever is paid to them: all are superseded, all are swallowed up in the one attribute of mercy; and no room is left for the exercise of any perfection that shall interfere with the happiness of an impenitent transgressor. As to "be a child of Abraham" was with the Jews a sufficient security from God's wrath [Matthew 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.9); so, among us, is baptism into the faith of Christ: we cannot perish, because we are Christians.

Let us however notice,

II. The manner in which he administered his reproof—

"He was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord:" for he and all the other "Prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit 1 Peter 1:11 and [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.21)." With judgment, too, and with might, was he filled; so that, in all his reproofs, he showed unquestionably that he was speaking under a divine impulse. And I too, my brethren, would execute my commission even as he did. With a mixture of tenderness and fidelity, "I pray you then, my brethren," bear with me, while, under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, I endeavor to show you the folly of your ways.

1. Can you impose on God?

You can, and do, deceive your own souls, and persuade yourselves that you have nothing to fear at the hands of an angry God. But if you make light of sin, can you convince Jehovah that it is so trivial a thing as you make it, or that you have not committed it to an extent to merit his displeasure?.

2. Can you prevail on God to cancel and reverse the threatenings of his word?

See if you can prevail on him to change day into night, or to alter for you any of the common laws of nature: and if you cannot prevail in things which would involve no contradiction, how can you hope to obtain a revocation of his word, which would involve in it a sacrifice of truth itself? For, I scruple not to say, that to hope for Heaven in an impenitent and unbelieving state, is to "make God a liar [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.10)."

Can you, when your self-delusions have ruined you, come back again to rectify your errors?

Truly, between God and the soul that perishes in its sins, there is a great gulf fixed, a gulf that never can be passed. The soul that has once passed into the eternal world has its state forever fixed; and the man who dies impenitent will bewail his folly in irremediable and everlasting misery.

I ask then, Is it wise to continue in sin, saying, "No evil can come upon me?": Not that I would dissuade you from "leaning upon God;" but only from leaning upon him in a way which he has never authorized; and from expecting at his hands what he has never promised, and what he cannot give without violating his most solemn declarations. Repent of sin, believe in Christ, and obey the commandments of your God; and then let your confidence be as strong as you please. Then will I also assure you, that God shall be with you of a truth, and that to all eternity shall no evil ever come upon you.

[Micah 4:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.1-4)

DISCOURSE 1206

UNIVERSAL ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

[Micah 4:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.1-4). In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it.

THE Prophet Micah was contemporary with Isaiah; and most probably had seen his prophecies. The prophecy before us is almost word for word the same as that in the second chapter of Isaiah, except indeed the concluding part of it, which is peculiar to Micah. The mode in which the prophecy too is introduced is different. In Isaiah, it is the commencement of a new prophecy; but, in Micah, it is the continuation of a prophecy of a very different complexion. Micah was a man of singular fidelity and courage. He declared to all the elders of his nation, and in a way that made a deep impression upon all [Jeremiah 26:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 26.18-19), that on account of their iniquities God would give up their city and temple, to be destroyed and "plowed up as a field." But, while he announced to the Jews God's determined purpose to punish them in this awful manner, he foretold also his intention at a future period to restore them to his favor, and to make them a source of blessings to the whole earth.

This is the substance of the prophecy before us; in elucidating which we shall notice,

I. The universal establishment of the Christian Church.

Here it will be proper to notice,

1. The prediction relative to it—

The temple of Solomon was built on a lofty hill: the altars also which were consecrated to false gods, were built on high places: hence the Christian Church is called by the prophet, "the mountain of the Lord's House," and by the Apostle Paul, "Mount Zion [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.22)." Of this Church it is said, that it "shall be established on the top of the mountains," that is, on the foundations of the Jewish Church, and on the ruins of all idol worship. It is the superstructure for which alone the foundations of Judaism were laid: and, when this edifice shall be complete, all idols shall fall before it, as Dagon before the ark. The period for its completion is in the last days, the days of the Messiah; a period yet future, though, we hope, not far distant. The terms of the prophecy are such as evidently to show, that the prediction has never yet been fulfilled, and consequently, that its accomplishment is yet to be expected by us in the appointed time.

2. The mode of its accomplishment—

"People," or, as Isaiah expresses it, "all nations," "shall flow unto it." Yes, this "mountain shall be established on the top of mountains," and all nations, like a majestic river, "shall flow unto it." By this metaphor, which is indeed a most extraordinary one, it is intimated, that all nations shall be united in one common sentiment and purpose; that their progress towards its completion shall be irresistible; and that the whole shall take place under a preternatural and divine influence; since the natural progress of a river is downward, whereas this shall be upward, to a mountain on the top of other mountains. What a grand idea does this convey! The natural propensities of all men checked in their course, and their affections directed into a channel, in which Omnipotence alone can uphold them!

But the mode in which this shall take place is more fully stated by the prophet himself. The people of different and distant lands shall suddenly become penetrated with one common principle, and shall call on one another to unite in one common cause, the cause of true religion. "Come," they will say, "let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, the House of the God of Jacob." Just as, in the days of old, the Jews from every part of their land went up thrice a year to worship at Jerusalem; so will the Gentiles in every quarter of the globe go up with one consent to the mountain of the Lord's House: "God will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear him forever."

The motives too by which they will be actuated are here distinctly specified. They will not go from regard to a particular ordinance which they feel constrained to obey, nor from a mere carnal partiality, such as the Jews evinced for their native land; but from a real desire to know, and do, the will of God. It is this which they will contemplate with such peculiar pleasure. In the Christian Church they will have an opportunity of becoming more deeply acquainted with that "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in human flesh," and dying for the sins of men; and they will have ampler means of knowing the whole extent of their duty, which it will thenceforth be their one labor to perform: to attain these things, I say, will be the one object of their ambition; and they will be alike filled with this one desire, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

This is the change which we expect assuredly to be wrought on the Gentile world in due time; and by this shall the predicted establishment of Christ's Church be fulfilled."

Yet simple, and as it might be thought weak, are,

II. The means by which it shall be effected—

The mere preaching of the Gospel is the appointed instrument which God will make use of for the attainment of this great end; "The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Gospel is here called "a law"—

It is "a law," because it is authoritatively enjoined to be obeyed by every creature under Heaven. And it is so called by the Prophet Isaiah, who characterizes it as "God's judgment which he would make to rest for a light of the people (the Gentiles;) even as his righteousness (or method for making people righteous before him,) and his salvation, for which all the isles shall wait, and in which they shall trust [Isaiah 51:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.4-5)." Paul also calls it "the law of faith [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.27)."

And by the publication of that shall the great work be effected—

It was that which produced such wonderful effects in the apostolic age; and it is still a "weapon mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin and Satan. It is "the rod of God's strength which was to go forth of Zion," and by which all his enemies are to be subdued before him. If we look into the discourses of the Apostles, we shall find nothing of that high-wrought eloquence for which the orators of Greece and Rome were famed: we shall see little else than a simple exhibition of Christ crucified, and a solemn declaration, that there was "no other name given under Heaven whereby any man could be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." This is the truth which still approves itself "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and still is "made the power of God unto salvation" to many souls. This began to be preached at Jerusalem; and is from thence come forth; and will in due time be "preached unto all nations." No human power shall be called to its aid; no human policy shall cooperate with it: this alone, accompanied with power from on high, and "preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven," will do the work: conviction will flash upon the consciences of thousands, as on the day of Pentecost; conversion will instantly ensue: Christ being erected as "an ensign, all will flock to it," and "a nation will be born in a day." He shall be acknowledged by all as the "Shiloh that was to come: and to him shall the gathering of the people be." The doctrine of the cross being universally proclaimed, the universal flow shall take place, "and the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."

From the work itself let us turn to the contemplation of,

III. The fruits that shall everywhere proceed from it—

The Lord Jesus Christ will reign in the hearts of all—

As judges of old swayed the scepter of Israel, so will the Lord Jesus rule over the whole earth; and whatever is contrary to his will, he will "rebuke" and subdue. Nothing will be able to withstand his power: "He will work, and who shall let it?" As in former days, when he brought his people out of Egypt, and planted them in Canaan, he made them triumphant over every enemy, so will he do in the day to which we are looking forward: he will "go on in the chariot of his Gospel, conquering and to conquer," until all his enemies and theirs be put under their feet.

Then shall peace and happiness universally prevail—

The distinctions between nations will then be no longer accompanied with rivalry and hate: all will be as children of one common Father, all as members of the same body. War will then no longer be a science, which even the most peaceful nations are constrained to learn for their own preservation: the cultivation of peaceful arts will be the one desire of all; "they will beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and they will learn war no more." Then also personal and domestic peace will abound throughout the world: "every man will sit under his own vine and fig-tree," as in Patriarchal times, none attempting to molest him, and not so much as the fear of molestation existing in his mind [Isaiah 32:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 32.16-18). Doubtless the internal peace which all will enjoy in their own heart and conscience is also to be included under this beautiful image: for the very character of Christ himself is, that he is the Prince of peace; and the character of his reign is, that it diffuses "an abundance of peace" throughout his whole empire, so that "the peace of all flows clown like a river." Blessed, blessed state! May "the Lord hasten it, in his time!"

From this subject we may clearly see,

1. What an unspeakable blessing the Gospel is—

Wherever the Gospel has come with power, these effects may be already in a measure seen. True it is, they are not seen to the extent that they will hereafter be, because real piety is at so low an ebb, even among the professed followers of Christ. But from what is partially seen, we may know what shall hereafter obtain throughout all the world. The hateful passions which produced so much hatred and contention in the world, are slain, wherever the Gospel has its due effect; and peace, and love, and every amiable disposition, have an habitual ascendant in the soul. O professors, judge yourselves in relation to this matter: see whether you be "putting off the old man, which is corrupt, with its deceitful lusts; and be putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:" and look to it, that, in these and all other respects, you walk worthy of Him who has called you unto his kingdom and glory.

2. How we may ensure to ourselves all its glorious effects—

The Gentiles, in the latter days, may well be proposed as a pattern for us in the present day. Let an entire conformity of heart and life to God's revealed will be the one object of our pursuit. Seek knowledge, not for its own sake, but for its influence upon the soul: and seek grace, not for the aggrandizement of yourselves, but that God may be glorified in the whole of your conversation. If you come up to the House of God with such dispositions as these, you will find that there is a power in the word to enlighten and sanctify the soul; and, in proportion as you cultivate these dispositions, you will "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

It will also have a good effect to animate and encourage one another. This will characterize the Christians in the latter day: and the influence of social piety will be found most beneficial to your souls. Be careful, however, when exhorting others to come up to the House of the Lord, never to omit, in spirit at least, if not in word, "I will go also [Zechariah 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-21)."

3. What glorious times are hastening upon us—

We do hope that the times here spoken of are not far distant. Multitudes of us who are here present can remember when the Church was by no means what it now is: even twenty years have made an immense difference; so great, comparatively, has been the out-pouring of God's Spirit, beyond what it has been for centuries before. And we account it no small privilege to live in a day when some of the greatest Potentates upon earth are uniting, with their subjects of every denomination and description, to disseminate throughout the world the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. By this we may form some little judgment what to expect in that day, when, in every nation under Heaven, kings shall be the nursing-fathers, and queens the nursing-mothers, of the Church. O blessed times! May God accelerate them! and may we all exert ourselves, as his instruments, to accomplish his will, and to hasten forward these glorious events! If it be thought that these prospects are too good to be ever realized; let any one only compare Britain as it now is, with what it was before the banners of the Cross were erected on our shores; and then he will see no reason to despair of those nations that are yet "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." But were the change far more beyond the reach of human probability than it is, there would be no reason to doubt of its ultimate accomplishment, since Omnipotence is pledged to effect it: It shall take place, "for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it."

[Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.5)

DISCOURSE 1207

THE WORLD'S AND THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD CONTRASTED

[Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.5). For all people will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

IT has been objected to Christianity, that it creates divisions in families, and in the world at large. But how should it not produce these effects, when the whole world is immersed in idolatry; and the direct end of Christianity is, to "turn men from idols, to serve the living God?" See the prophet's account of "the last days:" "It shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains; and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people, even all nations, shall flow unto it verse 1, 2." What can this import? What, but a general conversion to Christ; and, as far as that change shall extend, the determination here formed; "Every one will walk in the name of his God: and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever?"

Let us notice here,

I. The practice of the world—

Every unregenerate man is an idolater—

Idolatry may be found no less among the professed servants of Jehovah, than among the worshipers of stocks and stones. Idolatry, in fact, is "the loving and serving of the creature, rather than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.25)." Now it is a fact, that every man, in his unregenerate state, is under the dominion of some lust, which leads him captive. All are not governed by the same lust: the desires and appetites of men differ among different persons, and in the same person at different periods of his life. In youth, we are chiefly impelled by a love of pleasure and sensual indulgence. In middle age, we aspire after honor and advancement in the world for ourselves and our children. In more advanced life, the love of money not unfrequently gains an ascendant over us; and, at all events, a love of ease and quiet. Now, wherever these, or any other dispositions, operate upon us more powerfully than the love of God, they become, in fact, our God. As the sensual man is said to "make a God of his belly [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.19);" and the covetous man to make an idol of his gold [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.5); so the votaries of any created being or enjoyment are, in reality, despisers of the one true God, and worshipers of idols.

Whatever be the supreme object of a man's affections, "in the name of that he walks"—

The young men are never weary in the pursuit of pleasure. Behold the mirthful, the dissipated, the voluptuous! From the nature of things, they cannot always be in a direct pursuit of their object: but it is never out of their minds, at least never so far removed, but they can revert to it with delight, and renew, in contemplation, the feelings which have already been indulged even to satiety. Of this the records of the whole world will testify: and he can know little of himself, who needs be told that it has been his own experience. The Apostles themselves confess this to have been once their own course [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.3). [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 3.3); nor has there been an exception to it, in the state of unconverted man, from the fall of Adam to the present moment.

In direct opposition to this is,

II. The determination of the true Christian—

He also has his God—

Yes, the Lord Jehovah is his God; and him alone is he disposed to serve. The Christian sees that Jehovah alone has any claim upon him. As his Creator, his Governor, his Redeemer, and his Judge, Jehovah demands of him all the affections of his soul, and all the services of his life: and he not only accedes to this demand, but accounts it his highest honor, and his truest happiness, to fulfill the duties imposed upon him.

And in the name of this God he walks—

This God he confesses before men; and for him determines to brave all the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world. He sees that the servants of Satan will cast every obstacle in his way: but he resolves, by the grace of God, to go forward, and to serve his God even unto death. Look at the saints of God in every age: they all united in devotion to one God, even to Him who made them, and to Him who redeemed them by his own most precious blood. The voice of every one of them was, in fact, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? and there is none on earth that I desire besides You [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.25)." And in the name of this God they walk; proceeding continually from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

And now, Brethren,

1. Choose you whom you will serve—

"You cannot serve God and mammon." "To whichever of the two you cleave, you must, of necessity, renounce and despise the other [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.24)." And can you doubt whose you shall be, and whom you shall serve? What can the vanities of the world do for you?: On the other hand, what cannot, or will not, the Lord Jesus do for you?: Take him then as your God, and serve him faithfully with your whole hearts [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 24.15).

2. Be not out-done by the votaries of this world—

Are they constant? be also firm, uniform, unreserved. Let there not be a worldling in the universe so faithful to his God, as you to yours. Let the Apostle's counsel be the entire rule of your life: "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him; rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.6-7)."

[Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.2)

DISCOURSE 1208

THE MESSIAH TO BE BORN AT BETHLEHEM

[Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.2). You, Bethlehem, Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

IN estimating the degree of credit due to prophecy, we naturally ask, Of what kind the prophecies were? Were they numerous? Were the persons who delivered them unconnected with each other? Were the things which were foretold unlikely of themselves to be accomplished? or were they such as might easily, by the united efforts of interested persons, be brought to pass? If they were such only as might be the subjects of reasonable conjecture, or such as might by a confederacy of persons be easily devised and easily fulfilled, they would have but little weight; but if they were inconceivably varied, and absolutely incapable of being either feigned by impostors or fulfilled by friends, they will then carry proportionable evidence along with them. Such then were the prophecies relating to our blessed Lord: they were such as no deceivers could invent, and such as no confederacy whatever could cause to be fulfilled. Many of the most important of them were fulfilled by persons who sought to disprove the pretensions of Jesus to the Messiahship, and who unwittingly established what they labored to overthrow. Others were accomplished through the instrumentality of persons who could have no conception whatever of the ultimate consequences which their actions would produce. Of this kind was the prediction before us; it declared that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem; not at the Bethlehem in the land of Zabulon, but at that which was in the land of Judah. This, as will be seen presently, was so generally known, that the parents of our Lord might have known it, if they had been at all anxious to make the inquiry. But so little did they advert to it, that they never thought of going up to Bethlehem, until they were compelled to it by a decree of Augustus Caesar. They were living at Nazareth, and would, if no such unforeseen edict had been issued, have continued there until the birth of Jesus. But the Scripture could not be broken; and God was at no loss to provide means for its accomplishment. He wrought therefore on the ambition of the Roman emperor, and prompted him to exercise his authority over the Jewish people, and to order that all of them should go and be enrolled in the different cities to which they belonged. This constrained Joseph (who was of the house and lineage of David) to go up to his own city, Bethlehem, to be enrolled there: and during his stay there (some unforeseen occurrences probably having necessitated him to continue there longer than he had originally expected), the time for Mary's delivery arrived, and, contrary to all human expectation, Jesus was born in the city which had been specified by the Prophet Micah seven hundred years before. Thus, while the decree of Caesar showed that "the scepter was now just departing from Judah," and, consequently, that the time for the advent of the heavenly "Shiloh was come," it unwittingly on his part caused the Messiah to be born in the very city which Micah had foretold.

The prophecy itself gives us such a glorious view of Christ, that we shall do well to enter more fully into it. It declares to us,

I. His advent in time—

Two things the prophet mentions respecting him;

1. The place of his birth—

Bethlehem was of itself but a small city, and of little importance when compared with many other cities in the land of Judah; but it was the place of David's nativity [1 Samuel 16:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 16.1); [1 Samuel 16:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 16.11-13), and the place therefore which God ordained for the birth of David's Son, the Lord Jesus. The prophecy respecting it, we have before said, was generally known, especially among those who were at all conversant with the prophetic writings; so that when Herod sent to the chief-priests and scribes to inquire where the Messiah was to be born, they all with one consent declared that Bethlehem was the destined place, and, in confirmation of their opinion, they cited this very passage which we are now considering [Matthew 2:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.3-6). And it is curious enough, that many years afterwards, when the enemies of Jesus insisted that, notwithstanding all his miracles, he could not possibly be the Messiah, they adduced this very passage [John 7:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.41-42); which, if their premises had been correct, would have fully supported their conclusion; they knew that Jesus had been brought up at Nazareth; and they supposed he had been born there: and, if they had been right in this conjecture, he certainly could not be the Messiah; since it was ordained of God, that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem.

This will account for the remarkable care which God in his providence took, that the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem should be placed beyond a possibility of doubt. Perhaps no other event, scarcely excepting either his death or resurrection, was marked with such a variety of evidence as this. First, it was enrolled in the public records of Bethlehem, in consequence of Caesar's edict. Next, it was attested by an angel announcing it to the shepherds as they were guarding their flocks by night. Next, this testimony was confirmed by a host of angels, who celebrated it aloud in the hearing of the shepherds. Next, it was marked by a star in the east, which conducted the Magi from a distant country to the very spot, and caused those wise men to carry the report of it back to their own land. Next, it was ascertained by the inquiries of Herod, and the united testimony of all the chief priests and scribes, that Bethlehem was of necessity to be the place. And lastly, it was marked by that most extraordinary act of cruelty, the slaughter of all the infants in and around Bethlehem, "from two years old and under;" which measure king Herod adopted, in order to ensure the destruction of Jesus, whom he dreaded as a future rival.

What a confirmation all this is of the Messiahship of Jesus, it is needless to observe.

2. The character in which he should appear—

He was to be "Ruler in Israel." If we look only at the external circumstances of his birth, we confess, he had not much the appearance of a "Ruler," seeing that his parents were in so low circumstances as to be able to get no better place for their accommodation than a stable, (though one would have thought that a person in Mary's situation would have found a thousand females ready to receive her into their houses;) nor any better receptacle for the new-born infant than a manger. Nor in his subsequent life did there appear what we should have expected in a "Ruler." To the age of thirty he wrought at the trade of a carpenter: and during the three years of his ministry, he went about as a poor man who "had not where to lay his head." Least of all, in his last hours, did he look like a "Ruler;" since he was treated with nothing but scorn, and put to death as the vilest of malefactors.

Yet even at all these periods, if we look more narrowly, we shall find circumstances that sufficiently declared his dignity. The songs of the heavenly choir at his birth, the miracles he wrought in his life, and the testimony borne to him by universal nature at his death, all proclaimed, that, under the veil of his humiliation, there was a character more than human, and that he was not only a "Ruler," but "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

The Jews, fixing their eyes only on his external appearance, deny that this prophecy was fulfilled in him. But we answer, that "his kingdom was never intended to be of this world:" it is a spiritual dominion that he was sent to exercise; and such a dominion as no mere creature ever can exercise. He came to establish his throne in the hearts of men, and to bring their very thoughts into captivity to his holy will. And this empire he has established over millions of the human race, even over the whole Israel of God, in every age, and every place. To all of them without exception his will is both the rule and reason of their conduct. If only a thing be declared to be his will, that is a sufficient reason for their doing it, though they should see no other reason: and, rather than not do it, they would all without exception lay down their lives. This dominion he is now exercising over a willing and obedient people: and though Satan's vassals are infinitely the more numerous at the present day, the time is coming, when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom" of this great Ruler, when "all kings shall fall down before him," and "all nations shall serve him," and "his name shall be great unto the ends of the earth."

For submission to this great "Ruler" the prophet prepares us, by declaring,

II. His existence from eternity—

The terms in which this is declared are as strong as the prophet could well use: they are equivalent to what the Psalmist says of Jehovah; "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God [Psalm 90:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.2)." That Jesus did exist from all eternity is abundantly declared,

1. In the Old Testament—

There is a remarkable passage to this effect in the book of Proverbs, where, under the name of Wisdom, Jesus is represented as having been, by the "Father, as one brought up with him, as being daily his delight, and rejoicing always before him [Proverbs 8:22-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 8.22-31).": This passage is generally considered by the best commentators as relating to Jesus Christ; and its exact correspondence with the passage just quoted in reference to Jehovah, and with other passages in the New Testament, leaves no room to doubt, but that Jesus is the person there described. In the book of Psalms, we know infallibly that Jesus is the person spoken of, as "of old laying the foundations of the earth," and as continuing immutably the same to all eternity [Psalm 102:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 102.25-27). We know this, I say, infallibly, because Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, assures us that it was spoken of, and to, the Son; whom the Father addresses also in these decisive terms; "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.8); [Hebrews 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.10-12)."

2. In the New Testament—

Our blessed Lord himself frequently speaks of his pre-existent state. To Nicodemus he speaks of himself as having come down from Heaven, and as actually existing in Heaven even while in his bodily substance he was on earth [John 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.13). To the Jews who thought of him as a mere man like themselves, he says, "Before Abraham was, I am [John 8:58](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.58)." And, in addressing his heavenly Father, he prays, "Glorify you me with your own self, with the glory which I had with you before the world was [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.5)." His Apostles uniformly maintain the same language: "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was nothing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1-3); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14)." This is the testimony of John: and that of Paul accords with it, that, while "according to the flesh Jesus was of the seed of David, according to the spirit of holiness he was by his resurrection declared to be the Son of God," even "God over all, blessed forever [Romans 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.3-4); [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.5)." In the book of Revelations there is a remarkable passage, where, speaking of our blessed Lord, the beloved Disciple attests his character in these expressive words; "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty:" and then he introduces that same Jesus speaking personally to him, and saying, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; Amen; and have the keys of Hell and of death [Revelation 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.8); [Revelation 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.17-18)."

From all these testimonies then, we are prepared to welcome the advent of this august Ruler, in the language of the Prophet Isaiah; "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace: and of the increase of his government arid peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever [Isaiah 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 9.6-7)."

That we may suitably improve this subject,

1. Let us adore this divine Savior for his condescension and love—

How wonderful is it that such love should ever be shown to the children of men! that the Son of God, "Jehovah's fellow [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.7)," who was "one with the Father," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.3)," who "was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should yet make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.6-8)." How wonderful, I say, is this! and scarcely less wonderful, that we, towards whom this stupendous effort of love and mercy has been exercised, should feel so little, even while we profess to believe it, and to make it the foundation of all our hopes. But let us muse upon it; let us muse, until the fire kindle, and we speak with our tongues the wonderful works of God. Nothing but this is heard in Heaven: and nothing but this should he heard on earth. Methinks there should be but one song heard among us day or night; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing [Revelation 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.12)."

2. Let us submit to his government—

Do we look for salvation through our adorable Emmanuel? Let us not forget that he came to be "a Prince as well as a Savior," a "Ruler" as well as an Instructor. Let us willingly receive him in this character, and cheerfully dedicate ourselves to his service. Let us be his subjects, not in name, but in truth; not by an external profession only, but an internal surrender of our souls to him: let us do this, not by constraint, but willingly; not partially, but wholly, and without reserve. This is our first duty; this is our truest happiness; this is the way in which he expects us to requite him for all his condescension and love; and it is the only way wherein we can manifest our sense of the obligations he has conferred upon us. "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" let him find in us such a people; and he will then "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

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

DISCOURSE 1209

STABILITY AND EXTENT OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

[Micah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.4). He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

OF whom the prophet speaks, there can be no doubt. The preceding context indisputably refers to the Lord Jesus Christ verse 2 with [Matthew 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.6) and [John 7:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.42); Until he should come into the world, the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah should never be re-united verse 3; but after he should have come, and finished his course on earth, he should establish his empire over the whole earth; and unite all, both Jews and Gentiles, in one body, as one fold under one Shepherd. Of this the prophet speaks in our text, even of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: and he declares,

I. Its first establishment—

Christ is "the Shepherd of Israel." As such, he feeds and rules his people [Matthew 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.6). The Greek. In his appearance, indeed, he was mean; but he established his kingdom with power. It was announced as at hand by his forerunner, John [Matthew 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.2); and was declared by himself as already come [Matthew 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 12.28). By all his words and actions he showed himself entitled to establish it [John 5:22-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.22-29). [Matthew 25:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.31-32). And at the judgment-seat of Pilate he confessed himself a King [John 18:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 18.37). For this, indeed, he was put to death [John 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.3); [John 19:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.12-15); as the superscription on his cross proclaimed [John 19:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.19). On the very cross he acknowledged himself a King, and promised to the dying suppliant a participation of his throne [Luke 23:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.42). Indeed, it was upon the cross that he triumphed over his enemies, and established his kingdom [Colossians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.14-15). After his resurrection, he gave commission to his disciples to go forth in his name [Matthew 28:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.18-19); on the day of Pentecost he subdued multitudes to himself; and from that day he has been enlarging his kingdom in every quarter of the globe. Through the whole of his ministry on earth, he acted with authority, as here foretold; "standing and feeding in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."

From its first establishment, the prophet goes on to speak of,

II. Its subsequent preservation—

From the first instant that the establishment of Christ's kingdom was announced, it was assailed from every quarter. The question asked by the eastern Magi was, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews?" And instantly was Herod's jealousy moved to such a degree, that, to ensure the death of Jesus, "he sent forth and slew all the children in Bethlehem and the surrounding country, from two years old and under [Matthew 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.2); [Matthew 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.16)." From the time that he entered on his ministry, his life was sought; until at last his enemies accomplished their cruel purpose, unwittingly accomplishing, at the same time, the very end for which he came into the world. The same opposition has been made to his kingdom in every age and every place. The history of the Acts of the Apostles is one continued illustration of this fact. But greater was He who was in them, than he who actuated his malignant foes. In different places, indeed, his interests have been subverted, as in the Seven Churches of Asia; but if the candlestick have been taken from one place, it has been sent to another. The Church itself has stood, as a rock in the midst of the ocean, and has defied all the waves that beat upon it. Our blessed Lord said, that "it was founded on a rock, and that the gates of Hell should never prevail against it [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.18);" and this saying of his has been fulfilled: for though, like the burning bush, it has been continually immersed in flames, it never has been, nor ever shall be, consumed by them. "It shall abide," as the prophet has said The Text; "it shall break in pieces, and consume all other kingdoms; but itself shall stand for ever and ever [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 2.44)."

My text yet further declares,

III. Its ultimate extension—

Its limits hitherto have been narrow and contracted; but the time is coming when they shall extend "to the very ends of the earth." Yes, indeed, "He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high [Isaiah 52:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 52.13)." "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him [Psalm 72:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.11)." All the kingdoms of the world shall be his [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 11.15);; and under the whole heavens "there shall be but one Lord, and his name one [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.9). See, to the same effect, [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.8); [Psalm 22:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.27)."

Exhortation—

1. Let the kingdom of our Lord be welcomed by you—

Truly his subjects are happy; for "his yoke is easy, and his burden light." Not so the subjects of sin and Satan. No: "they are in sore bondage: for the way of transgressors is hard." Submit you then, Brethren, to his scepter: "obey his voice; for God's name is in him [Exodus 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 23.21);" and know assuredly, that if you still continue to rebel against him, the time is coming when he will say, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."

Let his name be dear unto you—

"To them that believe, he is precious [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.7)." And he deserves to be so: for he "delivers his subjects from the powers of darkness," and makes them kings like unto himself [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.29). [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.6); [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.21). He will be dear, and his name will be great among all nations [Psalm 72:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.17-19). O let him be so to you! Receive him into your hearts as your Savior and Redeemer, yes, and as your Lord and Governor.

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

DISCOURSE 1210

CHRIST OUR PEACE IN TROUBLE Preached in July, 1803.

[Micah 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.5). This man shall be the Peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.

IT is of the very nature of prophecy to be dark and intricate: for, if it were perfectly plain, men would either labor to defeat the counsels of Heaven. or ascribe the accomplishment of them to second causes. Among the various things which tend to obscure the predictions of the prophets, we notice more especially their complicated allusions to things temporal and spiritual, present and remote. In the prophecy before us, considerable difficulties occur, because it is so expressed as to comprehend several distinct events, and to be accomplished in a variety of ways: nevertheless the general scope of it is sufficiently plain; and the truth which we shall deduce from it, is obvious and indubitable; it is none other than this, that Jesus Christ is the one source of peace to his people, under all their calamities, temporal or spiritual The meaning of the context seems to be this: the prophet foretells that the enemies of Judah should "besiege" them, and treat their governor with contempt and cruelty; which may be considered as relating to the times of Hezekiah, and Zedekiah. He then foretells, that in the little city of Bethlehem the Messiah shall be born: but that, notwithstanding that event, the Jews, as a nation, shall be given up, until the time when Zion shall travail in birth ([Isaiah 66:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.7-8) with [Galatians 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.27).) and all, both Jews and Gentiles, be converted to the Lord. In the mean time, however, the Messiah shall govern and protect his people, and be a source of "peace" and comfort to them under their heaviest calamities.

Christ then will be the peace of his Church,

I. Under all temporal calamities—

God may, for wise and gracious reasons, suffer his people to be reduced to the greatest straits and necessities; just as he did in the days of Hezekiah, when all Judea was subdued by Sennacherib, and the capital itself was besieged by the Assyrian army. We must not therefore conclude that God has given us up, even though we should see our land invaded, and many strong places taken, and the capital itself in the most imminent danger of being plundered and destroyed. God may suffer it, in order to wean us from confiding in our fleets and armies, and to glorify himself in our deliverance. Supposing such a calamity to come upon this land, Christ will be our peace,

1. Through the instrumentality of others—

In the words following the text, he promises to raise up for his people "seven shepherds and eight principal men," that is, an indefinite number [Ecclesiastes 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.2). of eminent and useful men in all the departments of state, whom he would endue with wisdom and courage; and through whose instrumentality he would effect their deliverance. And is it not in this way that he has most marvelously interposed for us? Was there ever a period within our remembrance, when all ranks and orders of men were so unanimous as at the present? In the last war, some doubted whether we might not have avoided war; and others, whether we might not have terminated it long before. But is there a man in this whole kingdom who doubts whether our inveterate enemy would suffer us to be at peace; or whether if we were to make all the sacrifices that his ambition could dictate, he would not speedily find some fresh pretext for insult and exaction? No; we are unanimous in our conviction of the unavoidableness of war; unanimous too in our determination to maintain it with vigor, and to die rather than become the vassals of France: and this is a source of much peace and comfort to us in the midst of our impending dangers. And to whom can we ascribe this astonishing unanimity, but to Him who "has all hearts in his hand, and turns them wherever he will?"

2. Through his own immediate agency upon our minds—

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Governor of the Universe; and he makes his people to know, that their enemies derive all their power from his commission, the limits of which commission they cannot exceed, and the effects of which power shall be overruled for good. These are sources of unspeakable peace to their souls. Suppose "the Assyrian to be come into our land," and to be bearing down all before him, our murmurs will be silenced by that reflection, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.6)." The enemy is no more than "the axe with which he hews, or the saw with which he saws [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.15);" "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 3.18)." Suppose the enemy to be vaunting like the blaspheming Rabshakeh, and to be regarding the riches of the capital as a nest of eggs on which he is just going to lay his hands [Isaiah 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.14); even then, if the plunder of the capital be not within his commission, "God will put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws, and will cause him to return to his own land" ashamed and confounded [Isaiah 37:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.33-35). Suppose he be suffered entirely to prevail, yet if it be over-ruled for the good of immortal souls, and the glory of our God, no temporal trials, however great, can counterbalance the benefit derived from them. It was by sending his people to Babylon that he cured them of idolatry; and if he may but cure this nation of its manifold impieties, all will be well. In these views then Christ will surely be the peace of his people, yes, he "will keep them in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on him [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.3)."

But these observations apply to us yet more forcibly,

II. Under all spiritual troubles—

There is not in all the sacred volume one single prophecy that more clearly speaks of Christ than that before us. It is repeatedly applied to Christ in the New Testament, as marking out with precision the very place where he should be born verse 2 with [Matthew 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.6) and [John 7:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.42). In explaining it therefore as referring to his spiritual kingdom, we cannot err.

The enemies of God's people of old were typical of those spiritual enemies with which his people have to contend in every age. And it is certain that the enemies of our souls may prevail for a season in a very alarming degree. But when sin and Satan make their fiercest assaults, even then will Christ maintain our peace,

1. By the merit of his blood—

This it is which enables us to behold all our guilt without terror or despondency: this it is which enables us to answer the accuser of the brethren, "Who is he who shall condemn, since Christ has died [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.34)." In this view especially is Christ called "our peace," since "he made peace for us by the blood of his cross;" and every one of us by believing in Him shall have peace with God [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.1).

2. By the prevalence of his intercession—

The prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah were effectual for the peace of Jerusalem, even while the besiegers encompassed it [Isaiah 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.22); and in answer to them, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army were slain by an angel in one night [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.36). What then may not be expected from the prayers of our adorable Redeemer? Shall not he prevail, seeing that "He ever lives on purpose to make intercession for us [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 7.25)." To this, as to an inexhaustible source of consolation, we are taught to look, under the conflicts which we are called to sustain; "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.1)."

3. By the sufficiency of his grace—

We may be reduced to a more perilous condition than even Jerusalem itself, and yet find peace in the consideration, that Christ is all-sufficient, and that "through him we shall be more than conquerors." We can scarcely conceive a more distressing experience than that of Paul under the buffetings of Satan: yet this word, "My grace is sufficient for you," was able to turn his desponding sorrows into joy and triumph [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9). In like manner we also may go forth with confidence against all our enemies, saying with him, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13)."

4. By the inviolableness of his promise—

To all his people is that word addressed, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you [Joshua 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 1.5)." And can we find one instance wherein he has ever violated that blessed promise? May we not then adopt that inspired inference, and say, "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.5-6)." If the Apostles, when almost overwhelmed in a storm, were blameworthy for entertaining fears while Christ was with them in the vessel [Mark 4:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 4.38-40), much more must we be faulty, if we give way to discouraging apprehensions of ruin, when the word of Christ is pledged for our security. Relying on his word, we have an anchor which will keep us steadfast in the midst of all the storms and tempests that can assault our souls [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.19).

APPLICATION—

Let every one then seek to know this "Prince of Peace." To "acquaint ourselves with him is the way to be at peace [Job 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 22.21)." If we know him not, we cannot flee to him for refuge: but if we "trust in him, he will keep us in perfect peace."

[Micah 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.7)

DISCOURSE 1211

THE JEWS A BLESSING TO THE WORLD

[Micah 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.7). The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men.

IN this chapter we have as explicit a prophecy respecting Christ, as any that is to be found in all the sacred volume. His person is described in terms that can belong to none but Jehovah himself: "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting verse 2." The place of his nativity is expressly foretold, and so plainly mentioned, that all the Scribes and Pharisees at the time of our Savior's birth considered it as an indisputable point, that their Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; and not in the Bethlehem that was in the land of Zabulon [Joshua 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 19.10); [Joshua 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 19.15), but in Bethlehem Ephratah, which was in the land of Judah [Matthew 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.4-6). The establishment of his kingdom over the face of the whole earth was farther predicted verse 4; and not only is the final restoration of the Jews to a participation of it declared verse 3, 6, but their agency in the conversion of the Gentile world is distinctly asserted The text. Whatever accomplishment the words of our text received in the apostolic age by the preaching of the Apostles and their immediate converts, they have respect to a period far remote from that age, a period yet future: they refer to a time, when Jehovah will gather his people from the four winds, and reign over them in their own land [Micah 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.6-7); a time, when they shall vanquish all their enemies, as easily as a young lion prevails over a flock of sheep verse 8; but shall be as rich blessings to others, as the dew or rain is to the thirsty earth.

To place this subject in a proper point of view, it will be necessary to show,

I. The original design of God in their dispersion—

Once they were numerous as the stars of Heaven: but now they are reduced to a small "remnant;" and are scattered over the face of the whole earth. This judgment is designed of God,

1. To punish their iniquities—

Great and manifold were their transgressions, which caused them to be carried captive to Assyria and Babylon: but greater far has been their guilt in rejecting their Messiah, and "crucifying the Lord of glory:" and for that they have now been carried captive among all nations, and been reduced to the lowest state of degradation for the space of more than seventeen hundred years. The punishment inflicted for this crime is such as was foretold by Moses himself [Leviticus 26:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 26.27); [Leviticus 26:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 26.33). [Deuteronomy 28:62-64](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 28.62-64), and such as our blessed Lord also warned them to expect [Matthew 21:39-41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.39-41). The Jews themselves see and acknowledge, that the hand of God is upon them on account of their sins: and it is God's intention that his dispensations towards them should be viewed in this light by every nation under Heaven [Deuteronomy 29:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 29.24-28).

2. To bring them to repentance—

In this present world the judgments which God inflicts are all intended for good. It was "for their good" that God sent his people into captivity in Babylon [Jeremiah 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 24.5) and [Micah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.10); and for their good he has now scattered them over the face of the earth. The punishment inflicted on Levi for his cruelty to the Shechemites, was, that he and his family should have no lot among the tribes of Israel, but be scattered among them all [Genesis 49:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 49.5-7); yet was that overruled for their greater honor; they being appointed to minister in the sanctuary before the Lord; and pre-eminently honored, as having the Lord himself for their portion [Numbers 18:2-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 18.2-24). In like manner, though the present dispersion of the Jews is a heavy judgment, God inflicts it, not as the sentence of an inexorable Judge, but as the correction of a loving Parent: and the very circumstance of his transferring his regards from them to the Gentile world, is a yet farther expression of his parental love, it being designed to provoke his deserted people to jealousy, and thus to bring them to a renewed enjoyment of their forfeited inheritance [Romans 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.11). "They are cast off only for a season [Romans 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.25-26);" and, "if they abide not in unbelief, they shall yet again be grafted on their own stem," from which they have been broken off [Romans 11:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.23-24).

But in the prophecy before us, our attention is particularly called to,

II. The ulterior purposes which they are destined to accomplish—

The dew and rain are sent by God to fertilize the earth [Isaiah 55:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.10); and in like manner are the Jews dispersed throughout the world,

1. As witnesses for him—

Whoever beholds a Jew, beholds a witness of the proper Deity of Jehovah. The whole of his history attests, that the Lord Jehovah is Lord of lords, and God of gods. Who among the gods of the heathen could ever have done for their votaries what Jehovah has done for his chosen people? Who among them could have predicted everything that should befall them during the space of many thousand years? Who could have preserved their worshipers, as Jehovah has preserved his, unmixed with the people among whom they are scattered, and as distinct from all other people as they were when embodied in the land of Canaan? Other nations, that have been subdued and carried captive, have been blended at last with the inhabitants of the countries where they sojourned; but the Jews still, as formerly, "dwell alone" in the midst of the earth, as it was foretold they should do [Numbers 23:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 23.9). Hence they, above all people, are witnesses of his godhead. And in this view God himself appeals to them, yes, and appeals to the whole universe on the authority of their testimony [Isaiah 43:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.9-12); [Isaiah 44:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 44.6-9). We may say then of the Jews in every place throughout the world, that they are living epistles from God to man, yes, are "epistles known and read of all men;" so that, whatever be the language of the country where they live, they do unwittingly, yet most intelligibly and unquestionably, proclaim, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God [1 Kings 18:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 18.39)."

They are witnesses also of all his glorious perfections. Who that sees a Jew can help seeing in him the power and love, which God manifested to his fathers in all the wonders of his grace; in their very origin from parents, who, according to the course of nature, could have had no children; in bringing them forth also out of the land of Egypt, and carrying them in safety to the promised land, and, in short, in all his other dealings with them to the present moment? Who can but see also the purity and holiness of Jehovah, as marked in the judgments inflicted on them? Is it not evident, that they are monuments of God's wrath; and that, though God may spare long, he will at last visit the offences of his rebellious people? Above all, Who that sees a Jew, does not see in him the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah? God promised, that for Abraham's sake he would not utterly cast them off: and, notwithstanding all their provocations, he still preserves them, in order to their future restoration to their own land, and their renewed enjoyment of his special favor. David, expatiating on all the glorious perfections of God, interrupts, as it were, his song by what appears, at first sight, to be an unsuitable and irrelevant observation; "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel [Psalm 103:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 103.7)." But this one observation speaks more than the whole psalm besides; for it embodies all that is more particularly expressed, and gives, what we may call, a graphical exhibition, or picture, of the Divine character; and in the fewest possible words shows us, what will be God's conduct towards his people to the end of time. Precisely thus the sight of a Jew gives us a compendious view of all the Divine perfections, and sets God himself, as it were, almost visibly before our eyes.

2. As instruments in his hands to dispense his blessings to the world—

The dew that floats in the air, and the clouds that are carried over the surface of the globe, are unconscious of the end for which they are sent; but they perform the most invaluable offices for the sons of men. In like manner the Jews are scattered through the world, unconscious of any particular good which they are destined to perform: but God designs to use them as his instruments, and by them to communicate the blessings of salvation to the whole world. This is plainly intimated in our text, and expressly declared by the Prophet Isaiah; "They shall declare my glory among the Gentiles, and shall bring them for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations [Isaiah 66:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.19-20)." Then shall be fulfilled, in its utmost extent, that prophecy of Zechariah, "It shall come to pass, that as you were a curse among the Heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing [Zechariah 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.13)."

For this office they are fitted, having their own Scriptures in their hands, and understanding the language of the different countries where they sojourn: so that nothing is wanting but to have the veil removed from their hearts, and they are ready at this moment, each in his place, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And with what energy will they proclaim the Gospel, the very first moment that their eyes are opened! How deeply will they themselves be affected; and how much therefore will they affect others! How will they, when they "look on Him whom they have pierced, mourn, and be in bitterness, even as one that is in bitterness for his first-born [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10)." And how ardently will they love, when they see how much has been forgiven them [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 7.47). How will they emulate the example of their fathers, the Apostles, in their zeal to spread the knowledge of their Messiah! and, when they hear that their brethren in every country under Heaven are engaged in the same blessed work, how will they vie with each other in their endeavors to serve the Lord! With what effect too will they deliver their message! They are known everywhere to be the bitterest enemies to Christianity. They will not therefore be regarded, (as Christian preachers would be,) as a people endeavoring to propagate their own religion, but as people renouncing their own religion from conviction, and calling upon all other people to follow their example. This will create an interest which no other people could hope to excite: and the simultaneous efforts of their brethren in every quarter of the globe, accompanied as they will be by the operations of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men, will bear down all before them, like another Pentecost, and produce, as it were, a resurrection from the dead [Ezekiel 37:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.10) with [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.15). "Then shall the heathen fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory [Psalm 102:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 102.13-15). Mark the word "So.":" and then shall be literally fulfilled those words of the prophet, "A nation shall be born in a day [Isaiah 66:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.8).'

Now in all this they will be, not as the canals which were made by man, to water the earth [Deuteronomy 11:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 11.10-11), but as the dew or rain, "that tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men." As the clouds are not formed by man's device, or sent by the command of men, but owe both their original and their operations to God alone; so the Jews have gone to the ends of the earth, unsolicited, unsent, unconscious of their destiny; and in due time will exert such a genial influence on the souls of men, that "the wilderness shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose [Isaiah 35:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 35.1)."

From hence we may see,

1. In what light we should regard the Jews—

It cannot be but that God, in dispersing the Jews over the face of the whole earth, has designed, that we should gather instruction from his dispensations towards them, and subserve in some secret way his purposes towards them.

Wherever we see a Jew, we should regard him as an object from whom we are to derive good, and to whom we are to do good. There is no creature under Heaven from the sight of whom we may derive greater good than from the sight of a Jew. We have before said, that, whether intentionally or not, he proclaims to all, in the most convincing way, both the nature and the perfections of God. But there is one lesson in particular which we may learn from him, namely, the guilt and danger of neglecting the Lord Jesus Christ. It was for rejecting and crucifying their Messiah that God's wrath fell upon that whole nation; and that it has now abode upon them for the space of almost eighteen hundred years. They knew him not; for "had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory:" yet, notwithstanding their crime admits of this extenuation, it has been visited with a punishment unprecedented in the annals of the world. What guilt then must we contract, and of what punishment shall we be thought worthy, if we "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," by continuing in our sins! We profess to know him, and to honor him, and to expect salvation from him: our conduct therefore in pouring contempt upon him is aggravated in a ten-fold degree. O! how shall we escape? If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If such judgments have been executed on them, what must be the end of us, if we obey not the Gospel of Christ?: Brethren, I entreat you never to look upon a Jew, without recalling to your minds this beneficial and important lesson.

Yet be not content with deriving good from him, but put forth all your powers to do good to him. He, notwithstanding all the chastisements that are upon him, is still "beloved of God for his fathers' sakes. And, if he is beloved of God, should he not be beloved of you? If God have designs of love towards him, should not you seek to be an instrument in God's hands to accomplish towards him those gracious purposes? Can you think of the obligations which you are under to the Jews of former days, and not labor to requite them in their posterity? Or can you reflect on the purposes which are to be accomplished by the Jews in the present and future generations, and not endeavor to fit them for the work to which they are destined? If you have any love to the Gentile world, you should bestow all possible care on the instruction of the Jews, since it is by the Jews chiefly that the Gentiles will be brought into the fold of Christ. O! delay no longer to make this improvement of the circumstances before your eyes; but awake to all the calls of duty, of gratitude, and of love.

2. What ends we ourselves should endeavor to answer in our respective spheres—

Doubtless we should not live for ourselves, any more than they: we should all be inquiring, What can I do for God? or, what can I do for man? This is truly Christian; or, rather I should say, it is god-like. God himself is represented as resembling the rain [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.3), and being like the dew [Hosea 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.5); and O! what glorious effects does his descent upon the soul produce [Hosea 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.6). Would to God that we might live for the same ends, and produce, according to our measure, the same effects! Let every one know, that all his faculties, and all his powers, are the Lord's. Let all regard their time, their property, their influence, as talents committed to them by their God, to be improved by Him who has entrusted them to their care. If it be thought by any, that their talent is only as a single drop or two upon the barren ground, and too small to be of any use, let them remember, that a cloud is but an assemblage of drops; and that, if we only contribute according to our power, we may hope soon to see this "wilderness of become as Eden, and this desert as the garden of the Lord [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.3)." We look for such a season both among Jews and Gentiles: and may we not expect it also among ourselves? Yes surely: if we were all, ministers and people, to unite our efforts for this end, God would be with us; our labor should not be in vain [Isaiah 55:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.11); children should be born to God in this our Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all [Galatians 4:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.26-27);" her children should be numerous as the piles of grass [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.16);" yes, "the birth of her womb should be as the dew of the morning [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 110.3)." May God give us to see such a season of revival in the midst of us, and throughout our whole land, for Christ's sake!

[Micah 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.2-3)

DISCOURSE 1212

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE

[Micah 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.2-3). Hear you, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and you strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto you? and wherein have I wearied you? testify against me.

WHENEVER we call on men to serve the Lord, they have some excuses to offer, either for the deferring of their duty, or for the neglecting of it altogether. They will complain that the things required of them are too strict; that, by reason of the weakness of human nature, they are impracticable; or, at all events, that, under their present circumstances, it were better to postpone the observance of them. In these excuses, they do not intend directly to reflect on God: but, in reality, they do cast the blame of their iniquities on him: on him, I say, as a Lawgiver, that he has required too much of us; or on him as a Creator, in that he has formed us incapable of obeying his will: or on him as a Governor, who, in his providence, has assigned us a lot which does not admit of our fulfilling his commands. On these grounds God has a controversy with us; and appeals to the whole creation that he is greatly wronged by us. The whole process of his appeal is here stated.

We have here,

I. The court summoned—

Sometimes God makes his appeal both to Heaven and earth: "Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth; for the Lord speaks [Isaiah 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.2)." At other times he calls to the earth alone, as in the passage before us: "Hear you, O mountains, and you strong foundations of the earth!" But what amazing condescension is here, that he should summon his own creatures, to sit, as it were, in judgment upon him! He has a right to do whatever he shall please: and to presume to question anything that he does, is the height of impiety. Has not "a potter power over the clay, to make of the same lump a vessel unto honor or unto dishonor," as he shall see fit? Or has the "clay any right to say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus [Romans 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.20-21)." If the Maker choose to mar the vessel the very instant he has formed it, he has a perfect right to do so: nor would the vessel have any reason to complain. So has God exactly the same right over us [Jeremiah 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 18.6). He has not injured us, because he did not make us of the highest rank of created intelligences: nor would he have done us any injury, if he had made us devoid of reason, like the beasts? If, when he endued us with reason, he had again bereaved us of it; or if he were at this moment to deprive us of all the advantages we enjoy; we should have no ground of accusation against him: he has "a right to do what he will with his own [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 20.15),;" nor is he called to "give an account to us of any of his matters [Job 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 33.13)." But when we arraign his conduct, he is willing to have his cause tried before a tribunal of his own creatures, and to place sinners themselves upon the seat of judgment. His permission, yes, his entreaty, to them is, "Judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard [Isaiah 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.3)."

Viewing now the court assembled, let us hear,

II. The pleadings opened—

Here is evidently an accusation implied; namely, God has both injured us, and even "wearied" us, by his oppressive conduct: and to this the Almighty, standing as a defendant before the court, answers, by challenging inquiry; and, with conscious rectitude, he says, in the face of his accusers, "Testify against me." Declare wherein I have injured you: "declare it, that you may be justified [Isaiah 43:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.26)."

Have I injured you by any undue strictness in my laws? Point out one that could have been dispensed with, or one that could have been lowered. They are all reducible to love: they require nothing, but that you should "love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength; and, that you should "love your neighbor as yourselves." Wherein could any abatement have been made? Point out, in any one particular, wherein these requirements are too strict; or whether they be not, in every respect, "holy and just and good [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.12)."

'Have I injured you at all in my providential dealings? You may not be so elevated in rank and affluence as others: but the human race is a body; and the body cannot be all eye, or all ear: it must have hands and feet; and every member must have its proper office: every member, too, must seek its happiness in the good of the whole; and be as willing to contribute, in its place, to the welfare of the rest, as to have its own welfare furthered by the rest. But it may be, that you have been peculiarly afflicted, in mind, or body, or estate. Be it so: but have you been afflicted beyond your deserts? "Can a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.39)." Had you had your desert, you would long since have been "in Hell, without so much as one drop of water to cool your tongue:" and your sufferings are infinitely short of that; yes, and are mitigated also by numberless consolations. And are you aware of all the ends for which these afflictions are sent? What, if they have been sent to call you to repentance, and ultimately to save your soul? You should, then, be rather adoring me for them with the liveliest gratitude, than be complaining of them as injuries wantonly inflicted on you.

'Perhaps it is of the sanctions of my law that you complain: they disquiet you; they appal you; the dread of them makes your life a burden to you. But what less than Heaven would you appoint for the reward of my faithful servants? or what less than Hell for the punishment of those who rebel against me? The object both of the reward and of the punishment is the same—to make you flee from sin, the only true source of misery; and to make you follow after righteousness, which is a certain prelude to glory. Both sanctions are intended equally for good: the one, to operate on your hopes; the other, on your fears: and both together to secure your everlasting happiness. But it is of the threatening only that you complain: you think it hard that such a punishment as death, eternal death, should be annexed to one transgression of my law. But I have told you, that "the wages of sin is death [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.23), the provisions given to the soldiery." The provisions which were the payment of a Roman soldier were surely no very extravagant remuneration for his services: nor is eternal punishment an undue recompense for sin: the penal evil of damnation does not in the least exceed the moral evil of sin. Only let it be considered what sin is, and against whom it is committed, and its turpitude and malignity will be found perfectly to justify the judgments denounced against it.

If there be any other matter which mine accuser has to lay to my charge, let him bring it forth: I am prepared "to plead with him:" let him "testify against me;" and let the court, before which we stand, judge between us.'

The charges being thus, for want of an explicit statement on the part of the accuser, inquired into, let us attend to,

III. The replication made—

As far as relates to a vindication of Jehovah, in reference to some particular points, an answer has been provided in the allegations themselves: and, as nothing more specific is stated as the ground of complaint against him, all further vindication of him is waved: and now the complaints on his side must be brought forward. This is done in another part of Scripture, where the very complaints which are preferred against God are retorted by him on his accusers. "You have not called upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel. You have not brought me the small cattle of your burnt-offerings; neither have you honored me with your sacrifices. I have not (as you pretend) caused you to serve with an offering, or wearied you with incense; but you have made me to serve with your sins, and wearied me with your iniquities [Isaiah 43:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.22-24)." Thus, also, in the passage before us, God prefers his charge against his accusers: "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of servants; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, consulted; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that you may know the righteousness of the Lord verse 4, 5;" that is, 'Call to mind the mercies I have given to you, from the time I brought you out of Egypt, until your entrance into Canaan; and then say, whether you have cause to complain of me as acting unkindly towards you; or whether I have not rather reason to complain of you, for your base ingratitude, and your multiplied transgressions against me?' To the same effect may God well reply against us. 'You complain of me as acting oppressively towards you. Look at the redemption which I have given unto you; and not by power only, but by price, even the precious blood of my only dear Son; a redemption, too, not from a mere temporal bondage, but from sin and Satan, death and Hell. Look also at the counsels which your great adversary, the Devil, has given, and at the efforts which he has made for your destruction; and see how I have preserved you in the midst of all; "from Shittim," where the counsels were given, "to Gilgal," in the very land of your inheritance. Look at these things, and then say, whether your accusations against me are just; and whether there be any terms too strong wherein to state your baseness and impiety?

To this reply nothing is added. The truths contained in it being undeniable, not a word is spoken by way of rejoinder: the righteousness of Jehovah is admitted; and, by the consent of all parties, we have,

IV. The cause adjudged—

As in the case before us, so in all cases "will God be justified when he speaks, and be clear when he is judged [Romans 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.4)." Brethren, you may now offer your complaints as you please; and, while God is not permitted to be heard, you may have it all your own way: 'You are quite as good as you need to be; and God is unreasonable in expecting you to be better. The denunciations of his wrath are a mere fallacy: they will never be executed: he would be unjust, if he were to proceed in accordance with them: you have nothing to fear: you act in a very rational and justifiable way, while you live to yourselves and to the world, rather than unto him: and whatever he may have said to the contrary, "you shall have peace, though you walk after the imagination of your own hearts [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 29.19)," and trample under foot his holy laws.' Of all this you may he confident, while God is not heard: but let him be heard, and even you yourselves shall be judges in your own cause. Let him be heard, and not one of you will have a syllable to offer in your own defense, and much less in incrimination of your God. If the man that had not on the wedding-garment was silent (was muzzled, as the word means [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 22.12),) much more will you, if you will bring your matters to a trial here; and, at all events, when standing before the judgment-seat of Christ. Indeed I am persuaded, that the cause between you and your God is already adjudged, even in your own consciences: for, where is there one of you who will venture seriously to arraign the conduct of his God, and not acknowledge, that "God's ways are equal, and that it is his own ways only that are unequal [Ezekiel 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 18.25); [Ezekiel 18:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 18.29)."

Conceiving then the cause terminated, I will offer a few words,

1. In a way of candid appeal—

Is there one among us that will still persist in "charging God foolishly [Job 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 1.22)." When God asks, "What iniquity have you found in me, that you have gone far from me [Jeremiah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.5)." will any of you venture to accuse him as the cause of your miscarriages? When he further asks, "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Why say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto you [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.31)." will any one among you dare to maintain the charge that is here supposed? No: you all know that the fault is altogether in yourselves. You know, that God is worthy to be loved and served; and that to consecrate yourselves to him is "a reasonable service [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.1)." You know well, that you can neither substantiate your own accusations against him, nor rebut his accusations against you. I will, therefore, proceed to address you,

2. In a way of beneficial advice—

Offer not excuses now, which will not avail you in the day of judgment. That time is quickly coming: and then God will be heard, whether you desire it or not. You will not then have to make your cause good against a man like yourselves, but against the Omniscient and Almighty God. Cease, then, to determine from your own statements alone. Let God be heard speaking to you in his word. Try your case fairly, according to that book which you have in your hands, and by which you will be judged in the last day [John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 12.48). Be candid in weighing both sides of the question, and in giving "judgment according to truth." Then you will surely acknowledge, that by the law you are justly condemned; and that "God is true, though every man be made a liar [Romans 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.4)." But need you, on that account, despair? No. "If you have sinned, you have an advocate with the Father, even our Lord Jesus Christ; who is also the atoning sacrifice for your sins l [John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 2.1)." Put your cause into his hands; and though condemned by the law, you shall be acquitted by the Gospel: for through this Savior you shall have all your past "iniquities blotted out," and a righteousness given to you that shall be perfectly commensurate with all the demands of law and justice [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.21-22). Then, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, shall you stand approved; and "God himself be just in justifying" and rewarding you [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.25-26). To that day, so terrible to the impenitent and unbelieving sinner, you may look forward with confidence and joy: for though guilty in yourselves, you shall be "accepted in the Beloved [Ephesians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.6);" and, though in yourselves deserving of the heaviest condemnation, you shall receive "a crown of righteousness that fades not away."

[Micah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.6-8)

DISCOURSE 1213

THE SUM OF PRACTICAL RELIGION

[Micah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 6.6-8). With which shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

IN human judicatories, offenders are arraigned, witnesses examined, sentence passed, in order to the punishment of crimes. But God has raised a tribunal, to which he summons his offending creatures, in order that when their mouths are stopped, and they plead guilty before him, he may pardon their iniquity, and restore them to his favor.

We have, in the chapter before us, God bringing a charge against his people, and calling upon the hills and mountains to judge between them. He first challenges them to allege anything against him that can in any respect excuse their disobedience, or extenuate their guilt: and, when they are unable to do it, he proceeds to set forth his conduct towards them as the greatest aggravation of their guilt. He instances this in two particulars; in his exertions for them when he brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness; and in his kindness to them just when he was bringing them out of the wilderness into Canaan; when he overruled the evil purposes of Balaam, and constrained him to bless those whom he had been hired to curse. This having produced on some the desired effect, a repenting Jew is introduced, anxiously inquiring how he may be reconciled to his Maker, and serve him acceptably in future? and God, instead of inexorably consigning him over to the punishment he has deserved, prescribes to him the way wherein he must walk, and wherein he shall obtain the favor he desires.

Some have understood these words as proceeding from Balak and Balaam: but Balak had no such wish to please God: on the contrary, he wanted nothing so much as to destroy his people: and Balaam expressed no such solicitude to lead Balak to a holy life; but, on the contrary, taught him how to ruin the souls of God's people, by tempting them to an illicit fellowship with the daughters of Midian.

The view before given seems to be the more just: and agreeably to it we shall consider,

I. The inquiries of an awakened soul—

A person convinced of his lost estate, cannot but desire to obtain peace with God—

The most abandoned sinner, previous to the illumination of his mind by the Spirit of God, will be regardless of his state, and unconcerned about the account which he must give of himself at the judgment-seat of Christ. But, when once his eyes are opened to see his guilt and danger, he can no longer be indifferent about his eternal interests: he feels that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God; and, however hardened he may have before been, he will cry out with agony of mind, "What shall I do to be saved [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.37); [Acts 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.30).".

But the ways he devises for his restoration to the Divine favor are invariably erroneous and absurd—

The Jew, like all others of his own nation, first proposes a compliance with the ordinances of the ceremonial law; then, if that will not suffice, he will multiply them, so us to offer, if possible, thousands of rams instead of one, and "ten thousands of rivers of oil," instead of about one or three pints, prescribed for the meat-offerings [Leviticus 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 14.10); [Leviticus 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 14.21). [Exodus 29:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 29.40). If this be not of sufficient value, he is ready to offer even his first-born son; determined, that neither the heathen deities shall be more honored than Jehovah [2 Kings 17:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 17.16-17), nor Abraham himself perform a more self-denying act of obedience than he This idea will account for such a proposal in the mouth of a penitent Jew. [Genesis 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 22.2); [Genesis 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 22.16).

Such are the means whereby men still hope to recommend themselves to the Divine favor. They will multiply rites and observances far beyond what God himself has required: they will very readily submit to penances, and mortifications, and all manner of painful discipline: but to part with their bosom lusts, and to obtain a thorough renovation of their souls, they have no wish: they rest in external services; and substitute them in the place of an inward change of heart, and a thorough conversion unto God. And though we are not shocked at such views, as we are at the proposals of the Jew, yet are they, in fact, as derogatory from the Divine honor, and as unsuitable to the end proposed, as the grosser conceptions that are expressed in the text. The inquiries may be considered as twofold; first, How shall I obtain reconciliation with God? and next, How shall I walk so as to please him? Now is there anything in external ceremonies, of whatever kind they be, calculated to answer either of these ends? Can superficial penitence, and ritual observances, worthless as they are in themselves, and still further debased by a presumptuous affiance in them, stand in the place of deep contrition, humble faith, and universal obedience?.

Their futility will appear from,

II. The answer of God to them—

God "has shown to every person what is good"—

It is true that God did require offerings and sacrifices under the law: but he did not require them in lieu of obedience [Isaiah 1:10-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.10-17); nor in preference to obedience [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 15.22); nor at all for their own sake [Psalm 50:4-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.4-14). (Here is the same controversy as in the text,) and [Psalm 51:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.16-17); when used in any of these views, they were even hateful in his sight [Amos 5:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.21-24). [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.3); and on account of the abuse made of them, he calls them "statutes which were not good [Ezekiel 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.25)." He had declared by Moses, that the thing which alone he required, and to which all the ceremonial ordinances were subservient, was, the obedience of a humble and devoted heart [Deuteronomy 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 10.12-13).

And the things specified in the text have an exclusive title to that character—

Our blessed Lord, apparently referring to these words, throws the true light upon them [Matthew 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.23). He shows that the Pharisees substituted ceremonial in the place of moral obedience: and that, while punctilious and exact in outward observances, they neglected those things which God principally required, "judgment, mercy, and faith." These are the very things mentioned in the text: for the "walking humbly with God" evidently implies a humble and believing dependence on him.

Behold, then, what the Lord our God requires of us. First, we must "do justly." It is in vain to think that we can ever please God, if we be not honest and just in all our dealings. Truth in our words, and integrity in our actions, are so essential, that a man may as well call himself an angel as a Christian, if he be allowedly defective in either. An adulterous Christian, or a murderous Christian, is not a greater contradiction in terms, than a lying Christian or a dishonest Christian. Hear this, you professors of religion; and examine whether in your several trades and callings a dependence can be placed upon your word; and whether you are careful to "keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man:" and let it never be said of you, "They will talk about religion indeed, but they will lie and cheat as much, and perhaps more, than other people: a man of the world is more to be depended on than they." O, if you give occasion for such a scandal as this, cast off your religion at once; or else get it purified from these base and damning defilements.

Next, We must "love mercy." Justice admits of no degrees: we must be just or unjust; and therefore we are told to do justice. But mercy has gradations that are of an unlimited extent: and therefore we must love mercy; or we shall never attain such a measure of it as will adorn our holy profession. Mercy includes every act and office of love, at least as far as relates to the distressed, the indigent, or the offending. And this disposition must be cultivated in all its branches with assiduity and delight. This constitutes the image of God upon the soul: and therefore we are exhorted to "be merciful, even as our Father which is in Heaven is merciful." Indeed if we shut up our affections of compassion from a needy brother, all pretenses to the love of God are vain and hypocritical [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.17). Hear then again, you who profess godliness; and bring your experience to the touchstone. See whether you are filled with tenderness and compassion towards the bodies and souls of your fellow-creatures? See whether you not only do a kindness when called upon, but whether you "devise liberal things," and deny yourselves with a view to the more extensive exercise of benevolence? Look at a professor that is hard-hearted, griping, covetous, vindictive; what a monster does he appear! How unlike to that adorable Jesus who laid down even his own life for his very enemies! Are there such people in the world? O "tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon."

Finally, We must "walk humbly with God." We have already shown the construction which our Lord puts upon these words, and that without any force, they include the most essential doctrines of the Gospel. Indeed this requisition comprehends all our duty to God, as the two foregoing do our duty to our neighbor. Now our duty to God is, to "walk with" him, as Enoch and Noah did; and to walk "humbly" with him in a believing dependence on his grace to help us, and his mercy to pardon our defects. Without this, our attention to relative duties will be of no avail. This chiefly distinguishes the true Christian from a proud self-righteous Pharisee. There certainly are people of the world, who are eminent for their honor and integrity, their benevolence and liberality: but when we inquire into their secret walk with God, they are found miserably defective; and especially with respect to the humiliation of their souls, and their exercise of faith on Christ. It is in the relative duties, that the hypocrite fails; and in the duties to God, that the defects of the moralist appear. But both of them, though in different ways, are departed from God, and in the high road to destruction. Examine yourselves, therefore, you decent and externally blameless characters; search and try how it is with you in your secret chambers; see whether you be not habitually and allowedly wanting in respect of brokenness of heart, and a steadfast cleaving unto Christ? And remember, that, while you cherish such pride and self-sufficiency in your hearts, you are as far from Heaven as the most abandoned profligate; for "God will resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.6)."

We shall conclude with a word of caution,

1. To the careless and secure—

We hear this passage quoted by many, with a view to subvert all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: 'Tell us not,' say they, 'about regeneration, or faith in Christ: this is my religion; "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." ' But can it be supposed that the prophet intended to contradict every other part of the inspired writings, and to tell us that morality was all, and Christ nothing? It has already appeared, from the words of Christ himself (wherein he seems to have referred to the very passage before us,) that "faith is one of the weightier matters of the law;" and that an acknowledging of ourselves to be lost sinners, and a believing in Christ for salvation, are absolutely essential to a humble walk with God. Let not then this mistaken confidence deceive you. Rest not in such an interpretation of the text as directly opposes the whole tenor of Scripture. But, if you will persist in this perversion of God's word, inquire, Whether you have perfectly, and at all times, complied with these directions? and know, that if you have not, you shall be judged out of your own mouth, and be condemned by your own law.

2. To those who are concerned about their souls—

As you must shortly appear before God, it becomes you to inquire, "with which you shall come before him with acceptance?" and in answering this important question, there are two things against which you must guard with equal care, namely, a self-righteous dependence on your own works, and a presumptuous hope of salvation, while you live in any known sin, whether of commission or of omission. Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death can form a proper ground of your hope: yet nothing but a life wholly devoted to God can evidence your interest in Christ. If your faith be productive of good works, it is lively, and saving; if not, it is dead, worthless, delusive. Seek then a humble faith in order to a holy life. If you will offer sacrifices, let them be "those of a broken and contrite spirit:" if you will "give a first-born for your transgression," let it be God's First-born, yes, his only-begotten Son. But never forget that your duties to God and to your neighbor are of equal and immutable obligation; and that according to your performance or neglect of them you will be acquitted or condemned at the last day.

[Micah 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.7)

DISCOURSE 1214

PRAYER OUR GREAT PRESERVATIVE

[Micah 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.7). I will look unto the Lord; 1 will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.

IF we mark the discriminating character of the Lord's people, we shall find, that from the beginning of the world it has consisted in this: The ungodly "call not upon God [Psalm 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 14.4);" but the "godly are a people near unto him [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 148.14)." Abraham, the father of the faithful, built an altar to God in every place where he abode. Moses, David, and all the saints, familiarized themselves with God, if I may so speak; and carried their every want to him, as their Father and their Friend. The Prophet Micah, in his own conduct, well illustrates this. The awful state of the world around him he declares in very pathetic terms; crying, in the view of it, "Woe is me verse 1." And having represented this with the fidelity that became him, he declares, with no common measure of delight, the manner in which he proposed to occupy his mind: "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me:" that is, the more others depart from God, the more will I seek his face.

From these words I shall take occasion to show,

I. In what circumstances the godly are placed—

St. John expresses in one word all that can be said: "We are of God; and the whole world lies in wickedness [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.19)." To the same effect, the prophet here speaks of the godly, as living in a world,

1. Where iniquity abounds—

So universal was the reign of sin in Judea, that scarcely was a person of real piety to be found. And what is the state of things at this day? Is there not occasion for the same lamentation now? If you go into any place where the Gospel is not preached with power, and wish to refresh your spirit with the society of those who are truly alive to God, will you not find yourselves like a person in a vineyard after that the fruits have been gathered, where he can scarcely obtain a cluster to satisfy his longing appetite? There is nothing but a small remnant to which he can get access; and that, alas! of stinted growth, and destitute of the luscious flavor with which he had hoped to be regaled. If we look at Christians of more favored times, it seems as if "the good man had now almost perished from the earth;" so few are there who resemble the saints and martyrs of former ages verse 1, 2.

In the administration of the laws, I confess, we widely differ from the Jews of old. The rich cannot oppress the poor; nor could they, among us, find judges corrupt enough to pervert the laws for gain. But in every other species of iniquity all classes of the community will uphold each other; insomuch, that, whether we notice the more refined sensuality of the rich, or the more degrading habits of the vulgar, all have their advocates; all are declared innocent, or treated with indulgent connivance: and "so they wrap it up." Nothing is suffered to disgust us by its own proper character; but false names are imposed on everything, to hide from us its deformity, and to give it a title to our regard. Not even palpable wickedness goes unexcused: licentiousness is made to wear the garb of piety; and worldliness of prudence. The rich and the poor, the old and the young, all shall have their appropriate gratifications; and all agree to hold each other innocent. "So (I say again) they wrap it up verse 3."

And if we take persons of a better character, we shall find, that, however they may wear a good appearance at a distance, as a hedge of thorns or briers may do, the more closely you come in contact with them, the more you are pained by them; "the best of them proving as a brier, and the most upright of them as a thorn-hedge verse 4;" insomuch that he is really the happiest man who has least dependence on, or, except in a very distant way, communication with, his fellow-man. Such was the state of society in that day: and such, alas! it is at this very hour.

2. Where piety is discountenanced—

At different periods of the Jewish history, it was at the peril of a man's life to espouse the cause of the God of Israel; so entirely had idolatry superseded the worship of the one true God. At those seasons it was dangerous for a man to "trust his friend, or even the wife of his bosom," if he was inclined to serve the living God. "A son would rise up against his father, and a daughter against her mother; and a man's greatest enemies were often those of his own household."

It is remarkable, that our blessed Lord has cited this very passage, not only as applicable to, but as particularly characteristic of, the dispensation which he came to introduce: "The brother," says he, "shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household verse 5, 6 with [Matthew 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.21); [Matthew 10:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.35-36)." Such times have been in the very country in which we live: and such they would be again, if popery were to regain its ascendant. Not that we need go back to times of popery for acts of intolerance in reference to religion; for the same hatred of piety exists at the present day: and it not unfrequently happens, that persons are obliged to conceal from their parents, or from those under whom they live, their attachment to the Gospel of Christ; knowing that a disclosure of it would infallibly expose them to hatred and contempt.

Such, then, are the circumstances under which the godly are placed: and, as they are confessedly arduous, it will be proper for me to show,

II. To what measures they should have recourse—

Here the prophet's example will point out to us the precise line which every Christian should pursue. Mark,

1. The determination of his mind—

Difficult as it was to maintain his integrity in such a time as that, he determined to spread his case before the Lord, and to look to him for "strength according to his day." And, if the Lord should not instantly impart all the support he could desire, he would "wait for the Lord," and tarry his leisure, and expect from him all that an indulgent Father can bestow.

Here is the line of conduct which all the godly must pursue. If they attempt to contend with these difficulties in their own strength, they must fail. The direction which God himself gives them is this: "Call upon me in the time of trouble; so I will hear you; and you shall praise me [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.15)." What then should we do, but adopt, every one of us for ourselves, the determination of David, saying, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall hear me. Evening, and morning, and at noon-day, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice [Psalm 55:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 55.16-17)." Indeed David proposes himself to us as an example in this particular: "My soul," says he, "wait you only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times, you people: pour out your hearts before him: God is a refuge for us [Psalm 62:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 62.5-8)." In the New Testament, the directions to this effect are numberless: so that we may conclude, that humble, fervent, and persevering prayer is the true remedy for every saint, against all the evils which he either feels or fears.

2. The conviction of his soul—

There is something very imposing in that declaration of the prophet, "My God will hear me." He speaks not of God's assistance as a matter of hope, but as what he could not fail of obtaining: so great, so irresistible, was the efficacy of believing prayer. And what says the Apostle John on this subject? "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And, if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.14-15)." Nor is this a rash assertion: it is confirmed by actual experience. "I sought the Lord," says David; "and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. Yes: this poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles [Psalm 34:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 34.4); [Psalm 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 34.6). See also [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 40.1-3)." I hesitate not, then, to say to all of you, that this measure shall be crowned with the desired success. "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day [Psalm 37:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 37.4-6)." God may not indeed interpose precisely at the time, or in the manner, that our impatient minds may dictate: but, "though he tarry long, he will come at last [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.3);" and in the event will surely show himself "mighty to save." "Wait, then, on the Lord, every one of you; and be of good courage; and he will strengthen your heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord [Psalm 27:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 27.14)."

As a further improvement of this subject, learn,

1. The benefit of trials—

Trials of every kind are painful to flesh and blood: but they are, in reality, blessings in disguise. See the effect of them on the prophet's mind. Were they unserviceable to him? Neither shall they be unprofitable to us. I will suppose that they are heavy: yet, if they bring you to God, and God to you, tell me, Have you any cause to complain?: God deals with you as a skillful person does with a wheel and engine that is under his control. He lets down upon it so much water as will accomplish his own purposes; but whatever is superfluous, and would injure its movements, he turns off in another course. So does God deal with his people; permitting the wrath of man to prevail against them so far as shall be conducive to their best interests, but restraining the remainder, which would counteract his views [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 76.10). He has promised, that you shall not be "tempted above that you are able; but shall, with the temptation, have also a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.13)." And, "if you lose father or mother, houses or lands, for his sake, you shall receive an hundred-fold more in this life, to supply their loss; and in the world to come, eternal life [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 10.29-30)." To exchange the creature for the Creator, need never be to any a subject of regret.

2. The blessedness of those who have the Lord for their God—

The world know not where to go in a time of trouble: but the righteous have God himself for their refuge. Perhaps a person viewing the ungodly in their prosperity, and the poor persecuted prophet in his troubles, would be ready to envy the wicked, and to regard the persecuted saint as an object of compassion. But who that turns aside the veil, and beholds the saint in communion with his God, will be of that opinion? Who that should see God attending to the supplications of his afflicted child, and giving his angels charge concerning him, and sending down the Comforter into his soul, and preparing for him a weight of glory proportioned to his trials, would not rather congratulate the saint, and say, "Blessed is the man whose God is the Lord!" Seek him, then, as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus; and then all things are yours: "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.21-23)."

[Micah 7:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.8-10)

DISCOURSE 1215

ADDRESS OF THE JEWISH CHURCH TO HER ENEMIES

[Micah 7:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.8-10). Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord your God? My eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

IT is a matter of general complaint, that the minor prophets are difficult to be understood: and this is true to a considerable extent: but we apprehend that it arises very much from our not sufficiently bearing in mind the subjects on which they wrote. We do right in looking for many things applicable to the Messiah, and to his Church and kingdom: but we err in not having more respect to the Jewish Church as it existed in the times when the prophets wrote; and as it shall exist at a period yet future, when that people shall be gathered in from their present dispersion, and be restored to their own land. We complain that we cannot unlock those Scriptures; but we neglect to take the key that alone will fit the wards. If we kept the Jews more in view, many of the difficulties would vanish; and innumerable beauties would be seen in passages that are now passed over as devoid of interest. We believe truly that the day is fast approaching, in which "God will show them marvelous things," not a whit inferior to those which he wrought for them when he brought them out of Egypt verse 15; and it is their privilege to be looking forward to that period, with earnest and assured expectation of the blessings prepared for them. In the prospect of that period, the Jewish Church is represented by the prophet as consoling herself with the reflections which we have just read: in our further consideration of which we shall notice,

I. The address of the Jewish Church to her enemies—

Bitter in the extreme was the enmity of many surrounding nations against the Jews; far more bitter, we apprehend, than in any of them against each other. The favors conferred upon the Jewish nation by Jehovah, and the entire separation of the Jews from all other people by the ordinances of their religion, tended to call forth this enmity, and to keep it, as it were, in continual exercise. In like manner at the present day, when they have ceased to exist in their national character, and are blended with the different nations where they dwell, they are still hated, and despised above any other people upon earth. This, no doubt, is a judgment inflicted on them for their murder of their Messiah: and under their present sufferings they may well adopt the language of our text. It is the language,

1. Of deep submission—

Great were the iniquities of the Jewish people at the time that the prophet wrote verse 2–6; and heavy were the judgments which God inflicted on them in Babylon on account of them. But far greater is the guilt which they have contracted in rejecting their Messiah, and in crucifying the Lord of glory. For this they have been punished now these seventeen hundred years, and been made a bye-word and a hissing among all nations. Under these circumstances, what will be the reflections of a pious Jew? He will say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Indeed, this, we apprehend, is, in words at least, the language of the Jews at this time generally, or perhaps universally, through the world. It is on account of their sinfulness that they suppose God has not yet sent them the Messiah that was promised to them so long ago, and who, but for their wickedness, would have come to them at the appointed time: and they submit to the dispensations of God towards them from this very consideration, that they are not yet in a state fit to receive his promised mercies. This is a favorable circumstance for their future conversion: and when this submission to the Divine chastisements shall be accompanied with suitable penitence and contrition, their deliverance will be speedily given.

2. Of patient hope—

As the Edomites, the Ammonites, and others, formerly exulted over Jerusalem, and rejoiced in her calamities, so at this time her enemies regarded her as forsaken by her God, and doomed to interminable degradation. But the believing Jew knows that God has not forgotten to be gracious; nor so far shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure, as to be merciful to him no more. He knows, that even in the midst of all his troubles God is able to support and comfort him, and that in due season he will interpose to rescue his people from their oppressors. Hence he "encourages himself in the Lord his God;" and comforts himself with the hope, that, though his night of sorrow may be long and dreary, there is a morning of joy awaiting him, when he shall "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness."

3. Of joyful assurance—

The Scriptures everywhere denounce the heaviest judgments on those who oppress the Jews, and who shall labor to obstruct their future restoration. Their enemies will be as incapable of offering to them any effectual opposition, as Pharaoh and his armies were of preventing the departure of their forefathers from the land of Egypt. Their enemies will indeed gather together for the purpose of preventing their re-establishment in their own land: but they will be only as "sheaves" collected into the barn "to be threshed out by men, or trodden out" by oxen [Micah 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.11-13). Before them their adversaries will be only as sheep before the devouring lion [Micah 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.8-9). An universal terror will seize on them, such as filled the Canaanites when Joshua invaded and subdued their land verse 16. 17. Though they appear weak and contemptible as a worm, yet says God to them, "Fear not, you worm Jacob; you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and 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)." To this period the believing Jew may look forward with confidence, assured that his present degradation shall be more than equaled by his future exaltation [Isaiah 49:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.24-26); [Isaiah 51:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.21-23).

But if we would improve this passage aright, we must consider,

II. The lessons it teaches to the Church of God in all ages—

The Church of Christ bears a strong resemblance to the state of the Jewish Church: it is hated and despised by an ungodly world: it is "a speckled bird; and all the birds round about are against her [Jeremiah 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 12.9)." All who truly follow the Lord Jesus, and "walk as he walked," are "for signs and for wonders;" "nor can they live godly in Christ Jesus without suffering persecution."

But from the address of the Jewish Church they may learn,

1. Submission to God's chastisements—

From whatever quarter our trials may come, we should view the hand of God in them, and receive them as from him. We must always however distinguish between the inflictions of judicial wrath, and the chastisements of paternal love. As a Father, God chastens his most beloved children: and they can never err in saying, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." When Shimei cursed David, and Abishai desired permission to go and inflict on him the punishment he deserved, David would not suffer it, but with holy meekness submitted to the indignity, saying, "Let him alone; and let him curse: for the Lord has bidden him [2 Samuel 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 16.7-11)." It is surprising what composure this will bring into the mind amidst all the sufferings that can be inflicted on us. The consideration that they are sent by a wise and gracious God will reconcile us to them: but the thought of their being chastisements for sin, and means of purifying us from our corruption, will make us to "kiss the rod, and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good."Let us only see that he is "chastening us for our profit, and however we may, under the pressure of our anguish, deprecate the dispensation, we shall from our inmost souls refer ourselves to his all-wise disposal, saying, "Not my will, but your be done."

2. Hope in his mercy—

However severely God may see fit to chastise his people, there are two things which he gives them for their support; namely, a sense of his presence with them in their affliction, and the prospect of a happy issue out of it. They may, by reason of his dispensations, "sit for a time in darkness: but he will be a light unto them." They may, like Paul, be "troubled on every side; yet shall not be so distressed" as not to know what to do: they may be "perplexed; but shall not be in despair:" they may be "persecuted; but shall not be forsaken; and cast down, but shall not be destroyed [2 Corinthians 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.8-9)." He will "hide them, as it were, in his pavilion," or rather, as it is yet more beautifully expressed, "in the secret of his presence;" so that, though in the fire, they shall not be burned; and though in the lion's den, they shall not be hurt. Besides, when his dispensations have produced their desired effect, he, as a refiner watching over the vessels which he has put into the furnace, will take them out, and show that they have been purified by means of it, and have lost nothing in it but their dross. Under our afflictions the ungodly are ready to triumph over us, and to conclude, that God is visiting us in anger for some iniquity, which, though hidden from men, has been seen by him: but he will appear for us in due season, and "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day." Thus he did for David, under all his persecutions from Saul: thus he did also for his only dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he raised him from the dead: and thus he will do for all who put their trust in him. If we only "humble ourselves under his mighty hand, he will in due season lift us up, to our greater comfort, and to the everlasting honor of his own name.

3. An assured expectation of final victory—

Even in this life the enemies of his people are often put to shame, and constrained, as Job's friends were, to confess that they had erred in judgment respecting us. But O! what shame will seize them in the last day, when they shall see those whom they once despised and persecuted for their religion, openly acknowledged by their Lord as good and faithful servants; and they themselves be bidden to depart from his presence, and to take their portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone! Then will "their day come;" and "the righteous shall see it: they shall sit as assessors with Christ in judgment, and shall approve of the sentence denounced against them. Such is the honor reserved for all the saints. "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; but every tongue that rises against them in judgment shall they condemn [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.17)." Sooner or later will justice be administered both to the friends and enemies of Jehovah; and that which is spoken by the prophet, be verified in all its extent; "Behold, my servants shall eat; but you shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink; but you shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice; but you shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit [Isaiah 65:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.13-14)." Well may this prospect compose the minds of all God's afflicted people; and well may they be contented to go on their way weeping for a season, when they have a prospect of such a harvest, and an assurance of bringing with them such sheaves into the garner of their God.

[Micah 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18-20)

DISCOURSE 1216

THE MERCY OF GOD

[Micah 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18-20). Who is a God like unto you, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon its; he will subdue our iniquities; and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. You will perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which you have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

TO acquire the knowledge of God we must study his word; but we should mark also particularly his works: e.g. of creation, providence, and redemption. The passage, if taken separately, is grand; but with the context it is infinitely more sublime. The prophet has been contemplating the glory of the latter day, and it is with an especial reference to that that he breaks forth into these strains of grateful adoration.

Let us consider the words,

I. As uttered by the prophet in the prospect of the mercies that await his people in the latter day—

To enter fully into his views we must mark,

1. The dispensation which he has been contemplating—

He opens the subject of the Millennium, first, in a large and general view, (ch. 4:1–4.) He next shows the blessings of which the Jews shall partake in that day, (verse 6, 7.) This, though accomplished in part at Babylon, (verse 10.) is certainly posterior to Christ's advent, as the events (verse 11–13.) show. It is to take place under the Christian dispensation, (ch. 5:2–4.) At this time the Jews are destined to act an important part, as God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentiles, (verse 7.) and for the subjugation of all opposers, (verse 8, 9.) In the chapter before us, he represents, in moving terms, the Jews anticipating this period, (7:8–10.) Then, confirming this expectation as certainly to be fulfilled, (verse 11–13.) he prays for it, (verse 14.) To this prayer God returns a gracious answer, to the utter surprise and dismay of surrounding nations, (verse 15–17.)

2. The soliloquy in the contemplation of it—

Picture to yourselves the prophet, or any other Jew, contemplating this event. He breaks forth into a devout ascription of praise, in a general view of the dispensation, (verse 18.): in a view of the particular mercies that shall be given under it, (verse 19.): in a view of the great result, (verse 20.).

Now we may with propriety consider the words,

II. As uttered by a Christian in the review of his own daily experience—

Let us contemplate God in,

1. His mercy and loving-kindness—

His people are a remnant, ([Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.5).) Towards them he exercises most stupendous mercy, "passing by their transgression," "not retaining his anger," "pardoning their iniquities." He does so, purely because he "delights in mercy." To him judgment is a "strange act." He "waits to be gracious." He deliberates long before he casts off any, ([Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.4).) He never casts off but with reluctance. ([Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.41).) If he prevail over any, he rejoices. (Luke 15.) How can we but exclaim, "Who, etc."

2. His power and grace—

He continues with astonishing forbearance. They are prone to backslide from him; but he leaves them not to eat the fruit of their misconduct. He "turns again," after hiding himself for a season, ([Isaiah 54:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.7); [Isaiah 57:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.16-18).) He restores to them the light of his countenance; nor does he pardon only, but "subdues their sins." His very hidings are with a view to embitter sin. He renews their strength when faint, ([Isaiah 40:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.29-31).); and gradually "perfects the work he has begun." To complete all, he "casts their sins into the sea;" "all," without exception, into "the depths" of the sea. Who can survey all this, and not exclaim, "Who, etc."

3. His truth and faithfulness—

His promises, as made to Abraham and his seed, are "mercy." As confirmed to Jacob and his Church, they are "truth." They have been established with the sanction of an "oath." And they will be fulfilled "to all the seed." How will every glorified soul admire the Divine procedure in that day!: What energy will the sight of sins forgiven, of backslidings healed, of glory bestowed, give to the exclamation in the text!

APPLICATION—

Let the careless, consider against whom their sins are committed—

Will they never pause, and exclaim, as Joseph? ([Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 39.9).

Let the penitent reflect on the description given of God in the Scriptures—

Nor let them judge of him by the dictates of sense. [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.8-9).

Let the sincere believer apply to himself that congratulation ([Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 33.29).)

Let him get a becoming frame of mind; and let him adopt that triumphant boast. [Isaiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 25.9).

Let all contemplate the joy that will be felt when Jews and Gentiles all join in this ascription of praise.

[Micah 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18-20)

DISCOURSE 1217

GOD'S MERCY, AS RESERVED FOR THE JEWS

[Micah 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18-20). Who is a God like unto you, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities: and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. You will perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which you have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old This Discourse is added to the foregoing, not only in order to elucidate it more fully, but especially in order to mark the connection of the text with the future restoration and conversion of the Jews.

TO acquire the knowledge of God, we must examine what is spoken of him in his word; and more especially the delineation which he has given of his own character, when, by an audible voice, he revealed himself to Moses [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.6-7). Yet we must by no means overlook his character, as it is embodied in his works. In the works of creation, of providence, and of redemption, all his perfections are displayed; and in such a way as to make the deepest possible impression on our minds. The passage which we have just read, if taken apart from the context, exhibits Jehovah in the most glorious colors: but if we take it in connection with the whole preceding prophecy, from which it results, it will present us with a view of the Deity surprisingly grand. It is evident that the prophet has been meditating on the Divine character as displayed in some stupendous acts of mercy, either already exercised, or designed to be exercised at some future period. Let us, then consider,

I. The dispensation which is here contemplated—

The Prophet Micah enters very fully into the subject of the Millennium, and opens it as circumstantially, especially as far as the Jewish nation are interested in it, as any prophet whatever. Let us hear what he says respecting it,

1. In the former part of his prophecy—

In the fourth chapter he opens the subject nearly in the same terms with the Prophet Isaiah: "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not rise against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken it [Micah 4:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.1-4) with [Isaiah 2:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.2-4)."

He then proceeds to show the blessings of which the Jews shall partake in that day: "In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble her that halts; and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted: and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even forever [Micah 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.6-7)." This, he adds, shall be accomplished, in part, by their deliverance from Babylon [Micah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.10); but yet, in immediate connection with that, he foretells events which were not accomplished at that period, nor shall be until the time fixed for their future restoration to their own land: "Now, also, many nations are gathered against you, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord; neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise, and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you shall beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth [Micah 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.11-13)." Nothing like this was effected at any time subsequent to the Babylonish Captivity: and therefore we must, of necessity, look to some future period for its accomplishment. But the prophet himself goes on to declare, that these glorious events were not to take place until after that the Messiah should have been born at Bethlehem: "You, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travails has brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he (the Messiah) shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they (the Jewish remnant) shall abide: for NOW shall he be great unto the ends of the earth [Micah 4:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.2-4). This shall be the time for the universal reign of Christ: at which time the Jews are destined to act a most conspicuous part upon the theater of the world; being, on the one hand, God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentile world; and, on the other hand, his agents for the destruction of all who shall oppose his will: "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men. The remnant of Jacob shall also be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he go through, both treads down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver. Your hand shall be lifted up upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off [Micah 5:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.7-9)." Now, in this passage we have a complete summary of all that shall take place in that day. The whole world of Jews and Gentiles shall be converted to Christ; but the Jews shall lead the way, and be God's honored instruments for bringing in the Gentiles; by whom, in the first instance, they shall be fiercely opposed; but over whom they shall triumph with immense slaughter, and with the same facility as a lion triumphs over a flock of sheep.

Not less fully does the prophet speak also,

2. In the chapter before us—

He represents, in very moving terms, the Jew anticipating this blessed period: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord your God? My eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down, as the mire of the streets verse 8–10." Then, after confirming this expectation as certainly to be fulfilled at the time appointed for the termination of their present sufferings verse 11–13, he himself cries to God in their behalf: "Feed your people with your rod, the flock of your heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old verse 14." And to this prayer God returns a most gracious answer; declaring, that he would interpose for them as wonderfully and effectually as he did for them at the time of their deliverance from Egypt, to the utter surprise and dismay of all surrounding nations: "According to the days of your coming out of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things. The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf: they shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall move out of their holes, like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of you verse 15–17."

Thus it is that the words of my text are introduced: they arise altogether out of the foregoing subject, and ought to be considered in connection with it. Let us then next mark,

II. The soliloquy uttered in the contemplation of it—

The soliloquy may be regarded as proceeding from the prophet himself, or from any pious and believing Jew.

Picture to yourselves, then, a Jew contemplating this event—

He breaks forth into a devout ascription of praise to God: first, in a general view of the dispensation; then, in a view of the particular mercies that shall be given under it; and, lastly, in a view of the great result. Let us follow him in each successive step.

'Who is a God like unto you, O Lord, who deal thus with the remnant of your heritage? As your "heritage," we were bound to serve you: and as a "remnant" preserved from so many dangers, we were still more bound to manifest the greatness of our obligations to you. Yet have we been a rebellious people from the day that you called us. Our sins against you have been greatly multiplied: but most of all have we deserved your wrathful indignation for our rejection of your only dear Son, whom you did send to be our Savior and Redeemer. I am amazed that you should "pardon such iniquities," and "pass by such inconceivable transgressions." But I trace it to your own love of mercy. It would have been impossible but that you must have "retained your anger" forever, if it had depended on us to get it removed: but within your own bosom you have found motives which could have been found no where else: and I am beyond measure astonished that ever you should contemplate such mercy towards your offending people.

'The things which are so indispensable to our happiness, you have of your own mercy decreed to give. Though we have so provoked you to anger by our unparalleled iniquities, yet "will you turn again, and have compassion upon us;" subduing for us the sins which have led us captive, and "casting into the very depths of the sea" the sins which have subjected us to your displeasure. Once we saw our enemies subdued, and dead upon the sea-shore: and our sins, which are infinitely more formidable enemies, will you treat in the same way, making us happy monuments of your unbounded power and grace. O Lord, I look forward to that blissful period with eager expectation, and adore you from my inmost soul, that you have such blessings in reserve for us.

'Then shall all your promises to our nation be fulfilled in their utmost extent. To Abraham they were the fruits of "mercy," of free, unmerited mercy altogether: but to Jacob they were memorials of your "truth;" seeing that you had made them over to Abraham and his seed, by covenant and by oath. Then shall all that you have "sworn" receive its full accomplishment. Then shall the seed of Abraham possess, to a far greater extent than they have ever yet done, their promised inheritance; and, at the same time, "in him shall also all the nations of the earth be blessed." When I look forward to these glorious events, I am altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise.'

But, as we also are interested in this salvation, let us also contemplate God's perfections as displayed in it—

Here we may see distinctly marked, yes, written as with a sun-beam, his mercy and loving-kindness, his power and grace, his truth and faithfulness.

How greatly have we provoked him to anger, times without number! Yet "will he not retain his anger against us," but "will pass by our transgressions," yes, and "pardon them," and "blot them out as a morning cloud;" and solely "because he delights in mercy." It shall be in him altogether an act of sovereign love. Nothing have we ever done to merit it; nor is it possible for us, by anything that we ever can do, to merit it: but the motives which he cannot derive from us, he will find within his own bosom: "he will have mercy, because he will have mercy; and will have compassion, because he will have compassion."

And what is there that he will not do for us? Truly, there is no limit either to his power or grace. Has the guilt of sin subjected us to his heavy displeasure? and is it like a millstone around our necks, ready to sink us into the bottomless abyss of Hell? He will cancel it; and "put it away from us, as far as the east is from the west;" yes, "and cast it behind him irrecoverably into the very depths of the sea;" so that to us, no less than unto the Jews, shall that gracious promise be fulfilled, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve [Jeremiah 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 50.20);" Nor is this all. He well knows that sin, if suffered to retain its power over us, would still be, as it were, a Hell within us, and infallibly plunge us into everlasting perdition: he therefore takes to him his mighty power, and, by the effectual operation of his grace, subdues it in us; so that we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and are "transformed into his image in righteousness and true holiness." Thus, while he delivers us from Hell, "he makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light."

And where is the person who ever laid hold on his covenant, and has not had it fulfilled to him in all its parts? No, truly: God has said, "I will never leave you; never, never forsake you:" and he is faithful to his word; nor has one jot or tittle of it ever failed. No, blessed Lord; to the final accomplishment of your promises we look with unutterable joy. And, when we are once arrived at that promised land, the heavenly Canaan, O! what wonders of truth and faithfulness shall we have to contemplate! We shall view the acquisition doubtless as "mercy," in the first instance; but we shall view it also as "truth:" for "you have sworn" to give it to your believing people: and you did "confirm your promise with an oath, on purpose that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for you to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before us [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.18)." Lord, keep us unto that day; and "fulfill unto every one of us that word wherein you have caused us to put our trust!"

A reflection or two shall close our subject—

1. If such be the prospects of the Jew, in what a noble work are they engaged who are helping forward the attainment of them!

God sent a Moses and an Aaron to bring his people out of Egypt. And shall he use no means to gather them from their present dispersion, and to restore them to the enjoyment of his favor? The whole Scriptures attest the contrary; and assuredly, when the time draws near, he will find persons to send to them, and will bless to the intended end their benevolent endeavors. What then should be our state in reference to them? Should we not say with the Prophet Isaiah, "Here am I: send me?" It is much to be lamented, that the Christian world feel a backwardness to this work, far beyond any which they feel in reference to the Gentiles. But why is this? Has not God engaged to bring them to himself? And is he not as able to effect their salvation, as the salvation of the Gentile world? The truth is, that this backwardness is a remnant of that hatred and contempt which have subsisted against the Jews these eighteen hundred years, and have not even yet been dispelled by the kindlier offices of love. It is a scandal, however, to the Christian world, that this neglect of them should continue, in the midst of all the light which we now enjoy. It is a shame to ministers that they do not more unfold to their people the purposes of God respecting them; and to private Christians, that they never study the Prophecies relating to them. But I appeal to all of you: Is it not desirable that the glorious prospects of the Jews should be realized, and that Almighty God should receive the glory due unto his name? If, when Israel was saved from Egypt, they sang, "Who is like unto you, O God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" should we not labor, that more elevated songs of praise should be poured forth to him on account of that infinitely greater deliverance reserved for them? I call upon you, then, to unite in this blessed work. I call upon you to anticipate the event with confidence, and to help it forward with zeal.

2. If such be the feelings of a Jew, in the mere anticipation of those promised mercies, what should ours be, who are in the actual possession of them?

Thanks be to God! we are in possession of them. We know what it is to have "our iniquities forgiven, and our sins covered:" yes, we know what it is to "have peace with God, and to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Greatly as God has been provoked by us, we know that "his anger is turned away from us, and that he has comforted us." True it is, that, at the period before referred to, these blessings will be enjoyed in a far higher degree; for, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, 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)." But still our privileges are exceeding great: and we should contemplate them, not with indifference or with some transient emotions of joy: no; we should feel ourselves altogether overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness to us; and, in the spirit of our minds at least, if not in the audible expressions, we should be saying day and night, "O God, who is like unto you?" I must say, that, if this be not our state, we are far from appreciating God's mercy to us as we ought. And I call on all of you so to meditate on his kindness to you, that your present sense of it may be a foretaste of Heaven, and your songs of thanksgiving be a recital of those which you shall sing forever in the realms of bliss.

I know, indeed, that the trembling sinner feels it difficult to view God in this endearing light. But I would ask of any one, what evidence would you wish for of God's disposition to forgive sin? Can you have greater evidence of it than in God's promised return to his outcast people, even to that people who imbrued their hands in the blood of his only dear Son, and have for so many hundreds of years cast all possible odium upon his name? I say then, Hear the Jew speaking in my text, and adopt his language in reference to yourselves. And know, that, as God will return to the Jewish people in due season, so shall "mercy rejoice over judgment," in reference to you: and, as they shall yet become most distinguished monuments of his mercy and truth, so shall mercy and truth abound towards you, and God be glorified in you forever and ever. If there be here any one who is ready to suppose that the magnitude and long-continuance of his sins preclude a possibility of obtaining mercy, I would say to him, Though you had upon your own individual soul all the sins that ever were committed by the whole Jewish nation, if you had even murdered the Son of God himself, and persisted in your hatred of him eighteen hundred years; yet, on your desiring to obtain mercy, you should find God all that he is represented to you in the text. Let this saying sink down into your ears; and trembling as you are, your sorrows shall all be turned into joy.

NAHUM

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

[Nahum 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.2)

DISCOURSE 1218

GOD A REVENGER OF SIN

[Nahum 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.2); [Nahum 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.6). God is jealous, and the Lord revenges; the Lord revenges, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies.…Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?

MEN have such ideas of God's mercy, that they cannot persuade themselves he will ever execute judgment on impenitent transgressors. In fact, it is the hope of this which encourages men to go on in their sins: for, if once they could believe that they shall soon become monuments of God's righteous indignation, they would consider their ways, and labor by all possible means to avert his displeasure.

About one hundred and forty years before this was written, the Prophet Jonah had been sent to warn the Ninevites of their impending destruction. But they had repented of their wickedness; and God, in his mercy, had withheld his threatened judgments. But now he warns them, that since they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, his wrath should come upon them to the uttermost. Now, I would ask, supposing God to be determined to convince men that he would execute vengeance on the impenitent, what could he add to what is here spoken? Methinks there is here such an accumulation of words, as must defy incredulity itself to question the truth contained in them. It is not a pleasing subject that we are now called to insist upon: but it is necessary; and the more necessary, because of men's backwardness to give it the consideration it deserves. Let us, then, consider,

I. The description here given of the Deity—

God is "a jealous God"—

He has a claim to our undivided allegiance, and to all the affections of our souls. And when he sees how prone we are to set our affections on the creature rather than on him, it becomes him to be jealous. A man like ourselves would not do well to connive at the unfaithfulness of his wife, who was giving to others the affections which were his unalienable right: how much less, then, can God admit such an alienation of our hearts from him!. He cannot: indeed "his very name is Jealous [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 34.14);" and he must divest himself of his every perfection, before he can connive at the dishonor which our unfaithfulness reflects upon him.

He will "take vengeance" on obstinate transgressors—

"The Lord revenges; yes, he revenges, and is furious." We are not indeed to conceive of him as feeling in his own bosom such emotions as constitute "fury" in man: in that sense "fury is not in him [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.4);" but, so far as the effects of his displeasure are felt, it will be the same to us, as if he were filled with the utmost rage. At present, indeed, he bears with sinners with all imaginable patience and long-suffering: but "he reserves them unto the day of judgment to be punished [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.9)." In my text, the word "wrath" is in italics, to show that it is not in the original. In truth, there is no word in any language that can express what God "reserves for his enemies;" no, nor can any imagination conceive it. The Psalmist well says, "Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath [Psalm 90:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.11)."

And "who can stand before his indignation?"

"Who indeed can abide the fierceness of his anger?" These pointed interrogations convey the most tremendous thoughts to our minds. Now we can "puff at God's judgments," as if they were scarcely worthy of a thought [Psalm 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.5); but it will not be so when the time for the infliction of them is fully come. Then "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, no less than the poor bond-man, will hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and will cry to the mountains and rocks to fall upon them, and to hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. "The great day of his wrath being come, who shall be able to stand [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.15-17)." The wrath of man has been sustained, even when it raged to the utmost extent of human ingenuity to inflict pain: but who can sustain the wrath of God? The soul, aided by divine grace, has upheld the body: but who, or what, can uphold the soul, when it is God's arm, too, that inflicts the punishment? Some will console themselves with the thought that they shall do as well as others. But if they could for one moment descend to Hell, and see the agonies, and hear the cries, of a damned soul, methinks it would be little consolation to think that they shall do as well as others. If they were only to be racked upon a wheel, and to endure its agonies but for an hour, their prospect, methinks, would be but little cheered by this thought: how much less then, when the wrath of an offended God must be endured to all eternity!

But, that we sink not into despondency, let us attend to,

II. The advice, which one moment's reflection on this subject must suggest—

The doom of Nineveh was fixed: but not so the doom of any among us. No, Brethren, there is yet hope concerning you; yes, concerning every one of you. Only,

1. Abide not in impenitence—

When Nineveh was warned by Jonah, though no encouragement was given them to repent, they humbled themselves, on a mere perhaps that God might possibly have mercy on them: and the mercy which they sought was accorded to them [Jonah 3:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.5-10). But to you I am authorized to proclaim mercy: for God's gracious message to you is, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 18.30)." Hear what God says to you by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it [Jeremiah 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 4.3-4)." Yes indeed, by timely humiliation, you may yet avert the wrath of your incensed God; who, "if you forsake your evil ways, and turn unto him, will have mercy upon you, and abundantly pardon," to the full extent of your multiplied transgressions [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.7).

2. Abide not in unbelief—

God has provided a Savior for you, even his only dear Son; who has, by his own obedience unto death, effected a reconciliation for you; and "has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation;" so that we are not only authorized, but commanded, to say to all of you, without exception, "Be you reconciled to God [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.18-20)." He has illustrated this to you in his word, by the appointment of cities of refuge for those who by any accident should slay a man. The very instant he should get within the gates of any one of these cities, he was safe; and the pursuer of blood, however enraged, could not get at him to hurt him [Numbers 35:9-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 35.9-25). And who shall sustain any hurt, that flees to Christ for refuge? No: in him you will be safe. Once found in him, you have nothing to fear. You are as safe in him as you would be in Heaven itself [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18). [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.1). To every one of you, then, I give this counsel from the Lord: "Come, my people, enter you into your chambers, and shut your doors about you: hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.20)."

3. Abide not in a proud defiance of your God—

There were, in the days of old, some who, in answer to God's threatenings, said, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it [Isaiah 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.19)." And such there are among ourselves, who, in reply to all that we say, exclaim, "Ah, Lord God, does he not speak parables [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.49)." But indeed, my dear brethren, God's patience will have an end; and the very exercise of it will only aggravate our condemnation, if it do not "prevail to lead us to repentance [Romans 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.4-6)." Be persuaded that God's description of himself, in the words of our text, will be found true at the last. He is indeed "a consuming fire [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.29);" and "can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, in the day that he shall deal with you [Ezekiel 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 22.14)." "Have you an arm like God? and can you thunder with a voice like him [Job 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 40.9)." No: it is in vain to contend with God: for "who shall set briers and thorns against him in battle? He will go through them, and burn them up together [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.4)." Truly, "it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God [Hebrews 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.31)." Be convinced of this; and "today, while it is called today," implore mercy at his hands: so shall you find, that "he will pardon your iniquity, and pass by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; for he retains not anger forever, because he delights in mercy [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18)." And if the description of him in my text be true, you shall find that true also which is added in the seventh verse, "The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble; and he knows them that trust in him."

[Nahum 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.6)

DISCOURSE 1218

GOD A REVENGER OF SIN

[Nahum 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.2); [Nahum 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.6). God is jealous, and the Lord revenges; the Lord revenges, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies.…Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?

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"The Lord revenges; yes, he revenges, and is furious." We are not indeed to conceive of him as feeling in his own bosom such emotions as constitute "fury" in man: in that sense "fury is not in him [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.4);" but, so far as the effects of his displeasure are felt, it will be the same to us, as if he were filled with the utmost rage. At present, indeed, he bears with sinners with all imaginable patience and long-suffering: but "he reserves them unto the day of judgment to be punished [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.9)." In my text, the word "wrath" is in italics, to show that it is not in the original. In truth, there is no word in any language that can express what God "reserves for his enemies;" no, nor can any imagination conceive it. The Psalmist well says, "Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath [Psalm 90:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.11)."

And "who can stand before his indignation?"

"Who indeed can abide the fierceness of his anger?" These pointed interrogations convey the most tremendous thoughts to our minds. Now we can "puff at God's judgments," as if they were scarcely worthy of a thought [Psalm 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.5); but it will not be so when the time for the infliction of them is fully come. Then "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, no less than the poor bond-man, will hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and will cry to the mountains and rocks to fall upon them, and to hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. "The great day of his wrath being come, who shall be able to stand [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.15-17)." The wrath of man has been sustained, even when it raged to the utmost extent of human ingenuity to inflict pain: but who can sustain the wrath of God? The soul, aided by divine grace, has upheld the body: but who, or what, can uphold the soul, when it is God's arm, too, that inflicts the punishment? Some will console themselves with the thought that they shall do as well as others. But if they could for one moment descend to Hell, and see the agonies, and hear the cries, of a damned soul, methinks it would be little consolation to think that they shall do as well as others. If they were only to be racked upon a wheel, and to endure its agonies but for an hour, their prospect, methinks, would be but little cheered by this thought: how much less then, when the wrath of an offended God must be endured to all eternity!

But, that we sink not into despondency, let us attend to,

II. The advice, which one moment's reflection on this subject must suggest—

The doom of Nineveh was fixed: but not so the doom of any among us. No, Brethren, there is yet hope concerning you; yes, concerning every one of you. Only,

1. Abide not in impenitence—

When Nineveh was warned by Jonah, though no encouragement was given them to repent, they humbled themselves, on a mere perhaps that God might possibly have mercy on them: and the mercy which they sought was accorded to them [Jonah 3:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.5-10). But to you I am authorized to proclaim mercy: for God's gracious message to you is, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 18.30)." Hear what God says to you by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it [Jeremiah 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 4.3-4)." Yes indeed, by timely humiliation, you may yet avert the wrath of your incensed God; who, "if you forsake your evil ways, and turn unto him, will have mercy upon you, and abundantly pardon," to the full extent of your multiplied transgressions [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.7).

2. Abide not in unbelief—

God has provided a Savior for you, even his only dear Son; who has, by his own obedience unto death, effected a reconciliation for you; and "has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation;" so that we are not only authorized, but commanded, to say to all of you, without exception, "Be you reconciled to God [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.18-20)." He has illustrated this to you in his word, by the appointment of cities of refuge for those who by any accident should slay a man. The very instant he should get within the gates of any one of these cities, he was safe; and the pursuer of blood, however enraged, could not get at him to hurt him [Numbers 35:9-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 35.9-25). And who shall sustain any hurt, that flees to Christ for refuge? No: in him you will be safe. Once found in him, you have nothing to fear. You are as safe in him as you would be in Heaven itself [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18). [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.1). To every one of you, then, I give this counsel from the Lord: "Come, my people, enter you into your chambers, and shut your doors about you: hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.20)."

3. Abide not in a proud defiance of your God—

There were, in the days of old, some who, in answer to God's threatenings, said, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it [Isaiah 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.19)." And such there are among ourselves, who, in reply to all that we say, exclaim, "Ah, Lord God, does he not speak parables [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 20.49)." But indeed, my dear brethren, God's patience will have an end; and the very exercise of it will only aggravate our condemnation, if it do not "prevail to lead us to repentance [Romans 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.4-6)." Be persuaded that God's description of himself, in the words of our text, will be found true at the last. He is indeed "a consuming fire [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.29);" and "can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, in the day that he shall deal with you [Ezekiel 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 22.14)." "Have you an arm like God? and can you thunder with a voice like him [Job 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 40.9)." No: it is in vain to contend with God: for "who shall set briers and thorns against him in battle? He will go through them, and burn them up together [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.4)." Truly, "it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God [Hebrews 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.31)." Be convinced of this; and "today, while it is called today," implore mercy at his hands: so shall you find, that "he will pardon your iniquity, and pass by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; for he retains not anger forever, because he delights in mercy [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.18)." And if the description of him in my text be true, you shall find that true also which is added in the seventh verse, "The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble; and he knows them that trust in him."

[Nahum 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.7)

DISCOURSE 1219

GOD A REFUGE IN TIME OF TROUBLE

[Nahum 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.7). The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knows them that trust in him.

WHEN God interposed in a cloud between the camp of Israel and the camp of the Egyptians, the cloud was to those a pillar of fire, to give them light; but to these a cloud of darkness, to obstruct their way. And such is the varied aspect of Jehovah to his friends and enemies in all ages. Towards the Ninevites, who had now nearly filled up the measure of their iniquities, and forced, as it were, from Jehovah a decree of utter and everlasting excision, he is represented in terms the most awful that language could afford: "God is jealous, and the Lord revenges, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies.…Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire; and the rocks are thrown down by him verse 2, 6." But, lest the Lord's people should apply this description of Jehovah indiscriminately to all persons of whatever character, the prophet stops abruptly, and declares, that towards his own believing people Jehovah is of a very different character; for that "he is good, and a strong hold in the day of trouble, and knows them that trust in him."

Let us for our comfort consider Jehovah as he is here depicted to us;

I. In the perfections of his nature—

"He is good;" every way "good;" and appears to be so in all that he has ever done. His works of creation were all, after an attentive survey of them by the Divine Artificer, pronounced to be "very good." In the course of so many thousands of years there never has been found one single instance in which any work of his could be improved; so perfect has been the adaptation of every part to its respective use, and so complete the subservience of each to the good of the whole. His works of providence come less within the sphere of human observation, because we know not all the ends that are to be accomplished by them: but of those which have been the most dark or most calamitous we have had the unanimous testimony of the best judges, that "he has done all things well;" and that, however "clouds and darkness may have been round about him, justice and judgment have been the basis of his throne." Of his works of redemption what shall we say? In what terms can we convey any just notion of them? Truly the tongue of an archangel is incapable of expressing the goodness of God in giving his only dear Son to die for us [1 John 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.8-10); this mystery far exceeds the comprehension of any finite intelligence: its "height and depth and length and breadth can never be explored:" suffice it to say, that the incarnation and death of the Son of God is the one subject of adoration among all the hosts of Heaven, and will continue to be so through the countless ages of eternity [Revelation 5:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.12-14).

But, while the goodness of God is readily acknowledged in reference to those who are the objects of mercy, it may be doubted in reference to those who shall be the objects of his everlasting displeasure. It may be asked, How can his punitive justice be good? I answer, If he did not maintain the rights of justice he could not be "good." Whatever ungodly men may imagine, justice is necessary in every government: and, if an earthly monarch would be thought essentially defective if he suffered all the laws of the realm to be outraged and set at nothing with impunity, so would Jehovah, with reverence be it spoken, act unworthily as the Moral Governor of the universe, if he made no difference between the observers of his laws, and those who violated them without remorse. His law is a transcript of his holy will; and the honor of it must be maintained, either by the observance of its precepts, or by the execution of its penalties. Besides, if the justice of God were not displayed in the punishment of sin, he would neither be revered in Heaven, nor feared on earth. In Heaven, his justice and holiness and truth would be altogether darkened, and the radiance of all his other perfections obscured: and on earth, Satan would retain an undisputed sway over the hearts of men.

In every view therefore we must say, not only that God is good, but that his goodness, no less than "his greatness, is unsearchable."

We have a further insight given us into the character of God,

II. In the provisions of his covenant—

Sin has brought misery along with it: and since the first introduction of sin into the world, "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." But God has entered into covenant with his only dear Son as our head and representative; and has made over to us himself as our God, at the same time that he takes us to himself as his people. In the day of trouble we feel, that none but God can afford us any effectual help: and he engages at that season to be a very present help unto us. Whatever our affliction be, we may go to him with it, and find him "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)." What a strong-hold he is we see in the instance of Hezekiah, when surrounded by the Assyrian army, whom, according to all human appearance, it was impossible for him to withstand: one assurance of protection from Jehovah enabled that holy prince to despise all the menaces of his blaspheming adversary, and to rest as secure and as composed as if there had been no danger at hand [Isaiah 37:21-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.21-33).

But if in temporal troubles God is such a refuge, much more is he when the soul is oppressed with a sense of sin. Hear what he speaks to us by his beloved Son: "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes: our adorable Savior was fitly represented to us by the cities of refuge, which were open day and night to the manslayer, and which afforded him perfect security from the pursuer of blood, the very instant he entered within their gates. Such a city is the Lord Jesus, "whose name is a strong tower, to which the righteous runs and is safe." Has he not himself said, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out?" Let the afflicted sinner go to him, and he shall find that this "man," this God-man, "will be to him as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 32.2)." Truly "He will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."

We shall have a yet deeper insight into his character, if we view him,

III. In the dispensations of his grace—

"He knows those who trust in him;" not merely as distinguishing them from others, but as feeling towards them the most affectionate regard: (in this sense the word "knows" is frequently used [Psalm 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 1.6).) He views them with the tenderest sympathy and compassion, being "touched with a feeling of all their infirmities [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.15)," and being "afflicted in all their afflictions [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.9)." Of his people, when suffering under their Egyptian task-masters, he said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their sorrows [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 3.7)." And the same tender regard is shown by him to a solitary individual as to a whole nation: for David says, "When my spirit was overwhelmed, you knew my path [Psalm 142:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 142.3);" and again, "You have known my soul in adversities [Psalm 31:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 31.7)." The act of trusting in God is itself so pleasing and acceptable in his sight, that there is not anything which he will not do for one who looks to him in such a frame [Psalm 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 31.19). So abundantly will he communicate to such an one the riches of his grace, that he will make his soul like a well-watered garden, filled with the richest fruits, suited to every season of the year [Jeremiah 17:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.7-8). Whatever enemies may assault him, God will "keep his soul in perfect peace [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.3)," and make him even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 125.1).'

What improvement shall we make of this subject?

I answer,

1. "Acquaint yourselves with God"—

Study the character of God as drawn in the Holy Scriptures. Some think of him as a God of all mercy; and others, as clothed only in the terrors of inexorable justice. But the true character of God is, that he is "a just God and a Savior." In the Lord Jesus Christ this union of justice and mercy is fully displayed. Once view him as dying, rising, reigning for sinful man, and then all the description given of God in our text will be seen in its true light, and all the brightness of the Godhead irradiate your souls.

2. Glorify him as God—

As far as we know God, even though it be only in the notices which he has given us of himself in the works of creation, we ought to "glorify him as God [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.21)." How much more then ought we to do so, when all his glory is made to shine before us in the face of Jesus Christ! How should we love him, serve him, trust in him, and delight ourselves in him! O, beloved, let your hearts ascend to him, and your souls be devoted to him, as the occasion demands. Is he "good?" praise him for his goodness. Is he "a strong-hold?" flee to him, and dwell continually in him. Does he "know those who trust in him?" let him have joy over you as monuments of his grace, and delight in you as heirs of his glory [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.17). In a word, live but for him; and as he has "bought you with a price, see that you glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.20)."

[Nahum 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.15)

DISCOURSE 1220

THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF GOD'S MERCIES Thanksgiving Sermon for peace, in May 1802.

[Nahum 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.15). Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace! O Judah, keep your solemn feasts, perform your rows.

IN the writings of the prophets there is an abruptness of style, which often renders them intricate, and almost unintelligible. The rapidity of their transitions from one person to another, from one period to another, and from one subject to another, tends to bewilder the mind, and operates as a discouragement to us, when we endeavor to investigate and comprehend their meaning. But when we are on our guard respecting this, we shall often discover beauties that will amply repay the labor of investigation, and shall be led to admire those passages, which at first sight appeared to be involved in impenetrable obscurity.

The subject of the prophecy before us is the destruction of Sennacherib's army, as a prelude to the overthrow of the Assyrian empire, of which Nineveh was the capital. The prophet begins this chapter with expatiating in general terms on the power and vindictive justice of Jehovah verse 2–7. He then speaks of these perfections with a more express reference to his main point verse 8–10. After that, he proceeds to address himself to Nineveh, from whence that "wicked counselor," Sennacherib, should come verse 11. Then, in Jehovah's name, he addresses himself to the Jewish nation, to certify them, that, however greatly this formidable enemy should harass and distress them, they should be freed from his yoke verse 12, 13. Then he addresses more immediately Sennacherib himself, and declares that he, his family, and his idols, should be signally and entirely cut off verse 14. Lastly, beholding, as it were, his prophecy already accomplished, he points to the Messenger hastening over the mountains to announce the glad tidings: and he calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to resume their usual occupations, and especially their religious ordinances, in humble acknowledgment of the Divine goodness, and with a faithful regard to those vows which they had made in the day of their calamity verse 15.

The affinity between this subject, and that which calls for our attention this day, will more fully appear, while we consider,

I. The tidings which are announced to us this day—

These certainly relate, in the first instance, to Hezekiah's deliverance by the destruction of Sennacherib's army—

This was a great deliverance, wrought by God himself through the ministry of an angel [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 37.36). And it may well serve to illustrate the blessings we this day commemorate If it be the Restoration of Peace, the parallel must be drawn between the dangers to which Jerusalem, and our nation, had been exposed. And, if there have been any signal interpositions of the Deity in favor of our land, the mention of them will mark the parallel more strongly. If it be the Restoration of King Charles the Second, the blessings of Hezekiah's government, and the renewal of the established ordinances of religion, must rather be adverted to as the ground of the parallel.

But they relate also to the deliverance of mankind from sin and death through the intervention of the Lord Jesus—

The deliverances given to the Jews, are constantly represented in Scripture as typical of the great work of redemption: and the very expressions in the text are used by Isaiah with a more direct reference to that event [Isaiah 52:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 52.7). Nor is this idea founded in conjecture; for Paul, quoting the words of both the prophets, applies them directly to the proclaiming of salvation to the Gentile world [Romans 10:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.13-15). If then the prophet mingled these two events, well may we do so too; and from contemplating the mercies given to us in a temporal view, take occasion to reflect on the infinitely richer mercies which we obtain through Christ Here the destruction of our spiritual enemies by Christ, "the Angel of the Covenant," may be announced, as joyful tidings to those who are "shut up under the Law," the wretched expectants of death and judgment.

We are at no loss how to improve these tidings, since the prophet himself suggests,

II. The duties resulting from them—

In an encouraging yet monitory strain, he exhorts us to,

1. A devout acknowledgment of the mercies received—

The way to Jerusalem having been blocked up by the besieging army, the prophet tells the people, that now they may have free access to the temple, and come up at the appointed seasons to their solemn feasts. And should not we also now avail ourselves of the opportunities which are afforded us, and wait upon God without distraction Here, if the King's Restoration be the subject of thanksgiving, reference may be made to the interruption of the established worship during the usurpation, and the danger of its entire abolition afterwards, during the time of the Revolution. We should at least spend this day, not in mere carnal mirth, but in solemn feasting before God, even in spiritual, and more appropriate joy.

The remembrance of the work of redemption more especially should kindle in our hearts a sacred flame of gratitude and thanksgiving, and should stimulate us to a more strict observance of the Sabbath, which, in commemoration of it, was made to supersede the original Sabbath, and was designated by that honorable appellation, The Lord's Day.

2. A conscientious performance of the vows we have made—

It is most probable, that many, during the siege of Jerusalem, would make vows to God, as the Jews from the beginning had been in the habit of doing under their calamities. Nor can we doubt but that many of ourselves, in seasons of sickness or trouble, have purposed, and perhaps vowed, to change the course of our lives, if we were delivered from the distresses which we either felt or feared. At this time in particular we have been making vows, which we are bound to perform Such vows are constantly offered to God, in the forms of prayer for the 29th of May, and the fast-days; and they may here be quoted from the one or other of those forms, as the occasion requires; and may be pressed on the conscience as obligatory at this time. But, alas! if we compare our petitions in the midst of trouble, with our lives when delivered from trouble, what an awful contrast does there appear! Let it not, however, be so on this occasion; but let us remember the vows that are upon us; for "better were it never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay [Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 5.4-5)."

We conclude then with an address, both inspired and uttered by God himself; "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against you! Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay your vows unto the Most High [Psalm 50:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.7); [Psalm 50:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.14)."

HABAKKUK

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

[Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.13)

DISCOURSE 1221

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

[Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.13). You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and can not look on iniquity.

MEN do not sufficiently contemplate the character of God. The Psalmist, speaking of some in his day, says, "These things you have done; and I kept silence: and you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.21)." In like manner, we, if we do not see before our eyes some visible displays of God's displeasure, are ready to imagine that he will suffer our iniquities to pass unpunished. But, whoever he be that commits sin, whether he be an avowed enemy of God, or one that is numbered among his people, let him know that "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity" but with the utmost abhorrence. Primarily, these words have respect to the Chaldeans, who were about to invade Judea, and to execute upon the whole Jewish nation the most fearful vengeance Compare verse 2, 3. where the very same terms are used. In reference to them, the prophet calls upon the holy God to arise and vindicate the cause of his people. But the words of my text contain a general truth, which it becomes us all most seriously to consider.

Let me then show you,

I. What evidence God has given us of this truth—

If we look into the Holy Scriptures, we shall find them full of this truth. "Holiness" is that perfection which, above all others, is celebrated in Heaven [Isaiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 6.3); and in which God is pre-eminently glorious [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 15.11)." But not to enumerate passages expressive of this truth, let one suffice: "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand in your sight: you hate all workers of iniquity [Psalm 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 5.4-5)." It is by an appeal to facts that I propose to establish the truth before us. See how God has manifested it,

1. In a way of judgment—

Go back to the very fall of man in Paradise. An offence was committed; an offence against a merely positive command; and which therefore had in it no intrinsic evil, except as a violation of, what I may call, an arbitrary appointment. Yet behold, on account of that one offence were our first parents, and all their posterity, consigned to death; yes, and the whole creation also, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, was subjected to a curse.

Go on to the time of Noah, when, for the sins of men, the whole world, with every living creature, was overwhelmed with one universal deluge; one single family alone, with a small selection of the brute creation, being saved.

Go on to Sodom and Gomorrah, and to all the cities of the plain; and see them destroyed by fire and brimstone from Heaven; not so much as a new-born infant being spared, or any, except righteous Lot and his two daughters. Are these no evidences of the truth before us? Methinks they declare, in language that cannot be mistaken, God's hatred of sin, and his determination to punish it to the uttermost.

Behold, at a later period, Achan keeping for himself a wedge of gold, and a Babylonish garment, which ought to have been destroyed. No one was robbed; and the offence was not known to any human being; but yet, on account of that, did God leave for a season all the whole nation, and never return to them in mercy, until the offender was sought out and punished with death.

A terrible act of vengeance also was executed on Uzzah, who, to keep the ark from falling, inadvertently stretched out his hand, and touched it; he himself not being of the Levites, who alone were authorized to touch it. Say, brethren, is not God a holy God? and is not sin, of what kind soever it be, "that abominable thing which he hates?"

Take but one more instance; that of David numbering the people. For that one offence were seventy thousand of his subjects slain. What further proof can any man desire of God's irreconcilable abhorrence of all sin?

2. In a way of mercy—

When the whole human race were involved in Adam's guilt and misery, God could no more look upon them with the smallest measure of delight. Before he could cast an eye of love upon so much as one single soul, its sins must all be expiated; and a perfect righteousness must be given to it; and its every desire must be renewed. But how could all this be effected? It could be effected only through the mediation of God's only dear Son, and by the operation of his own Almighty and eternal Spirit. To exercise mercy, was God's desire: and that he might exercise it in consistency with his own immaculate holiness, he determined to give his only-begotten Son, that through him, and in his sacred person, his hatred of sin might be made manifest; and to give his Holy Spirit also, that, through his effectual agency, his love of holiness might be displayed. Tell me, then, whether this does not confirm the declaration in my text? To all eternity, God will not look upon any sinner that is not washed in the blood of Christ, and clothed in his unspotted righteousness: nor will he ever look on one who is not "renewed in the spirit of his mind," and transformed by the Holy Spirit into that very image of the Deity which sin has effaced.

Truly, let these things be considered; and you will say, that "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity:" for when sin was found upon his only dear Son, and that only by imputation, the cup of God's indignation must be drunk by him, even to the very dregs: nor, until that was done, should any soul of man find mercy at his hands.

This truth being so clear, let us consider,

II. What lessons it inculcates on every one of us—

Of the admiration which this sublime character of the Deity demands, I shall forbear to speak. I will notice only those more plain and obvious duties, which are of prime importance to every child of man. This view, then, of God's holiness, may teach us all,

1. To repent of our former sins—

Who is there that has not, in instances without number, grieved and offended this holy God?: Look back, my brethren, upon your lives, from the earliest childhood even to the present hour, and consult the records of conscience; and then say, whether God can ever look on you but with just and holy indignation?: O that all of us were duly sensible of our transgressions, and were humbled before God on account of them! To hope for mercy without deep contrition is in vain. We might as well hope that God should cease to exist: for while he continues a holy Being, he never can behold but with anger an impenitent transgressor. He tells us plainly, that, "except we repent, we must all perish [Luke 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 13.5);" and it is "the broken and contrite heart alone that he will not utterly despise [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.17)."

2. To flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge—

Christ is the city of refuge appointed for sinful man: and to him must every human being flee, if ever he would escape the sword of Divine vengeance. As for repentance, though it be necessary to prepare the soul for pardon, it can never of itself obtain pardon. Whole rivers of tears could never wash away so much as one single sin. Nothing but that which satisfied Divine justice can ever obtain for us the remission of any sin whatever: Indeed, Brethren, "no man can come unto the Father but by Christ:" "nor is there any name given under Heaven but his, whereby any man can be saved." Bring then your sins to Christ, and lay them upon his sacred head, as the high-priest laid the sins of all Israel on the head of the scape-goat. Take also to yourselves his perfect righteousness, that in that you may "stand before God without spot or blemish." In that way you may hope for acceptance with a holy God: but in no other way shall any soul of man come up with acceptance before him.

3. To implore of God the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit—

To your latest hour will you find, that, in some respect or other, "the law of sin which is in your members will prevail over the better law of your minds," and bring defilement on your souls. In truth, if you be not upheld continually by the Spirit of God, there is not any sin into which you may not relapse. Your own wisdom will not suffice to keep you from temptation; nor will your own strength suffice to preserve you from falling by it. A new-born infant does not more need to be carried in its mother's arms, than you do to be upheld continually by the Spirit of the Living God. Be earnest, then, in crying to God for help: for it is through the Spirit alone that you can mortify the deeds of the body, or bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the honor of your God, And do not presume on God's past mercy to you: for it is an unalterable truth, that "God cannot behold evil:" and, "if you indulge iniquity in your heart, God neither will, nor can, regard you." To be accepted of him, "you must be holy, even as he is holy."

[Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.3)

DISCOURSE 1222

OUR DUTY IN REFERENCE TO THE PROMISES

[Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.3). The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry.

AS there is no one so secure, but he may fall, so there is no one in so low and afflicted a condition, but God may have mercy in reserve for him. It has pleased God on many occasions to suffer his people to be reduced to the very last extremity before he interposed for them, in order that his interposition for them might be more visible, and might produce in their minds livelier sensations of joy and gratitude. The prophet, having foretold the total destruction of his country by the Chaldean armies, was greatly grieved at the prospect of such extensive and dreadful calamities. He looked therefore to God, to know whether there were any alleviating circumstances which might console the people in their troubles; and he was favored with a vision of their future deliverance from Babylon; and was ordered to write it down in terms so plain, that the most inattentive or superficial observer could not but understand them: but as the promise had respect to a distant period of time, he was told to bid them wait for its accomplishment, in a full assurance that they should not ultimately be disappointed.

But we must not confine the promise to this subject: for in the Epistle to the Hebrews this promise is quoted in a general manner, as applicable to all the distresses with which the Lord's people are tried [Hebrews 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.37). The Lord himself stands engaged for their support and deliverance; and he enjoins them to wait his appointed time, in a certain expectation that he will in due season fulfill his word.

We propose then to show,

I. The certainty of the promises—

There is a time fixed in the Divine counsels for the accomplishment of every promise—

The promises of God often have respect to a very distant period: yet that period is fixed; nor can it be either accelerated or delayed. The time for Christ's incarnation, though not revealed from the beginning, was appointed of God from eternity. Thousands of years rolled on before the period arrived; but at the time when, according to Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah's advent was generally expected, he came [Daniel 9:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.25-26). [Luke 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.38). The time for detaining Abraham's descendants was fixed, even to a single day: and the accuracy with which the promise was fulfilled, is noted by the historian as a circumstance worthy of most attentive observation; "It came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord [Exodus 12:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 12.40-42)." The same remark also extends to every blessing which God has determined to confer upon his people: nor can they use a better plea on behalf of themselves or of the Church at large, than that which the Psalmist urges, "Arise, and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, is come [Psalm 102:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 102.13)."

When that period is arrived, the promise, how improbable soever it may appear, shall be fulfilled—

Nothing could be more unlikely, according to human apprehensions, than the deliverance foretold in the text: yet at the appointed time the Chaldeans were subdued by the Medes and Persians, and the Jews were liberated by the very man who had been foretold by name long before he had any existence in the world. The promise made to Abraham and Sarah was delayed, until the accomplishment of it, according to the course of nature, seemed impossible: yet it was not suffered to fall to the ground; in due time it received its completion, and gave a demonstration, that God was true to his word. Thus when God delays to give peace to the contrite, and victory to those who are conflicting with sin, we must not imagine that he has forgotten to be gracious, but that the time for the performance of his promise is not fully come. He has said, that "he will give his people the blessing of peace [Psalm 29:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 29.11)," and that "sin shall not have dominion over them [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.14);" and he will "not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail." "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 46.10)."

Being assured then of the stability of his promises, let us consider,

II. Our duty with respect to them—

As "we know not the times or seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power," it becomes us to wait,

1. In humility—

We can claim nothing at the hands of God. If he were to deal with us as he did with the fallen angels, we should have no more than our desert. The most distant hope of obtaining mercy is a marvelous favor conferred upon us. We should therefore lie low before him, as conscious of our utter unworthiness. We should implore mercy, only for the sake of that adorable Savior who died for us. And we should cheerfully leave to God the time, the manner, the degree, in which he will show mercy towards us.

2. In faith—

We must "not stagger at any of the promises [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.20)." on account of the greatness of them, or of our own unworthiness. We should remember who it is that promises; how sovereign HE is in the distribution of his favors, and how mighty to fulfill his word. It is true, a promise of pardon to such guilty wretches, and of everlasting happiness to those who deserved nothing but misery, appears great and incredible: but he has given us his only dear Son; and will he not with him also freely give us all things? Let us not then be requiring signs to confirm our faith [Judges. 6:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 6.36-40), but believe that it shall be even as God has said unto us [Acts 27:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 27.25).

3. In patience—

If God should defer granting our requests until the latest moment of our lives, we should wait contentedly upon him: his blessing, if given at the expiration of a thousand years, would amply repay us for all our solicitude and suspense. Let us consider how long he has called, and we have refused to answer; and shall we be impatient if he delay to answer us? We exercise patience in hopes of obtaining in due season the fruits of the earth [James 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 5.7-8); let us do the same in hopes of that grace which shall supply all our wants, and satisfy all our desires [Hebrews 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.36).

INFERENCES—

1. How attentive should we be to the promises which God has made us!

There is not a situation in which we can be, wherein we have not many promises suited to our necessities. Should we not then treasure them up in our minds? Should we not plead them at a throne of grace? Should they not be to us "a light shining in a dark place?" Let us study the word of God with an especial view to the promises; for it is by them that we are to be "made partakers of a divine nature [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 1.4)," and by them to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit 2 Corinthians 7:1."

2. How ashamed should we be of ever yielding to unbelief!

The office of faith is, to give to things invisible and future a present and visible existence. It was by faith that Abraham was assured that Isaac, after he should have been slain and reduced to ashes, would be restored to life; yes, he was as much assured of it, as if he had seen the very transaction pass before his eyes. This honored God as a God of truth. But unbelief dishonors him in the highest degree: it says, in fact, that "the vision will lie." But what ground have we for such a suspicion? When did God falsify any one of his promises [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 23.14). To guard against our unbelief, he has confirmed his promise with an oath [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18); and shall we still question his veracity? O blush, you unbelieving people, who are doubting whether he will receive you to mercy, or supply all your need! Trust in him with unshaken affiance; and you shall find Him "faithful who has promised."

3. How awful is the state of those, who, instead of being interested in the promises, are obnoxious to the threatenings!

Every word of God is equally true, and equally certain of accomplishment. The threatening that the whole world should be destroyed by a deluge, was executed, notwithstanding the scoffs of unbelievers: and everything which he has spoken against sin and sinners shall be fulfilled in due season [2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.3-4); [2 Peter 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.8-9). His vengeance is delayed in mercy; but it shall surely come at last [2 Timothy 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.12-13). Let the impenitent and unbelieving consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before them."

[Habakkuk 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.4)

DISCOURSE 1223

FAITH AND UNBELIEF CONTRASTED

[Habakkuk 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.4). Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

THE sense of these words is not very obvious. In truth, the sense of them, as standing in the context, and as quoted in the New Testament, is so different, that we need examine them with great care, in order to find their true and full import. Their literal meaning, I apprehend, is to this effect. The prophet had foretold the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. The Jews would not believe that the predicted events could ever take place [Habakkuk 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.5-6). They therefore contended with the prophet; and he, wearied with their perverseness, spread his case before the Lord, and implored direction from him: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved verse 1." The Lord answers him, and commands him to write it in large and legible characters, for the instruction of the whole nation, that the predicted events should take place in their appointed season; and that those who, through pride and hypocrisy, rejected the Divine testimony, should perish; whereas those who, with simplicity of mind, believed it, should be saved.

Had we no further insight given us into these words in the New Testament, we should rest in that exposition of them, and conceive that we had given nearly the full meaning of them. But the captivity in Babylon was a forerunner of a yet more terrible bondage which they would suffer, through their contempt of that great Prophet who should come into the world. Through their pride and hypocrisy, they would reject him, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and would perish in their unbelief Compare [Habakkuk 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.5) with [Acts 13:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 13.41); but those who should believe in Christ, and place their hopes entirely on him, should be saved by him with an everlasting salvation.

Now, if an uninspired man had put this construction upon the passage, we should consider the interpretation as forced. But when an inspired Apostle, not once or twice only, but repeatedly, quotes this passage in this very sense; and not in an incidental way only, as it were by accommodation, but in a way of solid argumentation; we cannot doubt but that, in putting this construction upon the words, we express the mind of the Holy Spirit. Paul shows from these words, that the way of salvation is simply by faith in Christ: "Therein," that is, in the Gospel, "is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith [Romans 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.17)." Again, in another epistle, he takes occasion from these words to show, that salvation is by faith alone, without the deeds of the law: "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, The just shall live by faith [Galatians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.11)." In another epistle, he quotes the whole passage, to show that, as our entrance into the way of salvation is by faith, so must also our continuance in it be: "You have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he who shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul [Hebrews 10:36-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.36-39). The 37th and 38th verses are quoted from Habakkuk, exactly according to the translation of them in the Septuagint."

I conceive that the large and comprehensive view of this passage is that which we ought to take; and that it will properly give occasion for me to mark,

I. The evil of unbelief—

It was in reference to those who rejected his testimony, and who, by rejecting it, would perish, that the prophet said, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him." Here he marks the evil of unbelief in its nature, as the fruit of pride and hypocrisy; and in its tendency, as leading to destruction.

Let us notice, then, the evil of it,

1. In its nature—

Persons would gladly have it thought, that their unbelief arises from want of evidence: but in whoever it is found, provided he have had the means of information fully set before him, we hesitate not to affirm that it is the offspring of pride and hypocrisy. Men will not submit their wisdom to the wisdom of God; and, instead of receiving humbly what he has revealed, they will presumptuously sit in judgment upon him, and teach him, what he shall reveal, and in what manner he shall reveal it. They like not to be told that they are such guilty and helpless creatures as they really are. They like not to have all grounds of self-confidence taken from them; and to be necessitated to found their hopes altogether on another, even though that other be the Son of God himself. They like not that measure of self-denial and of devotedness to God, which the Scriptures require of them. Hence they endeavor to explain away the force of Scripture, if not to set aside its authority altogether. They do not examine it with the candor which they would exercise in the investigation of any other subject: they have a bias within them, arising from their prejudices and their passions: they wish to find occasion against the Scriptures, or an interpretation which shall enable them to evade their force. They do not set themselves diligently to conform to the word of God, as far as they believe it true: so that their whole conduct shows that "their soul is not upright in them." This habit of mind does not prevail in all to the same extent; but in every unbeliever is it found: and it is at the root of unbelief, wherever that baneful evil exists.

2. In its tendency—

It operated to the ruin of those who would not listen to the warnings of the prophets respecting the judgments that would be inflicted on them by their Chaldean invaders. And a similar consequence ensued to those who rejected the Savior of the world. And what other effect can ever be produced by it? Were not the Apostles commanded to declare, through all the world, "He who believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who believes not, shall be damned?" Nor does this consequence result from any arbitrary appointment of God: it is, and must be so, in the very nature of things. "This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life." Now, if this life be in the Lord Jesus Christ, how can we receive it, if we believe not on him? We put it away from us: we do in fact say, 'I will not have life: if God will not save me in any other way, I will not be saved at all.' This is what our blessed Lord himself complained of: "You will not come unto me, that you may have life." It is to no purpose to dispute against this. We cannot alter the Divine appointment. A Savior is given us: a free offer of salvation through Him is sent us: not a creature in the universe is excepted: not any one who comes to God through Him shall be cast out. But, if this Savior be rejected, "there is no other sacrifice for sin;" no other foundation on which we can build;" "no other name whereby we can be saved." We ought to be fully aware of this: for if we persist in our unbelief, "there remains for us nothing but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation to consume us."

Let us now view, in contrast with this,

II. The transcendent excellence of faith—

Faith is highly commended in the Scriptures of truth. And well it may be; for,

1. It is associated with candor—

"The just," is he who weighs with candor whatever is brought before him, and embraces truth wherever he can find it. This disposition of mind is called, in Scripture, "an honest and good heart:" and wherever that is, the seed of the Gospel which is sown on it will grow up, and bring forth its appointed fruit. The believer will not reject this or that declaration, saying, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" nor will he complain of "any commandment, that it is grievous." He will sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his word: and, if he meet with anything which strikes him as new, he will "search the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things be so:" and when anything exceeds his comprehension, he will go to God in prayer, and implore the gift of his Holy Spirit to "open the eyes of his understanding," and to "guide him into all truth." In this way, his doubts are cleared; his difficulties are removed; his perception of truth is quickened: his submission to it increased; and his faith, which at first was only as a grain of mustard-seed, becomes a large tree, under the shadow of which he can safely repose, and by the fruits of which he is nourished unto life eternal. In a word, his faith unites him to the Lord, "in whom he finds both righteousness and strength." Thus, from his integrity of heart, he is enabled to discern what a jaundiced mind would reject: and, from a readiness to obey the truth, he is put into possession of all those blessings which a proud, unbelieving hypocrite can never attain.

2. It issues in salvation—

"The just shall live by his faith." At the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the believers availed themselves of a favorable moment, and fled to Pella, and escaped; while the whole unbelieving nation endured the righteous vengeance of an offended God. And who are they that shall be saved in the last day? Believers; and they alone. They will be then acknowledged by their God: they shall stand at the light hand of their Judge: they shall be exalted to thrones of glory: they shall live before him for ever and ever. To this the whole sacred volume bears witness. Not an exception to this truth shall ever be found: however God may suffer his people to be sifted, "not the least grain shall fall to the earth." "It is not the will of our Father, that one of his little ones should perish." No, truly, "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."

Suffer you now, Brethren, a word of exhortation—

1. Be candid—

Be aware of the bias that is upon your own minds. You cannot but be sensible that there is in all of us a love of this present evil world, and a distaste for heavenly employments. You cannot but have seen it, both in your hearts and lives, from the very first moment that you began to act. You know that you have, by nature, no delight in communion with God, nor any realizing views of things invisible and eternal. You know that your affections are naturally set on the things of time and sense, and that you look to them with an intensity of interest which you do not feel in the concerns of your souls. How all this must operate on your minds, in relation to the Gospel, is obvious. That, as you well know, calls you to a renunciation of all earthly vanities, a mortification of all corrupt appetites, and a pursuit of holiness as your supreme good. Be sensible of this, when you either hear or read the blessed word of God: and beg of him to "put truth in your inward parts;" and, by the mighty power of his Spirit, to cast down all your lofty and carnal imaginations, and to bring into captivity every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ."

2. Be in earnest—

It is not a mere speculation which I would impress upon your minds. No: it is the very truth of God; yes, "it is your very life." Your rejecting of the truth will "not make void the faith of God." It will stand, whether you reject it or not: and the final judgment will assuredly be in conformity with it. Do not then trifle. Remember how much you have at stake. Lose no time. Hear the threatenings of God, and tremble at them: and listen to the promises of God with lively gratitude and humble confidence. Bear in mind the issue of things with respect to the Jewish people: has not every word of God been fulfilled to them? You shall surely, before long, see the same in reference to yourselves. If you proudly despise the word of God, or hypocritically pretend a submission to it which you do not yield, nothing remains for you but the stroke of God's avenging rod. But if you will believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, you shall surely experience all the riches of his grace, and finally inherit all the fullness of his glory.

[Habakkuk 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.20)

DISCOURSE 1224

GOD GREATLY TO BE FEARED

[Habakkuk 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.20). The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

TO any one who beholds the works of creation, one would suppose that there could not exist a doubt respecting the being of a God: and to any one that contemplates an idol of his own formation, one would suppose it absolutely impossible that he should ascribe to it divine attributes, or worship it as his God. Yet experience shows, that God is thus overlooked, and that idols are almost universally substituted in his place. The very people of God themselves, to whom he had so often manifested himself in the most stupendous acts, were ever prone to renounce him, and to place their trust in idols of wood and stone. But a dreadful woe is denounced against all who so dishonor God, and debase their own souls; and the declaration of God to the whole universe is this, "The Lord is in his holy temple: let the whole earth keep silence before him."

Let us here contemplate,

I. The majesty of Jehovah—

Viewing him in contrast with senseless idols, let us contemplate him,

1. As in the temple of the universe—

He is there as the Creator of all, the Governor of all, the Judge of all. Idols are the work of men's hands: but men themselves, together with everything in the whole creation, are formed by God; who, by a single expression of his will, called them all into existence, and upholds them all by the word of his power. Behold the worlds and systems that are around us, every single star preserving its appointed course, and fulfilling the ends for which it was formed: who can behold them, and not acknowledge a God of infinite wisdom, and power, and grace? Or look at the smallest insect, that is scarcely visible to the naked eye, and can be distinctly seen only through the medium of a microscope; and say, whether the Deity be not as conspicuous in it, as in the universe itself? The whole of this is under his continual care. A poor senseless idol, so far from directing others, cannot even move itself, but is carried wherever the maker of it wills; and, instead of bearing others, is often itself, as the prophet well observes, "a burden to the weary beast." But Jehovah governs all things, both in Heaven and earth; insomuch that not a sparrow tails to the ground, or a hair from the head of any one of his saints, without his special permission. His very enemies, while they think to oppose him, do, in fact, accomplish his will: even the crucifixion of his only-begotten Son, though so horrible an impiety, did in reality fulfill his eternal counsels: nor was there any part of that awful event which was not predicted by God, and "by him determined before to be done."

Nor is there so much as a transient thought in the mind of any man, but it is marked by him, and recorded in the book of his remembrance; and shall be brought forth at the day of judgment, as the ground of that sentence of condemnation or acquittal that shall be passed upon us. He appears, indeed, to be so far removed from us, that he cannot take cognizance of anything that we do: but "all things are naked and open before him;" and "with him is no darkness at all; but the night and the day to him are both alike." As for idols, they are unconscious of what is done even to themselves; and themselves are falling to decay, and may at any time be cast into the fire and be burnt. How unlike are they to Jehovah, who will assign to every one his proper doom; and himself exist forever, the joy of his redeemed people, the terror of his prostrate enemies!

2. As in the person of the Lord Jesus—

It will be remembered by you all, that Jehovah dwelt, as it were visibly, first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple, in that bright cloud called the Shechinah, the symbol of the Divine presence. But yet more visibly, if I may so speak, did he dwell in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ: according as it is said, "The Word was with God, and was God, and was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The expression here used has a direct reference to the tabernacle, which was a type of Christ's humanity: He was made flesh, and dwelt among us, as in a tabernacle [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14); and on that very account he is called the image of the invisible God [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.15); that is, the person in whom the invisible God has condescended to make himself visible to mortal man. In this adorable Savior "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.9);" and in him all the perfections of his Father shine forth, insomuch, that he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.3)." Behold, then, the incarnate Deity, sojourning on earth, to fulfill the counsels of eternal Wisdom, for the redemption of a ruined world. How contemptible are worthless idols in comparison of him! and how must every Dagon fall from its very base before him!

Let us then contemplate,

II. Our duty towards him—

Well is it said, "Let the whole earth keep silence before him." Truly, as surrounded by his majesty, and upheld by his power, and saved by his mercy, we must behold him,

1. With reverential awe—

He is indeed "greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." If the rocks trembled at his presence when he descended on Mount Sinai [Judges. 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 5.5), much more must his intelligent creation, and still more the sinners of mankind. In Heaven, all his hosts, whether of sinless angels or redeemed saints, fall prostrate before him: and on earth, his most favored people have never beheld his glory, or heard his voice, but they have fallen on their face, as Abraham did, with the profoundest awe, and in deepest adoration [Genesis 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 17.3). Even to a fellow-creature the most respectful reverence has been often shown, and that, too, even by persons of the highest rank, through an admiration of his superior goodness and wisdom [Job 29:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 29.9-10); what, then, must be due to the God of Heaven, whether as riding on the heavens in his majesty, or walking on the earth in the multitude of his tender mercy?

2. With meek submission—

Many things, of course, occur, which we feel to be painful, and are unable to comprehend: for "our God does whatever pleases him;" "nor will he give account to us of any of his matters." Nor should we for one moment rise against any of his dispensations. However dark or trying they may be, we should say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seems him good." In truth, his dispensations are frequently ordered for this very end, "to humble us, and to prove us," as he proved Israel of old: and he says to us, "Be still, and know that I am God [Psalm 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 46.10)." This is our duty, whether we contemplate his majesty or his love; and in every event of life we must learn to say, Not my will, but your be done."

3. With humble affiance—

Great as is our God, he has engaged to interpose in behalf of his people, and to order everything for their good. On him, therefore, we should rely with perfect confidence; not doubting but that he will accomplish for us that which, on the whole, shall be most for our good. The example of David, in this respect, is most worthy of imitation: "In the Lord put I my trust. How say you to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? For, lo. the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" What? "The Lord is in his holy temple: the Lord's throne is in Heaven [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 11.1-4);" and, as long as he is there to support me, "I fear not what men or devils can do against me." In relation to every concern, temporal, spiritual, eternal, this must be our frame: and this our song, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"

4. With unreserved obedience—

No authority must be regarded in opposition to his; no disposition be harbored that is contrary to his will. Of the angels it is said, "They do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word." Thus should we be listening with deep attention to the manifestations of his will: and, when once we have discovered it, we should fulfill it with our whole hearts. Nothing should deter us, nothing should impede us: we should strive to do his will, with the readiness and constancy that it is done in Heaven.

From this subject we may gather ample matter,

1. For reproof—

It is truly surprising, that, with all our knowledge of God, we should be so regardless of him, as not to have him "in all, or any, of our thoughts." It is not too strong to say of the generality of those who are called Christians, that they are "Atheists in the world [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.12). The Greek." But what impiety is this! yes, and what folly too! If, indeed, we could withstand his power, there were some kind of excuse for us: but "will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us? or can we thunder with a voice like his?" Alas! we must assuredly stand at his judgment-seat, and "receive from him according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." I call you, then, to stand in awe of him, and to tremble at his presence: for, if you refuse to fear him now, oh! think what trembling will come upon you, when you shall be summoned to his bar, to receive your eternal doom. I pray you despise not this warning; but today, while it is called today, implore his mercy, lest he leave you to the hardness of your own hearts, and give you up to final impenitence.

2. For encouragement—

God is, indeed, in his holy temple, ready to hear the weeping suppliant, and mighty to save his repenting people. To the Jews of old, access was denied, yes, was denied even to the high priest himself, except on one day in the year, to the more immediate presence of their God: but for you the way into the holiest is made clear; so that you may come with boldness and confidence to the very throne of God, whenever a sense of your necessities, or of his mercies, inclines you to approach him. When your Redeemer died, the veil was rent in twain, in order to represent to you this delightful truth. In Christ, your God is reconciled unto you: in Christ, he is ever near unto you, and ever ready to impart unto you all the blessings of grace and glory. Nay: He will make even your own hearts his temple; and "will dwell in you," and "manifest himself unto you." To you, then, I will rather reverse the direction in the text, and say, "Keep not silence; but rather plead with him, and give him no rest, day or night [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.6-7)," until he grant you the desires of your heart. "Be not straitened in yourselves; for you are not straitened in him." "However wide you may open your mouth, he will fill it," and will "give you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think." In reference to his dealings with you, indeed, you must keep the most reverential silence: for "his ways are in the great deep;" "nor are his thoughts" at all in unison "with ours." But I again say, in reference to all your own necessities, you can never ask too much, nor ever expect too much. Only look to him as "your God;" and you shall surely find him "a God unto you."

[Habakkuk 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 3.2)

DISCOURSE 1225

A REVIVAL DESIRED

[Habakkuk 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 3.2). O Lord, revive your work!

THE ministry of the Prophet Habakkuk seems to have been contemporaneous with that of the Prophet Jeremiah. He foretells the judgments which should be executed on the Jewish nation by the Chaldeans; and the fearful recompense which should come on the heads of the Chaldeans by the instrumentality of the Medes and Persians. But he was not willing that his people should wait so long without a blessing, even the whole period of their threatened captivity; and therefore, in a divine ode, an ode of peculiar sublimity, he implores of God the restoration of his favor towards them, and entreats him to blend his judgments with mercy: "O Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years (of their captivity) make known: in wrath remember mercy!"

The petition here offered is highly proper to be presented to God, at all times:

I. For the Church at large—

It is proper,

1. For the Jewish Church—

The captivity of that people in Babylon lasted only seventy years: but that to which they have been subjected, since their dispersion by the Romans, has lasted above seventeen hundred years: and in all this time there has been no material revival among them, in a way of humiliation, or of return to God. But now it seems as if God were about to return in mercy to them, and to restore them to himself: so that we are encouraged to cry unto him, "O Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years!" And certainly we have the same encouragement which the prophet had. He in all the subsequent part of this chapter, reminds God of his former interpositions for them, in Egypt, and in the wilderness; and of the deliverances given to them under circumstances of still greater difficulty than that with which they were encompassed in Babylon: and we may also well call those wonders to remembrance, as an encouragement to plead for them, and to expect from God's hands the most signal interpositions in their favor. For their present dispersion is not more unfavorable than their oppression in Egypt; nor are the manifestations of God's favor, which we look for in their behalf, more glorious than those which were given to them at the Red Sea, and on Mount Sinai. It is not a new work which we have to solicit for them, but only a revival of the former work. And we may hope, that God will yet again, and at no distant period too, take them under his protection, and "reveal unto them more richly than ever the abundance of peace and truth."

2. For the Christian Church—

This is at a low ebb, and greatly needs a revival. Where are the Pentecostal effusions of the Spirit, and the simultaneous conversions of thousands unto God? In great and extensive countries, where religion once flourished, the very name of Christ is now scarcely known. And among those who profess to be followers of Christ, how little is there of real piety, and of vital godliness! Whether among pastors or their flocks, we behold but little of that primitive simplicity, or of that entireness of devotion to God, which characterized the apostolic age. We read of "days of the Son of man;" and those are what we want to behold among us. We want to see the lighting down of his arm among us; and such displays of his power and glory as he gave when "he shook the room where his people were assembled, and filled them all with the Holy Spirit" and with power [Acts 4:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.31-33). In a word, we are looking for "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord:" and for these we should be earnestly pleading with God in prayer; saying, with the prophet, "O that you would rend the heavens, and come down; that the mountains might flow down at your presence [Isaiah 64:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 64.1)." and, with David, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your mercy, O Lord, and grant us your salvation [Psalm 85:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 85.6-7)."

But the petition may be offered also,

II. For our own souls in particular—

Who among us does not need to offer it?

We are but too apt, all of us, to experience changes in the divine life, similar to those which take place in the natural world. There are seasons of spring and autumn, summer and winter: and such we find at times within our own souls. In early youth, our feelings are warm and our imaginations lively: and we seem as if it were not possible for us ever to decline from the ways on which we have entered. But, when we have advanced to middle life, how often do we see reason to deplore the loss of those ardent affections which once glowed in our souls! "The cares of this World, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire of other things," have beguiled us, and caused a painful declension within us; so that we have need particularly to cry, "O Lord, revive your work in the midst of my years!".

To the prophet's remedy, then, we should betake ourselves—

Prayer is, of all things, the most effectual. Personal exertions are good in their place, and even necessary: but, to whatever extent they be carried, they will be of no avail without prayer. The gardener may labor day and night; but he can never obtain a crop, without the shining of the sun, and the influences of the former and latter rain. All is under the control of Heaven with respect to him: and so it is with respect to us: and it is by prayer that the Divine blessing is to be obtained. And what would not the prayer of faith effect? Has it closed Heaven for three years and a half, and then opened it again; and shall it not avail for us? Were we but earnest and constant in prayer, there would be little reason to complain of declension, though every day would still bring with it the need of a revival.

And have we not the same encouragement?

The prophet looked back to former days, and pleaded for a repetition of former mercies. And shall not we also look back to the day when he quickened us from our death in trespasses and sins, and created us anew, and translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son? We are taught to consider his gifts as earnests and pledges of further mercies: and that is a just mode of arguing which the Psalmist adopts, "You have delivered my soul from death; Will you not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 56.13)." God says to us, "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare you, that you may be justified [Isaiah 43:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.26);" and if we use these means in faith, our success shall resemble that which the prophet describes: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old! Are you not it that has cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Are you not it which has dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that has made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away [Isaiah 51:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.9-11)."

APPLICATION—

1. Inquire now, I pray you, what is the state of God's work within you?

Has he ever yet wrought effectually in your souls? Has he ever brought you out of bondage to the world, and sin, and Satan; and brought you to live in a state of entire dependence upon him, for guidance in his ways, for protection from enemies, for daily supplies of grace and peace, and for the final possession of the promised land? And are you advancing in the divine life, and "making your profiting daily to appear?": If the work is not yet begun, lose not a moment in pleading with him, that you may obtain mercy at his hands. And if, through the prevalence of temptation, it has declined at all, cry to him with all possible earnestness, "O Lord, revive your work!" and leave nothing undone, if by any means you may "strengthen in your souls what is yet remaining, but is ready to die [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.2)."

2. Let nothing discourage you in your application to the Lord—

See the state of the Jews in Babylon; and judge whether you can be in a more desperate state than they. To Babylon they had been sent by God himself, in token of his heavy displeasure: and there they were oppressed without mercy. No access to God had they in his ordinances; nor had they any hope of deliverance, except what was founded on his word of promise. Let your state, then, be as bad as your imagination can paint it, and the same blessed hope is yours: for God will not shut his ear against the cry of the poor destitute, or disappoint their desire. Go to him with that prayer of David, "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent you concerning your servants. O satisfy us early with your mercy, that we may rejoice, and be glad in you all our days [Psalm 90:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.13-14)." and you may be perfectly assured that he will return to you, and "give you a reviving in your bondage [Ezra. 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra. 9.8)."

[Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 3.17-18)

DISCOURSE 1226

THE CHRISTIAN'S BOAST

[Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 3.17-18). Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

A CHRISTIAN will be distinguished from others, whatever be his situation in life; but the more trying and afflictive his condition be, the more will he cause his light to shine before men, and demonstrate the excellence of the principles he has embraced. The prophet's resolution, in the prospect of the Babylonish invasion and of the calamities consequent upon it, affords a just picture of every child of God: for though all do not possess the same attainments, all determine through grace to make God the exclusive object of their joy and triumph. Taking then the text as expressive of the feelings of all God's people, we shall notice,

I. The Christian's boast—

The Christian is not exempt from the common calamities of life: but though he partakes of the troubles in which others are involved, he feels supports with which others are wholly unacquainted—

1. He views God as his God and Savior—

The Christian contemplates God as the Creator and Governor of the universe, but more especially as the Savior of sinful man. He admires the stupendous method which God has devised for the salvation of sinners through the blood and righteousness of his only dear Son: but that which gives peculiar sweetness to his meditations is, that he is enabled to claim God as his Savior, who has been already the "God of his salvation, and is daily his strength; and will be an effectual Savior, making his feet like hinds' feet, and causing him to walk upon his high places verse 19."

2. He determines, in the want of all other things, to rejoice in him—

In possessing God, he enjoys a suitable good, an all-sufficient good, and an everlasting good; he has that which fully satisfies the desires of his soul [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 4.6); which makes him regardless of all his wants or trials [Psalm 46:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 46.1-4); and which is unchangeable, no less in its operation than its existence: Hence he determines to rejoice in God, no less when bereft of all the necessities of life, than when surrounded with a fullness of all earthly comforts.

Nor is this a vain boast: for it accords with the experience of the godly in all ages of the world [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.34). [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.41); [Acts 16:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.23-25).

We shall have a just view of the Christian, if we consider,

II. The insight which this gives us into his real character—

Following the clue which this passage affords us, we shall find that the Christian is,

1. An exalted character—

His thoughts are not engrossed by the things of time and sense; he soars to Heaven, and views God himself in all the perfections of his nature, and in all the wonders of his grace. Nor could he be contented to call the whole world his own: he will be satisfied with nothing but the enjoyment of God, and a well-grounded persuasion of an interest in his favor. In this respect he as much surpasses the wisest philosopher, as the philosopher excels the most illiterate clown; because they who search deepest into the works of nature are circumscribed by the creation, whereas the Christian contemplates the Creator himself. Indeed he emulates even the angels around the throne, who are represented as continually looking into the mysteries of redeeming love [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.12).

2. A happy character—

The Christian is not exempt from trials and troubles; yet is he far happier than any unregenerate man. There is not any earthly bliss of which he has not a higher relish than others, because he enjoys, not the creature only, but God in the creature. A carnal mind cannot form any estimate of the Christian's joys. To know what is meant by communion with Christ, by the witness of the Spirit, and by the love of God shed abroad in the heart, we must experience them ourselves; and without such experience we are as incapable of judging of them as a blind man is of colors, or a deaf man of sounds. No words can fully express the joy with which the Christian is sometimes favored: it is represented as "unspeakable and glorified 1 Peter 1:8."

3. An independent character—

Others, if bereft of earthly supports, are reduced to extreme distress: the Christian may be deprived of all external comforts, and still the source of his happiness will remain entire. He can even derive happiness from his afflictions; he can "rejoice in his sufferings," and "glory in his tribulations." He is independent of the whole world: none can greatly add to his happiness, or materially detract from it. In the fullness of earthly blessings he enjoys God in all; and in the absence of them he enjoys all in God [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.10).

ADDRESS—

1. The careful Christian—

God would "have you without carefulness [1 Corinthians 7:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 7.32);" he commands you to "be careful for nothing [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.6);' and four times in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the command, "Take no thought," that is, no anxious thought, "about any earthly thing whatever [Matthew 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.25); [Matthew 6:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.28); [Matthew 6:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.31); [Matthew 6:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.34)." O you who are "careful and cumbered about many things," see how you live below your privileges. Get your hearts more filled with the love of God, and the cares of this world will be dissipated as the dew before the sun [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.14).

2. The timid Christian—

Some, though dead to the world, have not that joy in God which it is their privilege to possess. They meditate too much upon their own infirmities, and too little upon the perfections and promises of their God. O brethren, look at God as the God of salvation, as the God of your salvation, and you shall have your fears turned into confidence, and your sorrows into thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

3. The confident Christian—

If your confidence be tempered with humility and contrition, "hold it fast," and "keep the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end." Such joy in God will recommend religion unto others, and "be the strength of your own souls." While living in this state you will be prepared for every event: you will be guarded equally against the allurements of prosperity, and the terrors of adversity. "Rejoice then evermore; rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice!"

ZEPHANIAH

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

[Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.12)

DISCOURSE 1227

THE SECURE AND ATHEISTICAL CONDEMNED

[Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.12). It shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.

SUCH was the state of the Jews for a long time previous to the Babylonish captivity, that the prophets had little to do, but to denounce the judgments of God against them. The promises which they were inspired to utter had respect to a different and distant period, a period for the most part yet future; shadowed forth indeed by their deliverance from Babylon, but to be realized only by their future conversion to the faith of Christ. Nevertheless, the warnings given to them are of use to the Church of God in all ages. The Christian Church at this time is in a state not very dissimilar to that of the Jews in the land of Canaan. We are externally the chosen people of God: we enjoy the ordinances of religion in their purity: and we have all the means of grace richly afforded us. But we rest in external services, as they did; and have as little of real piety as the generality of that infatuated nation. While we call ourselves the people of the Lord, we differ but little from the nations that know not God. We conform in many things to customs most repugnant to true religion; and in the spirit and habit of our minds, show, that, whatever we may retain of "the form of godliness, we are strangers to its power." The evils which God reproved among them, are to be found in no less degree among us also: and the judgments that were denounced against them show what reason we also have to dread the displeasure of God. In confirmation of this truth, we will consider,

I. The characters here described—

Such we behold in every place; persons sunk in,

1. Carnal security—

The metaphor by which the state of these persons is depicted exhibits it in a most striking point of view. Wine, when "settled on its lees," retains for a long time its strength and flavor, which, if it were emptied from vessel to vessel, it would soon lose. In like manner, when, through a long period of ease and prosperity, persons have their natural dispositions fixed, and inveterate habits formed, they retain throughout their whole man, and manifest throughout their whole conduct, a savor of earthly things. The very habit of sin hardens them in sin; and the forbearance which God in his mercy exercises towards them, confirms in them an expectation of final impunity. This is the description which the Prophet Jeremiah gives of Moab [Jeremiah 48:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 48.11); and with it agrees the testimony of David respecting the ungodly in all ages: as long as they have no changes "to awaken them from their slumber, they fear not God." How true this is, we cannot but see in all around us. How securely do men live in a total neglect of their everlasting concerns! They have no dread of God's displeasure; no anxieties about the future judgment; no alternations of hope and fear as arising from an examination of their state before God. Whatever God may say in his word, they regard it not. If he tell them, that "broad is the road that leads to destruction, and that many," even the great mass of mankind, "walk therein; but that narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it;" they account it worthy of not the least attention: they cannot believe that they are in any danger; and they hold fast their delusions with a confidence that nothing can shake.

2. Atheistical presumption—

Persons, the more effectually to exclude all misgivings from their minds, deny that God takes any cognizance of their state. "Tush, say they, how shall God know? is there knowledge in the Most High Psalm 73 11." They think it would be dishonoring God to conceive of him as marking all the ways of the children of men in order to a future judgment. True indeed, they hear him denounce many threatenings against the ungodly: but they will not believe that he will execute them. They hear him, too, promising many things to his humble and obedient people: but they cannot persuade themselves that he will fulfill them. They imagine that he has, as it were, "forsaken the earth [Ezekiel 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 8.12);" and quite contented are they that he should do so, since the very thought of his presence would disquiet them. Thus do they, in fact, "say like the fool, 'There is no God [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 14.1).'"

Not that this is the language of their lips: they would be ashamed to avow such sentiments as these. But it is the language of their hearts: "they say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good; neither will he do evil." If they believed in their hearts the promises and threatenings of God, they would manifest a suitable regard to them in their lives: but, as they neither delight themselves in the one, nor tremble at the other, they show beyond all doubt what the secret feeling of their hearts is, and that the construction which God puts upon their conduct is true. They may be moral and decent in their outward conduct; but radically in their hearts they are "Atheists in the world [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.12). See the Greek."

After this view of the persons described in our text, we shall not wonder at,

II. The judgments denounced against them—

Two things God declares in the words before us;

1. That however hidden they may suppose their state to be, God will search it out—

The Jews at the Passover would search every corner of their houses with candles, in order to find the smallest portion of leaven which might lie concealed: and God will search with candles, not Jerusalem only, but every place, yes and every heart, to find the abominations which have been just described. They may not betray themselves by any overt acts, so as to excite the attention of men: they may even exist where all the outward conduct is correct; even as the most offensive masses of corruption are hid under a whited sepulcher. But God will not be deceived by any appearances, however specious; "The darkness is no darkness with him; but the night is as clear as the day:" before him all things are naked and opened: the thoughts and intents of the heart are discerned by him: and "he will make manifest its most hidden counsels." "He searches the heart, and tries the reins," and "weighs the spirit" as in a balance; and will interpret as infallibly the language of the heart, as if it had been manifested by ten thousand acts. Let this be duly considered. We may deceive others, and we may deceive ourselves: but we cannot deceive our God; for "he knows the things that come into our mind, every one of them."

2. That however innocent they may suppose their state to be, God will punish it—

God cannot look upon persons of this description without the deepest resentment: for they place him on a level with the basest idol, whose proper character is, that "it can do neither good nor evil [Jeremiah 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 10.5)." And how can a holy and jealous God endure this? Be it so: their wickedness is only, as it were, of a negative kind; and consists rather in a neglect of what is good, than in a perpetration of what is evil: but was this unpunished in the antediluvian world? "They ate, they drank; they planted, they built; they married, and were given in marriage:" and, What harm, it may be asked, was there in all this? None: but the evil was, that they lived without any regard for God: and therefore God sent a deluge, and swept them all away. And so will he do with respect to those who now cast off all fear of him, and, in heart at least, banish him from the world which he has created. See in what light he views such conduct: he declares "the iniquity of it to be exceeding great [Ezekiel 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 9.9);" and denounces against it his heaviest indignation [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 29.19-20). And so far are these persons from being out of danger, that the more secure they apprehend themselves to be, the greater and more imminent their danger is. They may say, Peace and safety; but "sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape [1 Thessalonians. 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.3);" they may sleep; but "their judgment lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not." "The sins of some are open beforehand, going before to judgment: but they that are otherwise cannot be hid [1 Timothy 5:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.24-25)." It is in vain to say that they do no harm: for the unprofitable servant, no less than the openly wicked, shall be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are living in the state above described—

I will appeal to you yourselves respecting the wickedness of your lives. Judge you between God and your own souls. Consider yourselves but as creatures; and does it become you to live without any regard for your Creator? But view yourselves as sinners redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and then say, whether a life of carnal security and atheistical presumption be such an one as your condition calls for?: Look into the Scriptures, and see whether you can find any countenance for such a life, either in the commands of God, or in the examples of his saints?: Think whether your own opinion of such a state will always remain what you now profess it to be? Do you find that any awakened soul looks back on such a life with delight? Does it appear to him a light matter to have lived all his days as without God in the world? If you continue to harden yourselves against God, he may give you up to your own delusions, and leave you under the power of them in your dying hour: but what think you will be your views of such a life the very instant your eyes are opened on the invisible world? What will be your views of it when standing in the presence of your Judge? and what will be your views of it, when you are eating the fruit of your own ways in that place from whence there is no return, and in which your residence will be fixed to all eternity? If in your hearts you think that you will then rejoice in the retrospect of a carnal life, go on; and sleep out the little remainder of your days. But if conscience tell you, that in that day you will have far different views from those which you now profess, then awake from your slumbers, and turn unto God without delay. God has given you a candle with which to search yourselves; (for "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly [Proverbs 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 20.27);") make use of it then with all diligence: "search and try your ways, and turn unto the Lord your God:" and doubt not but that in Christ you shall find a full and complete redemption. "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give you light."

2. Those who have attained deliverance from it—

Blessed be God, if any of you have been quickened from your death in trespasses and sins: and now beware, lest you relapse again into your former state of atheistical supineness. It is no uncommon thing for persons to run well for a season, and then turn back again; to "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." But to you also will I make my appeal: Is it "a vain thing to serve the Lord?" Will he not do good to those who seek him in sincerity and truth? Is he not, as he has said, "the Rewarder of all such?" Does he not even now impart to the soul blessings that are of more value than ten thousand worlds? Does he not answer prayer? Does he not communicate to the soul a peace that passes all understanding? Does he not lift up the light of his countenance on the poor and needy? Does he not shed abroad his love in the heart? Does he not give the witness of his Spirit to the soul, and seal it unto the day of redemption? On the other hand, does he not hide his face when you become remiss, and leave you to feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him?" Yes: you can testify that there is a God that rules in the earth; you can testify how rich his grace is, and how abundant his mercy in the Son of his love. You can testify that Christ "reveals himself to his people as he does not unto the world;" and that he dwells in them, and gives them, by the manifestations of his love, a pledge and a foretaste of their future inheritance. Go on, then, living by faith upon him, and cleaving unto him with full purpose of heart; and show to all around you what the Christian life is. Run, as in a race, for an incorruptible crown: wrestle as one that is striving against all the principalities and powers of Hell: and fight manfully until all your enemies are put under your feet. So shall you be living witnesses for God in this world, and partakers of all his blessedness in the world to come.

[Zephaniah 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 2.1-3)

DISCOURSE 1228

REPENTANCE URGED

[Zephaniah 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 2.1-3). Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek you the Lord, all you meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

IN the preceding chapter, the most dreadful judgments are denounced against the whole Jewish nation. That devoted people are represented as a sacrifice, which God himself has prepared to be devoured by their enemies, whom he has invited as guests to come and prey upon them [Zephaniah 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.7). Yet, as God afforded space for repentance to the Ninevites, notwithstanding the apparent immutability of his decree against them, so he does here to his own people the Jews. By the voice of his prophet he bids them "gather themselves together" for the purpose of national humiliation, and repent, before the threatened judgments come upon them. And, if they in their national capacity will not hear his voice, he bids the meek and contrite among them to abase themselves, that they at least may be preserved amidst the general wreck.

A similar exhortation is at all times seasonable; since at all times there are the heaviest judgments impending over the ungodly, and since by true and timely penitence they may be averted.

To analyze this passage, will be to enervate its force. I shall therefore ground upon it a general address, having respect to its main import, and prosecuting in an unartificial way its more prominent topics. Know then, that

The most dreadful judgments hang over an ungodly world—

There is a day wherein "God will judge the world by that man whom he has ordained, even by our Lord Jesus Christ." That day is called "the day of wrath and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and "the day of the perdition of ungodly men [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.5). [2 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.7)." But the terrors of that day who can conceive? Who can form any idea of what is meant by that wrath of God, which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.18)." Who can imagine what it is to be "cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone," where "the worm," that gnaws the conscience, "dies not, and the fire is not quenched?" In a word, the "power of his anger who can tell [Psalm 90:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.11)."

To escape those judgments should be the one concern of every living man—

There is no man who is not justly exposed to them: all are transgressors of God's holy law, and consequently obnoxious to the curse which it denounces against sin. All then, as with one heart and one mind, should unite in deprecating the displeasure of their God, and in "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them" in the Gospel: Hear this, "O people not desired:" whether through the hardness of your hearts you are not desired by God, or through your ignorance of him are not desirous of his favor, (for the prophet's expression may be understood in either way;) you should not lose an hour in embracing the offered mercy. If once "the decree bring forth," there will be an end of all possibility of obtaining mercy to all eternity. "As the tree falls, so will it lie" forever and ever. O, then let all of you "gather yourselves together," and, as the word also imports, "search yourselves," before it be too late. For your immortal souls' sake, repent, I beseech you, without delay, "before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you."

To those who have any measure of humility and contrition, this truth will approve itself as most unquestionable and most important—

Prevalent as impiety is to a vast extent, there are some, I trust, "who have wrought God's judgment," and labored in sincerity to fulfill his will. Such, it might be supposed, would be most self-confident. But the very reverse is their experience: the more observant they have been of the Lord's statutes, the more will they be humbled under a sense of their defects: they are, and ever will be, "the meek of the earth." To such then we address ourselves with the greater hope of success: "Seek you the Lord, all you meek of the earth." You have already shown that you think God is to be feared: your very attainments, small as they may be, yet testify in your behalf that you are neither "undesirous," or "undesired." You have chosen God; and that is a proof that God has previously chosen you [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.16). Relax not then your endeavors: be not contented to have run well for a season: press forward, forgetful of all that you may have attained: "never be weary in well-doing," lest you "turn back," and "your last end be worse than your beginning."

But let your humiliation be such as God requires—

"Seek righteousness, seek meekness;" "seek righteousness" in the way wherein God has appointed it to be obtained, even by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; who, by his own obedience unto death, has brought in an everlasting righteousness for the justification of the ungodly; and by his efficacious and all-sufficient grace will "sanctify you throughout, in body, soul, and spirit." Rest not in anything short of the full possession of Christ and all his benefits: but labor night and day, until "he is, of God, made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Particularly "seek meekness" also; for that is the grace which God most delights in: "the broken and contrite heart he will not despise;" on the contrary, he will come down from the highest heavens to testify his regard for it, and to make it his habitation [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.15). If there be one grace more than another which distinguishes the more advanced Christian, it is that of humility. Job was a "perfect" man before his sufferings; but, after them, his attainments in grace were exceedingly enlarged; and then it was that he "abhorred himself in dust and ashes." Do you also aspire after perfection in every grace; but learn most of all to "loath yourselves," when you have the most confident hope that "God is pacified towards you [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.63)."

It shall then assuredly prove effectual for the salvation of your souls—

"Repent," says the prophet, "and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Where the judgments are of a temporal nature, the true penitent may hope that God will put a difference between him and others [Ezekiel 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 9.4); but in reference to judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world, he may be sure of it. The sheep and the goats shall have their appropriate places assigned them; and the wheat be treasured up in the gamer, while "the chaff is burnt up with unquenchable fire." Were there but a perhaps concerning this, it were quite sufficient to encourage our deepest penitence: but it is not a matter of uncertainty: it not only "may be," but shall be: and not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever be lost [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 9.9). Did Jesus, even in the days of his flesh, lose one whom the Father had given him? No: "nor will he ever suffer one to be plucked out of his hands." "Their lives are now hid with Christ in God; and therefore when He, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.3-4)."

[Zephaniah 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.7-8)

DISCOURSE 1229

WHAT RECOMPENSE WE MAY EXPECT FOR OUR NEGLECT OF GOD

[Zephaniah 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.7-8). I said, Surely you will fear me, you will receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, however I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. Therefore wait you upon me, says the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey.

IN great national calamities we are apt, for the most part, to overlook the hand of God, and to trace events only to second causes, or to ascribe them to mere chance. But whatever there be either of "good or evil in the city," God must be acknowledged as "the doer of it." Moreover, in whatever he does, he has some fixed design: and to answer that design should be the labor of all his creatures. Now the general design of his judgments is, to awaken the inhabitants of the earth from their torpor, and to teach them righteousness: and if smaller judgments produce not this effect upon us, we may expect heavier to ensue. One very important object to be attained by cutting off the nations around Judea, and by sending the ten tribes into captivity in Assyria, was to reform his more peculiar people, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. And as his people were far from improving his judgments for that end, he declared that he would visit them in a way suited to display the enormity of their guilt, and the riches of that grace which they had so abused.

In order to accommodate this subject to the present occasion, we shall consider,

I. What God has been expecting from us—

Dreadful have been the judgments which God has inflicted on the surrounding nations—

To whatever part of Europe we direct our attention, we shall see that the different nations have, during the last twenty years, been visited with calamities of a most afflictive kind: but more particularly, the recent devastation of Russia, the destruction of its ancient capital by fire, and the total annihilation of the French army in the space of a few weeks, are events that demand particular notice at this time In October, 1813. Indeed, with the exception of our highly-favored land, there is scarcely a country to which, at some period of this war, we may not in a measure apply the words preceding our text; "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passes by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant."

And has not God been speaking to us by these great events?

Yes, surely: he has sought to reclaim us from our evil ways: he has "said with himself, Surely you will fear me; you will receive instruction; so that your dwelling shall not be cut off, however I punish you." Of us this improvement of his judgments might well be expected, not only on account of the peculiar protection which has been afforded us, but on account of the transcendent advantages which we enjoy in the knowledge of God's word, and the ministration of his Gospel Here show particularly wherein that improvement should have consisted; and our additional obligation to it, arising from our religious privileges: verse 5; And now, I ask, was not this expectation reasonable? and is not that complaint which God made against his people of old, in the fullest and strictest sense applicable to us [Isaiah 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.3-4)..

Alas! We have reason to blush and be confounded, when we reflect,

II. How we have disappointed his expectations—

Hear the accusation of God against us; "They rose early, and corrupted all their doings"—

There is no sin, in the commission of which we are not as eager as ever. It should almost seem that "the goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance of God, which should have led us to repentance," have produced rather the contrary effect, of lulling us to sleep in our sins. The accusation is more fully stated in a preceding verse verse 2: let us consider it more minutely: let us make use of it as a light by which to search and try our ways: exceeding heinous?

And is not the accusation applicable to all ranks and orders among us, even as it was against the Jews of old?

We do not in general wish to speak of others: but in a view of national iniquities we are constrained to do so, especially where the prophets lead the way. Behold then what the prophet speaks respecting the princes, the judges, the prophets, and the priests of his day verse 3, 4; we will not say that precisely the same iniquities prevail among those different orders in our land; but we appeal to you, whether any material change has taken place among the higher ranks; or whether those, whose duty it is to instruct and reform the world, have increased in activity and zeal, by any means to the extent that the occasion has called for? Alas! if we consult the records of the New Testament, and see what the Apostles preached, and how they lived, and then compare it with the lives and ministrations of the sacred order among us, we shall see cause to wonder that God has not already removed his candlestick from us, and left us in utter darkness.

And well may the misconduct of these orders be more distinctly noticed, since on them depends, in so great a degree, the state of all the other classes of society. If all ministers would preach the Gospel with fidelity, and exemplify its holy precepts in their lives; and if our princes and nobility would take the lead in the great work of reformation; an immense change would soon be wrought in every quarter of the land: but if, for want of their exertions, the whole land continue in its iniquities, let them not wonder that their criminality is exposed, and that the judgments reserved for them are proportioned to the guilt which they contract.

The disappointment of God's expectations from us leads us naturally to consider,

III. What we may expect from him—

On this part of our subject we shall be led to extremely different views, according to the interpretation which we put on the concluding words of our text. Some understand the words thus: "You have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; therefore expect from me the most tremendous judgments." Others justly observe, that the word "therefore" may properly be translated "nevertheless That is evidently the true sense of the word in [Micah 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.2-3);" and that the sense is, 'you have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; nevertheless that shall not induce me to alter my gracious purposes towards Jews and Gentiles, whom I will unite under one head, and sanctify as my peculiar people.' In confirmation of this latter sense, we must say, that this is the very way in which God often introduces his most glorious promises [Isaiah 43:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.22-26); [Isaiah 57:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.16-17) and [Habakkuk 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.12-14); and that the two verses following our text seem to require it. But as we cannot certainly determine which of the senses is the right, we include both; and show what we may expect from God,

1. In a way of judgment—

Often does God denounce especial vengeance against those who have abused his mercies [Isaiah 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.5-6). [Jeremiah 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 5.5-6); and well indeed may we expect to have it executed upon us: well may we be constrained to drink the dregs of that cup which has been put into the hands of the surrounding nations. And how fearful will be our state, if "God pour upon us his indignation, even all his fierce anger!" Let us not indulge in presumptuous security. Who that had been told a few years ago that either the ancient capital of the Russian empire, or that of the British empire, would before this be certainly destroyed by fire, would have imagined on which the lot should fall? O let us tremble for ourselves, and labor to fulfill the gracious designs of God, before his wrath come upon us to the uttermost.

2. In a way of mercy—

The Jews have an idea that the Messiah's advent was deferred on account of the wickedness of their nation: but it was not deferred; nor shall anything prevent the final execution of God's promises, in the restoration of the Jews, and the bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles verse 9, 10; No: we look for those events with full assurance that they shall be accomplished in due season. It is probable, indeed, that great calamities will precede those events [Luke 21:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.25-28); and there is great reason to hope, that the calamities of the present day are preparing the way for them. May God hasten forward that glorious period! and then, grievous as have been the distresses of the world for so many years, we shall not think we have sustained one too much, if it has been accessary in any measure to the promotion of so blessed an end.

APPLICATION—

Let us now drop all idea of national concerns, and come to those which are purely personal. Let us call to mind our personal transgressions, and reflect upon the personal judgments or mercies that await us: And may God reap the fruit of all his kindness; and Christ "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied!"

[Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.12)

DISCOURSE 1230

THE POOR LIVING BY FAITH

[Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.12). I will also leave in the midst of you an afflicted and poor people; and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

THE Lord's people have in every age been a mere remnant, in comparison of the great mass of mankind. At the time of the deluge they were confined to Noah and his family. In the patriarchal age, from the call of Abraham to the descent of his posterity into Egypt, they were still a very "little flock:" and though they afterwards in appearance multiplied, and became a great nation, yet "they were not all Israel who were of Israel:" there was still but a small portion of that people who truly loved and served God; and even in the apostolic age Paul tells us, that they were then only "a remnant according to the election of grace." Moreover, this remnant has for the most part been of the description mentioned in our text, persons destitute of anything whereon to found a carnal confidence, and necessitated to confide solely in their God. At the period referred to in the preceding context they will cease to bear the character of a remnant, seeing that they will fill the face of the whole earth, and comprehend in their number all the kings and princes of the world verse 9; but until that period they will be characterized as "an afflicted and poor people, who shall trust in the name of the Lord."

In further speaking of them, we shall be led to notice,

I. Their low condition—

The description here given of them is for the most part verified in them,

1. As members of the community—

Riches and poverty are relative terms; and, when viewed in a large and comprehensive sense, will serve to draw a broad line between the different classes of society. It is from the lower of these classes that the Lord's people are most generally taken. Others are not excluded; on the contrary, some of the opposite class will always be found among them: but "not many great, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: God has chosen rather the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, that no flesh should glory in his presence [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.26-29)." So evident has this been in all ages of the Church, that James appeals to his brethren all the world over in confirmation of the fact: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.5)." Indeed to this circumstance our Lord himself referred as confirming the truth of his Messiahship, that "to the poor the Gospel was preached [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.5);" and they received his word, and "heard him gladly," while the Scribes and Pharisees almost universally rejected him.

Affliction too is not unfrequently associated with poverty in the Lord's people: for it is rarely that any man will turn truly unto the Lord, until affliction of some kind or other has prepared his heart, and "plowed up, as it were, the fallow ground" for the reception of the heavenly seed. Almost all have occasion to acknowledge, with the Psalmist, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." The minds of men are so carnal and worldly, that they will scarcely admit a serious thought, until they are made to feel, like the Prodigal in the parable, the insufficiency of earthly things to comfort them in the hour of trouble. Then they awake, as it were, out of a dream; and begin to say, "I will go unto my Father, in whose house there is bread enough and to spare."

2. As convinced sinners—

In this state every child of God without exception answers to the character in our text. There was once a time when all of them thought that they were "rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing;" but, when the Lord opened the eyes of their understanding, they were made sensible that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." From that time they become "poor in spirit," and "go on their way weeping" for all their past iniquities and abominations. Now they have on their hearts a load too heavy for them to bear; and under the pressure of it they go to that adorable Savior, who has invited to him the weary and heavy-laden, and who alone is capable of giving them rest. Such are the persons to whom alone the Gospel is acceptable [Isaiah 14:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 14.32), or can ever be preached with full effect: "the whole need not a physician:" it is the sick alone that desire his aid, or will receive his prescriptions. And such are the Lord's people: they feel themselves utterly destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength; and they are content to receive these blessings out of the fullness that is in Christ Jesus.

3. As professors of godliness—

In former ages, long before the coming of Christ, the Lord's people were persecuted by an ungodly world. Thousands "of whom the world," as the Apostle says, "was not worthy, had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented [Hebrews 11:36-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.36-38)." Of the saints under the Gospel dispensation it is needless to speak: the Acts of the Apostles amply testify, as the Epistles do also, that the followers of Christ have been treated as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things;" and experience proves that they are so regarded even to this day. The increase of civilization, and the protection afforded by human laws, prevent the same cruelties from being exercised towards them as in days of old: but it is as true at this day as at any period of the world, that "he who departs from evil makes himself a prey;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." True, we are not dragged to the stake as formerly: but is it nothing to be hated, and despised of all men, and to be made a butt for impiety and profaneness to expend their arrows upon? Is it nothing, too, to have one's "greatest foes among one's own household?" Yet so shall every man, who will be faithful to his God, find it in his own experience: he shall surely have some cross to bear; and be himself a witness, that the Lord's servants are "a poor and afflicted people."

Nevertheless they need not be discouraged, if only they will improve,

II. Their exalted privilege—

"The name of the Lord is to them a strong tower, to which they may run and be safe." It is their privilege to trust in,

1. His mercy to pardon their offences—

Whatever their former sins may have been, their Lord and Savior is ready to forgive them, and to blot them all out as a morning cloud. Even though they may have been "red like crimson, they, through the virtue of his blood, shall be made white as snow." Know then your privilege in this respect: let no sense of guilt keep you from him: limit not his tender mercies: look at those whom he received in the days of his flesh: and be assured, that he is still as gracious as ever; and that "those who come to him he will in no wise cast out." "Though your sins may have abounded, his grace shall much more abound;" and he will say to you, as he did to a notorious sinner of old, "Your sins, which are many, are forgiven you."

2. His power to uphold them in their difficulties—

Great may be your conflicts with sin and Satan; but great shall be the support which you shall derive from your living Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will "strengthen you with might by his Spirit in your inner man:" and "as your day is, so shall also your strength be." In you shall that sweet promise be verified, "The foot shall tread down its adversaries, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy [Isaiah 26:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.6)." However formidable then your enemies may appear, remember, that "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and that, "while God is for you, none can with any effect be against you."

3. His love to overrule everything for good—

God has promised to his people that "all things shall work together for their good." How the good shall be elicited from the evil, and especially at the time, they have no idea. But God knows how to accomplish his own gracious purposes by the very means which his enemies are using to defeat them. The history of Joseph, and the book of Esther, draw aside the veil, and show us how God is acting at this very hour. The instances that occur are invisible to mortal eyes, as they were in the histories referred to: but the plot is going forward; and in due time millions of other instances will be seen, no less real, and no less wonderful than they. It is the privilege of God's people to "commit their ways entirely to him," and he engages that he "will bring to pass" what shall eventually be for their greatest good.

4. His faithfulness to keep them, even to the end—

Never does he forsake his poor and afflicted people. He has promised them, "I will never leave you; I will never, never forsake you." We may be confident, as the Apostle was, that "where God has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it until the day of Christ." This is assured to them by covenant and by oath, that they may have the stronger consolation [Hebrews 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-19). Not that a reliance on their Savior is to supersede their own efforts, but rather to encourage them; seeing that it is by their own efforts he will work: but still it is their privilege to anticipate the issue of their conflicts with confidence; and to rest assured, that "nothing shall ever separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus their Lord."

ADDRESS—

1. Let it not be a grief to any that they are "afflicted and poor"—

Such the Savior himself was; "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And shall it be a grief to any to be made like unto Him?: Besides, it is by our own utter destitution of all good, that the power and grace of Christ will be magnified. And shall we not thankfully acquiesce in anything that glorifies him? The Apostle Paul "took pleasure in his infirmities and distresses," because "the power of Christ as made perfect, and manifested to be perfect, by his weakness [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9-10);" and this is the proper disposition for us all. Be contented to be nothing; that "Christ may be all in all."

2. Let the religion of the heart be more and more cultivated—

We are far from undervaluing religious acts: they are excellent, as fruits of the Spirit, and as evidences of a lively faith. But it is the religion of the heart that must be our first concern; since until the tree be made good, it is in vain to hope for any good fruit to spring from it. The grand characteristic feature of the Lord's people is, that "they trust in his name." Now trust is altogether an act of the soul; an act invisible to mortal eyes. It realizes the presence of Jehovah, and his government of the whole universe. It rests on him: it reposes all its hopes on his agency; and thus honors him, far beyond all other exercises either of the mind or body. This then is to be the habit of our minds: and "the whole life which we now live in the flesh, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us."

[Zephaniah 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.14-15)

DISCOURSE 1231

THE DUTY OF THANKFULNESS FOR GOD'S MERCIES

[Zephaniah 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.14-15). Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your judgments, he has cast out your enemy: the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of you: you shall not see evil any more.

THE prophets are chiefly occupied with reproving the evils which prevailed in their day, and with denouncing, both on Israel and the surrounding nations, the judgments they had merited by their multiplied transgressions. But occasionally they change their voice, and, as heralds of mercy, proclaim to all, but to Israel more especially, the blessings which God has in reserve for them in the latter day. In performing this office they quite exult; and, when they have begun, they scarcely know how to end, their benevolent congratulations. In the former part of this chapter the prophet brings his accusations against the Jews, who, disregarding the warnings which God in his providence had given them by the judgments visibly inflicted upon others, persisted in their iniquities without shame or remorse verse 1–7. But, in the latter part of it, he launches forth into a subject more congenial with his feelings, and announces, both to the Jewish and Gentile world, that God had designs of love towards them, and would incorporate them all in one blessed society, and restore them all to his favor. In the address which I have just read to you he is peculiarly animated. We may consider it as delivered,

I. To the Jews, prospectively, in a way of anticipation—

The events referred to are spoken of as already past, even though at this time, after the lapse of twenty-five centuries, we see not yet the predictions fulfilled. But this mode of speaking is common to all the prophets, who, knowing the unerring certainty of their predictions, look through intervening ages as through a telescope, and see the objects of which they speak accomplished before their eyes.

Now here the prophet felicitates the Jews as already liberated from the judgments which they had suffered, or which yet at distant periods impended over them—

They were to be carried captive to Babylon and to Assyria, and to be utterly destroyed by the Roman power, and to be scattered over the face of the whole earth as objects of hatred and contempt among all people. And it is a fact, that no people that ever existed upon earth were ever so universally despised, and hated, and persecuted as they. But the prophet says to them by anticipation, "Your judgments are taken away." This has already in part been "fulfilled." And it is certain that in God's good time her judgments shall be so perfectly taken away, as not to leave even the appearance, and scarcely the recollection, of them behind: "You shall forget the shame of your youth, and shall not remember the reproach of your widowhood any more. For your Maker is your husband.…the God of the whole earth shall he be called [Isaiah 54:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.1-10). See also [Zechariah 1:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.15-17). In a Discourse written on this subject, almost all the passages here referred to, under the first head especially, should be cited at full length." So completely shall this be done, that Jerusalem shall yet become a name and a praise among all the people upon earth, as soon as ever the Lord shall have turned back the captivity with which his people are now oppressed verse 19 with [Isaiah 65:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.17-19).

But, to enter more distinctly into this subject—

Three things are here predicted as grounds of unutterable joy: First; Their enemies shall all be cast out; next, The Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall dwell in the midst of them; and lastly, There shall be an utter end of their troubles.

Their enemies shall all be cast out. When the time shall arrive for the full accomplishment of this, the combination against them will be formidable in the extreme. But "all of their enemies shall fall for Zion's sake [Isaiah 54:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.16-17);" yes, if there were "a confederacy of the whole earth against them," the Jews shall consume them "as easily as a torch of fire consumes a sheaf [Zechariah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.3); [Zechariah 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.6); [Zechariah 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.9)," and as certainly "as a lion prevails over a flock of sheep [Micah 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.8-9); [Micah 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.15);" such "a burdensome stone shall Jerusalem be, to crush all her opponents;" and to such an abject state shall she reduce them, that, "like serpents, they shall lick the dust of the earth before her," and be "like worms that dare not to crawl out of their holes through fear [Micah 7:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.15-17)."

Then shall the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, descend to dwell in the midst of them. This is repeated in most glowing terms by the prophet in the second verse following my text verse 17; and is affirmed also by the prophet Zechariah [Zechariah 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.10-12), and by Ezekiel also, who declares, that "they shall dwell in the land where their fathers dwelt," and that the true "David, their Messiah, shall be king over them;" and that "God's tabernacle shall be with them;" and his presence so conspicuous in the midst of them, that "all the heathen world shall acknowledge them as his peculiar people [Ezekiel 37:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.24-28)." As to the personal reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, I can say nothing to it. But I have no doubt, his manifestations of himself to them will be beyond all former example glorious; and his communications of his grace and peace to them far exceed all the precedents of former times, "the light of the moon being as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.26)." Under the Mosaic dispensation they saw the Savior as in a shadow: we see him as in a glass or mirror: but "the Jews in that day shall see him eye to eye," and face to face [Isaiah 52:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 52.8) with [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 13.12).

Then shall there be to them an utter end of all their troubles. "They shall not see evil any more." Then "will God take out of their hands the cup of trembling; and they shall drink it no more [Isaiah 51:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.21-23)." "No more will he hide his face from them [Ezekiel 39:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 39.25-29);" "the days of their mourning shall be ended [Isaiah 60:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.15-20);" and they shall thenceforth be for a name and a praise to God among all the nations of the earth verse 20."

And now I ask, is not this a ground for most exalted joy? So Jehovah himself regards it: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy [Isaiah 65:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.17-19); [Isaiah 49:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.13)." I call upon you then, my brethren, not to be indifferent to this sublime subject. If at the time when the prophecy was delivered, the prospect of these great events was a ground of joy, much more should it be so now, when the accomplishment of them is no near at hand. Could I address all the nation of Israel dispersed throughout the world, I would say to them, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; rejoice and be glad with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem;" for your complete redemption draws near. I already see, as it were, "the glory of the Lord revealed to you;" and in the name of the Most High God I proclaim unto you, "Your warfare is accomplished; your iniquity is pardoned; and you shall receive at the Lord's hands mercies double" the amount of all the sins you have committed, and of all the judgments you have merited [Isaiah 40:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.1-5).

But we must not confine the prophet's address to the Jews: while it was delivered to them in a way of anticipation, it was delivered also,

II. To us immediately in a way of congratulation—

It is in reference to converts from among the Gentile world that the prophet says, "Then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent," that is (as the margin translates it), with one shoulder; the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, drawing together harmoniously, like well-disciplined oxen, in the same blessed yoke. The truth is, that every soul, on its conversion to God, is brought into this blessed state, and made a partaker of all these privileges. The only difference between the Millenarians and us is, that we enjoy, in the earlier dawn, the light which they will behold in its meridian splendor. To all of you then who have believed in Christ, and through him been made the children of the living God, I say, "Sing and shout, yes, be glad and rejoice with all your hearts;" for "Jerusalem is as much your mother," as she was of the Jews of old [Galatians 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.26). To you then I say,

"The Lord has taken away your judgments"—

Think what guilt you have contracted, and what condemnation you have merited, by your numberless transgressions in thought, word, and deed, from the first moment of your existence, even to the present hour: yet, if you have believed in Christ, I am authorized to declare, that "your sins are all blotted out as a morning cloud [Isaiah 43:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.25)," that "God has cast them all behind his back into the very depth of the sea [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 7.19)," and that "there is now no condemnation to you [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.1)."

"He has also cast out all your enemies"—

You well know, you cannot but know, how the world, and the flesh, and the devil, have had dominion over you, and led you captive at their will. But "by faith you have been enabled to overcome the world [1 John 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.5);" "you have also crucified the flesh, with it affections and lusts [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.24);" and "from the snares of the devil are you recovered 2 Timothy 2:26." He is a vanquished enemy, "judged by God [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.11)," and "cast out from his dominion [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 12.31)," yes, and "overcome by you [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.14)," and so restrained, that he "cannot touch you [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.18)," though, like a roaring lion, he is incessantly seeking to destroy you. He is indeed still permitted to assault you: but his efforts are all in vain: the prayer of faith "puts him utterly to flight [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.7);" and in a little time "he shall be bruised forever under your feet [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.20)." Whatever other enemies you may have, they shall all be put to shame, and, "through him that loved you, you shall be more than conqueror over all [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.37)."

"To you also does the Lord Jesus manifest himself as he does not unto the world [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.22)."—

"He dwells in your very hearts by faith [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.17)." He is altogether "one with you," "one body with you [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.30)," and "one spirit also [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.17)." So gloriously does he reveal himself unto you, that "you behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14);" you so "behold his glory, as to be changed by it into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18);" and you are enabled by him so to "comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his unsearchable love, as to be filled by means of it with all the fullness of God [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18)." In a word, "He lives in you, and is your very life [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.20);" and from that very circumstance you are assured, that "at his future coming you shall appear with him in glory [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.4)."

From this time also you may bid an eternal farewell to evil of every kind—

You may have trials; but "they shall all work together for your good [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.28);" they shall all prove only blessings in disguise. Moral evil shall no more prevail over you. Penal evil, so far as it is the loving correction of a Father, you may yet feel; but, as a vindictive process of a Judge, you shall never feel it to all eternity. Not one of your sins shall ever be remembered by him [Hebrews 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.17); nor shall any one of your corruptions retain an allowed ascendant over you [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.14). God engages that he will "perfect that which concerns you [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 138.8)," and "finish in you the good work he has begun [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6)." Though you be the least of his little ones, "he will not suffer you to perish [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.14);" nor shall any prevail to "pluck you out of his hands [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.28-29)." Therefore, even while you are yet conflicting with evils of various kinds, you may rest assured, that "none of them, how great or formidable soever they may be, shall ever separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.38-39)."

And is not here abundant ground for joy?

Well does David say, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King [Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 149.2)." I say then to you, in the name of Almighty God, "Rejoice in the Lord always [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.4);" "rejoice evermore 1 Thessalonians. 5:14;" yes, "though now you see not your beloved Savior with your bodily eyes, yet, believing in him, it is both your privilege and duty to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.8)." In fact, "if you do not sing, and shout, and rejoice in him with all your heart, the very stones will cry out against you [Luke 19:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.40)."

While I say this, I am far from recommending to you a tumultuous joy. A tender contrite spirit must be retained in the midst of all your joy. Even in Heaven are his redeemed people all prostrate before him, while they sing with all imaginable love and gratitude his praise [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 7.11). A similar prostration of spirit I recommend to you: and, if only that be preserved, your joy can never be too exquisite, nor your praises too devout.

APPLICATION—

But do these congratulations belong to all of you, my brethren? Must I not rather say to many of you, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep [James 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.9)." Many, I fear, have never sought the removal of their judgments, so that "the wrath of God abides on them to this very hour [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36)." They are still, as much as ever, the bond-slaves of sin and Satan. As for union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, they are yet strangers to it, and know nothing of "a life of faith upon the Son of God, as having loved them, and given himself for them." What then shall I say to such persons? That "they shall not see evil any more?" No: I must rather say that nothing but evil is before them, both in this world and the next—an unholy life, an unhappy death, a miserable eternity. "O that mine head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep over them day and night [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 9.1)." I pray you, brethren, see what mercies you lose, what blessings you despise. Were you but penitent, and believers in Christ, all the congratulations which we have been contemplating would be yours. The Lord grant that you may avail yourselves of the opportunity now afforded you, and that "this day of grace may be the day of salvation" to all your souls [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.2).

[Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.17)

DISCOURSE 1232

GOD'S DELIGHT IN SAVING SINNERS

[Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.17). The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over you with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over you with singing.

HOW wonderful are these expressions, as uttered by Jehovah himself, in reference to such a worthless and sinful creature as man! But they are the very words of the Most High God addressed to his Church of old, and, in them, to us also. Behold then,

I. What bright prospects are here for the Jewish Church!

Greatly had they sinned against their God and raised his indignation against them. Hence they are threatened with utter destruction [Zephaniah 1:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.12-18). But their enemies too had grievously offended; and therefore they also are threatened with the visitations of his wrath [Zephaniah 2:1-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 2.1-15). But in the midst of judgment God remembered mercy towards his ancient people; and by his prophet announced his purpose to bring them back unto himself, and to make them happy in the enjoyment of his love verse 9–13. But, scattered as they are over the face of the whole earth, this seemed to be almost impossible. He therefore reminds them how "mighty" he is to save, even as in the day that he delivered them from their Egyptian bondage. And, as he had rejoiced over her to do her good in former days, so would he again in the latter day, taking away all her judgments, casting out all her enemies, and so perpetuating his mercies towards her that she should not see evil any more verse 15 If this were the subject of a Jewish Sermon, the four hints in this last sentence should be distinctly considered, and largely amplified, by appropriate citations from Holy Writ."

But let us notice also,

II. What bright prospects are here for every individual believer!

"Fear not, believer, nor let your hands be slack," but consider for your encouragement what your God has here so graciously set before you; namely,

1. His power to save—

He who was in his Church of old, is equally present with your soul: and he, even "the Lord your God, is mighty" See what he wrought in the days of old, when he brought forth his people out of Egypt, delivering them from all their enemies, [Exodus 14:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 14.27-28); [Exodus 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 17.14). and supplying all their wants [Psalm 77:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 77.15-16). And "is his hand now shortened that he cannot save, or his ear heavy that he cannot hear [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 59.1)." Be assured, there is not anything which he will not accomplish for you also, through the care of his providence [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.28). and the operation of his grace [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 10.4-5).

2. His determination to save—

"He will save;" and none shall hinder him. Having bought you with the blood of his dear Son, and committed you to him, he will suffer "none to pluck you out of his hands." Under all circumstances, "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for you," and "the strength of Christ be magnified in your weakness." Only "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and "nothing shall be impossible unto you [Mark 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.23)."

3. His delight in saving—

You may see in the parable of the prodigal son, what are the feelings of Jehovah towards returning penitents. But if that convey not an adequate idea to your minds, call to mind the image under which God has condescended to set forth the joy which he feels in his believing people. Nothing that a natural man can experience, can exceed the joy with which a bridegroom, after a long season of suspense and fear, is animated in the possession of his bride. Yet to that does Jehovah refer as most fitly illustrating the delight which he has in manifesting his love to his chosen people [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.5).

4. His immutability towards those whom he intends to save—

Man is often alienated from the object of his affections, either by means of some unexpected evil he has discovered, or through his own fickleness and inconstancy. But God changes not [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.6). [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.17). Whom he loves he loves to the end [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.1). He hates putting away [Malachi 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.16). And, as he loved his people from eternity [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3), and chose them without any reference to good, either seen or foreseen, in them [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 7.7-8); [Deuteronomy 9:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 9.5-6), so will he not forsake them on account of their infirmities [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.7-10). He will indeed punish their transgressions with all needful severity [Psalm 89:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.30-34); but his gifts and callings are without repentance [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.29); nor will he cast off the people whom he has chosen in Christ, and given to him [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 12.22). [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 2.19-20).

See, Brethren,

1. How marvelous the compassion of your God!

Call to mind the wickedness of God's ancient people through the whole course of their conduct, until they completed it and filled up the measure of it in crucifying their Messiah, the Lord of glory. Yet to them is my text more immediately addressed, and in them shall it before long be certainly fulfilled. How utterly does such love pass all human comprehension! But look back to your own ways, my brethren, and you will have reason enough to adore and magnify the grace of God, when you consider, that you also are interested in these promises, and that in you shall they receive a speedy accomplishment. Dear brethren, I would have this to be, if I may so say, the constant subject of your most devout meditations. It is this that will set your hearts at liberty, and cause you to go on your way rejoicing. Nothing can obstruct the happiness of a mind habituated to such contemplations as these.

2. How ardent should be your zeal in his service!

Is his mind so set on you, and his power so engaged for you? how devoted then should you be to him; and how entirely should your souls be occupied in endeavors to fulfill his holy will! Does he "rest in his love" to you, and will you suffer one moment's intermission in your love to him? O stir yourselves up more and more to serve him; and let your every faculty, whether of mind or body, be in constant exercise for the advancement of his glory.

HAGGAI

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

[Haggai 1:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.2-5)

DISCOURSE 1233

CONSIDERATION OF OUR WAYS ENFORCED

[Haggai 1:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.2-5); [Haggai 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.12). Thus speaks the Lord of Hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus says the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways.…Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high-priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.

ALL the preceding prophets prophesied either before or during the Babylonish captivity: but Haggai, and the two who follow him prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon. What space of time Haggai continued to prophesy, we know not: but all his prophecies which are come down to us were delivered in the short space of two months. His principal office, in which he was soon joined by the Prophet Zechariah, seems to have been to stir up the Jews to rebuild their temple, and to assure them, that, however inferior to the former temple it might be in their eyes, it should in reality far surpass that in glory. In reference to their neglect, he reproves them with just severity; and shows them, that already had God inflicted his judgments on them on account of it; but assures them at the same time, that, if they will recommence and prosecute the work with diligence, his blessing shall be visibly poured out upon them [Haggai 2:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.15-19).

In discoursing on this subject, we will notice,

I. The conduct reproved—

They had begun to build the temple about sixteen years before; but having been stopped by an edict from Artaxerxes, they had desisted, and had attended only to their own personal accommodations. But the Persian monarch was now dead; and they ought therefore to have availed themselves of that circumstance, and to have proceeded with the work. A whole year had elapsed, and they had not even thought of resuming the pious labor: they were even well pleased with the obstacle that had been put in their way; and satisfied their consciences with saying, that "the Lord's time for rebuilding the temple was not yet come." They did not say that they would never execute that work; but they justified their present neglect of it by this vain excuse.

Now this is precisely what we ourselves are prone to do,

1. In reference to God's temple which is to be erected in the world—

The Church is his temple, "the habitation of God through the Spirit;" and on the whole face of the globe is it one day to be erected. But when we call on persons to arise and work, they answer, "The Lord's time is not come." They see many difficulties to be surmounted; and, instead of regarding them as occasions only for calling forth their zeal, they consider them as indications that God does not require the work itself to be performed; thus making the dispensations of his providence a cloak for their own supineness. In reference to the conversion of the Jews in particular, this excuse is offered by many; and offered with as much confidence, as if they were acquainted with all the counsels of the Deity, and knew exactly all the times and the seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power. But this excuse of theirs is nothing more nor less than a plea for inactivity, and an acknowledgment, that they are altogether indisposed for the exertions which they are called to make in this sacred cause.

2. In reference to the temple which is to be erected in our own hearts—

Believers are "temples of the Holy Spirit:" Christ dwells in their hearts by faith: "the Father too dwells in them, and they in him:" and such temples all of us are called to be. But when persons of every description are urged to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of their God, they reply, as with one consent, "The time is not come." They will not say, 'No; God never shall dwell in me;' but, acknowledging it to be their duty to surrender up themselves to him, they think themselves excused from it by some providential impediment: one is too young to engage in such holy services as yet: another is too much immersed in business to afford the time: another is for the present afraid of offending some earthly superior: and thus, like the persons invited to the wedding in the Gospel, they all, on some frivolous pretext or other, unite in saying, "I pray you have me excused."

But how vain such excuses are, may be seen by,

II. The reproof administered—

This consists of two parts; an expostulatory appeal, and a solemn admonition: "Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways."

We then in like manner make our appeal to you—

Have you time for yourselves, and not for God? for your bodies, and not for your souls? for the affairs of this short transitory life, and not for those of eternity? Is it thus that you have been taught of God; to "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness last?" and to "mind your own things only, and not the things of Jesus Christ [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.21)."Was this a just return from those who had been delivered from their captivity in Babylon? and, if not from them, is it from you, who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son from a bondage infinitely more tremendous, a bondage to sin and Satan, death and Hell? Judge you, whether it becomes you to be seeking your own carnal ease, interest, and pleasure; and to be neglecting the work of God, and the welfare of your immortal souls? Only let conscience deliver an unbiased testimony, and we consent that you shall be judges in your own cause.

To you also we offer this beneficial admonition—

"Consider your ways." Twice is this repeated by the prophet verse 5, 7; and repeatedly should it be urged on all who are guilty of the conduct before described.

"Consider your ways,"in order to your humiliation. Look back, and see, how highly criminal they have been. The more fully you call them to remembrance, and the more distinctly you view them with all their several aggravations, the more you will see cause to humble yourselves before God in dust and ashes.

"Consider your ways," in order that you may see what indignation they have already excited in the bosom of an avenging God. The Jews were referred to the judgments which God in his providence had inflicted on account of their sin, as proofs of his heavy displeasure verse 9–11; and, if we could with equal certainty be informed of the reasons of those chastisements which God from time to time has inflicted on us, either publicly in common with the whole land, or privately in our several persons and families, there can be no doubt but that we should find our sins to have been the root and ground of all. But without such infallible information from above, we should not presume to interpret the dispensations of Providence in this way, except in our own particular case; and even then we should do it with great caution and diffidence. Nevertheless in many instances we may clearly read our sin in our punishment. We have preferred the cares and pleasures of the world; and we have been given over to a worldly mind: we have been impenitent; and have been delivered up to hardness of heart: we have disregarded the gracious visits of our God; and he has withdrawn himself from us altogether: he has left us to "be filled with our own devices, and to eat of the fruit of our own ways."

Once more; Consider your ways, in order to the amending of them in future. To this the Jews were called [Haggai 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.4); and to this we also are called: and without this, all consideration of our ways would be to no purpose: Determine then, with David, "not to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, until your hearts are become a temple for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob [Psalm 132:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 132.4-5)."

Happy the prophet who executed his office with such fidelity! and happy the people who were favored with such a monitor! may our testimony also correspond with his in,

III. The effect produced—

Great and instantaneous was the change wrought on their minds—

"The remnant of the people," from the highest to the lowest, all obeyed the voice of the Lord, and of the prophet whom he had sent unto them. They all began to "fear the Lord," and in little more than three weeks actually commenced the work to which they were called verse 14. O that such a change also might be wrought in us! O that our governors also, both in Church and State, might obey the call; and that all classes of the community would begin, as with one heart and one mind, to serve the Lord; first, to get their whole souls sanctified unto the Lord; and then, to promote his glory through-out the world!.

Great also was the encouragement instantly afforded them by God himself—

No sooner did they evince a desire to comply with God's command, than God commissioned his prophet to say to them, "I am with you, says the Lord verse 13." And no sooner did they set about the work, than God called them to notice the very day, and pledged himself from that hour to bless them [Haggai 2:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.15-19). Yes, even the very day of their change did God himself register, not only in the book of his remembrance in Heaven, but in the written records of his prophet on earth: "In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king verse 15." O that this present year of our king might be so marked! yes, that this very day might be so registered, as the season of a remarkable conversion of our souls to God! Be assured, that, if only one among us should now begin to obey his call, and to turn from earthly vanities to the Lord our God, it should not be overlooked, nor should it be forgotten in the eternal world. The very angels in the presence of God would shout for joy: and if they would notice it with such delight, we may be well assured that our God and Savior, at whose call we turn, will not he regardless of so blessed an event.

Conclusion—

The time will come when you will deeply regret that you have wasted the present hours in frivolous pursuits. Your past ease, and pleasure, and vanities, of whatever kind they have been, where are they? What fruit of them all have you at this time? Compare them with one single hour that has ever been spent in penitential sorrow: Is there any comparison as to the satisfaction they have left behind them?

Again: For what end is your time now allotted you by God? Is it for no higher purpose than to advance your temporal interests? Is there no work that you have to do for him, and none for your own souls?.

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To all then, I say, in the name of the Most High God, "Consider your ways." Consider the evil of them, that you may see your guilt; consider the fruit of them, that you may bewail your folly; consider the commands of God relating to them, that you may amend them henceforth, and obtain from God the blessings reserved for you in the eternal world.

[Haggai 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.12)

DISCOURSE 1233

CONSIDERATION OF OUR WAYS ENFORCED

[Haggai 1:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.2-5); [Haggai 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.12). Thus speaks the Lord of Hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus says the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways.…Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high-priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.

ALL the preceding prophets prophesied either before or during the Babylonish captivity: but Haggai, and the two who follow him prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon. What space of time Haggai continued to prophesy, we know not: but all his prophecies which are come down to us were delivered in the short space of two months. His principal office, in which he was soon joined by the Prophet Zechariah, seems to have been to stir up the Jews to rebuild their temple, and to assure them, that, however inferior to the former temple it might be in their eyes, it should in reality far surpass that in glory. In reference to their neglect, he reproves them with just severity; and shows them, that already had God inflicted his judgments on them on account of it; but assures them at the same time, that, if they will recommence and prosecute the work with diligence, his blessing shall be visibly poured out upon them [Haggai 2:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.15-19).

In discoursing on this subject, we will notice,

I. The conduct reproved—

They had begun to build the temple about sixteen years before; but having been stopped by an edict from Artaxerxes, they had desisted, and had attended only to their own personal accommodations. But the Persian monarch was now dead; and they ought therefore to have availed themselves of that circumstance, and to have proceeded with the work. A whole year had elapsed, and they had not even thought of resuming the pious labor: they were even well pleased with the obstacle that had been put in their way; and satisfied their consciences with saying, that "the Lord's time for rebuilding the temple was not yet come." They did not say that they would never execute that work; but they justified their present neglect of it by this vain excuse.

Now this is precisely what we ourselves are prone to do,

1. In reference to God's temple which is to be erected in the world—

The Church is his temple, "the habitation of God through the Spirit;" and on the whole face of the globe is it one day to be erected. But when we call on persons to arise and work, they answer, "The Lord's time is not come." They see many difficulties to be surmounted; and, instead of regarding them as occasions only for calling forth their zeal, they consider them as indications that God does not require the work itself to be performed; thus making the dispensations of his providence a cloak for their own supineness. In reference to the conversion of the Jews in particular, this excuse is offered by many; and offered with as much confidence, as if they were acquainted with all the counsels of the Deity, and knew exactly all the times and the seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power. But this excuse of theirs is nothing more nor less than a plea for inactivity, and an acknowledgment, that they are altogether indisposed for the exertions which they are called to make in this sacred cause.

2. In reference to the temple which is to be erected in our own hearts—

Believers are "temples of the Holy Spirit:" Christ dwells in their hearts by faith: "the Father too dwells in them, and they in him:" and such temples all of us are called to be. But when persons of every description are urged to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of their God, they reply, as with one consent, "The time is not come." They will not say, 'No; God never shall dwell in me;' but, acknowledging it to be their duty to surrender up themselves to him, they think themselves excused from it by some providential impediment: one is too young to engage in such holy services as yet: another is too much immersed in business to afford the time: another is for the present afraid of offending some earthly superior: and thus, like the persons invited to the wedding in the Gospel, they all, on some frivolous pretext or other, unite in saying, "I pray you have me excused."

But how vain such excuses are, may be seen by,

II. The reproof administered—

This consists of two parts; an expostulatory appeal, and a solemn admonition: "Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways."

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[Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.7)

DISCOURSE 1234

CHRIST THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

[Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.7). The Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of Hosts.

MANKIND are apt to imagine that God is pleased with what is grand and magnificent in their eyes; hence the many splendid edifices that have been raised to his honor: but a contrite heart is a more acceptable residence for God than even the temple of Solomon itself [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.1-2). The Jews, on their return from Babylon, began to rebuild their temple; but they, who remembered the former temple, wept aloud [Ezra. 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra. 3.11-13). To encourage them to complete the structure, the prophet was sent to declare, that, however inferior this should be to the former in point of magnificence, it should exceed that in glory; for that the Messiah himself should adorn it with his own personal appearance.

Let us inquire,

I. Who is the person here spoken of—

The prophet does not speak of desirable things, as silver and gold Some, indeed, put that interpretation on the text: but it is not probable that such an event would be so solemnly introduced; or that such a fact ever took place in the degree supposed; or that, if it did, the glory of their temple could by such means be brought to exceed that of the former, considering how many things there were in the former, of which the latter was destitute. He refers to Christ's advent, and appearance in the flesh. Christ is here properly called "the Desire of all nations All nations indeed do not actually desire him, because they know him not: but they may be said to desire him, just as the whole creation is said to be waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, etc. [Romans 8:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.19-21). or, as Mount Zion is said to be the joy of the whole earth, [Psalm 48:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 48.2)."—

Many in all nations do desire him—

The Jews, by means of their captivities, or flight, were scattered through the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, and other empires, and since the establishment of Christianity there are Christians in every part of the globe. Among these, there is indeed found a considerable difference with respect to clearness of knowledge and fervor of affection; but the desire of them all accords with that of the Apostle [Philippians 3:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.8-10).

All nations, if they knew him, would desire him—

He has in himself all imaginable excellencies, as God, as man, as mediator. Would we desire a mighty Savior? he is God over all [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.5). Would we desire one in our own nature? he was made flesh [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.14). Would we desire one that had testified his love? he has died for us [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.2). Would we desire one that from his own experience might sympathize with us? he has been tempted like us for this purpose [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.15); [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.18). If any hear of him, and desire him not, the reason is plain [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4).

He did in due season honor the temple with his presence—

The season of his appearance there was foretold He was to come while the temple was standing; [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.1) and the text. About forty years after his death it was utterly demolished. At the appointed time he was brought thither by his parents [Luke 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.27); at twelve years old he sat there among the doctors [Luke 2:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.46), and afterwards it became the frequent place of his resort.

The prospect of this event was peculiarly consoling on account of,

II. The consequences of his advent—

The presence of Christ in the temple "filled it with glory." It rendered the latter temple far more glorious than the former [Haggai 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.9)."

He more than supplied all those things which were wanting in this temple—

Though many of the sacred vessels were restored to the Jews by Cyrus, there was much that was irrecoverably lost. The Shechinah, the bright cloud, the symbol of the Deity, was withdrawn: the ark, with all that it contained, was missing namely, a copy of the law, the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded; the urim and thummin, or breast-plate, whereby the high-priest discovered the Divine will, was also gone: the fire, that came down from Heaven, was extinguished. These defects however were more than supplied to the latter temple by the presence of Jesus. Instead of a shadowy resemblance of the Deity, it had God incarnate: it had the true ark, containing infinitely richer memorials of Divine love The Jews no longer need the law to instruct them, the rod to confirm their faith, and the manna to show them how their fathers were sustained: since Jesus himself possessed all that was necessary for their instruction, confirmation, and nourishment; it had a divine Instructor, who revealed all his Father's counsels: nor could it need the fire to render the sacrifices more acceptable, since Jesus was about to offer one sacrifice for all. Thus did it excel in glory, even in those very particulars wherein it appeared most defective.

He also exhibited in it a brighter display of the Deity than ever had been seen in the former temple—

The glory of God did indeed fill the temple of Solomon [1 Kings 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 8.10-11), but in Christ it shone with brighter, though less dazzling splendor. Behold the condescension of the Deity, in that he not merely dwelt with man, but became man! Behold the wisdom, in every discourse that Jesus uttered [John 7:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.46). Behold the power, in in his miraculous cures, and irresistible operation on the minds of men [Matthew 21:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.12). Behold the grace, in his treatment of the adulterous woman [John 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.11). Such an exhibition of the Divine perfections in the temple far overbalanced every defect.

APPLICATION—

Wherever Christ dwells, he imparts a glory. And has he not yet a temple to which he will come [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.20); [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.20). Will he not grant his presence in his ordinances? And will not his presence in them make them glorious [Isaiah 60:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.7); [Isaiah 60:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.13). Will he not also make the souls of his people his habitation [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.16). And will not the soul, in which he takes up his residence, be transformed [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.13). Let him then be "the desire of our hearts; nor let us ever be satisfied until we possess that privilege [Ephesians 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.21-22).

[Haggai 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.11-14)

DISCOURSE 1235

INTEGRITY OF THE SOUL ENJOINED

[Haggai 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.11-14). Thus says the Lord of Hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, says the Lord; and so is every work of their hands: and that which they offer there is unclean.

THE one great rule of life which was given to Moses, and which is of universal and unchangeable obligation, is the moral law—the law of the ten commandments. But the ceremonial law also, which, in its primary use, was to shadow forth the Gospel of Christ, was of a moral tendency, and very instructive in that view. Take the most insignificant of its rites, such as the not wearing a garment of mixed materials, or sowing a field with different kinds of corn, or seething a kid in its mother's milk; they were all intended to teach us some practical lessons of great importance. The same we may say of the law mentioned in my text. Jehovah intended to reprove the supineness of his people in neglecting to rebuild the temple. For this end, he directed the Prophet Haggai to consult the priests as to the demands of the law; and from their answers, to deduce the truth, which he was instructed to enforce. They acknowledged, that the meat which belonged to the priests, as their share of the sin-offerings, could not, though holy in itself, make anything else holy which it might come in contact with; though a person, who by the touch of a dead body was unclean, would, according to the law, render anything else unclean which he might chance to touch Whatever touched the altar was thereby rendered holy, as was also anything which touched the flesh of the sacrifice ([Leviticus 29:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 29.37) and [Leviticus 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 6.27).); but the cloth, in which such flesh was contained, conveyed no sanctity: but the clothes of one unclean communicated a ceremonial impurity. [Numbers 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 19.22). From thence he took occasion to show them, that the sacrifices which they offered, so far from cancelling their sins, were themselves vitiated, and rendered worthless by their supineness.

Now here was a valuable lesson for them: and it is no less valuable to us; since it is of use,

I. For the forming of our judgment as to the theory of religion—

To enter into this, consider the precise state of things at that time. The foundations of the temple had been laid several years before. The people having been obstructed in the work, became indifferent to it; and thought, that, by offering their sacrifices with regularity, they should supersede the necessity of incurring the expense and trouble of rebuilding the temple. 'Now,' says the prophet, 'your sacrifices themselves, instead of being accepted of God, are detestable in his sight, on account of the hypocrisy which yet reigns in your hearts' In other words, we may consider him as determining two most important points:

1. That practice is of no avail without principle—

The Jews supposed that their offering of sacrifices would be accepted, though they were wholly inattentive to the principles by which they were actuated. And a most common error this is. Men abound in duties, public, social, personal; and add to these the offices of kindness and liberality to their fellow-creatures; and then ask with confidence, "What lack I yet?" Such were the Pharisees of old; who even went beyond the law in their observances, while they "neglected many of the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and truth." But I must declare, that these people labor under a most fatal error: for if Paul himself, who was, "touching the righteousness which was of the law, blameless," and who was therefore "alive, in his own estimation, without the law," but, when he saw the defectiveness of his obedience, saw and acknowledged himself to be a dead condemned sinner; if Paul himself, I say, so failed in establishing any righteousness of his own, much more must we lay aside such an erroneous conceit, and confess, that without a principle of faith and love we can never find acceptance with our God. We may attend the house of God every Sabbath; we may go to the table of the Lord; we may offer some stated prayers also in secret; and yet, if impenitent and unbelieving, be consigned over to everlasting perdition. We may have the tongues of men and angels, and have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have faith so that we can remove mountains, and bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and even give our bodies to be burned; and yet be destitute of a principle, without which we are no better than "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 13.1-3)." We may see clearly, that without a principle of real, vital, universal holiness in the soul, no external services, however good, can find acceptance before God.

2. That principle is of no avail without practice—

As men of a Pharisaic cast maintain the error which I have just mentioned; so men of an Antinomian complexion are prone to indulge this of which I am now to speak. They have embraced the Gospel; they believe in Christ: they see in him a perfect righteousness: they have that righteousness imputed to them: they stand, as they suppose, perfect and complete before God, and are in his sight "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; yes, holy and without blemish [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.27)." But are they necessarily in the state which this profession seems to imply? The persons reproved in my text offered their sacrifices, and professed to look to that great Sacrifice which those offerings prefigured: but were they therefore accepted of their God? No: they were essentially defective as to practical religion: under the influence of covetousness and self-indulgence, they neglected to rebuild the temple of the Lord: and therefore all their professions of faith were vain. Thus it is with thousands who rely on the Gospel of Christ for salvation, but neglect to adorn it by a suitable conversation. Their faith does not "overcome the world," and "work by love," and "purify the heart;" and therefore "their faith, being without works, is dead; and is in reality no better than the faith of devils [James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.19-20)."

Nor let any one imagine that it is only a course of open sin that will thus invalidate the efficacy of his faith. No: if there be in him any secret lust, such as covetousness, or pride, or envy, or impurity, or any other, it will "so defile him [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 7.21-23)," as to make all his professions of religion vain [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.26)." "A right eye or a right hand, which offends" against the principles of vital godliness, must be parted with, or "it will destroy him, both body and soul, in Hell forever [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.43-48) with [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.10)."

But the reproof here given is yet further useful,

II. For the regulating of our conduct, as to the practice of it—

You will observe in the text the figure, and the truth contained in it. Now both of these are instructive, in reference to practical religion:

1. From the figure we may learn to take heed to our communications—

It is a far easier thing to convey defilement to the souls of men, than holiness. One man that is diseased may impart infection: but ten men that are in health cannot impart health. Now, it is common for persons professing godliness to associate with the world, under an idea of doing them good; forgetting how much more likely they themselves are to contract evil from such society, than to impart to them any substantial benefit. A heathen could say, "Evil communications corrupt good manners [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.33). from the poet Menander." And experience proves the truth of it: for there is scarcely a person who associates much, and without necessity, with the world, but he imbibes the spirit of the world; and if not outwardly, yet in heart, declines from God. I mean not to say, that all connection with ungodly men should be avoided; for "then must we needs go out of the world:" our duties in civil and social life require some measure of fellowship with them: but I mean, that we should be aware of the danger of infection from the ungodly; and that we should mix with them as a Physician mixes with his patients in a hospital; having in our minds a desire to do them good, and exerting our influence for that end; and withdrawing, when we have fulfilled our duty, happy to breathe a purer atmosphere, and to associate with those whose state and habit are in accordance with our own. And this is the rule prescribed for us in the Gospel: "We are not to be conformed to this world [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.2);" we are to "come out from it, and be separate [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.17);" we are "not to be of the world, any more than Jesus Christ was of the world [John 17:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.14-16);" we are "not to affect its friendship [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.4);" or to "love any of its ensnaring vanities [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.15-16)." Our affections must be "set rather on things above [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.2);" and "our conversation is to be in Heaven [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.20);" and we must be ever on our guard to keep our garments clean [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.4); [Revelation 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 16.15); since it is almost impossible to come in contact with the ungodly, without contracting some defilement from them.

2. From the truth itself we may learn to look well to our hearts—

Solomon's advice is good: "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 4.23)." It is lamentable to think how much there may be amiss within us, while the external conduct is correct; yes, and while religion appears to have the chief ascendent over us. Truly, it becomes us to"search and try our ways [Lamentations 3:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.40);" yes, and to beg of God also to "search and try our hearts, to see whether there be any wicked way or principle in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 139.23-24)." When we reflect, that one evil propensity, if indulged, will vitiate all our moral and religious acts; and that it will make "our very prayers an abomination in the sight of God [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 15.8); [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.9);" we cannot but tremble for the great mass even of religious professors, who will be tried by the heart-searching God, and have their final doom fixed according to their real character, as it stands before him. Indeed, brethren, I wish you to examine yourselves well, whether you be sound in principle, and upright in practice also. And be careful not to "deceive your own souls;" nor to rest, until you have an evidence in your own bosoms, and the witness of God's Spirit also, that you are "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit:" for whatever you may imagine, it is "the pure in heart, and they only, that shall sec God" with comfort in the day of judgment [Matthew 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 5.8).

[Haggai 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.19)

DISCOURSE 1236

GOD RECOMPENSES OUR WORKS

[Haggai 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.19). From this day will I bless you.

MEN, when they see so great a disparity in the states of their fellow-men, are apt to imagine that there is an inequality in the ways of God. But "God's ways are equal," both in the dealings of his providence, and in the dispensations of his grace [Ezekiel 18:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 18.25-29) with [Psalm 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 18.25). True, indeed, this equality, under the Mosaic economy, was evinced in temporal gifts, whereas it is now manifested rather in spiritual blessings: and we may all observe it in reference to ourselves, almost as clearly as they could who are addressed in my text. Let us,

I. Review the dealings of God with us in past times—

God called his people, after their return from Babylon, to "consider" how he had dealt with them. While they were occupied only in their own concerns, and neglected to execute his will in the rebuilding of the temple, he visited them with sore and successive judgments: but now that they were engaged in that sacred work, he bade them take notice, even from the very day that they had commenced the work, that he would bless them. Now, "consider" how God has dealt with us,

1. Before we began to seek the Lord—

We might prosper perhaps in temporal things, as the world accounts prosperity; but what was the real state of our minds? Did we find all the satisfaction in them which we hoped for? We sowed largely in hope: but when we reaped, and came to measure the produce, were we not grievously disappointed? Say, brethren, was there even one half the happiness derived from them that you expected See verse 16, 17. Did you not find, that while you neglected to seek your happiness in God, the blessings which you sought with the greatest avidity and labor were but as "broken cisterns, that could hold no water [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13)." Yes; you must confess that everything to which you looked for comfort has proved, not only "vanity, but vexation of spirit also [Ecclesiastes 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 1.14)." There was a worm at the root of every gourd from which you expected consolation and repose [Jonah 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 4.6-7).

2. Since we turned to him—

Possibly enough, in respect to temporal things, you may have suffered loss. But has not that loss been abundantly made up to you, by an increase of grace, and by the manifestations of God's love to your soul? Have you not learned, that "man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses [Luke 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.15);" and that he only is happy who seeks his happiness in God? Possibly, too, you may have been bowed down greatly under the weight and burden of your sins: yet will I ask with confidence, whether you do not look upon that day, when you were first convinced of sin, and stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, as the best and happiest day of your life? From what time, think you, would Paul date his happiness, but from the hour when he was struck to the ground in his way to Damascus, and when he received the first communications of converting grace? And if you could tell the time of your first awakening, with the same accuracy as the laying of the first stone of the temple was marked ("the 24th day of the 9th month"), you would be able to say with certainty, "From that day God has blessed me."

Supposing, then, that we have been truly converted to God, let us,

II. Consider the anticipations which we are authorized to indulge—

Here the promise in our text indisputably belongs to us: "From this day will I bless you." Again I say, that we are no longer to estimate the Divine favor by the measure of our success in temporal things. True indeed, "If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all earthly things, so far as they will conduce to our welfare, shall be added unto us [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 6.33)." But that which we are authorized to expect, is, that "God will bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus [Ephesians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.3)." God will give you,

1. The communications of his grace—

These shall be suited to your necessities [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.6), and sufficient for your wants [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9).

2. The manifestations of his love—

No words can express what is implied in these. But "he will manifest himself to you as he does not unto the world [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.21-23)," and "shed abroad his love in your hearts [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.5)," and "give you the witness of his Spirit, as the earnest of your everlasting inheritance [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.13-14)."

3. A fitness for glory—

His whole work of grace will he carry on within you [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6), until you are transformed into his image [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18), and fully prepared for his glory [Philippians 1:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.9-11) and [Colossians 1:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.9-12).

ADDRESS—

1. To those in whom the foundation of God's spiritual temple is not yet laid—

You, alas! have no part or lot in these promises: and a far different portion have you to expect. If you will be intent only on your own business, and be concerned only to please yourselves, how can you expect that God should bless you? "Consider, I pray you," whether they who serve not their God can reasonably hope for the same portion as his faithful servants shall enjoy [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.18). I will be content that you shall judge this matter for yourselves. But, O! be persuaded, before it be too late, to follow the convictions of your minds, and to turn unto God with your whole hearts.

2. To those who are building up themselves a temple for their God—

To you assuredly is the promise made, that God will bless you, both in time and eternity. Be more and more diligent, then, in the work in which you are engaged. "Be coming daily to Christ, as lively stones, to be built up on him as the living foundation-stone [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.4-5);" and God will make you the habitation of his holiness forever and ever [Ephesians 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.19-22).

3. To those who think this distinction visionary—

If such there be among you, put it to the proof. God himself challenges you to this [Malachi 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.10). Make but the experiment fairly, and I have no fear of the issue.

ZECHARIAH

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

[Zechariah 1:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.3-6)

DISCOURSE 1237

AN EXHORTATION TO TURN TO GOD

[Zechariah 1:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.3-6). Say you unto them, Thus says the Lord of Hosts; Turn you unto me, says the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, says the Lord of Hosts. Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus says the Lord of Hosts; Turn you now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, says the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned, and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so has he dealt with us.

TO those who look for novelties, and enjoy nothing but deep and curious speculations, the words before us will appear uninteresting: but to those who love practical religion, they will convey sentiments and feelings worthy to be cherished by every child of man. It is a sickly taste that cannot relish them; and that minister who cannot find in them a proper subject for his discourse, must either labor in a more fruitful part of the Lord's vineyard than any we are acquainted with, or have different views of Christian edification from those which we are accustomed to entertain. Men at this day, as well as in former ages, are departed from God; and need to be exhorted to "turn unto him" in newness of heart and life. They also need the same warnings and the same encouragements, as those did to whom the prophet spoke. We therefore, without thinking any apology necessary for the selection of so plain a subject, (from which nothing can be offered which is not already familiar to all your minds,) proceed to call your attention to this solemn address: in which you may notice,

I. A friendly exhortation—

The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had been extremely remiss in rebuilding their temple; but they were almost instantaneously wrought upon by the preaching of the Prophet Haggai to resume the work which had been intermitted: and on this account God sent them another prophet, who by his exhortations and instructions should encourage them to proceed, and keep alive the zeal which had been kindled in their minds. But where is there not remissness in the work of God? Where is there one who does not need the direction and encouragement here offered? O brethren, hear you the direction; "Turn you unto me, says the Lord of Hosts"—

We have all revolted, and turned aside from God: we have "all gone after vanity, and become vain:" we "have turned every one of us to his own way;" some after their vile lusts and passions; others after the world with all its cares and vanities; others in the more creditable, but not less fatal, way of self-righteous formality. But we should turn to the Lord, to him only, to him entirely, and with the whole heart. We should turn to him in a way of deep contrition for our past offences, of lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness, and of unreserved obedience to his commandments. This is the way in which God expects us to turn unto him [Jeremiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.10); and to this alone does he give any promise of a favorable acceptance [Jeremiah 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 29.12-13)."

Hear you also the encouragement; "I will turn unto you, says the Lord of Hosts"—

God is alienated from us, as we are from him; and from us he turns, while in our unconverted state, with wrathful indignation. But, if we "turn to him, he will turn to us:" "if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us:" if we will call upon him in truth, he will hear, accept, and bless us. To the impenitent "he is a consuming fire:" but to the penitent, a Savior and a friend. Search the inspired volume, search the annals of the whole world, and find, if you can, one mourning and believing penitent whom he cast out; or find, if you can, any limit to his mercy and grace. In "turning unto us" is implied not only a reversal of all the judgments which he had purposed to inflict upon us, but a communication of all that a Father's love, and a Savior's grace can bestow—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory.

And here it will be proper to notice the frequent repetition of his name, "The Lord of Hosts." Was that repetition without design? No: it is intended to impress on our minds, that, as the message is from him, so is the particular direction stamped with his authority, and the particular promise confirmed by his unchanging truth and faithfulness. It is in the name of the Lord of Hosts that we come; it is the word of the Lord of Hosts that we speak: it is the veracity of the Lord of Hosts that is pledged for its accomplishment.

To this exhortation is added,

II. A beneficial caution—

We are apt to follow the examples of our fathers, and to tread the path which they have trod before us. Not that we so readily conform to the practice of godly parents: their example, though not destitute of weight, finds more than a counterpoise in our evil passions, and in the conduct of those around us: but in justification of our own evil ways we are glad enough to plead the habits and authority of those who have gone before us. This however will be of no avail. Such examples form no precedent for us. The word of God is our rule: and according to that we must walk, regardless of all that others have done, or may do, to establish any other rule. Attend then to this beneficial caution:

Walk not as your disobedient fathers have done—

The generality of those who have gone before us have walked just as the great mass around us do at this time. But a state of worldliness, or sensuality, or carnal indifference was not therefore right, because they lived in it; nor is it therefore safe, because they died in it. In like manner, the conduct of our superiors at this day is no rule for us. If they truly and unreservedly obey the voice of God in his word, cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ with full purpose of heart, and devoting themselves in body, soul, and spirit to his service, we may follow them: but even then we must not regard them as infallible: we must not follow even Paul himself any farther than he followed Christ: and wherein soever they deviate from the path marked out for them by Almighty God, there we must choose the more perfect way, and adhere exclusively to that which unerring wisdom has prescribed to us, knowing no other rule than that of God's commands.

Doubtless in dubious matters we would recommend much deliberation, and diffidence, and circumspection. We would not have young people setting up their judgment hastily against that of their superiors in age and station: for the young and inexperienced are apt to see things in a very partial light, and not to take a sufficiently comprehensive view of any subject; and hence they often err, when in their own judgment they are most confident that they are acting right. But still the word of God must be your rule: you must try everything by that standard: if what you see, or what is recommended to you, be evidently contrary to that, you must not do it, though it be sanctioned by the authority of the whole world: nor, if a line of conduct be clearly and undoubtedly agreeable to that, must you be diverted from it even though the whole world rose up to oppose you. It is by the word of God that you will be judged in the last day; and therefore by that, and that only, must you be regulated now.

This beneficial caution is further confirmed by,

III. A convincing appeal— "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?" No: both the one and the other are gone to give up their account to God, and to receive from him their proper doom. Now, whatever they may have thought or done, they know that God's word is true, and that it shall stand forever. But to a certain degree this may be seen even in this world.

Has not the word of God taken hold of multitudes who have gone before us?

Look at the Antediluvian world: were not God's threatenings verified in them? Look at the Jews at the time of the Babylonish captivity: did the word of God fail with respect to them? They put to death their prophets for predicting that captivity; but were the predictions falsified? Were the Jews able to avert, or to escape, the judgments that had been denounced? Look at the Jews at this present time, and compare their state with all the prophecies concerning them, from the time of Moses to that of Christ and his Apostles: has one word fallen to the ground? Has not the word of God found them out? In like manner, if we could go into the invisible world, we should there see, what now we are so unwilling to believe, that not so much as one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed. Of the unregenerate, not one has entered into the kingdom of God; and of the impenitent and unbelieving, not one has "escaped the damnation of Hell." This is a fearful thought: but, if in no instance that is visible has God's word ever failed, so neither has it, or shall it fail in those which are invisible.

Have not many who have gone before us borne testimony to this truth?

The Jews on many occasions acknowledged it [Lamentations 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 2.17); [Lamentations 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 4.11-12). [Daniel 9:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.11-13), and actually returned to God in consequence of the conviction impressed by it on their minds. In fact, every real penitent is a witness for this truth. He confesses, that his sins have found him out, and that, if mercy interpose not for his deliverance, all the judgments denounced against sin will in due season come upon him. Be convinced, then, while conviction may be of some avail: and wait not to learn, by bitter experience, what now, if credited, you might escape. Let not that come upon you, of which you are forewarned in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man would not believe the evil and danger of a carnal life, until he was made to experience its bitter fruits. His surviving brethren, too, who walked in his steps, accounted themselves sure of happiness in the eternal world, when, if a message could have been sent to them from the dead, they would have been better informed [Luke 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.27-28). But they had Moses and the prophets; and so have you; yes, and Christ and his Apostles also, all bearing the same testimony. And therefore as unto dying men I would speak; knowing that I myself also am soon to die, and that both preacher and hearers must, in a very little time, appear at the judgment-seat of Christ; I, to give an account of my ministry; and you, of the use you have made of it. I beseech you, receive not the grace of God in vain! In the name of the Lord of Hosts I declare unto you, that, if you will turn unto him in humiliation and faith, he will turn unto you in reconciliation and love; and that, if you will "turn from all your transgressions unto the Lord Jesus Christ, your iniquities, great and manifold as they have been, shall not be your ruin."

[Zechariah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.5)

DISCOURSE 1238

GOD THE AVENGER OF SIN

[Zechariah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.5). Your fathers, where are they?

THE preachers of God's blessed word have in all ages had reason to complain, "Who has believed our report?" True it is, that a faithful ministration of the Gospel is, to a certain degree, approved: but it is also true, that the approbation given to it is very different from that entire submission which it requires. The very people that commend the ministry will not obey the word delivered to them. They are pleased with an exhibition of truth; but they do not feel its force, or give themselves up to its influence. But the word of God will stand, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Now, that the judgments of God are almost exclusively of a spiritual nature, and therefore invisible, we can only declare what God has spoken: but when the commands of God were enforced with temporal sanctions, the prophets could appeal to what he had done. God had threatened, that if his people were disobedient to his voice, they should be subjected to a great variety of calamities, and be cut off by his four sore judgments— by wild beasts, and pestilence, and famine, and the sword. Hence the prophet exhorted the Jews, after the Babylonish captivity, not to walk in the steps of their rebellious progenitors: and, to convince them of the fatal consequences that would ensue if they despised his voice, he appealed to them, "Your fathers, where are they?" that is, 'Have they not, agreeably to the predictions of former prophets, been made monuments of God's indignation? and have not you, therefore, reason to expect, that, if you resemble them in their disobedience, you will, like them, be made to experience also the bitter consequences of your transgressions?'

The question thus put to them, may be considered in a twofold view:

I. As a devout reflection—

Have those of former generations been able to protract their existence beyond the period allotted to them by Almighty God?

No: however little they might think of death, they were overtaken by it; and, in the appointed season, fell beneath its stroke. Neither the people, nor the prophets who ministered unto them, could "live forever." They had a space assigned to them for the discharge of their respective duties; and when that period had elapsed, they were summoned into the eternal world, to give an account of themselves to the Judge of quick and dead.

And shall we continue here beyond our appointed time?

Not an hour; no, nor a single moment. "Our times are in God's hands:" and, when called by him, we must bid an everlasting farewell to everything here below. A tree, cut down, may sprout again: but man, once dead, can live no more Cite the whole of [Job 14:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 14.7-10). "However esteemed, however admired, however regretted, he falls to rise no more in this world: he perishes like his own dung," as Job observes; and "they that have seen him in all his glory, shall say, Where is he?" Truly, "his place shall know him no more Cite also [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.4-7)." Death will show no respect of persons. Whether we be unprepared to meet our God (and therefore desirous of a further respite); or be, like the holy prophets, actively engaged in his service (and therefore desirous of completing our work); we must equally obey the summons of Jehovah; "our bodies returning to their native dust, and our spirit ascending unto Him who gave it."

Let us then reflect on the transitoriness of earthly things, and the certainty of our approaching dissolution—

We have our occupations and enjoyments, even as our fathers had: but how speedily will they pass away, and come to an end! We are apt to be promising ourselves months and years of pleasure; but "we know not what a single day may bring forth." The fate of the Rich Fool may be ours before tomorrow: "this very night may our souls be required of us;" and all the things from which we hoped to reap such a harvest of joy may be delivered over to some unknown possessor.

Truly this is a reflection which we ought to cherish, and on which we should dwell with deep concern: for, until we have learned to estimate the vanity of time, we shall never feel as we ought, the importance of eternity.

Let us next notice the question,

II. As a solemn admonition—

Their fathers had been disobedient, and had despised the warnings of Jehovah: but they were made to feel his righteous indignation, and to acknowledge that he had dealt with them according to their deserts verse 5. In this view the question has the force of a most solemn warning to all who are disobedient to God's commands—

"Your fathers, where are they?" We will not speak of persons, but of characters. Of persons we know nothing: of characters we can speak on the authority of God himself. I ask, then, Can it be supposed that all who have passed into the eternal world are alike happy? Are none saying, "Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so has he dealt with us?" Do we believe, or does any one among us believe, that God will put no "difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not?" We cannot but know, that many, while they were living among us, gave no evidence of real piety: and that, as far as we had any opportunity of judging, or have any just reason to believe, they were never truly and savingly converted to God. Now, our blessed Lord has said, "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven [Matthew 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.3)." Is this word true then, or is it not? If it be true, where are they who have died in an unconverted state? If not in Heaven, there is but one other place in which they can be. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we hear of the one as "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom;" and of the other, that, immediately after his decease, he was "in Hell, lifting up his eyes in torments." And such, we are assured, will be the condition of all in a little time, according as they shall be found at the time of death. I know how backward men are to believe this; and how fondly we cherish the delusion, that all, on their departure hence, are happy In the writings of the pious Baxter, a fact, of which he was himself an eye-witness, is adduced, as illustrative of this truth. A flock of sheep being frightened as they were passing over a bridge, one leaped over the side of the bridge: the rest, in succession, having no apprehension of evil having befallen him, followed the example; and found not, until it was too late, how fatally they had been misled. Precisely thus it is that successive generations rush into the eternal world, deceiving and deceived. We will not even admit a thought to the contrary: and perhaps in our whole lives we never had the suggestion seriously proposed to us in reference to any departed soul, "Where is he?" To entertain a doubt of the happiness of any, would be deemed uncharitable in the extreme. But, be it known to you, that, however the wheat and the tares may resemble each other while growing in the field, a different end awaits them: the one is growing for the granary; the other for the fire, which, at their separation in the last day, will assuredly be their doom.

Forcible as the question is when considered generally, it will acquire tenfold importance if we regard it with a special Application of it to our own souls—

1. Where are we?

The general answer to this would be, "I am in a vain and transitory world." This is true. But there is another answer, to which I would wish to draw your attention; and it is this; "I am on Mercy's ground." Could we but view life in this light, what an insight should we have into the great ends of life! We are sinners, condemned sinners, respited for a little season, until it shall be seen whether we will avail ourselves of the overtures of mercy which our God and King has sent us. Regardless of the sentence that has been passed upon us, we are wasting our time in thoughtless gaiety, or spending it in unprofitable pursuits. One and another is led forth to execution; but, not being eye-witnesses of their fate, we continue unaffected by their removal, until we ourselves are summoned to participate their lot. The Rich Man, of whom we have before spoken, had five brethren, who were following the steps which lie had trodden before them, and were hastening unconsciously to the same awful end. So it is with us. We see not the state of those who have gone before us; and we put far from us all thought of the destruction in which their ways have issued, until, by bitter experience, we find that the warnings which have been given us are true.

Remember, then, that the time which is yet allotted us is given on purpose that we may seek reconciliation with our offended God, and avert, by a believing application to the Lord Jesus, the misery that awaits us. If we will consider life in this light, and improve it for this end, we shall be truly happy.

2. Where shall we be in a little time?

This is the question which every one of us should ask from day to day: nor should we ever rest, until we can give to it a satisfactory answer. Let us, then, put it to ourselves with all seriousness at this time. Suppose, by disease or accident, we had been removed, as many others have been who were once as likely to live as we; where should we have been at this moment? Shall we reply, "I do not know?" What! Have we lived twenty, or perhaps twice twenty, years in the world, and left it still in doubt what our portion should be at our departure hence? According to our own acknowledgment, then, it appears that we might at this very moment have been in Hell, writhing in anguish inconceivable, and looking forward to a never-ending eternity of woe. What an overwhelming thought is this! And what madness is it, to leave for one hour longer in uncertainty our acceptance with God! Let us come, then, to our present state: Where should we be, if we were to die this day? Are we prepared to meet our God? Have we washed in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, and clothed ourselves in the spotless robe of his righteousness? Are we living, from day to day, not to ourselves, but unto him? And is the one object of our lives to advance in our heavenly course, so as ultimately to win the prize? If this be not our state, what but misery could await us, if we were taken hence? Awake, my beloved brethren! awake to your true condition! Can you give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, in such a state as this? Will not the thought of eternity appal you? If any of your fathers, who have gone before, could be restored for any fixed time to your state, think you that they would trifle away their hours as they once did, and as you now do? or, if permitted to come to you from the dead, would they not speak in far stronger accents than ever you were addressed by me? O! arise, and "redeem the time!" and "what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

Let us not, however, close the subject without contemplating the state of those who have "fallen asleep in Christ." "Where are they?" O, how delightful the thought! They are at this moment with Christ in Paradise, and joining with all the hosts of the redeemed in everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb. Think then, I say, of their state If this were a Funeral Sermon, here the character and state of the deceased might be drawn, for the comfort and encouragement of survivors; And endeavor so to live, that, at whatever hour your summons may arrive, you may be found ready, and "have an abundant entrance into the presence of your Lord."

[Zechariah 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.12-13)

DISCOURSE 1239

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION FOR JERUSALEM

[Zechariah 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.12-13). Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of Hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which you have had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words, and comfortable words.

TO the ancient prophets revelations were often made by visions. It was in a vision by night that this communication respecting God's designs towards Jerusalem was made to the Prophet Zechariah There were presented to his view "a Man riding upon a red horse, standing among myrtle-trees in a bottom: and behind him a number of others, on red horses, and speckled, and white verse 8." The "myrtle trees in the bottom" represented the Lord's people in a low and debased state. "The Man on the red horse standing among them" was the Lord Jesus Christ (as we shall see more fully in the sequel); and "those on other horses behind him" were angels attendant on him, to execute his will. The prophet, anxious to know who these attendants were, asked the question, and gained from the Man (who is also called "the Angel") the desired information; namely, that they were beings, "whom Jehovah had sent to walk to and fro through the earth," and to bring him intelligence respecting the state of its inhabitants. These attendant angels being then interrogated respecting the result of their inquiries, informed the Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that "all the earth was sitting still and at rest verse 9–11." Upon this, "the Man," "the Angel," the Lord Jesus Christ, poured forth before his heavenly Father his intercession in behalf of Jerusalem under her present desolate condition, entreating that mercy might at last be given unto her: and by his Father he is "answered with good words, and comfortable words."

The two points then for our consideration are,

I. The Angel's intercession—

"The Angel" is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ—

"The Man," and "the Angel," are evidently the same person, even the Angel of the Covenant, who on many occasions, while he assumed the appearance of a "man," demonstrated himself to be of a superior order of Beings, even an angel, yes, and superior also to all the angelic host, even God himself, who had condescended to take on him the human and angelic appearance, in order to manifest himself to his people in a way suited to the weakness of their corporeal and mental faculties. It was in this way that he appeared to Jacob, wrestling with him as a man, and an angel, yet blessing him as God Compare [Genesis 32:24-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.24-30) with [Hosea 12:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 12.3-5). See also [Joshua 5:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 5.13-15). The Prophet Zechariah also speaks of him in another place as "the Man, that was Jehovah's fellow," or equal [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.7).

As the great Advocate of his people, he intercedes for them on all occasions, yes, "ever lives on purpose to make intercession for them:" and in the passage before us he prophetically and mystically proclaimed his future office, which in our nature he should execute at the right hand of God.

His intercession was for the restoration of God's favor to his chosen people—

Though the Jews had returned from Babylon, yet had they not in any degree recovered from the desolations which had been spread through their whole country. The rebuilding of their temple, though begun, had been for some time suspended; and no prospect remained of their recovering their former prosperity, unless God by his special providence should interpose for them, and, by a richer effusion of his grace, stir them up to the exertions that were necessary for the occasion. The time was now particularly favorable: the attendant angels, whom he had sent forth to explore the state of the world, had brought word, "The whole earth was still, and at rest;" and consequently there was no just reason to fear those powerful interruptions which they had hitherto experienced: and, if other nations were prospering, how painful was it to see Jerusalem excluded from participating the blessings which were diffused all around her! Already had she endured the indignation of God during the space of threescore and ten years: it might be hoped therefore, that now, at last, the season was arrived when she should once more experience the blessedness of his favor.

While we contemplate this intercession for the Jews at that period, how strongly are we reminded of our duty towards them at this time, when they have borne the indignation of Jehovah, not for seventy, but seventeen hundred, years; and when, so far from being restored to their country, they are still scattered over the face of the whole earth! The state of peace too which Europe now enjoys, leave us at liberty to seek their welfare in a way which was scarcely practical in the midst of war. Our attention now may be more deeply fixed on them, and our means be more liberally employed in their service. And shall we neglect to improve the opportunity? Shall we see all the nations recovering from their distresses, and feel no desire to impart blessings to God's ancient people, who are still in as disconsolate a state as ever? Does not gratitude to God, and love to immortal souls, demand this at our hands? Methinks the present circumstances of the world afford us an occasion, not unlike to that which the Samaritan woman enjoyed, when conversing with Jesus; who said to her, "If you had known who it is that says to you, Give me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.10). Yes, if we duly appreciated the benefits we now enjoy, we should labor to improve them, for the spiritual welfare of ourselves, and of all around us.

What success we might hope for is manifest from the whole tenor of,

II. Jehovah's answer—

"The Lord answered the Angel with good and comfortable words."

What this answer was, we are afterwards more distinctly informed—

The Angel who had interceded, kept not the answer within his own bosom, but imparted it to the prophet, and commanded him to communicate it to the people, for whom the intercession had been made. In substance it was this; That God had determined to restore Jerusalem; and that, notwithstanding her condition was in appearance hopeless, it should become more prosperous than at any period of her former history. As for those who had oppressed her, or were now at ease and regardless of her welfare, he was "sore displeased with them," and would require it at their hands: but Jerusalem herself should yet become the joy of the whole earth, enriched and comforted with all imaginable blessings verse 14–17.

The promises contained in this answer, doubtless have a primary reference to Judea at that time: but they also look forward to a period yet future, when the Jews shall return from their present dispersion, and be re-established in their own land. A beautiful description of that period is given in a subsequent chapter of this prophecy [Zechariah 8:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.2-8); as also in numberless other passages of Holy Writ See [Jeremiah 30:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.3); [Jeremiah 30:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.9-10); [Jeremiah 30:17-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.17-22); [Jeremiah 31:3-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3-14).

Say now whether these be not "good words, and comfortable words?"

The re-establishment of the Jews in their own land at that time, and the restoration of divine worship in the midst of them, was an unspeakable blessing, for which no adequate thanks or praise could be rendered. But what will their future restoration be? How replete with happiness to them, and with honor to their God! Taken in connection too with their spiritual welfare, and the welfare of the whole Gentile world, which will be promoted by it, how utterly will it surpass all human expectation, and all finite conception! Truly, "the light of the moon will in that day be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Let the promises then that relate to it be "good" in our estimation, and a source of "comfort" to all our souls.

From hence we may see,

1. What encouragement we have to pray for our own souls—

Alas! in what a low state is even the Christian world! Scarcely, if at all, are the generality of Christians in a better condition than the Jews themselves: the same neglect of God, the same worldly and carnal habits, the same indifference to the concerns of the soul, are found among the one as the other. For the most part, we are in the very same predicament as they were previous to the establishment of the Gospel among the Gentiles. They rested in the law, and made their boast of God, and, in consequence of their possessing a revelation of his will, assumed the high-sounding titles of 'guides of the blind, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes;' and yet, though professing to be teachers of others, they taught not themselves, and, while making their boast of the law, through breaking the law they dishonored God [Romans 2:17-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.17-24). Thus do we act in relation to the Gospel. We glory over the Jews who are ignorant of the Messiah whom we worship; and yet, in point of pure morality and solid piety, we are not a jot superior to them. Nevertheless, if we implored mercy at the hands of God in the name and for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should assuredly obtain an answer of peace. O what good and comfortable words does the Gospel contain! What exceeding great and precious promises are there made to every true penitent! Will Christ ever cast out one of this description? Never. Is there to be found so much as one single word in all the Bible that should prove a source of discouragement to such a character? No, not one; on the contrary, if there were but one such being in the universe, God would fix his eyes upon him with pleasure, and press him to his bosom with more than parental kindness. Call then upon Him, whoever you are that mourn your low condition; and know, that, as sure as ever you humblest yourself before God, you shall be exalted in due time.

2. What encouragement we have to intercede for the Church of God—

Whether we contemplate the state of the Jews or Gentiles, we find equal need to importune God in their behalf. Even the Christian world are far from being in that state of purity and blessedness which their superior privileges authorize them to expect. We should therefore lay to heart the state of the world around us: "our eyes should be as a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" in behalf of the myriads who are perishing in their sins. We should implore of God to take to him his great power, and reign among us, and to hasten the season when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Our blessed Lord teaches us to make it a part of our daily prayer, and never to approach our God without saying, "Your kingdom come." Did we but thus plead with God from day to day, what might we not hope for? Truly, our prayer should not go forth in vain: nor should it be with "good and comfortable words" only that God would answer us, but with an abundant effusion of his Spirit, as in the days of old. Then should "a little one become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; for the Lord would hasten it in his time [Isaiah 60:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.22)."

[Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.5)

DISCOURSE 1240

GOD THE PROTECTION AND GLORY OF HIS PEOPLE

[Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.5). I, says the Lord, will he unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

IF some of the prophecies of Zechariah be dark and intricate, some are peculiarly clear. Such is that in the close of the preceding chapter, respecting "four horns, and four carpenters;"—"the horns" denoting the enemies who had scattered Israel; and "the carpenters," those whom God would raise up for their restoration and protection. To the same effect is the vision of "a man with a measuring-line, going forth to measure Jerusalem;" in order that the city might be re-constructed on its former site, and be of the dimensions which God had previously ordained. As the former vision denoted the removal of all obstacles to this work, this marked its speedy and well-ordered accomplishment. But, as enemies had prevailed against the city before, so, it was feared, they might again: God therefore promises, that, though walls should be constructed, such should be the concourse of people to Jerusalem, that multitudes should live without the walls: yet should they be safe from every enemy, because God himself would be to them both a wall of fire for their protection, and the glory in the midst of them for their honor. What he had been to Israel when coming out of Egypt, that he would be to them again.

But, as the prophecy before us admits of a general application, I shall consider it,

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

Respecting that, at the time the prophecy was delivered, it must be understood, in the first place—

The Jews, after their restoration, were impeded in their endeavors to rebuild their city and temple; and it seemed as if they would never be able to accomplish it. But God promised that their enemies should not be able finally to prevail; for that he himself would be an effectual protection to them; not only as a wall which might keep off their assailants, but as "a wall of fire," that should devour them: and that his worship should be re-established among them, as in former days; so that they should again, as they had formerly been, become the joy and glory of the whole earth. Through the energy with which the people were inspired, they rebuilt the wall with incredible speed See [Nehemiah 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 4.7-8); [Nehemiah 4:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 4.13-18); [Nehemiah 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 6.15); and the temple itself also, after many hindrances, was raised; and in some respects, especially by the presence of the Messiah himself in it, the glory of it was made to exceed even that of the former house [Haggai 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.9).

But it has a further reference to that Church in the latter-days—

Their future restoration will be opposed with far greater vehemence and malignity than it was after the Babylonish captivity. Great and mighty nations will come against them, to destroy them [Ezekiel 38:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 38.14-16). But then will God be a wall of fire round about them; and not only will he protect them effectually, but he will spread such desolation among their enemies as has never yet been heard of, from the foundation of the world. When Pharaoh pursued them, God made the Red Sea a wall for their defense, and by that swallowed up all the hosts of Egypt: but when God and Magog shall come up against them, such shall be the extent of the victories that, shall be gained by Israel, that the weapons with which they have been assailed, shall suffice for fire-wood in the whole land, for the space of seven years; and it shall occupy the whole people of the land seven months to bury the slain [Ezekiel 39:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 39.8-13).

And how exalted shall be the piety of that Church in the latter day, the Prophet Isaiah very fully describes. The 60th chapter of his prophecies is generally understood as referring to the Gentiles: but, beyond all doubt, it relates primarily to the Jewish Church; which will then be so glorious, by reason of God's presence with her, that no earthly distinction can augment her glory: "The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you: but the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory [Isaiah 60:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.19)."

But the text may he understood also,

II. In reference to the Church of God in all ages—

To the Church at large, and to every individual in it, God promises,

1. The protection of his providence—

Wonderfully was the Church of Christ preserved in the first ages of its establishment. What but Omnipotence could have kept it, amidst all the assaults which it had to endure on every side? But God had said, that "the gates of Hell should not prevail against it:" and it yet exists, a monument of his Almighty power. And what is every individual believer, but a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean? Truly, if "He who dwelt in the bush," which, though burning, was not consumed, had not dwelt in us, we must all have been consumed long ago. But the mercy given to the Prophet Elisha has been renewed to us; yes, and is renewed at this very moment, if we had but eyes to see it. There are chariots of fire, and horses of fire, round about us: and it is through their incessant and effectual interposition that no enemy has been able to prevail against us. There is not one of us that is not a witness for God, in this behalf.

2. The blessings of his grace—

What glory was seen in the Church on the day of Pentecost! That out-pouring of the Spirit, by which such miraculous effects were instantaneously produced, and so many souls converted unto God, when was anything like it seen, from the foundation of the world? Such extraordinary manifestations of the Divine glory have, indeed, long since ceased in the Church: but is not God yet present with us? Yes, he is present, as he has said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Wherever his Gospel is preached with fidelity, there may the lighting down of his arm be seen; there are sinners quickened from their death in trespasses and sins, and enabled to live unto their God in righteousness and true holiness. And are there none here present who can bear witness to this truth? Yes, brethren, I bless God that there are those among you who can bear witness that God is with his Church: and that his word is still, as formerly, the power of God unto salvation! Nor is it only by the manifestations of his love to your souls that God is seen: he has raised up from among you, I trust, many who, by making their light to shine before men, constrain even the ungodly world to glorify him. His people are yet "lights shining in a dark world," and "cities set on a hill." They are still, as heretofore, "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men:" and "God is glorified in them," as he is not in the whole world besides.

How he shall be seen, admired, and glorified in them at the last day, when the whole number of his elect shall be assembled before his throne, every one shining forth in his Savior's image, I forbear to say. But, in a measure, that time is already commenced; and we enjoy even now, in our better moments, the dawn of that bright and blessed day.

As an improvement of our subject, let us contemplate,

1. What reason we have for thankfulness in the review of the past—

As, at the rebuilding of Jerusalem, enemies arose to obstruct its progress, so, in every place where a Church is erected for the Lord, are enemies without number ready to destroy it. The same I may say respecting every soul that sets himself to seek the Lord. Where shall we find one who has not many difficulties to contend with; and that too, not only from avowed enemies, but from professed friends. But here we are, this day, monuments of God's tender care; and, I would hope too, of his effectual grace. Let us not overlook this great transcendent mercy. Let us remember to whom alone we are indebted, if we have not long since fallen by the devices of our great adversary, and made shipwreck of our faith: and let us give glory to God, as a faithful and promise-keeping God.

2. What ground we have of hope, prospectively, in the time to come—

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; to which, if we run, we shall be safe." Let no confederacy then, of men or devils, alarm us. "Greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world."Our enemies may be mighty; but our Friend is Almighty. He can do everything for us, and everything in us. Only let us look to Him, and rely on Him, and "no weapon that is formed against us shall ever prosper."

[Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.8)

DISCOURSE 1241

GOD'S SYMPATHY WITH HIS PEOPLE

[Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.8). He who touches you touches the apple of his eye.

GOD makes use of the wicked as his rod, with which to chastise his own children. But while he accomplishes his own gracious ends with respect to them, he is not indifferent to the conduct of his agents, who unwittingly fulfill his will; he notices their motives, and will call them into judgment for the dispositions they have manifested [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.5-7); [Isaiah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.12); and because they exceed their commission, and seek the destruction, rather than the benefit, of his people, he will vindicate the cause of the oppressed, and recompense upon their own heads the wickedness of their oppressors [Isaiah 47:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 47.6-9). This assurance the prophet gave to those who yet remained in Babylon after that the greater part of the captive Jews had returned to Jerusalem: he exhorted them instantly to come forth from that wicked city; for that God had tenderly sympathized with them in the midst of all his chastisements, and had determined to visit with very signal judgments the Babylonish nation for the needless and excessive severities they had exercised towards them [Zechariah 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.15); [Zechariah 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.6-8).

From these remarkable words we may observe,

I. God sympathizes with his people in all their troubles—

No terms can more strongly convey this idea than those used in the text—

The eye is the tenderest part of the whole body; it not only is susceptible of injury from the smallest accident, but it feels most acutely any injury it may sustain. What exquisite concern then must God feel for his people, when their afflictions pierce him in so deep a manner; yes, when even that, which is but as a slight "touch" to them, inflicts on him so severe a wound! Can our imagination conceive a more expressive image, a more astonishing declaration?

Nor is there any truth more abundantly confirmed in the Holy Scriptures—

Look we for examples of it? how pitifully did he regard the afflictions of his people in Egypt [Acts 7:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 7.34), and how was "his soul grieved for the misery of Israel" (though they were but ill-deserving of such mercy) when the Ammonites came up to fight against them [Judges. 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 10.16). Nor does he sympathize with them under temporal troubles only, but still more under spiritual afflictions. When Ephraim bemoaned his guilty state, how attentively did God listen to his complaints, and how compassionately did his affections yearn over him [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.18-20). Look we for promises of similar regard? how does God represent himself to us as "the comforter of them that are cast down," yes, as a "God of all comfort [2 Corinthians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 1.3); 2 Corinthians 7:6." He calls himself the "God that pleads the cause of his people [Isaiah 51:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 51.22);" He assures us that he pities them even as a father pities his own children [Psalm 103:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 103.13), and he illustrates his compassion by the most tender image that the whole universe affords, even by that of "a mother dandling upon her knee her suckling child," and striving by all possible methods to soothe and please it [Isaiah 66:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.12-13). Nor is he ever more ready to hear and answer our petitions, than when we plead like the Church of old, "Where is your zeal, and your strength, the sounding of your affections, and of your mercies towards me? Are they restrained? doubtless you are my father, though Abraham be ignorant of me, and Israel acknowledge me not [Isaiah 63:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.15-16)."

This truth, glorious as it is, is far from comprehending the full extent of God's love to his people; for,

II. He has communion with them in all their interests—

God considers himself as altogether one with his people—

There is an union subsisting between him and them; yet not merely such as exists between a husband and wife, or a vine and its branches [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.4). [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.1), but one far closer; for he is the head, and his people are his members [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.15-16); he dwells in them, and they in him [1 John 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.12-16); he is one with them, and they with him; in short, they are so united, as to be one body [1 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.12); [1 Corinthians 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.27), and one spirit, with the Lord [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.17). And when our Lord himself was pleased to illustrate this subject, in order, if possible, to convey to us some adequate idea of it, he set forth the union of the different persons of the Godhead as the truest pattern of that which exists between himself and his people [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.21).

Hence he participates in everything which relates to them—

Are any of them relieved? he acknowledges the kindness as shown to him [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.40). On the other hand, are they despised? he does not scruple to declare, that he will consider himself as the object of that contempt which is poured on them [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 10.16). We have a memorable example of this in the account which Paul gives us of his own conversion: he was going with a commission to Damascus to extirpate, if possible, the Christian name: and, if be bad been asked, Who were the objects of his rage? he would doubtless have branded the Christians with some odious name, and affirmed, that he was treating them as they deserved. Little did he think that the Lord of Glory himself was the person at whom his shafts were hurled. But Jesus stopped him in his mad career, and asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutes! you me [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.4)." Thus at this day everything done to the Lord's people is done to God himself; or, as the text expresses it, "Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye."

Nor is his a mere inactive sympathy; for,

III. He will avenge every injury inflicted on them—

Often has he interposed to rebuke and confound their enemies—

What signal vengeance did he take on the Egyptians in ten successive plagues, and in the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea! And with what righteous severity did he command the Israelites to blot out the very remembrance of Amalek from under Heaven, on account of the cruel ties they had exercised towards them forty years before [Deuteronomy 25:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 25.17-19). Nor is it injurious treatment only that God notices, but even a neglect to support them: he denounces the bitterest curses against Meroz for refusing to help them, and bestows the highest encomiums on Jael for her exertions in their favor [Judges. 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 5.23-24). Indeed the Jews at this hour are a living monument of the indignation which God will manifest against all who hate his Christ, and persecute his people.

And he will still plead their cause against all that injure them—

Doubtless "the blood of his saints is as precious to him" as ever. And he accounts his own justice and holiness as pledged to render tribulation unto their persecutors [2 Thessalonians. 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 1.6). Let those who revile and ridicule the Lord's people well consider this. He makes use of this as an argument why his people should forbear to avenge their own cause, namely, that vengeance will one day be executed on their enemies by himself, and that too in a more equitable and more effectual manner than it could be by an arm of flesh [Romans 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.19). Nor will he punish only the positive evils that may be inflicted on them; he will mark also an inattention to their wants, and treat as despisers of himself, those who did not actively administer to their necessities [Matthew 25:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.41-42).

INFERENCES—

1. How low are our conceptions of God's love to man!

How little are any of us able to realize the idea in the text! how little can we comprehend the heights and depths of such unsearchable love! Still is he dealing with us as with his people of old [Deuteronomy 32:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.9-12) and [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.9). Yet we, like little infants, are almost unconscious of our Father's love. But O that every heart might "praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he does for the children of men!"

2. How tender ought to be our concern for God!

In general we think but little of his honor in the world. But shall he be so mindful of us, and we be forgetful of him? Shall he be so concerned for our welfare, and we be indifferent about his glory See the conduct of Moses, [Exodus 32:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 32.11-13) and of Joshua, [Joshua 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 7.9). Shall not sin, the accursed thing which he hates, be a source of pain and anguish to our minds? Could we see the eye of an earthly parent pierced, and be unconcerned about it? Let "rivers of waters then run down our eyes because men keep not God's law [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.136)."Let us especially weep over the sins of his professing people [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.18). And above all, let us loath and abhor ourselves for all the evils of our hearts and lives. Let us feel, as it becomes us, our obligations to God, and labor to requite his kindness by a suitable deportment. Yes, while we entreat him to "keep us as the apple of his eye [Psalm 17:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 17.8), let us keep his "law as the apple of our eye [Proverbs 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 7.2)," and, "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, do all to his glory [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.31)."

3. How strong a motive have we to beneficence!

If God be so sensible of any injuries we receive, surely he cannot be regardless of any benefits conferred upon us: if he avenge the one, surely he will also reward the other. Nor is this an uncertain deduction of human reason: he himself tells us, that at the last day every kindness that was shown to us shall be recorded as shown to himself, and a suitable recompense be awarded for it [Matthew 25:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.34-35); nor shall even a cup of cold water given to one of his disciples lose its reward [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.42). Shall not then this thought stimulate us to acts of beneficence? Has "Christ so pitied us as to give himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor," and shall not we endeavor to show love to him [Ephesians 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.1-2). Can I, in administering to the poor, relieve him who is my Lord and my God? Can I assist him, who, as my great High Priest, is yet daily and hourly touched with the feeling of all my infirmities [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.15). O let no opportunity then be lost; nor let me ever think much of anything that I can do for such a tender Friend, such an adorable Benefactor!

[Zechariah 3:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 3.1-5)

DISCOURSE 1242

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH CHURCH PREDICTED

[Zechariah 3:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 3.1-5). And he showed me Joshua the high-priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan, even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel. And he answered and spoke unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said. Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with change of clothing. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.

THE prophecies of Zechariah are by no means easy to be understood: but by attending to the general scope of his subject, we shall generally get an insight into their true meaning. It is not any one particular expression that will give us the best clue to the meaning of the prophet: on the contrary, we may, by laying an undue stress on some word or form of expression, involve the whole in insurmountable difficulty. For instance; if, because it is said, "The Lord has chosen Jerusalem," we suppose Joshua to represent Jerusalem, and the whole people of the Jews; or, because "Satan is said to stand at Joshua's right hand,"(the place of the accuser in a court of justice,) we interpret the whole as a judicial process, we shall never acquire a just and consistent view of the prophecy: we must bear in mind the prophet's main object, and then every part of his prophecy will appear easy, natural, and clear.

It shall be my endeavor to set before you,

I. Its primary and prophetic import—

The prophet was sent on purpose to encourage the Jews to rebuild their temple, and restore the whole worship of the temple as it had been prescribed by Moses. The former of these objects he had already attempted, by assurances that Jerusalem should be restored to a great measure of its former splendor and prosperity: and the latter he now endeavors to promote, by declaring to them a vision with which he had been favored, wherein it had been shown him, that, however improbable such an event might be, it was ordained of God, and should surely and speedily be accomplished.

Joshua the high priest is here represented as ministering before the Lord Jesus Christ, in the regular exercise of his priestly office The priests stood to minister. See [Deuteronomy 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 10.8).

What the precise state of Joshua's mind was at the time, we are not certainly informed: but, from the whole of the vision, it appears, that he was bemoaning his own sins, and the sins both of the priests and people, and entreating God to interpose for the restoration of his own worship among them.

To obstruct his efforts, Satan put forth all his power. Satan is peculiarly active when the honor of God and the interests of immortal souls are to be opposed. He knew how greatly the restoration of divine worship would advance both the one and the other of these objects, and therefore he set himself instantly to counteract the designs of Joshua. It is probable that the means he used for this end were, first, by representing to God the greatness of the people's sins, to alienate the mind of God from them (in this way it was that he resisted Job; [Job 1:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 1.6-12); [Job 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 2.1-6);) and then by similar representations to discourage the heart of Joshua, and to fill him with despondency.

In support of Joshua, "the Angel of the Lord," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, rebuked Satan, saying, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan." In this form of speaking, a distinction of Persons in the Godhead is clearly marked, as it is also in many other places [Genesis 19:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 19.24). [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 110.1). The Angel of the Lord is here exercising the unalienable prerogative of Jehovah in forgiving sins; yet refers it to the Father to rebuke Satan, because he is acting the part of an Advocate with the Father in behalf of Joshua and the Jewish Church: and in the rebuke itself, he assures Satan, that all his attempts against Joshua shall fail. "The Lord had chosen Jerusalem;"and would not suffer his own eternal purposes to be defeated. Besides, Joshua, and the Jewish Church whom he represented, were "as a brand plucked out of the fire." This Satan could not but know and acknowledge: could he think therefore that they had been plucked out of the fire in order to be cast back again into it? Was this ever the way in which Jehovah acted? Were not rather the manifestations of his mercy and love pledges and earnests of yet further blessings? Thus was Satan confounded before him, and Joshua comforted with the hope of ultimate success.

Satan being thus baffled, the angel proceeds to impart more fully to Joshua the assurance he so much desired. The temple not being rebuilt, Joshua had none but old and "filthy garments" wherein to minister before the Lord: the Lord Jesus therefore commands that these be taken from him, and exchanged for others more worthy of the office which Joshua was called to execute. And, as a mitre was no less requisite for the high priest than pure and holy garments, he orders "a fair mitre to be put upon his head." This signified two things; first, the removal of all guilt from Joshua and those whom he represented, so that they might stand with acceptance before God; and next, the restoration of the temple service in all its excellency and glory. These were the points which Joshua had been pleading for before the angel; and these were the points assured to him in this vision.

The attendant angels were employed in executing Jehovah's purpose in relation to these things: and "the Angel of the Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ, "stood by," to see that completed, which, by his effectual mediation, he had obtained.

This appears to me to be the primary and prophetic import of the vision before us. We proceed to notice,

II. Its secondary and mystical import—

As individuals, no less than the Church at large, are the temple of Jehovah, so every true believer, no less than Joshua, is a priest unto his God [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.9). [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.6). Hence we may fitly consider Joshua as the representative of individual saints; all of whom minister before the Lord from day to day, under diversified discouragements, but with certainty of ultimate success. See here,

1. 1. Their discouragements—

The state of the Jews at that time may not unfitly be regarded as characterizing the state of a believer in the earlier stages of his progress. He has been delivered indeed from bondage; but he is still in a very low and destitute condition, and is ready to doubt whether the work that has been begun within him can ever be perfected. He goes before his God from day to day; but comes away more discouraged than before. Satan, that malignant adversary, is more especially active at such seasons, and stands at his right hand to resist him. Numberless are the stratagems which this subtle enemy uses to obstruct his progress and to damp his hopes. He represents to the believer's mind the enormity of his sills; and intimates, that they are too great to be forgiven. He adduces them as proofs that God has not elected him; and that therefore to seek for mercy is a hopeless task. It is on this account that Satan is called "The accuser of the brethren," because he accuses them to God, and God to them; yes, and accuses them also to themselves, in order to bring them to despair.

We forbear to notice the outward opposition which Satan raises against them, by persecutions and temptations of different kinds, because it is of that opposition which he makes to them at the throne of grace that we are more particularly led to speak. But "he desires to have them," as he did to have Peter of old, "that he may sift them as wheat:" and if he were left without control from a higher power, he would soon reduce them all to chaff.

2. Their certainty of final success—

Believers "have an Advocate with the Father," the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.1);" and through the care of this ever watchful Protector they are secured, so that "no weapon that is formed against them can prosper." In the rebuke which this Almighty Friend gives to Satan, there are two things which afford them peculiar consolation; namely, the evidence which they have, that, notwithstanding all their remaining infirmities, a work of grace has been begun upon them; and, the immutability of Him who has thus distinguished them by his grace. True, they see in themselves the fearful marks of the fire in which they have been burned, and a lamentable susceptibility of impression from fire, if by any means they come in contact with it. But from these very things a question arises in their minds, How is it that I am not wholly consumed? If "the bush burn with fire and is not consumed," is there not reason to hope that God is in the bush? Then I will hope, and not be afraid: for though with man it would be impossible to make use of me as a part of God's temple, it is not so with God; for with him all things are possible; and "his gifts and calling are without repentance [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.29)."

Further; while deploring their extreme unworthiness to serve and enjoy God, they hear the order given, "Take from him his filthy garments, and give him a change of clothing:" and, clothed in the unspotted robe of their Redeemer's righteousness [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.18), they know that "their iniquity is taken away, and their sin covered [Isaiah 61:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.10)." They see that there is a sufficiency in the provision thus made for them [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.18), and they rejoice in it: and, thus habited, they hope to minister before God with increasing pleasure upon earth, and to stand before him with acceptance in his temple above.

Here is their hope; "The Angel of the Lord stands by." That Angel has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world: and, with such an Advocate and Intercessor, they defy all the power of their enemy; assured, that "neither the power nor policy of Hell shall ever prevail against them."

Would we make a suitable improvement of this passage?

1. Let us not despair of the Church's prosperity, however low or desolate her present condition may be—

The prophet's word was accomplished: and low as the state of the Jewish Church is, all that is spoken respecting her shall yet be accomplished. She is destined to be the joy and glory of the whole earth. The degradation and dispersion of her members shall not always continue. Glorious days are yet in reserve for her [Zechariah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.17); [Zechariah 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 2.10-12); [Zechariah 8:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.1-8); and, "when she shall turn to the Lord, her Messiah, ungodliness shall be turned away from her, and all Israel shall be saved [Romans 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.26)."

The Gentiles also, though now so dark,—millions upon millions of them being as ignorant of God and his Christ as the very beasts that perish,—shall one day be joined to the Lord, and, as a royal priesthood, shall offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise continually, throughout the whole earth. Who that sees the state of the Heathen world would suppose that this could ever be? But God has said, that "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God:" and "he is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent."

2. Let us commit our own souls altogether to the care of our all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator—

Jesus lives: and because he lives, we shall live also; for "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." If we be his people, we must expect that Satan will use his utmost efforts to destroy us: but he is a vanquished enemy; and "if we resist him manfully, he will flee from us." When he seems as if he would overpower us, let us call in Omnipotence to our aid, and say, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan." Let us never doubt the power of our Almighty Friend to support us, or his faithfulness to preserve us. If we look to ourselves, or if we look to our great adversary, there is nothing but discouragement: but if we look unto Jesus, there is no ground for fear: he can overcome the strong man armed, and liberate us from his yoke. He who "spoiled principalities and powers upon the cross," and "led captivity captive" in his ascension, can he not bruise Satan under our feet now? He can; he will: and the weakest believer who trusts in him shall "be more than conqueror" over earth and Hell. "Faithful is He who has promised; who also will do it."

[Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.6)

DISCOURSE 1243

ALL IS OF GOD

[Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.6). This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.

MANY parts of the prophetic writings are extremely dark: but many, which appear dark, would become clear, if we were contented to explain their main scope, without descending to every particular contained in them. Indeed they are, for the most part, explained by God himself; so far, at least, as to leave us in no doubt respecting their general import. The vision before us appears to be of difficult interpretation: to the Jews, methinks, it was altogether inexplicable; but the design of it was plainly declared in the words which we have just read: and, indeed, the declaration of its chief design reflects no inconsiderable light on every part of it. Perhaps we may say, that the lamps are the Church of God; the oil which feeds them is the Holy Spirit; the pipes conveying it are the ordinances; the bowl which supplies those pipes is the Gospel; and the olive-trees, which pour continually their sacred stores into the bowl, are the Lord Jesus Christ, in his offices of Priest and Prophet See this more fully treated, in the Discourse on verse 11–14. But, supposing we are mistaken in the precise meaning which we have assigned to these several parts, the import of the whole together is perfectly clear. You perceive that these lamps are kept alight, not by human agency, in any respect: the oil is secretly conveyed, from God himself, to every lamp, through the means of his own appointment: and this is the precise meaning which God himself, by his angel, annexes to the vision: "Know you not what these be? And I said, No, my Lord. Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

Let us consider these words,

I. In reference to the work which was then in hand—

Zechariah was sent to encourage the Jews to rebuild their city and temple. Great opposition was made to them; so that they despaired of ever accomplishing so great a work. But God, by this vision, instructed the prophet what to say unto them. He was to show them,

1. That they needed not to desire the aid of men, nor to fear their opposition—

Men are only what God is pleased to make them. They can do neither good nor evil, any further than he for his own glory enables them to do it. He had not sent armies to deliver them from Egypt: nor could all the power of Pharaoh detain them there. Nor had he brought them out of Babylon by human might or power. Mighty as the Chaldean empire was, and powerful as were the Medo-Persian conquerors of that empire, he had brought them forth, without force, to their native land: and therefore they should bear in mind how impotent the creature was, either to effect or prevent anything, but in perfect accordance with his purpose, and in subserviency to his will.

2. That they needed only to trust in Him alone—

Nothing in the vision could either promote or obstruct the supplies of oil from the olives to the lamp: yet not a lamp was left destitute, or ceased to exhibit a splendid light. The Spirit of God did all; and kept alive the lamps, by a secret, continued, and effectual communication. It was the Spirit, that, by operating on the hearts of men, supplied every part of the furniture belonging to the tabernacle [Exodus 35:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 35.21-22); [Exodus 35:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 35.26). It was the Spirit alone that moved the heart of Cyrus to issue his proclamation for their return from Babylon [2 Chronicles 36:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 36.22-23). And it was the same Spirit that raised up Zerubbabel, and inspired them with a zeal to forward the great work which they had in hand [Haggai 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.14). And was He not still as able as ever to accomplish his own gracious purposes? or did they need to indulge either hope or fear with respect to man, when they had the Almighty God for their help?

But, as the words are spoken generally, let us consider them more at large,

II. In reference to the work which was therein typified—

The whole work of redemption from Babylon was typical; and had respect to,

1. 1. The establishment of Christianity in the world—

What was then done for the Lord in the erection of a material temple, was done by Jesus Christ in the formation of a spiritual temple, "of which the Prophets and Apostles were the foundation, and he himself the Chief Corner-stone; and the whole being fitly framed together, is continually growing up a holy temple to the Lord [Ephesians 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.19-22)." But how has this been built? or how is it carried on? Is it, or has it at any time been, by might or by power? Who instructed the Prophets and Apostles? Who gave effect to their word? Who digs out the stones from the quarry, if I may so speak, and fits them for their places in this spiritual building 1 Peter 2:5-6. It is the Spirit of God altogether. The powers of the world have been exerted to the uttermost against it: yes, men and devils have been confederate against it from the very beginning: but "it is founded on a rock; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

2. The maintenance of religion in the souls of men—

The soul of every individual believer is a temple of the Lord [1 Corinthians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.16). But every such temple is "the workmanship of Jehovah" altogether [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.10); it is a new creation. In the natural man there is not anything of which such a building can be formed: there is not in him either power or inclination to serve God: it is the Spirit of God alone that "gives him either to will or to do, and that altogether of his own good pleasure." Human power has no part in effecting it: "We are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.13)." "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.16);" and, in the bestowment of his blessings, "the Spirit divides to every man severally as he will [1 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.11)."

3. The future restoration of the Jews—

The restoration from Babylon was but a partial accomplishment of what is to be more completely fulfilled at a future period. If we look into the prophecies of Zechariah, we shall find that he peculiarly and pre-eminently delights to dwell on this subject Compare chapter 1:16, 17 and 2:10–12 and 6:12–15 and especially the whole 8th chapter. And how shall this future restoration be effected? Not by human might or power; for all the power of man will be exerted to prevent it [Micah 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.11-13); but by the power of the Holy Spirit: for the Prophet Hosea, speaking of the time when "the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall he gathered together and appoint themselves one head, and shall come out of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel," says expressly, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God; and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen [Hosea 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 1.7); [Hosea 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 1.11)."

Thus we have ascertained the import of the declaration before us. Now let us proceed to the improvement of it.

It is clear, that when Almighty God saw fit to give a special vision to his servant, for the express purpose of fixing more deeply on his mind, and on the minds of the Jewish people, this particular truth, it must deserve at our hands the strictest attention. Learn then from it,

1. On whom alone to depend—

We are prone to creature-confidence, and to place our reliance on an arm of flesh. But God denounces a curse on all who indulge this propensity: "Cursed is the man that trusts in man, or that makes flesh his arm; and whose heart departs from the Lord [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.5)." And the truly godly are particularly distinguished by their victory over this sin: "We are the circumcision, who have no confidence in the flesh [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.3)." It is not possible to divest ourselves of this propensity in too great a degree: for not even so small a matter as the falling of a sparrow takes place without the special direction of the Almighty. We see how dependent a little infant is on its mother; and such must we be in the arms of God. We must undertake nothing in our own strength: in no circumstances whatever may we lean to our own understanding: whatever is devised, or whatever is done, the creature must be nothing; but God must be all in all.

2. To whom alone to give the glory of all that is done—

We must not "sacrifice to our own net, or burn incense to our own drag [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.16)." God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. When Herod was pleased with the adulation of his courtiers, and took honor to himself, instead of giving it to the Lord, he was smitten and eaten up with worms [Acts 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 12.21-23). And we also shall be made monuments of his displeasure, if we ascribe not to Him the glory due unto his name. Wherein soever our success has been, whether in temporal or spiritual concerns, this must be our invariable acknowledgment, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name, be the praise [Psalm 115:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 115.1)."

3. In what light to view the very beginnings of grace—

Were we left to accomplish anything by our own might or power, we might well despond. But when we recollect that "all is of God," and that "He is a Being that changes not," we may take comfort in the slightest expressions of his love, and in the smallest tokens of his grace. This is a very particular lesson to be learned from our text. We are "not to despise the day of small things verse 10;" but to believe, that "He who has laid the foundation of good within us will also finish it verse 9." And, if any enemy vaunt himself as sure to prevail against us, we should address him in that triumphant language, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain verse 7." The communication between the olives and the lamps could not be intercepted by mortal man; nor can the effectual aids of the Holy Spirit be kept from us. These lessons, well learned, are worth a vision: for in the practice of them shall all imaginable good flow down unto us, and God eternally be glorified.

[Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.7)

DISCOURSE 1244

ZERUBBABEL A TYPE OF CHRIST

[Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.7). Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.

OUR eyes are generally fixed more on the creature than on God. Hence we are apt to entertain many unnecessary fears. Nor are we unfrequently diverted by them from the path of duty. This was the case with the Jews when rebuilding their temple. Cyrus had given them permission to rebuild it. But they met with opposition from their envious neighbors. And through this they were intimidated and disheartened. But God encouraged them with an assurance of success verse 6, 7.—

We may notice,

I. The difficulties that obstruct the building of God's spiritual temple—

The temple at Jerusalem was typical of that, which God erects visibly in the world, and invisibly in the hearts of men In proof of this, see [Ephesians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.21) and [1 Corinthians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.16).—

1. The visible temple of the Church has much to obstruct its erection in the world—

With what inconceivable difficulty are men hewn from the quarry, where they by nature lie! What an impenetrable hardness is there in their hearts! They pay little, if any, attention to the word of God. They set themselves against what is spoken to them in God's name. Their state seems almost to destroy all hope that the Gospel should ever operate effectually among them. There is also much opposition made to them by all descriptions of people. Many pretended friends, as well as open enemies, strove to impede the building of the material temple [Ezra. 4:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra. 4.1-4). They sought to prevent it even by means of a legal process [Ezra. 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezra. 4.5). Thus both force and stratagem are used to stop the progress of the Gospel, and the united opposition of all ranks of men seems like an impassable mountain in its way. Those too who are employed in erecting this spiritual temple, are weak and insufficient. The work might call forth all the wisdom and energy of angels; but God has put his "treasure into earthen vessels." Even Paul cried, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Much more may inferior ministers adopt his language. Whoever knows his own insufficiency for so great a work, must often have felt it a source of discouragement, and almost of despondency.

2. The invisible temple also which God is erecting in men's hearts, is retarded by many difficulties and obstructions—

The Christian finds many outward impediments. The terrors and allurements of the world have great influence, and every Christian is, more or less, beset with these. Many, after running well for a season, are turned aside by them: yes, all find them obstacles very difficult to be surmounted. He has also many inward difficulties to encounter. The believer still feels sad remains of corruption within him. These are ever counteracting the efforts of his better principle [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.17), and he is often apprehensive that sin will regain its dominion. Above all, he finds his strength to he perfect weakness. He has learned by bitter experience, how weak he is. He has found, how his strongest resolutions have failed him. Hence he is led to fear, that he shall not persevere to the end.

But whatever obstructions there be to God's work, God will manifest,

II. Their utter inefficacy to arrest its progress—

God enabled Zerubbabel to proceed in spite of all opposition. Nor will He suffer any obstacles to counteract his designs—

1. The visible temple of his Church shall still be carried on—

In the first ages of Christianity the Gospel was victorious. Neither the lusts nor prejudices of men could withstand its power. The very persecutions raised against it were overruled by Him to promote its progress [Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.1); [Acts 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.4) and [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.12-14); nor did the weakness of those who preached it prevent its success. That promise had then a glorious accomplishment [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.16). So now neither open nor secret assaults shall prevail against the Church. Of this we are assured by Him who governs all [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.18).

2. The invisible temple also shall be advanced in our hearts—

The work has hitherto been maintained, notwithstanding the most unpromising appearances. It has often been advanced by the very things which seemed most likely to counteract it. There is an invisible and Almighty Agent engaged to carry it on [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.17). [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 138.8). He will fulfill what he has spoken by the prophet [Luke 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 3.5). Of this comforting truth we may be confidently assured [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6).

INFERENCES—

1. In what manner we should regard difficulties—

We are apt to exaggerate the difficulties that lie in our way; but, if we inspected them more narrowly, they would often appear contemptible. "Who are you, O great mountain?" Are you a fiery furnace, or a den of lions? I am ready to encounter you: for, great as you are, "you are not worthy to be compared with the sufferings I shall escape, or the glory that shall follow [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.18). [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 21.13)." However great they be, we should not be afraid to address them in the exulting language of the text. They will always, in the issue, be the means of glorifying Christ [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9-10). Let us therefore go forward in dependence on that promise "Fear not, you worm Jacob.…You shall thresh the mountains." [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 41.14-16). The whole passage is replete with beauty.

2. In what manner we may overcome difficulties—

Remember who the Builder is: it is Zerubbabel, the Lord Jesus Christ; and is there anything too hard for him? The greatest mountains before him will become a plain: he therefore must be viewed as our all-sufficient helper. If we trust in him, we shall never be disappointed. We shall surely experience the truth of that declaration [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.9). To him then let us commit ourselves with thankful adoration Jude, verse 24, 25.

[Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.10)

DISCOURSE 1245

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

[Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.10). For who has despised the day of small things?

IT is observable in the dispensations both of nature and of providence, that the greatest things take their rise from very small beginnings. From a view of a new-born infant we might be ready to imagine that it would never be capable of any exertions: but, when its faculties are strengthened and matured, it may astonish the world with its profound wisdom, or its heroic exploits. Thus in the dealings of God towards the Jewish nation, they were frequently so reduced, as to be, to all appearance, incapable of attaining that state, which their prophets had given them reason to expect. After their restoration from the Babylonish captivity, their difficulties seemed absolutely insurmountable: but God, in the passage before us, assured them, that the very person, who had laid the foundation of their temple, should live to finish it; and exhorted them not to despise the present small beginnings; for that, in spite of every obstacle, they should have a favorable termination; the temple and city should be rebuilt, and the nation be restored, in a measure at least, to its pristine grandeur. Thus in the literal sense this promise refers to the material temple at Jerusalem; but it may well be applied,

I. To the mystical temple which God has erected in the world—

The very names of "Zion" and "Jerusalem" are often given to the Church of Christ. Nor can there be a doubt, but that the history to which the text relates was a typical representation of Christ's Church, which is brought out of bondage, and erected in the midst of unnumbered difficulties—

There have been many seasons when it has been "a day of small things" with the Church of God—

If we look back to the days of Noah, Abraham, Elijah, and the prophets, we shall find that the true worshipers of God were so few as to be "for signs and wonders" in the age and nation where they lived [Isaiah 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 8.18). After our Lord had preached for three or four years, the number of his disciples was no more than a hundred and twenty: and even at this day the are very few in comparison of those who serve mammon: they are "a little flock," who walk in a "narrow and unfrequented way [Matthew 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.14)."

But we must not "despise" the Church, however low it may appear—

God has promised that his Church shall one day fill the world; that "all shall be righteous;" that "all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest;" and that "Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.8)." True it is that there is very little prospect of such an event at present; but "faithful is he who has promised: who also will do it [1 Thessalonians. 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.24)." "Before our Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain verse 7;" he shall "ride on. in the chariots of the everlasting Gospel, conquering, and to conquer [Revelation 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.2);" and "the knowledge of him shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea [Isaiah 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.9)." Instead therefore of despising the present low appearances, we must regard them as a pledge of that universal empire of Christ which shall in due season be erected in the world.

The text is yet further applicable,

II. To the spiritual temple which is founded by God in the hearts of his people—

Believers are often called the Temple of God 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; but so imperfect is their present state that it may well be said to be with them only as "a day of small things"—

In some sense the most established believer is but in a low and despicable condition. What are any man's attainments when compared with the law, which is our rule, or with Christ, who is our pattern, or even with Paul, who was a man of like passions with ourselves? But to weak believers the text may be more properly applied. They have indeed been liberated from their sore bondage, and have had the foundations of grace laid in their hearts; but alas! how slowly has the work advanced! and how many obstacles do they meet with, that weaken their hands, and discourage their hearts! often are they ready to question, whether the work have been begun in them or not? and to say in despair, "There is no hope."

But they should not despise the operations of grace, however small—

The mode in which this part of the promise is conveyed, is worthy of notice. The interrogatory form of it puts the desponding soul, as it were, upon an inquiry, that by finding how important the day of small things is in the eyes of those who are competent to judge, it may not yield to its disquieting fears. Let the inquiry then be made; Who has despised the day of small things? Did the Father, when he ran to meet the yet distant prodigal, and fell on his neck and kissed him? Does Christ, who "carries the lambs in his bosom," and has promised never to "break the bruised reed," though it be so unfit for his use, nor to "quench the smoking flax," notwithstanding there is so much in it to disgust, and so little to please, him? Do the angels, who, instead of waiting until the penitent becomes established, shout for joy at the very first appearances of his conversion? Does Satan? Does he not act precisely like the kings of Canaan, who, the very instant they found the Gibeonites had made a league with Joshua, confederated to destroy them [Joshua 10:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 10.1-5). This seems to have been a typical event. Yes; the moment we submit to Jesus, that roaring lion seeks, if possible, to devour us. If then they who best know the worth of true grace do not despise the very smallest portion of it, shall we? Shall we not rather value it, rejoice in it, adore our God for it, and take occasion from it to seek for more? Consider the author of it, God; his design in it, to make us his habitation; the benefits resulting from it, present peace and everlasting glory; and shall we despise it; especially when God himself has assured us, that, "wherever he has begun the good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it to the day of Christ [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6)." Did he notice "some good thing" in the heart of young Abijah [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 14.13), and will he forget you? Let not the thought be entertained one moment; but let the weak be strong, and the faint-hearted dissipate their fears; for behold, "the temple shall be built, though in troublous times [Daniel 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 9.25);" and "the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!"

To this encouraging subject we should subjoin a word or two of caution:

1. Do not mistake the day of small things—

As the wheat and the tares may be mistaken for each other in the early stage of their growth, so may good purposes and good desires be easily mistaken for the operations of saving grace. Religion may be counterfeited so well, as, in some instances, to deceive an apostle [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.13); [Acts 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.21); and in ten thousand instances are men led from very false or equivocal appearances to fancy themselves possessed of the reality. To guard against so fatal an error, we should inquire whether the foundation be laid deep in humility and contrition; for, where this is not done, the superstructure, how beautiful soever it may appear, will inevitably fall, and bury us in its ruins.

2. Do not think too highly of the day of small things—

If we have solid grounds for believing that God has begun a good work in our hearts, we must still remember that much remains to be done: many conflicts must be sustained before we can get the victory; and "it ill becomes him who girds on the armor, to boast as one that puts it off [1 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 20.11)." The difficulties which the builders of the material temple experienced, were shadows of those which we must expect in the divine life. Numberless are the devices of our subtle enemy; nor can we defeat his purposes, unless, while we build with one hand, we hold our sword in the other [Nehemiah 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 4.17). Be not then high-minded, but fear; and, while you rejoice in what God has done for your souls, "rejoice with trembling."

[Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.11-14)

DISCOURSE 1246

THE VISION OF THE OLIVE-TREES

[Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.11-14). Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me, and said, Know you not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

VISIONS, under the Old Testament dispensation, were like parables under the New: they gave a shadowy representation of some important truths. They are frequently very obscure: yet there is almost invariably a clue given us, whereby to discover their real import; and not unfrequently an explanation of them is given by God himself. As in the parables, there will be sometimes found circumstances, the precise drift of which is not easy to be explained: but an attention to the main scope of the whole will keep us from ever deviating far from the true interpretation.

The vision which we are about to consider is certainly not very obvious at first sight; and it requires to be investigated with great sobriety of mind: but, when properly understood, it will richly repay the care we have used in the investigation of it. The prophet's solicitude to understand it, shows us the propriety of inquiring into it with care and diligence. Let us therefore endeavor to ascertain,

I. The import of the vision—

The general scope of it is declared by God himself—

The Prophet Zechariah was commissioned to encourage Zerubbabel and Joshua to proceed with the re-building of the temple, which had been long neglected. The Jews who had returned from Babylon were poor and feeble; while their adversaries were numerous and powerful. Hence they despaired of accomplishing, under such unfavorable circumstances, so great a work. But in this vision they were taught to look to God, who, if they confided in him, would assuredly crown their labors with success. With him on their side, they needed not either to regret the want of power in themselves, or to dread the existence of it in their adversaries, since he was almighty and all-sufficient for them. This was the construction which the prophet himself was taught to put upon the vision: "Know you not what these be?" said the angel unto him: "And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts verse 5, 6."

The particular parts of it will be found to bear upon this point with much beauty and exactness—

In the second and third verses we have the vision: "What see you? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candle-stick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof; and two olive-trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side thereof." In our text there is an additional circumstance mentioned, namely, that "the olive-branches empty out of themselves golden oil through the two golden pipes." What the import of all this was, the prophet was very anxious to know; and therefore repeated his inquiries with a kind of holy impatience Mark the repetition, verse 11, 12; and the answer given him was, "The two olive-trees are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." From this answer we may gather both the literal and mystical interpretation of the whole.

The literal import then was this. Zerubbabel and Joshua were the two persons anointed of God to superintend, the one the civil, and the other the ecclesiastical, affairs of the Jews at that time. They had but little power in themselves, yet were they ordained of God to effect great things: and God engaged through them to impart unto the people such supplies of wisdom and strength, as should enable the whole nation to shine with their former splendor. However weak therefore they were in themselves, they must not despair; for every mountain should, before Zerubbabel, become a plain.

The mystical import must be more minutely explained. It must never be forgotten that that whole dispensation was typical. The return of the Jews from Babylon, and the restoration of their civil and ecclesiastical polity, were typical of the deliverance of sinners from their spiritual bondage, and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. Bearing this in mind, we shall see how this vision illustrates the purposes of God, in relation to the Church of Christ. The lamps are emblems of his Church, which shines as a light in a dark world. The pipes are the ordinances of religion, by means of which continual supplies of oil are imparted to them, that their light may never be extinguished. The bowl is the Gospel, which abounds with blessings for all, according to their several necessities. The oil is the Holy Spirit, by whom alone the light that has been set up can be kept alive. And the two olive-trees, from whence that oil spontaneously flows into the bowl, are the kingly and priestly offices of Christ, who, like Zerubbabel and Joshua, is appointed of God to establish Jerusalem, and to build the spiritual temple of the Lord. He is exalted to the right hand of God, and "stands by the Lord of the whole earth," that he may carry on everything in conformity with the Divine will, and accomplish, in due season, the work that has been committed to him. He himself, as the Messiah, the Christ, is the Anointed of the Lord; (the words Messiah and Christ both mean Anointed;) and from him flows "the unction of the Holy One," by which all spiritual light and life are communicated to the Church 1 [John 2:20-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 2.20-27).

The proof of these several points will be more advantageously adduced under the next head of our discourse, in which we propose to point out the proper improvement of the vision, or,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

To ascertain this, we must bear in mind the scope of the vision: for, if we forget that, the whole interpretation of it may be thought fanciful: but, if we duly regard that, the whole instruction derived from the vision will appear sober, just, and pertinent. It teaches us, then,

1. That Christ is, by his offices, qualified to support and perfect his Church—

The offices filled by Zerubbabel and Joshua both unite in Christ. He is the High Priest of his Church; and in that capacity he is now officiating at the right hand of God. He offered himself a sacrifice for us at the appointed time; and he is now entered with his own blood into the Holy of Holies, to plead the merit of that blood, and to make intercession for us before the mercy-seat of Jehovah. Hence he is called "The Apostle and High-Priest of our profession [Hebrews 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 3.1);" and it is from the consideration that we have such an High-Priest, that we are encouraged to hold fast our profession [Hebrews 4:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.14-16); [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.11-12); [Hebrews 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.21-22). Moreover he is a King; God has "set him as his King upon the holy hill of Zion [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.6)." And to this the Apostle Peter bore witness on the day of Pentecost, saying, "God has made that same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.36)." From the union of these two offices in him arises his ability to build his Church. Were either of them wanting, he would fail; but, by the concentration of infinite merit and almighty power in his sacred person, he is fully qualified for the work assigned him. This is particularly marked by Zechariah in a following chapter, where he says, "Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the Temple of the Lord: even He shall build the Temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both [Zechariah 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 6.12-13). It is remarkable, that in this passage, where our Lord is called a King and a Priest, he is particularly designated as The Branch." Thus standing by the Lord of the whole earth, and sustaining in himself the united offices of Zerubbabel and Joshua, he is really to the Church what they were in a shadow, the source of all that is necessary for her spiritual edification."

2. That the fullness which is in him is expressly committed to him, for the use and benefit of his Church—

"It has pleased the Lord that in Him should all fullness dwell [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.19)." But for whose sake is it committed to him? His own? No; but ours. He appears in Heaven, not in a private, but public capacity, even as the Head of his Church. At his ascension thither he received gifts; and received them in order to impart them to rebellious man Compare [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.8). "received," "gave." He ascended, on purpose "that he might fill all things [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.10)." He is the Head; and "the Church is his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all [Ephesians 1:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.20-23)." Hence we find, that when the Holy Spirit was poured forth on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter confidently traced the gift to him, even to that very Jesus who had so recently been crucified as a malefactor: "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses: therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has shed forth this which you now see and hear [Acts 2:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.32-33)." And to the same effect Paul also says, that God "saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior [Titus 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 3.5-6)." These passages reflect great light upon our text, inasmuch as they show that Christ is the true source of all spiritual blessings to the Church; and that the Holy Spirit, with all his graces and consolations, flows from him according to the Father's will, just as the oil in the vision dropped from the olive-trees into the bowl, for the continual supply of the lamps dependent on it.

3. That in the use of his ordinances, we may expect all needful supplies—

It was through the pipes only that the lumps received the oil; and it is through the ordinances only that we can receive "supplies of the Spirit from Jesus Christ [Philippians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.19)." He will be inquired of for all that he has promised us [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.37). "If we ask not, we cannot have [James 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.2)." We must wait upon him in private, reading his word, meditating upon it, and praying over it. We must wait upon him also in public, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," but expecting more particular manifestations of his love, and richer communications of his grace, through the medium of his preached Gospel. "Where two or three are met together in his name,"there it is that he sheds forth his Spirit in a more abundant measure [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.20). Truly, if we watch unto prayer, and abound therein with thanksgiving, we shall never be disappointed of our hope. We shall have just reason to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." "The hungry he will fill with good things: it is the rich only," and the self-sufficient, "that he ever sends empty away." "The diligent soul shall be made fat."

And here let me observe, that, in the vision, the lamps, the pipes, the bowl, the oil, were all of gold. Those who wait upon the Lord in sincerity and truth are in themselves as superior to unregenerate men as gold is to the baser metals? And what is there of such value as the grace of which they have been made partakers? in comparison of it, all else is but as dung and dross. And are there not in the Gospel "unsearchable riches?" And may we not well say, that under the ordinances, whether public or private, we have enjoyed many golden opportunities? Yes indeed: and if we be careful to keep up the communication between Christ and our souls, we shall have all our wants abundantly supplied [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.19), and the "salvation ministered unto us shall be as a lamp that burns [Isaiah 62:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.1)."

4. That however low our state may be, or powerful our enemies, His grace shall be sufficient for us—

Of this were Zerubbabel and Joshua assured: and the event corresponded with the vision. Of this too may we be assured; for to us, no less than to Paul, does the Lord Jesus say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Is that grace at present imparted in but a low degree? Still God says to us, "Who has despised the day of small things verse 10." 'I do not: and therefore let not any of you do it.' Are our enemies exceeding powerful? God teaches us again to say, "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain verse 7." Have we an evidence in ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ has begun a work of grace within us? God again teaches us to say, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house: his hands also shall finish it verse 9." Shall it be thought that these passages relate only to that particular occasion? Look then to the New Testament, and there you will find all the same assurances and triumphs. We are told that "He, who has been the author, will also be the finisher of our faith [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.2)." We may be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in us, will perform it "until the day of Christ [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.10)." And even now, while yet conflicting with our enemies, we may say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he who shall condemn? Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded, that neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.31-39)." "The plummet is in the hands of our Zerubbabel, with those seven" attendant spirits, "who are the eyes of the Lord, and run to and fro through the whole earth;" and he will see that the work is perfected in us according to his will verse 10 with [Zechariah 1:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 1.8-11).

Look you then, beloved, to our adorable Lord and Savior, and let nothing interrupt your communication with him. It is your privilege to be daily and hourly "receiving, out of his fullness, grace," according to the grace that is in him, and sufficient for all your necessities [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16). Do you feel your need of repentance, or pardon, or any blessing whatever? Know that "he is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.31);" and though you are not to expect the Holy Spirit to be imparted to you in his miraculous powers, you may in his gracious influences: yes, "you shall receive the Holy Spirit; for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.38-39)." And though you may still have many conflicts, the time is not far distant, when, the work being completed in you, "the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shouting;" and to all eternity you shall cry, "Grace, grace unto it! verse 7."

[Zechariah 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 6.12-13)

DISCOURSE 1247

CHRIST SAVING BY HIS UNITED OFFICES

[Zechariah 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 6.12-13). Thus speaks the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

MANY of the most important prophecies were introduced with remarkable and appropriate signs. When God foretold to Moses the deliverance of his people from their bondage in Egypt, he appeared to him in a burning bush, which represented the state of his Church as persecuted on every side, but preserved from injury by his presence in it. Thus was Joshua the high-priest now made to receive an honor which described in a very significant manner the glory and dignity of the promised Messiah. Some of the Jews who had chosen to remain in Babylon after that their brethren had returned to their own land, showed that they were not altogether unmindful of their brethren or their God, by bringing a present of gold and silver for the use of the newly erected temple: and God instantly commanded that two crowns should be made of the gold and silver, and that these crowns should, in the presence of the donors, be put upon the head of Joshua: then, in explanation of this sign, the prophet was ordered to direct their attention to the promised Messiah, in whom all honor and power, whether regal or priestly, should be combined verse 9–11.

This prophecy will lead us to consider,

I. The name and work of the Messiah—

Christ is here referred to as "the man whose name is The Branch"—

Frequently is he characterized by the prophets under this appellation [Zechariah 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 3.8). [Isaiah 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 4.2). Its import is, that he was to be a scion or shoot springing out of the stem of Jesse, that is, to be born of the house of David, when it was cut down and reduced to the lowest state [Isaiah 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.1); [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.2). But though he was to appear in such a weak and mean condition, yet he was to "sit upon the throne of his father David and to reign forever." Nor can we err in applying this prophecy to Christ, since another prophet, speaking of him by the very same name, expatiates in exalted terms upon the glory of his majesty, and declares that the name whereby he should be still more eminently distinguished, should be, Jehovah our Righteousness [Jeremiah 23:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.5-6). In due time he "grew up out of his place," both out of Bethlehem, where he was born, and out of Nazareth, where he was brought up. We do not indeed find him called "The Branch" by any of the New Testament writers; but, as the place where this branch was to grow up seems to be so particularly specified, it is not impossible but that this prophecy received its accomplishment in that contemptuous appellation given to him, "The Nazarene [Matthew 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 2.23). The Hebrew word Netzer signifies a Branch;" at all events it was fulfilled in that title so often ascribed to him, "The Son of David [Matthew 20:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 20.30-31); [Matthew 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.9)."

The work to which he was appointed was, to build the temple—

The material temple was now rebuilding under the auspices of Zerubbabel and Joshua. In reference to that, the prophet speaks of another temple (of which that which was now erecting was but a type or shadow,) which should in due time be raised by the Messiah himself; and he repeats his declaration both to denote the great importance of it, and the certainty of its accomplishment. This temple is no other than the Church of God, which Jesus Christ has founded on the earth, and against which neither the power nor the policy of Hell shall ever prevail [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.18). [Ephesians 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.20-21).

To him also, as the only builder, was to be given all "the glory"—

Whatever instruments he uses, they can effect nothing but through the agency of his Spirit. Whether Paul plant or Apollos water, it is Christ alone that can give the increase [1 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 3.7). The workmen in the material temple might say of the carved work, This and that was the work of my hands; it was formed by my skill, and is a monument of my power: but, in the Church of God, there is not one stone laid in the whole building, which was not dug from the quarry, fitted for its place, and fixed in its station by the hand of Jesus: and the chisel has as much right to boast against him who works with it, as any instrument, which the Lord may use, has to arrogate to himself any part of his honor [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.15). When "the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings," there shall not be one in Heaven or earth, who will not ascribe the glory to the Divine Architect, crying, "Grace, grace unto it [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 4.7)."

As his work was to be glorious, so were also,

II. The offices whereby he was to execute that work—

Mean as his appearance was, he was appointed to bear the highest offices:

1. He was to rule both as a King and as a Priest—

As "King of kings and Lord of lords," he erects his throne over all in Heaven and earth. But he exercises also a government which the Father has committed to him in his mediatorial capacity. This relates more immediately to the Church, the minutest concerns of which are all subject to his control [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.22). But though a King, he executes also the office of a Priest; and appeared to the beloved Apostle arrayed in priestly vestments, in token that he still carries on the work which he began on earth [Revelation 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.13). In him the kingly power of Zerubbabel, and the priestly office of Joshua, were to be united: and it was for this reason that both the crowns were put upon the head of Joshua, who in so remarkable a manner represented him. Being "a priest upon his throne," his government was to be mild, like that of a compassionate Priest; and his intercession effectual, like that of an Almighty King.

2. By these united offices he was to perform the work assigned him—

The salvation of men has been contrived by infinite wisdom, and is effected only in that way which God has appointed. It is not accomplished either by power alone or by price alone; but by price and by power. Christ in his priestly office atones; and in his kingly office imparts the benefit of that atonement: "the counsel of peace is between them both." However meritorious the death of Christ might be as a sacrifice, we can receive no salvation by it, unless he exert his almighty power to renew and sanctify our nature; nor, on the other hand, would his grace be sufficient to bring us unto God, unless he had offered a sacrifice for our sins, and continued in Heaven to make intercession for us. But by making satisfaction to the injured Majesty of Heaven, and delivering us out of the hands of all our spiritual enemies, he both effects our reconciliation with God, and renders us meet for our heavenly inheritance.

INFERENCES—

1. What abundant provision has God made for our peace!

A guilty conscience is not easily pacified: in the midst of all its endeavors to divert its attention from the state of the soul, it will feel many fears and secret misgivings: it will always suspect, either that something which they do not possess, is necessary for the securing of pardon, or that the exertions used for the attainment of holiness, are inadequate to the end proposed. But God has given us a Savior, who equally bears the sacerdotal censer, and the regal diadem; and unites in himself the compassion of a Priest, with the power and authority of a King. What then can be wanting to satisfy our minds? Surely we need only believe; and "according to our faith so shall it be done unto us." If our minds be but "stayed on Christ" as a willing and all-sufficient Savior, we shall, according to his word, be "kept in perfect peace."

2. How evidently must all the glory of our salvation be given to Christ!

We always wish to ascribe some of the glory to ourselves: but the whole work is his from the foundation to the top-stone: He is "the author and the finisher of our faith."Are we reconciled to God? it is through the blood of his cross. Is our peace maintained with God? it is through his prevailing intercession. Are we freed from the bondage of sin and Satan? it is through his mighty power, and victorious grace. Let him then "bear the glory:" on him "let us hang all the glory of his Father's house [Isaiah 22:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 22.24);" and let us now sing, as we hope to do to all eternity, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.5-6).

[Zechariah 7:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 7.4-7)

DISCOURSE 1248

OUTWARD SERVICES VAIN WITHOUT OBEDIENCE

[Zechariah 7:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 7.4-7). Then came the word of the Lord of Hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did you at all fast unto me, even to me? And when you did eat, and when you did drink, did you not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should you not hear the words which the Lord has cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity?

THIS was an answer to a question which had been proposed to the prophet, by persons who had been sent from Babylon to consult him on a matter of considerable importance. The Jews, when carried captive to Babylon, instituted four annual fasts [Zechariah 8:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.19), two of which are mentioned in the text; that in the fifth month, in remembrance of the destruction of their temple and city by Nebuzaradan, the Chaldean general; and the other, in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah, who had been placed, as governor, over the poorer part of the Jewish population that were left in the land [2 Kings 25:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 25.8-10); [2 Kings 25:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 25.22-25). But the people were now restored to their land; and the temple was in part rebuilt; and therefore it was justly doubted, by those who yet remained in Babylon, whether it was proper to continue those fasts, now that the judgments on account of which the fasts were instituted were removed. This was a question which could not be satisfactorily answered, but by one who was inspired of God to declare his will respecting it. But before a direct answer was given to it, the prophet was instructed to reprove the whole nation, priests as well as people, for the manner in which those fasts had been observed. They are not blamed for instituting the fasts, but for the hypocrisy which they had manifested in the observance of them.

The reproof here given to the Jewish nation furnishes us with a fit occasion,

I. To inquire into the principles by which we have been actuated in our religious duties—

External acts are of no value in the sight of God, any farther than as they express the real dispositions of the mind. It is to the principle from which we act, and not to the mere act itself, that God looks: and it is to that that we also must look, in order to form a right estimate of our character. Consider then,

1. To whom we ought to have performed all our religious services—

That "fasting and mourning" were religious services, is obvious: and that "eating and drinking"are here used in the same sense, is also obvious. The Jews were ordered by the Mosaic law to carry up their tithes, and their first-fruits, and their free-will offerings, to Jerusalem, and to eat them, in the temple before the Lord [Deuteronomy 12:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 12.17-18); and not being able to carry them thither, they observed the same rites in Babylon. Hence we may properly notice our own religious services in general, whether those of greater solemnity, as public fasts, or those which are of more ordinary occurrence, both public and private: in all of them we ought to have had respect to God; to his will, as the cause; his word, as the rule; his glory, as the end [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.31). If not done for him, they are not acceptable to him: and the more entirely we have respect to him in them, the more pleasing they are in his sight. But if we examine our religious services in this view, how few will be found to have been such as God could accept! Enter distinctly into those three points: and then say what answer you can return to that searching interrogation, "Did you perform them to me, even unto me?"

2. To whom we have performed them—

Self was the spring of all their services in Babylon; and self has been, for the most part, the true source of ours. With some they have been no more than a decent regard for the customs of the place wherein they live. With others, they have originated in pride, having been performed only to set a good example to others, or to gratify a self-complacent spirit in themselves. With others again, the observance of them has been prompted by self-righteousness, and a vain desire of establishing a righteousness of their own before God. With some too, it is to be feared, their services have been debased by, if not founded in, hypocrisy, having been little else than an endeavor to preserve a fair appearance before men, and to get advantage for the promoting of their temporal interests.

In any of these points of view, what is the principle that actuates us? Is it love for God, or zeal for his glory? No: it is self, and nothing but self; and inasmuch as we have performed religious services under any of these impressions, it must be said that we have done it "for ourselves," and not for God. Of Pharisaic hypocrisy we would fondly hope, that it is not a common principle among us: but formality, and pride, and self-righteousness operate to a vast extent. O let us search and try ourselves in relation to these things: and we shall find abundant ground for humiliation, where perhaps we imagined there was cause for nothing but self-approbation and joy.

That we may not perform our services in vain, I will proceed,

II. To show what practice is necessary to the acceptance of them before God—

The prophet appealed to the Jews, whether their attention ought not rather to be called to the commands of God, which in their more prosperous state they had neglected, and which even now they overlooked?

This is the duty to which we are called—

Under all circumstances, our first duty is to obey the commands of God: and to bring us to obedience is the end of all his dispensations towards us. If he gives prosperity, it is to encourage us to what is good; and, if he send adversity, it is to reclaim us from evil. Even in the gift of his only-begotten Son he aimed particularly at this, the reducing of men to a state of holy obedience, and of an unreserved devotedness to their God [Romans 14:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 14.7-10). [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 2.14).

Without this, all services, of whatever kind they be, are of no avail—

In numberless places is this declared by the voice of inspiration: the universal testimony of God's prophets is, "that God has not such pleasure in sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord; but that to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams." The Prophet Isaiah in particular insists upon this truth, and in the strongest terms [Isaiah 1:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.11-16); [Isaiah 58:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.1-7); Indeed such is God's abhorrence even of the most exalted services, if offered as a substitute for obedience, that he accounts them no better than idolatry and murder [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.3). Our blessed Lord in like manner expresses his indignation against those who profess regard for him without manifesting it by a life of holy obedience: "Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" And, as the prophet appealed to the Jews respecting this, so we would make our appeal to you, assured that, if conscience be allowed to speak, there can be but one sentiment on this subject. It is an incontrovertible and fearful truth, that "He is an empty vine, who brings forth fruit to himself [Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 10.1)."

Let this subject be improved,

1. For our humiliation—

Who among us does not, on a review of his past conduct, find abundant cause for self-condemnation in his religious duties? Who has not too much consulted self, and too little had regard to God? Truly, we all need one to "bear the iniquity of our holiest things," as well as of the things which have been more palpably contrary to the will of God. Let us look to that adorable Savior on whom all our iniquities were laid, and seek through him alone that gracious acceptance, which services like ours can never merit.

2. For our direction in future life—

It is good to serve the Lord: and we must not be discouraged because we cannot serve him so perfectly as we could wish. Self, that subtle enemy, will more or less intrude into all we do. But let us be on our guard against this evil principle, and beg of God to deliver us from it. Let us endeavor to get a deeper sense of our obligations to God our Savior, for all the wonders of redeeming love. This will do more than anything else to counteract our natural depravity, and to make us "live in all things, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14-15)."

[Zechariah 8:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.3-8)

DISCOURSE 1249

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

[Zechariah 8:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.3-8). Thus says the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem, shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the holy mountain. Thus says the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus says the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes? says the Lord of Hosts. Thus says the Lord of Hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

THE restoration of the Jews from their present dispersion forms a very principal subject of all the prophetic writings; and one cannot but be amazed that it should occupy so small a share of attention among the ministers of religion, as scarcely to be noticed by them. Indeed those who do notice the passages relating to that event, pervert them for the most part, by applying them to the Church of Christ, and giving them an interpretation which they were never designed to bear. From whatever cause this proceeds, it tends exceedingly to keep out of view the mercy of God towards his once-favored people, and to foster in our bosoms an indifference to their welfare. But let us indulge a more benevolent disposition towards them, and contemplate with pleasure,

I. Their interest in this prophecy—

In its primary sense, it was applicable to the Jews of that day—

They were at present but a small "remnant," and under circumstances that were very discouraging. They had long been afflicted, both by God and man. Previous to their captivity, the judgments of God had been so heavily inflicted on them, that scarcely an old man was to be found among them; and nothing but want and misery was to be seen in the streets verse 10; but now peace and plenty should be restored to them verse 11, 12. In a moral view, also, there should be a great and general improvement, insomuch that their city, which had been the seat of the most abominable idolatries, should be called "A city of truth;" and the mountain where their temple was rebuilding, "The holy mountain."

But it had respect to the Jewish nation in days that are yet future—

Of this there is abundant evidence: for Judah alone returned from captivity; whereas the chapter before us speaks of "Israel and Judah." Moreover, the Jews after their return never displayed any great piety; whereas they were, in this prophecy, designated as a holy people. They were also to "be a blessing among the heathen, as before they had been a curse verse 13." But never, at any period, were they so execrated among the heathen, as since their dispersion by the Romans: nor, with the exception of the Savior and his Apostles, have they ever been such a blessing to the world, as they will be at a future period, when they shall rise up as missionaries in all the countries where they have been scattered, and be the means of converting the whole Gentile world to the faith of Christ [Micah 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.7). Nor can the concluding part of this chapter be referred to any events that have hitherto taken place in the world. The time is yet to come, when "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem;" and when "ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you verse 20–23."

What then are the things here predicted? First, the return of the Jews to their own land. And this is an event which shall certainly be accomplished in due season [Isaiah 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.13). [Jeremiah 30:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.3); [Jeremiah 30:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.18-19); Next it declares their conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and their instrumentality in converting the heathen world. This also shall be accomplished at the appointed time [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5). [Isaiah 66:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.19-20). [Romans 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.15).

God, foreseeing the incredulity of all to whom this prophecy should come, declares,

II. The certainty of its accomplishment, notwithstanding all the difficulties which lie in the way—

When things are far beyond the powers of man we are apt to judge that they can never be effected—

Unbelief is deeply rooted in the heart of man. When Sarah was informed, that she, notwithstanding the advanced age of herself and her husband, should bear a child, she laughed at the idea, as altogether incredible [Genesis 18:9-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 18.9-15). The Israelites in the wilderness, notwithstanding they had seen all God's wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea, conceived it impossible that God should ever give them flesh to eat in the wilderness [Psalm 78:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.19-20); and Moses himself staggered at this promise through unbelief [Numbers 11:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 11.18-23). So it is with us all: "we limit the Holy One of Israel [Psalm 78:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.41)," and "judge of him as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.21)."

But this is erroneous and absurd—

Very pointed is that interrogation in the text: "Thus says the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes? says the Lord of Hosts." "There is nothing impossible to God." He who by a word called the whole universe into existence, What can he not do? There were many in our Lord's days who doubted the resurrection of the body, because they could not conceive how the scattered atoms could ever be brought together and re-united into the same corporeal mass, so that every human being from the beginning to the end of the world should have his own proper body. But our blessed Lord said to them, "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God [Matthew 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 22.29)." A just consideration of God's omnipotence would at once have removed all their doubts on this subject, as it will also on every other subject connected with prophecy. Particularly in reference to the final restoration and conversion of the Jews is the power of God insisted on, as a pledge and security for the performance of his promised mercy: "They shall be engrafted into their own olive-tree again; for God is able to engraft them in again [Romans 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.23)." When therefore we see the desperate state to which the Jews are reduced, and feel inclined to ask, "Can these dry bones live?" let us bear in mind, that God has declared they shall live [Ezekiel 37:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.3-5), and that "what he has promised he is able also to perform [Romans 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.21)."

ADDRESS—

1. Let none indulge unbelief, in reference to their own souls—

Frequently are persons ready to despond, as though their difficulties in the divine life were too great to be surmounted. And truly, if our salvation depended on our own efforts only, we might well despond. But has not God engaged to keep his people [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 2.9). [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 17.9). [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.6).: Has not the Lord Jesus Christ assured us, that "his grace shall be sufficient for us [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 12.9)." Why then should we be cast down, as though there were no hope? See how tenderly God chides us for such unworthy and unfitting fears [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.27-31); and learn to "live by faith in the Lord Jesus," and to be "strong in faith, giving glory to God [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 4.20)."

2. Let none indulge it, in reference to the Church of God—

We confess, "it is marvelous in our eyes," that the Jews should ever become such a people as we are taught to expect. But we are not therefore to doubt whether the promises of God respecting them will be fulfilled. What the prophet predicted respecting the speedy re-establishment of the Jews after their captivity, was fulfilled: and so will his predictions relative to their future restoration. Hence, in the words immediately following the text, it is said, "Let your hands be strong, you that hear, in these days, these words by the mouth of the prophets:" and again, in verse 13 "Fear not, but let your hands be strong." So then say I to you at this time: You who are engaged in promoting the welfare of the Jewish nation, "fear not, but let your hands be strong." Your prospects, humanly speaking, are discouraging; but God is on your side; and he who by the sound of rams' horns cast down the walls of Jericho, will, by your feeble efforts, "glorify himself, and make his own strength perfect in your weakness."

[Zechariah 8:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-23)

DISCOURSE 1250

THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES

[Zechariah 8:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-23). Thus says the Lord of Hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall, come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

IF we did not see that the generality of Christians, with the Scriptures in their hands, are yet ignorant of the plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion, we should wonder how the Jews, with the sacred oracles before them, could be such strangers to God's design of bringing the Gentiles into his Church. If there were no other passage, in all the inspired volume, relating to the subject, besides that which we have now read, they would have had abundant reason to expect that glorious event.

But the prophecy before us, however fulfilled in part in the apostolic and succeeding ages, is yet to receive, at a future period, a more complete accomplishment. In unfolding its meaning, we shall be led to consider,

I. The conversion of the Gentiles—

To human appearance, it must be granted, this event is very improbable: but,

It is certain—

It is an event foretold from the earliest ages by Moses [Deuteronomy 32:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.21) with [Romans 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.19-20). and the prophets [Psalm 72:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.8-11). [Isaiah. 49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa. 49).and [60](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isaiah 49.60); and we are confirmed in our expectation of it by Christ [Luke 21:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.24), and his apostles [Romans 15:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.8-12); [Romans 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.25).

It will, however, be sudden—

There will probably be no more prospect of its arrival, than there was of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon a little time before it took effect. "A nation shall then, as it were, be born in a day [Isaiah 66:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.8)." "As soon as the people hear of Christ, they shall obey him [Psalm 18:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 18.43-44)." No sooner shall his standard be erected, than they shall flock to it in crowds, "like doves to their windows [Isaiah 60:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.2-3); [Isaiah 60:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.8)." Like persons eager for some great and unexpected good, they shall "lay hold of the skirt" of him, who they think can aid them in the attainment of it. Yes, so vast and sudden will be the accession of converts to the church, that the places appropriated to divine worship shall not be able to contain them, and the people of God themselves shall be filled with wonder and astonishment [Isaiah 49:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.18-22).

It will also be universal—

"All the ends of the world are given to Christ as his possession [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.8)." And in that day "many and strong nations" shall unite themselves to the Lord; and "men shall fear him from the rising to the setting sun [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.11)." "All shall know him, from the least of them even to the greatest [Jeremiah 31:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.34)." All shall be righteous [Isaiah 60:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.21); even the most ignorant countrymen shall be consecrated to the Lord [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.20-21). None, or next to none, shall remain in an heathenish unconverted state [Zechariah 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.21). The knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as universally as the waters cover the channel of the sea [Habakkuk 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.14).

Together with this assurance of the event itself, the text further sets before us,

II. The way in which it will be manifested—

Conversion, wherever it exists, uniformly produces the effects mentioned in the text:

1. A cordial delight in God's ordinances—

A proud pharisee will go to the temple as well, and perhaps as often, as a repenting publican: but he never can find delight in the worship of God. Prayer is a task, that he performs either from necessity, or with a view to establish a righteousness of his own. But the true convert rejoices in opportunities of approaching God both in public and in private [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 148.14). [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 42.1-2). [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.3); There will indeed be many seasons when he will find his mind lamentably indisposed for holy exercises: but, when he is in a proper frame, his joy is in God alone [Romans 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.11).

Nor will any true Christian be satisfied to serve God alone: when once he has tasted the benefits of communion with God, he will desire to bring all he can to a participation of his bliss [John 1:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.41-42); [John 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.45). Son. 1:4. Nor will he readily be put off with vain excuses: he knows the danger of procrastination; and therefore says, Come, "let us go speedily, and seek the Lord:" yes, to give more efficacy to his advice, he is glad to lead the way "I will go also.", and to profit others by his example, as well as by his precepts.

This will be an universally prevalent disposition in the latter day [Micah 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.1-2); and it will assuredly prevail, wherever the grace of God is received in truth.

2. A zealous attachment to his people—

A person truly converted to God can no longer associate with those who would turn him from the paths of righteousness [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.14-15). He seeks rather those who will aid him in his journey heaven-ward. He sees that God is with his people, "comforting them with his presence [John 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.21-22)," and "blessing them with all spiritual blessings [Ephesians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.3)." He therefore desires to cast in his lot with them [Psalm 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 16.3). [Isaiah 44:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 44.5) with [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.41); he "takes the Lord's people, as it were, by the skirt, saying, I will go with you;" and, with Moses, accounts it better to renounce all the vanities of the world, and to "suffer affliction with the Lord's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.24-26)." In this choice, he is not instigated by fear, as the heathen were in the days of Esther [Esther 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 8.17), but from a firm persuasion that God is with his Church, and that there is no solid happiness to be enjoyed but in connection with it [1 Corinthians 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 14.25).

This subject affords ample matter,

1. For reproof—

With all our profession of Christianity, the generality never once in all their lives have manifested such a disposition as is described above. We frequently say to each other, 'Let us go to this or that amusement;' but never, "Let us go speedily and seek the Lord." On the contrary, though frequently and earnestly exhorted by the ministers of God, we cannot even be persuaded to seek the Lord for ourselves. What resemblance then is there between such persons, and the Christians of the latter day? Let us know that to call ourselves Christians, while we are wholly destitute of Christian principles and Christian habits, is a fond and fatal delusion.

2. For encouragement—

God is with his church at this time, as well as in the days of old [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 28.20); and his people can testify, that it is well with those who seek his face [Ecclesiastes 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 8.12) with [2 Chronicles 26:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Chron 26.5). Behold, then, we say to all, as Moses to his father-in-law, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: and it shall be, if you go with us, yes, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will he do to you See [Numbers 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 10.29); [Numbers 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 10.32)." Let the day then, the blessed day commence among us, when that prophecy shall be accomplished, "The children of Israel shall come together, going, and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God: they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten [Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 50.4-5)." This was written and published before the Author's attention was directed to the Jews. He has now added another Discourse on the same text, more illustrative, he trust, of its true meaning. And he leaves this as a lasting reproach to himself, for having passed over them in a passage, where, had he been duly alive to their welfare, he could not have overlooked them. Dr. Lowth has fallen into the same error.

[Zechariah 8:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-23)

DISCOURSE 1251

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS AND GENTILES

[Zechariah 8:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-23). Thus says the Lord of Hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of Hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.

WHEN the conversion of the Jews is proposed as an object proper to occupy the attention, and to call forth the exertions of the Christian world, it is often regarded as a visionary scheme, which it is in vain to hope will be realized in any other way than by miracle. The attempt also is deemed premature, because it is supposed that their conversion cannot be accomplished until the great mass of the Gentile world shall have embraced the faith of Christ. But the Scriptures give us no more reason to expect a miraculous interposition in behalf of the one, than of the other. The conversion of both will be effected as in the apostolic age. Though miracles were wrought then for the confirmation of the word, neither Jews nor Gentiles were converted by miracle, but by the preaching of the word, and the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit upon their souls. So, also, will it be in the latter day; and in somewhat of a similar order too. In the apostolic age, a number of Jews were first called, and then the Gentiles. So, in the Millennial period, the awakening will commence among the Gentiles; and then shall come the conversion of the Jews; who, being turned to the faith, will be God's instruments for the bringing-in of the whole Gentile world. This, I apprehend, is strongly intimated in the passage before us; in considering which, we shall have to state,

I. The conversion of the Gentiles—

This is an event which shall certainly take place in God's appointed time, and that, too, through the instrumentality of human efforts. As, in the apostolic age, the saints, on being driven from Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word [Acts 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.1-4);" so, at the period we are now speaking of, all, as soon as they are themselves awakened to see and feel the excellence of religion, will exert themselves to propagate it to the utmost of their power; the inhabitants of one city going to those of another, and exhorting them without delay to seek the Lord. This has certainly never yet been accomplished: for, though it is true that great multitudes of Gentiles were converted in the apostolic age, and their union with the Christian Church may be fitly considered as a fulfillment of the prophecy which says, They should "come up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem," as all Israel were accustomed to do three times in the year; yet nothing has ever yet taken place that has corresponded with the strong expressions in our text. There has never yet been such a conflux of Gentiles to the Christian Church as has answered to the declaration, that "many people and strong nations" should come unto it. While we admit, therefore, that there was, in the first ages of Christianity, a partial accomplishment of this prophecy, we must affirm, that its complete fulfillment is yet future, and that it is reserved for that time which is generally designated "the latter days." Then will a spirit of piety be diffused throughout the whole earth; insomuch that, "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, the name" of Jesus shall be adored [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.11), and "all the nations of the earth shall worship before him [Psalm 72:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.8-11); [Psalm 86:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 86.9)." "Then shall there be but one King over all the earth [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.9);" and "all the kingdoms of the world be the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 11.15)."

This point, the future conversion of the whole Gentile world, being generally known and admitted, I forbear to enlarge upon it; and proceed to mark, what is less known and less considered,

II. Its connection with, and dependence on, the conversion of the Jews—

The latter part of our text, like the former, may be regarded as having had a partial accomplishment in the days of the Apostles, through whose ministry vast multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ: for, as the Apostles were Jews, and as the Gentile converts, seeing, by the miracles which they wrought, that God was with them, freely and unreservedly submitted to their word; it might be said, that, in embracing the Gospel, they "took hold of the skirt of him that was a Jew." But we have already shown that the whole prophecy relates to a future period, even to that period when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be united under one Head, and form one glorious Church, under the true David, the Lord Jesus Christ [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5). Then shall the Jews, who reaped the first-fruits among the Gentiles, be employed to gather in the whole harvest; and, to an extent that has never been seen before, shall ten men, out of all the languages of the nations, lay hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; saying, "We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."

To these words different interpretations have been given. Some suppose "the Jew" here spoken of, is the Gospel, as revealed by the Apostles, who were Jews: others understand the word as designating Christians generally, who are sometimes called "Jews." Others think that Christ himself is spoken of under this name. But I understand it as relating literally to the Jewish nation; and as declaring, that the Jews shall be first converted to the faith of Christ; that their conversion shall attract the notice and admiration of the Gentiles; and that they shall be eminently instrumental in converting the whole Gentile world.

This appears,

1. From the whole scope of the preceding context—

Can any one read the first eight verses of the chapter, and imagine for a moment that the Apostles are spoken of; or that their word is spoken of; or that Christians are spoken of, under the name of Jews? Beyond a doubt, the persons referred to are the descendants of Israel and Judah, who shall be restored to their own land, and enjoy there a state of unprecedented prosperity Cite the whole of the passages here referred to.

2. From many particular expressions throughout the context—

"The House of Israel and the House of Judah" are spoken of as the persons to whom the prophecy pertains, and as the persons who are to be instrumental in conveying "the blessings to the Gentile world." And these are the persons who have been "a curse" to the world. Can this refer to the Apostles, or to the word which they have transmitted to us, or to converted Christians, in any age? Have the Apostles ever been a curse to the world, or their word a curse, or pious Christians a curse? Have they ever been anything but "a blessing?" But the Jewish people have been execrated all the world over; yes, and have been the occasions of many judgments to the people among whom they have dwelt: and of them it is said, that they shall be "a blessing verse 13."

Again: God says, that as He repented not, but executed upon the Jews his threatened judgments, so will he assuredly fulfill to them his "promises to do them good verse 14, 15." What reference can this have to the Apostles, or their word, or to the Church of Christ?

Again: He exhorts them to "speak the truth, and love no false oath verse 16, 17." To whom can this refer, but to the Jews who shall exist at that time?

Again: He tells them, that the Fasts instituted in remembrance of the evils which had brought upon them the Divine judgments, and of the calamities which the Chaldeans had inflicted on them, should, at the appointed season, be turned to Feasts verse 18, 19. The two former of these, the Fast of the fifth month and of the seventh, are mentioned in chapter 7:3, 5.That of the fifth month (July) was in remembrance of the City and Temple burnt by the Chaldeans. See [2 Kings 25:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 25.8-9). That of the seventh (Sept.) in memory of the murder of Gedaliah. See [2 Kings 25:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 25.25) with [Jeremiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 41.17-18). That of the fourth month (June) commemorated the taking of Jerusalem. See [Jeremiah 52:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 52.6-7) : and that of the tenth (Dec.) the commencement of the siege by the Chaldean army. See [Jeremiah 52:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 52.4). What sense can there be in this, as applied to the

Apostles, or their word; or to the Christian Church? It can relate to none but the Jews personally; even those who shall be alive in the latter day.

3. From the express words of our text—

On a supposition that the great body of the Gentiles are to be converted first, and that they are to be the means of bringing in the Jews, the language of the text must be altogether changed. The Gentiles are more than a hundred times as numerous as the Jews; and if they are to be converted first, and then bring in the Jews, they must say, not as in the text, "Ten men shall take hold of the skirt of one Jew;" but, "we ten, out of all the languages of the nations, hold out our skirts to you, a poor Jew, saying, Come with US; for you have heard and seen that God is with us." But this were to reverse the text altogether, which represents ten Gentiles as taking hold of the skirt of one Jew.

4. From the passage to which the text itself evidently refers—

There can be no doubt but that the prophet had in his mind the language used by Moses to Hobab, his father-in-law, when he endeavored to persuade him to go up to the earthly Canaan: "Come you with us, and we will do you good: for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel. And it shall be, if you go with us; yes, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto you [Numbers 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 10.29); [Numbers 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 10.32)." Thus, in the latter days, the Gentiles, seeing beyond a doubt that God is with his people the Jews, will be anxious to go up with them to "the New Jerusalem, the city that comes down from God out of Heaven."

5. From the whole Scriptures of truth—

The whole Scriptures declare, with one voice, that the Jews shall be converted first, and be God's honored instruments for the converting of the whole Gentile world. The Prophet Micah says, "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men [Micah 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 5.7)." The dew and the clouds come not at man's call; but go when and where the Lord is pleased to send them: and, unconscious of the ends for which they are sent, they fertilize the ground in God's appointed time, and diffuse life wherever they descend. So are the Jews scattered unwittingly, and unconscious of the ends for which they are sent, over the face of the whole earth, to impart, in due season, all the blessings of life and salvation to a perishing world. And to this effect does the Prophet Isaiah also speak, when of them, in their present scattered state, he says, "They shall declare my glory among the Gentiles; and shall bring all their Brethren, as the Children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the House of the Lord [Isaiah 66:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.19-20) with [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.16)." Whether the persons, here called their brethren, be their brethren of the ten tribes, whose place of residence is not known; or of the Gentiles, who may be called brethren by anticipation; I cannot exactly say: but this is plain; "They shall declare God's glory among the Gentiles." And speaks not the Apostle Paul also to the same purpose? He says, "If the fall of them (the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but 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)." Yes, it is the admission of the Jews into the Christian Church that will be the means of awakening the attention of the whole Gentile world; who, beholding and admiring the grace of God in them, will, with holy zeal, embrace the Gospel of Christ, and fly to him with unanimity, "as a cloud," and with speed, "as doves to their windows [Isaiah 60:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.8) with [Zephaniah 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.20) and [Jeremiah 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 33.9)."

Thus I think it appears, both from the Scriptures in general, and from my text in particular, that the Jews must be converted first, before the great body of the Gentiles be gathered in; and that they are ordained of God to be his honored instruments for the conversion of the whole world.

As for the notion of some Commentators, that Christ is the Jew, on whose skirt the Gentiles shall lay hold, it really is so foreign to the whole context, that it does not deserve a moment's consideration. The Jews themselves are far nearer to the true interpretation than such expositors as these. The Jews adduce this passage, to prove, that, instead of their ever embracing Christianity, the Christian world are to become Jews; since it is said, that the whole world shall "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." The Jews, I say, are so far right in this interpretation, that they are the persons designated in the text: only the passage must be understood of Jews who have embraced their Messiah, and not of Jews who continue to reject him. With this only proviso, the Jews are right: and we Christians should exert ourselves to the utmost, to prepare them for the work they are destined to perform.

Learn, then, from hence,

1. The great importance of the Jewish cause—

By the Jewish cause, I mean the endeavors which are now making for the conversion of the Jews. It is a lamentable fact, that the Christian world has never yet, since the time of the Apostles, paid to it the attention it deserves. The situation of the Gentile world has not been overlooked; but that of the Jews has been altogether forgotten, except in one or two instances, where partial exertions have been made for their welfare. But why should they be thus excepted, and be the only people upon earth that are to be cut off from the flow of Christian benevolence? Are not their souls of as much value as the souls of others? Is it a small matter that six or eight millions of souls should be daily and hourly going down into perdition; and be left, in all their successive generations, to "perish for lack of knowledge?" But consider them as "beloved of God;" as no doubt they still are, notwithstanding all that they are suffering at his hands; consider them, I say, as "beloved of God;" and will you think it right that they should be despised by us?

But come more closely to the point: view them as God's instruments for the conversion of the world; and then say, whether we should not seek to bring them to the knowledge of the truth? Truly, if we have no regard but for the Gentiles, we ought, even for their sakes, to express love to the Jews, and to labor, to the utmost of our power, to fit them for their destined work: yes, the greater our concern for the Gentiles, the more earnest should be our efforts for the Jews. Permit me then, if it be only for the Gentiles' sake, to urge upon you an attention to the Jews; and henceforth to labor for them, as their ancestors in the apostolic age labored and endured for you: The gardener, when his corn is ripe, looks out for reapers. Do you the same now. The Gentile field is ripening apace: the Jews are God's appointed reapers. Engage them, then, without delay, that the harvest may be gathered throughout all the earth.

2. The duty of Christians in all ages—

You have seen the religion which will characterize that blessed period to which we are looking forward. There will be a delight in worshiping and serving God: there will be zealous exertions, too, in all, to stir up one another to a holy emulation in this good work. None will be satisfied with going to Heaven alone, or serving God alone. All will be anxious for the good of all: all will be active, too, in honoring their God, and in promoting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. The people of one city will go to another city, to exhort and urge them to an active concurrence in every good work. Methinks the means, which are now used on so contracted a scale that a few only embark in this service of love, will then be adopted on the largest scale; and whole societies, or rather whole cities, shall unite to provoke one another unto love and to good works.

Yet, let me say, I would not have any to imagine that a zeal either for Jews or Gentiles will stand in the place of personal religion. If we commend to any the blessed word of God, or the embracing of our holy religion, let us take care to lead the way, in the study of the one, and in the practice of the other. Let us never say to any, "Come," without adding at the same time, "I will go also." Yes, and let us so lead the way, as the Jew will do at the period before referred to: let us so walk before others, that they may see, and be constrained to acknowledge, "that God is with us of a truth." Let us be living "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" so that others may "lay hold of our skirt," and wish to "go with us," and have "their portion with us," in the realms of bliss. Let us "be as lights shining in a dark world;" and "so make our light to shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in Heaven." This is our duty, no less than it will be of those who shall live in the latter day. Our religion must be neither wholly personal, nor wholly official; but a just combination of both: and, while we are laboring to the uttermost to "save ourselves," we must use all diligence to save every other person who can by any means be brought within the sphere of our influence."

[Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.9)

DISCOURSE 1252

THE ADVENT OF JESUS A GROUND OF JOY

[Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.9). Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes unto you: he is just, and having salvation: lowly, and riding upon an donkey, and upon a colt the foal of an donkey.

THERE is scarcely any circumstance relating to the life and death of Christ which was not made a subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world. Even things the most improbable in themselves were predicted, that by their accomplishment the truth of his divine mission might be more fully manifest. That the words before us do indeed relate to him, is certain; because the voice of inspiration assures us that they were fulfilled when he entered into Jerusalem riding on the foal of an donkey. In discoursing on them we shall consider,

I. The description here given of Jesus—

In his office he is the "King of Zion"—

The whole universe is under his dominion, seeing that he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." But he is in a more eminent manner King of Zion, because all the members of Zion are his subjects willingly and by an sincere surrender of themselves to him. They gladly receive his laws; and he constantly affords them his protection. As the Church in the wilderness was under a visible theocracy, so is the Church in all ages, and every individual in the Church, really, though invisibly, under the care and government of Jesus [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.22).

In his character he is the best of princes—

He is just—

His justice appears in every law which he has enacted, and his righteousness in every part of his administration. There are indeed many things in his government, which we are not at present able to account for; but the day of judgment will clear up all the present obscurities, and manifest, that every the minutest occurrence was ordered by him with unerring wisdom, goodness, and truth. It will then be seen that "righteousness was at all times the belt of his loins, and faithfulness the belt of his reins [Isaiah 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.5)."

He is powerful—

Earthly kings may be just, yet not be able to screen their subjects from the injustice of others. But Jesus "has salvation" in his hand for all those who call upon him. Does sin oppress us? he can deliver us both from its guilt and power. Does Satan assault and buffet us? "His grace shall he sufficient" for the weakest of his people. Does "the fear of death keep us in bondage?" He can make us triumphant both in the prospect of it now, and in a happy resurrection at the last day.

He is lowly—

Great power and dignity are too often the means of engendering pride in our hearts. The kings of the earth would think it a degradation to converse familiarly with their meanest subjects; but our Almighty Monarch possesses a lowliness of mind, which makes him accessible to every subject in his dominions. There is not any moment when we may not enter into his presence, nor any complaint which we may not pour into his bosom. His ear is ever open to hear, and his hand ever stretched out to relieve, his needy suppliants. The same lowliness which induced him, at his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to ride upon a young donkey, with no other furniture than the clothes of his poor disciples, when he might as easily have commanded all the pomp and splendor of an earthly monarch, still actuates him in his exalted state. There is no office to which he will not condescend for the benefit of those who wait upon him.

From this description of Jesus we may well be prepared to hear,

II. The exhortation to rejoice in his advent—

The advent of such a prince is a proper ground of joy for all people—

When first he came in the flesh, the event was announced by angels as glad-tidings of great joy to all people. And all the multitudes who surrounded him at the time referred to in the text, were penetrated with the liveliest joy. And is there not now as much cause for joy as on either of those occasions? Are not the great ends of his advent better understood now than at his incarnation? and the nature of his kingdom more clearly seen than at the time of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Surely then our joy should far surpass all that could be experienced at those seasons. How should poor captives now rejoice to hear that there is one proclaiming liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound! If an earthly king were coming not only to redress all the grievances of his people, but to relieve all their wants, and enrich them with all that their hearts could desire, would not all exult and leap for joy? Would not every one be impatient to see him, and to receive his benefits? Why then should not all rejoice in the advent of Him, who is come to bind up the broken-hearted, and to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?

But the "daughters of Zion" in particular should rejoice in this event—

The daughters of Zion are the true members of the church, who have been begotten by the Word and Spirit of God. These are addressed by the prophet, and are bidden to exult and "shout" for joy. Well does the prophet select them as the persons to whom he should direct his exhortation. "Let them give thanks whom the Lord has redeemed." They know the glorious character of their prince. They have found both his laws and government to be "holy and just and good." They have experienced his power to save, "to save to the uttermost those that call upon him." They have continual proofs of his lowliness, being admitted daily to the most intimate fellowship with him. Should not they then rejoice? "Surely the very stones would cry out against them it they held their peace." "Behold" then, believers, your King, even he whom you have chosen to reign over you, is come. He now waits for you. "Arise, lo! he calls you." Go, enter into his presence-chamber, and receive the blessings which he is come to bestow.

APPLICATION—

Are there any who feel no disposition to rejoice in this event? Alas! too many, like Herod and the Pharisees, cannot join in the general chorus. Let them not, however, imagine themselves related to the church of God: they are daughters of the world, but not daughters of Zion; nor need they have any other evidence of their alienation from God, than their want of joy in the Lord. How base is their ingratitude! that the Lord of glory should come down from Heaven for them, and they have no hearts to welcome his arrival: that they should be gratified with the company of an earthly friend, and have no delight in communion with Jesus. Surely if they were to have all the curses of God's law inflicted on them, who served not the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart on account of the temporal benefits bestowed upon them [Deuteronomy 28:45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 28.45); [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 28.47), they must have a far heavier condemnation, who so despise the condescension and love of our incarnate God. Mark then the alternative to which you are reduced; you must begin now that joy in the Lord which you shall possess forever, or, by continuing insensible of his mercy, continue destitute of any interest in it to all eternity. Choose you now whether you will have life or death: remember, however necessary it may be at other times to weep for your sins, it is to joy that we now invite you; not to carnal joy, but to that which is spiritual and heavenly. We unite with the Apostle in saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, Rejoice." Methinks such an exhortation should not be slighted, especially when your present joy is to be a certain prelude to eternal happiness: but if you will still despise the mercies of your God, behold this King comes shortly to judge the world; behold he comes riding upon the heavens with myriads of the heavenly host: know too that he is just and powerful; but his justice will condemn, and his power punish you. Go to him then in this day of salvation, welcome him in this the accepted time; so shall you, at his second coming, behold his face with joy, and join the choir of Heaven in everlasting hallelujahs.

[Zechariah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.12)

DISCOURSE 1253

CHRIST A STRONG HOLD

[Zechariah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.12). Turn you to the strong hold, you prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto you.

IF the declarations of God be humiliating, and the denunciations of his vengeance awful, we must acknowledge that his invitations and promises afford us all the encouragement we can desire; inasmuch as they are addressed to persons in those very circumstances wherein we are. Nor should we be averse to confess the truth of our state, when we see what provision God has made for our happiness and salvation. The words before us lead us to consider,

I. The persons addressed—

All men, as sinners, are condemned by the law of God, and may therefore be considered as prisoners arrested by divine justice, and sentenced to eternal death. But they who hear the Gospel are "prisoners of hope:"

1. Though they be prisoners, yet they have a hope—

Those, who have died in their sins, are utterly without hope, being reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day. But as long as we continue in the world, we need not to despair. The invitations of the Gospel are sent to us; nor can any thing but an obstinate rejection of divine mercy cut us off from the blessings of salvation. Though we are condemned, and are every hour in danger of having the sentence executed upon us, yet there is a way opened for us to escape, and we may obtain mercy even at the eleventh hour.

2. There is however but one hope, unto which all are shut up [Galatians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.23).—

Christ is set before us as the way, the truth, and the life; nor is there any other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved. We are all enclosed as the prophets of Baal: and the order is given, Go in and slay [2 Kings 10:18-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 10.18-25); but Christ says, "1 am the door [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.9);" and if we will flee out at that door, we shall live; if not, we shall perish in our sins. Christ came on purpose to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to them that are sitting in the prison-house, lie says, Go forth, and show yourselves [Isaiah 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 42.7); [Isaiah 49:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.9); [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.1). But if we spend our time in devising other methods of escape besides that which he has provided, the hour appointed for execution will come, and we shall suffer the punishment which our sins have merited.

Thus while we see that all, who need the provisions of the Gospel, are addressed by it, let us consider,

II. The invitation given them—

Christ is here represented as a strong hold—

Christ is evidently the person referred to in the whole preceding context. He is that meek but powerful King, who comes to subdue all nations to himself, not by carnal weapons, but by speaking peace to them; and who confirms his kindness towards them by a covenant sealed with his own blood [Zechariah 9:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.9-11). He is represented as a strong hold to which, not the righteous only, but the most ungodly, may run for safety. Here may be some allusion to the cities of refuge to which the manslayer was appointed to flee, and in which he found protection from his blood-thirsty pursuer [Numbers 35:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 35.11-12). Such a refuge is Christ, an impregnable fortress, which defies the assaults of earth and Hell.

To this we are all invited to turn—

The Gospel thus exhibits Christ, not as an abstract speculation, but as a remedy which we greatly need: and in exhorting us to "turn to this strong hold,"it recommends us to renounce all false refuges, to regard Christ as our only Savior, and to seek in him that protection which he alone can afford us. It stretches out the hand to us, as Christ did to Peter, when he was sinking in the waves. It urges us to go without hesitation, and without delay, to him, who alone can deliver us from the wrath to come, and bring us into the liberty of God's children. To the same effect it speaks in numberless other passages: it calls the thirsty to come for refreshment, the weary to come for rest, and to the dying says, "Look unto Christ and be saved."

But because even the most needy are apt to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the Gospel, we would direct your attention to,

III. The promise with which the invitation is enforced—

The terms in which the promise is conveyed, are somewhat obscure—

The expression of "rendering double"will be best understood by comparing it with other passages of the same kind [Isaiah 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.2); [Isaiah 61:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 61.7). From them its import appears to be, that God will give us blessings in rich abundance; not according to the sufferings we have endured [Psalm 90:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.15), but double; not corresponding to the punishment we have deserved, but double; not equal to the blessings enjoyed by our fathers, but double. Or perhaps it may be best explained by the Apostle's declaration, that God will give us "abundantly, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."Certainly the promise implies, that we shall not only be delivered from prison, but be restored to the favor of our God; not only have our debt discharged, but be enriched with a glorious inheritance.

The manner in which it is given is peculiarly solemn and energetic—

God is desirous that we should give implicit credit to his word: hence he speaks as one who would on no account recede from it: he speaks as in the presence of ten thousand witnesses, and pledges all his perfections for the performance of his promise. And as the day of our desponding fears is long remembered by us, and as we, in that day, find a want of all the support which God himself can administer, he dates his promise as made to us in that very day; not at a time when our difficulties were not foreseen, but when they were at the height, and when nothing but the immediate hand of God could deliver us. Yes, God would have us consider the promise as made to us this day, this very day, this very hour, when we most need the application of it to our souls; and, that every individual may take it to himself and rely on it as intended for himself alone, the promise is made particular, while the invitation is general.

Observe—

1. How astonishing are the condescension and compassion of God!

Behold the Judge offers mercy to the prisoners, and urges them in the most affectionate manner to accept it! Methinks prisoners in general would need no entreaty to leave their dungeons; if their prison doors were open, and their chains were beaten off, they would be glad enough to effect their escape, though at the risk of a severer punishment. Nor would a manslayer need much importunity to enter into the city of refuge, if an armed avenger were closely pursuing him. Yet we slight the invitations of our God, and the security he has provided for us. Well then might he leave us to perish! But behold, he enforces his invitations with the most gracious promises: he engages to exceed our utmost wishes or conceptions. And shall we not admire such transcendent grace? Shall we not adore him for such marvelous loving-kindness? O let every heart glow with love to him, and every tongue declare his praise!

2. How reasonable is zeal in the concerns of religion!

Zeal is approved in everything, but in that which most of all deserves it. But would any one ask a defeated army, why they fled with haste to an impregnable fortress? Surely, it is no less absurd to condemn the prisoners of hope for any earnestness they may manifest in turning to their strong hold. Coldness in such circumstances is the most deplorable infatuation. Let all then exert themselves to the utmost of their power. Let them never regard the scoffs of those who are in love with their chains, and regardless of the salvation offered them. But let them strive, as men wrestling for the mastery, and run as those that are determined to win the prize.

3. How great is the danger of delay!

Now we are prisoners of hope! but soon we may be in that prison from whence there is no escape, and into which not one ray of hope can ever enter. Shall we not then turn, while the strong hold is open to us? Shall we stay until the gate is shut; and thus, instead of obtaining double mercies, procure to ourselves an aggravated condemnation? Today God invites and promises; tomorrow may terminate our day of grace. Let us then no longer delay; but "today, while it is called today, let us hear his voice," and "flee for refuge to the hope set before us."

[Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.17)

DISCOURSE 1254

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

[Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 9.17). How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!

THE glory of Christ is manifested throughout all the Holy Scriptures. This is attested both by the Apostles and by our Lord himself [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.43). [Luke 24:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 24.27). [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.39). In the New Testament he shines like the sun in an unclouded atmosphere: in the Old, though generally veiled, he often bursts forth as from behind a cloud with astonishing beauty and splendor. Such a view of him is exhibited in the chapter now before us After foretelling the preservation of the Jews amidst the destruction of surrounding nations, the prophet called their attention to Christ, as their lowly but triumphant king (verse 9.), who should redeem them by his blood (verse 11.), be a strong hold to all who should turn unto him (verse 12.), and save them with an everlasting salvation, (verse 16.): nor could the prophet himself forbear exclaiming with wonder and admiration, "How great is his goodness!"etc.

We cannot have our minds more delightfully occupied than in contemplating,

I. The goodness of our Lord—

In the context he is set forth as the God of providence and grace: and, in order to behold his goodness, we must view him in both respects:

1. As the God of providence—

As all things wove created, so are they upheld and governed by him. To him we owe the preservation of our corporeal and intellectual powers. We are continually fed by his bounty, and protected by his arm. The meanest creature in the universe has abundant reason to adore him. His own people in particular may discern unnumbered instances of his goodness in his dispensations towards them. His most afflictive as well as his more pleasing dispensations afford them much occasion for gratitude and thanksgiving [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.75).

2. As a God of grace—

Jesus is the one fountain of spiritual blessings to his Church [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.22). Neither Prophets nor Apostles had any grace but from him [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16). To him we must ascribe every good disposition that is in our hearts [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.13). [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.2). What reason then have his faithful followers to bless his name! How thankful should they be that he called them by his grace! That he so distinguished them, not only from the fallen angels, but from multitudes of the human race! With what gratitude should they acknowledge his continued kindness! Though they have often turned back from him, he has not cast them off. Yes, rather, he has "healed their backslidings and loved them freely." Surely, every blessing they receive, and every victory they gain, should fill them with admiring thoughts of his goodness [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 2.14). Let every soul then comply with that injunction of the Psalmist [Psalm 145:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 145.7). And, like him, repeat the wish, which a sense of his mercies must inspire [Psalm 107:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.8); [Psalm 107:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.15); [Psalm 107:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.21); [Psalm 107:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.31).

If we have just conceptions of his goodness we shall be more able to behold,

II. His beauty—

The world behold "no beauty nor loveliness" in the face of Jesus; but the saints of "old saw his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father"—

This we also may see, if we survey him,

1. In his divine character—

"We cannot by searching find out the Almighty to perfection." Little do we know of the greatness of his majesty, or the thunder of his power [Job 26:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 26.14). We cannot comprehend his unsearchable wisdom, his unspotted holiness, his inviolable truth and faithfulness. We can scarcely form any idea of the inflexibility of his justice, the extent of his mercy, or the heights and depths of his love [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.19); We know that Jesus is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.3); but, when we attempt to delineate that image, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge [Job 38:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 38.2)." His glory is more than the feeble language of mortality can express.

2. In his human character—

Here we look at him, as the Jews at Moses when his face was veiled, and can contemplate him more easily, because he shines with a less radiant luster. Doubtless while he lay in the manger the virtues of his mind beamed forth in his countenance. Nor is it to be wondered at that the Jewish doctors were so filled with admiration at him while he was yet a child [Luke 2:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.46-47). But principally must we view him during the course of his ministry. What marvelous compassion did he manifest to the souls and bodies of men! Not one applied to him for bodily or spiritual health without obtaining his request. And when many were hardened in their sins he wept over them [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.41); yes, he even pleaded the cause of those who mocked and reviled him on the cross [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.34). His zeal for God was ardent and unremitted. It was "his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father;" nor could anything for one moment divert or deter him from the prosecution of his work. His meekness, patience, fortitude, were altogether invincible. Whatever was amiable and excellent in man abounded in him [Psalm 45:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 45.2). He was not merely virtuous, but virtue itself incarnate. Nor, though continually tried in the hottest furnace, was there found in him the smallest imperfection or alloy [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.30).

3. In his mediatorial character—

With what readiness did he become a surety for sinful man [Psalm 40:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 40.7-8). What astonishing condescension did he manifest in uniting himself to our nature! How cheerfully did he go forth to meet the sufferings that were appointed for him. In the garden and on the cross, when to the eye of sense "his visage was marred more than any man's," his beauty was most conspicuous to the eye of faith. His obedience unto death was the fruit of his love, and the price of our redemption. How beautiful is he now in the eyes of those who behold his glory! And how will he "be admired and glorified by all" in the last day! Satan must have blinded us indeed if we be yet insensible to his charms [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.4). If we be true believers, he cannot but be precious to our souls [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.7).

APPLICATION—

1. To those who have never yet beheld the goodness and beauty of the Lord—

We speak not now to those who seek his face, and long to enjoy him; for though their sorrow endure for a night, joy will come to them in the morning. But they, who pant not after him, are miserably ignorant of his excellency. Their views of Christ are different from those of the most competent judges To the Father he is "chosen and precious," [1 Peter 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.4); to the angels, the subject of their praise, [Revelation 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.11-12); to saints of old, an object of great desire, [Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.7). [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.56); to all pious men at this time, their supreme good, [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.7-8), and different from what they will shortly be in the eternal world. Let such persons diligently consider the Savior's character, and cry to God for that spirit whose office it is to reveal Christ unto us. Then shall they both see the King in his beauty, and be changed into his image [Isaiah 33:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 33.17). [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18).

2. To those whose eyes have been opened to behold him—

Let your meditations of him be more sweet and frequent. However much you know of him, there are unsearchable depths unfathomed. Let your determination therefore accord with that of David [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 27.4). View him as appointing your trials, and dispensing your mercies. Consider him as the fountain from whence you are to have supplies of grace. Look to him as the example which you are continually to follow. Above all, rely on him as expiating your guilt, and interceding for you. Thus will you glory in him as your "friend and your beloved;" and at last will see him as he is, and be like him forever.

[Zechariah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 10.12)

DISCOURSE 1255

CHRIST THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE

[Zechariah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 10.12). I will strengthen them in the Lord; and they shall walk up and down in His name, says the Lord.

IF we were to judge of Christianity from what we behold around us, we should give it a preference, perhaps, to all other religions; but we should be far from thinking very highly of its nature and effects. The generality of those who profess it, are but little elevated above the better orders of the heathen world; and, in some respects perhaps, have a lower standard of morals than they. If it were asked of the great mass of nominal Christians, What has Christianity done for you? in what respect are you either a better or a happier man, than you would have been if Christ had never come into the world? it would be difficult for them to give any satisfactory answer, consistent with truth. Even those who do feel somewhat of its influence are far from manifesting its full power. In order to judge of its real excellence, we must go back to former days, and see how it wrought in the apostolic age; or must look forward to that glorious period, when it shall prevail over the face of the globe, and exercise a more complete sway over the hearts of men. It is to this period that my text refers; a period, when, in comparison of the present, "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.26)."

In opening the passage to your view, I shall be led to speak of,

I. The state to which the Jews shall, in due season, be restored—

The Jews will, at a future season, be restored to God—

Of this, no man who believes the Scriptures can entertain a doubt. The passage before us, even if it stood alone, would be amply sufficient to warrant our expectation of this event. But it is one of many: for the prophets all, with one voice, agree in declaring that God has not finally cast off his people; but that they shall return to him, and enjoy under their Messiah a state of prosperity far exceeding anything that they ever experienced since they became a nation. That that event is spoken of in the passage before us, will be evident to any one who will consult the context. Read it from the sixth verse. The persons spoken of are both Judah and Israel: "I will strengthen the House of Judah, and I will save the House of Joseph." It was the former only that were brought from Babylon: and therefore the prophecy must relate to a period yet future, even to the return of the whole nation from their present dispersion. "The Lord will hiss for them," as men in Eastern countries are accustomed to do when they would collect their bees [Isaiah 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.26); [Isaiah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 7.18).with verse 8; and "they shall come from Egypt and Assyria," and from all countries where they have been driven, "unto the land of Gilead and Lebanon," where they shall increase as rapidly as they did in former times; insomuch that "place shall not be found for them to dwell in verse 10." This circumstance, which is considered by many as an objection to the literal interpretation of those prophecies which speak of their return to their own land, instead of being an objection to such an interpretation, is actually contemplated in the prophecy, and specifically predicted. In their present dispersion, they seem as if they were cast off: but, though scattered over the face of the globe, they are only "sown" there, as seed which the gardener casts over his field, with a view to reap, and gather it to greater advantage at a future period verse 9. Their return will be a season of most sublime joy, both to them and their children verse 7; and the interpositions of God in their behalf will be as visible and as effectual as those which were given at the Red Sea, on their departure from Egypt; or at the river Jordan, on their entrance into Canaan. Every obstacle shall be removed from before them, and every opposing enemy be destroyed verse 11.

Persons who are adverse to the idea of a literal restoration of the Jews to their own land, will satisfy themselves with saying, that the whole of this description is figurative: but if this be figurative, where, I would ask, shall anything be found that is to be taken in a literal sense? or, supposing God to have ordained to accomplish anything literally, by what plainer terms could he possibly declare it? There must, I think, be an end of all certainty in language, if the event here predicted be not to be understood in its literal and most obvious sense.

Their restoration, however, will be, not literal only, but spiritual also—

At their triumphant entrance into Canaan, they were strong in the Lord Jehovah, in whose name they took possession of the land, and in dependence upon whom they walked through its length and breadth. At their future restoration to God, such also will be their confidence in their Messiah; whom they will then acknowledge as their Lord, and their God. The Prophet Hosea plainly declares this: "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 [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5)." In his name, and in his strength, will they then go forth against their spiritual, no less than against their temporal, enemies: and their victories over both the one and the other will be complete. It cannot be doubted, but that, in that day, they will be as much distinguished for righteousness as for prowess in arms [Isaiah 60:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.1-2); for "they shall be all righteous [Isaiah 60:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.21);" their penitence will be exceeding deep [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10), their piety most refined [Zechariah 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.9), their devotion to God universal and entire [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.20-21).

Christianity being already embraced by us, we may see in this passage,

II. The state which it is our privilege to enjoy at this day—

We have been redeemed, if not by the power of divine grace, at least by the price once paid for us on Calvary. As the Lord's people, therefore, we are privileged to live by faith on Christ, and to possess in him,

1. Invincible strength—

In ourselves, we remain as weak as ever: but in Christ we are strong: for in him there is all fullness treasured up for us [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.19); and out of that fullness we are privileged to receive even grace corresponding with all the grace that is in him [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.16). He is appointed "Head over all things to the Church," for that very end [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.22-23); that we, as members, may be "strengthened with all might, by his Spirit in the inner man [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.16), and have all our "enemies bruised under our feet." We are commanded to "be strong, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, and in the power of his might [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.10);" and to regard our own weakness rather as an encouragement, than as any ground of despondency; because he will delight to "perfect his own strength in our weakness 2 Corinthians 12:9."

Without hesitation, then, do I say to every believing soul, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus [2 Timothy 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.1);" and never contemplate the strength of your adversaries, but the power of your heavenly Lord. Never doubt, for a moment, but that "his grace shall be sufficient for you:" and let your daily consolation be, "that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13).

2. Assured confidence—

St. Paul's direction, probably in allusion to this very passage, is, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him [Colossians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.6)." Never for a moment forget "in whom you have believed, or how able he is to keep that which you have committed to him." Wherever you turn your steps, you will doubtless meet with many adversaries: but "in him" you may "walk up and down" with confidence, defying every enemy, and saying, "If God be for me, who can be against me?" See how the Messiah himself exulted in the days of his flesh; and what an example he has therein afforded you! "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me; who will contend with me? let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he who shall condemn me? To, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 50.7-9)." Indeed, this very language is adopted by the Apostle Paul, who proceeds yet further to challenge every created being: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.33-39)." Here we have a perfect comment on the words of our text: here we see what that confidence is which every Christian should feel, when he says, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.24-25)." Thus it is, that "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified; and thus it is, that they should glory." To all of you, then, I say, "Walk in Christ, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanks-giving."

Is this, then, the state to which the whole world shall in due time be brought?

1. Contemplate it in reference to the Jews—

Does it not rejoice you to reflect on the mercy which is in reserve for them; for them, to whose ancestors you yourselves are so greatly indebted? As far as relates to their restoration to their own land, it is no otherwise of importance, than as fulfilling the Divine promises, and magnifying the grace of God towards them. But their believing in Christ, and experiencing the blessedness of his salvation, how ardently is it to be desired! and how should the prospect of it fill every soul with joy! Be not indifferent to it, beloved brethren. The Scriptures are full of this glorious subject; and universal nature is called upon to exult and glory in it. If you had no concern but for the benighted Gentiles, you should take an interest in the welfare of the Jews; seeing that the "receiving them into the Christian fold will be as life from the dead to the whole world [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.15)."

But put aside all consideration, except for the honor of your Lord and Savior. Shall it be no joy to you that his kingdom shall be extended throughout all the earth; and that upon the whole face of the globe there shall be but "one Lord, and his name one?" Truly, if you have the smallest measure of love to his name, you will strive, and pray that this blessed period may be hastened, and that he may speedily be the "King over all the earth."

2. Seek to enjoy it in your own souls—

Hear the determination of the Church of old: "All people will walk every one in the name of his God: and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever [Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.5)." And is not this the proper resolution for us to adopt? Adopt it then, my brethren; and may Almighty "God strengthen you" to fulfill it! and may your whole "walk" and conversation, to your latest hour, illustrate and confirm it!.

[Zechariah 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.8)

DISCOURSE 1256

THE MUTUAL ABHORRENCE BETWEEN GOD AND SINNERS

[Zechariah 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.8). My soul loathed them; and their soul also abhorred me.

THE judgments of God that from time to time are inflicted on mankind are standing proofs that man has offended his Maker, and that God is displeased with his creatures. In this view they are continually represented in the Scriptures; and in this light the prophet taught his hearers to consider them. God had determined to "abolish that covenant which he had made with his people," and to destroy the Jewish polity, the sacred part of which he called "Beauty," and the civil "Bands." He speaks of himself as having already cut off (or perhaps, in prophetic language, as determined to cut off) three shepherds, the princes, the prophets, and the priests, in one month; and assigns as a reason for it, that there was a mutual abhorrence between himself and them; and that consequently there was abundant reason for the judgments he denounced against them.

The prophet, throughout this chapter, personates the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom a part of it was very remarkably fulfilled, and to whom it is expressly applied in the New Testament verse 11, 12 with [Matthew 27:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.9-10). But it is simply to the words before us that we would now draw your attention: and we will take occasion from them to show,

I. What a deep-rooted enmity exists between God and sinners—

View it, where it first commenced:

1. On man's part—

Ungodly men neither seek to please God [Job 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 35.10), nor are at all grieved at having displeased him [Jeremiah 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 8.6); they like not to speak, hear, or even think of him [Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.4); they cannot endure (a melancholy proof of their aversion to him!) to be with him alone As men can meet their bitterest enemy in a crowd, but would be uneasy to be left alone with him; so the ungodly can meet God in his house, but cannot bear to commune with him in their secret chamber; they hate everything in proportion as it exhibits God to them, or would lead them to God Hence faithful ministers, and godly people, and searching discourses, yes, and the Bible itself, are neglected and despised; they even wish there were no God [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 14.1). This is a wish. The words, "there is," are not in the original; yes, when God actually put himself into their power, they sold him at the price of a slave, and crucified and slew him verse 11, 12 with [Matthew 27:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.9-10).

What abundant proof is here, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.7)." And what an evidence of that abhorrence in which, according to the Scriptures, our adorable Savior was to be held [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.7).

2. On God's part—

Towards penitent sinners (as we shall have occasion to show) God is reconciled: but, while they continue obstinate in their sins, he "loathes them," nor can even look upon them without the utmost abhorrence [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 1.13). He will not grant them the smallest taste of those blessings which he imparts to others in the richest abundance Compare [Psalm 119:165](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.165) with [Isaiah 57:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 57.21) and [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.8) with [Proverbs 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 14.10); he gives them up into the hands of their greatest enemies, to Satan and their own hearts' lusts 2 Timothy 2:26. [Psalm 81:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 81.12). [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); he prepares his instruments of vengeance against the time when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities [Psalm 7:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 7.12-13). [Deuteronomy 32:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.19-20); [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.35); [Deuteronomy 32:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.41-42). He even kindles with his own breath the fire that is to consume them. [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.33); he even comforts himself with the prospect of pouring out his wrath upon them to the uttermost [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.24). [Ezekiel 21:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 21.15); [Ezekiel 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 5.13).

What awful evidences are these of the truth in question! what proofs that he even loathes and abhors all the workers of iniquity [Psalm 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 5.5); [Psalm 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.3).

But, notwithstanding this mutual enmity, the Gospel shows us,

II. How it may be turned into mutual love—

There is, in truth, but one way in which reconciliation can be effected between God and sinners. Yet we may not unprofitably divide it into two heads:

1. Repentance towards God—

This can never purchase our peace with God; yet is it absolutely necessary to prepare our minds for the reception of his favor. And wherever it manifests itself in deed and in truth, God will instantly put away his anger, and embrace the sinner in the arms of his mercy [Jeremiah 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.13). [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.7). [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 51.17). [Luke 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 15.20). [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.20).

2. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—

It is this which unites us unto Christ, and gives us an interest in all that he has done and suffered on our behalf. If his hand were stretched forth, to plunge his sword into the bosom of any one among us, the very first act of faith should make it fall from his hands, and induce him to return it instantly to its scabbard [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16); [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.37). [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 13.39). [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.18). [Acts 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.30); Nor would he from that moment account any expression of his love too great for us [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 32.41). [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 3.17).

Nor is God only reconciled to us by these means, but we also are reconciled to him—

It is in this view that the Scriptures most generally represent our return to God [2 Corinthians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.18); [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.20). [Colossians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.21). And it is certain that from the very instant we repent and believe in Christ, our enmity against God is slain, and we delight in him as much as ever we once abhorred him. We love to hear and think and speak of him, and to maintain the closest fellowship with him: we love all who love him, and that too in proportion as they resemble him: and everything that can discover him to us, or draw us nearer unto him, is on that very account unspeakably precious to our souls. As for the Savior, who was sold for the price of the meanest slave, and who was once altogether despised by us, his name is as music in our ears; and the whole world is as dung in comparison of him [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.8).

We subjoin a word,

1. Of caution—

We may suppose that, because our enmity against God is the ground and reason of his aversion to us, our love to him is the ground and reason of his love to us. No: if we love him, it is because he first loved us [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.19). Were it not that he of his own mere mercy given to send us his grace, we never should have our enmity to him in the smallest degree abated. We must therefore take nothing but shame to ourselves; and give nothing but glory unto him. We must confess that our hatred of him was altogether without a cause [John 15:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.25); whereas his aversion to us was just and merited. On the other hand, his love to us is free and sovereign; whereas ours is the tardy, forced, and disproportioned fruit of his victorious grace.

2. Of encouragement—

"The wicked man is loathsome [Proverbs 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 13.5);" but how loathsome soever he be, he need not fear but that God is ready to receive him to the arms of mercy If instead of continuing the contest we apply to God through Christ, our peace with him shall soon be made. [Isaiah 27:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 27.4-5); Let this be contemplated by all, until a lively hope is begotten in their hearts, and they are constrained to say, I will no more "abhor the Holy One, and the Just [Acts 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 3.14)," but will turn to him, and love, and serve, and glorify him, with my whole heart.

[Zechariah 11:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.12-13)

DISCOURSE 1257

THE CONTEMPT POURED ON CHRIST

[Zechariah 11:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.12-13). And I said unto them, If you think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord The text may properly consist of these words only. [Zechariah 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.13). A goodly price that I was prized at of them! And they may be treated 1. In reference to the Jews, who fulfilled the prophecy. (Here the first head might be introduced.) 2. In reference to ourselves. (Here the second entire head, and all the Application, would come in easily.)—If the subject have no immediate reference to the passion week, I would rather recommend this mode of treating it.

THE prophet, under the character of a shepherd, is declaring what reception he had met with from the flock committed to his charge, and what judgments awaited them for their treatment of him. Extremely beautiful and grand is the address at the beginning of the chapter, where he calls on all orders of the Jewish community to prepare for the sentence that was gone forth against them [Zechariah 11:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.1-3); [Zechariah 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.6),: and threatens to abandon them to their fate [Zechariah 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.9). He then takes two staves or wands, one of which he called Beauty, and the other, Bands; and in their presence cut asunder the one that was designated by the name of Beauty, in order to intimate, that their whole ecclesiastical polity, which was the beauty and glory of the whole world, should be dissolved [Zechariah 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.10). Obscure as this intimation was, it was understood by the poor, the humble, and the pious, who trembled at the voice of the Lord [Zechariah 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.11). The other stick, named Bands, represented the civil polity of the Jews: and before he proceeded to cut asunder that also, and to declare the utter destruction of the whole nation, he made one more effort in their favor, and desired the chief priests and elders to signify their regard for his services by such a financial tender as they deemed adequate to their value. They, in compliance with this demand, weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave [Exodus 21:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 21.32). Upon this, the Lord, full of indignation against them for so undervaluing his richest mercies, ordered the prophet to cast the money to a potter who happened to be in the temple, and then to cut asunder the other staff, in token of his giving them up to internal commotions and to utter destruction [Zechariah 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 11.13-14).

But the whole of this transaction had respect also to other times, and other circumstances; and must be understood,

I. As a prophetic intimation—

The prophet was a type of that great and good Shepherd, who was in due time to come into the world, and "to lay down his life for the sheep:" and the treatment which he received, was typical of what should afterwards be accomplished by the Jews of later days in reference to their Messiah.

How exactly it was accomplished, the New Testament will inform us—

When Judas conceived the design of betraying his Lord, he bargained with the chief priests, who offered him this precise sum, thirty pieces of silver, which he took accordingly, as the price of the Redeemer's blood [Matthew 26:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 26.14-16). After he had betrayed his Lord, he went to return them their money: and finding that they would not regard his overtures, he cast down the money in the temple, and went and hanged himself. And what did they with the money? They would not put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood; but, after consultation had, they bought with it a potter's field, to bury strangers in: and thus, as an inspired Apostle informs us, fulfilled what had so many hundred years before been predicted concerning them [Matthew 27:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 27.3-10).

From this minute accomplishment of it we derive most important instruction—

Mark how many circumstances in this extraordinary transaction concurred to fulfill the prophecy: The person whose services were so valued; the good Shepherd. The price fixed; thirty pieces of silver. The application of the money; given to a potter. The spot where the transaction took place; the temple of the Lord. The persons chiefly concerned in it; the priests and elders. All this was predicted, in order to attest the truth of Christ's Messiahship. And was there any concert, think you, to fulfill the prophecy? Did Judas and the chief priests commune together, to prove beyond a possibility of doubt that Jesus was the person to whom all the law and the prophets bare witness as the Savior of the world? Behold then, from one proof out of a hundred, on how firm a basis our faith is fixed!

Nor is the accomplishment of this prophecy instructive only as confirming our faith: it goes much farther, and gives us an insight into all God's dispensations, whether of providence or grace.

God has ordered everything, both in Heaven and earth, both in time and eternity. But are men therefore to be considered as mere passive instruments in his hands? No: they are free agents in all that they do. The chief priests sought only the gratification of their own malice, as Judas did of his own covetous desires: neither the one nor the other acted from any impulse but of their own hearts. The spot where the transaction took place, the presence of a potter, the circumstance of his having a field of the precise value to sell, with various other circumstances, were all, as we should call them, accidental: but God foresaw all, and fore-ordained to accomplish his own will by means of all. And this shows us how God's decrees respecting the salvation of his people are accomplished. Men are not at all the less free because of his decrees; nor are the decrees of God the less certain because of man's free agency. There are ten thousand minute and accidental circumstances, as we should call them, necessary, as links in the chain of God's purposes; but not one shall be wanting; not one shall fail; nor shall one jot or tittle of God's word ever pass away. The responsibility of man will be precisely the same as if God had made no decrees: and the termination of events will be the same, as if God himself had produced them without the agency of man. With respect to man, all is uncertain: but with respect to God, all is as fixed, as if it were already done: "His counsel shall stand: and he will do all his will." Deep as these truths are, they are not at all inconsistent with each other: and if men will only mark in what way the prophecies have been fulfilled, they will have a key to all the difficulties which have embarrassed, and incensed against each other, the whole Christian world.

But the transaction in our text must be yet further viewed,

II. As an emblematic act—

It was foretold by Isaiah, that the Messiah should be "despised and rejected of men [Isaiah 53:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.2-3)." But was it by the men of one generation only that he was to be so treated? No; but by men of every nation, and of every age. It is indeed humiliating to think that the prophecy in our text has been fulfilled in us: but it is not more humiliating than true. Consider,

1. What we have done to obtain an interest in Christ—

After the things of this world we have burned with most intense desire: pleasure, riches, honor, have been in such request, that no measure of attainment of them could ever satisfy us: but after the knowledge of Christ we have felt no such longings: a small measure would satisfy us at any time: and we could be quite content to leave it in doubt whether he were our friend or not. Anxieties and disappointments in abundance we have felt in relation to earthly things; but not in reference to him; because it has been a matter of indifference to us, whether we possessed an interest in him or not. For earthly things we could consume the midnight oil, or encounter perils and fatigues: but an hour spent in prayer, in our secret chamber, has been a labor too irksome for us to endure. Whole years have passed; and not a single day been devoted by us to fasting and prayer for the obtaining of his salvation. Such a price as this has appeared an unreasonable demand; nor could we ever be prevailed upon to pay it: a faint wish, or formal service, has been the full amount of the estimate which we have set on His love. How justly then may God reject us with indignation, saying, "A goodly price truly is this at which I have been prized of you!"

2. What we have been willing to suffer for him—

Great are the sacrifices which we have made for the poor vanities of time and sense: but what have we sacrificed for the Lord? Paul counted not his life dear to him, so that he might but honor and glorify his Lord: but we have felt no such constraining sense of his excellency, no such disposition to part with all for him. An interest equivalent to the purchase of a potter's field has been at any time a sufficient barrier in our way to obstruct our progress, and prevent us from confessing him openly before men. It is really grievous to think how little we have been willing to bear for him. A frown, a threat, an ignominious name, have been quite sufficient to intimidate us; when, if we had valued Christ aright, ten thousand worlds would, in comparison of him, have weighed no more with us than the dust upon the balance.

3. What efforts we have made for promoting his glory in the world—

The Apostles and primitive Christians counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might but diffuse the knowledge of his salvation. And thus it should be with us. Our hearts should be ever intent on that object: we should never lose sight of it: we should live altogether for it. But, alas! how inactive have we been in his service! We have seen millions perishing for lack of knowledge, and used scarcely any means for their instruction. We have seen the kingdom of Christ invaded and usurped by the prince of darkness, and put forth no efforts to bring it to its rightful Owner. Say, would it have been thus, if we had valued him as we ought? Would the advancement of his glory have been so light a matter in our eyes, if we had formed a just estimate of his kingdom and glory? Surely God has had too much reason to cast this reflection upon us, "A goodly price it was that I was prized at by them." And all our worthless services he may well cast away with indignation, as unworthy his acceptance, and fit only for the purchase of a potter's field.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are indifferent about Christ—

Can it be so, that there should be any found of this description? Alas! they constitute the great mass, not of the heathens only, but of those who name the name of Christ. But will it be so always? Will it be so when you get into the eternal world? You can sleep now like the foolish virgins: but will you not in that day, when excluded from the marriage feast, cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us?" Yes: you will then at least form a correct estimate, if you will not now: but I pray God you may learn to do it now, while it may be available for your good, and not wait until you shall know his value only by your loss. Better to know him now by the manifestations of his love, than to know him then by the terrors of his avenging arm.

2. Those who desire to obtain an interest in him—

Be ready to pay the price which your God demands. The wise merchant, when he has found this pearl of great price, will sell all to procure it. And this is what our blessed Lord himself requires at your hands. You must "forsake all, and follow him:" you must not love father or mother more than him. You must even "hate father and mother, yes, and your own life also," in comparison of him. He must have no rival in your estimation. There must be nothing which you will not do for him; nothing which you will not sacrifice. Be not like the Rich Youth, who renounced him rather than his wealth. The greater the sacrifices you make, the more must you account them grounds only of self-congratulation, and of joy [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.17). O beg of God the Spirit to reveal him in your hearts; and so to make his glory pass before your eyes, that you may henceforth have no wish but to enjoy his presence, and to glorify his name!

3. Those who profess that they do already possess this inestimable treasure—

I can have no doubt but that there are many of this description here present: and I greatly rejoice that the Lord Jesus Christ is valued among us in some measure as he ought to be. But I tremble to think what changes may yet be wrought even in the most hopeful among us. Who that had seen the piety of Demas, would have expected such an issue of it as we read of: "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present world [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 4.10)." Who that had beheld the Galatian converts, so full of love to the Apostles, that they would have "plucked out their own eyes, and given them to him," would have expected to find them afterwards so "bewitched" through the influence of false teachers, that they "accounted him their enemy for telling them the truth [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 3.1); [Galatians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.15-16)." But Paul, in all his epistles, complains, as Peter does also, that, as there had been "false prophets in former ages, so were there in their days false teachers, who brought in damnable heresies, and prevailed on many to follow their pernicious ways [1 Timothy 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.11). [2 Peter 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.1-2)." We read of "whole families being subverted and turned from the faith [Titus 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 1.10-11);" some through the instrumentality of Judaizing teachers, who blended with the Gospel the observance of the Mosaic rites [Galatians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.14); and others, through the delusive statements of self-conceited philosophers, who, by their specious refinements, despoiled Christianity of all its simplicity and glory [Colossians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.8). And as then multitudes were "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," so it is now; as, indeed, we have been taught to expect it would be in these latter days. Paul says, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Mark here, 1. The principle, "after their own lusts." 2. The habit of mind, "itching ears," that love to be scratched. See the Greek. 3. The conduct, "heaping to themselves teachers." 4. The effect, "turning from the truth to fables." What an accurate and awful picture is here!: And what is the effect of this among us? it is precisely the same as in the Apostle's days; the minds of the simple are distracted; and instead of hearing, in every place, the praises of our adorable Redeemer, we hear of little but a "doting about questions and strifes of words;" and see little, but envy, and strife, and railing, and evil surmisings, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds [1 Timothy 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.4-5)." And this is the price at which our blessed Lord is prized by us! Any new opinion, or fond conceit, has more attraction for us, than the contemplation of his love, and the adoring of his grace! Dear Brethren, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ: but I fear lest, by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ [2 Corinthians 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.2-3)." Be on your guard, I pray you, against his devices. He can now, as well as formerly, "transform himself into an angel of light, and make his ministers to appear as the ministers of righteousness [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.13-15)." But I appeal to all, whether the listening to "questions and strifes of words" does not divert the mind from Christ, and indispose the soul for communion with him. Then, I say, have a higher regard for Christ than to run after novelties, which only draw you from him. It is but little that you can know of him, how intent soever your minds may be upon him; and but little that you can do to requite his love, how devoted soever you may be to his service. Value him then as you ought; love him as you ought; serve him as you ought: let "all created things be as dung" in your estimation in comparison of him [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.8); and endeavor now to keep your mind engaged, as it will to all eternity be occupied in Heaven, in praising and magnifying him, who "loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.5-6)."

Take care that you be not robbed of it. Satan will leave nothing undone to prevail against you. How he has prevailed over others, let the history of Demas inform you. Do not imagine, that because the world is as nothing to you now, it will always appear so vain and worthless. No: a change of circumstances often produces a change of views and habits. What changes may await you, God alone knows: but O! pray that there may never be a change in your regards for Christ, unless indeed that he may be increasingly precious in your eyes, and that your devotion to him may be more entire. And be assured that in the eternal world it will be no grief to you that you did too much for him, or suffered too much for him. Let it be to you "Christ to live; and it will in due time be gain to die."

[Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10)

DISCOURSE 1258

THE MEANS OF EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE

[Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.10). I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.

REPENTANCE is a subject, with which every one supposes himself to be sufficiently acquainted, but which is indeed very rarely understood. The Scriptures speak of a repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of [2 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.10); intimating thereby, that there is a repentance, which is not unto salvation; and which therefore itself needs to be repented of. The text in this view deserves our deepest attention, since it opens to us,

I. The nature of evangelical repentance—

The sorrow, produced in the heart of a true penitent, is exceeding deep—

Nothing can be more pungent than the grief of a parent who has lost "his first-born," "his only son [Luke 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 7.12)." Yet to that is the mourning of a penitent twice compared. In either case, the soul is bowed down greatly; it is indisposed for receiving gratifications from those vanities, with which it was before amused; and loves to indulge in pensive solitude, and painful reflections. The parent's anguish indeed may be softened by the assiduities of surviving friends; and may wholly lose its pungency through the lapse of time. But nothing can mitigate the pangs of a wounded spirit, nothing silence the accusations of a guilty conscience, until "the balm of Gilead," the blood of Jesus, be applied to it: nor even then will sin ever cease to be the grief and burden of the soul [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 16.63).

But repentance is then only to be called evangelical, when it has immediate respect to Christ—

Twice is it said in the text, that men shall mourn "for him," that is, for Christ Comp. [John 19:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.37). Not that the miseries, which Christ endured on the cross, are the proper grounds of a penitent's sorrow; but rather, it is his grief that he has so dishonored Christ by his sins, and that he has yet again and again "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin. Many, who are not really humbled, are concerned for their sins as having subjected them to God's displeasure [Exodus 10:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 10.16-17). [1 Kings 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 21.29); but it is the true penitent alone, who mourns for sin, as dishonoring Christ, and as counteracting all the gracious purposes of his love.

This will more fully appear by considering,

II. The means by which it is to be attained—

The effusion of the Spirit is the primary means of producing penitence in our hearts—

The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of grace and of supplication," because he is the Author and Giver of all grace, and because it is through his agency alone that we are able to pray. And this Spirit Christ will "pour out" upon us. He not only has a right to send the Holy Spirit, as being God equal with the Father, but in his mediatorial capacity he is authorized and empowered to send forth the Spirit, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit," on purpose that he may impart to us out of his own immeasurable fullness. To him all must look for this blessing [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 5.31); and all may look with an assurance of obtaining it, provided they truly and earnestly desire it [John 14:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.13-17). The great and learned, "the house of David," must submit themselves to his influence; nor shall the poorest or most illiterate of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" be destitute of this mercy, if they will but ask it of their heavenly Father [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.13). Nor until this Spirit convince us of our sin, can any of us know our state, so as to be suitably and abidingly affected with it [John 16:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.7-8).

As a secondary mean, the Spirit turns our eyes unto a crucified Savior—

Nothing but a view of Christ as dying for us, can ever thoroughly break our obdurate hearts. But this has a powerful tendency to produce sincere sorrow; because, while it shows us the malignity of sin in most awful colors, it discovers to us also the remedy provided for the expiation of sin. In the one view, we are humbled by a sense of our extreme vileness; in the other, we are overwhelmed with a sense of the Redeemer's love: and a combination of these two effects constitutes that sincere shame and sorrow, which may be denominated evangelical repentance.

We may improve this subject,

1. For conviction—

All acknowledge that they need repentance, and profess an intention to repent. But let not any imagine that the slight acknowledgments, and faint purposes of amendment, which are usually made on dying beds, are sufficient. If the comparison in the text be just, nothing will suffice, but a heart broken and contrite under a sense of sin. And precisely such is the view which the Apostles also give of true repentance 2 Corinthians 7:11. [James 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.9). O that we may never rest in anything short of such repentance, lest, instead of looking now on Christ with beneficial contrition, we behold him hereafter (as we must do) with endless and unavailing sorrow [Revelation 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.7).

2. For encouragement—

Many are discouraged by reason of the hardness and obduracy of their hearts. Indeed we all feel, that notwithstanding we have so much cause to weep day and night for our sins, and are really desirous to do so, we can rarely, if ever, bring our souls to any measure of tenderness and grief. But let us look more at Christ as dying for us; and not confine our attention, as we too often do, to our sins. Let us particularly beg of Christ to pour out his Spirit upon us, and then the heart of stone shall soon give way to a heart of flesh [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.26). The Spirit of grace and of supplications will easily effect, what, without his aid, is impossible to man: and the rocky heart, once struck by him, shall yield its penitential streams through all this dreary wilderness Alluding to [Numbers 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 20.11).

[Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.1)

DISCOURSE 1259

CHRIST, THE FOUNTAIN OPENED

[Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.1). In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for impurity.

THE various metaphors by which our Lord is described in Scripture, while they give just representations of him, are frequently calculated in a peculiar manner to impress the minds of those who heard them. This remark admits of the fullest confirmation from our Lord's own discourses See [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.35); [John 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 11.25); it may also be illustrated by the prophecy before us. The Jews had heard of the wanderings of their ancestors in the wilderness; and they had themselves traversed a much larger tract of country in their return from the Babylonish captivity. To them therefore the tidings of a fountain to be opened would convey very strong and pleasing sensations. Nor shall we be unaffected by them if we lament our spiritual defilements.

We propose to consider,

I. The meaning of the prophecy—

The Scriptures often mention a time under the expression "that day"—

This expression sometimes refers to the apostolic, and sometimes to the millennial period. It is to be understood in this place as designing the former. That was a day in comparison of which all preceding ages were but as the morning dawn: then the mists of Gentile ignorance and Jewish superstition were dispelled before the Sun of Righteousness.

At that period Christ was to be known under the notion of "a fountain"—

Christ is frequently spoken of under the metaphor of a fountain [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13). [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.3). He virtually applies the name to himself The Jews after their return from Babylon used on a certain day to fetch water in a joyous and triumphant manner from the pool of Siloam, in reference, it is supposed, to [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.3). And on that day our Lord addressed them, and pointed them to himself as the true well of salvation, [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.37-38). He is described nearly by the same character even in Heaven [Revelation 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.1). The river, which John beheld, proceeded out of the throne of the Lamb. He justly answers to this description, having within himself an inexhaustible source of blessings.

He was to be a fountain "opened"—

From eternity was he as "a fountain sealed," having in himself all fullness, before there existed any creatures to whom he might impart of it. Before his incarnation he afforded a scanty measure of his Spirit The meanest Christian is more enlightened than the greatest of the prophets, [Luke 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 7.28). At the time of his death he properly became a fountain opened.

The persons for whom it was to be opened were "the house of David," etc.—

"The house of David" are the spiritual seed of Christ He is the root as well as the offspring of David, [Revelation 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.16). "The inhabitants of Jerusalem" are the members of the Christian Church. Both together import all believers, high and low, rich and poor; none are excluded who wish to participate his blessings.

The end for which it was to be opened was, to cleanse from "sin"—

There had been fountains for ceremonial impurity There was a brazen sea, above fifty feet in circumference, and almost ten in depth, wherein the priests were to wash their hands and feet: there were also ten lavers wherein the things offered for sacrifice were washed, and from whence the water for the sprinkling of the offerers was taken, 2 Chronicles 4:6. There were also fountains for the cure of bodily disorders The pool of Siloam, where our Lord sent the blind man to wash, ([John 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 9.11).) and which was typical of Him who was the Shiloh of the tribe of Judah, ([Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 49.10).) and eminently the sent of God. Compare [John 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 9.7); [John 6:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.38-40). Bethesda was still more appropriate to this use, [John 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.2-4). But Christ was a fountain for moral defilement, and spiritual maladies.

In due season this prophecy received its accomplishment.

II. The completion of it—

From the incarnation of Christ this fountain was more fully exhibited: during his ministry its waters flowed in partial streams; but at his death it was fully opened:

It was broken open on the cross—

In our Lord's agony, the blood had flowed through every pore [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.44); previous to his crucifixion his back had been torn with scourges [John 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.1). [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 129.3); the crown of thorns pierced his sacred temples [Mark 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 15.17); [Mark 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 15.19); his hands and feet were nailed to the accursed tree [Psalm 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.16); and his side, pierced with the spear, emitted blood and water [John 19:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.34). This imported that he should cleanse both from the guilt and power of sin, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.6). Thus did men and devils concur in breaking open this fountain. The dying thief was made a monument of its cleansing efficacy [Luke 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 23.43).

It was set open on the day of Pentecost—

Then the Spirit was poured out in a more abundant measure: thousands, even of the murderers of our Lord, were cleansed by it. The effects produced were instantaneous and abiding [Acts 2:42-47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.42-47); the blackest guilt was purged, the most ferocious natures changed. Nor was its influence to be confined any longer to one age or nation.

It was left open in the promises to all succeeding generations—

We may say of this fountain as Paul does of the Gospel [Romans 10:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.6-8). The word is the channel in which it flows: it has already spread its streams to the ends of the earth [Romans 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.18); it will flow until that prophecy be fully accomplished [Habakkuk 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hab 2.14); the invitations to it are yet sounding in the ears of all [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 55.1). [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 22.17).

ADDRESS—

1. To those who expect salvation while they live in sin—

If men could be saved in their sins, why was this fountain opened? Would God have given up his Son to death without necessity? or shall they who neglect the fountain be cleansed like those who wash in it? Let none deceive their own souls: to wash in this fountain is the one thing needful. They who cry with the leper, shall receive the same answer [Matthew 8:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 8.2-3).

2. To those who hope to cleanse themselves in some other way—

Many hope to wash away their guilt by tears of repentance. But would God have opened this fountain, if any other would have sufficed? How lamentable that there should still be such cause for those expostulations [2 Kings 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 5.13).—! Let those who say like Peter, remember the answer given him [John 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.8).

3. To those who doubt whether they may come to this fountain—

Many imagine that the greatness of their guilt is a bar to their acceptance; but the fountain was opened for sin and for impurity. What would have been the effect of such hesitation at the pool of Bethesda [John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.4); [John 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.7). Be it remembered that all, who have a need, have a right to wash: let every one then press forward, lest he lose the blessing.

4. To those who have experienced its cleansing efficacy—

It is in you that the efficacy of this fountain must be seen. Let it appear that it has cleansed you from earthly and sensual desires. But still you have need to wash in it daily We contract defilement every step we take. Bishop Beveridge justly observes, "Our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of." This do, and you shall soon join in that triumphant song [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 1.5-6).—

[Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.7)

DISCOURSE 1260

CHRIST SMITTEN FOR OUR SINS

[Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.7). Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

THIS is generally thought to be the beginning of a distinct prophecy: yet it seems not only to be connected with, but in a measure to arise out of, the preceding context. The connection, it is true, is not obvious: but it must be remembered, that this is the way in which some of the most important predictions in all the Scriptures are introduced. Take, for instance, the prophecy that Christ should be born of a pure virgin; a more wonderful event than which is not predicted in all the inspired volume: there was no necessary connection between that, and the destruction of the ten tribes; nor between that, and the obstinate incredulity of Ahab: yet, on Ahab's declining to ask a sign that the deliverance promised to Judah should speedily be accomplished, the Lord gave him this sign; "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [Isaiah 7:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 7.10-14)." In that prophecy, the event predicted appeared wholly foreign to the subject that was in hand: but in the prophecy before us it is not so. The chapter begins with a plain declaration, that in due time Christ, by the shedding of his blood upon the cross, should open unto mankind "a fountain to wash them from sin and impurity." It then goes on to say, that by him idolatry should be destroyed; and that both men and women, if tempted to idolatry by their own children, should immediately execute judgment upon them, and thrust them through with a sword or dart This was agreeable to the law of Moses, [Deuteronomy 13:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 13.6-10); and that so general should be men's abhorrence of idolatry, that those who had been disposed towards it, and had even marked their bodies in honor of their idols, should deny their having ever felt any disposition towards it, and should ascribe the marks that were on their flesh to some "wounds which they had received, either accidentally, or for some particular purpose, in the house of their friends."

Then in our text God says, As the false prophet shall be slain by his own father for endeavoring to turn you from God, so shall the true prophet be slain by his father in order to turn you to God: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts."

In discoursing on these words we shall consider,

I. The commission given to Jehovah's sword—

It is bidden to "awake and smite:" but here two questions arise;

1. Whom was it to smite?

It was assuredly the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone answers to the character here described. He is the Shepherd of Israel," appointed to that office by God himself [Psalm 80:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 80.1). [Ezekiel 34:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.23). He designates himself by that very name, and as the person to be smitten under that very character [John 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.11). Moreover, he alone can be called "Jehovah's fellow," for he was God as well as man [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.1), even the true God [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 5.20), the mighty God [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 9.6), altogether One with the Father himself [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 10.30), "God over all, blessed forever;" and, being-God in his own nature, and therefore incapable of suffering, he assumed our nature on purpose that he might suffer [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.6-8).

2. In whose hand was it to inflict the stroke?

It was the Father himself who was to wield it, even he who here calls upon it to arise and smite. True it was that men and devils were the more immediate agents [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.53); but they were only instruments in the Father's hands: "they could have had no power at all against him, if it had not been given them from above." They were willing agents, no doubt, and executed what their own malignant dispositions dictated: but God overruled their designs for the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.23); [Acts 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 4.37). There was not one thing done by them which had not been foretold; nor one thing predicted, which they did not unwittingly and exactly perform [John 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.28); [John 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 19.30).

But even without the intervention either of men or devils, the Father himself smote him. What was it but a sense of God's wrath upon his soul that made him sweat great drops of blood in the garden? It was the Father himself who put that bitter cup into his hands. Upon the cross too, when Jesus uttered no complaints respecting inferior agents, he bitterly bewailed the hidings of his Father's face: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Thus was verified that awful prediction of the prophet, "It pleased the Lord, even Jehovah himself, to bruise him [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 53.10)."

Let us next inquire into,

II. The grounds and reasons of this commission—

It was the Father's purpose to exercise mercy towards our fallen race: but he would do it in a way that should be consistent with his own perfections. Hence he gave us his only-begotten Son to be our substitute and surety: and against him, when standing in that capacity, he called forth the sword;

1. To show his indignation against sin—

We presume not to say what God might have done, if it had pleased him: but we are sure that "it became him, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings [Hebrews 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 2.11)." As the Moral Governor of the Universe, it became him to vindicate the honor of his broken law, and to mark his utter abhorrence of iniquity: and this he did more strongly and effectually in smiting his only-begotten Son, than if he had smitten the whole human race. As for the children of men, they are but worms of the earth, far inferior to the angels that fell: but Christ was his co-equal, co-eternal Son, his fellow, his equal. O what an evil must sin be, when God would not suffer it to pass unpunished even in the person of his own Son, on whom it was found only by imputation! We may be well assured, that, on whoever it be found in the last day, it will be visited with "wrath to the uttermost."

2. To reconcile justice with mercy in the salvation of sinners—

Had sin been pardoned without any atonement, the claims of justice must have been superseded. But God would not exalt mercy at the expense of justice; and therefore he devised a way of satisfying the demands of justice, while he listened with delight to the voice of mercy. "He laid our iniquities upon" his only dear Son, and exacted of him the debt which had been incurred by us: and that debt he paid to the uttermost farthing; so that justice itself has nothing more to require of us, provided only we plead what Christ has done and suffered in our behalf. Thus has God become "a just God and a Savior," or, as Paul expresses it, he is "just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus."

Such being the reasons for this mysterious commission, we proceed to notice,

III. The effects and consequences of it—

The immediate effect was the scattering of our Lord's disciples—

One would have thought that our Lord's more intimate disciples, who for above three years had heard all his discourses, and seen all his miracles, would have firmly adhered to him, even to the end; more especially as they had promised, in the most solemn manner, to follow him, even unto death: but God, who knew what was in man, foretold that they would shamefully desert him in the hour of trial: yes, our Lord himself forewarned his disciples that they would forsake him, and thereby fulfill the prophecy in our text [Matthew 26:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 26.31); and the event, alas! corresponded with these predictions: the "Shepherd being smitten, the sheep were immediately scattered abroad;" "they all forsook him and fled [Matthew 26:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 26.56)." What a poignancy must this circumstance have given to all the other wounds inflicted on our Lord! Where were all the myriads whom he had miraculously healed? Where were those whom he had raised from the dead? Were they all afraid to own him? Was not so much as one found to stand forth in his defense, or even to speak a word in his behalf? No: all were panic-struck and mute. Hear how our blessed Lord himself complains of this, as a bitter aggravation of his sorrows [Psalm 69:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 69.20); [Psalm 142:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 142.4); But utter dereliction, unmitigated sorrows, were our desert; and he, as our substitute, endured it all in our behalf.

The ultimate effect was their restoration and recovery—

This is intimated in the last clause of our text. By "turning his hand upon his little ones," is meant, that he would accomplish upon them all his merciful designs, recovering them from their fears, and restoring them to the Divine favor Compare [Isaiah 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.25). This he did as soon as ever he was risen from the dead: he did not even except Peter, who had so shamefully denied him with oaths and curses [Mark 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 16.7). [John 20:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 20.17). On the day of Pentecost he so "strengthened his little ones," that they were henceforth no more intimidated, but boldly confessed him before all the rulers of their nation, and braved death in all its most tremendous forms, for the honor of his name. Similar effects were instantly produced on thousands of his followers: and to this hour is the same divine energy communicated to the feeblest of his people: though but "a little flock," they fear not the threats of any adversaries, because they know that it "is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom;" and, that they shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

Such were intended to be the effects of our Redeemer's death: "He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:" and to God he will bring us; so that "of those whom the Father has given him, not one shall be lost."

Improvement—

Let us take occasion from this prophecy,

1. To admire the love of God the Father—

When God called to his sword to "awake and smite," whom should we suppose to be the objects of his vengeance? Should we not conclude of course that we were to be the monuments of his wrath? we, towards whom he had so long exercised forbearance, and who had so obstinately persisted in our rebellion? Yes, methinks God would say, "Sword, go and smite those my incorrigible enemies; go and smite them to their inmost soul." But, behold, he sends his Son, "his fellow," and directs the sword to execute vengeance upon him, as our substitute! We wonder not so much that the Jews should cry out, "Spare not this man, but Barabbas:" but that Jehovah should give his direction to his sword, "Spare not my dear Son, my fellow, but Barabbas," is truly wonderful. Yet this, in effect, he did say: 'Spare the vilest of the human race, even though they be robbers and murderers; but "smite my Son, my fellow," and spare not him, in order that you may spare them.' O wondrous love! Who can estimate it? What tongue can utter it? What imagination can conceive it? Well is it said, "God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son:" but the heights and depths of that love are unsearchable, either by men or angels.

2. To follow the steps of the good Shepherd—

Jesus, Jehovah's fellow, is our shepherd; and we, as sheep of his pasture, are under his protection. Let us then, however weak in ourselves, despise the threats of all our enemies. Let us never for a moment indulge the fear of man, or entertain a thought of forsaking him who has laid down his life for us. Let us consider our obligations to him: let us consider them, until we feel our whole souls inflamed with love to him; and, under the constraining influence of his love, let us "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach," and "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame, or even death itself, for his sake." Let us "know in whom we have believed;" and say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want;" nor "will I fear what man can do unto me."

3. To seek the effectual influence of his grace—

What shall we not be able to do, if "he turn his hand upon us for good?" Could Paul say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthened me?" so then may we say. He was by nature no stronger than the weakest among us: and the weakest of us, by grace, may be as strong as he: "Christ's strength shall be perfected in our weakness," as it was in his. Let our eyes then be unto Jesus; that, as he has been "the author, so also he may be the finisher, of our faith." Let our expectations from him be enlarged: and, whatever our difficulties be, let us remember, that "our Redeemer is mighty," is almighty; and that he has pledged himself to us, that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands."

[Zechariah 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.9)

DISCOURSE 1261

GOD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH HIS PEOPLE

[Zechariah 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.9). I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.

AFFLICTION is the lot of mankind in general, and more especially of those who fear the Lord, who are all, in their measure, "predestined to he conformed to the image of Christ," as well in sufferings as in glory. In the context we are told what Christ would have to endure when once he should become incarnate; "Awake, O my sword, against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd." It is true, that Christ was to make satisfaction for sin by his sufferings and death; and in that view there is no occasion for us to "drink of his cup:" but it is true also that "he learned obedience, and was made perfect, by the things which he suffered;" and these ends are no less necessary to be accomplished in us; nor can they be effected in any better way. On this account God has determined to "bring the third part through the fire;" that so he may fit them for the fuller enjoyment of himself, both in this world and the world to come.

The text informs us how God deals with his people,

I. In respect of trials—

he people of God are but a small remnant—

Perhaps the text may refer to that period when the Christian Church was to be delivered from the destruction which was coming on the Jewish nation. At that time they were very numerous in Judea, and might, in general terms, be represented as a "third part." But in every age and place they have been comparatively a "little flock," or, as the Apostle calls them, "a remnant according to the election of grace." Even in one of the most distinguished Churches in the apostolic age we read that there were "but few who had kept their garments undefiled:" and, if those who bear the Christian name at this day were tried by the standard of God's word, the number of true disciples would be found very disproportioned to the collective body.

But, whether few or many, they are all "brought to God through the fire"—

It is no uncommon thing for persons to receive their first serious impressions by means of some afflictive dispensation: many must say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." But, in whatever way they are converted to God, they seldom continue long in his service without experiencing some temporal or spiritual affliction. God, who is a wise physician, knows what is most conducive to the health of our souls. He sees that there is much "folly bound up in our hearts, and that nothing but the rod of correction can effectually drive it out." He sees it necessary "to try us, as gold, and to purify us as silver," that we may both manifest what we are, and become what we should be. If we be only superficial Christians, who, like "the stony-ground hearers, have no root in ourselves," we shall "be offended as soon as tribulation or persecution arises because of the word:" but if we be "Israelites indeed," the trial of our faith, which is much more precious than gold, which, though it stand the trial of fire, yet perishes at last, will be found to praise, and honor, and glory in the day of his appearing [1 Peter 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 4.12); [1 Peter 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 1.6-7)." Besides, the very best have much amiss within them, which escapes their notice, until "God counsels them in the night season" of affliction, and discovers to them the hidden abominations of their hearts. On this account especially the saints have testified with one consent that they have found it "good to be afflicted;" and have seen reason to bless God more for their heaviest trials, than for their richest comforts.

That their trials, however, are not unmixed, will appear by considering how God deals with them,

II. In respect of enjoyments—

If the Christian has much "bitterness of heart," with which others are unacquainted, so has he also much "joy, with which a stranger intermeddles not." He enjoys,

1. Communion with God—

Before he was converted he knew nothing of fellowship with a reconciled God and Father. He performed perhaps many outward acts of worship, but never prayed from his inmost soul. He felt not the greatness of his wants; he knew not the excellency of spiritual attainments: he was not persuaded of the efficacy of prayer: no wonder therefore that he never cried to God in earnest, and consequently, that he never obtained an answer to his prayer. Not even Paul himself, notwithstanding all his zeal, had ever prayed aright, until Christ appeared to him in his way to Damascus [Acts 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.11). But the true Christian is enabled to "pour out his soul before God:" and to him is that promise fulfilled: "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.24)." Often does he go to God weak, weary, or disconsolate, and return from a throne of grace strengthened with might, and filled with peace and joy.

Nor is this happy state a little promoted by his trials. When he is long at ease, he is too apt to relax his exertions, and to rest in a cold and carnal frame: but afflictions drive him to his God, and necessitate him to wrestle in prayer until he obtains the desired aid [Genesis 32:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 32.24-26).

2. Confidence before God—

God is unspeakably gracious to the soul that seeks him. He will not only answer the prayers of his people, but will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and give them such tokens of acceptance with him, as, in effect, to say to them, "You are mine." He will "seal them with the Holy Spirit of promise," and set his mark upon them in such a manner, that they themselves may know their relation to him. Moreover, by these manifestations of his favor he will embolden them to claim him as their God. Like the Church of old they shall make their boast of him; "My beloved is mine, and I am his," "This God is my God forever and ever Son. 2:16. [Psalm 48:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 48.14)."

This assurance too, no less than their fellowship with God, is advanced by means of afflictive dispensations. Their tribulation makes them apply to God for patience; the acquisition of patience gives them an experience of his truth and faithfulness; and this experience begets a lively hope [Romans 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3-4), yes, oftentimes an unshaken confidence in God, which is as "an anchor of their souls both sure and steadfast."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are but little conversant with trials—

Doubtless it is a mercy to be free from troubles, because "they are not joyous at the present, but grievous." But what do you find to have been the effect of this exemption? Have you not, like Jeshurun, "waxed fat and kicked?" "When you have eaten and been filled, have you not forgotten the Lord your God [Deuteronomy 8:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 8.10-14); [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.15)." Do you not find that your corruptions are unmortified? Are you not conscious that you have never yet experienced that exalted state of communion with God, and of confidence before him, which it is both your privilege and your duty to enjoy? Guard then against these pernicious effects of ease; for the prosperity of fools, as we are told, will destroy them [Proverbs 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 1.32). Let the attainment of a holy and heavenly frame be desired by you far more than any temporal comfort. In a little time all present things, whether pleasing or painful, will come to an end: and then they only will be found happy, who sought an interest in Christ, and "had the Lord for their God [Psalm 144:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 144.15)."

2. Those who are "tossed with tempests and not comforted"—

Though God brings his dearest children into the fire, he does not leave them there; he engages to bring them "through" it. While they are yet in it, he will be with them, that they may not be burned [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 43.2); yes, "he will sit by them as a refiner and purifier of silver," to watch the process which he has ordained for their good [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.3). He knows what heat is requisite for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes; and, when their dross is purged out, he will bring them forth as "vessels of honor meet for their Master's use [Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 23.10)." Be patient then under your trials, knowing from whom they proceed, and for what blessed ends he has appointed them: and be rather solicitous to have your troubles sanctified than removed. Only let them drive you to a throne of grace, and not, as they too often do, discourage you from drawing near to God. Let them make you more earnest in seeking an assured confidence in his love, and an increasing fitness for his glory. Then shall you in due time be numbered with those blessed spirits, "who came out of great tribulation, and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb." Nor need you fear but that the "eternal weight of glory" which you shall possess, shall abundantly compensate "the light and momentary afflictions" which you endured in the way to it.

[Zechariah 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.7)

DISCOURSE 1262

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS—OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PROMOTE IT

[Zechariah 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.7). It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

IN the writings of the prophets, there are, as might be expected, many things difficult to be understood. Yet, even when a passage, in respect of its full import, is involved in the deepest obscurity, there may be some things perfectly clear, and capable of an easy application, for the elucidating of points that are of great importance. The prophecy before us is of this kind. It is generally understood as referring, in the first instance, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies: it then, after some circumstances, which the events alone, when they shall have occurred, will enable us satisfactorily to explain, leads us forward to the period fixed in the Divine counsels for the conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ; when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth, and when there shall be one Lord, and his name one verse 9." The manner in which that day shall be introduced is particularly specified in the words immediately preceding my text: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." By this I understand, not, as some do, that there shall be one continued day, in which there will be no darkness at all; for it is not of the Millennium itself that the prophet is speaking, but of the time when the Millennium shall be introduced: and that will be a time "neither perfectly clear, nor altogether dark;" "not entire day, nor entire night:" but a time like the evening, when, though there is some light remaining, it seems gradually drawing towards extinction. When the Church is so circumstanced, that shall be the period for God's appearance in behalf of his people: and when, according to general expectation, increasing darkness might rather be expected to ensue, then shall light arise in God's Church, and his purposes respecting it be accomplished.

For the purpose of confirming this interpretation of the passage, I will first consider the text in reference to God's general dispensations; and then, in reference to the period more especially described.

I. Let us consider the text in reference to God's general dispensations.

The more we examine the dealings of God with mankind, the more we shall see that he has, in all ages, permitted difficulties to arise, in order to make his people feel their dependence on him; and to display, eventually, in a more striking manner, his interposition in their behalf. In the 107th Psalm, this plan of the Divine government is illustrated in a great variety of particulars: Travelers "wandering in a wilderness [Psalm 107:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.3-7);" captives "sitting bound in affliction and iron [Psalm 107:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.10-14);" sick persons "drawing near to the gates of death [Psalm 107:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.17-20);" and mariners, in their tempest-tossed vessels, "at their wit's end [Psalm 107:23-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.23-30);" all having been brought to the utmost extremity, are made to know, by happy experience, that there is a God who hears prayer, and who is able to save, from every kind of danger, all those who call upon him [Psalm 107:23-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.23-30).

Nor is this his mode of dealing only in relation to temporal matters; it obtains equally in reference to men's spiritual concerns. The parable of the Prodigal Son is not unfrequently realized among ourselves. How often have persons been left to run to the utmost excess of riot, until the very extremities of want and misery, to which they have reduced themselves, are made the occasions of suggesting to their minds that beneficial reflection; "In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, while I am perishing with hunger: I will return unto my Father." And in this way they have found that mercy which their souls desired.

Nor is this process observed only at the first conversion of men to God. The saints are sometimes permitted, through the violence of temptation, to fall into the very depths of despondency. What can be conceived more distressing than the state of Asaph's mind, as depicted in the 77th Psalm? "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more? is his mercy clean gone forever? does his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" In this extremity God mercifully interposed, to show him that these fears were altogether groundless: and then the desponding saint acknowledged, that "this was his own infirmity [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 77.7-10)." Multitudes of others also, in every age of the Church, are enabled to bear the same testimony; and to say with David, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry: he brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay; and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 40.1-3)." In truth, this is what may be well expected under all trials, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature: for, from the days of Abraham to this present hour, has that proverb been verified, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen [Genesis 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 22.14)."

We must not, however, suppose that these dispensations are limited to individuals: they may be seen with equal clearness in God's dealings with the Church at large. Let us go back to those two redemptions which his people experienced from Egypt and from Babylon. In Egypt they were reduced to the lowest ebb of misery [Judges. 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 10.16) with [Acts 7:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 7.34), and had their afflictions for a time augmented by the very means used for their deliverance; so that they were in utter despair [Exodus 5:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 5.20-23); but then it was that God interposed with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm, to bring them out from their captivity. Yet there was not even then an end put to their troubles: on the contrary, their danger became speedily more imminent than ever. Though they went forth out of Egypt, they soon found themselves enclosed by mountains and morasses on either side of them; by the sea before them, and by the Egyptian army in their rear: now their fears rose as high as ever, and they regretted that they had come out of Egypt at all. "They said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Is not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness [Exodus 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 14.11-12)." Then did God open a way for them through the Red Sea; and complete their deliverance, by making a channel through the great deep a path to Israel, and a grave to Egypt.

The deliverance of Israel from Babylon, also, was scarcely more within the reach of reasonable expectation. It might possibly be hoped, that, after having kept them seventy years in a state of rigorous servitude, their Babylonish oppressors should relent, and suffer them to return to their own country. But who would have supposed, that the Persian conqueror of Babylon should confer on them so great a benefit? Yet was that very conquest the means of their deliverance; and Cyrus, as had been foretold three hundred years before, freely dismissed them to their own land, laden with the spoils which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from them. How surprising this event was to them, may be seen in a psalm composed on the occasion; "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream [Psalm 126:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 126.1-3)." As Peter, when rescued from prison by an angel, could not believe the fact, but thought he saw a vision; so the people of Israel, when liberated by Cyrus, could scarcely believe that so great a mercy had been given to them; so strange was it in itself, and so contrary to all human expectation.

But from the Jewish, let us turn our attention to the Christian Church; for in the establishment of that, also, we shall see the same truth illustrated with peculiar force. Behold the Founder of this Church riding triumphant into Jerusalem, amidst the acclamations and hosannahs of the multitude, and you will think the day of his reign had begun to dawn: but see him, in the space of four short days, apprehended, crucified, entombed, and his little band of followers scattered, without a ray of hope in their minds; and you will say, that all prospect of his reign has forever vanished. Yet behold, within how short a space of time light rises up in obscurity, and the darkness becomes as the noon-day! On the third day he rises from the dead; and, after giving to his disciples many infallible proofs of his resurrection, he ascends to Heaven, in the presence of no less than five hundred brethren; and then sends down the Holy Spirit to testify of him, and to confirm the word which his disciples should preach in his name. Here indeed it may be said, that "at evening time it was light:" and it is probable that at that period the prophecy before us received a partial accomplishment; for then did "the living waters go out from Jerusalem," even those waters of salvation which have since, in a measure, flowed towards every quarter of the globe, and which in due season shall "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Thus we see how the text has already marked and characterized God's general dispensations, as well towards his Church at large, as towards individuals in particular. And let not the time spent in this statement be grudged, as though it did not bear sufficiently on the main subject of our consideration: for when we have seen to what an extent the leading features of our text have been illustrated in the dispensations of God, whether general or particular, from the foundation of the world, we are more disposed to admit, that such a mode of procedure is likely to be adopted in the latter day, and consequently are better prepared to view the text,

II. In reference to the period more especially described.

The declaration, that "in that day the Lord shall be king over all the earth; and that there shall be one Lord, and his name One;" clearly shows, that the period referred to has not yet arrived. From the very time when the prophecy was delivered, to the present hour, there have been lords and gods without number, worshiped by the different nations of the earth. But the time is coming, when the Gospel shall be preached to all nations, and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ:" and to that time the text clearly refers. The whole concluding part of the chapter also, whether literally or spiritually interpreted, manifestly determines our views to that period.

We have then, in our text, an intimation of the time when we may expect this great work to commence: it will be a time when it is "neither day nor night," but, as it were, "the evening time," partaking in a measure of both.

The conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ is an event which every one who believes the Scriptures looks forward to as certain. But the time for it is supposed to be yet far distant; and all attempts to promote it are deemed visionary and absurd. Persons will say, 'Look at the Jews: see in what a low degraded state they are; how deep and inveterate are their prejudices against the very name of Christ; how intrenched they are in their own forms and ceremonies; and how inaccessible to the Christian world: they will not suffer you to converse with them on the subject of Christianity: they will not read the books which you put into their hands. As for the Christian Scriptures, they will not look into them. Look at the efforts which have been made for their conversion; how vain and nugatory they have been. If some have professed to embrace the faith of Christ, it has only been for the purpose of advancing their temporal welfare: and they have no sooner gained their end, than they have proved themselves to be the most consummate hypocrites, and been an utter disgrace to the religion which they have professed to honor. What has the Society The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, which has now existed a dozen years, effected in their behalf? There has been no want of zeal in them, or of liberality in the public; and what have they done, but waste the public money in unprofitable speculations? This is a clear proof, that the time for the conversion of that people is not come, and that there is no hope of effecting it by any human efforts.'

I hope it will be allowed, that I have stated with sufficient force what is urged by those who deride the efforts of the Society: and though I must declare, that these objections are by no means true, to the extent that they are urged, yet I willingly admit that they are true in part. I acknowledge also, that the difficulty of the work is great; and that the efforts, which have been already made, have not succeeded so far as might have been wished, or so far as persons of a sanguine temperament, and unacquainted with the difficulty of the undertaking, were induced at first to expect: consequently, I acknowledge, that, in relation to this great work, there is abundant evidence that it is not "day."

But, if it be not "day," must it therefore be "night?" Does not my text speak of a time when it shall be "neither day nor night?" Allowing, then, that it is not day, I ask, Is it night? Let any candid person hear and judge.

Consider the state of the Christian world. For eighteen hundred years, if we except a partial effort or two made in their behalf, the Christian world have been altogether asleep, as it respects this object: but now they have begun to awake to a sense of their duty, and to the necessities of this outcast nation. Societies have been formed in different parts of Britain, for the express purpose of aiding the efforts of persons whose time and attention are mainly fixed on this object: and a work has been accomplished, a work which one would have supposed should have been executed many centuries ago, but which has never before been attempted for circulation among the Jews—the translation of the New Testament into pure Biblical Hebrew. It is well known, that the Jews will not read the Christian Scriptures in the vernacular languages of the countries where they dwell; but it was hoped that they would read it in the language which they venerate as sacred; (and in this hope, as I shall show presently, the Society has not been disappointed:) and thus have they opened a channel of communication with them, whereby all the most intelligent among them are rendered comparatively easy of access. Until this was effected, it was not to be wondered at that no great success attended the Society's labors; but now they may hope to exert themselves with more effect. It is well known, that the long extant and widely-diffused translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek afforded great facilities for the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles; and it may well be hoped, that the translation of our Greek Scriptures into the Hebrew tongue will subserve, in no small degree, the reception of the Gospel among the Jewish nation. Add to this, the interest which many crowned heads in Europe have begun to take in the welfare of their Jewish subjects. It may be said, that this attention to them respects only their temporal advancement in the scale of society: still, it tends to remove that stumbling-block which has been so long laid in their way; and to diminish the odium with which they have ever regarded (yes, and too justly regarded) the Christian name. And if the generality of these monarchs have in view no higher object than that which is merely political, it is by no means so with one of them, at least; who, by providing an asylum for those who shall be persecuted for embracing Christianity, has rendered a most essential service to the Christian cause. Is this, then, I would ask, to be called "night?"

But consider, also, the state of the Jews themselves. We have sent forth a few missionaries among them, (others are now in a course of preparatory studies, in a seminary recently established for them,) and they have, in many instances, been most kindly received by the Jews; who, instead of rejecting the offer of the Hebrew Testament, as in the preceding objections is supposed, have most gladly and thankfully received it; and, indeed, have expressed the most ardent desire to obtain it. They have shown a great willingness, also, to be instructed in the knowledge of Christianity; and, to a very great extent, have they shaken off the yoke of Rabbinical tyranny and Talmudical superstition: so that, when we shall be able to send forth among them a larger number of well-instructed missionaries, there is every reason to hope that the light of Divine Truth will arise upon them, and "the word of the Lord have free course, and be glorified" among them.

While, then, on the one hand, I readily acknowledge that it is not "day," I think that any person of candor, who shall compare the present state of the Christian world towards them, and of the Jews themselves, with what it has been in past times, must admit that it is not "night."

Is it then, "neither day nor night?" Methinks there is reason to hope that it is the very time fixed in the Divine counsels, even "the evening time," wherein the prophet tells us "there shall be light." Whether it be the full time for the calling in of the Jewish people generally, I presume not to determine; but that it is at least the proper time for our exertion, there can be, I think, no doubt. If a sign, whereby we may ascertain this fact, be demanded, I ask, What sign can any man reasonably require? He will not surely call for a gift of prophecy, or for a power of working miracles; but if, with the exception of these, he demand the same signs to mark the Messiah's advent to convert his Jewish brethren as were given to mark his advent in the flesh, I am not sure but that we may venture to put the matter upon that issue. For what were the principal signs which marked his advent in the flesh? There was a general expectation of him among the Jews themselves; there were some more particularly "waiting for redemption" in Jerusalem, and ready to welcome his arrival; and there were some actually converted to the faith of Christ by the ministry of John the Baptist. And is there not a general expectation among the Jews at this time, that the Messiah is near at hand? Yes; and in a degree that has not existed before. Nor will I say this on mere report: for a prophet of their own, writing expressly against the Society, to correct their too sanguine expectations, has undertaken to fix the time; and, after giving it as the opinion of one great and eminent Rabbi, that there were only twenty-nine years more to the coming of the Messiah, he gives a calculation of his own, and says, "There are yet thirty-six years to the end of the jubilee of Israel; and before the end of these thirty-six years, Israel will be restored, and the Messiah will take possession of his empire Rabbi Crooll on the Restoration of Israel, people. 48, 66." So that, according to these two Rabbis, the period now remaining at this time, (for that calculation was made eight years ago,) it is not more than twenty-one, or, at the utmost, twenty-eight years This Discourse was delivered before the University of Cambridge, 1820. As for the opinions, I lay no stress on the one or the other; but I adduce them, to show that the Jews themselves, even those who are averse to the idea of his speedy advent, expect assuredly that their Messiah is, at no distant period, to appear.

That there are many, especially among the Christian world, ready to welcome the Messiah's arrival and to advance his kingdom, is sufficiently evident, both in Europe and America: and that some of the Jewish nation have been truly converted to God, is a fact to which we can appeal with perfect confidence. Some are at this time employed as missionaries to their brethren; some, of whose piety we can no more doubt than we doubt the piety of multitudes among ourselves: and the New Testament, distributed among the Jews, is doing its work silently, but effectually; being "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds, and casting down imaginations, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Whether they shall all continue steadfast unto the end, I pretend not to say; for, after the most eminent saints recorded in Scripture have fallen, I know no man under Heaven respecting whom a continued steadfastness can be certainly and unerringly predicted: but this I say, that, if there be genuine piety depicted in any human composition whatever, it is depicted in the experience of some who are at this moment in connection with our Society: so that, if we cannot boast of Pentecostal conversions, we have seen some, the first-fruits before the harvest, the drop before the shower.

If, then, there exist at this time signs similar to those which marked the Messiah's advent in the flesh, I think we have abundant evidence, that, whether the time for the national conversion of the Jews be come, or not, the time for our exertion is come; and we ought to "go forth to the contest with them, seeing that our God is gone out before us [Judges. 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg. 4.14). [2 Samuel 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 5.24)." To prevent misapprehension, I repeat, that of "the times and seasons which God has reserved in his own power," I presume not to speak: but of our duty I do speak, and that with confidence: and if the time for the light to arise be that of "evening-time, when it is neither day nor night," then do I think, that at this hour we have all the encouragement to exert ourselves that we can reasonably desire.

But it is in vain to urge on men the performance of their duty, while so many objections lurk against it in their minds. Of the duty itself, I am well assured, nothing need be added to what I spoke in my former Discourse See Disc. on [Jeremiah 30:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.17). I hope and trust, that, on that subject, there is but one feeling among us all. But, as I then observed, we too readily listen to objections; and perhaps feel somewhat of a pleasure in embracing anything which may serve as a plea for postponing at least, if not altogether neglecting, our duty. Hence, on the last occasion, I observed, that, in the present Discourse, I would address myself somewhat more fully to this part of my subject. And if, in doing this, I should trespass somewhat longer than usual on your time and patience, I trust that the importance of the subject will plead my excuse, and be kindly received by you as an apology.

To the first and most common objection, that the time is not come, I need add little to what I have already said. If only it be borne in mind, that I am not speaking of the complete in-gathering of the Jews, but only of our duty to seek their conversion, I may reply to the objector, 'When is the time not come? What period has there been, from the first establishment of Christianity to the present hour, when we were released from all obligation to fulfill this duty?' And, if to this I add, that the present moment singularly accords with that which is described in my text, I conceive that the objection will be allowed by all to have no reasonable weight. If the fallacy of it was made apparent, when urged by the Jews for their delay in building the second temple [Haggai 1:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 1.2-4), much more will it be found altogether vain, when urged by us as an excuse for our neglect to re-edify his spiritual temple among the Jews. Some, indeed, have been led to this idea by that passage of Scripture, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in:" from whence they conclude, that the great body of the Gentiles must first be brought into the fold of Christ; and that then the conversion of the Jews is to commence. But what, then, is the meaning of those words in the very same chapter, "If the fall of them (the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?" And again: "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but 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); [Romans 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.25)." Here we see that it is the fullness of the Jews that is ordained to be "as life from the dead" to the whole Gentile world. That there is no real opposition between these two passages, we may be well assured. The question is, how to reconcile them? In order to this, I would observe, that, in my apprehension, the word 'fullness' is not to be understood of a complete and universal change in either case, but only of the commencement of the two periods referred to. The commencement of a work among the Gentiles will introduce the in-gathering of the Jews: and in like manner, when once the Jews shall begin generally to be converted to the faith, they will be the means of awakening the great body of the Gentiles, and of bringing them also into the fold of Christ This interpretation makes the import of the word 'fullness' the same in both passages; and, in the author's opinion, it is the most plain and simple. But, in many parts of the earth, the Gentiles, through the unprecedented dissemination of the word of God, and the multitude of missions established among them, are already beginning to experience the blessings of the Gospel; and therefore we may well conceive, that the period for the conversion of the Jews also is near at hand. And the man who most earnestly desires the salvation of the Gentiles ought, on his own principles, to be the warmest friend to the Jews.

An idea prevails with some, that the Jews are to be converted by miracle; and, that it is presumptuous in us to attempt so great a work. But this is altogether a mistake. They are to be converted precisely in the same way as they were in the first ages, and as the Gentiles also were; namely, by the ministration of the Gospel. Let any one examine the prophetic writings, and he shall find that there is no difference whatever between the conversion of the Jews and the calling-in of the Gentiles at the latter day; except, indeed, that the Jews shall be gathered in first, and be God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentile world. The fullness, both of one and of the other, shall be brought in; and be, though not perfectly simultaneous, yet as nearly so as the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles were, at the first establishment of Christianity See [Acts 13:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 13.46). That it is to be wrought by human means, and not by miracle, is clear from those injunctions which the Prophet Isaiah has given us: "Go through, go through the gates: prepare you the way of the people: cast up, cast up the highway: gather out the stones: lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say you to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes [Isaiah 62:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 62.10-11)." Here it must particularly be observed, that the proclamation respecting the Messiah's advent is not made by Jehovah himself, but by the Gentile world: "The Lord has proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say you to the daughter of Zion; you Gentiles, deliver you this message; Say you to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes!" Here, then, our duty is clear: we are commanded by God himself to remove every obstacle out of their way; to prepare, with great labor and diligence, a path for them; and to direct them, by all possible means, to their Savior and their God.

Some, however, who will not call it presumptuous, yet regard it as a hopeless task. But why should not the Jews be converted, as well as the Gentiles? Whatever blindness there may be in their minds, God is able to remove it now, as well as in former ages. Who is it that has wrought effectually for the Gentiles? Is his arm so shortened, that he cannot effect the same for the Jews? Shall we say, like those of old, "He has smitten the rock indeed, that the waters gushed out like a river; but can he give bread also, or provide flesh for his people [Psalm 78:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 78.19-20). The same power is alike competent for both; and he who has engaged that his outcast people shall be restored, will be at no loss to effect it. Paul puts this matter beyond a doubt: "They, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be engrafted in; for God is able to engraft them in again. For, if you were cut out of the olive-tree, which is wild by nature; and were grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be engrafted into their own olive-tree [Romans 11:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.23-24)."

If, notwithstanding these assertions, any one still think that the low estate of the Jews is a just cause for despairing of success in our efforts with them, be it known, that the lower their degradation is, and the more desperate, according to all human appearance, their condition, the more assurance we have that the season for their restoration is near at hand: for God's express declaration concerning them is, "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he sees that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.36)."

By many it is objected, that the labors of the Society are a mere party-matter, being not set on foot by authority; and prosecuted chiefly by a few, whose opinions and habits differ widely from those of the generality. But, with submission, I would ask, With whom did Christianity originate? or, with whom the Reformation? In reference to both, great stress was laid on the objection, that it was not supported by the rulers. But was either the one or the other less excellent in itself, or less worthy of support on this account? Supposing, then, that the objection were admitted as true, it would have no real weight. But it is far from true in reference to the Society of which we speak; for that is patronized by some, whose names would add weight to any cause: and I doubt not, but that, when the object itself shall be better understood, it will be more justly appreciated, and more universally espoused, among the higher orders, as well as among the community at large. As for its being advocated by persons of a peculiar class, if it were true, whose fault would it be? It is the duty of every Christian in the universe to seek the salvation of the Jews: and if any neglect to do it, the fault must rest with them. We invite all to unite in this good work. It does not belong to a party; it is the work of God, and the duty of all, without exception; and we would have all, of every rank, and every class, to co-operate with us in the performance of it. It is a curious fact, that, while Churchmen urge this objection, it is equally alleged against the Society by Dissenters also, who, because the Society is now conducted by members of the Established Church, imagine that their great object is to enlarge and aggrandize the Establishment. But the object of the Society is to convert the Jews to Christianity; and not in Britain only, but in every part of the world; and this is a work in which every Christian under Heaven, to whatever Church he may belong, may well join. For, whatever be men's peculiar sentiments in relation to Church government, there can be no reason why they should not help forward the circulation of the New Testament among the Jews, and their conversion to the faith of Christ; this being a labor of love, which both requires and deserves the united efforts of all who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

Not very different from this is the objection arising from a disapprobation of some parts of the plan adopted by the Society. Some do not approve of the education of Jewish children; because, as they think, it operates as an inducement with parents to violate the dictates of their conscience, in permitting their children to be instructed in a faith which is contrary to their own. But to this I would say, that the same argument will hold equally against every missionary society for the conversion of the Gentiles; since the education of their children has uniformly constituted a very leading feature of such Societies: and, if we reflect from what a state of depravity and ignorance these children are rescued, and what attention is paid to their best interests, every benevolent mind must rejoice that so great a benefit is accorded to them. Some have thought that the children were collected by undue means; but none are admitted, except a written request be delivered in by the parents themselves; some of whom are altogether indifferent what religion their children embrace; while others would gladly inquire after Christianity themselves, if the fear of utter destitution did not constrain them to decline it.

Exceptions have been taken against the affording of temporal relief to such Jews as have embraced our holy religion, as though that operated with them as a bribe to profess what they did not believe. But this plan has been abandoned, in compliance with what appeared to be the general wish: though it may well be doubted, whether we have not thereby rendered the gate of Heaven more strait than God ever designed it to be: for the first converts, when cast off by their former friends, were not left to perish with hunger, but were supplied with necessities out of a common fund. One benefit, however, accrues from this; namely, that the funds of the Society, which are very inadequate to the objects we have in view, are by these means more entirely devoted to what may be called the primary and more important parts of the institution: and it is to be hoped that private benevolence will supply what necessity alone constrains us to withhold.

The objection which, perhaps, is urged with most confidence is, that the Society has spent much money, and effected but little, if any, good. That large sums have been spent, is certain: and that several of the plans first prosecuted were unsuccessful, must also be acknowledged. But the object was altogether new: and it is not to be wondered at, that, where the path was untrodden, the most perfect way should not be found at once. It must be confessed, also, that there was too little attention to economy among those who first established the Society. But the plans have since been simplified; every improvident scheme has been laid aside; and the utmost attention paid to economy in every part of the institution. As to that part of the objection, that little good has been effected, it is what I can by no means admit. It was to be expected, that the work of conversion among the Jews should be slow and gradual. Their prejudices are strong; and, until lately, they were almost inaccessible to us: but, since the publication of the New Testament in Biblical Hebrew, the effects have been as great as could reasonably be expected: for some, at least, have been truly converted to God; and vast multitudes have been stirred up to inquire after Christianity; so that I might almost say of different, parts, both of Germany and Poland, that "the fields are white already to harvest." But, were it not so, shall it be said that little has been done, when a work has been sent forth into the world which, since the first promulgation of Christianity, was never before attempted; and which, of all the works that ever can be conceived, is the most likely to be effectual for the desired end? If we look forward to its ultimate results, as likely to be the one great means of qualifying the Jews in every quarter of the globe to become at a future period the instructors of the Gentile world, the importance of it can scarcely ever be duly appreciated. There are also many other things now in operation, which until lately could not be brought to bear: missionaries are sent out to different parts: others are receiving appropriate instruction in a seminary recently instituted for that special purpose: and a variety of other plans are now in full activity, and, I would hope, with good effect: so that it can by no means be said, that there is little doing, or little done. In point of efficiency, the Society will be found, especially since it came under the management of its present directors, to bear a comparison with other institutions of a similar nature. As to its progress, compare it with the Reformation: Was that wrought in a day? How long had Wickliffe protested against the abominations of Popery, before any considerable portion of the Church could be effectually purged from its corruptions? and how little has been done towards the diffusion of the Protestant religion in a neighboring portion of the United Kingdom during the space of above two hundred years? Nay, let any one of us labor only in a single parish, with every possible advantage, for a number of years, and see how few are truly converted to God; and, of those few who profess to have received the word into their hearts, how very small a portion "bring forth fruit unto perfection," and "endure unto the end!" Let us but judge candidly in this matter, and we shall see indeed but little reason for this complaint.

Regretting that I have been necessitated to detain you so long, I will mention but one objection more; and it is this: I will wait and see what others do, before I will commit myself as a friend and patron of this Society. But, if all proceed on this plan, how is anything to be done? If the thing be good, we should aid it, even though no one else should either lead the way, or follow our example. Instead of hesitating or delaying, we should all vie with each other in this long-neglected duty, and labor to redeem the time we have lost. If any would still procrastinate, I would ask, Have not the Jews been neglected long enough? Will not seventeen centuries suffice to have left them in their perishing condition? Would we still leave generation after generation to die in the ignorance of that Savior whom God has sent for them as well as us, and through whom we profess ourselves to have obtained eternal life? Have we not yet filled up a sufficient measure of iniquity by our neglect? Would we add yet more to all the inhumanity we have been guilty of? Would we carry on to an indefinite period our injustice and ingratitude towards them, and continue our impiety, until it is past a remedy? If the Jews have no claim upon us, let us acknowledge none: if the reproofs of God respecting our neglect are not deserving of attention, let us disregard them: if there be no excellency in love, let us forbear to exercise it: and if our own souls be of no value, let us continue to trifle with them, even unto the end. But if, as was shown in our former Discourse, God will resent this apathy, and call us into judgment for it, let every one of us act for himself, and obey, without delay, the dictates of his conscience, and the commands of God. Let none think it beneath them to espouse the cause of that despised people. Let none suppose, that, because they stand pre-eminent for rank or learning, they should account themselves excused from this sacred work. I ask of all, Are the Jews at this day in a more desperate or degraded state than they were when laboring at the brick-kilns in Egypt? or are any among us more distinguished for rank or talents than Moses, who was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," and, in the first court at that time in the universe, was inferior only to the king himself? yet did he not merely condescend to patronize that injured people, but, at the peril of his own life, he espoused their cause, yes, and joined himself to them, that he might participate their afflictions; "esteeming even the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.24-26)." To any such exercise of self-denial as this, I readily grant, we are not called. But to a zeal for God's honor, and his people's good, we are called: and I feel assured, that if, in this benevolent and holy cause, we do make some sacrifice, the time is coming when we shall not regret it. In the court of Pharaoh, it is highly probable that all those who were ignorant of the high principles by which Moses was actuated, regarded his condescension as folly, and his zeal as madness. But far different is the estimate that has been formed, both of the one and of the other, by the Christian, no less than by the Jewish, Church; among whom, from that very hour, it has been an acknowledged principle, that it is "better to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." This I say, in case it should please God to raise up among us men of piety and talent, who shall enter fully into this subject, and devote themselves to the arduous and long-neglected office of enlightening and converting the Jews. Of course, this can be expected of few, and of those only who feel themselves at liberty to consecrate their time and talents to this blessed work. But, after the statement you have heard, I hope I may be permitted to say, without offence, If you are convinced that the cause in which we are engaged is good, aid us by your patronage and your contributions: and let it be seen, that, while Monarchs are declaring before the whole world that such efforts 'equally become the statesman and the friend of humanity.

[Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.9)

DISCOURSE 1263

CHRIST'S REIGN ON EARTH

[Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.9). The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.

UNDER the Jewish dispensation, the saints looked forward to the first coming of our Lord; at the prospect of which, though at the distance of two thousand years, Abraham exulted, and leaped for joy. Under the Christian dispensation, we look forward to his second advent: when he shall take to him his great power, and reign over the face of the whole earth. The near approach of this great event should make us more intent upon it, and fill us with delightful anticipations of the blessings which will then be diffused throughout all the world. The words which we have just read will furnish us with an occasion to consider,

I. The incalculable importance of this prophecy—

It is of importance,

1. To the world at large—

At present, our blessed Savior reigns over a very small part of the globe. By far the greater part of mankind are sunk in the grossest idolatry: But there is a time coming, when every Dagon in the universe shall fall before the ark, and Christ shall be King over all the earth. In every place under Heaven shall men "cast their idols to the moles and to the bats," and Christ be made the one object of supreme and universal regard.

The delusions of Mohammadanism shall also then be banished; the worshipers of that false prophet shall be undeceived; and Christ be acknowledged as that Prophet of whom Moses spoke, as ordained of God to be supremely and exclusively the Teacher of the world.

God's ancient people, too, shall then be brought to "look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn; and be in bitterness, as one that mourns for his only son." To him shall they submit, as King in Zion; and thus all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall become "one fold under one Shepherd."

To all these things the Scriptures bear witness, in so plain and abundant a measure, that we must doubt altogether the inspiration of the sacred volume, if we can doubt that these things shall be fulfilled in their season [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.6); [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 2.8); [Psalm 22:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.27-28); [Psalm 72:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.8); [Psalm 72:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.11); [Daniel 2:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 2.44-45).

2. To the Church in particular—

Even in the Christian world there is almost as little subjection to one Head as in the world at large. Both in the Roman Church and the Greek Church, superstition prevails to such a degree, as in a great measure to supersede the work and offices of Christ. And even among Protestants, the divisions which exist tend greatly to embitter their minds against each other, and to prevent that union which ought to exist among the members of Christ's mystical body. As, of old, the tribes of Judah and of Ephraim were in a state of most inveterate hostility against each other, even so it is now. But as, in reference to them, we are told that the two sticks in the prophet's hand became one, as shadowing forth their future union [Ezekiel 37:16-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.16-22), "(Ephraim no longer envying Judah, nor Judah vexing Ephraim [Isaiah 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.13)," but both living together in harmony and love,) so we may assuredly expect, that, at the season predicted in my text, all will become, as at the day of Pentecost, "of one heart and one mind;" all, as it were, "being like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus; and all, with one mind and one mouth, glorifying God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [Romans 15:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.5-6)."

3. To every individual of mankind—

Who among us has not reason to confess, that "other lords besides Jehovah have had dominion over us?" But at that time we shall all say, "By you, and the influence of your grace, will we henceforth make mention of your name, even of your only [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 26.13)." An entire subjection of the soul to Christ is a very rare attainment. But in that day there shall be none to "say, Lord, Lord, without doing the things which he commands." Hypocrisy will then be banished from the world; and all who are called Israel, will be "Israelites indeed [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.47)." "All will be righteous in that day [Isaiah 60:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.21)." Every vessel in the Lord's house, from the greatest to the least, will be holiness to the Lord: nor shall there any more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts verse 20, 21."

Is this the true import of the prophecy? How great then must be,

II. The blessedness of the period to which it refers—

Surely it will be a season of great temporal prosperity—

There will then exist few, if any, of those calamities which now overrun the world. Do wars now rage, and desolate the earth? They shall then cease: "the swords shall be beat into plow-shares, and the spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more [Micah 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.3)." Do unfruitful seasons reduce men to great distress? There shall then be such fertility in the earth, that "every man shall sit under his own vine and fig-tree [Micah 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.4)," in the undisturbed possession both of peace and plenty. Do injustice and oppression prevail? Universal righteousness will then obtain; and neither fraud nor violence be suffered upon earth [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.6-9); [Isaiah 60:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.17-18). Do diseases bring men to an untimely end? To such a degree shall the constitutions of men be strengthened, that a person at the age of a hundred years shall be accounted only a child; and if he die at that early age, he shall be judged as cut off prematurely by a judicial act of God's displeasure. In truth, the whole system of things will appear like "a new creation;" "a new Heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness [Isaiah 65:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 65.17-20) and [2 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.13)."

Then, also, shall spiritual blessings most richly abound—

Men's knowledge of the Gospel shall then far exceed anything that is possessed at this day: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, 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)." At present, our views of Christ are obscure: we see him only as a shadow, or, at the best, only "as in a glass darkly:" but then "we shall see him eye to eye," and, as it were, face to face [Isaiah 52:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 52.8). The grace also that shall accompany this knowledge will be proportionably enlarged. Exceeding beautiful is the description which the Prophet Joel gives us of the state of things in that day: "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 [Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.18)," a place proverbially dry and barren. In fact, so universal and abundant will be the prevalence of real piety, that it will seem as if all the saints that have ever died had risen again, and Christ himself were dwelling and reigning in the midst of them [Revelation 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 20.6); [Revelation 21:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.2-4).

Above all, it will be a season when God will manifest himself on earth, almost as he does in Heaven itself—

Some think that Christ will personally reign on earth, during the whole Millennium. But, without acceding to that opinion, I think it clear that he will manifest himself on some special occasions, as once he did upon Mount Tabor in his transfiguration: and so bright will be his glory, that the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously [Isaiah 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 24.23)." In fact, the city in which we shall dwell will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof See [Revelation 21:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.22-26)." See the exultations of the saints in that day, as expressed in the prophetic writings [Psalm 98:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 98.1-9) and [Isaiah 12:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.3-6); See them, also, as declared in the book of Revelation, where they refer expressly to the period when "the saints shall reign on the earth [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.9-10);" and, methinks, you will say that that season will be to every living man a pledge and a foretaste of Heaven itself.

Let me then entreat you, Brethren,

1. To seek the establishment of Christ's kingdom in your own souls—

If He is to reign over all at the period referred to, should not his kingdom be established in our hearts? O, let him not find a rival there! Let everything that exalts itself against him be cast down; and every thought and desire of your hearts be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

2. To promote its establishment throughout the world Here may be an exhortation, suited to the occasion, and to the particular circumstances of the case at that time.—

[Zechariah 14:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.16-19)

DISCOURSE 1264

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

[Zechariah 14:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.16-19). It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whose will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, with which the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

MANY passages of Holy Writ derive an interest from the plainness of their import, and the force with which they are expressed; and many attract our attention from the peculiarity of the subject, and even from the difficulty of finding the just interpretation of them. It is in this latter view that I propose to call your attention to the passage which I have now read. That vast importance is attached to the subject by the prophet himself, is evident: and therefore it should not be overlooked by us. But, whether the true sense of it has yet been ascertained, may well admit of doubt.

There are two points of view in which it may be considered:

I. As a prediction to be accomplished in due season—

That the event which it refers to is yet future, can admit of no doubt. It is not to take place until the period shall arrive, when "the Lord shall be King over all the earth;" and when, instead of the multitudes of gods that are now worshiped, "there shall be but one Lord, and his name one verse 9."

By the Mosaic law there were appointed three great feasts, for the observance of which all the males in Israel were to go up to Jerusalem: these were the feast of the Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles; and they were all partly commemorative, and partly predictive. The Passover referred to the deliverance of the Hebrew first-born through the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb, when the Egyptian first-born were slain; the Pentecost reminded them of the giving of the law from Mount Sinai: and the feast of Tabernacles brought to their remembrance their dwelling in tents for forty years in the wilderness. The event predicted by the Passover was the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 5.7); and that predicted by the Pentecost was the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the fiftieth day after the deliverance by Christ's death should have been effected, and the writing of God's law by him upon our hearts [Acts 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.1-4). But now comes the difficulty: What was the event predicted by the feast of Tabernacles? Commentators have mentioned two; namely, the incarnation of our blessed Lord, and the state in which all his people should live in this dreary wilderness. For the former of these, there appears some foundation in Scripture: for our blessed Lord's advent was, in all probability, at that season of the year, the autumn; and not, as we generally imagine, in the winter: and the expression whereby his incarnation is designated by John seems to have a special reference to this feast; "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us." And this being so wonderful an event, and withal so accordant with the other two, it may well be supposed that the expectation of it should be kept up by a particular feast instituted for that express purpose. But then there arises a great difficulty; Why should this be so particularly, and so exclusively, celebrated in the latter day? Why should such heavy judgments be denounced against those who should omit to celebrate this, while yet no notice at all is taken of the other two? This necessitates one to look for some other event, which is of sufficient importance to justify the appointment of a feast, and which demands that peculiar honor which is here exclusively reserved for it. As for the state in which all are to live under the Christian dispensation, there is nothing at all mysterious in that, nothing that calls for such a typical prefiguration, and nothing that is peculiarly appropriate to the latter-day. We therefore dismiss that altogether from our thoughts, as far as the prediction is concerned,

In order to discover what event there is, which the prophet had in view, and which, either by itself, or in connection with Christ's first advent, corresponds with the feast of Tabernacles, and which moreover calls for such distinguished honor in the latter day; we must examine the whole preceding context. The prophet is speaking respecting the future restoration and conversion of the Jews verse 11. He foretells, that it will be opposed to the uttermost by the heathen nations: but that the Jews will triumph over all their enemies verse 12–14. See also [Zechariah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.3); [Zechariah 12:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 12.6-9), and having destroyed immense multitudes of them, will be the instruments of converting the rest to the faith of Christ [Isaiah 66:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.14-16); [Isaiah 66:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.19). Now, it is obvious, that the Jews, in going up to their own land, must dwell in booths made of the branches of trees; or, at best, in tents, such as soldiers use when they take the field. It is equally obvious, that, in appearance, they will be as likely to fall a prey to their enemies, as when they came out of Egypt to sojourn in the wilderness. Yet shall they be as miraculously preserved then as heretofore; not only through the destruction of their enemies, but by a supply of all their wants: and they shall have renewed to them all their former mercies under their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will then reign over them, and fix his Tabernacle in the midst of them, as their Head and King [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.23-24) with [Revelation 21:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.3). By this blessed event, their surviving enemies will be convinced, and converted to the faith of Christ: and all who shall resist the evidence thus afforded them, and refuse to join them in the worshiping of the Savior, shall be visited with plagues, which shall mark plainly the indignation of God against them. At the feast of Tabernacles they were accustomed to pray for the latter rain, which fell at that season of the year [Joel 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.23); and God threatens, that they who should not unite with them in these holy exercises "should have no rain." And whereas Egypt was independent of rain, their land being fertilized by the overflowing of the Nile, they should have some other plague equivalent to that inflicted on other disobedient nations verse 18; for God would sorely chastise all who should refuse to unite in celebrating this wonderful event, and in honoring the Savior who shall have brought it to pass.

Now, here we have an object worthy of such an ordinance to prefigure it: for it is the consummation of all the prophecies, relating either to the Jewish or Gentile world. And here we see why this feast is to be observed, not only in preference to, but to the exclusion of, the other two. And certainly, if we conceive, as many do, that the Lord Jesus Christ will then descend, and personally reign on earth, the connection between his first and second advent will more strongly appear, and the authoritative injunction respecting the observance of that feast will be more fully accounted for. Could we make up our minds to this point, it must be confessed it would throw great light on the passage before us; because this feast would then have the same direct reference to Christ as is unquestionably found in the other two. But of his spiritual reign there can be no doubt: and that being then more glorious than ever, and over both the Jewish and Gentile world in one collective body, it may well be regarded as a renewal of his presence upon earth, and an accomplishment of the prophecy before us.

But there is yet further reason for supposing the conversion of the Gentile world to be the immediate subject of this prophecy: for the feast of Tabernacles was expressly called "the feast of in-gathering [Exodus 23:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 23.16);" and therefore it might well prefigure that second advent of "Shiloh, to whom shall the gathering of the Gentiles be [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 49.10)." And, in fact, the whole current of prophecy seems to determine the point: for "at that period shall many people and strong nations come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem; and ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you [Zechariah 8:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.22-23). See also [Isaiah 60:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.10-14); [Isaiah 66:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.13)."

Having endeavored to throw light on my text as a prediction, I shall now proceed to notice it,

II. As a command, to be obeyed in all ages—

Beyond all doubt, that which is so authoritatively required of the whole world at a future period, must, in spirit at least, be required of the Church in all ages. Now, the spirit of the ordinance plainly inculcates,

1. A grateful remembrance of past mercies—

This was indisputably one great end of the feast, as it was originally established: "You shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know, that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt [Leviticus 23:39-43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 23.39-43)." In that state they were exposed to the want of every necessary of life, and to numberless dangers, both from men and beasts: yet were they preserved by the continued care of their Heavenly Protector. And have not we, also, similar mercies to recount? With respect to our bodies, what care has God taken of us, from the first moment that we came into the world! How many millions of the children of men have never attained to our age, or had such blessings multiplied to them as we! And if we speak of our souls, we must know all the devices of Satan himself, before we can estimate aright the care which we have experienced at the hands of our heavenly Father. There has not been an hour in which we should not have been destroyed, if God had permitted Satan to sift us, as he gladly would have done. It is through God's unbounded mercy that "we continue to this day" following after God, and that we have not long since "turned back unto perdition." If, through mercy, we can say, "My foot stands fast;" it becomes us gratefully to add, "In the congregations will I bless the Lord [Psalm 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 26.12)."

2. An humble dependence on God for future blessings—

In the passage before cited, to show that the ordinance was appointed for the remembrance of past mercies, it is added, "I am the Lord your God [Leviticus 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 23.43)." This taught the Hebrews to expect a continuance of those blessings at his hands. And to whom shall we look? Where shall we go for blessings, either temporal or spiritual? If we lean on the creature, we shall find it a broken reed. We must rely on God alone. We must look to Him, as "our Sun and our Shield:" we must "rely on him both for grace and glory;" and rest assured, that "he will withhold no good thing from us, if only we walk uprightly before him;" "acknowledging him in all our ways," and "committing" our every concern "into his hands [Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 3.6)."

It is worthy of observation, that, on the last day of this feast, the Jews were accustomed to go to the pool of Siloam, and to pour out water with joy; referring, in their minds, to the promise, that at that time "living waters should go out from Jerusalem verse 8;" and to that particular song which the Prophet Isaiah had taught them, "With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 12.3)." In the midst of that ceremony, our blessed Lord addressed the whole multitude, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He who believes on me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him should receive [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 7.37-39)." If only we look to Him, "we shall want no manner of thing that is good In the Church of England we have Rogation-days, for the express purpose of supplicating God's blessing in reference to the fruits of the earth, and the out-pouring of his Spirit on the Church: and these begin the Sunday before Whitsunday."

3. A self-denying surrender of our whole selves to God—

It was no little act of self-denial, for the whole nation to leave their houses, and live in booths (not in tents of canvass, as we are apt to imagine; but in booths, made of the branches of trees) for seven days every year. In truth, this ordinance was so contrary to flesh and blood, that, from the days of Joshua, until after their return from the Babylonish captivity, the people never once observed it. But we must not draw back from any act of self-denial whatever. We must forsake all, and follow Christ: father, mother, houses, lands, yes, and life itself, must be hated by us in comparison of him. Though in the world, "we must not be of the world;" but "be crucified to it," and "have our conversation altogether in Heaven." This is our duty: "we must live not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and rose again." Nor must we account anything hard: we should rather "rejoice, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame or loss for the Lord's sake;" and "not count even our lives dear to us, if only we may honor him, and"finish our course with joy." At the discovery of their long-neglected duty through the instructions of Ezra, the people, even all the congregation of those who were come out of captivity, made themselves booths, on the roof of their houses, and in their courts, and in the courts of the House of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim: and there was very great gladness [Nehemiah 8:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 8.14-17)." O, that there were in us also such a heart! For I hesitate not to affirm, that the more self-denying readiness we manifest to obey the commands of God, the more solid joy shall we possess. Verily,"in keeping God's commandments there is great reward."

4. A joyful anticipation of the period more especially referred to—

Abraham, two thousand years before the Savior's advent, was filled with joy at the glimmering view of it which he beheld: and shall not we rejoice in the prospect of his second advent, when all the ends of his incarnation and death will be gloriously accomplished; and when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be gathered together as "one fold under one Shepherd?" "Woe be to us, if we are at ease in Zion," and altogether insensible to these great events! Were "the Ammonite and the Moabite forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, because they met not the Hebrews with supplies of bread and water, when they came out of Egypt [Deuteronomy 23:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 23.3-4);" what judgment, then, think you, may we expect, if we help not forward, to the utmost of our power, this glorious consummation, of which their deliverance from Egypt was but a faint shadow! Truly, God calls us to enter into the subject with our whole hearts, and to help it forward with our whole souls. "Thus says the Lord: Sing with gladness for Jacob: shout among the chief of the nations: publish you; praise you; and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel [Jeremiah 31:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.7)." This is addressed to us: and if it was the duty of Gentiles five hundred years before the first coming of Christ, what must it be now that his second advent is so near at hand? Come, Brethren; rise to the occasion: prepare to keep the feast. If you refuse to participate in this joy, no wonder "you have no rain"upon your souls; no wonder you are visited with plagues: but, if you will enter fully into the design of this mystery, then shall you "come with singing unto Zion, and with everlasting joy upon your heads."

[Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.20-21)

DISCOURSE 1265

THE MILLENNIAL GLORY

[Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 14.20-21). In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.

THE period to which the text refers is yet future. If there be in the preceding context much that is difficult to be understood, there is much also that is plain. It is here plainly foretold, that the Jews shall be restored once more to their own land verse 11; that those who oppose their settlement there, how numerous or powerful soever they may be, shall be destroyed verse 12–15; that both Jews and Gentiles shall embrace the faith of Christ verse 9; that those who refuse to do so, whether Jews or Gentiles, shall be visited with heavy plagues verse 16–19; and that, among those who do turn unto the Lord, there shall be such high degrees of holiness as have never yet been generally found in the Church of God The text.

By "the bells or bridles of the horses" may be meant the ornaments of horses, not merely of those used in war, but rather of those used for common purposes, whether of labor or pleasure. On them shall be inscribed "Holiness unto the Lord,"just as there was on the mitre of the high-priest [Exodus 28:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 28.36), in order to show, that the owners of the horses consider them as consecrated to the Lord, and desire to glorify God in the use of them. By this I understand, that, in all the comforts and conveniences of life, God will be acknowledged, as much as he formerly was in the most sacred ordinances and appointments.

Every service then will be, in fact, a religious service. In the tabernacle and the temple were "pots,"both of earth and brass, for the use of the priests; and "bowls" of gold for the blood of the sacrifices, which was to be sprinkled according to the prescribed forms. These were more holy as being used in the more immediate service of God. But in that day, "the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar," every meal being partaken of in the same devout spirit as a sacrifice, and every common office of life being performed as unto God himself. Nor will this obtain among the priests only, but among the people also, and that of every rank and order in society; for "every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord." The seething of the flesh of the sacrifices in the pots formerly belonged only to the priests [Leviticus 6:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev 6.25-28); but under the Christian dispensation all are priests, even "a royal priesthood [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.9). [Revelation 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 5.10), "and are therefore entitled to "seethe therein;" "the people who sacrifice" being in this respect as the priests themselves.

So universal will holiness then be, that "there will no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord." In the Promised Land the Canaanites retained a possession for many centuries, and were with great difficulty extirpated at last. At this time too there are in the Church many who dishonor their holy profession; nor can the tares be in any tolerable degree separated from the wheat; but at that day "Jerusalem shall be altogether holy [Joel 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 3.17)," and in the Lord's highway no unclean thing or person shall be found [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 35.8); [Isaiah 60:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 60.21).

From the text thus explained, we may see,

I. The true character of the Gospel dispensation—

The law was holy; and not the moral law only, but the ceremonial law also: for though, in comparison of the Gospel, it consisted only of poor and "beggarly elements," yet it tended to render sin odious, and to impress on the mind the fear and love of God. But the Gospel is yet more holy, being itself the substance of those things of which the law was only a shadow. The whole character of it is holiness:

1. It displays above all things the holiness of God—

Sec what an atonement was offered for sin! nothing but the blood of God's only dear Son could make satisfaction for it: What a holy God must he be, who required such a sacrifice!.

2. It proposes to us no lower pattern than God himself—

We are required by it to "be holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Far as we are from this, we must press forward for it, and rest in nothing short of it.

3. The holiness which it requires of us, it promises to us—

It makes not any one perfect in this life; but it delivers us from the dominion of all sin and transforms us into "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," and that "from one degree of glory to another, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18)." This it does for all who receive it aright: for "every one that has a good hope in Christ, purifies himself, even as he is pure [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3)."

To illustrate this yet farther, we shall mark,

II. The effect which it produces, in proportion as its influence is felt—

"It brings forth fruit in all the world:" and that fruit is of the richest kind, even as the fruit of Paradise itself. In the last day it will operate in its full extent: and now, if we cordially embrace it,

1. We shall regard all that we have as consecrated to the Lord—

Whatever we possess, whether for use or pleasure, "Holiness unto the Lord" will be inscribed upon it. Our bodies with all their members, our souls with all their faculties, our time, our property, our influence, all will be considered as talents received from him, and to be improved for him [Isaiah 23:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 23.18); [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.9).

2. We shall perform our most common services in a religious manner—

As the ungodly carry a worldly spirit into their most sacred duties, so, on the contrary, do the saints endeavor to do everything for God. This is shown us particularly in reference to religious servants, whose privilege it is in the most menial offices to serve the Lord Christ [Ephesians 6:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 6.5-8); In like manner all of us are to regard "our pots and cups as the bowls before the altar," and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do it all for the glory of God [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 10.31)."

3. We shall suffer no sin willingly to abide in our hearts—

The Canaanite will be expelled, and no truce be made with him. "The right eye will be plucked out, and the right hand or foot will be cut off." To the harboring of one sin the penalty of "Hell fire" is annexed: and no candidate for Heaven will knowingly subject himself to this fearful alternative [Mark 9:42-48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.42-48).

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of religion, which ought to shine before men—

2. Let none rest in any measure of religion short of that which will characterize the Millennial age.

MALACHI

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

[Malachi 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.2-3)

DISCOURSE 1266

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD'S GRACE

[Malachi 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.2-3). I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, Wherein have you loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.

THE scope of this prophecy is, to reprove the Jews for their impiety, after their re-establishment in their own land, especially for their neglect and profanation of God's ordinances. To give the greater weight to his reproofs, he begins with reminding them of the mercies which they, above all people, had received; and which they, therefore, should have requited in a far different manner.

To us, no less than to them, may this address be applied. In considering it, I shall be led to show you,

I. The distinguishing mercies which we have received at God's hands—

These may be contemplated,

1. In our national capacity—

It is in this view that our text must be primarily understood: for of the temporal condition of the Jews, as contrasted with that of the Edomites, the prophet evidently speaks; the Jews having been favored with the possession of Canaan, and restored to it after their temporary captivity in Babylon; while the Edomites had a very inferior portion in Mount Seir, to which, now that they were expelled from it, no efforts of theirs should ever be able to restore them Compare [Genesis 25:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 25.23) with verse 4, 5 and [Jeremiah 49:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 49.17-18).

And what nation under Heaven has ever been more highly favored than ours? What nation has more to be thankful for, than we have at this time; having for so long a period escaped the desolations with which other countries have been visited, and been so elevated among the kingdoms after so many and great perils After the war, during the French Revolution. The very constitution of our kingdom is such as no other nation in Europe enjoys, or is found capable of enjoying; so great is the liberty possessed by every subject of the realm, and such safeguards existing in the very constitution itself for the preservation of it. As for our religious advantages, they are of incalculable value. No nation under Heaven possesses either more light than we, or more liberty to walk, every one of us, according to the dictates of his own conscience. Not Israel itself was more highly favored than we, in the administration of divine ordinances, or in the communications of God's blessings by means of them.

2. In our individual capacity—

St. Paul evidently understood our text as comprehending this also: for, having quoted the words in proof of God's right to dispense his blessings to whoever he will, without any respect to their character, past, present, or future, he deduces from it this universal position: "So, then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy See [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.16)."

Let us see then, whether, as individuals, we have not received many distinguished mercies from God's hands. If we look around us, may we not see thousands whose lot differs widely from ours, in that we are living in the enjoyment of health, and peace, and perhaps of plenty too, while others are pining away, under disease of body, or trouble of mind, or want of even the necessities of life. Yet is not Esau Jacob's brother? and are not we thus favored solely through the good providence of our God?

But let us come to things of greater moment, even to those which affect our everlasting state. May I not say, that God has highly distinguished you, in that you have had, and that for the space of forty years, the Gospel ministered unto you, in all its freeness, and in all its fullness. If all the same truths have with the same fidelity been proclaimed in every place, whence is it that any stigma has been affixed to the ministrations which you attend? I have no wish to speak of others: but, respecting the Gospel as preached unto you, I am in duty bound to speak; and to say, before you and the whole world, that "I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," but "have declared unto you, as God has helped me, "the whole counsel of God." Yes, truly, "many kings and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to bear those things which you hear, and have not heard them." To some of you, too, I trust, the word has come with power, even to the quickening, and sanctifying, and saving of your souls; so that you are walking in the light of God's countenance, and in a prospect of his glory, while others around you are yet sitting in darkness, and perishing in their sins. Yes, I must further add, that many, who were once partakers of all the same advantages with yourselves, are now gone beyond the hope of redemption, and suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; while you are numbered with the saints of God, heirs and expectants of all the blessedness of Heaven. Yet, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" Are not those very persons, whose misery we have so much reason to bemoan, members of the same community with you; yes, perhaps of the very same family?

See, then, the truth of God's assertion in my text: "I have loved you, says the Lord."

Yet, while we contemplate these mercies, let us mark also,

II. Our insensibility in relation to them—

The question with which God's assertion was repelled by Israel may serve to show us how his distinguishing favors are regarded by us.

1. By some they are utterly disclaimed—

This is the plain import of that impious reply, "Wherein have you loved us?" The same kind of reply is made to every accusation which is brought by the prophet; and it invariably imports a denial of his assertions verse 6, 7 and [Malachi 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.17) and [Malachi 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.7-8); [Malachi 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.13-14). There is not anything more offensive to the proud heart of man, than to be told that God has dealt with him in a way of sovereign grace and love. Men will not hear of God's sovereignty: and, though they claim a right to dispose of their own things according to their own will, they deny that right to God. They affirm, that the idea of electing love is subversive of God's justice: as though man had any claim upon the justice of his God. We had no claim on his justice, as creatures: he might, if it had so pleased him, have reduced us to a state of non-existence, the very hour after he had formed us: how much less can. we have claim on his justice, as sinners! The very devils have as much claim on his justice as we: and if mercy did not rejoice over judgment, there is not one of us that would not, in one moment, be a partaker of their doom.

By many, it is supposed, that, to speak of an interest in God's electing love, must necessarily be an indication of the most insufferable pride. But who, I would ask, are lifted up with pride; those who acknowledge every blessing to be the unmerited gift of God; or those who imagine that God has had respect to some goodness in them, as the ground on which he has been constrained to distinguish them from others? Who, I say, are obnoxious to the charge of pride, they who give all the glory to God's free and sovereign grace; or they who arrogate to themselves some good qualities, as determining God in his selection of them in preference to others? If, of two stones lying in a quarry, a builder take one, and polish it with care for a conspicuous ornament to his edifice, and leave the other without so much as giving it any place in his building; has that favored stone any ground for glorying? Or, if a potter take of one lump of clay a portion, to make it a vessel of honor, while of another portion, equally good in itself, he makes a vessel into dishonor; has the one any reason to glory, or the other any reason to complain? This is Paul's own application of our text [Romans 9:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.19-21). One distinction indeed he makes; and it is of great importance that we should make it also; namely, that the vessels of honor are made so by Him; whereas the vessels of dishonor are made so by themselves [Romans 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.22). See the Greek; but this is clear, beyond a possibility of doubt, that it is not the person who refers everything to God as its Author, and acknowledges his obligation to His free and sovereign grace; it is not he, I say, that is to be accused of pride; but he who founds his hopes on some past or future good within his own bosom, as the determining cause with God for the bestowment of his blessings, and the procuring cause of them to his own soul.

Those, therefore, who, in the language of my text, deny the exercise of God's sovereign grace, are justly obnoxious to his heaviest displeasure.

2. By others they are received with sad indifference—

This is the least that the question in my text can possibly import: "You speak of God's love to me; but I need to be informed what evidence you have of it: for, if any instances of it have occurred, I have quite forgotten them."

Now, it is in this way that God's mercies are, for the most part, received by us. How little do we reflect on the blessings of a free government, which, as Britons, we possess in rich abundance! And how sadly are our personal and domestic comforts overlooked! But, not to dwell on matters of subordinate importance, how little are we sensible of the blessings of a preached Gospel? How many refuse to avail themselves of the advantages they enjoy! and how many make no better use of them than to lull their consciences asleep in sin! Even of those who, in the judgment of charity, are partakers of salvation, how few are impressed with this privilege as they ought to be! Little do they think of the awful state of the Esaus that are around them, and of the obligations they owe to God for his distinguishing love and mercy. My dear brethren, if our minds were in a proper state, we should scarcely find time to think of anything else but of the wonders of God's love to us in Christ Jesus, and of the privileges we enjoy as his redeemed people. Suppose an angel were sent down from Heaven to occupy our post, would he ever have occasion to put the question, "Wherein has you loved me?" No: he would never for a moment be insensible of God's love towards him. And, though we cannot hope to attain to the perfection of angels, this should, on the whole, be our state; more especially because our calls for gratitude infinitely exceed all that angels have ever experienced.

Let us learn, then, from hence,

1. To trace all our mercies to the proper source—

God's love is the true source of all. And if we were in the habit of tracing them to this, how sweet would our smallest and most common mercies appear! Truly, such a habit as this would be a foretaste even of Heaven itself. But the mercy which swallows up, as it were, every other, is the gift of God's only dear Son to die for us: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.16)." In this we are told, "God commends his love towards us [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.8);" referring to it as the most stupendous display of his love that ever was, or ever can be, exhibited to mortal man. On this, then, we should dwell with wonder and amazement: for no such mercy was ever given to the fallen angels; yet as creatures, they were our elder brethren: nor is the knowledge of him given to above one-sixth of the human race; yet are that vast majority descended from one common parent with us: nor, where his name is known, is his Gospel truly preached, probably not to one part in a hundred of the Christian world: and of those to whom it is ministered, how few receive it in truth! Yet, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" What thanks, then, do we owe to God, if it has been made the power of God to the salvation of our souls! Beloved brethren, trace you this to its proper source. God has loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn you: and wherein soever you differ from others, "it is He, and he alone, that has made you to differ."

2. To improve them for their proper end—

The Apostle tells us, "We love him, because he first loved us." And, truly, so it ought to be. The mercies of God ought so to affect our minds, as to make us "yield up our whole selves as living sacrifices unto him." This is "our reasonable service:" and to perform it should be the continued labor of our lives. What was it that wrought so powerfully on the heart of Paul, and made him so zealous in the service of his God? He tells us, "The love of Christ constrains me [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.14);" or, as the word imports, 'carries me away, like an impetuous torrent.' Thus, then, should it operate on us: and truly it would so operate, if we reflected on it as we ought. If we strove, as we ought, to "comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ, it would surely fill us with all the fullness of God [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.18-19)." I am perfectly persuaded, that the reason of our making such low attainments in religion is, that we forget to meditate on this glorious subject, and occupy our minds with considerations which tend only to depress them and to enervate all their energies. Let us turn our eyes from the world and from our various discouragements, to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and we shall soon be "changed by it into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.18)."

[Malachi 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.6)

DISCOURSE 1267

RELATIVE DUTIES TO GOD AND MAN

[Malachi 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.6). A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts.

THE unfolding and enforcing of relative duties, is a very essential branch of the Christian ministry; and conducive, in a variety of views, to the most important ends. If indeed the whole of religion were made to consist in the performance of those duties, or if men were urged to perform them in their own strength, or with a hope of meriting God's favor, then the foundations of Christianity would be sapped, and the whole fabric would fall to ruin. But, if they be set forth in order to show to the ungodly their transgressions, and their consequent need of mercy; or if they be inculcated on the believer in order that he may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior; no subject can be more weighty, or more deserving of our attention. But there is yet another view, in which the consideration of them may subserve the best of purposes. Men, however disposed they may be to limit the extent of their own duties, are easily led to acknowledge the obligations of others towards themselves. Hence, there being always a number of persons interested in discovering their own rights, and disposed to insist upon them; and every person having risen, or hoping to rise, from a subordinate relation to one invested with authority; the duties of every distinct relation are ascertained and approved. This is not the case with respect to the duties of men towards God. The authority there is all on one side, and obedience is wholly on the other. Hence all men feeling the same desire to limit and curtail the rights of their Governor, and to extend the boundaries of their own liberty, the laws of God are almost entirely superseded: disobedience to them is universally connived at, as though it were no evil; and the general welfare of society is made the ground and measure of all morality. Here then the relative duties may be introduced to great advantage; these being already admitted, serve as acknowledged principles, from whence we may argue; and the application of them to the duties of the first table is obvious and irresistible. This use of them God himself has taught us, as in many other passages, so especially in that before us; in illustrating which we shall propose for your consideration the following observations:

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the universe.

II. However attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God.

III. The performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it.

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the universe.

Reason, no less than Revelation, teaches us that a child owes subjection to his parent, and a servant to his master: nor is there any one so depraved as to controvert this general position, however indisposed he may be to act conformably to it in his own particular situation. What the laws of nature inculcate in the one case, is established by a particular compact in the other: and an habitual infringement of it is considered as a subversion of social order, and an inlet to universal anarchy. Still however there are limits, beyond which no human authority extends: and, when these are exceeded, resistance, rather than obedience, is our duty. But God's claim to honor and obedience knows no bounds. He is, in some sense, the Father of our bodies, which could not exist without his creating hand: but in a more eminent manner is he "the Father of our spirits;" because he forms them without the intervention of human agency, and endues them with powers which matter could not generate. Being the Creator of all, he is also, of necessity, the Lord of all; to whom every faculty and every power should be consecrated. The honor which we pay to parents is but a faint shadow of that reverence with which we are to approach him, and of that profound respect, which we are to entertain for his person and character, his word and will. The obedience which we yield to earthly superiors, relates chiefly to outward acts: but God has a right to control our inmost thoughts. We are to believe everything he says, because he says it; to love everything he does, because he does it; and to execute everything he enjoins, because he commands it. We not only may, but must, inquire into the injunctions of men, whether they be right in themselves, and whether a compliance with them be agreeable to the mind and will of God? But there is no room for such questions respecting any of the commands of God. If God say, "Abraham, take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him up; slay him with your own hand, and consume him to ashes;" there is no room for deliberation: Abraham has no right to gainsay the decree of Heaven; he is not at liberty to offer any objections: it is sufficient for him to know what the will of his Maker is; and then he must perform it instantly, without reluctance. Had the command been given by an earthly superior, there had been ample ground for hesitation, for expostulation, for disobedience: no parental, no magisterial authority should be regarded in such a case. But against a Divine command there never can be any ground for the exercise of carnal reason: a prompt, a steady, a determined acquiescence on our part, is our truest wisdom, and our bounden duty. Our obedience however is not to be that of a slave to an imperious and cruel master, but like that of a dutiful child to an affectionate and beloved parent. We ourselves consider the mind and disposition with which we are served, as affecting very materially the acceptableness of the service itself. That which is done for us grudgingly, and through mere constraint, is of very little value in our eyes: it is the willing, cheerful obedience that engages our esteem, and endears to us the persons actuated by such a spirit. Similar to this is the service which God requires. He justly expects that we should be like "the angels, hearkening to the voice of his word," and waiting for the slightest intimations of his will, in order to execute it with all possible readiness and despatch. We should come into his presence with the confidence of beloved children: we should ask from time to time, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" We should set about the duties of our calling as regularly as the most diligent servant prosecutes his accustomed labors: we should never think anything done, as long as there remains anything to be done. If an arduous service occur, we should not draw back from it, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel; but should rather address ourselves to it with increased energy, and regard it as a favorable opportunity of displaying our zeal and love. If we could be freed from his yoke, we should decline the offered liberty, and, like the servant under the law, request that our ear might be fastened to the door-post, in token that we account his service to be perfect freedom, and that it is our desire to continue in it to the latest hour of our lives. We should find our reward in our work, and our happiness in honoring and enjoying God. We may indeed without impropriety "have respect also to the recompense of the reward," which we shall receive in another world: but our principal incentives should be of a more unselfish and sincere nature: we should perform the will of God, because we love the very things which he prescribes; and because it is our highest ambition to please and glorify him.

But truth compels us to observe,

II. That however attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God.

Amidst all the depravity which has deluged the world, there may be found, in many instances, a conscientious regard to relative duties. If some have reason to complain of disobedient children and unfaithful servants, others can testify, that the persons so related to them are deserving of the highest commendations on account of their fidelity and affection. Even where spiritual religion is overlooked and despised, this attention to relative duties frequently obtains. A good natural disposition, united with a sense of honor, and a regard to interest, will often produce habits, which may provoke to emulation those, who profess to be actuated by the sublimer principles of the Gospel.

But where, except among the despised followers of Jesus, shall we find those who fulfill their duties to God? That many are punctual in some outward observances, is readily acknowledged. But we shall do well to remark, that the inquiry in my text does not relate to outward actions so much as to the inward dispositions of the mind; "If I be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of Hosts." Let our attention then be directed to this point: let us, in our self-examination, keep this in view. Has there been in our hearts an habitual fear of offending God? Has there been a holy reverential awe upon our minds whenever we have entered into his presence? Has there been an unwearied solicitude to please him, and a determination, through grace, to prove ourselves faithful to him in all things? Have we sought carefully to know his will; and then set ourselves diligently to perform it? Have we been afraid of wasting his time in vain unprofitable pursuits, and endeavored to lay out to advantage the talents he has committed to our care? Have we, together with the fidelity of a servant, combined the love and confidence of a child? Have we entered into his presence with joy, and made known our requests with a humble yet thankful assurance, that he would hear and answer our petitions? Have we cast our care upon him, not doubting but that he would care for us, and order everything for our good? Have we, at the same time, taken an interest in everything that relates to him? Have we been filled with grief and indignation, when we have beheld the contempt poured upon him by an ungodly world? And has it been a source of lively joy, if at any time we have heard his name exalted and his glory extolled? If we have felt towards him as duteous children, we must have considered ourselves as having a communion of interests with him; and must have participated in all these emotions, which the advancement or declension of his cause are suited to inspire.

Let us examine in this manner the conduct both of ourselves and others, and then answer, if we can, that pointed interrogation, "Where is mine honor?" Blind and partial as we are, we cannot be so blind or so partial, as not to confess, that, however attentive men may be to their relative duties, they are not mindful of their duty to God. There is doubtless a considerable difference between some and others: some have respect for religion, while others despise it; and some endeavor in a self-righteous way to please God, while others care not how much they provoke him to anger. But, as to the dispositions of a faithful servant and a dutiful child, there is not a person in the universe who feels them, except the few who have "entered in at the strait gate, and are walking in the narrow path" of evangelical obedience. All others prefer their own ease to God's service, their own will to God's precepts, their own interests to God's honor.

And what shall we say to these things? Shall we leave men to imagine that their punctuality in some duties will atone for their remissness in others? No: we must rather say, (what indeed we proposed as the third head of our discourse,)

III. That the performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it.

In one view indeed it must certainly be allowed, that the fewer laws any man transgresses, the less guilt he contracts: and that therefore he who obeys, though imperfectly and exclusively, the injunctions of the second table, is better than he who lives in the unrestrained violation of all the commandments. Nevertheless it is certain that obedience in some cases may be a great aggravation of our disobedience in others; inasmuch as it may argue a preference given to the creature above the Creator, and may therefore excite the fiercer indignation of a jealous God. More especially if the duties of the second table be exalted to the neglect of those of the first table, and obedience to the latter be pleaded as excusing our transgressions of the former, then our partiality becomes an awful aggravation of our guilt. For, what is this, but to raise altar against altar, to set God at variance with himself, and to "provoke to jealousy" the Holy One of Israel? We can scarcely conceive anything worse than such conduct as this. For, shall God be denied the honor which is paid to man? Shall he alone be treated with contemptuous neglect? Shall he be excluded from the minds of those whom he created and upholds? Shall all the wonders of redeeming love be requited in no better way than this? Shall we refuse to him the homage which we exact from our fellow-creatures, and which we even pay to those who are authorized to receive it? Would not God be justly indignant, if he were only placed on a footing of equality with men? How much more then, when he is degraded so far below them! Surely every mercy be has ever given to us, but especially the gift of his dear Son, will dreadfully enhance our guilt and condemnation, if our obligations to him do not operate to produce in us a reverential honor of him as our Father, and an unrivaled obedience to him as our Lord and Master.

This mode of arguing is very common in the Scriptures. God is pleased frequently to suggest the relation subsisting between himself and his people with the same view as in the passage before us. Sometimes he does it to raise our expectations from him; and at other times to show the reasonableness of his expectations from us. In the former view he says, "Which of you, if his child should ask for bread, would give him a stone? How much more then will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him!" In the latter view he says, "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" Precisely thus does he speak in the text; with this only difference; that the conclusion drawn from his statement is not merely an appeal to our reason, but a reproof for our misconduct. The interrogations are extremely pointed: they intimate a mind justly incensed: they express the highest indignation against us for refusing to our Maker what we concede to our fellow-worms: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is mine honor? if I be a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of Hosts."

We shall more easily enter into this idea, if we suppose a child or servant of our own fulfilling his duties with some considerable care to others, but violating all which he owed to us. If his attention to others were adduced in vindication of his neglect of us, should we not argue in the very same way that Jehovah does in the text? Should we be satisfied with his serving others, when he withheld his services from us? Should we not insist upon our superior title to his regards? Should we not represent the violations of his duty to us as more heinous, in proportion to the right which was vested in us by virtue of our relation to him? When he told us of what he did for others, should we not say, "But where is my honor? where is my fear?" Should we not consider his conduct as in the highest degree insolent and contemptuous, when we ourselves, who had an exclusive, or at least a superior, claim to his affection, were particularly selected as objects of his neglect? There can be no doubt: and therefore we may be well assured, that the very pleas which we are apt to urge in extenuation of our guilt, will one day be adduced as the greatest aggravations of it.

Permit me now to ask a question or two, in reference to the foregoing subject. Supposing that God should now call us to account, as certainly he will before long, and ask, What proofs we have given of our allegiance to him? What proofs have we to adduce? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that we have indeed respected his authority, that we have habitually conducted ourselves towards him as faithful servants and obedient children? Let us examine well our own hearts: let us not be hasty to conclude that all is well: it is easy to deceive ourselves; but we cannot possibly deceive God. Every act of our lives has been registered in the book of his remembrance; and we shall be judged, not by the partial verdict of our own self-love, but by the unerring testimony of truth itself. And if it be proved that our allegiance to God amounted to no more than "saying, Lord! Lord! without doing the things which he commanded," our Judge will pronounce upon us that awful sentence, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity!"

We cannot however conclude this subject, without suggesting some consolatory considerations—

To those who are conscious of having neglected God.

Our God and Father does not instantly disinherit the rebellious child, or exclude forever the disobedient servant: Onesimus may yet return, through the mediation of his heavenly Sponsor; and the Prodigal may yet be feasted on the fatted calf. Only let us confess our sins, and turn to God with humiliation and contrition; and we shall soon find, that "he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." Let us, like the penitents under the law, lay our hands upon the head of our Great Sacrifice, and transfer our guilt to Him, who takes away the sins of the world. Then shall we have no cause to fear the displeasure of an angry God: our iniquities shall be forgiven, and our sins be covered: and though unworthy in ourselves to obtain the smallest mercy, we shall be dealt with, not as servants merely, but as sons, and be made partakers of an everlasting inheritance.

[Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.8)

DISCOURSE 1268

GOD'S APPEAL TO SELF-JUSTIFYING SINNERS

[Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.8). If you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person? says the Lord of hosts.

SELF-VINDICATION is natural to fallen man: it began in paradise, as soon as ever sin entered into the world. "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," was Adam's excuse, when exculpating himself at the expense both of his wife and of God himself [Genesis 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.12). Eve, too, excused herself by casting the blame of her transgression upon the serpent who had beguiled her [Genesis 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.13). In all their descendants, the same propensity has shown itself, and often with a degree of vehemence amounting to indignation and disdain. In the time of the Prophet Malachi it prevailed to an extraordinary degree; or he at least records it with more than ordinary minuteness and force. He was inspired of God, to show the Jewish people their transgressions: but to every charge which he brought against them, they replied with a degree of petulance savoring of extreme impiety and obduracy. When God addressed by him the priests, as despising his name, they utterly denied the charge; and insolently asked of God himself, "Wherein have we despised your name?" And when he told them that they had offered polluted bread upon his altar, they challenged him to tell them when: "Wherein have we polluted you verse 6, 7." When the prophet complained of them as having "wearied the Lord with their words," they immediately asked, in the same contemptuous spirit, "Wherein have we wearied him [Mal. 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal. 2.17)." Even when God graciously invited them to return to him, saying, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you;" they deny that there was any necessity for such an invitation, saying, "Wherein shall we return [Malachi 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.7)." And when God tells them that they had robbed him, they reply, with undiminished effrontery, "Wherein have we robbed you [Malachi 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.8)."?And when God complains of all this, saying, "Your words have been stout against me; they still persist in the same impious strain, "What have we spoken so much against you [Malachi 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.13)." In every instance God substantiates his charge, by declaring wherein they had committed the offence imputed to them: but, in the words of my text he does it in a way which nothing but the most inveterate impiety could resist. He appeals to them, Whether they could deny either the conduct of which they were habitually guilty, or the construction which he put upon it? "If you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto your governor: will he be pleased with you, or accept your person? says the Lord of Hosts."

In opening to you these words, we shall consider,

I. The appeal of God to man—

Nothing can exceed the condescension of Almighty God, in his reasonings with sinful man. He here grounds his appeal to us,

1. On the standard which exists in our own consciences—

The Jews knew that God was to be served with the best of their flocks. His express command to them was, "If there be any blemish in the firstling of your herd or of your flock, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God [Deuteronomy 15:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 15.21)." To go in direct opposition to this command, they knew to be "evil:" they knew that it would, in fact, be a pouring of contempt on God himself; and justly did God denounce a curse on all who should so presumptuously sin against him verse 14.

Now we know the same, in relation to our spiritual sacrifices: we know that God requires the heart: and that whatever we present to him without the heart, is only to mock and insult him. It is an acknowledged truth, that to "draw near to God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him," is to offer him a sacrifice, which he can never accept [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 15.7-8).

Let us, then, examine our offerings by this test: and, if the services which we present to him be ignorant, formal, hypocritical, what do we, in fact, but commit, as far as we are able, the very same evil which obtained among the Jews, when they offered in sacrifice to God "the blind, the lame, and the sick?" That our services are ignorant, is but too clear: for we know not the true character of that God whom we profess to worship; nor how he is to be approached; nor what are the services we should render him. If we were duly enlightened on these subjects, it would be impossible for us to approach him as we do, or to conceive that he could ever he pleased with such services as we render him.

In all our services, we are formal. We are punctual, perhaps, in certain observances of man's invention; and should be greatly offended if any one omitted to comply with certain prescriptions relating to the posture of the body. But, as to the prostration of the soul, we are unconcerned about it; and judge that we have done our duty, if we have gone through the appointed round of bodily motions, though our mind have not accorded with the body in any part of the service.

In truth, our services have been hypocritical throughout. Had any one come into the house of God, and overheard our confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, he would have supposed that we were the most humble, spiritual, and devout persons in the universe: but had he been privy to the real state of our souls, how little would he have seen of humiliation in our confessions, or of fervor in our petitions, or of gratitude in our thanksgivings! He would, for the most part, have seen, that the whole was only a solemn mockery; and that, instead of being Israelites indeed, in whom there was no deceit, we were base hypocrites, in whom was no sincerity. Times without number we implore mercy as miserable sinners; but if any man were to express his thoughts of us in accordance with our confessions, we should be full of wrath and indignation against him. And, if God were to offer to hear and answer many of our prayers, especially those which we have presented for the conversion and renovation of our souls, we should be ready to pray them back with ten times more fervor than ever they were uttered. As for our thanksgivings, the whole state of our souls has shown that we fell nothing, and meant nothing, at the very time that we professed to mean so much and feel so much.

Now, let me ask, in the name of God himself, what reason you can have to think that such services should ever be accepted by him? If, indeed, he were like ourselves, and could see only the outward appearance, we might hope, that, being imposed upon and deceived, he would be pleased with us: but, when we bear in mind, that "he searches the heart, and tries the reins," and that "all things are naked and open before him," we must be sure that our very "sacrifices are an abomination in his sight."

2. On the standard which exists between man and man—

We are fond of reducing God and his services to this standard; and to infer, that, because we would not act in such or such a way towards each other, God can never deal so or so with us. This, however, is no proper standard at all; because we bear a very different relation to God from what any man can bear to us. But yet God condescends, on this occasion, to put himself on a footing with an earthly governor; and to ask, how even such an one would be pleased with the treatment which he receives at our hands? Now let us suppose, that, while professing allegiance to an earthly monarch, we were as lukewarm in his service as we are in the service of our God: that we showed no more zeal for his honor, no more concern for his interests, no more respect for his laws, than we have towards our heavenly Master; would he consider us as good, loyal, duteous, and loving subjects? Would our love to his enemies, and conformity to their wishes, create no jealousy in his mind, especially while we thought that our attentions to him were quite equal to his deserts?

Or, to bring the matter more home to ourselves: if a son of ours felt as indifferent towards us, as we do towards our God; or a servant were as little anxious to please us, as we are to please him: if, when he rose in the morning, he thought as little what work he had to do for us; and, when he went through the day, attended as little upon us; and, when he lay down to rest at night, felt as little dissatisfied with himself as we do with our conduct towards God; should we be pleased with him? Should we account ourselves well treated by him? Should we, when he was brought before us, commend him, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"

Now, if an earthly governor would not accept from us, or we from our own servants, such services as these, how can we suppose that God should be pleased with them? I think we shall scarcely venture to say that God is entitled to less at our hands than we are at the hands of our fellow-creatures: and therefore, according to this lowest of all standards, we are exceeding faulty, and may justly be condemned out of our own mouths.

If we have nothing to urge in reply to this appeal, let us attend to,

II. The obvious and necessary deductions to be made from it—

It is plain from hence,

1. That our defects are exceeding great—

If every service, of the kind we have been speaking of, is evil, what must we think of our whole lives, which have been spent either in open rebellion against God, or, at best, in a continued series of such services as these? To appreciate your state aright, I will not refer you to your more flagrant sins: I will set before you your very duties, yes, your best duties, your confessions, your prayers, your sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving: and I will take these, not in your private chambers only, where perhaps, from want of suitable helps, you have not been able to express, as you could wish, the feelings of your hearts; but in the very house of God, where all suitable expressions have been provided for you, and put into your mouths, if you had had but a state of mind suited to them: yet even there have the words been repeated by you without one corresponding emotion in your souls, and your Amen been added without the smallest concern whether God ever heard the prayer or not. Tell me, in the review of a life thus spent, what should be your estimate of your state before God? If you would have a very mean opinion of a servant who had so conducted himself towards you, what should be your judgment of yourselves, who have so acted towards God?

2. That all self-justification must be most offensive to God—

Suppose a servant, who had dealt with you as you have with God, were to applaud himself as deserving commendation at your hands; What would you think of him? What would you think of his respect for you, or of his views of his duty towards you? Would you not be offended with his estimate of your character and your rights? What then must God think of you, when, instead of loathing yourselves for your short-comings and defects, you are taking credit to yourselves for your fidelity towards him, and claiming a reward for that very conduct which has excited nothing in his breast but wrathful indignation? You will find in Scripture, that there is no sin whatever marked with more heavy displeasure than self-righteousness and self-applause. It was this, more than anything else, that sealed up the Jews under guilt and condemnation: they would "trust to their own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.30-33);" and therefore they were rejected by God; while the idolatrous, but self-condemning, Gentiles were admitted to his favor. So shall you also, yes, and every child of man, find it, both in this world and in the world to come: the self-condemning Publican shall be justified before God; but the self-applauding Pharisee shall be condemned.

3. That without a Savior we must all perish—

What has any one of us whereon to ground his hopes of acceptance with God? Our works will not even stand the test that we have established for our fellowship with each other; and how much less will they stand before the holy law of God? If, then, we have not a Savior to make an atonement for our sins, and to work out a righteousness wherein we may be justified, what hope have we? Truly, we have no more hope than Satan himself: for he may as well hope to satisfy divine justice, as we; or to merit Heaven by his own works, as we. The very thought of seeking Heaven by any righteousness of our own must be put away, as the most fatal delusion: and all of us, the best as well as the worst, must look to Christ alone, as "all our salvation and all our desire." Beloved brethren, I charge you before God to remember this: for no man can ever come to God but by Christ; "nor is there any other name given under Heaven whereby any man can be saved, but the one name of Jesus Christ." "In Him must all the seed of Israel be justified; and in Him alone must they glory."

4. That if any service of ours be ever accepted of our God, it must be entirely through our Lord Jesus Christ—

After what has been said respecting the imperfection of our works, can it be hoped that anything which we can do should ever find acceptance with God? Yes, if it be done for his glory, and not relied upon as a foundation of our hope before him. The services which we render to our governor are not perfect; yet are they pleasing to him, if they be done with a view to his honor and interest: so are the services which we ourselves receive from others most truly gratifying, when they are rendered from a principle of love. And God is infinitely gracious and condescending to accept our poor unworthy offerings, when they are presented to him in humility, and with a sincere desire to please and honor him. This is very strongly marked by God at the very time that be most strongly insists upon the necessity of presenting to him none but perfect offerings. Hear his words, in the 22d chapter of Leviticus: "You shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. But whatever has a blemish, that shall you not offer; for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whoever offers a sacrifice of peace-offerings unto the Lord, to accomplish a vow, or a free-will-offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, you shall not offer these unto the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the Lord." Here you would suppose, that to present such imperfect offerings as ours were vain: and so it would be, if we relied upon them in the smallest measure for our acceptance with God: but, if we rely altogether on Christ's perfect sacrifice for our justification from sin, and then present our imperfect offerings to God, as tokens of our love, they shall come up with acceptance on his altar, and be truly pleasing in his sight. This is what, in the very next words, he has expressly declared: "Either a bullock or a lamb that has anything superfluous or lacking in its parts, that may you offer for a free-will-offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted." Here you see the very distinction which your necessities require. If you would present anything to God towards your justification, you must bring only the perfect righteousness of Christ: but if you would do anything to glorify your God, your own poor services, mean and worthless as they are, shall be accepted of him for Christ's sake. And this is the very statement which is so frequently and so fully given us in the Gospel. Paul says, "By him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased [Hebrews 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.15-16)." Peter also speaks to the same effect: "You are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 2.5)." Be not discouraged, then, by the imperfection of your services: for, if only you do indeed set yourselves to seek the Lord, and endeavor to serve him with your whole hearts, he will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss; but will cast a veil of love over your imperfections, and crown you with his applause, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Only "be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and you may be assured that "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

[Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.11)

DISCOURSE 1269

THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES

[Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.11). From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles: and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts.

THROUGHOUT all the prophetic writings we shall find the predicted abandonment of the Jews followed by a promise respecting the future call of the Gentiles. It should seem as if God intended by this to provoke his people to jealousy, according as he had before intimated by Moses, in order that by any means he might stir them up to deprecate his threatened judgments. In the passage before us, Jehovah complains of the extreme impiety of the Jewish nation. Among the priests themselves, who should have been an example to others, such was the selfishness and utter destitution of every religious principle, that none were to be found who would even shut the temple doors for nothing, or kindle a fire upon his altar but for their own temporal advantage. God therefore tells them, that he would "no more accept an offering at their hands." But would he therefore be destitute of a people, and be forgotten in the world? No: "for" he would take to himself a people from among the heathen, among whom such offerings should be presented to him as he would accept, and "his name," which the Jewish people had so dishonored and despised, "should be great among them to the ends of the earth." Thus would he make their apostasy subservient to the good of others, or, as Paul expresses it, "the fall of the Jews should be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them should be the riches of the Gentiles [Romans 11:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.11-12)."

In further considering this prophecy, shall notice,

I. What is implied in it—

We may see here by implication,

1. The intended abolition of the Mosaic law—

Sacrifices and incense were to be offered at Jerusalem alone, and in the temple, in which God had chosen to place his name there [Deuteronomy 12:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 12.10-14). But in the prophecy before us it is intimated, that incense and offerings should be presented to the Lord in every place; which could not be without a disannulling of the commandment before given. Of course, with this one commandment must the whole law be abrogated, because the whole priestly office, in all its most important operations, would be superseded. Nor is this an inference of mine only: it is drawn by an inspired Apostle from premises precisely similar. God had foretold, by David, that a new order of priesthood should arise, even one after the order of Melchizedek. This would of necessity militate against, and supersede, the established priesthood; that which was predicted being to arise from the tribe of Judah, while that which had been established was confined to the tribe of Levi. From hence the Apostle infers the total abolition of the Levitical priesthood, and of the whole law with which it was connected [Hebrews 7:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 7.11-14); and the same inference is plainly deducible from the prediction contained in our text.

This observation shows how mistaken the Jews are in thinking their ceremonial law to be of perpetual obligation; since their own prophets frequently, and in the plainest terms, intimated, that it was intended only for a season, to prepare the way for a better and more spiritual dispensation: and, in conversing with the Jews, it will be well to show them this from their own Scriptures, as Paul himself has done, in the most satisfactory manner, in his Epistle to the Hebrews.

2. The nature of that worship which alone is acceptable to God—

Of the ceremonial observances, when unattended with a spiritual frame of mind, God himself has frequently spoken in the most contemptuous terms See [Isaiah 1:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 1.10-14). [Jeremiah 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 6.20). [Amos 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 5.21-23); The temple itself, as the first martyr Stephen informed the Jews, was despicable in God's eyes, if its ordinances were not administered in a becoming manner [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.1-2) with [Acts 7:48-50](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 7.48-50). It is the incense of a devout spirit, and the offering of a pure heart, that God approves: and wherever these are presented to him, there will he give manifest testimonies of his favorable acceptance. This is plainly intimated in the prophecy before us; and by our Lord himself it is unequivocally declared to the Samaritan woman; "Woman, believe me, the hour comes when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him [John 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.21); [John 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 4.23)."

This is a point that deserves attention from us, as much as from the Jews. We, no less than they, are apt to rest in external observances, and to think that we serve God, if we perform some outward act which he prescribes. But we must never forget that he looks at the heart, and estimates all our services entirely by that: "If we draw near to him with our lips, while our heart is far from him, we worship him in vain [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 15.8-9)."

But to enter more fully into the prophecy, we must notice,

II. What is expressed in it—

It announces clearly,

1. The calling of the Gentiles—

It is surprising that the Jews should not have seen that the Gentiles were, in God's time, to be called into his Church. The prophecies relating to this subject were innumerable: yet not even the Apostles themselves, for several years after the day of Pentecost, were able to enter into their import, or to acquiesce in the purposes of the Most High. It will not be unprofitable to turn to a few passages in the Psalms, and in the Prophets, relating to this event [Psalm 22:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.27); [Psalm 72:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.11). In [Psalm 98:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 98.1-3). it is spoken of as if it were already accomplished. See also [Isaiah 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 11.9); [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.6); [Isaiah 49:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.22-23) and [Zechariah 8:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 8.20-22); We may consult also some passages adduced by the Apostles in relation to it [Acts 15:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.14-17). [Romans 15:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 15.9-12); What can be more clear? Even the text alone, if there had been no other passage, would have been sufficient to establish this point beyond a doubt. How strange then is it, that, even to this hour, the Jews should not be able to see in us the accomplishment of their own prophecies! But it has been well said, that prejudice has neither eyes nor ears; nor can any evidence suffice, without the operation of divine grace, to bear down its influence. We see this in relation to the Jews and their Scriptures; and we must not be stumbled, if we see it in Christians also, notwithstanding the superior light which they enjoy.

2. The state of the world when that event shall take place—

"God's name will then be great," in every place, and in every heart. The regard paid to him will no longer be formal and fictitious: it will be spiritual and real, from the inmost soul. All his perfections will be then adored: all his dispensations will be received with the profoundest reverence, as the counsels of unerring wisdom, and as the fruits of unchanging love. The name of Christ especially, O how precious will that be! when all the glory of the Godhead is beheld in his face, and all the treasures of divine grace are received through him: truly, as the prophet has said, he will in that day "be exalted and extolled, and be very high." That this will be the case in the latter day, may be seen by what took place in the apostolic age. It may be farther seen in what is yet daily realized in our own hearts: and so far will it be from being diminished by the further diffusion of divine light, that in that day "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days;" and "the knowledge of the Savior's glory will be, no less in depth than in extent, as the waters that cover the sea".

This subject may be yet further improved—

1. For the edification of our own souls—

Let us see how far our calling has been productive of suitable effects. What is the estimation in which our Savior is held by us? and, What are the offerings which from day to day we are presenting before him? Truly if we view him aright, all other things are as dung and dross in comparison of him: and, if we are serving him aright, our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, are sanctified unto him, as a reasonable service [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.1).

2. For the encouragement of our exertions in behalf of others—

This prophecy must be fulfilled in all its extent. Whatever difficulties may lie in the way, they shall all vanish, as soon as the Lord's time is fully come. The evening shades may in appearance be more and more obscuring the horizon; but "in the evening time it shall be light." As instruments, we may be but weak: but this need not discourage us. We are not weaker than was the rod whereby Moses wrought all his miracles. If God be pleased to make use of us, "the depths of the sea shall become a way for the ransomed to pass over;" and "the rock shall pour forth its streams to give drink to the chosen people of the Lord." "The Lord will work; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

[Malachi 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.2)

DISCOURSE 1270

REPENTANCE GLORIFYING GOD

[Malachi 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.2). If you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.

THE whole Scripture bears witness, that "God wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." For the advancement of this object, nothing is omitted; but every argument that can influence the human mind, whether in a way of terror or desire, is adduced. In the passage before us, the whole people of Israel, and the priests in particular, are addressed. Their sins had been very aggravated: the offerers and the priests had been alike implicated; and in my text they are all called to repentance See [Malachi 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.7-8); [Malachi 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.13-14). The admonition here given them is extremely solemn. In it we notice,

I. The duty prescribed—

This, in general terms, was repentance [Joshua 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 7.19), which does all that a sinner can do to glorify that God, whom, by his past iniquities, he has dishonored. "It gives glory to God's name," and honors every one of his perfections.

1. His holiness—

The Law of God is holy: it is a transcript of the mind and will of God himself: and every penitent expresses his perfect approbation of it, and his shame and sorrow on account of his numberless violations of it Here his views and feelings may be stated.

2. His justice—

God has denounced his judgments against every violation of his law. And the penitent acknowledges from his inmost soul his desert of those judgments. He attempts not to extenuate his guilt; but confesses, that death, everlasting "death, is the just wages of his sin".

3. His mercy—

On God's mercy the penitent casts himself, as Benhadad did upon the mercy of the king of Israel; "going before him with a rope round his neck, and sackcloth on his loins;" and relying simply on the compassion of him against whom he had warred, and whose captive he was 1 Kings 20:31-32.

4. His truth—

The penitent lays hold on the promises which God has made to returning sinners, and to Christ, "in whom all the promises of God are yes and amen." He looks to the Savior as having died for him; and he pleads before God the merit of his blood; of "His blood, which cleanses from all sin".

This is genuine repentance, such as is prescribed under the Christian dispensation: nor will any man, who truly "lays to heart" his past sins, be satisfied with anything less: Nor will anything less prevail, to avert,

II. The judgment threatened—

God declared, that, if his people would not give glory to him, "he would curse their very blessings:" yes "he had cursed the offenders already, because of their impenitence." Now, it is a fact, that God has inflicted a curse upon the whole world; not only by temporal judgments of various kinds, but by turning their very blessings into a curse. This he has done in relation to,

1. Their temporal blessings—

Behold men in the possession of health, and wealth, and all those things which the carnal mind affects; and say, what use they make of these benefits. They are all employed as occasions and instruments of sin; and involve the possessors of them in far greater iniquity than they would have been able to commit if these blessings had been withheld from them. The like evil accrues also from their domestic blessings, Men seek for happiness in the married state, and in the increase of their families. But, if we look through the world, we see little but misery arising out of these relations; husbands and wives, parents and children, only embittering each other's life; and proving, in too many instances, no better than curses to each other.

2. Their spiritual blessings—

God has given his dear Son to die for men; his Holy Spirit to instruct them; and his holy Gospel to make known to them all the provisions of his grace and love. But how are these received? In every place where the Gospel comes, divisions are created; and the great mass of the people make it an occasion of offence. Even Christ himself is made "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;" over which men fall, to their utter ruin [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 8.14-15). [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.34-35). [Matthew 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.6). And the monuments of grace, whom God raises up in different places, are treated with scorn and derision; so that the very means which God has used for the salvation of men, become the occasions of their heavier condemnation. Our blessed Lord declared this to be the effect of the blessings given to the people of Capernaum: they were "lifted up to Heaven in their privileges, and were cast down the deeper into Hell" for their abuse of them [Matthew 11:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.21-24). And this, alas! is the unhappy portion of the great mass of those to whom the tidings of salvation are sent: they will not repent, but will still go on in their wickedness: and the greatest blessing that God has ever given to them becomes their heaviest curse.

Learn then,

1. What is the proper object of a Christian's ambition—

You should not be content to avoid gross and open sin: you should seek to "glorify your God [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.20);" and if you have not done this by a course of holy obedience, you should at least endeavor to do it by a course of penitential sorrow, and by a due improvement of those blessings which God has given to you in his Gospel [Jeremiah 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 13.15-16).

2. What is the proper object of a Christian's hope—

Only walk with God as his redeemed people, and you shall have all imaginable blessings from your God: as he has said, "The faithful man shall abound with blessings [Proverbs 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.20)." Nay more: as for his people of old "he turned the curses of Balaam into blessings to them [Nehemiah 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 13.2)," so will he do to you: your trials, your troubles, your losses, your very temptations, shall be the means of weaning you more and more from this world, and perfecting the work of divine grace in your souls [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3-5), and bringing you into a state of nearer access to God, and preparing you for higher degrees of glory; according to that saying of Paul, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.17)." This, brethren, may be your assured hope, if only you will serve your God aright: such "showers of blessings shall be poured out upon you [Ezekiel 34:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.26)," and so greatly will God magnify himself in your salvation [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 1.20). Only do you glorify him here, and "he will be glorified in you" to all eternity [2 Thessalonians. 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 1.10).

[Malachi 2:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.5-7)

DISCOURSE 1271

THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE

[Malachi 2:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.5-7). My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear with which he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

THE priests, in the days of Malachi, were extremely degenerate. It was to them principally that the prophet addressed himself, because to them principally was owing the degeneracy of the people. In the preceding chapter he complains of them as despising God, and polluting his altar, and offering to him such worthless sacrifices as they would not have dared to offer to an earthly governor; yes, and as so venal, that "not one among them would shut the doors of the temple for nothing, or kindle a fire on his altar for nothing [Malachi 1:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 1.7-11)." In this chapter, after calling them to repentance verse 1, 2, he contrasts their conduct with that of those to whom the priesthood was first committed; such as Aaron, and Eleazar, and Phinehas, whom he designates by the name of Levi, from whom they sprang. The piety of those early priests he describes in the words of my text; and then, with a special reference to the terms used in that description, he addresses the priests of his day, saying, "But you are departed out of the way: you have caused many to stumble at the law: you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts."

The description given of the Jewish priesthood, at the period of their first appointment, will serve to show us what the Christian priesthood should be. In it we see the minister of the Gospel drawn, as it were, at full length. We see,

I. His obligations—

With Levi, the Jewish priesthood, "God had made a covenant of life and peace"—

At the time that the people turned aside to worship the golden calf, Moses gave commandment, that they who were on the Lord's side should gird on their swords, and go through the camp, slaying every one, even his nearest relatives, if he should find them in the act of idolatry: and the tribe of Levi in particular obeyed with promptitude this trying injunction, and executed without any partiality this severe decree [Exodus 32:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 32.26-28). As a reward for this ("for this fear with which Levi feared him"), God gave to that tribe the priesthood in perpetuity: "Of Levi he said, Let your Thummim and your Urim be with your holy one; who said unto his father and to his mother, 1 have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed your word, and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your judgments, and Israel your law: they shall put incense before you, and whole burnt-sacrifice upon your altar [Deuteronomy 33:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 33.8-10)." The same grant was re-renewed to Phinehas, on account of his zeal in slaying a prince of Israel, who, in the sight of all the congregation, had taken a Midianitish woman to his tent [Numbers 25:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 25.6-8); [Numbers 25:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 25.11-13). "The covenant of an everlasting priesthood" given to him, was that which, in my text, is called "a covenant of life and peace." And to that tribe was the priesthood confined, even to the latest ages; they alone being consecrated by God to that high office, and having God himself for their portion; while all the other tribes had their portion allotted out of the Promised Land [Numbers 18:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 18.20-21).

The Christian priesthood, in like manner, are consecrated to the special service of the altar—

Every pious minister has been truly "called of God, as was Aaron;" and every one, at his ordination, expressly avows his persuasion, that he has been moved by the Holy Spirit to take the office of the ministry upon him. Every such minister has entered into covenant with God at his altar, engaging to renounce all worldly pursuits, and to dedicate himself exclusively to the work he has undertaken. Of all engagements that any man can enter into, this is the most solemn: for by this act he makes himself responsible for all the souls committed to his charge, and must answer with his own soul for the blood of everyone who perishes through his neglect [Ezekiel 33:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.6-9). Paul, under a sense of his deep responsibility, said, "A dispensation is committed to me: and woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel [1 Corinthians 9:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 9.16-17)." And "the same necessity is laid on" every minister of Christ; who, by his own solemn engagement, is bound to disregard even life itself, in the discharge of this all-important duty [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 20.24).

In the description of the Jewish priests, a Christian minister may further see,

II. His office—

The Jewish priests were "messengers from God" to all the tribes of Israel—

They were to study the law of God, and to teach it unto others; at the same time exemplifying it both in their hearts and lives. To them the people were to apply for information; and they were to give their instructions with simplicity and godly sincerity: "the law of truth was to be in their mouth, and no iniquity was to be found in their lips." At the same time, they were so to "walk with God in peace and equity," that their whole life might be a visible lesson to the people, of all that God required of them.

Such "messengers" are the Christian priesthood—

Ministers should not only study the Gospel, but be able to declare it from their own experience; saying, "What my ears have heard, my eyes have seen, and my hands have handled, of the word of life, that same declare I unto you [1 John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 1.1-3)." In truth, brethren, "we are ambassadors from God:" we come in the name, and stand in the very place, of God himself. We bring to you from him "a covenant of life and peace [Ezekiel 37:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.26-27). Mark the agreement of this with the text;" we set before you the terms on which he will accept you to his favor: and "we beseech you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.18-20)." The word which we deliver is God's, and not our own; and "it must be received, not as our word, but God's [1 Thessalonians. 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 2.13)." And what we deliver with our lips, we are bound to exemplify in our lives, so as to be living "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men [2 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 3.3)." We should ourselves be living witnesses of its excellency and power, so as to address you in the words of Paul; "Whatever you have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you [Philippians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.9)." Nor should you account it any indignity to look up to us for information, and to "receive the word at our mouth." True, you have the Scriptures in your hands; and by them should you "try every word that proceeds from us [1 Thessalonians. 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.21). [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.1);" but, whatever we deliver in accordance with them must be received by you as from God himself: for be assured, "if you despise it, you despise not us who deliver it, but God himself" who revealed it [1 Thessalonians. 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 4.8) with [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 10.16).

In the discharge of this office, God gives him many promises for,

III. His encouragement—

The Jewish priests were instruments in God's hands, to "turn many from iniquity"—

God had promised to all his faithful servants, that, though they should not all be crowned with equal success, no one of them should labor in vain. And this he casts in the teeth of the false prophets: "I have not sent these prophets; yet they ran: I have not spoken unto them; yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings [Jeremiah 23:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 23.21-22)."

But far greater encouragement is given to us under the Christian dispensation—

The Gospel is far more powerful than the law. It is, by way of eminence, "the rod of God's strength [Psalm 110:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 110.2);" and has been in every age "the power of God unto salvation, to all who truly believed it [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.16)." Paul, by means of it, "turned multitudes from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.18)." To the Thessalonian Church he could make his appeal: "You see what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come [1 Thessalonians. 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 1.9-10)." And are not we also assured, that, if we "take heed to ourselves and to our doctrine, we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us [1 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.16)."

Behold, then, what encouragement is here! Were we instrumental only to the saving of one soul, it would well repay a whole life of labor. Yet may we hope to "turn many unto righteousness," if we faithfully discharge our high office; and, as the fruit of our labors, to have "many for our joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day 1 Thessalonians. 2:19-20."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have taken, or are about to take, upon themselves the sacred office of the ministry—

You have seen what holy and useful priests there were under the law: and shall we, whose employment is so much more spiritual, be less distinguished under the Gospel? Think, I pray you, of your obligations: your offices: and your encouragements; and "give yourselves wholly to these things," that your profiting may appear unto all. At the same time, bear in mind your fearful responsibility: for of all people under Heaven, none are so contemptible in the sight both of God and man, as those who violate their covenant-engagements, and mind the fleece only, instead of attending to their flocks verse 8, 9 with [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 2.30). This subject should be touched with a due regard to the age and authority of the preacher.

2. Those who desire to derive benefit from the ministry of the Gospel—

If your ministers must be careful in the discharge of their duty, so must you also in the discharge of yours: and if they have need to fear lest they contract additional guilt by the neglect of their duty; so have you, lest you, by not paying due attention to the word, bring upon yourselves an aggravated condemnation. Capernaum, which was exalted to Heaven in its privileges, was cast the deeper into Hell for its abuse of them. Yes, even Sodom and Gomorrah will have a less severe doom at the day of judgment, than they will who harden themselves against the Gospel of Christ. Remember, you too have entered into covenant with God: and you too have your proper offices to sustain and execute, if you will approve yourselves God's faithful servants. May you then know the day of your visitation! and may we so preach, and you hear, that we may all rejoice together forever in the great day of the Lord Jesus!

[Malachi 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.1-3)

DISCOURSE 1272

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT

[Malachi 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.1-3). Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his people, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appears? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

THE goodness and long-suffering of God are often made an occasion of profane derision and atheistical contempt. Because he does not instantly interpose to vindicate the honor of his injured Majesty, many will deny his interference in the concerns of men, and his determination to punish sin in a future world. We are assured that such scoffers will be found in the latter days, who will insultingly cry, "Where is the promise of his coming [2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.3-4)." And such there have been in every age and place. In the days of Malachi there were many who "even wearied God" by their impious language: they said, that God delighted in the wicked as much as in the good; and denied that he would ever put any difference between them; "Where," said they, "is the God of Judgment [Malachi 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 2.17)." It was in answer to that question that the Lord Jesus Christ inspired the prophet to announce his advent in the flesh, and to declare the discriminating effects that should be produced by it.

Let us notice what he says respecting,

I. Our Lord's advent—

Jesus is here described under the most august titles—

He is "the Lord," the supreme Ruler and Governor of Heaven and earth, "the Lord of all [Acts 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.36)," even "Lord of lords, and King of kings [Revelation 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 17.14)." Yet, notwithstanding his equality with the Father as God, he "assumes the form of a servant, and comes as "the Messenger of the covenant." He made a covenant with the Father for us, and himself became "the surety of that covenant [Hebrews 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 7.22); [Hebrews 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 8.6)," pledging himself to God, that our part should be performed, and to us also, that God's part should be fulfilled. This covenant he confirmed and ratified with his own blood [Luke 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 22.20). [1 Corinthians 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 11.25); and he "calls us into the bonds of it," assuring us, that it is "ordered in all things and sure," and that all the blessings of it shall be imparted to those who believe in him. In this office he was "an object of desire and delight" long before he came into the world: He was "the desire of all nations [Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Haggai 2.7);" not indeed that all actually sought and delighted in him; but he was the joy of all that knew him; they who saw his day, though at ever so great a distance, rejoiced in it [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 8.56); and if all the earth had known his office and character, they would have been like-minded with those, who "waited for him as the consolation of Israel," and "looked for redemption in Jerusalem [Luke 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.25); [Luke 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.38)."

The circumstances of his advent also are minutely foretold—

He was to be preceded by a herald, or harbinger, who was to announce his speedy approach, and "to prepare" the minds of men for his reception. This messenger was John, who had the distinguished honor of pointing him out as that very "Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world [John 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.23); [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.29)."

The temple was the place to which in a more especial manner he was to come: yes, it was while the second temple was yet standing, that he was to come. And thither was he brought at the purification of his mother, when that holy patriarch, Simeon, took him up in his arms, and blessed God for permitting him thus to embrace the promised Savior [Luke 2:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.27-29). It was at the temple also that his parents found him conversing with the doctors when he was but twelve years of age: and, when his mother expressed the sorrow that she and her husband had felt while seeking him, he answered, (doubtless in reference to this and similar prophecies,) "Don't you know that I must be at my Father's business?" It was in the temple that he delivered many of his instructive discourses, and wrought many stupendous miracles, and he repeatedly purged it from the profanations which the venal priests had allowed [Matthew 21:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.12-14); [Matthew 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 21.23).

His advent, however, though so long predicted, was to be "sudden," as in fact it was: for though there was then a general expectation of his arrival, yet the manner of his appearance was so contrary to the carnal notions which were entertained respecting him, that he was overlooked; and, instead of being welcomed as the Messiah, was rejected as an impostor.

The repetition of this prediction in the close of the verse is remarkable as being intended to evince the certainty of the event predicted.

The prophet, having thus foretold the Messiah's advent, proceeds to declare,

II. Its diversified effects—

As the characters of those, to whom he was to come, were very various, so his advent was to prove,

1. Discriminating—

Many in that and every age have professed a great regard for the law of God, while they have really hated it in their hearts, and have shown their utter enmity to God under the semblance of zeal for his honor. On the other hand, many, who have been despised of their fellow-creatures on account of some enormities they may have committed, have really possessed a broken and contrite heart, and have proved incomparably more willing to submit to Jesus, than any self-applauding Pharisee ever was. Now to discover these hidden dispositions of the heart was one intent of our Lord's coming: "He was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 2.34-35)." And this was the very effect produced by him; for the Scribes and Pharisees, filled with a conceit of their superior knowledge and goodness, cast him out with abhorrence, while many publicans and harlots believed on him to the saving of their souls. This very effect also still follows from the preaching of his gospel; the precious are separated from the vile, and men, though unconscious of it themselves, are led to manifest their real characters, as careless Gallios, atheistical scoffers, proud Pharisees, or humble believers.

2. Purifying—

Some there were in our Lord's day, who, the more they were rubbed with the fuller's soap, and heated by the refiner's fire, were the more freed both from their outward filthiness and their inward depravity: the apostle tells us of many, who, having once abandoned themselves to the most infamous lusts, were "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God 1 Corinthians 6:11." So at this time many of the "sons of Levi," not ministers only, but people also (for all believers are now "priests unto God") are "purified as silver and gold, and offer to the Lord their offerings in righteousness." And it is no small consolation to them to know, that, while they are in the furnace, the Refiner himself "sits" over them, watching the process with all due solicitude, and taking care that they shall lose nothing but their dirt and dross.

3. Destructive—

A "refiner's fire" will consume the dross, and "fullers' soap" will destroy the filth, of that to which it is applied: so will our Lord eventually destroy many of those to whom he comes; He will prove to them no other than "a stumbling-block, and a gin, and a snare [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 8.14)." When he appeared in the days of his flesh, how many were there that could not "stand" the trial! their prejudices were excited, their enmity called forth, their hearts hardened, their sins multiplied. Thus it is also in this day: Christ comes, in the preaching of his Gospel, and "sits as a refiner and purifier of silver:" but do all, to whom his as a refiner and purifier of silver:" but do all, to whom his word is preached, approve themselves to be pure gold? Would to God that this were the case! But, alas! the greater part show themselves to be but "reprobate silver," or mere dross; who, instead of being purified and rendered "meet for their Master's use," are only "as vessels of wrath, fitted for everlasting destruction [Romans 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.22)."

Let two questions close this interesting subject—

1. What reception have you given to Christ since his first coming?

Ministers are sent, like John, to prepare his way; they are "a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an highway for our God!" Let me then ask, Are you "seeking this Lord?" Are you "delighting in him as the Messenger of the covenant?" Do you open your hearts to him as "his temple," and invite "the King of glory to enter in?" Are you welcoming him even under the character of a refiner, and saying, 'Put me, Lord, into any furnace, so that I may but come out of it purified as gold?" Is it your one desire and endeavor to "offer unto him your offerings in righteousness?" and do the sacrifices of prayer and praise ascend up daily from the altar of your hearts, inflamed by fire that you have received from Heaven? This, this is the reception which he should meet with; God grant that he may be thus precious to all our souls!

2. What preparation have you made for his future advent?

It is no less certain that He will come again, than that he has already come. Nor will his advent be less "sudden" than at his first arrival: yes rather, as Noah's flood, it will come wholly unexpected by the world at large [Matthew 24:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 24.37-39). "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appears?" That will be a discriminating day indeed: all that have ever lived will have "the counsels of their hearts made manifest;" and the tares shall then be separated from the wheat, and the sheep from the goats. Alas! how will his fire then burn up the ungodly Compare [Malachi 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.1). [Nahum 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Nah 1.6). [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 6.15-17). and how strict a scrutiny must every one undergo, before he shall be finally approved 1 Corinthians 3:13-14. Brethren, are you ready? Are you "prepared to meet your God?" Have you been so purified from the love of sin, that you are now "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?" Are you so "seeking and delighting in Jesus" now, that you can give up your account to him with joy and not with grief? O say not, Where is the God of judgment? Think not that he delights in any who commit iniquity: but know that "he will come even as a thief in the night;" and that it is to those only who look for him, that he will appear to their everlasting salvation [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.28).

[Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.6)

DISCOURSE 1273

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

[Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.6). I, the Lord, change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.

THERE is not anything in the whole creation that is in itself immutable. The angels indeed are, by God's gracious favor, established, so that they are no longer in any danger of sinning: but the fall of the apostate angels sufficiently shows, that the highest creatures are changeable in themselves; and that their stability, whatever it be, is derived from, and dependent on, the power that formed them. As for man, he is in a state of continual change: some of us are yet in a state of childhood: some are grown up to maturity: some have arrived at the period when nature hastens to decay, and when their great last change is near at hand: but all are changing every day, every hour, every moment: like the earth which we inhabit, we have our revolutions of day and night, summer and winter; and in a short period shall undergo an infinitely greater change than any we ever yet experienced. But there is one who changes not; even Jehovah, from whom all other beings derive their existence. This immutability he claims as his prerogative, and mentions it as a source of unspeakable blessings to his people. In considering his words, we shall notice,

I. The immutability of God—

The gods of the heathen were frail and perishable, being wood and stone: but Jehovah is immutably the same,

1. In his essence—

There is nothing from without that can effect a change upon him; because all things were formed by him, and depend upon him for their agency and existence. Nor is there any principle within him that can operate to produce a change; because a contrariety of principle would argue imperfection, and consequently be a denial of his Godhead. Besides, if he were to change, it must be either for the better or the worse: if for the better, he was not perfect before; and if for the worse, he would not be perfect now: in either case he cannot be God. His very name, Jehovah, implies and supposes immutability.

2. In his perfections—

He ever was, and ever will be, the same holy, and just, and good, and merciful Being, that he now is. He was not more just, when he condemned the fallen angels; nor more merciful, when he sent his only-begotten Son into the world. In the one case he displayed his justice, and, in the other, his mercy, more than he had done before; but his perfections in either case remained the same. "He is a rock: his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 32.4)."

3. In his purpose—

Everything is done agreeably to "his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 1.11); [Ephesians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.11)." God is said indeed to have "repented that he had made man [Genesis 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.6)," and that he had raised Saul to be King [2 Samuel 15:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 15.35); he also revoked the sentence denounced against Nineveh [Jonah 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.4); [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jonah 3.10), and Hezekiah [Isaiah 38:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.1); [Isaiah 38:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 38.5); on these accounts he may be thought to have altered his original purpose: but he speaks only after the manner of men, who change their conduct in consequence of a change their conduct in consequence of a change of mind: God knew from the beginning what he would do [Acts 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.18); and the change was, not in his purposes, but in his dispensations according to his purpose [Isaiah 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 14.24); [Isaiah 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 14.27); [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 46.10).

4. In his promises—

"All the promises of God in Christ are yes, and amen 2 Corinthians 1:20." If we ever imagine that they fail of their accomplishment, it is wholly owing to our own infirmity [Psalm 77:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 77.8); [Psalm 77:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 77.10). There is no foundation whatever for any such apprehension: for "his gifts and calling are without repentance [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 11.29)." We must distinguish indeed between the promises that are conditional, and those which are unconditional: those which are conditional, are of no force, if the condition whereon they are suspended be not performed: and, in reference to those, God said to his people, "You shall know my breach of promise [Numbers 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 14.30); [Numbers 14:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 14.34)." But the unconditional promises (such as that which says "the gates of Hell shall never prevail against the Church [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.18).") are as firm as Omnipotence can make them: "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not a jot or tittle of God's word shall ever pass away [Luke 21:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.33)." In the day of judgment every believer will be constrained to confess, that, "of all the good things which God had spoken concerning him, not one has failed [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 23.14)."

Nor is this a merely speculative truth, but one in which our welfare is deeply involved. This will appear, if we consider,

II. The benefit we derive from it—

To this alone can we ascribe it, that "we have not long since been consumed"—

The Israelites in this respect were types of us. They were a stiff-necked people, that deserved, on ten thousand occasions, to be destroyed utterly. Moreover, if left to themselves or to their enemies, they would again and again have been consumed. But God spared and preserved them for his word's sake. He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that in their seed should all nations be blessed; and on that account, though he visited the Israelites with many judgments, he did not wholly destroy them. "He changed not; therefore they were not consumed."

And what other reason can be assigned for our continuance on mercy's ground? Have we never merited excision? Search, and judge: Have we no enemies, who would gladly execute upon us the Divine judgments, if they could gain permission? What else do Satan and his hosts so earnestly desire?: Have we no inward fire, which, if suffered to burst forth, would effect our ruin? We should soon follow Judas and Ahithophel, if God should withdraw from us his restraining grace: Have we not at some time or other been, as it were, within a hair's breath of ruin, either from sickness, or accident, or from some foul transgression which would have issued in final obduracy?: Let us then "give God the glory." Our preservation has not been the effect of our own wisdom, or strength, or goodness, but of God's unchangeable love and mercy. It is to his immutability we owe it, that, notwithstanding all our provocations, he has not been stirred up to destroy us: had he been mutable, like us, his wrath would long since have broken forth against us, and consumed us utterly.

In this view the Holy Scriptures uniformly represent our obligations to the Deity—

Moses traced to this source, even to the immutability of Jehovah, the continued mercies which Israel experienced in his day [Deuteronomy 7:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 7.6-9). In the Psalms, God himself has been pleased to show explicitly in what manner he will deal with his offending people, so as to reconcile their welfare with his own veracity [Psalm 89:28-35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 89.28-35). By the Prophet Isaiah he expresses a holy jealousy, lest his dispensations should be misconstrued as violations of his word: and declares, that whatever come to pass in the course of his providence, he will never break his covenant with his people, nor suffer his kindness to depart from them [Isaiah 54:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 54.8-10). In short, the whole volume of inspiration attests the same blessed truth, that "we are not consumed, because the Divine compassions fail not [Lamentations 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 3.22);" and that "the Lord does not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 12.22)."

INFERENCES—

1. What evidence have we of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus?

Immutability is the unalienable prerogative of the Deity. Creatures may be fixed by God in the condition in which they are: but, as they have only a derived existence, there must have been a period when they began to be what they were not before. But Jesus is, and ever has been, the same with respect to the nature which he possessed before his incarnation [Hebrews 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 1.10-12); [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 13.8); and therefore, with respect to that nature, he is truly and properly God [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 3.16). Let us then hold fast this blessed truth, and rejoice in Christ as an unchangeable Savior.

2. What consolation does this subject administer to believers?

The frames and feelings of believers are extremely variable: but He who has chosen them has "no variableness, neither shadow of turning [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.17);" and "whom he loves, he loves to the end [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 13.1)." Now this consideration God has endeavored strongly to impress upon our minds, (he has even confirmed his promises with an oath,) on purpose that we may derive strong consolation from it [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.17-18). Let every one therefore take comfort from it: and be encouraged, not to indulge sloth and security, (for that were a horrible abuse of this doctrine,) but to apply to God for fresh mercies, and to regard past communications as a pledge of future blessings.

3. What a ground of terror is here afforded to the impenitent?

God has said, that "except we repent, we shall all perish;" and, that "except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.3)." If therefore any impenitent or unregenerate man be saved, God must falsify his word. O that those among you who are unconverted would consider, for one moment, on what ground they stand! Beloved brethren, consider this; Either God must change, or you. But will God change? "Is he a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 23.19). [1 Samuel 15:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 15.29)." Will he alter his very nature, and sacrifice all his perfections, in order to save you? All that he can do consistently with his own honor, he is ready and willing to do: but you cannot suppose that he will, or can, divest himself of all the properties of the Godhead, to save you in your sins. Know, then, that there must be a change in you: and, if you become not new creatures in Christ Jesus, you must perish. As long as God is true, your doom is fixed. O "turn you then! for why will you die?"

[Malachi 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.8)

DISCOURSE 1274

SIN A ROBBERY OF GOD

[Malachi 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.8). Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me.

FIDELITY in Ministers, how unacceptable soever it may be to their hearers, is their indispensable duty. Accordingly, we find all the prophets, and all the Apostles, distinguished for it, notwithstanding they exercised it at the peril of their lives. And God's word to all his servants is, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully." True it is, that in the execution of this duty we may be accounted harsh: but we must commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and deal faithfully with all, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." The Prophet Malachi has set us, in this respect, a noble example; seeing that he charged the whole nation of Israel with being thieves and robbers in the sight of God. In conformity with this example, I will proceed to show you,

I. What an odious thing sin is—

By the excuses which we invent for it, and the specious names we put upon it, we contrive to hide from ourselves its horrid deformity: but, if we look at it as it is represented in the Scriptures, we shall not hesitate to pronounce it odious in the extreme.

Hear God's description of it, as existing,

1. In our very nature—

"The carnal mind 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)." By "the carnal mind" we are to understand the disposition of every man by nature: and this is not merely inimical to God, but enmity itself against him: there is not any faculty in his soul that is in accordance with God; nor anything that is in God that is pleasing to him. There is the same contrariety between him and God, as between fire and water, or between light and darkness; which cannot coalesce in any degree, but have a mutual tendency to destroy each other. "The carnal mind not only is not, but cannot be, subject to God's law." Were it only inimical to God, a reconciliation might be hoped for: but the whole soul being enmity itself against God, it can never be brought to submission to God, until the enmity itself is slain. What a picture does this give us of our fallen nature! There is nothing in man which does not hate God; nor anything in God which man does not hate. What can be conceived more odious than this?

2. In the more moral of mankind—

Of those who are grossly immoral, I forbear to speak. But look at those who, like the Pharisees of old, have a semblance of religion; and who, from a conceit of their own superior sanctity, look with contempt on their less specious neighbors: of these our Lord says, that they are whited sepulchers, which have a fair outside indeed, but "within are full of dead men's bones and of all impurity." Now, let us endeavor to realize this image. Let us suppose a grave, in which a number of bodies have been buried, opened, while the putrefaction is in full process: we could not endure the sight or smell, even for a moment. Yet such an object is the heart of a decent Pharisee in the sight of God. His exterior before men may be fair enough; but God, to whom the inmost recesses of the soul are open, turns away from him with disgust, not able to endure the sight of such a nauseous object. Nor can we ever have a just view of our fallen nature, until we see it in this loathsome and offensive light.

3. In those who make a faint profession of religion—

Nothing but perfect sincerity can approve itself to God. If "the heart be not right with him," it is as odious in his eyes as if it were altogether insensible before him. Its professions of sanctity render it only the more detestable in his sight, while the life corresponds not with his professions. To the Philadelphian Church, God says, "I would you were cold or hot: but, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.15-16)." To our ears, this very expression is so offensive, that, if it were not the very word of God himself, we could not venture to use it: but the more offensive it is, the more it serves to illustrate that which I am endeavoring to mark—the odiousness of sin. Let us remember, that there is nothing of gross sin imputed to these persons: nothing is laid to their charge, but a want of zeal in the service of their God: yet of them is it said, that they fill Jehovah himself with such disgust, that he cannot endure the least connection with them, but casts them off with utter abhorrence. What can show sin in its true colors, if this do not?

4. In those who, after some profession of religion, turn back from it—

To these is applied a proverb, which places them in their just light: "They turn back with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow, that was washed, to the wallowing in the mire." Take these images: ponder them in your minds: conceive what a taste they display: and then transfer the idea to a man's returning to sin. Is it possible for language to convey, either in more appropriate or more disgusting terms, the truth I am insisting on? Only let us realize these images, and we shall need nothing further to show us "the exceeding sinfulness of sin."

From this view of the odiousness of sin, let me proceed to state,

II. What reason we have to humble ourselves before God on account of it—

Men will not acknowledge themselves so vile as God represents them to be: and, even when he himself accuses them, they will insolently deny the charge, just as those did whom the prophet addressed in the words before us. It is remarkable, that to every distinct charge of the prophet, whether implied or expressed, the Jews returned the very same challenge: "Return unto me." "Wherein shall we return?" that is, 'We do not know that we have ever departed: how then can we return?' So in the text: "You have robbed God." 'Wherein have we robbed him? 'Tis a false accusation, a downright calumny.' So again; "Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord: yet you say, Wherein have we spoken so much against you?" 'We deny the charge altogether.' Now this shows the spirit with which men reply against God himself. But, if we be dared to the proof of our assertions, we will meet the challenge, and adduce our proofs.

We say, then, of you, my brethren, whether you will acknowledge it or not, that "you have robbed God, even this whole nation verse 9." You have robbed him of his dues to a great extent. Even in regard to your temporal concerns, who among you has been a faithful steward to his God? Whatever has been committed to you in respect of property, it has been put into your hands, as stewards, to dispose of altogether for your God. But who has not accounted it his own; and disposed of it rather for the gratification of his own lusts than for the honor of his God? But, waving this matter, I will speak of other things which God may justly claim as his own. Your Sabbaths, how have they been spent? God has given you six days in the week for yourselves, and required the seventh to be consecrated wholly to his service. It has been your duty not to do your own works, or speak your own words, or find your own pleasure on that blessed day, but to keep it holy to the Lord. But have you so kept your Sabbaths? Have you not profaned them by carnal ease and temporal occupations, and robbed God of the glory that would have accrued to him by a due improvement of them? But a daily sacrifice of prayer and praise should also have been offered to him, every morning and every evening of your life. And how has this service been performed? Has God seen, them ascending from the altar of your hearts, burning with fire that came down from Heaven? Tell me, whether your own consciences do not accuse you of having withheld these sacrifices; and whether, when you have attempted to offer them, you have not been content with offering the blind and the lame for sacrifice, rather than the choicest affections of your souls? God has said to us, "My son, give me your heart;" "your head and your hands you may devote to the world, but your heart must be reserved for me." I ask you then, my brethren, as before God, Whether you have not alienated from him this which he claims as his exclusive property? Had a fellow-creature dealt with you as you have dealt with God in this matter, I need not ask with what name you would brand him. Know, then, that that is the name which belongs to you in the sight of God. True, it is very humiliating to be designated by the name of thieves and robbers: but, until we feel ourselves deserving of those opprobrious appellations in the sight of God, we shall never attain that contrite spirit which our state so justly demands. Methinks I hear one and another saying, like Hazael of old, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do such things?" Yes; this is not what you will do, but what you have done: and it is only by pleading guilty to the charge, that you can ever obtain the remission of your sin.

Let me now address you, Brethren,

1. In a way of indignant inquiry—

Will you continue thus to "rob God?" As for denying the charge, it is in vain. You must fall under it. You must confess your guilt. You must humble yourselves for it in dust and ashes. If you plead for further indulgence in a way of sin, I ask, How much longer will you hold fast your wickedness? and when will you consent to pay the Lord his dues? Know assuredly, that your iniquity is all recorded in his book: and, when "a bill is sent to you of one hundred, it will be in vain for you to write fourscore." You must answer for your whole debt, and "be cast into prison, until you have paid the utmost farthing." Increase not, then, the awful account which you have to give: but surrender up yourselves to God without delay; and devote to him all that you are, and all that you have. Less than this will not suffice: for "you are not your own: you are bought with a price: and therefore you are bound to glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 6.20)."

2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—

The charge here adduced against you reminds me of One, who says, "I restored that which I took not away [Psalm 69:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 69.4)." Those words, however they may be spoken of David in the first instance, are undoubtedly spoken of the Messiah, who redeemed our souls by his own obedience unto death. Yes, brethren, He, even the Lord Jesus Christ, has discharged our debt, and made perfect satisfaction to God for all the injury that he has sustained from us. Undertake not, then, to pay Jehovah from any funds of your own. To all eternity you would be unable to present to him an equivalent for the smallest sin. But you need not attempt it. In Christ you have "a atoning sacrifice not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Go to him, therefore, as your Surety; and plead with God all that He has done and suffered for you: then shall your sins be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance: and, though you owe him ten thousand talents, you "shall freely be forgiven all."

[Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.16-17)

DISCOURSE 1275

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP APPROVED OF GOD

[Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.16-17). Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels: and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him.

THE wicked in all ages harden themselves and one another in their iniquities. They vindicate their ways even against the charges of God himself; and hope by a kind of confederacy to maintain their cause against God. It is to this that God refers, when he says, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." To what an extent the Jews carried this daring and contemptuous conduct, may be seen in the preceding context: "Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, What have we spoken so much against you?" They deny the charge, and defy even the omniscient God himself to prove his allegations: and even when their impious speeches are adduced in proof of the charge, they still hold fast their sentiments, and maintain boldly that the service of sin and Satan is preferable to the service of their God verse 13–15.

Now from this the people of God may learn a very important lesson, namely, to be as bold for their Master as the wicked are for theirs; and to unite as firmly with each other in maintaining the cause of piety, as the wicked do in upholding the maxims and habits of ungodliness. The propriety of this was felt by the godly in the prophet's days; and the Lord testified, by the prophet, his approbation of their conduct.

Let us for our own edification consider,

I. The conduct approved—

There were some, even in the worst of times "who feared the Lord," and maintained frequent fellowship with each other for their mutual support. Their conduct in this respect was such as befitted their circumstances, and became their holy profession. Such conduct is extremely useful—

Those who fear the Lord have the whole world combined against them. They are, however unintentionally on their part, a reproach to the wicked: they exhibit a light, which the ungodly cannot but see: and being actuated by faith, and manifesting, by the whole of their life and conversation, that their one object is to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life, they, like Noah of old, "condemn the world," who will neither believe, nor endeavor to escape, the impending judgments of their God [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.7) with [Proverbs 28:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.4). Hence "the world hates them, because they testify of it that the works thereof are evil." Nor is it a slight measure of hatred which they incur: on the contrary, from the moment that they begin to walk in the steps of their Lord and Master, they are made to participate all the odium that was cast on him: and they must consider themselves highly favored, if they be not called to sacrifice even life itself in the service of their God.

But how shall they endure all these trials? Instead of receiving support from their friends and relatives, they will usually find, that "their greatest enemies are those of their own house-hold." True, it may be said, 'They have a God to go unto; and he will give them all needful support.' I acknowledge this; and readily grant that no effectual support can be derived from any other quarter: but still we need, on ten thousand occasions, advice and encouragement from one another; and often derive from fellowship with the saints such consolation as bears us up against all the power of our adversaries. Hence it is that so many directions are given us in Scripture, relative to the performance of this duty. We are all considered as members of one body, every member of which is to extend its regards to the whole, and to supply to those which come in contact with it all the support which it is able to administer [1 Corinthians 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 12.25). [Ephesians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.16). We are to exhort one another [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 3.13); [Hebrews 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.24-25), and comfort one another [1 Thessalonians. 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 4.18); [1 Thessalonians. 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.11), and to edify one another in every possible way [1 Thessalonians. 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess. 5.14). [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.16). Of the benefit arising from such communications we may judge by the effect produced on the minds of the Apostles, when joined by their Lord in their way to Emmaus: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures [Luke 24:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 24.32)." Yes, and thousands have experienced the same blessed consolations and supports from occasional fellowship with their fellow-saints, who by seasonable advice have "strengthened their hands in God [1 Samuel 23:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 23.16-17)."

When wisely regulated, too, it is deserving of high commendation—

Doubtless the conversation of those who profess religion may easily degenerate, and not unfrequently does degenerate, into the mere "talk of the lips, which tends only to poverty [Proverbs 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 14.23)." But when it is humble, modest, spiritual; when it has a divine savor in it, and nothing is sought but the glory of God, and the edification of the soul; then it is an ordinance of the Lord, which he will honor with his more immediate presence, agreeably to what he has said, that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there he will be in the midst of them."

But of this, we shall see more, by considering distinctly,

II. The approbation given—

God, in testifying his approbation of his people's conduct, speaks of,

1. That which he himself felt in secret—

Inexpressibly beautiful is the image here presented to our view. We are not to suppose that God needs to listen, in order that he may know what is said; or to write it down, in order that he may remember it. These terms are merely used for the purpose of conveying to our minds, by a familiar image, what, if conveyed in a more abstract form, we should not so readily comprehend. God here represents himself as a parent overhearing the conversation of his little children. In itself, the observation of a child is not worth the attention of a man: but when uttered by a man's own child, it becomes extremely interesting, especially when it is on a subject which denotes the presence of early piety. Hence God represents himself as greatly interested by the conversation which he, as it were accidentally, overhears. The very accents seem to be such as his holy mind will approve: "he hearkens; he hears;" he is, if I may so speak, struck with astonishment; he is exceedingly delighted; he determines not to forget it; he takes a book, "the book of his remembrance, and writes it down," that from time to time he may refresh his memory with it, and, if occasion offer, bring it to the remembrance of the child himself. Can we conceive anything more expressive of approbation than such a representation as this, more especially when we consider that it is the Almighty God who portrays himself in this posture, and assumes to himself this character? Know then, that while we are affectionately communicating our sentiments and feelings to each other, unconscious that any eye is upon us, or any ear within the reach of our voice, our heavenly Father beholds us, and notes down in his book our every word, and every thought See [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.18). [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.8). [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 56.8); and that no parent in the universe feels such exquisite delight in the most sagacious observations of his little child, as God does in the mutual communications of his believing people.

2. That which he will manifest before the assembled universe at the last day—

There is a day coming when "God will make up his jewels," gathering them together from every quarter of the globe; that, being put together, each in its proper place, they may compose the crown with which the Lord Jesus Christ shall be adorned to all eternity. In that day will God search them all out: not one shall be missing; nor shall one counterfeit be found among them. Among them will be found all who bear the character assigned them in the text, even all who "feared God, and spoke often one to another" respecting the things belonging to their everlasting peace. In themselves they are unworthy of such an honor, yes, deserving rather of God's wrath and indignation: but God will spare them, not merely as a father spares a disobedient son, but as he would spare the most faithful and beloved of his children. To enter into this representation, reflect on David's anxiety for Absalom, at the very time that Absalom was come forth to dethrone and destroy him: and further reflect on the grief, the inconsolable grief he expressed, when he heard that this rebellious son was slain in battle. If he then, a mortal man, felt such solicitude to spare a rebellious and parricidal son, what must be implied in the promise of the Most High God to "spare his people as a man spares his own son that serves him?" Surely no evil from whatever quarter shall come unto them: when the goats are banished from his presence, the sheep shall be gathered into his fold; when the chaff is burnt up with fire unquenchable, they, as wheat, shall be treasured up in his garner; and as his peculiar treasure shall they be preserved to be his joy, and glory, for evermore. They confessed him before men in this world; and he will confess them in the presence of all his holy angels forever and ever.

We will yet further improve this subject,

1. In a way of advice—

Do not rest satisfied with a religion that is altogether secret. Religion doubtless, in its sublimest actings, is secret, because it consists in the exercise of our affections upon God himself: but it is impossible so to conceal our piety, that the world shall not discern its operations; for it must influence us in the whole of our life and conversation: and if any one think to maintain an upright walk before God, and at the same time to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world, he deceives his own soul. We might as well hope that light should pass unobserved in darkness, as that a man who fears God should pass unnoticed through a world that lies in wickedness. The world unite with those who are of the same mind and spirit with themselves: and so must the godly do: and "in the excellent of the earth must be their chief delight." And the man who, through fear of the cross, draws back from the society of the saints, has yet to learn what is meant by being ashamed of Christ, and what portion all such persons have to expect at his hands [Mark 8:34-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 8.34-38). Let all therefore learn to confess Christ openly before men, and to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach:" and instead of shunning the cross, let all learn to rejoice and glory in it, and to "account, as Moses did, the reproach of Christ a greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt."

2. In a way of caution—

While we advise all not, through fear, to shun religious society, we would affectionately guard all against placing their religion in social converse of any kind. It is not always those who "speak most one to another" that are the best in God's estimation: on the contrary, those who are the most forward to talk, are often the least humble, and the least correct in their secret deportment. Persons of this description ought to be peculiarly jealous of themselves, lest, while they pretend to be seeking the edification of others, they be in reality filled with self-conceit, and advancing only their own glory. God, who sees the heart, often beholds a thousand times more piety in the humble hearer, than in the admired speaker: and therefore it is particularly marked in my text, that God noted in his book the frame of those "who thought upon his name." Yes, the thinkers, if I may so speak, while lamenting perhaps their incapacity to speak, and admiring, almost with envy, the fluency of others, are often noticed by God with pre-eminent delight; while the speakers, being filled with pride and self-sufficiency, are objects of his abhorrence. Let none then pride themselves in their fluency, or be dejected for the want of it: but let all remember, that, when "God shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, they, and they only, shall have praise of God [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 4.5)," whose fear of him was accompanied with love, and evidenced by a humble, holy, heavenly deportment.

[Malachi 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.1-2)

DISCOURSE 1276

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISING

[Malachi 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.1-2). Behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

THE thought of many is, that "God will do neither good nor evil," and that it is therefore unnecessary and vain to make him an object either of our hope or fear. This was the state of mind in which the greater part of the Jews were in the time of Malachi: and God sent his prophet to warn them, that a time was coming when they should clearly discern between the righteous and the wicked by the awful judgments he would inflict on the one, and the unspeakable benefits he would confer on the other [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.12).

In the words before us are contained,

I. A warning to the wicked—

The following context leads us immediately to the times of the Messiah; and to them we must look for the accomplishment of this tremendous threatening—

Temporal judgments are often predicted in similar language. The enemies of the Jews [Isaiah 10:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 10.16-18), and the Jews themselves [Zephaniah 1:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 1.14-18), yes, and all the enemies of God [Psalm 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 21.8-9), are menaced in this manner. But never were they fulfilled so fearfully as in the destruction of Jerusalem. Thither almost all the whole Jewish nation were assembled; and, being shut up in the city, as in an oven, they were made astonishing monuments of God's fiery indignation.

But doubtless this warning refers also to the day of judgment—

In that day the Judge himself will come in flames of fire [2 Thessalonians. 1:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Thess. 1.7-9); and the earth, the theater on which so much wickedness has teen acted, shall be burnt up [2 Peter 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.10-12); and the objects of God's displeasure shall be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 21.8).

It is asked, Who they are that shall then suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? We answer, The proud despisers of God's law, and they who "go about to establish their own righteousness" instead of submitting to the righteousness of God; and they who think religion vain and unprofitable [Malachi 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.13-14); yes, moreover, all who commit any kind of wickedness knowingly, deliberately, and habitually, all, I say, without exception, shall be as stubble to the consuming fire [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.18). The four distinct characters here enumerated, should be separately and distinctly addressed, and in very pointed terms, as very especially warned by God himself.

And shall we not take warning, when we know that the day is coming, and that every hour brings it nearer and nearer? O "let it not overtake us as a thief!" Our forbearing to reflect upon it cannot delay its approach, or mitigate its terrors. Be persuaded to prepare for it, that, instead of dreading, you may welcome, its arrival.

We turn with pleasure from this awful subject to contemplate the latter part of the text, wherein we have,

II. A promise to the righteous—

Whatever distant reference there may be in these words to the deliverance of the Christians from Jerusalem, when, according to our Lord's instructions, they took advantage of the retreat of the Roman army, to flee out of it to Pella, we must certainly look for the accomplishment of the promise principally in the spiritual blessings conveyed by the Messiah.

The Christian character is briefly delineated in contrast with God's enemies—

The fear of God is often represented as comprising the whole of religion: and indeed, wherever that obtains, pride will be humbled, wickedness banished, and every holy affection cultivated to the utmost These also, with some distinctness of delineation, should here, in very encouraging terms, be called upon to consider themselves as especially addressed by God; Let those who have reason to think themselves under its genuine influence, listen with gratitude to the promise, which God himself addresses to them.

To those who answer to this character, shall Christ be a source of the richest blessings—

Christ is "the Sun" of the spiritual world, and the one fountain of light and life to all that believe in him. He is also the Sun of Righteousness, not only as being pure and spotless in himself, but as being the Author of all righteousness, whether of that which is imputed to us for justification, or that which is imparted to us by sanctification. And how delightful was the sight of him to those who beheld him rising on this benighted world, to those, into whose hearts he shined with his refreshing beams! On them he shone, not with burning rays, that dry up and wither the earth and all its fruits, but with genial warmth, "healing" the desolations of winter, and causing every herb to spring forth into life and vigor. How did the first Christians "go forth" out of a dead and carnal state, and "grow up" with astonishing rapidity and strength "as the calves of the stall!": Thus also, in this day, does the light of his countenance convey healing to our souls. A sight of him removes both the guilt we have contracted, and the pollutions whereby we have been defiled; thus "healing" at once the deadly wounds of sin, and restoring health and beauty to those who have been debased by more than leprous deformity. Who would not wish to bask in his beams, and to experience the full effects of his renovating power?

Improvement—

1. How different even in this life are the states of God's friends, and of his enemies!

The "proud are called happy [Malachi 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.15);" but are they so? the heart-searching God declares that they have no solid peace. Nor is it possible that they can look forward to the day of judgment without much disquietude of mind. Their joys, such as they are, are "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," of short duration, and succeeded by smoke and darkness, by spleen and melancholy: But, is this the state of God's people? Let the text declare, and let the experience of all the saints attest: The more they enjoy of the light of this Sun of Righteousness, the more they anticipate the blessedness of Heaven.

2. How different will be the states of God's friends and enemies in the eternal world!

The day of judgment is called "the day of wrath," and, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.5). [2 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.7)." Alas! alas! where shall the objects of God's vengeance flee? How shall they "dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who can conceive the anguish with which they will "weep and wail and gnash their teeth?" View, on the contrary, the godly healed of every malady, grown to the full measure of the stature of Christ, and enjoying continually the meridian glories of the Sun of Righteousness. Who can conceive the happiness of such a state? But though "we know not yet what we shall be," so far as respects the degrees of our happiness or misery, we know that the distance between the righteous and the wicked will be immeasurably great. Would to God that, in the contemplation of it, we might all fear the Lord, and walk in his fear to the latest period of our lives!

[Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.5-6)

DISCOURSE 1277

ELIJAH TO PRECEDE OUR LORD

[Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.5-6). Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

THE advent of our blessed Lord has been foretold from the beginning of the world. No sooner had man in Paradise fallen, than God promised him a Savior in that seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.15). From that time has it been predicted with increasing clearness by many successive prophets, that so he might be easily and clearly discovered at the period of his arrival. At last, the Prophet Malachi foretold the very person who, as his harbinger, should precede him, and point him out to the people.

The day of his arrival is here, as well as in the Prophet Joel, called, "the great and terrible day of the Lord." But Luke, quoting the Prophet Joel, calls it "the great and illustrious day of the Lord Compare [Joel 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Joel 2.31) and the text, with [Acts 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 2.20)." And it was, indeed, both illustrious and "dreadful:" for then did God himself become incarnate, for the salvation of all who would believe in him; but then also were inflicted, on those who rejected him, such judgments as were altogether unprecedented in the annals of the world [Luke 21:22-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 21.22-27). Truly, from that day to this, has "their whole land been smitten with a most dreadful curse."

The prophecy before us closes the canon of Scripture under the Mosaic dispensation, and is peculiarly worthy of our closest attention. In two points of view I propose to consider it:

I. As evincing the truth of Christianity—

In this view this prophecy is considered by all who have written on the evidences of our holy religion—

It was a prophecy pre-eminently insisted on at the time of our Savior's advent. When our blessed Lord had manifested to his disciples his glory on the mount of transfiguration, where he had conversed with Moses and Elijah, "he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, until the Son of Man were risen from the dead. Upon which they asked him, "Why say the Scribes that Elijah must first come [Mark 9:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.9-11)." that is, 'Why, now that we have had this accumulated evidence of your Messiahship, are we to conceal it from others, more especially since it is, in part at least, that very evidence which the Scribes, and all who are instructed in the prophecies, are looking for?' Moreover, when almost the whole of the Jewish nation flocked to John's baptism, the rulers sent priests and Levites to him, to inquire, "Whether he was himself the Christ; or whether he was Elijah," whom they expected as his Forerunner [John 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.19-21). Hence it appears that the people at large expected, about that time, the literal accomplishment of this prophecy.

And accomplished at that time it was. Previous to John's conception in the womb, the angel, who announced to his parents God's merciful intentions towards them, said of him, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God: and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord [Luke 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.16-17);" in other words, he shall fulfill the prophecy of Malachi, which you are all now expecting to see accomplished. Our blessed Lord yet more strongly declares, that John was the person ordained of God to fulfill that prophecy. John, being shut up in prison, and hearing of the miracles which Jesus had wrought, sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to inquire, whether he was the predicted Messiah; or whether they were to look for some other person to sustain that office? Our Lord referred them to the miracles which he wrought before their eyes, in proof of his Messiahship; and then expressly declared concerning John, that he was that very "Messenger," whose coming the Prophet Malachi had foretold; and that very Elijah also, of whom the same prophet had spoken as the precursor of the Messiah: "If you will receive it, this is Elijah which was for to come Compare [Matthew 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.10); [Matthew 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.14) with [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.1); [Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 4.5-6). See: also [Matthew 17:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 17.11-13)." And here you will see, that our Lord himself explains the two prophecies as relating to one and the same person; the messenger being Elijah, and Elijah the messenger.

The messenger then, even Elijah, having come, and borne his testimony to Jesus as the Messiah; the Messiah is come, and the religion introduced by him is of divine authority; or, in other words, Christianity is true.

The objections by which the Jews would set aside this conclusion, though plausible, are of no real weight—

A Jew would say, 'It is confessed by all, that Elijah must come before the Messiah: but John was not Elijah: yes, when expressly interrogated upon that subject, he himself plainly and unequivocally stated, that he was not Elijah [John 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.19-21); therefore Elijah not having appeared, the Messiah cannot be yet come; and, consequently, Christianity is an imposition upon the world.'

This being one of the strong-holds of Judaism, it must be overthrown, before we can hope to convert the Jews to Christianity.

It is said by the Jews, that, because Elijah did not personally appear, the prophecy before us cannot have been fulfilled. But I will ask a Jew; Are you not told, by Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Hosea, no less than six times, that in the latter day your whole nation, Israel as well as Judah, shall be restored, and that they shall be "united under one Head, even David, who shall be king over them all forever Compare [Jeremiah 30:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 30.9). [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 34.23-24); [Ezekiel 37:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 37.24-25). [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 3.5)." But is there any learned Jew that expects David personally to come and reign on earth again? Have not all commentators, both ancient and modern, agreed, that the person here spoken of is the Messiah; who yet is called David, because he was typified by David, and shall inherit, as it were, his throne? Then why may not John, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, bear his name; when, in fact, there was as striking a correspondence between the two, in their whole office and character, as can be conceived? If an absolute identity of person be dispensed with in the one case, it may also be dispensed with in the other: and, so far as that is concerned, the objection falls to the ground.

But it is said, that John acknowledged that he was not Elijah. True; he did so. The Jews supposed him to be Elijah the Tishbite, or probably Jeremiah: but he declared he was neither the one nor the other: but, at the very time that he declared this, he informed them, that he was the Forerunner of the Messiah, even the person whom Isaiah had described as "a voice crying in the wilderness." "They said to Him, Who are you? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What say you of yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Isaiah [Isaiah 40:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.3) with [John 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.22-23)." Now, there is not a learned Jew in the universe who does not interpret this passage of Isaiah as referring to the Forerunner of our Lord: and therefore we see, not only that our blessed Lord assigned that office and character to John, but that John himself claimed it, at the very time that he denied himself to be Elijah the Tishbite: and it is remarkable, that our blessed Lord, in asserting his own Messiahship, appealed to the testimony of John as decisive of the point; and thus put all his adversaries to silence. When the chief priests asked him "by what authority he did the things which they saw," he answered by putting another question to them: "The baptism of John, was it from Heaven, or of men?" And, when they saw to what a dilemma they were reduced, and declined giving him an answer, he disdained to give any reply to their question; which, in fact, needed no answer at all; for it was self-evident, that if John was indeed a prophet, as he had clearly proved himself to be, his testimony must be received; and Jesus, of whose Messiahship he had testified, must be the Messiah.

Thus, then, have we shown, that there was no necessity for Elijah personally to come, in order to fulfill this prophecy: it was sufficient that John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," and fulfilled all that the person spoken of in my text was to execute. That he did this, he himself declared: and, when his testimony was appealed to as decisive, the Jews themselves were put to silence. The objection, therefore, which the Jews found on this passage, is obviated; and the truth of Christianity is proved from the very passage which the Jews adduce to overthrow it.

The prophecy, however, may be considered yet further,

II. As illustrating the scope and intent of Christianity—

That which was the primary scope of John's mission was, to bear witness to Christ. But, in conjunction with this, his office was to turn men to God, and thus to prepare them for Christ as his peculiar people. And these are the two great objects of Christianity in the world:

1. To convert men to God—

It was said of John, "He shall turn many to the Lord their God [Luke 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.16)." This he was to effect among persons of every age in life, and every order in society: he was to "turn the heart of fathers to their children, and the heart of children to their fathers." According to the general effect of divine truth, it must be expected that the Gospel will create only division in families, "setting the father against the son, and the son against the father [Luke 12:51-53](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.51-53);" but his ministry was to operate rather in a contrary way, bringing all the nation, as it were, old and young, to a pledge and harmonious expectation of the Messiah; "fathers with their children, and children with their fathers." And thus the Gospel is to work on all, without exception; so that they may move harmoniously, like a river turned by the tide, up towards the fountain-head. However contrary to nature this may be, even like a river ascending a lofty mountain, it shall be effected: for "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it [Isaiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 2.2)." Wherever it prevails, it produces this union, this harmony, this progress contrary to the course of nature [Philippians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 2.2); and if, either in individuals or communities, it fails of this object, it is published in vain, and the grace of God is so far "received in vain."

2. To prepare men for Christ—

This was done by John, to a very extraordinary degree: for, in a very short space of time, a few months at the utmost, "there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan; and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins [Matthew 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 3.5-6)." "He went before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation to them, for the remission of their sins [Luke 1:76-77](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.76-77)."

And this is the great scope of the Gospel ministry—to "preach Christ crucified [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.23);" and to bring all to "behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 1.29)." Every faithful minister has, like John, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord [Luke 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 1.17)." It is said in the book of Revelation "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints [Revelation 19:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 19.7-8)." And may I not say, that we ministers are assistants to the Bride? O blessed office, to prepare you, brethren, for that great solemnity, when you shall be forever united to the heavenly Bridegroom! Gladly would we see you adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, Gladly would we see you habited in white clothing from head to foot, without one spot, that should be unsuited to your high character [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.4). And we do indeed account it an honor to be instrumental, in any measure, to the preparing of you for this glorious consummation. Beloved brethren, concur with us in this good work. Attend to all the counsels which are given you from the Lord; and readily adopt "every method which he has ordained for your purification;" that, when you come into his presence, you may find the most "cordial acceptance with him," and "receive at his hands a crown, of glory that fades not away [Esther 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 2.12), [17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Esther 2.17) with [1 Peter 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Pet 5.4)."