

SERMON 33

ANCIENT PROPHECY, PROVED TO BE DIVINE, 1761

IN A DISCOURSE PREACHED AT *The Rev. Mr. THOMPSON'S Meeting-House, in a Monthly EXERCISE of PRAYER, with a SERMON, February the 19th, 1761.*

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2 PETER 1:21

“For the Prophecy came not in old Time by the Will of Man; but holy Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

THE Apostle exhorts us, in the preceding Part of the Context, reverentially to regard the Writings of the Prophets. And in order to enforce his Exhortation, he introduces the Words which I have read.

In treating the Text, I would First, explain the Terms and Phrase used therein, and Then, advance a doctrinal Proposition from them.

First. Prophecy is the Knowledge and Revelation of Things, not discoverable by natural Light, whether past, present, or future. Things past are Matter of Prophecy. For Instance, the Order of Creation which *Moses* gives, the Account of; that could not possibly be discovered by Reason. The great Creator, in an immediate and supernatural Manner, made known to *Moses* how he proceeded in the Formation of all Things which exist. Present Things also were Matter of Prophecy. Thus *Elisha* by a prophetic Spirit became acquainted with his Servant *Gehazi*, receiving Gifts of *Naaman the Syrian*, 2 Kings 5:26. Future Things likewise are Matter of Prophecy; such as are *contingent* and *free*, especially if they are not only in a general Manner predicted, but with the Circumstances of Persons, Place and Time. By this God proves his Omniscience, and strongly asserts his Divinity, against the feigned Deities of the Gentiles; that He by himself knew future Things, and revealed them to whom he would, Isaiah 41:21-23.

Secondly. Prophecy came not in old Time by the Will of Man. Old Time means the former Ages of the World. Prophecy was ancient, for it commenced very early. It came not by the Will of Man; the human Will had no Influence therein: For no Man was endowed with a Spirit of Prophecy, because he willed so to be: It was entirely of the sovereign Will of GOD that any Man became a Prophet. And it must be observed, that the Prophets had not an habitual Capacity of prophesying or declaring

the Will of GOD. It was not by virtue of an infused Habit residing in them, which they could exert at Pleasure. This is evident in *Moses*, who did not immediately pass Sentence against a Blasphemer; but he was put into Custody. until the Will of GOD was declared concerning him, Leviticus 24:12.

Thirdly. The Prophets, who were holy Men of God, *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. They were holy Men of God; sanctified by divine Grace, and let apart of GOD unto that sacred Function wherein they ailed, and they enjoyed Nearness to, and Familiarity with Him: They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost: Who is the third Person in the adorable Trinity. His Office and Work it is to reveal the Will of GOD unto the Church. The Prophets spake as they were moved by him. He furnished them with the Knowledge of the Matter of their Prophecies: And by a powerful Impulse He excited them to speak in delivering them. For the holy Spirit dictated to them in speaking; or the Prophets expressed the Mind of GOD in Language, which He directed them to use. The Medium by which we communicate Knowledge to one another, in this State, as Speech, wherein we may err: For, our Language is not an infallible Mean of conveying Knowledge. If, therefore, the Prophets had been left to themselves, in the Choice of Words, they might have erred. To suppose which, is to overthrow Inspiration itself, as it is intended for the infallible Instruction of the Church of GOD. This is clear, because a fallible Mean cannot infallibly instruct, or infallibly convey the Knowledge of Truth. The Conceptions of the Prophets were suggested to their Minds in an immediate and supernatural Manner, by the Holy Ghost; and they expressed those Conceptions, under his infallible Guidance and Direction. So that, they were effectually preserved from Error, in Thought, and in Language too. And therefore, their Doctrines are not only of GOD; but the Words in which they expressed those Doctrines are of GOD also. As Saints they were not *impeccable*, but as Prophets they were certainly *infallible*. For, they both thought and spoke under the infallible Direction of the holy Spirit.

From the Words thus briefly explained, I think this doctrinal Proposition naturally arises, viz. The Writings of the Prophets are an immediate and supernatural Revelation from God.

It is reasonable to suppose, that GOD is capable of conveying to the human Mind, the Knowledge of Truth, in an immediate and supernatural Manner; and also, that the Mind of Man is capable of receiving the Knowledge of Truth in such a Manner: Because, I apprehend, without the Supposition of both, we must conclude, it is impossible, that the Knowledge of Men, even in the future State, should be carried farther, than their natural Powers can arrive unto. Which surely none will ever imagine. Hath not GOD the same immediate Access to, and Power of acting upon the human Mind, in its embodied State, as in its separate State? Doubtless he has. And, therefore, he can, while it is united to the Body, enlarge its Knowledge of

Truths as far as he pleases, by an immediate and supernatural Manner of acting upon it unto that End. Consequently, Inspiration is not a Thing in the least unreasonable. Our Incapacity to explain it, or declare the Mode of it, is no Objection unto its Possibility. We pretend not to have any Experience thereof; how, therefore, should we be capable of explaining of it, or of declaring its Mode. Reason cannot but conclude upon the Possibility of it, though' it is unable to describe how GOD acts upon the human Mind therein.

In discoursing on the doctrinal Proposition which I have advanced from the Text, I would,

I. Endeavour to prove, that an immediate and supernatural Revelation was absolutely necessary, to teach Men their Duty, and conduct them to Happiness.

II. Offer some Arguments to evince, that the Writings of the Prophets are such a Revelation.

III. Hint some Things to prove, that we now enjoy their Writings *pure* and *uncorrupt*.

I. An immediate and supernatural Revelation was absolutely necessary to teach Men their Duty, and conduct them to Happiness.

The Truth whereof, I conceive, the following Arguments will most clearly and solidly prove.

1. We know not how we may worship GOD *acceptably*. By Worship Is understood giving that Glory to GOD which is due from us, on Account of his infinite Perfections, our absolute Dependence on Him, and our numerous Obligations to Him: Reason itself, without the least Hesitation, will at once determine, that it is fit that we should pay religious Honors to our Creator. But in what Way, which will be approved by him it is at a Loss, and cannot resolve. No Man, who thinks, can be without some degree of Consciousness, that he is a Sinner, and unable to perform devotional Acts with that fixed Attention, and absolute Freedom from Vanity in his Thoughts which he ought. How, therefore, his religious Services may be accepted with his Maker, which are not such as they ought to be, he cannot obtain Satisfaction about. Our Religion is the Religion of Sinners: Therefore, very defective and imperfect. Consequently, it is impossible that our Reason should ever discover how our religious Services may be accepted by the infinitely pure and holy Object of our Devotions. I dare venture to affirm, that if all the Deists upon Earth were to unite in a Consultation on this momentous Subject, they would never be able to prescribe to us such a Mode of Worship, as we may be assured will be pleasing to our Maker. This is a Point of the utmost Importance, and fully proves the absolute Necessity of an immediate and supernatural Revelation from Heaven to instruct us in our Duty, and guide us to Happiness.

2. Another Thing of equal Importance, which we are ignorant of, is, how our depraved Nature may be rectified and cured of that moral Disorder which it is the

Subject of That Corruption hath overspread human Nature, is as clear as the Sun: But to what particular Cause it is owing, Reason cannot inform us. The Malady is evident to all who seriously think on the Matter, but none can trace it up to its Origin; nor discover by what Means it may be remedied. If Reason is capable of discovering that GOD only can effect our Cure, which perhaps it may, yet it hath no Way of knowing whether He will or not. For no Man hath a Right to claim this Favor of his Maker, and therefore none can tell, whether he will vouchsafe it to any of the human Race or not. From hence it is evident, that an immediate and supernatural Revelation from GOD was absolutely necessary to instruct and conduct us to Happiness. **3.** It is a Point unknown to Reason whether GOD will pardon Sin. As we cannot be without some Consciousness of Guilt, our natural Light discerns that Sin demerits Punishment. Divine Benevolence and Goodness assure the innocent Creature of kind Treatment from its Maker: But that He will act mercifully towards the Guilty, cannot be collected from thence; because, Acts of Mercy and Forgiveness are not *natural* to GOD. They are *free* Acts of his Will, which therefore must be above the Discovery of our Reason. If indeed there was a *Fitness* in Pardon, or if it was fit in itself for GOD to forgive Sin, he could not but forgive it. Remission would then be *necessary* and not *free*. Nor Can we attain unto a Satisfaction, from the Works and Bounties of Providence, that there is a Purpose in GOD to pardon Sin. Deferring the Execution of Punishment is no Evidence of an Intention, in GOD, to remit our Guilt. And permitting Men to possess Abundance of this World, is no Ground for a Conclusion that He is upon Terms of Peace and Reconciliation with them. The grandest Monarch, from his exalted Station and princely Treasures, hath no more Reason to think that GOD will forgive his Sins, than the meanest and most necessitous of his Subjects have to imagine, that He will pardon theirs. *Divine Love or Hatred to the Sons of Men*, cannot be known by what they are intitled unto, or want of the Things of this World. Placability in GOD towards Sinners cannot with the least Appearance of Truth be inferred from the Dispensations of Providence. The great Governor of the World often suffers the most abandoned to swim in Plenty, and enjoy Ease; while the less vicious drag through Life in Penury and great Distress. Besides, what pleasing Sense of the divine Favor do the Sons of Men enjoy, in all that glittering Show, with which they glide through the short Time of their Existence here? None at all: Nor are they desirous of that delightful Consciousness. As they have their Portion in this Life, they are content with it, and look not higher. This is a farther Proof of the absolute Necessity of an immediate and supernatural Revelation from GOD.

4. We cannot by any Means assure ourselves, that it is possible with GOD to pardon Sin and save criminal Creatures. Some, perhaps, will say this is proceeding very far indeed: But I hope to make it evident, that it is true. The Reason of the Matter asserted. is clear: Which is this. If Sin is pardoned, and guilty Creatures are saved,

it is *fit* that it should be, in such a Way as is glorifying to GOD. It may be, it will be asked, Is not GOD infinitely merciful? I answer, he undoubtedly is. It may be enquired farther, Is it not an Act of Mercy to save a miserable Creature? I reply, It certainly is. May not, therefore, GOD glorify his Mercy in laving Sinners *absolutely* on the Ground of Mercy, or without any Provision for his Honor in other Respects? I answer boldly, No, he cannot: Because, Mercy in Remission only regards the miserable Object, in sparing him, not his Guilt, unto which his Misery is owing. GOD is not merciful to Sin itself, nor can be: That he cannot spare, or suffer to go unpunished. As he cannot act powerfully, in the natural World, without acting wisely therein: So, he cannot act mercifully in the moral World, (if I may be allowed the Use of that Phrase) without acting holily therein. Now, the Manifestation of divine Holiness, in relation to Guilt, can only be in the Infliction of deferred Penalty, And it is not possible with GOD to exercise Mercy towards guilty Creatures, and therein neglect to discover his Holiness, or his just and infinite Abhorrence of moral Evil. To pardon Sin, as an absolute Act of Mercy, would be a total Neglect of Holiness, which is no more possible with GOD, than it is to put forth the Acts of Power without Wisdom. As He cannot act powerfully without the Exercise of his infinite Wisdom therein: So He cannot act mercifully, without manifesting his infinite Holiness therein. But to forgive Sin, as an Act of *absolute* Mercy, would not be an Act of Holiness; and therefore no such Act of *absolute* Mercy is possible with GOD. Can finite Wisdom resolve how Holiness, as well as Mercy, may be discovered in the Remission of Sin? No, that is impossible. Holiness is manifested in the Infliction of Punishment for Sin, and Mercy is displayed in the Impunity of a Sinner. It is absolutely beyond the Power of all created Wisdom to determine how both should be; and therefore our Reason cannot assure us, that the Pardon of Sin, and the Salvation of Sinners, are possible: And consequently our Reason must conclude, that for ought we know, our Salvation may be a Thing impossible. For we cannot tell how GOD may act holily and mercifully towards guilty Creatures in their Remission and Salvation. I make no Scruple to allow, that Reason of itself is sufficient to acquaint us, in some Degree, with our Guiltiness and Misery: But I *peremptorily* deny, that it is capable of pointing out a Way wherein GOD may save us, consistently with the Honor of his Perfections. And *right Reason* will never imagine that GOD may act otherwise than *becomes himself*, Or unsuitable to any of his Perfections. These Things clearly evince the absolute Necessity of an immediate and supernatural Revelation to instruct us in our Duty, and conduct us to Happiness.

II. I would offer some Arguments to prove, that the Writings of the Prophets are such a Revelation.

It is reasonable to think that the Prophets had a full Persuasion in their Minds, that they were inspired of GOD. For they did not acquire Riches, obtain Ease, and gain the Applause of the World, by acting in the prophetic Character; on the contrary;

they were exposed to Poverty, Loss of Liberty, the keen Resentment of a rebellious and wicked People, Unto whom, they delivered their Prophecies, yea even unto Death itself, in Consequence of the Part they acted as Prophets. And, therefore, they must, most deservedly, be esteemed *Fools* or *mad Men*, if they were not fully persuaded in their own Minds, that they had a Commission from GOD to speak and as they did. Would Men in their Senses, without any View of Advantage; but quite the Reverse, pretend to be divinely inspired, unless they really thought themselves so to be? It is most unreasonable to imagine this. I add, the Prophets were holy Men of GOD. They loved Him, revered Him, trusted in Him, sacredly regarded his Honor, were obedient to Him, and enjoyed Intimacy with Him. And therefore, they certainly conceived, that the Matter of their Prophecies was suggested unto them by GOD. For, Men of their Character could not be guilty of *impious Fraud*, or of palming a *Forgery* on the infinite Being, whom they adored. If any shall say, Be it so, that those Men really thought themselves to be inspired, were they above a Possibility of Deception? Might they not be mistaken? What Evidence have we that they were not? In answer, I will say, that We have most clear, and abundant Evidence, that they were not mistaken.

1. The Sublimity and mysterious Nature of the Doctrines, which they delivered, clearly and solidly prove, that they were inspired of GOD. The prophetic Writings contain Principles, which are absolutely above the Discovery of human Reason; and, therefore, those Principles could not possibly be invented by the Prophets. Their Knowledge of them was not acquired; but it must have been conveyed to their Minds, in an immediate and supernatural Manner. Things they are, *which Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, and which have not entered into the Heart of Man*. Yea, they infinitely transcend the Wisdom of Angels. For, they are *the Wisdom of God, in a Mystery, the hidden Wisdom, which be ordained before the World, to our Glory*. They are the *manifold Wisdom of God. And the deep Things of God*. The Scheme of the Salvation of Sinners, by the promised Messiah, whereof the Prophets treat, was the Contrivance of infinite Wisdom, and could never have been thought of, by Men, or Angels. The Prophets assert, that the Messiah is *Jehovah, God, the mighty God, and also a Child born, and a Son given*; therefore properly divine, and really human, which is a Mystery, that cannot be comprehended, by any finite Mind, nor could ever have been conceived of, by a created Understanding, how capacious so ever. And that this glorious Person should be a Substitute for guilty Men, obey the Law for them, bear their Guilt, and atone for their Crimes, are such Mysteries, as could not have been devised by a Creature, angelic or human. Consequently, the Prophets, who discovered those Mysteries, must have been inspired of GOD. I am sensible, that the Deists assert, that these Doctrines are absurd, and repugnant to Reason, but they have not yet proved them so. And I dare affirm, that they will never be able to give the least Proof thereof. For, they have no Medium, by which such Proof can be

given. Because, they are not inconsistent with any Principle of natural Religion. Above it they are; but contrary to it, they are not. This is an *intrinsic demonstrative* Proof, that the holy Prophets were divinely inspired.

2. The perfect Harmony and Agreement, in all the Writings of the Prophets, relating to those sublime and mysterious Doctrines, clearly prove, that they are of divine Original, in nothing do they contradict one another. They correspond, and exactly agree in all Things. No Contradictions, or jarring Principles, can be produced, in what they spake, and wrote. They are one and uniform, in all they express, upon every Point of Doctrine, whereof they discourse. Now, if we consider, at what distant Times, their Prophecies were delivered, if we consider the large Number of the Prophets, their different Capacities, Advantages and Stations, as Men, under what different Circumstances, and also on what different Occasions, they did write, surely, we must be convinced, that it is no less than *real Miracle*, that a Unity of Sentiments, should run through their Writings: or, which is the same Thing, that they were under unerring Direction in what they wrote. For, without that, human Frailty would most certainly have discovered itself, in some Part or other, on that great Variety of sublime and profound Subjects, whereof they treat. I challenge all the Deists in the World, to try their Skill on this Head.

And if they are able to produce a single Contradiction, upon any Point of Doctrine, in the Writings of the Prophets, I will allow, that with Reason they reject the Bible. But I am firmly persuaded, that by this Concession, I am not in the least Danger of being driven into infidelity. And that this is a Task, which no Deist will dare to undertake. Bold and enterprising as they are, in their Attacks on the Credit of the sacred Writers. If anyone should be hardy enough to attempt the Thing, he would quickly find, that he could not hope to succeed, in that Attempt. The Uniformity of Doctrines, in the Writings of the Prophets, is a pregnant, and irrefragable Proof of their Divinity: or, that those holy Men of GOD, spake and wrote *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.

3. The numerous Predictions of future Events, which could only be foreknown to GOD, and their exact Accomplishment, that we have in the Writings of the Prophets, undeniably prove, that GOD, in an immediate and supernatural Manner, revealed his Will to them. This is an exceedingly copious Subject; a large Field opens itself to our View. And I might greatly enlarge upon it. For, the prophetic Writings abound with such Predictions. But I shall confine myself, in this Discourse, unto two general Heads of them.

(1.) Those relating to Jesus Christ.

(2.) Those which respect the State of the Jews upon their Rejection of Him, and their Opposition to his Gospel, which was preached to them, after his Ascension to Heaven.

(1.) I would observe some of those Predictions, relating to Jesus Christ, which we have, in the Writings of the Prophets, and the exact Accomplishment of them in Him. His Descent is foretold, not only of which Tribe; but of what particular Family He should be. It was a Matter well known among the Jews, from ancient Prophecy, that the Messiah promised to them, was to spring from *David*. And our Saviour was of the Seed of *David*, according to the *Flesh*. A clear Prediction was given of the supernatural Conception of Christ. *Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son, and shall call his Name IMMANUEL*. This is a Thing *miraculous*. Which, therefore, could only be foreknown to GOD. For no Creature whatever can possibly tell whether GOD will exert his Power to effect a Miracle, unless He himself makes a Discovery, that such is his Intention, And, therefore, this Prediction of the *miraculous Conception* of Christ, is a clear Proof, that the Prophet was divinely inspired. Our blessed Lord was conceived and born of a Virgin, by the almighty Agency of the Holy Ghost. He was *made of a Woman*, formed of her Substance; so *that he was the Seed of the Woman*, in Distinction from the Man, according to the first Promise which GOD expressed after *Adam's* Fall. The Place of the Birth of Christ was Matter of Prophecy, which, through a remarkable Dispensation of Providence, was not only accomplished; but the Fact was rendered so notorious, that it could not possibly be denied. Also, full Proof was given, that He descended from *David*, whose Son the Messiah was to be. Farther, his Behavior is described in the Writings of the Prophets, in as exact a Manner as if they had seen and been conversant with Him, in the Course of his Conduct. It was declared concerning Him in Prophecy, that he should *not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his Voice to be heard in the Street*; in order to gain public Applause, either by what He spake or wrought. And according to the Prediction of the Prophets, Christ was absolutely free from Ostentation. He made use of no Methods to spread his Fame, and obtain Honor and Praise from Men, in the great Variety of stupendous Works, which he constantly effected, wherever he went. Our Saviour wisely performed many miraculous Works, in a public Manner, with a View to render his divine Mission evident and incontestable. But he wrought none with an Intention to gain worldly Honor and Repute.

In no Instance did He court the Applause of Men. His sole Aim was to glorify his Father, and give Proof, that He acted by his Commission. Majesty and Modesty centered and met in Him, and were equally manifest in all that He spake and acted. It was foretold of Him, that He should be *lowly, riding upon an Ass, upon a Colt, the Foal of an ass*. And He was *meek and lowly*, Which he discovered, when He entered in Triumph, into the City of *Jerusalem*, upon so mean a Creature as an Ass, agreeable to the Prophet's Prediction. Now, who but GOD could possibly foreknow these Things? Certainly none. And, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude, that the Prophets who predicted them, were divinely inspired. Moreover, the Sufferings and

Death of Christ, were prophesied of in a most explicit Manner. It is said, that *He gave his Back to the Smilers, his Cheeks to them that plucked off the Hair, and hid not his Face from Shame and Spitting*. Wherein are expressed the rude and cruel Treatment our Saviour met with, and his Fortitude in bearing it. He was spit upon, smitten in the Face, and scourged. In suffering which Indignities and Cruelties, he conducted himself, in the most meek and patient Manner. Not the least Degree of undue Resentment appeared in Him. When *He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not*. But, as the Prophet predicted, *He was led as a Lamb to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before her Shearers is dumb, so He opened not his Mouth*. His Death not only was foretold; but also, the Manner of it, was intimated in Prophecy. *His Hands and his Feet were to be pierced*, and they were so, when He was nailed to the Cross. That Prediction suggested that He was to suffer Death, by Crucifixion, and He actually did. Again, It was prophesied, that the Messiah should be laid in the Grave, and have an honorable Interment. *He made his Grave with the Wicked, and with the Rich in his Death*. That Prediction also was exactly accomplished in our blessed Saviour. I add, his Resurrection from the State of the Dead was Matter of Prophecy. He is prophetically represented, expressing himself thus. *Thou wilt not leave my Soul in Hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see Corruption*. Which was verified in Jesus, Who arose from the Dead on the third Day, after he suffered, as is abundantly verified by numerous credible Witnesses, who could be under no Temptation to affirm a Falsehood: And who had sufficient Means of satisfying themselves of the Truth of the Fact. It cannot be denied that this was an Event *really miraculous*. And, therefore, it could only be fore-known to GOD, consequently, no one could possibly become acquainted with it, before its Accomplishment; but by an immediate and supernatural Revelation from Him. To which I subjoin, his Ascension to Heaven, and sitting down at the right Hand of GOD, were clearly predicted in the Writings of the Prophets. The Messiah was to *ascend up on high; and sit at the right Hand of GOD*. *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right Hand*. This likewise was accomplished in our Saviour. For, He is exalted at the right Hand of the Father, in that Character, *to give Repentance to Israel, and Remission of Sins*. Which wonderful and glorious Event, could not possibly, have been thought of, by any Mortal, without a supernatural Revelation of it from Heaven. Hence, it is evident, that the Writings of the Prophets were divinely inspired. Once more, the Glory which followed, in the Church, upon the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ to Heaven, was foretold. The wonderful Spread of the Gospel, the Conversion of the Gentiles, and the large Effusion of the Holy Spirit, in his Graces and Gifts, were clearly prophetic of. Which are such Events as none, but GOD could foreknow. And, therefore, the Prophets who predicted those extraordinary Events were inspired by Him.

(2.) The State of the Jews upon their Rejection of the Messiah, and Opposition to his Gospel, was most clearly prophesied of. The Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, irrefragably proves two Things, in general, from the Writings of the Prophets, relating to that People. One is this, that the Covenant made with their Fathers, at *Sinai* and *Horeb*, was to be antiquated, *become old*, and *vanish away*. That *their Heaven*, and their *Earth*, *i.e.* their ecclesiastical and political States, were to be *shaken*, yea *shaken* all to Pieces. According to ancient Prophecy, *the Scepter was to depart from Judah, and a Lawgiver from between his Feet*; after the Coming of the Messiah. Their civil and ecclesiastical Authority was entirely to sink. And quite a different State of Things was to be introduced upon the Sinking of the *Mosaic* Oeconomy. A different Mode of Worship was to take Place, and different Persons were to officiate therein. The other Point, which that Divine Writer proves, is this: That nothing was to be expected by that incredulous People, *but fiery Indignation, which would devour them*, as a Body politic; and which actually did. The Condition of that People, ever since, to this Time, is a standing undeniable Evidence, that the Writings of the Prophets are of divine Original.

4. The Miracles which were wrought by the Prophets, for the Confirmation of their heavenly Mission, and the Truth of their Prophecies, most clearly and solidly evince, that they were divinely inspired. When I say *Miracles*, I understand *stupendous Works of such Sort, which are done beside or contrary to the Laws of Nature, and that exceed all the Power of created Causes, performed of God, to gain Credit to his Word*. That Works of such Sort were done, in great Abundance, to obtain Credit unto what the Prophets declared, is not to be denied. Numerous Miracles were wrought by *Moses* in *Egypt*, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness, among the People to whom he was appointed a Leader, for their Deliverance out of Bondage, Safety, Supply and Preservation. And a great Variety, from Time to Time, were effected by succeeding Prophets, unto the like important Ends. And, therefore, omnipotent Power was exerted to prove the Truth of their divine Mission, the Verity of the Doctrines they asserted, and of the Predictions which they delivered. Must we not conclude from hence, that it is most unreasonable Incredulity, to disbelieve the Inspiration of those holy Men? GOD will never exert his Power to confirm Falsehood. He can no more do that, than He is capable of affirming what is untrue. Divine Power can only be put forth for the Establishment of Principles, which are divinely true. No false Doctrines can have Attestations in their Favor of that Kind.

The external Evidences of the Inspiration of the Prophets are such, that a Man who takes them into Consideration, must be either a *Knave* or a *Fool*, that refuses to believe it. Some, perhaps, will say this is very *rough and plain*. Be it so. I am free to declare to all the World, that I think, not the least Degree of Compliance is due to a Deist. If we may not be allowed to impute Folly to Infidels, who generally pretend unto a superior Degree of Wisdom, we may take the Liberty to exhibit a Charge of

very culpable Partiality against them, for without that, there is no Man of a common Understanding, but must discern, that the Writings of the Prophets were not their own Invention; but that they were penned under the infallible Direction of GOD. I proceed,

III. To hint some Things, in order to prove, that we now enjoy those sacred Writings pure and uncorrupt.

Some who seem too ready to allow, that Corruptions have taken Place in the Writings of the Prophets, freely grant us this, that those Corruptions are not such as render it uncertain, whether they were inspired of GOD, or not. Their Books, as they now Read, contain such evident Marks in them, of their coming from GOD, that it cannot reasonably be doubted of. That Point is yielded to us. Which is a Matter of very weighty Consideration. If such Corruptions could be proved in the prophetical Writings, as obscure the Evidences of their divine Original, the Deists might triumph over us. But this is not pretended. Take those Writings as they now stand, they will irrefragably prove, of themselves, that they are no human Production. Such Things are found therein, as are absolutely undiscoverable by a finite Mind. Those Things, therefore, must have been revealed, by GOD. I apprehend, that several Things may be proposed to Consideration, which will render it improbable, that those Writings are corrupted or mutilated.

1. The End of GOD in dictating them, both respecting Himself and the Church.

(1.) The End respecting Himself was his own Glory, That we might know Him, love Him, fear Him, and obey Him. In short, that we might understand how to glorify Him as GOD; which Mankind, without a supernatural Revelation, could never do. That is far above the Reach of our impaired Reason. Philosophy is insufficient to instruct us in our Duty to our Maker, or in what Way we may honor Him as we ought. This End was worthy of GOD, and suitable to his Perfections. For it is fit that He should design his own Glory in all his Works, and in all his Transactions with his reasonable Creatures.

(2.) His End therein with respect to the Church was, not only her Instruction in the Matter of her Duty, but her Consolation, and her safe Guidance unto a state of everlasting Felicity in the Enjoyment of himself. This also is an End becoming the divine Perfections. From hence,

2. A strong Argument may be formed to prove the Purity and perfection of the prophetical writings. For, if these were the Ends of GOD, in granting us such a Revelation of his Will, unless we can suppose that He is become unconcerned about attaining those holy Ends, which He once designed in infinite Wisdom, we cannot imagine that He will ever suffer his Word to be corrupted or mutilated, whereby He would be frustrated of his Ends, in committing that sacred Depositum unto the Church. Now, such an Imagination would be as gross an Impeachment of his Wisdom, as great a Reflection on his Holiness, as dreadful an Abuse of his

Goodness, as is possible to be deviled. Far greater Reverence is due to those sacred Writings than some *bold* Critics have discovered, who allow, that this Fountain of divine Light and Truth is become *foul* and *muddy*, or, in some. Instances, *grossly* corrupt, and have imagined themselves capable of purging it, by their learned Conjectures founded upon Translations, which they conclude, must have been made from *Hebrew* Copies, much differing from those which are now extant*. If this be the Fact, may we not say, how happy was it with the Church formerly, when through the Kindness and Care of GOD she enjoyed the Revelation of his Will, pure, uncorrupt, and entire in all its Parts? But alas! for her, in later Ages GOD hath not manifested the same kind Care of her, nor the same Regard to his own Glory, which He once did, in preferring his Word complete and free from Corruptions; but hath suffered it to be corrupted in a vast Multitude of Places, so that, in a great Variety of Instances, we cannot now determine, with Certainty, whether it is GOD, or Man only, who speaks to us in our Bibles. I very much lament, that any learned Man should advance Positions, relating to the Scripture, which naturally tend to produce Apprehensions in our Minds, that are dishonorable to GOD, and exceedingly dangerous to the Church. That some have so done, it is evident, if I mistake them not. If I do, I crave their Pardon for this Suggestion concerning them.

3. It cannot reasonably be thought that the Writings of the Prophets were corrupted in the Time of our Saviour's being in the World. He appealed unto those Writings to prove the Truth of the Doctrines which He delivered, concerning GOD and himself, in the Character of the Messiah, without the least Intimation of Errors and Mistakes in them; and, therefore, it is highly improbable that they were then attended with Errors and Mistakes. Much less is It probable, if they had before that Time been willfully corrupted by the yews, in whole Possession they were, that He would have been silent on that Head. His Zeal for the Honor of his Father, his intense Love to, and tender Care of the Church, would doubtless have caused Him to have detected and condemned their impious Fraud, if they had so done, though but in a single Instance. With what Severity of Language does He reprove the *Jews* for their false Glosses on, and perverse Interpretations of those Writings. And shall we imagine that He would pass over in Silence the Wickedness and Impiety of they *Jews*, in daring to change the Language of the Prophets, in order to make them express a Sense, which they never intended? GOD forbid, that any Christian should ever admit such a Thought, to have the least Entertainment in his Mind. In my Apprehension, such a Conceit, though it should regard but one Instance only, reflects such Dishonor on the blessed Jesus, that I would not for the whole World allow of it, without the most demonstrative Proof of its Certainty, let all the learned Men in it say what they please, in order to vindicate themselves, in their *Criticisms*, on the sacred Text.

4. There is clear Reason to conclude, that those Writings have not been corrupted since that Time. Who should corrupt them? If any have so done, they must be either

Jews, or professed Christians, who had them in their Possession. Now, it ought to be observed, that neither could act such a Part, without an immediate Discovery. *Jews* Could not, without being detected by Christians, if they had been inclined to corrupt them, out of their Hatred to Christianity. But it is doing Wrong to the *Jews* to suggest, that they have ever been inclined to corrupt the prophetic Writings, from their Dislike of Jesus and his Followers. So far have they been from any such Inclination, that they have *been strictly, yea superstitiously* careful to preserve them exactly correct, and free from Alterations. If any professed Christians corrupted them, they must have been either the Orthodox or Heretics. Now, neither the former nor the latter could possibly make Alterations therein to serve a Turn; but they must have exposed themselves to the Censure of the others, for so wicked and fraudulent a Practice, and which would not have been to the Advantage, but the manifest Prejudice of their Cause. Men must be not only *exceedingly wicked*, but also *extremely foolish*, to attempt the Support of any Opinion, by a willful Corruption of the Scripture, because ever since the Spread of Christianity, that hath been impossible to be done, without a Discovery thereof by others, who espouse not that Opinion, which they would maintain. And, therefore, we may reasonably conclude, that the sacred Writings have not been corrupted, either by *Jews*, or professed Christians of any Party. And, from the Whole, that we now enjoy the Writings of the Prophets *entire, pure and uncorrupt*. Which Writings justly challenge our highest Reverence, as they demand our greatest Gratitude, on Account of their divine Original. I shall conclude my Discourse with the Words of my Text. *For the Prophecy came not in old Time by the Will of Man; but holy Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

FOOTNOTES

* Particularly the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint. Whose Folly and Boldness have been justly exposed by many learned Men, and the Purity of the *Hebrew* Text excellently defended BUXTORF, GLASSIUS, etc. The late very learned Mr. BEDFORD offers some convincing Reasons to prove, that the Samaritan Copy is of later Date than the Septuagint, and copied from thence, in several Places. He concludes, “that we may as well set up to correct *Greek* Authors by their *Latin* Versions, or *Latin* Authors by their *English* Versions, or the Alcoran of *Mahomet*, by the *Latin* and *French* Translations, as to correct the Text by those. — If a Suggestion, that the *Jews* had corrupted them (the Scriptures of the Old Testament) shall be sufficient to attempt daily Alterations, instead of fixing the Standard, we shall confound it; instead of one Bible, we shall have as many as there are Critics. We shall search after Truth until we have lost it, and play with this sacred Light until we have put it out. And whilst we arraign God’s Providence in suffering such Corruptions to be made, and the World to be imposed on with a Scripture as coming from Him, a great Part whereof was none of his, we too justly provoke Him

to enter into Judgment for such unprecedented Impieties, if not to remove his Candlestick out of its Place, and give it to a Nation which will make a better Use of it." This is wisely and piously, said. CHRONOLOGY, p. 49-52.