

Departing Promises to the Church Daniel 12:1-4, 10

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. II, 369-380, 387-389, 393, emphasis added; English updated.

Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book."

LECTURE SIXTY-FIVE

God's eternal decrees and predestination

The twelfth chapter commenced, as we stated in yesterday's Lecture, with the angel's prediction as to the future state of the Church after the manifestation of Christ. It was to be subject to many miseries, and hence this passage would soothe the sorrow of Daniel, and of all the pious, as he still promises safety to the Church through the help of God.

Daniel therefore represented Michael as the guardian of the Church, and God had enjoined this duty on Christ, as we learn from the 10th chapter of John (John 10:28, 29).

John 10:28-29 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand."

As we stated yesterday, Michael may mean an angel; but I embrace the opinion of those who refer this to the person of Christ, because it suits the subject best to represent Him as standing forward for the defense of His elect people. He is called the *mighty prince*, because He naturally opposed the unconquered fortitude of God to those dangers to which the angel represents the Church to be subject. We well know the very slight causes for which terror often seizes our minds, and when we begin to tremble, nothing can calm our tumult and agitation.

The angel then in treating of very grievous contests, and of the imminent danger of the Church, calls *Michael the mighty prince*. As if he had said, Michael should be the guardian and protector of the elect people, he should exercise immense power, and he alone without the slightest doubt should be sufficient for their protection.

Christ confirms the same assertion, as we just now saw, in the 10th chapter of John. He says all His elect were given Him by His father, and none of them should perish, because His father was greater than all; no one, says He, shall pluck My sheep out of My hand. My father, who gave them Me, is greater than all; meaning, God possesses infinite power, and displays it for the safety of those whom He has chosen before the creation of the world, and He has committed it to Me, or has deposited it in My hands.

We now perceive the reason of this epithet, which designates *Michael as the great prince*. For in consequence of the magnitude of the contest, we ought to enjoy the offer of insuperable strength, to enable us to attain tranquility in the midst of the greatest commotions.

It was in no degree superfluous for the angel to predict such great calamities as impending over the Church, and in the present day the same expressions are most useful to us. We perceive then how the Jews imagined a state of happiness under Christ, and the same error was adopted by the Apostles, who, when Christ discoursed on the destruction of the temple and the city, thought the end of the world was at hand, and this they connected with their own glory and triumph (Matthew 24:3).

Matthew 24:3 "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

The Prophet then is here instructed by the angel how God should direct the course of His Church when He should manifest to them His only-begotten Son. Still the severity of distress awaited all the pious; as if he had said, The time of your triumph is not yet arrived; you must still continue your warfare, which will prove both laborious and harassing.

The condition of the new people is here compared with that of the ancient one, who suffered many perils and afflictions at God's hands. The angel therefore says, even although the faithful suffered very severely under the law and the prophets, yet a more oppressive season was at hand, during which God would treat His Church far more strictly than before, and submit it to far more excruciating trials. This is the meaning of the passage, *a season full of afflictions should arise, such as the nations had never seen since they began to exist*. This may refer to the creation of the world, and if we refer it to the people themselves, the exposition will prove correct; for **although the Church had in former periods been wretched, yet after the appearance of Christ, it should suffer far more calamities than before**. We remember the language of the Psalmist: The impious have often opposed me from my youth; they have drawn the plough across my back (Psalm 129:1-3).

Through all ages then God subjected His Church to many evils and disasters. But a comparison is here instituted between two different states of the Church, and the angel shows how after Christ's appearance it should be far from either quietness or happiness. As it should be oppressed with heavier afflictions, it is not surprising that the fathers should wish us to be conformed to the image of His only-begotten Son (Romans 8:29). Since the period of Christ's resurrection, even if a more harassing warfare awaits us, we ought to bear it with great equanimity, because the glory of heaven is placed before our eyes far more clearly than it was before theirs.

At length he adds, *At that time your people shall be preserved*. By this expression the angel points out to us the great importance of the protection of Michael: He promises certain salvation to His elect people, as if he had said, although the Church should be exposed to the greatest dangers, yet with respect to God Himself, it should always be safe and victorious in all contests, because Michael should be superior to every enemy. The angel then, in thus exhorting the faithful to bear their cross, shows how free they should be from all doubt as to the event, and the absolute certainty of their victory.

Although at first sight this prophecy might inspire us with fear and dismay, yet this comfort ought to be sufficient for us: "We shall be conquerors amidst fire and sword, and amidst many deaths we are sure of life." As perfect safety is here set before us, we ought to feel secure, and to enter with alacrity into every engagement. We are in truth obliged to fight, but Christ has conquered for us, as He says Himself, Trust in Me, I have overcome the world (**John 16:33**).

But the angel restricts what he had said generally by way of correction. Many professed to belong to the people of God, and every one naturally sprung from the stock of Israel boasted of being the offspring of divine seed. As all wished promiscuously to belong to God's people, the angel restricts his expression by a limiting phrase, *all people*, says he, *who were found written in the book*.

This clause does not mean all Israel after "the flesh" (Romans 9:6-8), but such as God esteems to be real Israelites according to gratuitous election alone. He here distinguishes between the carnal and spiritual children of Abraham, between the outward Church and that inward and true community which the Almighty approves.

Romans 9:6-8 "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

Upon what then does the difference depend between those who boast of being Abraham's children, while they are rejected by God, and those who are really and truly His sons? On the mere grace and favor of God. He declares His election when He regenerates His elect by His Holy Spirit, and thus inscribes them with a certain mark, while they prove the reality of this sonship by the whole course of their lives, and confirm their own adoption. Meanwhile we are compelled to go to the fountain at once; God alone by His gratuitous [free, unearned] election distinguishes the outward Church, which has nothing but the title, from the true Church, which can never either perish or fall away. Thus we observe in how many passages of Scripture hypocrites are rejected in the midst of their swelling pride, as they have nothing in common with the sons of God but the external symbols of profession.

We ought to notice this restriction, which assures us of the utter uselessness of outward pomp, and of the unprofitable nature of even a high station in the outward Church, unless we are truly among God's people. This is expressed fully in Psalm 15 and 24, while Psalm 73 confirms the same sentiments. How good is God to Israel, especially to the upright in heart! In these passages of the Psalms the cause is not stated to be the secret election of God, but the outward testimony of the conduct; and this although inferior in degree, is not contrary to the first cause which produces it. This has its proper place, but God's election is always superior.

The word *book* refers to that eternal counsel of God, whereby He *elect*ed us and adopted us as His sons before the foundation of the world, as we read in the first chapter of Ephesians (Ephesians 1:4).

Ephesians 1:4 "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love . . ."

In the same sense Ezekiel inveighs against the false prophets who deceived the people of Israel (Ezekiel 8:9). My hand, says God, shall be upon those prophets who deceive My people. They shall not therefore be in the secret assembly of My people, nor shall they be found in the roll of the house of Israel.

The word signifying to write is used here—they shall not be written in the enrollment of the house of Israel. The word book is here used in the same sense and yet we need not adopt the gross idea, that the Almighty has any need of a book. **His book is that eternal counsel which predestinates us to Himself, and elects us to the hope of eternal salvation.**

We now understand the full sense of this instruction, as the Church shall remain in safety amidst many deaths, and even in the last stage of despair it shall escape through the mercy and help of God.

We must also remember this definition of a church, because many boast of being God's sons, who are complete strangers to Him. This leads us to consider the subject of election, as our salvation flows from that fountain. Our calling, which is His outward testimony to it, follows that gratuitous adoption which is hidden within Himself; and thus God when regenerating us by His Spirit, inscribes on us His marks and signs, by which He is able to acknowledge us as His real children. It follows—

The resurrection of the just and the unjust

Daniel 12:2

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.”

. . . The angel seems here to mark a transition from the commencement of the preaching of the gospel, to the final day of the resurrection, without sufficient occasion for it. For why does he pass over the intermediate time during which many events might be the subject of prophecy? He unites these two subjects very fitly and properly, connecting the salvation of the Church with the final resurrection and with the second coming of Christ.

Wherever we may look around us, we never meet with any source of salvation on earth. The angel announces the salvation of all the elect. They are most miserably oppressed on all sides, and wherever they turn their eyes, they perceive nothing but confusion. Hence **the hope of the promised salvation could not be conceived by man before the elect raise their minds to the second coming of Christ.** It is just as if the angel had said, God will be the constant preserver of His Church, even to the end; but the manner in which He will preserve it must not be taken in a carnal sense, as the Church will be like a dead body until it shall rise again.

We here perceive the angel teaching the same truth as Paul delivers in other words, namely, we are dead, and our life is hidden with Christ; it shall then be made manifest when He shall appear in the heavens (Colossians 3:3).

Colossians 3:3-4 “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

We must hold this first of all, **God is sufficiently powerful to defend us, and we need not hesitate in feeling ourselves safe under His hand and protection.**

Meanwhile it is necessary to add this second point; **as long as we fix our eyes only on this present state of things, and dwell on what the world offers us, we shall always be like the dead.** And why so? Our life ought to be hid with Christ in God. Our salvation is secure, but we still hope for it, as Paul says in another passage (Romans 8:23, 24).

Romans 8:23-24: “Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”

What is hoped for is not seen, says he. This shows us how completely reasonable is the transition from this doctrine respecting God’s elect to the last advent of Christ. This then is enough with *respect* to the context.

The word *many* seems here clearly put for all, and this is not to be considered as at all absurd, for the angel does not use the word in contrast with all or few, but only with one.

. . . *Some shall rise to life, and others to disgrace and contempt.* . . . This shows the angel to be treating of **the last resurrection**, which is common to all, and allows of no exceptions. I have lately explained why he calls our attention to the advent of Christ. Since all things in the world will be constantly confused, our minds must necessarily be raised upwards, and gain the victory over what we observe with our eyes, and comprehend with our outward senses.

Those who sleep in the earth and the dust—meaning, wherever the earth and dust exist, nevertheless they shall rise, implying **the hope of a resurrection** not founded on natural causes, but depending on the inestimable power of God, which surpasses all our senses. Hence, **although the elect as well as the wicked shall be reduced to earth and dust, this shall by no means form an obstacle to God’s raising them up again.** . . . God, then, is endued with sufficient power to call forth the dead to newness of life.

This passage is worthy of special notice, because **the prophets do not contain any clearer testimony than this to the last resurrection**, particularly as the angel distinctly asserts the future rising again of both the righteous and the wicked. Eternity is here opposed to those temporal miseries to which we are now subjected. Here we may notice the admonition of Paul, that those momentary afflictions by which God tries us, cannot be compared with that eternal glory which never shall cease (Romans 8:18).

Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

This, therefore, is the reason why the angel so clearly expresses, that eternal life awaits the elect, and eternal disgrace and condemnation will be the lot of the ungodly. He afterwards subjoins,

Daniel 12:3

“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”

The word *wise* means endued with intellect. . . . It means those who are endued with understanding. The angel here confirms what I have lately expressed concerning the final resurrection, and shows how we shall enjoy its fruits, because eternal glory is laid up for us in heaven. We ought not to complain of being treated unworthily, whenever we seem to suffer harshness at God’s hands, because **we ought to be satisfied with the glory of heaven, and with the perpetual existence of that life which has been promised to us.**

He says then, *the teachers*, or those who excel in understanding, *shall shine forth as*

the light of heaven. If the word “teachers” is thought preferable, there will be a figure of speech, a part being put for the whole, and, therefore, I follow the usual explanation. He applies the phrase, “endued with understanding,” to those who do not depart from the true and pure knowledge of God, as will be afterwards explained more fully. For the angel contrasts the profane who proudly and contemptuously rage against God, and **the faithful whose whole wisdom is to submit themselves to God, and to worship Him with the purest affection of their minds.** We shall say more on this subject tomorrow.

But he now says, those who retained sincere piety should be like *the light of the firmament*; meaning, **they shall be heirs of the kingdom of heaven, where they shall enjoy that glory which surpasses all the splendor of the world.** No doubt, the angel here uses figures to explain what is incomprehensible, implying, **nothing can possibly be found in the world which answers to the glory of the elect people.**

The duty of Christian evangelism and discipleship

And those who shall justify many shall be like stars, says he. He repeats the same thing in other words, and now speaks of *stars*, having formerly used the phrase, *the brightness of the firmament*, in the same sense; and instead of “those who are endued with understanding,” he says, *those who shall have justified.* Without doubt, the angel here especially denotes the teachers of the truth, but in my opinion **he embraces also all the pious worshippers of God.**

No one of God’s children ought to confine their attention privately to themselves, but **as far as possible, every one ought to interest himself in the welfare of his brethren.**

God has deposited the teaching of His salvation with us, not for the purpose of our privately keeping it to ourselves, but of our pointing out the way of salvation to all mankind. This, therefore, is the common duty of the children of God—to promote the salvation of their brethren.

By this word “justifying,” the angel means, not that it is in the power of one man to justify another, but the property of God is here transferred to His ministers. Meanwhile, we are as clearly justified by any teaching which brings faith within our reach, as we are justified by the faith which springs from the teaching.

Why is our justification ever ascribed to faith? Because our faith directs us to Christ in whom is the complete perfection of justification, and thus our justification may be ascribed equally to the faith taught and the doctrine which teaches it.

And those who bring before us this teaching are the ministers of our justification. The assertion of the angel, in other words, is this—**The sons of God, who being devoted entirely to God and ruled by the spirit of prudence, point out the way of life to others, shall not only be saved themselves, but shall possess surpassing glory far beyond anything which exists in this world.**

True wisdom defined

This is the complete explanation. Hence, we gather the nature of **true prudence** to consist in **submitting ourselves to God in simple teachableness, and in manifesting the additional quality of carefully promoting the salvation of our brethren.**

The effect of this our labor ought to increase our courage and alacrity. For how great is the honor conferred on us by our Heavenly Father, when He wishes us to be the ministers of His righteousness? As James says, We preserve those about to perish if we bring them back into the right way (James 5:19).

James 5:19-20 “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

James calls us preservers, just as the angel calls us justifiers; neither the angel nor the apostle wish to detract from the glory of God, but by these forms of speech the Spirit represents us as ministers of justification and salvation, when we unite in the same bonds with ourselves all those who have need of our assistance and exertions. It follows next—

Daniel 12:4

“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end: Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

We have already explained “the time of the end” is a period previously fixed on by God, and settled by His own counsel. The following word refers to tracing out and running to and fro, but not necessarily in a bad sense, while it also signifies to investigate.

. . . The angel’s advice is this, There is no reason why this prophecy should cause despondency or dismay, because few should receive it. Although it should be universally despised and ridiculed, *nevertheless shut it up* like a precious treasure. Isaiah has a passage nearly similar (Isaiah 8:16), Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples. Isaiah’s spirit would be broken when he perceived himself an object of universal derision, and God’s sacred oracles trodden under foot; thus he might lose all courage and decline the office of a teacher. But God affords him comfort: Close up, says he, My law among My disciples, and do not notice this profane crew; although they all despise your teaching, do not suppose your voice deserves their ridicule; close it up, close it up among My disciples, says He; how few soever may embrace your teaching, yet let it remain sacred and laid up in the hearts of the pious.

The Prophet afterwards says, “Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel” (Isa. 8:18). Here he boasts in his contentment with very few [followers], and thus triumphs over the impious and insolent multitude.

Thus at the present time in the Papacy and throughout the whole world, impiety prevails so extensively that **there is scarcely a single corner [of the world] in which the majority agree in true obedience to God.** As God foresaw how very few would embrace this prophecy with becoming reverence, the angel desired to animate the Prophet, lest he should grow weary, and esteem this prophecy as of little value, in consequence of its failing to command the applause of the whole world.

Close up the book, then but what does the phrase imply? Not to hide it from all men, but to satisfy the Prophet when he saw but few reverently embracing the teaching so plainly laid before him by the angel. This is not properly a command; the angel simply tells Daniel to hide or seal up this book and these words, offering him at the same time much consolation. If all men despise your doctrine, and reject what you set before them—if the majority pass it by contemptuously, *shut it up and seal it*, not treating it as valueless, but preserving it as a treasure. I deposit it with you; lay it up among My disciples.

You, *Daniel*; here the Prophet's name is mentioned. If you think yourself to be alone, yet companions shall be afterwards added to you who shall treat this prophecy with true piety. *Shut up, then, and seal it, even, till the time of the end;* for God will prove by the event that He has not spoken in vain, and experience will show me to have been sent by Him, as every occurrence has been previously predicted.

It now follows—*Many shall investigate, and knowledge shall increase.* . . . I do not hesitate to suppose the angel to promise the arrival of a period when God should collect many disciples to Himself, although at the beginning they should be very few and insignificant. *Many, then, shall investigate;* meaning, though they are most careless and slothful, while boasting themselves God's people, yet God should gather to Himself a great multitude from other quarters.

Small indeed and insignificant is the apparent number of the faithful who care for the truth of God, and who show any eagerness to learn it, but let not this scantiness move you. The sons of God shall soon become increased. *Many shall investigate, and knowledge shall increase.* This prophecy shall not always be buried in obscurity; the Lord will at length cause many to embrace it to their own salvation.

This event really came to pass. Before Christ's coming, this doctrine was not esteemed according to its value. The extreme ignorance and grossness of the people is notorious, while their religion was nearly overthrown till God afterwards increased His Church.

And at the present time any one who will carefully consider this prediction will experience its utility. This can scarcely be fully expressed in words; for, unless this prophecy had been preserved and laid up like an inestimable treasure, much of our faith would have passed away. **This divine assistance affords us strength, and enables us to overcome all the attacks of the world and of the devil.**

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, as we have to engage in battle through the whole course of our lives, and our strength is liable to fail in various ways, that we may be supported by Your power and thus persevere to the end. May we never grow weary, but learn to overcome the whole world, and to look forward to that happy eternity to which You invite us. May we never hesitate while Christ Your Son fights for us, in whose hand and power our victory is placed, and may He ever admit us into alliance with Himself in that conquest which He has procured for us, until at length He shall gather us at the last day into the enjoyment of that triumph in which He has gone before us. — Amen.

Daniel 12:10

“Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”

Again, the angel mentions the persecutions which were at hand for the purpose of arming the faithful for the approaching conflicts. We know from other sources how tender and weak our minds naturally are, for as soon as any cause for fear arises, before it comes to blows, we fall down lifeless through terror. As, therefore, our natural imbecility is so great, we necessarily require many stimulants to patience, and to urge us to contend with earnestness, and never to yield to any temptations. This is the reason why the angel announces the necessity for such multiplied purifications, *to cleanse them*, as wheat from chaff; *to whiten them*, as cloth by the fuller; and *to melt them*, as metal to be separated from dross.

First of all, as I have previously explained, He admonishes Daniel and all the pious of the future state of the Church, to lead them to prepare and gird themselves for battle, and to gather up their unconquered fortitude, since the condition of life set before them is that of forcing their way through the midst of troubles. This is one point.

Again, the angel shows the practical utility of this kind of life, which might otherwise seem too bitter. **We naturally refuse the cross because we feel it contrary to our disposition, while God shows the pious that nothing can be more profitable to them than a variety of afflictions.** This is a second point.

But afflictions by themselves might possibly consume us, and hence we are cast into a furnace. Now, then, could we expect these sufferings to promote our salvation, except God changed their nature in some wonderful way, as their natural tendency is to effect our destruction? But while we are *melted down, and whitened, and cleansed*, we perceive how God consults for our welfare by pressing us with His cross and causing us to submit to adversity.

Now, thirdly, the angel shows the insufficiency of one single act of cleansing, and our need of many more. This is the object of this numerous heaping together of words, *they shall be cleansed, and whitened, and melted down*, or poured forth. He might have embraced the whole idea in a single word; but, as through our whole lives God never ceases to test us in various ways, the angel heaps together these three words **to show the faithful their need of continual cleansing** as long as they are clothed in flesh; just as garments which are in daily use have need of continual washing. However snowy-white a coat may be, it becomes soiled immediately when used for even a single day; requiring constant ablution to restore it to its original purity.

Thus we are brought in contact with the defilements of sin; and as long as we are pilgrims in this world, we necessarily become subject to constant pollution. And as **the faithful** also are infected with the contagion of numerous iniquities, they **require daily purifications in different ways**. We ought, then, diligently to notice these three distinct processes.

The angel afterwards adds, *The impious will act impiously, and will never understand anything; but the prudent [wise] will be ever endued with intelligence*. Here he wishes to fortify the pious against a stumbling block in their way, when they see the profane despisers of God exulting in every direction, and defying God to His face. When the faithful see the world so full of the impious, they seem to be indulging so freely in lust as if there were no God in heaven. Hence they are naturally subject to grievous sorrow and distress. To prevent this trial from agitating their minds, the angel announces how *the impious should conduct themselves impiously*; implying, there is no reason why you, O Daniel, or the rest of the righteous, should depend on the example of others; Satan will cunningly set before you whatever obstacles may draw you into the contempt of God, and the abyss of impiety, unless you are remarkably cautious; but let not the conduct of the impious cause either you or the rest of the pious to stumble. However they conduct themselves, stand invincible.

He afterwards assigns a reason for their behavior—*they understand nothing*, they are perfectly blinded. But what is the source of this blindness? Their being given over to a reprobate sense.

If any one should see a blind man fall, and should cast himself down after this blind man, would he be excusable? Surely his blindness was the cause of his perishing so miserably, but why does the other person destroy himself willingly?

Whenever we see the impious rushing furiously on to their destruction, while God is admonishing them that their blindness proceeds from Satan, and that they are given over to a reprobate mind, are we not doubly mad if we willingly follow them?

The cause then of this impious behavior on the part of the wicked, is added with good reason; namely, they understand nothing. Meanwhile, the faithful are recalled to the true remedy, and the angel subjoins, *But the prudent shall understand*, meaning they shall not permit themselves to be implicated in the errors of those whom they see entirely devoted to their own destruction.

Lastly, the angel points out to us the true remedy which will prevent Satan from drawing us off towards impiety, and the impious from infecting us with their evil examples, if we earnestly apply ourselves to the pursuit of heavenly doctrine.

If, therefore, we heartily desire to be taught by God and to become His true disciples, the instruction which we derive from Him will snatch us from destruction. This is the true sense of the passage. . . .

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, since You propose to us no other end than that of constant warfare during our whole life, and subject us to many cares until we arrive at the goal of this temporary race course: Grant, I pray, that we may never grow fatigued. May we ever be armed and equipped for battle, and whatever the trials by which You prove us, may we never be found deficient. May we always aspire towards heaven with upright souls, and strive with all our endeavors to attain that blessed rest which is laid up for us in heaven, in Jesus Christ our Lord. — Amen.

PRAISE BE TO GOD.