

ALARM TO THE CHURCHES.

A

S E R M O N,

**PREACHED AT NEW-MARLBOROUGH,
SOUTH PARISH,**

July 23, 1812;

Being a DAY of FASTING and PRAYER,

OCCASIONED BY THE

**DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST GREAT-
BRITAIN.**

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Published at the request of the hearers.

Stockbridge :

PRINTED BY H. WILLARD.

Nov. 1812.

A FAST SERMON.



Hosea xiii. 9.

*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself ; but in me
is thine help.*

IT is a consideration highly interesting to us, my brethren, that we may be called by the name of Israel. As Israel was the visible church of God, so are we. As Israel was a chosen and peculiar people, placed under the special instruction and guidance of Jehovah ; so are we. As they were never suffered to pass unnoticed ; but were, at all times, treated by Divine Providence, according to their national character ; so it has been, and probably will be with us, till, like them, we shall sink in infidelity, and be destroyed by our iniquity.

In attending to the subject before us, it is proposed, only to illustrate the text, and apply it to our own nation and times. And

I. The visible church of Christ, and, this favoured nation, may notice and apply to themselves the pathetic address in the text. “ *O Israel !* ” “ *O house of Jacob ! O my people !* ” is the style in which God often addressed his ancient covenant people. “ *O my people, what have I done unto thee ? wherein have I wearied thee ?* ” The language of the text is very affectionate and endearing. It is in the style of lamentation, that *Israel had destroyed himself.*

In this prophecy, God repeatedly expresses the most tender affection for his people. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." And after stating their grievous rebellion and idolatry, still the language is that of a compassionate father; "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? and set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." The expressions of God's love to his church are wonderful. They are emphatical and sincere. Never will he suffer the enemy to prevail, without the highest provocation. "Yea he rebuketh kings for their sakes, saying, touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

II. The text, in a strain of lamentation, states a heavy charge against the visible church—a charge even of *suicide!* of *self-destruction!* This indeed, is the leading idea in the text, that if the visible church, the favorite people of God be destroyed, they destroy themselves. The church, acting in character, is terrible to its enemies as an army with banners.

The flock of Christ, which is comparatively a little flock, surrounded with many and powerful enemies, is in continual apprehension of destruction from others; but is too little apprehensive of *self-destruction*. The Israelites in the wilderness, and in Canaan, were often in terror and dismay, in view of their enemies. Even David, in his distress, forgetful of the divine promises, said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Yet both he and the nation were safe, so long as they acted in character. Exam-

ine the whole history of God's ancient people, and you find not an instance, in which they suffered from the hand of their enemies, till they had, in a moral sense, destroyed themselves. So long as they were reconciled to the government of God, walked in his commandments and ordinances, and avoided the idolatries of the heathen ; though surrounded with hosts of enemies, they were invulnerable. The bush, burning with fire, but not consumed, was a just representation of God's protection of his people. While the people of God walk uprightly, earth and hell are incapable of doing them a real injury. " No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper ; and every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment, they shall condemn." This has, in fact, been the case with the church, in all ages, down to the present day.

After the coming of Christ, and his ascension to heaven, his church was beset, from age to age, with most violent persecutions. Individuals were, indeed, murdered and destroyed ; but the body was greatly increased, strengthened and purified. At length persecution subsided ; and the prospects of the church, in human view, became bright and glorious. The whole power of the Roman empire was engaged for its protection. But, elated with worldly splendor, and plunging in error and delusion, the church soon destroyed itself. The Romish church became *the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth* ; and was destined to be destroyed, even by the hands of her principal supporters. Concerning those very princes, who had given their power and kingdom unto the beast, it is said, " These shall hate the whore, and make

her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Thus it is, that the Romish church has, actually destroyed herself.

Great, also, have been the calamities which have fallen on many nations professing the protestant faith. Rivers of blood have been shed ; kingdoms and states have been subverted, and churches overthrown.

These calamities have, in all instances, been judgments inflicted by the hand of God. Judgment often begins at the house of God, which is the visible church. But never, in any instance, until such visible church, in a moral sense, has destroyed itself.

Christian professors, of this age, are much alarmed at the progress of infidelity, as portending ruin to the nation. It certainly portends ruin, if they themselves are drawn into the same dismal vortex. But if there be, in the visible church, no conformity to the corrupt maxims of infidelity, then no danger can arise to the nation from the exertions of infidels.

All their triumphs are designed of God, to chastise the visible church for their breach of covenant. They are *the rod of God's anger* ; and the staff in their hand is God's indignation against a hypocritical church. Let the visible church, however few in number, only hold fast their integrity ; and not all the power of great Babylon is able to destroy it. Only let your conversation be as becomes the gospel of Christ—that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel ; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries."

Again ; some have fearful apprehensions of national ruin from the advancement of infidels

to the most important public stations. But, are the enemies of the gospel promoted now to public stations, more than twenty or forty years ago? If so, it is owing in a great measure, to the influence of christian professors. Too many there are, of every christian denomination, and of christian professors in every political party, who not only give their suffrages, but, on some occasions, make special exertion to promote to public office, the enemies of the christian system. Although this great and threatening evil may not *originate* in the church; yet, in some instances, it has the concurrence of christian professors. The pernicious maxim, that *real religion is unessential to the character of a good ruler*, is adopted by too many in the christian profession. Were it not for this, all the danger of national evil from the promotion and power of the ungodly, would subside. Would God have appointed proud Saul to be king over Israel, against the wish of the people? No: In this instance, the Israelites destroyed themselves. They coveted the splendors of a monarchy; and "God gave them a king in his wrath, and took him away in his anger." He suffered the nation to rejoice in their tyrant, and, finally to smart for their folly.

Again; others are extremely apprehensive, lest, by certain foreign connexions, or by the influence of proud and despotic characters among ourselves, the nation should be deprived of its republican form of government. This would be a sore calamity indeed; but, my brethren, we are too prone to look for danger, where danger is never suffered to arise. Should we, at any time, experience the horrors of despotism, the

fault will be chiefly in the visible church of Christ. Admitting the foregoing observations to be correct, the fault is already discoverable. We do not sufficiently regard the honor of Christ, and the welfare of his kingdom, in our transactions for the nation. We listen to the siren song of the enemies of Christ, who, "while they promise men liberty, are themselves the servants of corruption."

"The powers that be, are ordained of God:" and will the God of all grace ordain over his *faithful flock*, a despotic government? No, my brethren. As long as Moses and Aaron are regarded; and especially, as long as Jesus Christ, their great Antitype is regarded, "Israel is safe."

The idea which appears to be established by this subject is, that all the national evils, which in our case, are either felt or apprehended, flow from the great unfaithfulness of the visible church—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." O ye seed of Abraham! can ye endure the thought of working out the ruin of your dearly beloved, and highly favored nation!

III. We are led to the illustration and application of the consoling idea in the close of the text; "*In me is thine help.*" As respects national and temporal good, we may observe, with admiration and gratitude, God is not hasty to devote his covenant people to ruin. Though they have in a great measure destroyed themselves, yet they experience the long-suffering and forbearance of God. "The Lord is slow to anger, and of great kindness; and repenteth him of the evil." How often did his ancient people, in the wilderness, in the land of Canaan, and even in captivity, experience divine help and

deliverance, when in human view, they had effectually destroyed themselves ! Nothing more than a sincere reformation, was ever found necessary to the help and salvation of Israel. If, indeed, only the leaders of God's people, such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Hezekiah, were truly humble and devout ; God always granted help and deliverance. To us God is the same as to Israel. On our part the condition of divine help is easy ; and on God's part the salvation is sure. Sad as our situation may appear ; yet the smiles of divine providence are as easily regained as lost. It is not necessary, as some imagine, that infidelity be subdued ; or that the open enemies of the gospel be generally converted to the christian faith, before we may hope for the tranquility of the nation. Let all professors of religion reform ; let them humble themselves before God ; and, for their sakes, be their number great or small, God will bless the nation. Yea, he will give them the influence, as he gave it to his servant David, in troublous times. It is for the sake of the church of Christ, that God will either build up, or destroy the nation.

In this view of things, our case is not so desperate as some may imagine. Who can tell, but God may, by the threatening aspects in his providence, arouse his church to serious consideration, and make them realize their responsibility ? How often were his ancient covenant people reformed by severe calamities ! And as often, they experienced divine help and deliverance.

There is the greatest encouragement, in the present day of darkness and perplexity, for every christian to be humble, and "cry mightily unto God" for national help and relief. It is vastly

important, brethren, that we be sensible where the difficulty lies, not in the vile intrigues of the open enemies of God ; but in the great unfaithfulness of his church. Let the professed friends of Christ, therefore, “ be clothed with humility ;” and let them manifest their sense of dependence on divine help. This will have a tendency to convince and convert the unbeliever ; and this will secure the welfare of the nation.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We learn from this subject that the character of God’s people is principally regarded, not only in his dealings with them ; but also in his dealings with all their natural or civil connexions. If the church act in character, it is out of the power of unbelievers to provoke divine vengeance on the nation. Suppose the church to consist of but one hundredth part of the nation ; and the rest to be gross unbelievers and idolaters ; yet, unless God were specially provoked by the unfaithfulness of the church ; for their sakes, he would defend and prosper the nation. The church acting in character is even “ the salt of the earth, and the light of the world.” How important, how interesting, how responsible is a standing in the visible kingdom of Jesus Christ !

2. The subject, in its application, suggests very mortifying considerations to unbelievers, and despisers of the christian church. Such may be gratified to hear, that national calamities originate in the misconduct of christian professors. But let them first understand the matter, and then what will be their triumph ? The case is this, as the apostle says to the church ; “ All

things are for your sakes." All real and substantial blessings are for the sake of the faithful few who belong to the nation. If God's regard to the church be such as the scriptures and the subject before us represent, we may be certain that a nation of infidels would be void of national blessings. Neither would God, in his providential dispensations, in this world, manifest any special regard to their character. Should they commit ever so many abominations, it would not be, in its nature and tendency, like a violation of special, covenant engagements. The state of such a nation would be like that of the gentile world, previous to the promulgation of the gospel. At that time, they were so buried in darkness, so deep in ignorance and idolatry, that but little regard was had to their character, in the dealings of divine providence. "The times of this ignorance God winked at." The heathen passed unnoticed of God, while a solemn regard was had to every part of the character and conduct of the visible church.

On the whole, it is not granted to them that know not God, to build up, or to pull down and destroy the nation. This honor belongs rather to God's enlightened and covenant people. Psal. 149. "Let the high praises of God be in *their* mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron: to execute upon them the judgment written. This honor have all the saints. Praise ye the Lord."

Those who stand on the high ground of the christian profession, have very great influence

given them to effect national good or national evil. One hypocritical professor of christianity, can do more to corrupt the sentiments and morals of society, than ten open infidels. To the great mortification of open unbelievers, they can do little or nothing to effect the welfare of society, without the aid and concurrence of enlightened and corrupt professors of revealed religion. But, being supported by these, they obtain their influence.

Let no man, therefore, or combination of men, glory in the prospect of subverting the christian church. Power to do this, is never delegated to the unbelieving world. If any branch of the visible kingdom of Christ be destroyed, *it destroys itself*. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

3. As it is thought, that, professing the true religion, we are in great danger of national destruction; let us notice, in particular, the ways in which we are destroying ourselves. But if any, exulting in our national prospects, cry "Peace peace;" a few things to open the eyes of such may first be suggested. And, in the first place,

The nation is agitated, and almost convulsed, by the virulence of party spirit. Even in our national councils, this malignant spirit, this moral pestilence is so inveterate, that, in the most important points, there can be neither concurrence nor compromise. And, "every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation."

2. We are threatened with a most destructive and desolating war; if not eventually, even with a *civil war*. War against one the greatest foreign powers, even that power which seems most able to destroy us, is proclaimed in our