



*The*  
COMPLETE WORKS  
*of* JOHN OWEN

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The Christian Life • Volume 19

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*Sermons from the Commonwealth and  
Protectorate (1650–1659)*

INTRODUCED & EDITED BY

*Martyn C. Cowan*

*The Complete Works of John Owen*

## ***The Complete Works of John Owen***

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- Vol. 34 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 6, Hebrews 5–6*
- Vol. 35 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 7, Hebrews 7–8*
- Vol. 36 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 8, Hebrews 9–10*
- Vol. 37 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 9, Hebrews 11–13*

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VOLUME 19

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Commonwealth and  
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John Owen

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GENERAL EDITORS

Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
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# Volume 19

## Contents

*Works Preface* vii

*Editor's Introduction* 1

*Outlines* 93

*The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness  
of Staggering* 107

*The Branch of the Lord, the Beauty of Sion* 149

*The Advantage of the Kingdom of Christ in the Shaking of the  
Kingdoms of the World* 189

*The Laboring Saint's Dismission to Rest* 233

*Concerning the Kingdom of Christ, and the Power of the Civil  
Magistrate about the Things of the Worship of God* 263

*God's Work in Founding Zion, and His People's Duty  
Thereupon* 301

*God's Presence with a People, the Spring of Their Prosperity* 341

*Providential Changes, an Argument for Universal Holiness* 377

*The Glory and Interest of Nations Professing the Gospel* 437

*General Index* 463

*Scripture Index* 473



## *Works Preface*

JOHN OWEN (1616–1683) is one of the most significant, influential, and prolific theologians that England has ever produced. His work is of such a high caliber that it is no surprise to find it still in demand more than four centuries after his birth. As a son of the Church of England, a Puritan preacher, a statesman, a Reformed theologian and Bible commentator, and later a prominent Nonconformist and advocate of toleration, he is widely read and appreciated by Christians of different types all over the globe, not only for the profundity of his thinking but also for the depth of his spiritual insight.

Owen was born in the year that William Shakespeare died, and in terms of his public influence, he was a rising star in the 1640s and at the height of his power in the 1650s. As chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, dean of Christ Church, and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, he wielded a substantial degree of power and influence within the short-lived English republic. Yet he eventually found himself on the losing side of the epic struggles of the seventeenth century and was ousted from his position of national preeminence. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 effectively barred him from any role in the established church, yet it was in the wilderness of those turbulent post-Restoration years that he wrote many of his most momentous contributions to the world of theological literature, despite being burdened by opposition, persecution, family tragedies, and illness.

There was an abortive endeavor to publish a uniform edition of Owen's works in the early eighteenth century, but this progressed no further than a single folio volume in 1721. A century later (1826), Thomas Russell met with much more success when he produced a collection in twenty-one volumes. The appetite for Owen only grew; more than three hundred people had subscribed to the 1721 and 1826 editions of his works, but almost three thousand subscribed to the twenty-four-volume set produced by William H. Goold

from 1850 onward. That collection, with Goold's learned introductions and notes, became the standard edition. It was given a new lease on life when the Banner of Truth Trust reprinted it several times beginning in 1965, though without some of Owen's Latin works, which had appeared in Goold's edition, or his massive Hebrews commentary, which Banner did eventually reprint in 1991. Goold corrected various errors in the original seventeenth- and eighteenth-century publications, some of which Owen himself had complained of, as well as certain grammatical errors. He thoroughly revised the punctuation, numeration of points, and Scripture references in Owen and presented him in a way acceptable to nineteenth-century readers without taking liberties with the text.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, and especially since the reprinting of Goold's edition in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a great flowering of interest in seventeenth-century Puritanism and Reformed theology. The recent profusion of scholarship in this area has resulted in a huge increase of attention given to Owen and his contribution to these movements. The time has therefore come to attempt another presentation of Owen's body of work for a new century. This new edition is more than a reprint of earlier collections of Owen's writings. As useful as those have been to us and many others, they fail to meet the needs of modern readers who are often familiar with neither the theological context nor the syntax and rhetorical style of seventeenth-century English divinity.

For that reason, we have returned again to the original editions of Owen's texts to ensure the accuracy of their presentation here but have conformed the spelling to modern American standards, modernized older verb endings, updated some punctuation for clarity, reduced the use of italics where they do not clarify meaning, updated some hyphenation forms, modernized capitalization both for select terms in the text and for titles of Owen's works, refreshed the typesetting, set lengthy quotations in block format, and both checked and added Scripture references in a consistent format where necessary. Owen's quotations of others, however, including the various editions of the Bible he used or translated, are kept as they appear in his original. His marginal notes and footnotes have been clearly marked in footnotes as his (with "—Owen" appearing at the end of his content) to distinguish them from editorial comments. Foreign languages such as Greek, Hebrew, and Latin (which Owen knew and used extensively) have been translated into modern English, with the original languages retained in footnotes for scholarly reference (also followed by "—Owen"). If Goold omitted parts of the original text in his edition, we have restored them to their rightful place. Additionally, we

have attempted to regularize the numbering system Owen employed, which was often imprecise and inconsistent; our order is 1, (1), [1], {1}, and 1st. We have also included various features to aid readers' comprehension of Owen's writings, including extensive introductions and outlines by established scholars in the field today, new paragraph breaks marked by a pilcrow (¶), chapter titles and appropriate headings (either entirely new or adapted from Goold), and explanatory footnotes that define archaic or obscure words and point out scriptural and other allusions in the text. When a contents page was not included in the original publication, we have provided one. On the rare occasions when we have added words to the text for readability, we have clearly marked them using square brackets. Having a team of experts involved, along with the benefit of modern online database technology, has also enabled us to make the prodigious effort to identify sources and citations in Owen that Russell and Goold deliberately avoided or were unable to locate for their editions.

Owen did not use only one English translation of the Bible. At various times, he employed the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, or the Authorized Version (KJV), as well as his own paraphrases or translations from the original languages. We have not sought to harmonize his biblical quotations to any single version. Similarly, we have left his Hebrew and Greek quotations exactly as he recorded them, including the unpointed Hebrew text. When it appears that he has misspelled the Hebrew or Greek, we have acknowledged that in a footnote with reference to either *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece*, though Greek accents and breathing marks have been silently corrected.

This new edition presents fresh translations of Owen's works that were originally published in Latin, such as his *Θεολογούμενα Παντοδαπά* (1661) and *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (which Goold published in an amended eighteenth-century translation). It also includes certain shorter works that have never before been collected in one place, such as Owen's prefaces to other people's works and many of his letters, with an extensive index to the whole set.

Our hope and prayer in presenting this new edition of John Owen's complete works is that it will equip and enable new generations of readers to appreciate the spiritual insights he accumulated over the course of his remarkable life. Those with a merely historical interest will find here a testimony to the exceptional labors of one extraordinary figure from a tumultuous age, in a modern and usable critical edition. Those who seek to learn from Owen about the God he worshiped and served will, we trust, find even greater riches in his doctrine of salvation, his passion for evangelism and missions, his Christ-centered vision of all reality, his realistic pursuit of holiness, his belief

that theology matters, his concern for right worship and religious freedom, and his careful exegetical engagement with the text of God's word. We echo the words of the apostle Paul that Owen inscribed on the title page of his book *Χριστολογία* (1679), "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

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# Editor's Introduction

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS some of the most important sermons delivered by Owen in the 1650s. Many of these sermons were delivered on the national stage and address the turbulent events associated with a search for a lasting settlement for the English Revolution. Some of his other important sermons from Westminster have not come down to us. For example, there is no known record of the following: Owen's weekly preaching to the executive of the new regime, the Council of State, in 1649–1651; his sermons to the Rump Parliament in June 1649, the Nominated Assembly in August 1653, and the Recalled Rump in May 1659; and finally, there is no known record of his preaching to the Council of State at Whitehall each Sunday in the highly fraught months of October and November 1659 (something Crawford Gribben described as the Council “keeping its friends close, and its enemies even closer”).<sup>1</sup>

The sermons in volume 19 are not to be regarded as representative of all Owen's preaching during that decade. For example, we have no extant record of the sermons he preached while in Ireland. Writing from Dublin Castle in December 1649, Owen described how he was constantly preaching to “a numerous multitude, *of as thirsting a people after the Gospel as ever yet I conversed withal*.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there is some evidence that a number of people were converted through his ministry in and around Dublin.<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, numerous examples of the fruit of Owen's pulpit ministry in Cromwellian Oxford that are found in other volumes in this edition

1 Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 115, 202; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1971), 88, 113.

2 John Owen, *Of the Death of Christ, The Price He Paid* (1650), 97. See also *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 9.

3 Crawford Gribben, *God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26, 135, 225n37.

of Owen's works. These help provide a fuller record of the themes that Owen addressed in preaching. In Oxford, Owen was preaching at Christ Church and delivering fortnightly Sunday afternoon sermons at the University Church of St Mary's. Around the middle of the decade, a new wooden pulpit was installed in St Mary's on the old stone pedestal.<sup>4</sup> Some of this expository material was adapted into treatises for the press. For example, the material in important treatises such as *Communion with God* (1657) and *Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656) found its first expression in Owen's preaching in the 1650s. The former was a series of sermons from 1651 that took a number of years, and some persuasion from others, to finally make its way into print.<sup>5</sup> In the latter Owen notes in passing that his preaching on the doctrine of mortification had enjoyed "some comfortable success" and that it was adapted for publication "with such additions and alterations as I should judge necessary."<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, in works like these Gribben has detected "the strategies of the pulpit" in Owen's "pithy soundbites."<sup>7</sup> Unlike much of what is contained in this volume, the application in the preaching from which these treatises evolved was often aimed at the individual believer rather than being directed to the duties and responsibilities of those in government. Nonetheless, the content of Owen's political preaching ought not to be too sharply distinguished from his other preaching. For example, Owen's work *Of Temptation* (1658) was based on sermons from Cromwellian Oxford delivered at the time when Owen was losing influence both at Oxford and Westminster. Owen emphasized that his message was particularly "suited to the times that pass over us,"<sup>8</sup> in which "providential dispensations, in reference to the public concernments of these nations" had seen all things "shaken."<sup>9</sup> It is striking to note that Owen himself stated that he was not dealing with temptation in a general sense: he was providing a probing analysis of the "hour of temptation" that comes to "try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10). He spoke of a time of "backsliding" in which "thousands" had apostatized "within a few years."<sup>10</sup> Now increasingly

4 T. G. Jackson, *The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), 180–81.

5 John Owen, *Communion with God, the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost* (Oxford, 1657), sig. A2r; *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 1. See what are the notes from these (or at least very similar) sermons: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Don F. 40, fols. 113–17 (Notebook of Thomas Aldersey).

6 John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sinne in Believers* [. . .] (Oxford, 1656), sig. A3r; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:76.

7 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 165.

8 John Owen, *Of Temptation* [. . .] (Oxford, 1658), sig. A2r–v; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:203.

9 Owen, *Of Temptation*, sig. A2r–v; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:204.

10 Owen, *Of Temptation*, 66–67; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:233.

alienated, he highlighted how “the prevailing party of these nations, many of those in rule, power [and] favour” had formerly been regarded as lowly “Puritans,” but their attitudes had changed once they had been “translated by a high hand to the mountains they now possess.” Owen lamented, “How soon they have forgot the customs, manners, ways, of their own old people, and are cast into the mould of them that went before them.”<sup>11</sup> He specifically referred to those “in high places” who were particularly tempted to pursue “Crownes, Glories, *Thrones*, pleasures, [and] profits of the world.”<sup>12</sup> Owen’s litany of sins resonated with the temptations that he believed accompanied the monarchical drift of the Protectorate.<sup>13</sup> Thus, even something like *Of Temptation* displays many of the hallmarks of the sermons contained in this volume. The potentially subversive tenor of some of his pulpit ministry helps explain why he was replaced at St Mary’s. Owen’s rather provocative response was to set up a rival lecture at St Peter’s in the East.<sup>14</sup> In the summer of 1659, John Locke mocked the dispirited preaching about the state of the nation that he, as a student, presumably heard from Owen’s other pulpit in Christ Church.<sup>15</sup> It is highly plausible that the undated sermon *Providential Changes, an Argument for Universal Holiness* was preached in Cromwellian Oxford, most likely in the first half of 1657, and this is included in this volume to help readers follow the development of Owen’s preaching across the decade. Some of the sermons from volume 22 may tentatively be assigned a date in the 1650s, but the lack of certainty means that they are included among the other undated sermons.<sup>16</sup>

Owen’s sermons from this decade are best described as a form of “prophetic preaching.”<sup>17</sup> Taking the voices and assuming tropes of the biblical prophets, Owen offered an explanation of the events of the English Revolution and

11 Owen, *Of Temptation*, 66–67; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:243.

12 Owen, *Of Temptation*, 160; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:286.

13 Owen, *Of Temptation*, 175–76; *Complete Works of John Owen*, 15:292–93.

14 Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 122–23; Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 176.

15 John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. Esmond S. de Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–1989), 1:83. Locke wrote of those whose message was “of noe thing but fire sword and ruine.”

16 *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 22.

17 The shorthand of “prophetic preaching” has been usefully employed by the following scholars: Patrick Collinson, “Biblical Rhetoric: The English Nation and National Sentiment in the Prophetic Mode,” in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 284; Mary Morrissey, “Elect Nations and Prophetic Preaching: Types and Examples in the Paul’s Cross Jeremiad,” in *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600–1750*, ed. Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 43–58.

urged his hearers and readers to make a proper response. Patrick Collinson helpfully summarizes the message of this genre as “always the same: most favoured, more obligated, most negligent.”<sup>18</sup> This pattern is certainly evident in Owen’s preaching as he drew attention to the undeserved blessings of apocalyptic significance that the nation had experienced, set forth the obligation incumbent upon it to respond appropriately to this unique providential moment, and as he lamented the nation’s failures to do so, with warnings of the consequent threat of divine judgment.

*THE STEADFASTNESS OF THE PROMISES,  
AND THE SINFULNESS OF STAGGERING*

**Context of Owen’s Parliamentary Fast Sermon**

Recently returned from the Irish expedition, where he had served as a military chaplain, Owen preached to the Parliament on the occasion of a national fast. On January 29, 1650, the Rump had ordered a committee to draw up a declaration for this solemn day of fasting and public humiliation. The act appointing that a fast be held on Thursday, February 28, was read on February 2 and approved after two readings on February 4.<sup>19</sup> As regular monthly humiliations had now been abolished, public fasts were now called only for specific purposes. Those reasons were set out in the published act.<sup>20</sup> It began by making reference to the Lord, “who Ruleth over the Nations, who disposeth and ordereth all things, according to the Good pleasure of his own Will.” It explained how God’s intention was to “warn and awaken the inhabitants of the Earth” to live faithfully and fruitfully before him. It rehearsed how, in recent days, God had intervened decisively to deliver England from “Tyranny, Popery and Superstition.” The receipt of such goodness and mercy should evoke duty and obedience. The nervous new regime had introduced a test of loyalty that took the form of the Engagement Oath, and in January 1650 an act for nationwide subscription to this engagement was passed. This required all men to declare their allegiance to the Commonwealth “as now established

<sup>18</sup> Collinson, “Biblical Rhetoric,” 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 13 vols. (London: HMSO, 1802–1803), 6:352, 356–57; Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs* [. . .], 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1853), 2:517; Natalie Mears et al., eds., *National Prayers: Special Worship Since the Reformation*, vol. 1, *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2013), 515–16.

<sup>20</sup> *An Act Appointing Thursday the Last Day of February, 1649. For a Solemn Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer: And Declaring the Grounds Therof* (London, [February 4,] 1650).

without a single person, kingship or the house of peers.”<sup>21</sup> This was the cause of significant debate at the time when this sermon was delivered and prepared for publication.<sup>22</sup> In an attempt to broaden the support base for the new regime, particularly among Presbyterians, the engagement cautiously avoided religious language; indeed, people were told to regard it “not as a thing of Religion, but a civill action,” and some who promoted it encouraged subscribers to swear “equivocally.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, some Presbyterians made much less than half-hearted promises of loyalty to the new republic.<sup>24</sup> In this sermon, Owen appears to commend the Engagement Oath of fealty to the new regime.

The act establishing the fast lamented how “we finde . . . crying sins, hideous Blasphemies, and unheard of Abominations (and that by some under pretence of Liberty, and greater measure of Light).”<sup>25</sup> This was, most likely, a reference to the uproar caused by groups such as the so-called Ranters. Of particular relevance for this sermon was this act’s call for prayer and supplication concerning the propagation of the gospel, and this was a major theme that Owen chose to address in this sermon by offering “more specific guidance than heretofore” about how this might be done, all informed by his own recent experience across the Irish Sea.<sup>26</sup>

The other preacher that day was the Welsh radical Vavasor Powell (1617–1670), whose sermon, like Owen’s, was also published. Powell was listed as one of the approvers of a parliamentary act that had established the Commission for Better Propagation of the Gospel in Wales and that had been passed the week beforehand, on February 22.<sup>27</sup> This was part of a wider scheme designed to advance the gospel in Wales and the north of England.<sup>28</sup> Powell appears to have been sponsored by Thomas Harrison, who had a key role in this propagation scheme.<sup>29</sup> Powell’s sermon was distinctly millenarian,

21 *Severall Proceedings in Parliament 14* (December 28, 1649–January 4, 1650), 180.

22 Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1648–1653* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 226–32.

23 *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, 180.

24 Edward Vallance, *Revolutionary England and the National Covenant: State Oaths, Protestantism and the Political Nation, 1553–1682* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2005), 168–73.

25 *An Act Appointing Thursday the Last Day of February, 1649, For a Solemn Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer* (London, 1650).

26 *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Owen, Dr John (?1614–83).”

27 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:350, 365–70.

28 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:335–37, 352, 365, 370, 396, 416, 420–21; David Underdown, *Pride’s Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 273; Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 120–21, 234–36, 271–73.

29 Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 234; David Farr, *Major-General Thomas Harrison: Millenarianism, Fifth Monarchism and the English Revolution 1616–1660* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 131.

announcing that 1650 was “to be the Saints yeare of Jubilee.” He rejoiced in God’s providence both in England and Ireland and pleaded with members of Parliament to examine themselves to ensure that they were favoring the cause of the saints and being gentle to those with “tender consciences, who peradventure cannot subscribe and submit to your power and authoritie.”<sup>30</sup>

If the choice of Powell as a preacher was linked to the Welsh scheme for the propagation of the gospel, then this was something of a two-pronged movement, with Owen’s sermon concentrating on the need for similar action in Ireland. Toby Barnard comments that the Rump Parliament had to be “goaded into action” by Cromwell through the action of some of his military chaplains from the Irish expedition and claims that this sermon by Owen “breathed new life” into the ordinance first read at the end of November 1649.<sup>31</sup>

Somewhat unusually, the parliamentary order was not included in the printed version of the sermon. On Friday, March 1, the Commons instructed Sir William Masham to communicate thanks to Owen for the sermon he delivered at the previous day’s fast and requested that the sermon be published.<sup>32</sup> Masham, a well-established member of the Essex gentry, had been the most prominent prisoner during the siege of Colchester and one of those to whom Owen dedicated *Ebenezer* (1648).<sup>33</sup> He was readmitted to the House in February 1649 and elected to the new Council of State.<sup>34</sup>

The sermon was printed by Peter Cole (ca. 1613–1665) to be sold at his shop at the sign of the printing press in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, where he had been operating since 1643.<sup>35</sup> Cole was a prominent London bookseller and printer, best remembered for printing works on medicine, particularly those of Nicholas Culpeper. In the year that he printed this sermon, Cole also produced Owen’s *Of the Death of Christ, the Price He Paid* (1650) and works by a variety of ministers such as Jeremiah Burroughes, William Bridge, and John Cardell. The book collector George Thomason acquired his copy on April 30.

30 Vavasor Powell, *Christ Exalted Above All Creatures by God His Father [...] the Last Day of the Last Month Called February 1649* (London, 1651), 74–77, 87.

31 Toby C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English Government and Reform in Ireland, 1649–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 96–97.

32 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:374.

33 See *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 18.

34 See *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1640–1660*, ed. Stephen K. Roberts, 9 vols. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2023), 1660, s.v. “Masham, Sir William, 1st bt. (1591–1656).”

35 See Elizabeth Lane Furdell, “Reported to be Distracted’: The Suicide of Puritan Entrepreneur Peter Cole,” *The Historian* 66, no. 4 (2004): 772; Henry R. Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1641–1667* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1907), s.v.

## Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen took as his text Paul's description of Abraham's faith: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief" (Rom. 4:20).<sup>36</sup> He called the saints to follow Abraham, setting out with trustworthy promises, even if they were unsure of exactly where their journey might lead. While Owen's exposition of the text addressed the application to individual believers, given his context, his concerns lay with members of Parliament. Parliament had, like Abraham, triumphed over a king and enjoyed "outward success and glory" and yet was in many ways perplexed and in danger of stumbling in unbelief because of a refusal to believe the promises, not least about the "propagation and establishment" of the kingdom of Christ, because of "all the difficulties that lie in the way for the accomplishment of it." Owen explained how this led to hesitation and indecision. The need was for "consolation and establishment" so that as rulers they would embrace the promise that "peace and prosperity" would be "the inheritance of the nation" in due "subordination to the kingdom of Christ" (Isa. 60:11; Jer. 30:20–21). Owen set about doing this by demonstrating the reliability of the promises of God because of "the ability of the promiser" and "the means whereby he works." Consequently, the cause of staggering was unbelief. Opposition may, "for a season," impede the fulfillment of the promise, but "the appointed hour" would come, and, like water welling up behind a dam, the promise would break through in great power.

Owen turned to illustrate this by means of "the affair of Ireland," where, despite the "mountains of opposition" seeming so great, he was confident of "deliverance for Ireland." He believed that the "mountains" there included the following: the English Civil Wars that had delayed the Long Parliament's plans to take action in Ireland; the Levellers ("that mighty mountain" that some "misnamed a Level") who had tried to influence a significant part of the army soldiers not to participate in the expedition; and the "many congregations in this nation" failing to engage in "prayers, tears, and supplications for carrying on of the work of God in Ireland." Owen claimed that even with respect to the "choicest and most rational advices of the army," had they not been "overswayed" by providence, the cause would not have been as far advanced as it was. According to Patrick Little, the commanders of the expeditionary force initially planned that the main assault would land in Munster, but events took a different course, and the entire force eventually disembarked at Ringsend in Dublin.<sup>37</sup>

36 Two years later, in Henry Ireton's funeral sermon, Owen portrayed Ireton as an exemplary godly magistrate precisely because he "staggered not" but was "steadfast in faith." See *The Laboring Saint's Dismission to Rest* (1652), which is included in this volume.

37 Patrick Little, "Cromwell and Ireland before 1649," in *Oliver Cromwell: New Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Little (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 134.

This change of plan, which Owen attributed to the hand of God, had significant bearings on the outcome of the invasion because of three events. First, the Marquess of Ormond took the fateful decision to divide his army, sending his most able commander, Murrough O'Brien (d. 1674), the Earl of Inchiquin, south in the belief that Cromwell would land in Munster.<sup>38</sup> Second, Colonel Michael Jones (d. 1649) won a remarkable victory at Rathmines, outside Dublin, over Lieutenant General Purcell's royalists, killing up to four thousand, capturing two thousand five hundred, and seizing Ormond's artillery, ciphers, and supplies. This was "a stupendous reversal of royalist fortunes, with incalculable psychological and strategic consequences."<sup>39</sup> From a parliamentary perspective, this was hugely significant: according to Whitelocke, "There never was any day in Ireland like this."<sup>40</sup> The invasion force heard of this "astonishing mercie" just before embarkation and believed it provided clear evidence of God's favor.<sup>41</sup> Third, although Henry Ireton set sail with a smaller force to the original target of Kinsale, unable to land, he diverted to Dublin. Thus, with no field army to face them, Cromwell's full army assembled with its large train of siege artillery at Dublin. Once Drogheda had been taken, and the area north of Dublin secured, the main army marched south and met Lord Broghill (d. 1679), who had by this stage managed the successful mutiny of the garrisons in Munster against Lord Inchiquin.<sup>42</sup> It is likely that these are the unplanned events in which Owen saw the hand of providence advancing the cause of the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland. Powell concurred in his sermon, telling members of Parliament that one of the "signes of the Lords presence, with you" was the "concurrence of Gods Providence in effecting those great things which you have undertaken, both in this land and in *Ireland*."<sup>43</sup> The members of Parliament whom Owen addressed, as well as the wider public hungry for news, would have been well aware of the ongoing successes that Cromwell was enjoying early on in the

38 Micheál Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 72.

39 Ian Gentles, *The English Revolution and the Wars in the Three Kingdoms, 1638–1652* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2007), 391; Pádraig Lenihan, *Consolidating Conquest: Ireland, 1603–1727* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2008), "Map Five," 127–28; William Strong's Thanksgiving sermon for this victory, titled "Babylons Ruine, the Saints Triumph," in his *XXXI Select Sermons, Preached on Special Occasions* [ . . . ] (London, 1656), 55.

40 Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs*, 3:85.

41 Oliver Cromwell, *The Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. John Morrill et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 2:72.

42 Little, "Cromwell and Ireland," 135; J. S. Morrill, "The Drogheda Massacre in Cromwellian Context," in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 251–59.

43 Powell, *Christ Exalted Above All Creatures*, 87 (italics original).

campaigning season of the year since news had been read to members of Parliament on February 25 and then subsequently published.<sup>44</sup>

The final “mountain” was the “combined opposition” that arose. He depicted the royalist coalition as a strong “Fivefold Cord” of ill-matched associates in an unholy alliance: (1) the Scottish Covenanters in Ulster under Sir George Monro;<sup>45</sup> (2) the Ormond Party united in its desire to maintain prelacy and the Book of Common Prayer; (3) the Roman Catholics of the Kilkenny Confederation; (4) the self-interested in the southern ports of Munster who had temporarily abandoned the parliamentary cause in April 1648 and who would need to be bribed to return; and (5) the native Irish rebels. These five groups now had joined forces after having spent the last seven years fighting one another in various combinations. For Owen, their union was reminiscent of the pact between the northern kingdom of Israel and Syria. This Syro-Ephraimite bloc had aimed to force Judah into alignment with them (Isa. 7–9), just as the enemies of the Commonwealth had been intent on doing. Owen cast their role in the drama as that of a monstrous “hydra” of “covenant,” “prelacy, popery,” “treachery,” and “blood.”<sup>46</sup> In these examples, Owen’s portrayal of the enemy served to emphasize their strength that, in turn, highlighted the providential nature of their defeat.

Owen’s first point of application was “unto temporals.” He called members of Parliament to live by faith when “called out to public actings.” Throughout the sermon, Owen was concerned with reliance on “carnal wisdom” and “carnal policy.” He linked this to those who “plot, and contrive, and design.” This is possibly an allusion to the continuing links that the Presbyterians maintained with Charles II. By this stage Charles had given up on securing help from Ireland and was turning to the Scots. In March 1650, negotiations began between Charles and the Covenanters in Breda in the Netherlands. Some London Presbyterians wished for “the presbyterian party in England” to be represented at Breda.<sup>47</sup> Another area

<sup>44</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:207.

<sup>45</sup> Owen does not dwell on the Scottish Kirk’s rejection of the Second Ormond Peace in July 1649 and the rejection of it by the Ulster Presbytery. See David Stevenson, *Scottish Covenanters and Irish Confederates: Scottish-Irish Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1981), 273–74. See also *A Seasonable and Necessary Warning and Declaration concerning Present and Imminent Dangers* [. . .] (Edinburgh, 1649), 12; and *A Declaration and Warning unto all the Members of This Kirk and Kingdom* [. . .] (Edinburgh, 1650), 5.

<sup>46</sup> For a description of Ormond’s uneasy coalition, see Jane H. Ohlmeyer, *Ireland from Independence to Occupation, 1641–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60–61.

<sup>47</sup> Elliot Vernon, “The Quarrel of the Covenant: The London Presbyterians and the Regicide,” in *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I*, ed. Jason Peacey (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001),

in which Owen detected the operation of such “carnal wisdom” was in the parliamentary “management of religion.” Here Owen criticized those for whom religious policy was simply a means to an end—for example, those who adopted policies specifically designed to gain the “assistance and compliance” of others. This could well be a reference to those in Parliament who were wishing to make concessions to the Presbyterian interest.<sup>48</sup> Owen appeared to commend the Engagement Oath but was preaching for much more than a merely de facto acceptance of the legitimacy of the new regime; he exhorted his hearers to “Engage your hearts” and to believe that God was fulfilling his promises.

Owen's second use was to ensure appropriate engagement in “the propagating of the kingdom of Christ.” Thus, with respect to the reconquest of Ireland, members of Parliament ought not only consider “the sovereignty and interest of England” but should do their “utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.” He exhorted them not to conceive of the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland simply in terms of the destruction of the influence of the antichrist in that place but instead to see it as an opportunity for Christ “to take possession of his long since promised inheritance” in that place. He believed Parliament's enemies in Ireland were “vassals of the man of sin” and “followers after the beast,” and justice required that they be given “a cup of blood” to drink. Referring to the Irish Rebellion of 1641, he likened Irish rebels to the Amalekites, the first of the nations that attacked God's people who were seeking to enter their promised rest (Ex. 17). In doing so, they disobeyed the command “touch not mine anointed” and invited God's pronouncement that all Amalekites would “perish forever” (Num. 24:20).<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, after the violence in which he claimed to see Christ “as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his Enemies,” he pressed Parliament to send preachers to the island in order to “hold [Christ] out as a lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends.” He presented an impassioned firsthand account of what he had witnessed, speaking of the “tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin after the manifestations of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, he revealed how in Dublin he had been constantly preaching to “a numerous multitude, *of as thirsting*

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202–24; Elliot Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions, 1638–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 228.

48 Anthony Milton, *England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 307–8.

49 Ethan H. Shagan, “Constructing Discord: Ideology, Propaganda, and English Response to the Irish Rebellion of 1641,” *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 1 (1997): 4–34.

50 For details of Owen's preaching in Dublin, see Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 7, 11; Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 145.

*a People after the Gospel, as ever yet I conversed withal.*<sup>51</sup> This concern was accentuated by his fears about preachers who had already traveled to Ireland “without call, without employments,” who were, he believed, “seducers and blasphemers” (he had previously called the magistrate to bring under his cognizance those who wander about with “no calling . . . under a pretense of teaching the truth, without mission, without call, without warrant”).<sup>52</sup> Owen was suggesting that preachers who had been ejected in England could easily move to Ireland, bringing their heretical ideas with them.<sup>53</sup> If they do not to their utmost sow the “Seed of the word,” then surely numerous “seducers and blasphemers” will sow their tares in “those fallowed fields.”

Owen pressed for talk to turn into action: “This thing is often spoken of, seldom driven to any close!” He called his hearers and readers to pray that God would send “laborers” to Ireland (Matt. 9:38). Owen’s sermon proposed that Parliament should send “one gospel preacher, for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland.” Practically, he suggested that a committee be appointed to “hear what sober proposals” might come regarding how best to further this aim.

The day after Owen delivered the sermon, Whitelocke reported on amendments to the bill for “Advancement of the Gospel, and Learning, in Ireland,” and the relevant committee was authorized to receive proposals for how to advance and maintain a preaching ministry in Ireland.<sup>54</sup> That Owen thought himself among those bringing sober proposals is clear from the sermon’s dedicatory epistle, which describes the printed tract as “a serious proposal for the advancement and propagation of the Gospel in another nation.” The ordinance for the propagation of the gospel in Ireland was passed on March 8, the day Owen penned his preface.<sup>55</sup> The rather sketchy ordinance was, according to Underdown, “uncontroversial” and lacked direct provisions beyond increasing the endowment of Trinity College Dublin, vesting the property of the late archbishop of Dublin and the dean and chapter of the cathedral in fifteen commissioners (of whom Owen was one).<sup>56</sup> It was supplemented by a decision

51 John Owen, *Of the Death of Christ, The Price He Paid* (1650), 97 (italics original). See *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 9.

52 See Owen, *Of Toleration* (1649), in *Complete Works of John Owen*, 18:396.

53 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 99.

54 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:374.

55 “March 1650: An Act for the Better Advancement of the Gospel and Learning in Ireland,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660*, eds. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, 3 vols. (London: HMSO, 1911), 2:355–57.

56 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:248; Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 95–98; Raymond Gillespie, “The Crisis of Reform, 1625–60,” in *Christ Church Cathedral Dublin: A History*,

to “send over Six able Ministers” to Dublin, the place whose plight Owen had highlighted.<sup>57</sup> Barnard concludes that “compared with Ireland’s needs, and with treatment of Wales and the north, the Rump’s legislation was meagre, and had been achieved only at Cromwell’s and his entourage’s prompting.”<sup>58</sup>

Owen appeared to be particularly concerned about the so-called Ranter threat: those preachers of a “high and heavenly notion which have an open and experimented tendency to earthly, fleshly, dunghill practices.”<sup>59</sup> He told Parliament that if it failed to act, Ireland in particular was in danger of becoming a “friperry of monstrous, enormous, contradictory opinions.”<sup>60</sup> Owen warned that some have fallen into “downright atheism.” Care needs to be taken with the language because, according to Michael Buckley, early modern accusations of atheism “possessed all the accuracy of the newly developed musket.”<sup>61</sup> It is unclear whether Owen was addressing practical or speculative atheism.<sup>62</sup> Several pieces of Parliamentary legislation that year would go some way to addressing his concerns. In June there was an act “for the better preventing and suppressing of the detestable sins of prophane swearing and cursing,” which was intended to suppress the Ranters.<sup>63</sup> This was closely followed in August with the “Act against several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions, derogatory to the honor of God, and destructive to humane Society.” There was an anti-Ranter element to this legislation against blasphemy.<sup>64</sup> It was against “divers men and women . . . most monstrous in

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ed. Kenneth Milne (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 209–10; Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 40; Underdown, *Pride’s Purge*, 273–74.

57 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:379.

58 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 98.

59 The “Ranter” phenomenon of 1650–1651 is controversial, with some historians suggesting it was a myth projected by the pulpit and press. E.g., J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11, 83. An alternative view is argued by Nigel Smith, ed., *A Collection of Ranter Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (London: Junction Books, 1983), 7–39.

60 For a discussion of some of the extremists in Dublin, such as the radical prophet Elizabeth Avery, see Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 160–73.

61 Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 10.

62 For the “frequent division of atheism into its practical and speculative components,” see Kenneth Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720: The Atheist Answered and His Error Confuted* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 19–21.

63 “June 1650: An Act for the Better Preventing of Prophane Swearing and Cursing,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:393–96; *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:427; Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs*, 3:206.

64 J. F. McGregor, “Debate: Fear, Myth and Furore: Reappraising the ‘Ranters,’” *Past and Present* 140, no. 1 (1993): 157–58.

their opinions, and loose in all wicked and abominable practices . . . not only to the notorious corrupting and disordering, but even to the dissolution of all humane society; who rejecting the use of any gospel ordinances, do deny the necessity of civil and moral righteousness among men.”<sup>65</sup>

Owen was also horrified by “poor parentless children, that lie begging, starving, rotting in the streets, and find no relief.” In particular, he called on Parliament to provide for the families of soldiers who had “lost their dearest relations in your service” but who were now “seeking for bread, and finding none.” Powell concurred with the sentiments about the poor in his sermon, urging members of Parliament to remember prisoners and poor “Beggars.”<sup>66</sup> By the summer of 1649, the Rump had resolved to reform the excise but would only complete those plans in September 1650.<sup>67</sup>

His final three uses were “purely spiritual” and involved calling his hearers to learn how “to believe for your own souls” so that they would, in turn, be able “to believe for a nation.” Owen believed that there had been too many excuses for inactivity that were nothing but the consequences of the sin of unbelief, a sin that grieved, provoked, and dishonored God. It was unbelief and “carnal reasonings” that threatened the fulfillment of the promise: “Oh stop not success from Ireland, by unbelief.”

Owen’s influence as a spokesman for the regime continued to increase in the wake of this sermon. On the day he penned the dedication to the version intended for publication, the Council of State appointed him to deliver sermons to it for the next year “every Lord’s day in the afternoon,” and to facilitate this it provided him with “fit lodgings” in Whitehall.<sup>68</sup>

## THE BRANCH OF THE LORD, THE BEAUTY OF SION

### Context of Owen’s Preaching in Scotland as an Army Chaplain

After the defeat of the Scottish Engagers’ army at Preston in August 1648, the government of Scotland that had sanctioned the Engagement with the king was overthrown with the establishment of the more militant Kirk Party

<sup>65</sup> “August 1650: An Act Against Several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions, Derogatory to the Honor of God, and Destructive to Humane Society,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:409–12.

<sup>66</sup> Powell, *Christ Exalted*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 167–68, 216; *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:168–91, 422–23.

<sup>68</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic: Interregnum*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green, 13 vols. (London, 1875–1886), 9:30. Toon suggests that these lodgings might have been those formerly used by the late Archbishop Laud. See Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 42.

regime. Following the execution of Charles I, the Covenanters proclaimed his son to be Charles II on February 5, 1649, but they did not permit him to return to Scotland to exercise his authority until he subscribed to the Covenant and promised to implement Presbyterianism across his three kingdoms. By mid-1650, the king knew that any real hope of support from Ireland had disappeared, and he grudgingly consented to Scottish demands, signing the Covenant and sailing into the Moray Firth in June.<sup>69</sup> It now seemed as if another Scottish invasion was likely in order to recapture England for Charles, and so the Council of State, having recalled Cromwell from Ireland, decided to conduct a preemptive invasion of Scotland with Cromwell as commander in chief. The invasion was unpopular with many; indeed, General Fairfax resigned rather than lead the army into Scotland.<sup>70</sup> Owen was to serve on the Scottish expedition, and on June 26 the Council of State dealt with "his employment with the Lord General in the expedition to the North."<sup>71</sup> In mid-July, Cromwell's forces had reached Newcastle, where *A Declaration of the Army of England upon Their March into Scotland* (1650) was composed and printed; it is possible that Owen had a hand in it since it set out to justify the invasion in largely religious terms. Rather than being directed to the Committee of Estates or the institutional Kirk, it was addressed to "all that are Saints and Partakers of the Faith of Gods Elect in Scotland."<sup>72</sup> It sought to distinguish the godly elect from those who refused to recognize the "finger of God" in recent acts of providence.<sup>73</sup> The English Parliament's recourse to providence angered the Kirk, which complained that the English used providence as a pretext to justify its invasion.<sup>74</sup>

At the border in Berwick on July 21, just before the English army crossed into Scotland, Owen delivered a sermon that would, with another sermon delivered in several months, evolve into what was published as *The Branch of the Lord, the Beauty of Zion: or, The Glory of the Church, in Its Relation unto*

69 Anna Keay, *The Magnificent Monarch: Charles II and the Ceremonies of Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 46–47.

70 David Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution, 1644–1651* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2003), 170–71; Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland, 1638–1651* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 339.

71 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 9:217.

72 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:278–79; Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 20–30.

73 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:283, 287.

74 *A Short Reply unto a Declaration Intituled the Declaration of the Army of England, upon Their March into Scotland. By the Generall Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland* [...] (Edinburgh, 1650), 7.

*Christ* (1650).<sup>75</sup> The text for the sermon was Isaiah 56:7, but the title of the published work drew on language used earlier in the prophecy: “In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel” (Isa. 4:2 KJV). Owen would explain his understanding of the purpose of these verses from Isaiah 4 in his treatise *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance* (1654). He summarized how they laid out God’s gracious promises to Israel in the context of her present painful experience of exile. In particular, there were promises of justification (4:2), sanctification (4:3–4), and perseverance (4:5–6). All these were given on account of Christ, who is both “the branch of the Lord” and “the fruit of the earth.”<sup>76</sup>

The text of scripture emblazoned on the title page of the printed sermon was Psalm 48:12–14. (In his 1649 sermon *Human Power Defeated*, Owen had expressed confidence that those who embarked for Ireland would be made “sensible” of the truth of these verses—in particular, that it was far more dangerous to fight against Christ than to fight against the antichrist.)<sup>77</sup> The leading Scottish Covenanter, Archibald Johnston of Wariston (1611–1663), heard a report about the sermon and noted in his diary that Owen had warned that “God would bring down Cromwell and his army, who was so proud as to say that at the sight of his face wee would all flye.”<sup>78</sup> According to Whitelocke, when orders were given for the army to march, “they went on shouting as they entered Scotland.”<sup>79</sup>

Cromwell’s invasion force of some sixteen thousand troops found the land stripped bare of crops, with even the animals driven north, and the weather was cold and wet.<sup>80</sup> Despite Cromwell’s best efforts to bring the Scots to battle, the Covenanter army remained entrenched behind the fortified line of earthworks and gun emplacements that they had built from Edinburgh to Leith.<sup>81</sup> Owen wrote to the Lord Commissioner John Lisle (ca. 1609–1664),

75 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 119.

76 See Edwin E. M. Tay, *The Priesthood of Christ: Atonement in the Theology of John Owen (1616–1683)* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2014), 171–72.

77 See *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 18.

78 Archibald Johnston of Wariston, *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston* [ . . . ], ed. D. H. Fleming et al., 3 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1911–1940), 2:16. For a discussion of this diary entry, see Crawford Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” in *The T&T Clark Handbook of John Owen*, ed. Crawford Gribben and John W. Tweeddale (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 92.

79 Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affair*, 3:223–24.

80 Frances Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland, 1651–1660* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 8.

81 Kenneth Charles Corsar, “David Leslie’s Defence of Edinburgh,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 25, no. 103 (Autumn, 1947): 96–105.

a member of the Council of State, about a skirmish that took place at the end of July. This short letter reveals something of Owen's understanding of how the Scottish army viewed their own cause and the invasion of the army of "sectaries."<sup>82</sup> Cromwell took the time to engage in a further theological offensive against the Scottish Presbyterian clergy. Writing to the Commissioners of the Kirk, he asserted the providential mandate that Owen had done so much to construct: "The Lord hath not hid his face from us since our approach so near unto you."<sup>83</sup> He accused them of pride and "Spirituell Drunkenesse" and urged them to read Isaiah 28:5–15 with its stinging denunciation of "dissolute priests."<sup>84</sup> (Owen would quote from this chapter in this sermon.) Cromwell told them that the Scots had made a covenant with "wicked and carnall men," one that amounted to "a *Covenant . . . with Death and Hell*."<sup>85</sup> Owen may well have had a hand in *The Declaration of the English Army Now in Scotland*, written from Musselburgh on August 1, and a number of ideas from that tract are found in this sermon.<sup>86</sup>

Following the Cromwellian invasion, a number of significant leaders within the Covenanter movement denounced the king for his manifest insincerity in subscribing to the covenant and called for the Scottish army to be purged of all known royalists and former Engagers according to the 1646 and 1649 Acts of Classis.<sup>87</sup> In August, the Kirk Party insisted that Charles issue a declaration making clear his commitment to the covenanting cause by repudiating popery and prelacy and his alliance with the Irish Roman Catholics. He was also forced to express shame concerning the faults of his father and the idolatry of his mother. By the end of the month, a significant (and damaging) purge of the army had been carried out, perhaps reducing it in size by as much as one third.<sup>88</sup>

Five weeks after the invasion commenced, the English army withdrew to Dunbar. Cromwell's forces were reduced to some eleven thousand men because of sickness and desertion, and they were significantly outnumbered and effectively stranded on the coast, with the Scots occupying a more stra-

82 *A True Relation of the Proceedings of the English Army Now in Scotland: From the Two and Twentieth Day of July, to the First of August. Contained in, and Extracted Out of the Several Letters Sent from the Army and Read in Parliament, the Sixth of August, 1650* [ . . . ] (London, 1650), 14.

83 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:309.

84 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:309–10.

85 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:309–10 (italics original).

86 See the discussion in R. Scott Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland: Conquest and Religion, 1650–1660* (John Donald: Edinburgh, 2007), 21.

87 Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland*, 2–12.

88 Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 145, 169–70, 176–7.

tegic defensive position. Nonetheless, among the English army there was a significant culture of prayer and preaching and confidence in the intercessions of the godly in England.<sup>89</sup> Cromwell launched his attack before first light on September 3 by calling out “let God arise and his enemies be scattered” (Ps. 68:1). (Owen had quoted from this Psalm in two of his published sermons: *Ebenezer* [1648] and *The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth* [1649].) In what was a stunning victory, the English apparently lost only twenty soldiers, compared to the loss of some three thousand Scots (according to Cromwell “the enemy made by the Lord of Hosts as stubble” to his cavalry) and the capture of around ten thousand prisoners.<sup>90</sup> It was taken to be “an especially significant declaration of God’s favour.”<sup>91</sup> According to Cromwell, it was “one of the most signal mercies God hath done for England and His people”<sup>92</sup> and an act of divine punishment on the Scots for “not beholding the glory of Gods wonderfull dispensations in this Series of his Providences in *England, Ireland and Scotland*.”<sup>93</sup>

It appears that Owen’s responsibilities as a preacher to the Council of State had necessitated a return to Westminster, so he was not present to witness this victory, against all the odds, at Dunbar. On September 10, the House of Commons ordered that he and Joseph Caryl would preach a thanksgiving sermon for the victory on October 8 at St Margaret’s, Westminster.<sup>94</sup> However, two days later, on September 12, the Council of State determined that Owen and Caryl were needed in Scotland, and the following day the Commons ordered both preachers to go “forthwith” to Scotland “according to the Desire of the Lord General.”<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, on September 20, £50 was to be paid to Owen, Caryl, and two other ministers who were to serve in Scotland.<sup>96</sup> Their presence was necessary because in the aftermath of Dunbar Cromwell “renewed his

89 Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army: Agent of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 209, 212.

90 Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 178.

91 Blair Worden, “Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England,” *Past and Present* 109 (1985), 81–82.

92 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:328.

93 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:362 (italics original).

94 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:464. The two preachers would actually be William Strong (d. 1654) and Thomas Brooks (1608–1680). Many in both Scotland and England refused to honor such national days of thanksgiving to celebrate the English Parliament’s victories. See, e.g., William Prynne’s scathing comments about the October 1651 thanksgiving in his *Sad and Serious Politicall Considerations Touching the Invasive War against Our Presbyterian Protestant Brethren in Scotland, Their Late Great Overthrow* [ . . . ] (London, 1650), 6, 8, 9, 21.

95 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 11:336; *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:468.

96 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 11:348.

theological offensive,” and the “religious warfare” began in earnest; he clearly wished to have Owen and other ministers alongside him.<sup>97</sup> Owen “embraced his call” and traveled north with “thoughts of peace,” intending “to pour out a savour of the gospel upon the sons of peace in this place.” Back in Scotland, he was involved in “a vigorous culture of preaching” in which it also appears that officers including Cromwell and his second in command, the brilliant cavalry officer Major General John Lambert (ca. 1619–1684), participated.<sup>98</sup> However, as R. Glynne Lloyd notes, Owen’s preaching did not seem to be as well received in Scotland as it was in Dublin.<sup>99</sup> While few specifics are known, part of that preaching in Edinburgh involved a celebration of the submission of the city to the Cromwellians.

When the Cromwellians had entered the capitol in September, they quickly seized control of Edinburgh’s presses.<sup>100</sup> Cromwell prayed that the Lord would give the Scots “a cleare sight of the great worke, he is now in these last dayes carrying on.”<sup>101</sup> In order to facilitate this, he had his press in Leith printed this sermon by Owen and another by fellow English Congregationalist minister Nicholas Lockyer (1611–1685). This sermon was published in November under the name of the printer Evan Tyler.<sup>102</sup> The London book collector George Thomason acquired his copy on November 26. Owen’s sermons were, as Gribben describes, combined into “one seamless discourse” that was both a “celebration of Independent ecclesiology” and a “searing critique of the Presbyterian position.”<sup>103</sup> Tellingly, the title page of the sermon contained the text of Psalm 48:12–14, a text whose interpretation for matters of

97 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 214.

98 Henry Reece, *The Army in Cromwellian England, 1649–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119.

99 R. Glynne Lloyd, *John Owen: Commonwealth Puritan* (Pontypridd: Modern Welsh Publications, 1972), 72.

100 J. D. Ogilvie, “Papers from an Army Press, 1650,” *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions* 2 (1938–45): 420.

101 *Letters from the Head-Quarters of our Army in Scotland: Being a Diary of All Proceedings in the Army to Octob. 30. 1650* [. . .] (London, [5 Novembers] 1650), sig. A3r.

102 The print house of the Englishman Evan Tyler (fl. 1639–82) had published for the king and the Covenanter regime. In 1647 it was purchased by the London Stationers’ Company, and by 1650 John Twyn was operating it printing pro-English propaganda under the imprint of the former owner. See David Stevenson, “A Revolutionary Regime and the Press: The Scottish Covenanters and Their Printers, 1638–51,” in Stevenson, *Union, Revolution and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1997), 315–30; R. Scott Spurlock, “Cromwell’s Edinburgh Press and the Development of Print Culture in Scotland,” *Scottish Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (2011): 179–203.

103 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 121; Crawford Gribben, “Polemic and Apocalyptic in the Cromwellian Invasion of Scotland,” *Literature and History* 23, no. 1 (2014): 12.

ecclesiology was contested—for example, it had appeared on the title page of Samuel Rutherford's *A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Pauls Presbyterie in Scotland* (1642).<sup>104</sup> The goal of these sermons was the same: to help define the purpose behind the Commonwealth invasion and persuade the Scots to accept it.<sup>105</sup> *The Branch of the Lord* would help answer Cromwell's desire that the Lord would give the Scots a clear vision of the work that he was doing through the revolutionary English regime.

Alongside it, Cromwell's Scottish press would publish Nicholas Lockyer's sermon titled *A Little Stone, Out of the Mountain. Church-Order Briefly Opened* (1652). It revealed his eager expectation of the church being "raised from its corruptions, intrusions and ruine made by unsound men."<sup>106</sup> Lockyer's polemical description of the Scottish church shows remarkable similarities to what Owen had preached during the Scottish campaign.<sup>107</sup> Both contrasted gathered churches comprised of "living stones" with the churches of the Kirk, which they believed to be comprised of "dead, rotten stones." Lockyer declared the Kirk to be beyond hope of regeneration and rejected the idea that a national church could be purged. Instead, he called for the gathering of "Gospell Churches out of a Legall Nationall Church."<sup>108</sup> As Scott Spurlock recognizes, Owen's sermon was subtler than Lockyer's "openly anti-Kirk" sermon, but both would have been provocative, especially given that, since 1647, the Kirk had enforced strict censorship on the writings of the English Congregationalists.<sup>109</sup>

The Kirk Party's ascendancy was coming to an end, and as the sermon was published the party split between its more extreme and moderate members. For the more radical Covenanters, their defeat at Dunbar was a sign not of divine favor toward the English but of divine judgment on the ungodly Scots because the purging had not gone far enough.<sup>110</sup> The emerging ideological differences within the Kirk Party came to the fore in the Western Association's Remonstrance of October 1650. This announced that support for Charles II should not be forthcoming until he demonstrated sincere repentance and genuine commitment to the Covenant. *The Branch of the Lord* was published

<sup>104</sup> Owen would use this text once again on the cover of *God's Work in Founding Zion* (1656).

<sup>105</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 45.

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas Lockyer, *A Little Stone, Out of the Mountain. Church-Order Briefly Opened* (Leith, 1652), 13–14.

<sup>107</sup> Lockyer, *Little Stone*, 16, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Lockyer, *Little Stone*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 46; *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638–1842* (Edinburgh, 1843), 75–76.

<sup>110</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 14–15.

in the context of the November debates on the Western Remonstrance, which brought about open division of the Kirk Party. On November 28, the moderate Commission of the Kirk condemned this Remonstrance. Soon after Owen's sermon was published, on December 1, the English defeated the forces of the Western Association at Hamilton. Later in the month, public resolutions led to the repeal of the Acts of Classes, thus allowing royalists and Engagers back into the Covenanter armies and public office. This was condemned by the minority Remonstrants, later termed Protesters.

Owen's published sermons found a warm reception from at least some in Scotland. In early January 1651, the officer and regicide Robert Lilburne wrote to Cromwell asking "that some able minister were here to speake in publique, and that I had some of Mr Owen's sermons, and other books to disperse." Many of the Scots had apparently told Lilburne that "they would gladly see and reade them," particularly because "they have been keptt from them, and have not beene truely informed concerning our proceedings."<sup>111</sup> Cromwell would, presumably, have been delighted to receive Lilburne's request since it was in line with his existing policy of disseminating preaching, which supported the regime.

One of Owen's perhaps most paradigmatic conversions occurred during this time—namely, that of the Scottish politician Alexander Jaffray (1614–1673).<sup>112</sup> In his diary, Jaffray, a member of the Scottish Committee of Estates, described being seriously wounded in the fighting at Dunbar and his subsequent imprisonment by the English, during which months he "had good opportunity of frequent conference" with both Cromwell and Owen. Through these encounters, he came to understand the "dreadful appearance of God against us at Dunbar," in which the Covenanters were "visibly forsaken." Previously, Jaffray had been "zealous for presbytery," but he came to abandon it, instead adopting Congregationalism. Significantly, Jaffray even appealed to a text frequently employed by Owen: Revelation 11:1–2.<sup>113</sup> Owen persuaded Alexander Jaffray that "the sinful mistake of the good men of this [Scottish] nation" concerned "the knowledge and mind of God as to the exercise of the magistrate's power in matters of religion—what the due

<sup>111</sup> *The Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell: Concerning the Affairs of Great Britain* [. . .], ed. J. Nickolls (London, 1743), 48–49; Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642–1651* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1990), 71–72.

<sup>112</sup> Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution: 1625–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 492; G. D. Henderson, *Religious Life in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 107–16; Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 107–8.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander Jaffray, *Diary of Alexander Jaffray*, ed. J. M. G. Barclay (Aberdeen, 1856), 45–48, 60.

bounds and limits of it are."<sup>114</sup> He accepted Owen's interpretation of providence, particularly in regard to its civil and ecclesiastical implications. This accords with the *Declaration of the Army upon the March into Scotland* (July 15, 1650), which stated that ministers should preach rather than "medling with, or engaging the Authorities of the World." Too many clergy had "seduced" the people by mingling "the Presbyterian with the Kingly Interest."<sup>115</sup> In other words, they had failed to recognize the due bounds of church and state. Similarly, Jaffray's testimony resonates with Cromwell's comments to Speaker William Lenthall after the battle of Dunbar, in which he described how God had dealt a blow to the "Ministers of Scotland" for "medling with worldly Pollicies & mixtures of earthly power, to sett up, that which they call the Kingdome of Christ."<sup>116</sup>

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen took the text as a description of "Christ's church of saints," gathered out of the nations, with its appointed ordinances and worship. This was, in the first instance, the church universal but, in a secondary sense, "every particular church of his saints," which Owen styled as "every holy assembly of mount Zion." This house is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and is made up of living stones—that is, elect believers. The principal builder of God's house is the Holy Spirit, who makes instrumental use of "the prophets and apostles," first in their labors and then in the apostolic doctrine.

The resultant house is living, strong, and glorious: living because "Christ the foundation is a living stone, and they that are built upon him, are living stones"; strong because of the rock on which it is built; and glorious because Christ is present in each assembly and the glory of the ordinances of the gospel surpass all the glory of the worship of the tabernacle and temple. No opposition to this house has arisen or will arise that will not be broken in pieces. Owen listed persecutors of the church such as Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan Roman emperors, the persecuting Laudian bishops, and others who had recently had their garments "rolled in blood." Owen was seeking to justify the invasion on account of freeing the saints in Scotland from those who were seeking to impose religious tyranny. At Musselburgh on August 1, the officers spoke of "the Antichristian Tyranny that was exercised by the late king and His Prelates" over "the True Spiritual Church of Jesus Christ;

<sup>114</sup> Jaffray, *Diary of Alexander Jaffray*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:284–85.

<sup>116</sup> See Cromwell's letter from September 4, 1650, in Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:329.

namely, Those that were born again, and united to him by his Spirit." They knew that "a time of Deliverance was to be expected to the Church of Christ, and destruction and ruine to *Babylon*."<sup>117</sup> They were "called forth by the Lord" to be "instrumental" in the "destruction of Antichrist" and the "Deliverance and Reformation of Christ's Church and people."<sup>118</sup> Owen depicted the true church of the saints as "a house, a palace hung round about with ensigns, spoils, and banners taken from the enemies." This is especially poignant given that in the rout, all the Scottish artillery and baggage were captured along with over two hundred regimental colors emblazoned with such slogans as "Covenant: for Religion, King and Kingdomes" and "Covenant: for Religion, Croune and Countrie." Parliament ordered them to be hung in Westminster Hall alongside those taken at Marston Moor, Naseby, and Preston.<sup>119</sup> Ian Gentles has analyzed banners from the civil wars to demonstrate how they were often "wrought from expensive materials," regularly with religious or political slogans, and thus had "high symbolic importance."<sup>120</sup> This action was well-known and controversial. For example, *Mercurius Politicus* reported on the images and mottos on some of the flags.<sup>121</sup> William Prynne was greatly exercised that Cromwell sent "all the Scots Colours to Westminster" in order to "hang up the Ensignes taken from them in Westminster Hall, as publicke trophies and testimonies to succeeding ages."<sup>122</sup>

Owen's main intention was to speak of how this house stands in a twofold relation to Jesus Christ. In the first instance, he developed four relevant motifs from the architecture and furnishings of this house. He began by considering what it means for Christ to be the foundation, distinguishing the different senses in which he is foundational for the church. From all eternity, God purposed that Christ would be the church's foundation. Christ is also first in that in the protevangelium he was announced as the one through whom grace would be given to the elect. Christ is first in that he is "laid in the heart of every individual stone, before they are laid up in this building." Finally, he is to be first and preeminent in every particular congregation. Owen developed this architectural metaphor by considering how foundations "must be hidden, and out of sight unto all those that outwardly look upon the house."

<sup>117</sup> *The Declaration of the English Army Now in Scotland* (London, 1650), sig. B1r (italics original).

<sup>118</sup> *Declaration of the English Army Now in Scotland*, sig. B1v-B2r.

<sup>119</sup> C. H. Firth, "The Battle of Dunbar," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (1900): 19-52.

<sup>120</sup> Ian Gentles, "The Iconography of Revolution: England 1642-9," in *Soldiers, Writers, and Statesmen of the English Revolution*, ed. Ian Gentles, John Morrill, and Blair Worden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95, 97.

<sup>121</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 14 (September 5-12, 1650), 224.

<sup>122</sup> Prynne, *Sad and Serious Politicall Considerations*, 6, 9.

He extended the illustration by describing the ornamental features of a great house—for example, impressive carvings on the exterior of the building. Here he refers to a type of decorative plaster work particularly associated with Essex known as *pargework*. A foolish person may believe that these outward structures are load bearing when in reality “they bear not the house,” but “there is a foundation in the bottom, which bears up the whole.” Owen confessed that he himself had at times mistakenly thought that the church would not survive without the assistance of the civil magistrate or the army. The reality was the other way round. The “very best” in civil government and the army realized that they were supported and held up by the church. Those who were worldly had no apprehension of the hidden foundation and made the mistake of thinking that they could easily demolish the church, not realizing that in doing so they would “dash themselves all to pieces.” His final use of the motif of the foundation is to say that without the foundation of faith “a man [may] be hewed and squared by the word and ordinances into outward conformity,” but the stone has no support and “will quickly fall to the ground,” leaving only a heap of rubbish.

In terms of the furnishings of this house, Christ is the ark, altar, and candlestick. He is the ark and “the mercy seat covering it” in the sense that he hides the law with its condemning power and contains in himself the new covenant. Furthermore, he is the altar of this house—that is, the altar of sacrifice and atonement as well as the golden altar of incense. Finally, he is the “one eminent candlestick” of the church, giving out the light that is necessary for the church’s worship in revealing all that is necessary of the doctrine, worship, and discipline of the house. Others had attempted to “set up light in this house” by appeal to tradition, prudence, and ceremonies. The Commissioners of the Kirk had alluded to Jeremiah 9:14 and Isaiah 50:11 in regard to those who would tolerate error. They sought to portray the English army as comprised of those who “love to walk in the Imaginations of their own hearts, and in the light of their own fire, and in the sparkes that they have kindled, corrupting the truth of God, approving errors in themselves, and tolerating them in others.”<sup>123</sup> Owen suggested that it was the Scottish Presbyterians who “compass themselves with sparks, and walk in the light of the fire which themselves have kindled, in the face of the Sun of Righteousness?” He exhorted his hearers and readers to “take heed of such *ignes fatui*, foolish misguiding fires.” Such so-called lights were “not from Christ”

123 *A Seasonable and Necessary Warning concerning Present Dangers and Duties from the Commissioners of the Generall Assembly unto All the Members of This Kirk* (Edinburgh, 1650), 7.

and were nothing more than a will-o'-the-wisp. Furthermore, Christ is the candlestick in that by the "mighty efficacy of his Spirit" he opens the eyes of the blind by "creating a new power of life, and light upon the soul."

Having addressed how Christ stands in relation to the church in terms of its "fabric and building," he turned to consider Christ's fivefold relation to his house as owner, builder, watchman, inhibitor, and avenger. First, Christ is the owner of the church. He not only has the title to this inheritance as the rightful heir but also has paid the price of purchase with his own blood; furthermore, he has conquered the devil, the "unjust usurper" who "had taken possession of this house, and kept it in bondage." Owen raised three observations from Christ's ownership of his house. First, Christ will "defend his own possession" from all who upon "various pretenses" oppose, encroach, spoil, or meddle with it. To do so was to fight against God. The language of meddling is significant within the context of the Scottish invasion. Cromwell and his council of officers had written about how the Scottish ministers should preach rather than "medling with, or engaging the Authorities of the World," seducing the people by mingling "the Presbyterian with the Kingly interest."<sup>124</sup> After his victory, Cromwell wrote to Speaker William Lenthall, describing how God had dealt a blow to the "Ministers of Scotland" for "medling with worldly Pollices & mixtures of earthly power to sett up, that which they call the Kingdome of Christ."<sup>125</sup> Owen warns those whose actions appear to suggest that they are the owners: "Do not think it will excuse you to say, you wast mistaken." Here Owen is adopting the rhetoric that Cromwell had addressed "to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland" in his letter from August 3: "I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."<sup>126</sup>

The second observation arising from the Christ's ownership was that he alone had the right to "order" the affairs of the house, and therefore no one should seek to tamper with it by ordering and regulating it for their own ends or according to their own wisdom. His final observation was pointedly anti-Presbyterian. Congregations in which "the far greatest part are dead stones" ought not to be called churches. Owen's treatments of "titles" is striking when located in its context. David Dickson (ca. 1583–1662), a member of the Commission of the Kirk and a Resolutioner wrote, "Whosoever are born within

<sup>124</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:284–85

<sup>125</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:329.

<sup>126</sup> This is striking in the context of Cromwell's appeal to the Scots on August 3, 1650: See Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:309. This letter from the English Army's camp at Musselburgh was in response to the Kirk's Declaration on July 30.

the compass of a Nationall covenant with God, are children of *the Kingdome*, that is, have an external title to be heirs of *the Kingdome*.<sup>127</sup> As John Coffey has argued, Samuel Rutherford was also committed to the idea that the visible church must be a comprehensive national church.<sup>128</sup> Owen claimed that such a view was a great provocation to Christ to give the title of church to what was “a sty of swine, a den of unclean beasts, a ruinous heap.”<sup>129</sup> In the early 1650s, the Covenanter minister Hugh Binning (1627–1653) acknowledged that “the great blot on our visible church” was that “the most part are not God’s children but are called so.”<sup>130</sup>

Christ was also the Master-builder of his house, both the one mystical house and the congregations that comprised it, which he styles as “assemblies and dwelling places of mount Zion.” Only Christ can build the church because he alone can give “life unto dead stones,” meaning that the “workman” of free will “never placed stone in the house of Christ.” Furthermore, he alone gives directions for the “institution” and “perfection” of this building. It was a great mistake to try to “hew and square” the stones by “vows, promises, resolutions, and engagements” or to attempt to “beautify” dead stones “with duties and services” because only Christ can produce living stones. This was not an unfamiliar line of argument against the Covenanters, who demanded from both elect and reprobate alike a commitment to live in the fullness of covenanted expectations. Rutherford, for example, knew that Presbyterians were accused of endeavoring to lay dead stones in a living temple but rejected the idea that the church should be composed only of visible saints.<sup>131</sup> The Covenanters believed in a covenanted nation and a church comprising both elect and reprobate alike. The visible church was not composed entirely of the elect but rather was an *ecclesia mixta*, comprised of both elect and reprobate.<sup>132</sup> Rutherford captured the differences between the view laid out in this sermon by Owen and that held by the Covenanters in his treatment of the constitution of the visible church in his *Due Right of Presbyteries* (1644):

127 David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of the Evangel of Jesus Christ according to Matthew* (London, 1651), 86. For Dickson’s role, see David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637–44: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (Newton Abbot, UK: David and Charles, 1973), 24.

128 John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 206.

129 Lockyer described such churches as nothing but “a carcasse.” See Locker, *Little Stone*, 131.

130 Hugh Binning, *The Works of Hugh Binning*, 3 vols., ed. James Cochrane (Edinburgh: William Whyte, 1839–40), 2:409.

131 Samuel Rutherford, *Due Right of Presbyteries* [. . .] (London, 1644), 266.

132 Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 166–67, 206.

A visible profession of the Truth and Doctrine of godlinesse, is that which essentially constituteth a visible *church*, and every member of the visible *church*; onely our Brethren and we differ much about the nature of this profession which is required in members added to the *Church*. Our Brethren will have none members of the visible *Church*, but such as are satisfactory to the consciences of all the visible *church*, and give evidences so cleare, as the judgement of discerning men can attaine unto, that they are truly regenerated. We againe do teach, that the scandalously wicked are to be cast out of the *Church* by excommunication, and these of approved piety are undoubtedly members of the visible *Church*, so these of the middle sort are to be acknowledged members of the *Church*, though the *Church* have not a positive certainty of the judgement of charity, that they are regenerated, so they be knowen. 1 To be Baptized. 2. That they be free of grosse scandals. 3. And professe that they be willing hearers of the Doctrine of the Gospell. Such a profession, as giveth evidences to the positive certainty of the judgement of charity, of sound conversion, is not required to make and constitute a true visible *Church*.<sup>133</sup>

A distinction was made between external and internal covenanting: there was an external covenant to which all members of the visible church belonged that was distinguished from the internal covenant of which the elect, the members of the invisible church, were members. As Spurlock explains, “Rutherford understood the external covenant to stretch the canvas of a visible church over the whole population of Scotland.”<sup>134</sup> In the aftermath of Dunbar, Protesters like Rutherford did lean in Owen’s direction as they sought a purged church. However, those on the majority Resolutioner side, such as Robert Baillie, maintained their commitment to a mixed church that pragmatically embraced lapsed “malignants” in the interests of maintaining a unified national Kirk.<sup>135</sup> Owen’s sermon would have been highly provocative because he implied that another of the ways in which the Kirk had become infected with popery was by admitting the unregenerate. He had effectively unchurched much of Scotland because his issue with the mixed constitution

<sup>133</sup> Rutherford, *Due Right of Presbyteries*, 251 (italics original).

<sup>134</sup> R. Scott Spurlock, “Polity, Discipline and Theology: The Importance of the Covenant in Scottish Presbyterianism, 1560–c.1700,” in *Church Polity and Politics in the British Atlantic World, c. 1635–66*, ed. Elliot Vernon and Hunter Powell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 84.

<sup>135</sup> Alexander D. Campbell, *The Life and Works of Robert Baillie (1602–1662): Politics, Religion and Record-Keeping in the British Civil Wars* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2017), 110.

of the Kirk could however be addressed satisfactorily only by the gathering of congregations of visible saints. That is exactly what Jaffray and several other Protesters were openly advocating in May 1652.<sup>136</sup>

Owen then addressed what it meant for Christ to be the “great watchman or keeper of this house.” Christ appointed other watchmen—principally pastors—to be watchmen, but too often “they have been, and oftentimes are” guilty of self-interest, meddling, or abuse. Consequently, it was a mercy that Christ watched over the state and condition of his people “to eye them in their distresses, and to give them timely and suitable deliverance.” If there was a delay to his intervention, it was because he was allowing the godly to “strive and wrestle with great oppositions” in order “to draw out and exercise” faith. The “enemies of the church” should know that “the eye of Christ” is on them in “all their counsels and undertakings.” Owen described this in a way that resonated with recent events. The enemy may be “digging deep,” but their undertakings would come to nothing because Christ was “continually present” in all their planning. Owen pointed to an episode from the life of Elisha where the perplexed king of Syria could not comprehend how his Israelite enemies had prior knowledge of all his military maneuvers, knowledge that extended to “the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2 Kings 6:8–12 KJV). As Owen applied this, he attributed the intelligence that enabled Cromwell to identify the weakness in Leslie’s army to the hand of providence.

Owen outlined a threefold sense in which Christ is the inhabitator or indweller of the church: it is his “habitation” and “his court.” First, he dwells in his house and in every stone of it by his Spirit. He clarified that “Christ does not assume the saints into a personal subsistence with himself, but dwells in their persons by his Spirit.” Perhaps Owen was aware of how the Congregationalist point about the visible church consisting only of those who were “partakers of the divine nature” might be misunderstood (2 Pet. 1:4). Rutherford, for example, had engaged with the Congregationalists’ use of this terminology. While Christ indwelt all his saints, he did not do so equally when it came to his “workings,” “operations,” and “manifestations.” Second, Christ dwells in his house by the “graces” of which his people are made partakers. These graces, such as “light, and life, and love,” are the “the ornaments of the living stones.” Third, Christ dwells in his church by his “ordinances.” From this Owen entered into a discussion about the “intimacy” that Christ has with his saints, drawing upon the Song of Songs in order to describe “the choicest communion.” This was a common theme among

<sup>136</sup> Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 221.

Congregationalists, and Owen's treatment of these texts is similar to that adopted by William Strong in *The Saints Communion with God* (1655), and it anticipates his own sermons from the following year that would in time be published as *Communion with God* (1657). Once again, contextualization brings Owen's point into clarity because Rutherford had claimed something very different: "The faithfull may become and stand members, and have a spirituall communion with a people . . . that are Idolaters, thieves, murderers, worshippers of Baal, so being they worship the true God publickly as he commandeth, and be in externall covenant with him."<sup>137</sup>

Owen then warned about grieving the indwelling Spirit of Christ by "unbelief, unruly passions, worldly desires, [and] foolish imaginations." In response, Christ would "hide his face," and all sense of his presence would be lost. Although Owen was clear that the application was not limited to the Scots, the implication was that this is exactly what the Covenanters had done as he paraphrased Isaiah's warning of how God would act to make "your heart ache, your joints tremble, and break all your bones in pieces" (see Isa. 38:13). Owen's point would have been heard by many engaged in significant heart-searching after the events at Dunbar which, as Spurlock notes, resulted in "a number of queries about the very nature of a covenanted nation."<sup>138</sup> Owen pressed the point by insisting that the indwelling Christ could be grieved by calling the appearances of the grace of Christ in others "hypocrisy, humor, folly, pride, [and] singularity." The implication was that this is what the Scots had done by describing the English army as nothing more than an army of sectaries.<sup>139</sup>

The final consideration of Christ's relationship to his house was as its "great avenger," the one who would "destroy all the enemies of his holy dwelling." Here Owen returned to texts and motifs from his sermons from the previous two years to argue that "every instrument of persecution in the world" would be called to account, "sooner or later, temporally or eternally." For example, the old pagan Roman Empire had been judged, and anti-Christian Rome would also be destroyed, tellingly, "with all its adherents." In the Declaration of Musselburgh, the junior officers in the army announced that they were fighting for "the destruction of Antichrist, [and] the advancement of the Kingdom of

<sup>137</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Pauls Presbyterie in Scotland* (London, 1642), 136.

<sup>138</sup> R. Scott Spurlock, "Boundaries of Scottish Reformed Orthodoxy, 1560–1700," in *The History of Scottish Theology*, vol. 1, *Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 367.

<sup>139</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 24.

Jesus Christ.<sup>140</sup> Owen's point here was that the Scots had effectively "roused" the lion and so had been destroyed by the avenger.

Owen closed the sermon with three brief but significant applications. The first concerned the "eminent privilege of them which are indeed stones of this house." It was a great honor to serve Christ and be "safeguarded as his." Second, it was "vanity" to trust in "outward church privileges" because Christ actually "abhors those assemblies" comprised of "dead rubbish." By implication, this was a call to abandon such assemblies and to be gathered into churches made up of living stones. Finally, Owen explained that persecution appeared "in various forms," some "old ones new painted," and others "new pretenses." Regardless of the form it took, persecutors would be destroyed.

### *THE ADVANTAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IN THE SHAKING OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD*

#### **Context of Owen's Sermon Celebrating the Victory at the Battle of Worcester**

The Scots crowned Charles at Scone in January 1651 in the hope that he would be a covenanted monarch reigning over three kingdoms.<sup>141</sup> Charles's intention was that with the support of the Scots he would invade England in the hope that this might exploit disillusionment with the republican regime and northern royalists would rally to his standard. At the beginning of August, around thirteen thousand Scottish royalist troops crossed the border into England. There was, however, no general uprising, and Charles's army began to dwindle because of desertion and dysentery. With Parliament's army in pursuit, the depleted royalists arrived at the loyal but weakly fortified city of Worcester, tired and exhausted after the long march from Stirling. By now, the Parliamentary army had caught up with them, and the king found himself outnumbered and effectively trapped in the city. On September 3, this covenanted king and his Scottish army suffered an overwhelming defeat. Cromwell attacked the city from the east and south, and after the walls were breached, bitter street fighting ensued. The aftermath was, as Gentles explains, "a scene of desolation," with the streets "choked" with corpses and "the stench of death everywhere."<sup>142</sup> It was said that perhaps nearly three thousand royalists were killed, compared to only two hundred parliamentarians, and more than six

<sup>140</sup> *Declaration of the English Army Now in Scotland*, sig. B2r.

<sup>141</sup> Kirsteen M. MacKenzie, *The Solemn League and Covenant of the Kingdoms and the Cromwellian Union, 1643–1663* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 76–77.

<sup>142</sup> Gentles, *English Revolution*, 430.

thousand were taken prisoner. Charles fled and eventually escaped to France. It was not lost on anyone that this was the first anniversary of the victory at Dunbar. The day after his sweeping victory, Cromwell wrote to William Lenthall, expressing his desire that this "Crowning mercy," as he put it, would "provoake those that are conserved in it to thankfull nes, & the Parliamt. to doe the will of him, who hath done his will for it, & for the Nation." He warned that "the fatnes of these continued mercies may not occasion pride, & wantonnes, as formerly the like hath don [illegible], to a chosen Nation." He demanded that "justice righteousnes, mercie & trueth, may flow from you, as a thankfull returne to our gracious God."<sup>143</sup>

On Saturday, September 6, having heard about "the great Success God was pleased to give the Army, in a total Rout of the Enemy," the Rump Parliament resolved to hold a day of solemn thanksgiving across England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and that "Mr. *Thomas Goodwyn* and Mr. *Owen*, be desired to preach before the Parliament that Day." Earlier in the summer, Joseph Caryl (1602–1673) had replaced Owen as preacher to the Council of State, but the invitation is evidence that Owen "still moved on the national stage." Sir Henry Mildmay was, once again, tasked with giving him notice.<sup>144</sup> The thanksgiving was originally scheduled to take place on Thursday, October 2, but on September 26 it was pushed back to October 24 (the reasons for this were not stated).<sup>145</sup> After the service, Parliament had been due to dine at the Banqueting House on Whitehall, but for some unknown reason that feast was canceled. Details were duly published as *An Act for Setting Apart Friday the Four and Twentieth Day of October, One Thousand Six Hundred Fifty One, for a Day of Publique Thanksgiving: Together with a Narrative Declaring the Grounds and Reasons Thereof* (1651). Such a celebration was an occasion of great rejoicing for some.<sup>146</sup> However, such days of public thanksgiving were not universally well received. For example, the minister of Doultling in Somerset did not attend any service of thanksgiving and chose to pass the

<sup>143</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:491.

<sup>144</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:12–13; *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Owen, Dr John (?1614–83)." Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 1:573. Mildmay, a member of the Essex County Committee, had also been tasked with issuing the invitation to Owen to preach the fast sermon on January 31, 1649.

<sup>145</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:20, 22.

<sup>146</sup> For example, John Goodwin published *Two Hymns, or Spirituall Songs* [. . .] (London, 1651), and William Barton produced *Hallelujah, Or Certain Hymns, Composed out of Scripture, to Celebrate Some Special and Publick Occasions* [. . .] *Upon Occasion of those Two Glorious and Most Remarkable Appearances of God for them, at Dunbar and Worcester: Both upon That Memorable Day Septem. 3 1650. 1651* (London, 1651).

day in an alehouse.<sup>147</sup> In Dorchester in Dorset, a collection was held as part of the celebration, but only a paltry sum was given, even less than the small sum collected to mark the victory at Dunbar the previous year. This was indicative of “the townsmen’s ambivalence towards the Commonwealth.”<sup>148</sup> Unsurprisingly, in Scotland, the ministers of the Kirk refused to participate in the thanksgiving, judging it instead a day “to fast and murne” because of their “miserie and destruction.”<sup>149</sup>

The sermon was printed by Leonard Lichfield (1604–1657), a “jobbing printer” who styled himself “printer to the university.”<sup>150</sup> It was sold by the Oxford bookseller Thomas Robinson at his shop by the junction of St Mary’s Church and High Street.<sup>151</sup> A London edition was printed probably in the same year as the Oxford edition.<sup>152</sup> It was dedicated to the members of Parliament of the House of Commons, “the supreme authority of the nation.” Owen sought to impress upon them that they were living in unprecedented days and were themselves instrumental in the fulfillment of God’s providential purposes. In particular, as was befitting the occasion, he drew their attention to the “wasting and desolation” of “the late grand attempt of those in Scotland” to oppose the cause of Jesus Christ. For Owen, despite its appeal to “zeal” and “reformation,” the covenanted interest was no more than a hypocritical pretense, and its supporters were motivated by “revenge” and a desire to persecute and enslave. This was a provocation to God who executed “dreadful vengeance” against them at Worcester. Owen informed members of Parliament that his sermon dealt with the obligations placed upon them to make an appropriate response to such a gracious deliverance. In other words, this was a sermon calling for Parliament to demonstrate reforming zeal. This accords with Cromwell’s words to the Rump via Speaker Lenthall on the day

<sup>147</sup> Imogen Peck, *Recollection in the Republics: Memories of the British Civil Wars in England, 1649–1659* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 125.

<sup>148</sup> David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 213–14, cf. 228–29.

<sup>149</sup> John Nicoll, *A Diary of Public Transactions and Other Occurrences Chiefly in Scotland, from January 1650 to June 1667*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Society, 1836), 61.

<sup>150</sup> See Jason Peacey, “‘Printers to the University’ 1584–1658,” in *The History of Oxford University Press*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1780*, ed. Ian Gadd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56, 69, 71.

<sup>151</sup> J. G. Philip and Paul Morgan “Libraries, Books, and Printing,” in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 4, *Seventeenth-Century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 666.

<sup>152</sup> Falconer Madan, *Oxford Books: A Bibliography of Printed Works Relating to the University and City of Oxford or Printed or Published There*, vol. 3, *Oxford Literature, 1651–1680* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931), 9–10.

after Worcester, when he urged its members to respond with thankfulness and “to doe the will of him, who hath done his will for it.”<sup>153</sup>

Now that Scottish and royalist resistance was collapsing, the regime was secure, and there were further moves to broaden the support base for the Commonwealth by securing an amnesty for former royalists through the Act of Oblivion. Not only had the Scottish army been defeated, but in the summer, the Presbyterian minister Christopher Love (1618–1651) had been executed for his alleged role in a royalist conspiracy. This had broken the back of pro-Covenant English Presbyterian resistance to the regime, and in the middle of October, Love's fellow conspirators received a reprieve.<sup>154</sup> However, this “reversion to peace” also brought “its anxieties.”<sup>155</sup> In the turbulent political waters of the autumn, fissures in the regime were coming to light. The Rump Parliament was becoming more aware of the complexities of significant change and reform in matters of religion, law, and the electoral franchise. As the army officers (and their chaplains) returned from nearly two years of fighting, they discovered that a good deal of what they had been fighting for was now viewed as unrealistic.

Owen preached as part of a campaign to push a threefold reformist agenda. First, the army sought the dissolution of the Rump Parliament and fresh elections, even though the result could prove to be problematic; as Owen came to preach, the Rump had been discussing the bill for such a new representative. Second, there was a renewed demand to reform the English legal system. The Rump had debated legal reform on a number of occasions, but as Cromwell complained in June 1650, “the sons of Zeruiah are yet too strong for us: and we cannot mention the reformation of the law.”<sup>156</sup> In the sermon, Owen lent his voice for a reform of the law. Third, there was the outstanding issue of the church settlement. Owen shared the Cromwellian desire for a settlement that would include all truly godly. After the victory at Dunbar, the army had prodded the Rump into agreeing to a measure of religious toleration with the repeal of the Elizabethan laws compelling attendance at parish church services on the Sabbath. That, however, had been the Rump's last effort at

<sup>153</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Wirings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:491.

<sup>154</sup> Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 247–48.

<sup>155</sup> Blair Worden, “Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan,” in *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>156</sup> Edmund Ludlow, *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow: Lieutenant-general of the Horse in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, 1625–1672*, ed. C. H. Firth, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1894), 1:246. Cromwell was quoting 2 Sam. 3:39. John Morrill and Philip Baker, “Oliver Cromwell, the Regicide and the Sons of Zeruiah,” in *The Regicide and the Execution of Charles I*, ed. Jason Peacey (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 14–35.

religious reform, and at this point the broad national church settlement was still not in place.<sup>157</sup>

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen was aware that many were slow to recognize God's hand of providence. This had been the case with the wicked in the Old Testament, people like the Egyptians and Philistines, and often the reason for this was judicial blindness and hardening. In order to interpret the significance of the "providential alteration" that was being celebrated on the day of thanksgiving, Owen selected a text from a chapter in Ezekiel that described, in the form of a parable, how "God would destroy the outward visible monarchy of the Jews" because of idolatry and persecution (see Ezek. 17:24). Owen sought to trace obvious parallels to contemporary events, not least because the passage described how God "subdues the nation" and "takes away two kings, one after another." The Scots had been defeated, and two Stuart kings had been removed in quick succession, one by death and the other by exile. Owen took the opportunity to clarify that "kingly government" did not have any "eminency" in it: God had also employed rule by elders and judges at various times in biblical history. Although the monarchy did have an important typological role for the people of God, in time, the people began to idolize the type, embracing "the shadow instead of the substance," which led to "the neglect of the spiritual kingdom of Christ represented thereby." Owen noted how God's purposes in providential alterations of civil rule often involved the "plucking down of kings," with all the accompanying "tumults and embroilments of the nations"—namely, "the setting up" of the kingdom of Christ, "planting it in the church," advancing it, so that it would flourish. In "this nation" of England, such work involved the punishment of tyrants (the late king, Charles I) and the disappointment of "revengeful persecutors" (the Kirk Party in Scotland) and the establishment of godly "governors" (the new republican regime).

Using the arboreal metaphor of his text, Owen expounded several aspects of this great work of advancing the kingdom of Christ with respect to its author, responses to it, and the assurance of its accomplishment. First, considered negatively, this work of the Lord involves the rejection of all means of worldly glory, whether the monarchy in the days of Ezekiel or, in Owen's day, the rejection of the "mighty monarchy" of the house of Stuart, the "triumphing prelacy" of the Laudian bishops and all attempts at enforced "conformity." Considered positively, and contrary to the expectations of many, it involved

<sup>157</sup> Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 271–77.

the exaltation of “things, persons, [and] assemblies” that were instrumental in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ despite many viewing these instruments as “weak and contemptible.” Second, in terms of responses to these providential observations, Owen observed that people were often reluctant or unwilling to see the hand of God at work when what was being done went against their expectations of what they judged reasonable. Nonetheless, he insisted that God would continue his work until all people acknowledged his mighty works of providence. The saints could be assured that despite opposition, God would continue to advance the kingdom of Christ. From his exposition of the verse, Owen raised two significant observations that he would spend the rest of the sermon proving and applying.

The first major observation was as follows: “In the carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations.” Owen explained that there were three principal seasons of divine “appearances” to advance the kingdom of Christ and the gospel. The first was during the time of the promulgation of the gospel by Christ and his apostles. This included the “wars and rumors of wars” that Christ prophesied (Matt. 24:6) concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and for which Josephus recorded the unparalleled “destruction and desolation” that took place. The second such season involved the spread of the gospel across the Roman Empire and the dissolution of that pagan empire. Owen understood this to be a fulfillment of the opening of the six seals described in Revelation 6. The importance of this chapter for Owen’s understanding of history is seen in his referencing it in five previously published sermons.<sup>158</sup> The third and final season of “wonderful providential alterations” was ongoing in the work of Christ “to recover his people from anti-Christian idolatry and oppression” in fulfillment of Revelation 17–19. Owen explained that when the Reformation began in the sixteenth century, it was attended by “wars, tumults, and destructions” and that work of deliverance and transformation was not yet complete. As he had argued in previous sermons, the interest of the antichrist was not restricted to its manifestation in Roman Catholicism. When Owen said that he would not speak about “any engagements of war with foreign nations,” he simply did not need to do so because, as Gribben notes, “Owen had already made his position clear . . . he was calling for a global revolution.”<sup>159</sup> As for what nation Owen might have in mind, Venning points out that France was, at this time, the “likeliest choice of target,” especially since many in the army viewed

<sup>158</sup> See *Complete Works of John Owen*, 18.

<sup>159</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 133.

the French as sharing some responsibility for the invasion from Scotland.<sup>160</sup> Colonel Edward Sexby and other English envoys were in Huguenot regions of southwest France, seeking to gain support from the radical party known as the *Ormée*. In the month Owen preached this sermon, the Council of State was considering sending an expeditionary force to La Rochelle in response to a request that had come via Conan, the agent of the Comte du Daugnon, the pro-Condé governor of La Rochelle.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, Owen argued that there was “work enough” to be done domestically, and Owen’s thanksgiving sermon was a call to complete that work.

Owen offered two reasons why providential desolations like what had been witnessed at Worcester were necessary. The first was that in order for Christ to come into his possession, he had to act against the leaders of the Western nations who grasped onto his inheritance by seeking to oppress his people. He offered the example of how the Stuart kings James I and Charles I were committed to “holding fast prelacy”—that is, the system of episcopal church government that Owen provocatively styled as “a mere antichristian encroachment upon the inheritance of Christ.”<sup>162</sup> This had to be shaken to pieces in the First Civil War. More recently, the Kirk Party in Scotland, “those who would have been our oppressors” by the imposition of Presbyterian uniformity, had been destroyed, and “the cockatrice” (a mythical dragon hatched by a serpent) had been crushed while it was still in its shell (Isa. 14:29). The second reason why such providential shakings were required was because God was delivering his people and taking revenge on those who oppressed them. Owen recognized that even in England there were those who wished to impose the yoke of false worship on others and persecute those who would not conform. In the run-up to the battle of Worcester, there were some supporters of this agenda and others who were simply complacent and unmoved at the plight of the godly. Owen was unequivocal: vengeance would be taken on all of them, and that could not happen “without great alterations.” The trials that this inevitably would refine the godly and expose hypocrites.

Owen applied this first observation by way of two main uses. The first was for his hearers and readers to understand that the English revolution—which had caused such “amazement” as the world was turned upside down and set

<sup>160</sup> Timothy Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 40–41.

<sup>161</sup> Philip A. Knachel, *England and the Fronde: The Impact of the English Civil War and Revolution on France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 162–64.

<sup>162</sup> Samuel Parker quoted this as a provocative example of Owen’s hostility to prelacy. See his *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie* [. . .] (London, 1671), 60.

ablaze—came about because God was advancing the interest of Christ and removing all obstacles that stood in the way. The house of Stuart was brought down, and Charles I was “brought to punishment for blood.” The Scots had been exposed as hypocrites for forming an alliance with the English Parliament against the king and then entering into an alliance with English royalists against the English Parliament. In England, those who had once favored the cause of Parliament but who had turned away revealed their true identity in their “cursing, repining, [and] slighting the marvelous appearance of God” in support of the new republic. No obstacle could stand in the way of God’s work of delivering Zion.

Owen’s second use was to provide the rationale for why the saints ought to rejoice even in an “outwardly dreadful and horrible” dispensation such as the slaughter at Worcester. When the enemies of Christ were being destroyed, the saints were to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3) because they had witnessed a deliverance that was both temporal and spiritual. Consequently, he contended that there was every reason to rejoice in the outcome at Worcester because the nation had been delivered from an Egyptian-like “tyrant full of revenge” (Charles II returned from exile) and a Babylonian “discipline full of persecution” (enforced Presbyterian uniformity). As Spurlock explains, Owen’s assessment was that Scotland bore the responsibility for the conflict between the two nations “because it had attempted to impose its tyrannical anti-Christian form of church government upon England.”<sup>163</sup> Therefore it was incumbent upon the nation “to rejoice” in the destruction of a Babylonian-like regime. For Owen, there was no place for neutrality, given that the hand of God was so obviously at work in these alterations.

The second major observation that Owen drew from his text was that “the actings of God’s providence in carrying on the interest of Christ, are and shall be exceedingly unsuited to the reasonings and expectations of the most of men.” Here Owen offered a number of examples as to why “the thoughts of God are ‘not as our thoughts,’ neither doth he look on ‘outward appearances.’” He explained that this was the case with Jesus Christ, who was rejected by many because he did not conform to their expectations. Similarly, the apostles were “ignorant, weak, unlearned fishermen, despised upon all accounts,” and yet they were the “instruments” that God made use of in the proclamation of the gospel to the pagan world. When it came to the destruction of Babylon, the Scots made the mistake of thinking that reformation would be accomplished “with might, power and strength” and so put their confidence in the king.

<sup>163</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 85.

They thought that if Charles II's "malignant" advisors were removed from the royal court, the king with "sound good men" next to him would further the covenanted interest and establish a system of enforced Presbyterian uniformity (what Owen termed the "iron yoke"). Contrary to their expectations of being lifted up and exalted to influence, they found themselves "shaken and broken with unparalleled destruction." The so-called army of sectaries that the Scots so despised was actually the great instrument employed by the Lord to achieve his purposes.

Owen explained that there were at least several reasons why the thoughts and expectations of many in his day were at odds with God's ways. The first was that corrupt hearts long for "carnal power and glory." For Owen, the Scots wanted to see Charles returned to his English throne so that they would "be great under him"; they were set on "re-enthroning . . . tyranny" under the guise of their covenant. Another reason was that by such works of providence, God gave people "a clear" and unclipped view of his power. Such manners of working also had a role in judicial hardening. Owen believed that the late king's heart had been hardened and that through his "stubbornness" many mighty providential alterations had been carried out. The application was straightforward; it was "vanity" (and "a great provocation") for proud hearts to reject the work of God simply because it did not conform to expectations: "our ways please not God, when his ways please not us."

Time did not permit Owen to deal with two other observations raised from the text, and so he closed with one final general point of application. This "use" was drawn from the prophet Amos's counsel for how to live during such a "great dispensation of providence": "prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12 KJV). This was the duty incumbent upon the nation and its Parliament and army. Given the tensions that were developing between these two groups, this use was proposed as the way in which their unity could be restored. Owen was endeavoring to mediate between the Parliament and the army by calling for them to look back over the Second Civil War, the campaign in Ireland, and the defeat of the Scots through this shared providentialist and apocalyptic framework. This meant submission and acceptance of the mind and will of God in three areas: his works of providence, worship, and holiness.

With regard to God's works of providence, Owen laid out six things that were "clearly promised" for the period of latter-day glory. Here he returned to a number of texts that he had made reference to in earlier sermons, particularly ones from Isaiah and Revelation. Those in authority (and others among the godly) were to believe these promises because prayerful faith would hasten their fulfillment more than great armies. Owen then raised

two areas in which action was required from Parliament as a response to the “constant appearing of God” in vindication of its cause against all opposition: “the advancement of the gospel” and “the administration of justice.” Here he was referring to two issues in which Parliament and the army were increasingly at odds. Owen impressed on his hearers and readers that God’s work in his days involved “staining the glory of all flesh” (Isa. 23:9) and “shaking and translating” the heavens and earth (Heb. 12:26–27). In the wake of this triumph on the battlefield, Owen was expecting the dawn of a new era, and that involved action in the areas of religion and law. The radical-moderate split over these two issues caused significant tension in Parliament at the time. With the former, Owen would the following year lead a broad coalition of ministers that made proposals for the better regulation and propagation of religion in the Commonwealth church. With the latter, the Rump had debated legal reform on a number of occasions and had made some progress—for example, in November 1650, an act was passed declaring that legal proceedings would take place in English rather than in Latin or French and that the paperwork would be written in ordinary script rather than in the antiquated “court hand.” As others added their voice to the calls for further reform to the law, particularly the army’s Council of Officers, two months later, in December 1651 Matthew Hale’s Commission was established and charged with overhauling the English legal system.<sup>164</sup>

Owen tactfully raised the issue of the self-interest of those in government. This matter had generated a degree of tension in Rump-army relations, as it was thought that the Rump had been hesitant to embark on legal reform because its membership was dominated by lawyers intent on maintaining their position within the status quo. Owen called his hearers to loosen their grip on those things that were being shaken away and to instead find their riches in Christ.

A response was also required in the area of worship. Owen was concerned about a tendency to neglect God’s ordinances or to utilize those institutions without an appropriate response of the heart. This was not confined to public worship and included “private worship, both personal and family,” as well as Sabbath keeping. He made reference to the recent new laws that the Rump Parliament had passed concerning Sabbath observance and encouraged his hearers to set an example in this area.

The final area of response that Owen dealt with was in holy living. Here Owen appealed to a text that he would expound in depth in the posthumously

<sup>164</sup> Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 271; Underdown, *Pride’s Purge*, 277–79; *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:455–56.

published sermon *Providential Changes, an Argument for Universal Holiness* (2 Pet. 3:11), which is included in this volume. Owen sought to harness the recent victory at Worcester, utilizing it as a further call to holiness of life, a responsibility that he believed was particularly important for those in government (2 Sam. 23:3).

The sermon was “an immediate success,” being published in London and Oxford in 1651 and then in Leith in 1652.<sup>165</sup> Spurlock suggests that Robert Lilburne’s earlier appeal for copies of Owen’s sermon may have been the motivation for this sermon being printed by the “Evan Tyler” print house in Leith.<sup>166</sup> Four days after it was preached, Parliament ordered Owen and Thomas Goodwin to preach at the University of Oxford, and for the next five years they alternately delivered sermons from the pulpit of the University Church of St Mary’s.<sup>167</sup>

## THE LABORING SAINT’S DISMISSION TO REST

### Context of Ireton’s Funeral

Henry Ireton (1611–1651) was educated at Trinity College, Oxford, and underwent legal training at Middle Temple, London. During the First Civil War, he had fought at Marston Moor, Naseby, and the siege of Bristol. He entered the House of Commons as the member of Parliament for Appleby in 1645, and in 1646 he married Oliver Cromwell’s oldest daughter, Bridget.<sup>168</sup> Ireton became the army’s chief political strategist. He was involved in drawing up the Heads of the Proposals, the army’s basis for attempted negotiations with the king in 1647, and he participated in the Putney Debates with the Levellers later in that year. During the Second Civil War, Ireton served in Kent and Essex. It is quite possible that Owen would have become acquainted with Ireton during the siege of Colchester. In the immediate aftermath of the siege of Colchester, it was Ireton who had led Lucas and Lisle out from the Council of War to be put to death as traitors.<sup>169</sup> In late 1648, he participated in the Whitehall debates and had an important role in orchestrating both

<sup>165</sup> Crawford Gribben, “Becoming John Owen: The Making of an Evangelical Reputation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79, no. 2 (2017): 313.

<sup>166</sup> Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 46.

<sup>167</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:31.

<sup>168</sup> See David Farr’s discussion of Ireton as Cromwell’s “son” in David Farr, *Oliver Cromwell’s Kin, 1643–1726: The Private and Public Worlds of the English Revolution and Restoration* (London: Routledge, 2024), 18–32.

<sup>169</sup> Barbara Donagan, *War in England, 1642–1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 364.

Pride's Purge and the regicide.<sup>170</sup> Ireton was convinced that the army was God's instrument and that the king must be brought to justice.<sup>171</sup> He was appointed Cromwell's second-in-command for the Irish expedition of 1649 and succeeded his father-in-law as Lord Deputy in Ireland. He died of a fever shortly after concluding the siege of Limerick on November 26, 1651.

Owen was chosen to preach at his high-profile funeral in London. As Gentles has shown, through the 1640s London provided the stage for a number of significant funerals, "each of which exploited the familiar idioms of civic pageantry for the purpose of forwarding a political agenda."<sup>172</sup> Ireton's funeral would be no different. Evelyn provided a full account of what he described as "the Magnificent Funeral of that arch-Rebell Ireton."<sup>173</sup> Evelyn was not the only one to mock the funeral. Anthony Wood recorded that a hatchment was hung at Somerset House while Ireton's body was lying in state, "with this Motto under his Arms depicted thereon, *Dulce est pro patria mori*, which was englished by an honest Cavalier thus, *It is good for his country that he is dead*."<sup>174</sup> There was all the pomp and grandeur of a state funeral with trumpeters and four heralds wearing new tabards bearing the arms of the Commonwealth.<sup>175</sup> Owen delivered the sermon at Westminster Abbey because, as Gribben notes, "preaching was central to [the] construction of godly memory."<sup>176</sup> And, as Jeanne Shami comments, funeral sermons in London were "reaching their apogee in the 1640s and 1650s."<sup>177</sup> Anthony Wood, a hostile detractor, claimed that Owen preached "not without some blasphemy."<sup>178</sup> Afterward, Ireton was buried in Henry VII's chapel at the abbey. Merritt notes how the funeral was "notorious for its lavish expense," with the Venetian ambassador describing

<sup>170</sup> David Farr, *Henry Ireton and the English Revolution* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), 159–203.

<sup>171</sup> A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–49) From the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (London: J. M. Dent, 1974), 87–88.

<sup>172</sup> Ian Gentles, "Political Funerals during the English Revolution" in *London and the Civil War*, ed. Stephen Porter (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996), 207.

<sup>173</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E. S. de Beer, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 3:57–58.

<sup>174</sup> Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* [. . .], vol. 2 (London, 1692), 82. The phrase is drawn from the *Odes* 3.2.13 of the Roman lyric poet Horace and is properly translated: "It is sweet to die for one's country." For text and translation, see Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd, Loeb Classical Library 33 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 144–45.

<sup>175</sup> H. Stanford London, "The Heralds' Tabards under the Commonwealth," *Notes and Queries* 198 (1953): 276–77.

<sup>176</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 135.

<sup>177</sup> Jeanne Shami, "Women and Sermons," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, ed. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156.

<sup>178</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 2:82.

it as “sumptuous.”<sup>179</sup> The government commissioned a substantial tomb to be completed by a prominent London mason.<sup>180</sup> After the Restoration, in January 1661, Ireton's remains were disinterred along with those of Cromwell and John Bradshaw.<sup>181</sup> Evelyn described how their “Carkasses” were “draged out of their superbe Tombs (in Westminster among the Kings).”<sup>182</sup>

Such a lavish funeral was likely at odds with Ireton's own austerity and views on how the dead should be commemorated. Ireton refused a number of opportunities to enrich himself during his career, and, as Farr comments, “it seems unlikely that Ireton received the funeral that he would have wanted.”<sup>183</sup> There are perhaps hints of Owen seeking to disassociate himself with aspects of the funeral when he explained that he was charged to “preach the word, not to carry on a part of a funeral ceremony.” Nonetheless, the funeral provided an important occasion for the new regime to demonstrate its legitimacy.

Owen dedicated the sermon to his friend, Colonel Henry Cromwell (1628–1674), who had served under Ireton, his brother-in-law, in Ireland and who had been alongside him when he died.<sup>184</sup> In the prefatory address to Cromwell's son, Owen described Ireton as an exceptional example of “righteousness, faith, holiness, zeal, courage, self-denial, love to his country, wisdom and industry.”

The work was licensed by those appointed by Parliament, and the title entered on the register of the Stationers' Company on April 15, 1652.<sup>185</sup> It was printed by Robert and William Leybourn (or Leyborne), who were, most likely, brothers operating a printshop on Monkswell Street, Cripplegate.<sup>186</sup> It was published by Philemon Stephens, who had already been responsible for a number

179 J. F. Merritt, *Westminster, 1640–60: A Royal City in a Time of Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 101; “Venice: March 1652,” in *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, vol. 28, 1647–1652, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London: HMSO, 1927), 215–19.

180 Peter Sherlock, “The Revolution of Memory: The Monuments of Westminster Abbey,” in *Revolutionary England, c.1630–c.1660: Essays for Clive Holmes*, ed. George Southcombe and Grant Tapsell (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), 211.

181 For a fuller account of Ireton's burial, funeral, and disinterment, see Farr, *Henry Ireton and the English Revolution*, 1–14.

182 Evelyn, *Diary of John Evelyn*, 3:269.

183 Farr, *Henry Ireton and the English Revolution*, 11.

184 Peacey cites this as an example of how printed sermons “tended to be dedicated to friends of both the author and the deceased.” Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 73.

185 See *Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers: From 1640–1708 A.D.*, ed. G. E. B. Eyre, 3 vols. (London, 1913–1914), 1:394.

186 William Leybourn (1626–ca. 1716) went on to become an important mathematician and land surveyor.

of Owen's earlier works. Owen's return to working with him may suggest that "Owen was now someone who could make money for his publishers."<sup>187</sup>

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen's text comprised the words of discharge spoken to Daniel upon which he formally took his leave to go to his rest: "But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:13). He judged these words to be able to stand alone and so proceeded without his usual examination of the context. He divided the text into four parts and from it raised six observations, two of which he handled at length and two only briefly.

For Owen this was a fitting "parallel" between Daniel and Ireton because both were dismissed from their faithful service having demonstrated the same qualities of wisdom, love for God's people, and uprightness in the discharge of their offices and employments. Both showed "civil wisdom" in "the management of the affairs of men" and were men of "the most eminent abilities" and "most useful employments" who died doing their work.

Daniel was also one who received clear visions about the "providential alterations" that would take place from his own day to the end of the world, all of which were centered on the exaltation of the kingdom of Christ. Ireton was a model of one who listened to God's providential voice and who understood the times in which he was living, asking, "What saith the Lord?" and "What Israel ought to do." In Ireton's own *Declaration*, this outlook is obvious as he writes, for example, about how "the Lord our God" had stretched "his heavy hand over this Nation" in those "capital Judgements of Sword and Pestilence."<sup>188</sup> Ireton explained how he believed divine judgments were sent for "reproving, or restraining, for awakening, or quickening, for humbling, teaching or instructing, for purging or purifying, for trying or perfecting."<sup>189</sup> The godly were to seek God through "frequent exercise of Prayer with Fasting (such is without Superstition) and (suitable to the Faith, Simplicity, Truth and Purity

<sup>187</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 109. At this time "virtually every frontage in the Cross Yard either was, or had been, a bookshop." The different bookshops were known by their devices, in this case a gilded lion. Stephens remained at these premises "until at least 1665." See Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Bookshops of Paul's Cross Churchyard* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1990), 5, 40. In Thomason's copy of the sermon, the date was altered to 1651 in order to reflect the idea that the new year began on Lady Day, March 25.

<sup>188</sup> Henry Ireton, *A Declaration of the Deputy-General of Ireland, concerning the Present Hand of God in the Visitation of the Plague; and for the Exercise of Fasting and Prayer in Relation Thereunto* (Cork, 1650), 3.

<sup>189</sup> Ireton, *Declaration of the Deputy-General of Ireland*, 6.

of the Gospel).<sup>190</sup> Recalling the title and theme of his parliamentary sermon from February 1650, Owen portrayed Ireton as an exemplary godly magistrate precisely because he “staggered not” and instead was “steadfast in faith.” Owen presented Ireton as one fully aware that he was living during the period of the “vengeance of the Lord and his temple” before Christ would “reign in Righteousness and Peace.” Owen spoke of how even in the “most dismal and black engagements,” Ireton remained confident that, in “the appointed season,” there would be “the coming in of the promised glory.” Unlike those “swallowed up” in “applying secondary causes,” Owen was able to hold up as an example Ireton’s pattern of “receiving from God, and holding out to others, clear and express visions concerning God’s wonderful providential alterations in kingdoms, and nations, which were to be accomplished, from the days wherein he lived.”

Owen drew out further similarities between Daniel and Ireton in the area of love for their people. He mentioned Ireton’s “great neglect of self,” something for which others also remembered Ireton. John Cook (bapt. 1608–d. 1660), prosecutor at the trial of the king and Ireton’s Chief Justice of Munster, shared this perspective: “If he erred in any thing (as error and Humanity are inseparable) it was in too much neglecting himselfe.”<sup>191</sup> Similarly, John Hewson (d. 1660), the regicide governor of Dublin, also praised Ireton for his selflessness, writing the following on December 2, 1651: “Wee that knew him, can and must say truly, wee know no man like minded; most seeking their own things, few so singly minde the things of Jesus Christ, of publique concernment, of the interest of the precious sons of Zion.”<sup>192</sup> Edmund Ludlow (ca. 1616–1692), who had served with Ireton in Ireland, also remembered his austerity and self-denial: he “was so diligent in the publick service, and so careless of food he used, what hour he went to rest, or what horse he mounted.”<sup>193</sup> Ludlow recalled Ireton turning down Parliament’s gift of land worth £2,000 a year, and, as such, he believed that Ireton would have despised the “pompous and expensive vanities” associated with his funeral.<sup>194</sup>

It appears that Owen sought to justify some of the changes in policy that Ireton engaged in during the late 1640s. For example, the Leveller leader John Lilburne (1615?–1657) described Ireton as “the cunningest of Machiavilians”

190 Ireton, *Declaration of the Deputy-General of Ireland*, 7–8. Ireton ordered twice as many acts of special worship in his two years as Lord Deputy than had taken place in the previous twenty-five years. See Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 1:526.

191 John Cook, *Monarchy No Creature of Gods Making* [ . . . ] (London, 1652), sig. G1r.

192 *Severall Proceedings* 115 (December 4–11, 1651), 1780.

193 Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:278–79.

194 Ludlow, *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:286, 295.

and accused the regicide of playing “fast and loose with the King” by initially being willing to bargain with him in the *The Heads of the Proposals* (1647).<sup>195</sup> Similarly, Lilburne and the other Levellers were incensed that Ireton had appeared to court them in late 1648 before turning his back on their *Agreement of the People*.<sup>196</sup> He reasoned that “what is most wisely proposed in one season, may be most foolishly pursued in another.” As Owen discussed Ireton’s political involvement, he revealed something of his own political theory.<sup>197</sup> Political society is necessary because of human sinfulness and serves to mitigate the effects of the fall. For Owen, certain principles of natural law precede the formation of human government and serve as the foundation on which political society is built. These principles are “universally unchangeable and indispensable,” and these “general rules of unchangeable righteousness, and equity” apply to “all times, places, ways and forms of government.” The example that Owen offers is that of self-preservation. This had been an important principle for Ireton, for whom peace was “the central political value, which governments existed to maintain.”<sup>198</sup> In the Whitehall debates, Ireton had argued that

the necessary thing, that which *necessarily* leads all men into civil agreements or contracts, or to make commonwealths, is the necessity of it for preserving peace. Because otherwise, if there were no such thing, but every man [were] left to his own will, men’s contrary wills, lusts and passions would lead every one to the destruction of another, and [every one] to seek all the ways of fencing himself against the jealousies of another.<sup>199</sup>

In Ireton’s Army’s Remonstrance, appeal was made to the principle that peace and safety is the highest law (*salus populi suprema lex*). However, when it came to particular forms of government, Owen, like Ireton, granted considerable freedom to human beings to shape their own political

<sup>195</sup> John Lilburne, *Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England* [ . . . ] (London, 1649), 35. *The Heads of the Proposals* (the most generous peace terms offered to the king) has, traditionally, been credited to Ireton. However, the parliamentary Independents and the Council of Officers also had input. Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 374.

<sup>196</sup> John Lilburne, *The Second Part of Englands New-Chaines Discovered* [ . . . ] (London, 1649), 17.

<sup>197</sup> It is impossible to agree with Peter Toon’s assertion that this sermon contained “no religiopolitical ideas.” See Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 83.

<sup>198</sup> Glenn Burgess, “Religion and Civil Society: The Place of the English Revolution in the Development of Political Thought,” in *The Experience of Revolution in Stuart Britain and Ireland: Essays for John Morrill*, ed. Michael J. Braddick and David L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 277.

<sup>199</sup> Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 130 (italics original).

communities.<sup>200</sup> For Ireton, “‘Just principles of law, nature and nations’ provided the ultimate sanction for any system of government.”<sup>201</sup> At the Putney debates in 1647, Cromwell said that he was not “wedded and glewed to formes of Government.” Forms of government were secondary matters, but “Drosse & Dunge in Comparison of Christ.”<sup>202</sup> In 1648, the army leaders spoke of significant flexibility over forms of government, being prepared to believe that “any of them,” “monarchical, aristocratical, or democratical,” might be appropriate “as providence should direct us.”<sup>203</sup> This is another example of what Owen refers to in saying that what is wisely proposed in one season would be foolish in another. Serving as an apologist for the revolution in which Ireton had engaged, Owen explained that under certain circumstances alterations to the form of government were permitted, and indeed required. This could be when an institution degenerated or even when it had outlived its usefulness. In such circumstances, change was required for the sake of “mutual preservation,” a universal principle of natural law. The implication of what Owen was claiming is that the political institutions such as the monarchy and the House of Lords were, under certain circumstances, “alterable and dispensable.” Owen alluded to Ireton’s role in the regicide when he described him as “an eminent instrument in the hand of God in as tremendous providential alterations, as such a spot of the world has at any time received since Daniel.” Owen allowed “prudence” to determine the manner in which individuals would be designated for office or their tenure in such positions. This had relevance for two matters that the army and others were pressing the Rump to consider—namely, the electoral franchise and the Rump’s own dissolution.

The parallels between Daniel and Ireton continued in that both were “saints of the most eminent abilities, in the most useful employments,” and they were dismissed from service before they could see “the issue and accomplishment of those glorious things wherein themselves have been most eminently engaged.” They were dismissed for a variety of reasons, not least so that they were seen to be merely instruments in the hands of the one who was doing the work. The first application Owen made from this was to remind those of “eminent abilities” who were engaged in “eminent employments” that they had only an allotted season in which to do that work. It was therefore

200 Glenn Burgess, *British Political Thought, 1500–1660: The Politics of the Post-Reformation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 256.

201 Sarah Mortimer, “Henry Ireton and the Limits of Radicalism, 1647–9,” in *Revolutionary England*, 57; and Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 404.

202 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 1:451, 465.

203 Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:184–85.

incumbent upon them “to improve the time.” It was possible to do “a world of work for God” in a short period of time, just as Ireton did in his forty years. Ireton had worked long hours in Ireland, something that Cromwell alluded to in one of the letters to his daughter, Ireton’s wife, Bridget.<sup>204</sup> This meant that his hearers needed to “be diligent to pass through your work, and let it not too long hang upon your hands.”

Owen pressed this home with a litany of areas in which parliamentary reform and action was necessary: the relief of oppressed persons (probably the poor and those imprisoned);<sup>205</sup> responding to requests from widows and orphans (perhaps a call for pensions for army widows and orphans); chastising offenders against God and man; encouraging the better administration of justice across the nation; and the propagation of the gospel. In all these areas of reform, there had been little action.

The Commons revived its committee for poor law reform in April 1652, which did succeed in passing a bill for the relief of poor prisoners. As for law reform, despite the lengthy debates that had taken place, it “now vanished from parliamentary view.”<sup>206</sup> Ireton would have been disappointed because in Ireland he had supported Cook’s legal reforms.<sup>207</sup> The propagation of the gospel, the last of the areas that Owen mentions, is of particular note. The energy of the relevant committee had “waned markedly,” and the propagation bill had by this stage effectively “gone completely to sleep.”<sup>208</sup> Owen was imploring his hearers to do something about it. The opportunity to do so arrived days later when, on Tuesday, February 10, Owen and some fellow Congregationalists appeared at the bar of the House of Commons to submit a petition calling for Parliament to take action over the recent republication of the Latin anti-Trinitarian tract known as the Racovian Catechism.<sup>209</sup> Hunter Powell suggests that the Council of State had Owen and his colleagues present its warrant for the seizure of all copies of the catechism.<sup>210</sup> Mortimer proposes that Owen may have hoped to take advantage of Ireton’s legacy in order to call Parliament to greater religious

204 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 1:354.

205 See “April 1652: A Further Additional Act for Relief of Poor Prisoners,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:582.

206 Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 298.

207 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, 256.

208 Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 298; Underdown, *Pride’s Purge*, 274.

209 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:85–86. The anonymous work in question was titled *Catechesis ecclesiarum quae in Regno Poloniae* [ . . . ] (London, 1651).

210 Hunter Powell, “‘Promote, Protect, Prosecute’: The Congregationalist Divines and the Establishment of Church and Magistrate in Cromwellian England,” in *Church Polity and Politics in the British Atlantic World*, 226.

reform since it was well known that Ireton had been a supporter of the civil magistrate's authority in "spiritual" matters—namely, to ensure that there was tolerance for the orthodox godly and the exercise of restrictive power in order to restrain heresy.<sup>211</sup> This may have been what Owen had in mind when in this sermon he spoke about the need to chastise those who offended against God. In response, the Rump created two committees: one to consider the Racovian Catechism and the other to confer with Owen and the other petitioners and to receive proposals "for the better Propagation of the Gospel."<sup>212</sup> A week later, Owen and his colleagues submitted a blueprint for a church settlement to the committee in the form of a list of fifteen proposals, which they duly published as *The Humble Proposals of Mr Owen, Mr Tho Goodwin, Mr Nye, Mr Sympson and Other Ministers* (1652). The title page reveals its consistency with what Owen believed to be the two broad duties of the magistrate—namely, supplying "all Parishes in England with able, godly and Orthodox Ministers" and also dealing with "dangerous Errours and Blasphemies."<sup>213</sup> It included provision for the vetting, supervising, and maintenance of ministers.<sup>214</sup> All people were required to attend public worship, apart from those who out of a "scruple of conscience" would meet in alternative venues notified to the magistrate. Any ministers who opposed "those Principles of Christian Religion, without the acknowledgment whereof the Scriptures doe clearly and plainly affirme, that salvation is not to be obtained" would "not be suffered to preach or promulgate any thing in opposition unto such Principles."<sup>215</sup>

These *Humble Proposals* resulted in a barrage of criticism from the sects and other champions of a fuller toleration such as Roger Williams (just recently returned from New England), Sir Henry Vane, John Milton, and Marchamont Nedham.<sup>216</sup> They were, however, an attempt for a broad settlement within the Commonwealth's national church. As Coffey points out, even the Arminian John Goodwin was persuaded to subscribe to them, despite having criticized

211 Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 198; Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 126, 131, 143–44.

212 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:85–86.

213 *The Humble Proposals of Mr Owen, Mr Tho Goodwin, Mr Nye, Mr Sympson and Other Ministers* [...] (London, 1652), title page.

214 Jeffrey R. Collins, "The Church Settlement of Oliver Cromwell," *History* 87, no. 285 (2002): 24–25.

215 *The Humble Proposals of Mr Owen, Mr Tho Goodwin, Mr Nye, Mr Sympson and Other Ministers* [...], 4–6; Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 296.

216 Carolyn Polizzotto, "The Campaign against The Humble Proposals of 1652," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (1987): 570–71; Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 266–68.

the magistrate's power in matters of religion throughout the 1640s.<sup>217</sup> The committee called to consider Owen's proposals initially met regularly over the next few months, but then it stalled because of the Rump's internal divisions. There was another gesture toward toleration in June, with recusants no longer being forced to attend Protestant worship against their consciences.<sup>218</sup>

Owen offered two reasons why those employed in great works are so often called away before their work is done. The first was because of "secret provocations." There is every indication that Ireton would have agreed with Owen at this point because John Cook wrote about him in very similar terms: "upon the least losse we received by the Irish, or any disappointment; Oh, sayes he, is not our God angry with us? let us be fervent in prayer to know his minde in every checke or chastisement."<sup>219</sup> The second was because God had "better things in store for his saints." Consequently, if those who were engaged in the work of God were unlikely to see the end of their work, they should "seek for a reward of your service in the service itself."

Owen turned to offer comfort with his third observation about the dismissed saint being in a condition of rest: freed not only from the power of indwelling sin and its guilt but also from the trouble of this life. He presented Ireton as one whose pilgrimage was "consumed in travail"; but now there was "no more fighting, no more blood, no more sorrow." The one whom he described as "our deceased friend" no longer battled with "tyrants" and "rebels" but was at rest. Owen dismissed all ideas of purgatory and limbo. As Richard Muller states, these postmortem receptacles of souls were regarded by the Reformed orthodox "as inventions or fabrications of Rome."<sup>220</sup> Owen also dismissed the different conceptions of Christian mortalism, both *psychopannychism* (that the soul in some sense sleeps at death) and *thnetopsychism* (that the soul dies with the body).<sup>221</sup>

Owen closed with a rehearsal of Ireton's capacities: his exceptional "heroical virtues," particularly his "courage" and tenacity; his "ability, faithfulness, and industry" in his work in the civil state as a wise counselor and commitment to his work; and the fruit of the Spirit seen in Ireton's "faith, love,

<sup>217</sup> John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), 233–35.

<sup>218</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:138.

<sup>219</sup> Cook, *Monarchy No Creature of Gods Making*, sig. L2r.

<sup>220</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), s.v. "limbus."

<sup>221</sup> Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 97–191; Richard Sugg, *The Smoke of the Soul: Medicine, Physiology and Religion in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 207–22.

and self-denial.”<sup>222</sup> This set Ireton apart from those involved in government whose rule caused others to suffer by their “weakness, treachery [and] sloth” and “unsettled, pragmatism shuffling.” Owen hoped that he could make his point “without offense,” but the point would not have been missed by those present: in light of eternity, the nation had to engage in serious reform, and they could do that by seeking to emulate the example of Ireton.

*CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST, AND  
THE POWER OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE ABOUT  
THE THINGS OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD*

**Context of This Fast Sermon during the First Anglo-Dutch War**

On August 10, 1652, Parliament proposed that a fast would be held on September 8. When the act was read again on August 19, the matter was referred to the Committee for Propagating the Gospel, presumably to seek its guidance in crafting the rationale for the keeping of the fast. On Wednesday, September 1, the Rump Parliament passed the act for the fast but moved the day to Wednesday, October 13.<sup>223</sup> The preachers were to be Owen; Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), president of Magdalen College, Oxford; and Christopher Feake (ca. 1611–ca. 1682), the Fifth Monarchist leader and lecturer at St Anne’s Blackfriars.<sup>224</sup> Once again, Owen’s invitation came via Sir Henry Mildmay, with Goodwin being nominated by Colonel William Purefoy (ca. 1580–1659), a regicide and member of the Council of State,<sup>225</sup> and Feake by the Army Office and regicide Thomas Harrison (1616–1660).<sup>226</sup> The act appointing the fast sought to discover “how the saving truth of the Gospel may be best advanced and propagated, and whatsoever is contrary to sound Doctrine & the power of Godliness suppressed.” The act also spoke of the war between the Commonwealth and the United Provinces that had started in July, stating

<sup>222</sup> This appraisal of Ireton’s virtues corresponds to Ludlow’s recollections of Ireton: he “erected for himself a more glorious monument in the hearts of good men, by his affection to his country, his abilities of mind, his impartial justice, his diligence in the public service, and his other virtues; which were a far greater honour to his memory than a dormitory among the ashes of kings.” See Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:33.

<sup>223</sup> Mears, *National Prayers*, 1:584.

<sup>224</sup> The name of this religiopolitical movement came from the references in the book of Daniel to a fifth monarchy that would follow the great kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. These millenarians believed that Christ was about to abolish the rule of papal Rome (the current manifestation of the fourth monarchy) and establish the rule of Christ on earth (the fifth monarchy).

<sup>225</sup> *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Purefoy, William I (c. 1584–1659).”

<sup>226</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:162, 173.

that the fast would provide an opportunity to pray for God's "Presence with, and Blessing upon the Forces and Navy of this Commonwealth."<sup>227</sup>

The ongoing debate about the civil magistrate's role in the propagation of the gospel is one of the most important contexts in which to locate this sermon. Owen's *Humble Proposals* had been published in March, and these constituted what Hunter Powell refers to as the magisterial Congregationalists' "manifesto" for the church of the English republic.<sup>228</sup> These proposals envisaged a state-supervised national church with an educated ministry and a panel of triers to vet and discipline the clergy.<sup>229</sup> In order to define the boundaries of acceptable doctrine, a list of foundational doctrines was under consideration according to which no one would be permitted "to preach or promulgate any thing in opposition unto such principles."<sup>230</sup> These fundamentals were not published until December 1652, but they were known about by the end of March. These principles were generous in scope and had the potential to unify the Reformed orthodox middle ground of Congregationalists and Presbyterians.<sup>231</sup> The Congregationalists hoped that this would be a means to prevent heresy while maintaining toleration for the various Dissenters who were deemed to be within the bounds of orthodoxy. The issue was pressing because an English translation of the Socinian Racovian Catechism appeared in July, almost certainly a work of John Biddle (1615/16–1662), who had recently been released from prison.<sup>232</sup> The *Humble Proposals* had alarmed Separatists and, almost immediately, a significant campaign had been launched against them by Roger Williams, John Milton, Henry Vane, and Marchamont Nedham.<sup>233</sup> In the sermon, Owen provided "a telling summary of the tumultuous last year of the Rump Parliament."<sup>234</sup> For example, Owen could well have had Williams in view as one who advocated unlimited toleration, no involvement of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, and the disestablishment of the ministry.<sup>235</sup> Similarly, he may be alluding to the

227 *An Act for Setting Apart Wednesday the Thirteenth day of October, 1652, For a Day of Publique Fasting and Humiliation* [ . . . ] (London, 1652).

228 Powell, "Promote, Protect, Prosecute," 226.

229 Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167.

230 *Humble Proposals*, 6.

231 Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 517.

232 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 137–38.

233 Polizzotto, "The Campaign against *The Humble Proposals* of 1652," 569–81; Blair Worden, "John Milton and Oliver Cromwell," in *Soldiers, Writers, and Statesmen*, 244–52.

234 Powell, "Promote, Protect, Prosecute," 226.

235 Roger Williams, *The Fourth Paper; The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* [ . . . ] (London, 1652). Thomason acquired his copy on April 28.

ideas put forward by Sir Henry Vane the Younger (1613–1662), author of the anonymously published *Zeal Examined*, which appeared in June. In early July, Milton praised Vane for his near unmatched understanding of “spirituall powre and civill.”<sup>236</sup> Shortly beforehand, in his sonnet “To the Lord Generall Cromwell,” Milton had warned of “new foes,” “hireling wolves whose Gospell is their maw,” who threatened “to bind our soules with secular chaines.”<sup>237</sup>

As this debate about the magistrate's role in the propagation of the gospel continued, tensions were mounting between Parliament and the army, and, according to Gentles, by the autumn (the time Owen came to preach) the mood of the officers had “turned ugly.”<sup>238</sup> There was a growing sense that the Rump was incapable of accomplishing the reforms that it believed were necessary.<sup>239</sup> The Dutch war was unpopular with the officers, not least because of the expenditure that it required and because it pushed domestic reform further down the political agenda. The army had issued a strong petition to Parliament on August 12, 1652, demanding wide-ranging reforms. (One of the officers who submitted the petition was Colonel John Okey [ca. 1606–1662], who also had subscribed to Owen's *Humble Proposals*.) It spoke of how the officers, having sought the Lord, desired that twelve articles be considered.<sup>240</sup> The first of these was, “That speedy and effectual means be used for promoting the gospel, profane and scandalous ministers be outed, good preachers encouraged, maintenance for them provided, and tithes taken away.” This petition also included calls for legal reform, changes in public accounting, arrangement for soldiers' pay, and measures for dealing with poverty. The final article reminded the Rump that a bill settling the nature of a future Parliament was long overdue and that measures should be taken to ensure that those elected would be suitably qualified—that is, “well-affected,” “pious, and faithful to the interests of the Commonwealth.” The importance of this petition from August is seen in how the following year Cromwell and the officers justified the dissolution of the Rump on the basis that there had been so little progress on the matters laid out in it.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>236</sup> John Milton, “To Sir Henry Vane the younger,” lines 10–11, in *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, *Paradise Regain'd, Samson Agonistes, Poems upon Several Occasions, Both English and Latin*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 154.

<sup>237</sup> Milton, “To the Lord General Cromwell,” lines 11–14 in *Poetical Works*, 154. See Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, 241–54.

<sup>238</sup> Gentles, *New Model Army*, 242.

<sup>239</sup> Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:345–46.

<sup>240</sup> *To the Supreme Authoritie the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England. The Humble Petition of the Officers of the Army* (London, 1652); *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:164–65.

<sup>241</sup> Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 40.

After the sermons were preached at the fast, Owen and Goodwin were informally thanked by the house, but Feake was not, having caused controversy by being “very home in his applications.”<sup>242</sup> At least two sources recounted how the fiery Fifth Monarchist spoke “plain English” to the Parliament. The resulting controversy was not unlike what happened when John Simpson preached on March 13, 1651.<sup>243</sup> Outside Parliament, although the fast was to be held across England and Wales, it was noted that while some kept it “very strictly,” many of the Presbyterians “would not open their church doors.”<sup>244</sup> Owen alluded to this in the sermon when he pointed out that public fasts were “neglected, despised, [and] spoken against.” Owen’s sermon was printed by Leonard Lichfield for Thomas Robinson.<sup>245</sup> In the previous month Owen had been nominated by Cromwell to be the vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford and had been duly elected by convocation. Nonetheless, on the title page the author is simply styled “John Owen” without any of his titles. The book collector George Thomason had acquired his copy by the end of October.

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

As he had done at Ireton’s funeral, Owen looked to the prophet Daniel to provide an example of a godly magistrate. The sermon reveals how Owen himself was in “a reflective mood”; like the prophet Daniel he too was “grieved” and “perplexed.”<sup>246</sup> He presented Daniel as one who was seeking the truth—in particular, the interpretation of the things that he witnessed in order to understand the mind and will of God.

Daniel found himself in this state because of the very things that Owen had been describing in his various parliamentary sermons—namely, “the great works of the providence of God, in the shaking and overturning of kingdoms and nations, in a subserviency to his kingdom.” The things that Daniel had witnessed were communicated to him in visions of violent “winds and seas.” The language is particularly evocative in the midst of the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), which had started just some three months beforehand, and at that time it must have seemed as if the nations were indeed being “tossed with the winds of commotions, seditions, oppressions, [and] passions,” resulting in “horrible tumults, shakings, confusions, and violence.”

<sup>242</sup> *A Perfect Account* (October 13–29, 1652), 745.

<sup>243</sup> Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 315.

<sup>244</sup> See “Newsletter from Henry Walker, Westminster, 16 October 1652,” in *The Clarke Papers*, vol. 5, ed. F. Henderson (London: Camden Society, 2005), 67.

<sup>245</sup> Madan, *Oxford Books*, 3:19.

<sup>246</sup> Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 93.

Owen regarded all this as the work of God in “the setting up, and pulling down the powers of this world.” As to the nature of the kingdom that Christ was establishing, Owen recognized the ongoing disputes about its “rise, and manner of government.” Here he alluded to the Fifth Monarchists and their expectations of an earthly kingdom and claimed that they had made the mistake of adopting the erroneous views held by the pope and the Jews. He sought to correct this by insisting that the kingdom of Christ was “First and principally . . . internal and spiritual.” The fast had been called in order to receive “strength and direction” for “carrying on” and propagating this kingdom. Owen recognized that such a task was difficult and that it was easier to complain about the Rump’s inactivity in this matter than to guide and direct its members about how to do the work. Nonetheless, he proceeded to offer them five “brief observations” of what was “clear and certain from Scripture” about the nature of Christ’s kingdom. Aware that there were “endless and irreconcilable” differences about the kingdom that it was believed Christ would set up, it appears that he himself believed that Christ’s future reign would be “only differenced by more glorious degrees and manifestations of his power.” “While never directly naming the Fifth Monarchists,” Owen sought to correct their invective with five observations that offered a rebuttal of their radical millenarianism.<sup>247</sup> This had direct bearing on the matter of the magistrate’s role in the propagation of the gospel and the search for a national church settlement because the Fifth Monarchists were calling for the overthrow of secular government in order to make way for the rule of the saints. First, Owen insisted that the saints in every age should pursue godliness and regard any “outward glory” that would appear in the world as “a shadow” of this; he described as “sin and folly” the attempts of some radical millenarians to try “to set up the kingdom of Christ in the world” while “pull[ing] it down in their own hearts.”<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, and second, it was indeed the case that an apocalyptic shaking of the nations would take place, and this would result in a transformation of their governments and constitutions. Owen reminded his audience that this was something he had “fully demonstrated elsewhere” and pointed to his sermon from April

<sup>247</sup> Stella P. Revard, “Milton and Millenarianism: From the Nativity Ode to *Paradise Regained*,” in *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52.

<sup>248</sup> In September 1654, at the opening of the first Protectorate Parliament, Cromwell responded to the Fifth Monarchists by speaking of “a notion I hope we all honour, wait, and hope for; that Jesus Christ will have a time to set up his Reigne in our hearts.” Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:74.

1649, *The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth*. Third, Owen once again returned to Isaiah 60, a chapter that he had referenced in numerous previous sermons, to make the point that the civil powers of those nations would come to serve the interests of Christ as “his kingdoms” (Rev. 11:15). Fourth, Christ would advance his glorious kingdom through the conversion of the Jews and the destruction of the antichrist. Thus, any attempt to set up a kingdom for Christ in the world before these promises were fulfilled was, in effect, an attempt to “set up his kingdom here on a molehill.” Finally, unlike the kingdoms of this world, the kingdom of Christ was not established by “outward force” through the actions of “the sword of man setting up a few to rule over others.” Rather, it was a work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God.

Having “opened” the words of his text, Owen made three observations, the first of which was: “In the consideration of God’s marvelous actings in the world, in order to the carrying on of the gospel and the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ, the hearts of his saints are oftentimes filled with perplexity and trouble.” God’s great works associated with the coming of Christ, either his coming in the flesh or his coming to advance his kingdom, were astonishing and beyond expectation. Even the saints had not been expecting such “shakings” as led to the regicide, the establishment of the English Republic, and, more recently, the banishment of Charles II. Owen engaged in what Gribben describes as “homiletical flattery” in order to portray the Rump as being united in a commitment to the further propagation of the gospel while, at the same time, acknowledging there was much that was unsettling.<sup>249</sup> He made what Hunter Powell describes as “dire warnings against sectary views of the magistrate’s power.”<sup>250</sup> His concerns reflect the debates of the past year, particularly about the *Humble Proposals* that had been before Parliament.<sup>251</sup> He laid out some of the views that he was most concerned about:

Say some, “There is no gospel at all” say others, “If there be, you have nothing to do with it”: some say, “Lo, here is Christ”; others “Lo, there”: some make religion a color for one thing; some for another: say some, “The magistrate must not support the gospel”; say others, “The gospel must subvert the magistrate”: say some, “Your rule is only for men, as men, you have nothing to do with the interest of Christ and the church”: say others, “You have nothing to do to rule men but upon the account of being saints.”

<sup>249</sup> Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 93.

<sup>250</sup> Powell, “Promote, Protect, Prosecute,” 226.

<sup>251</sup> Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 234–35, 294.

For maximum impact, Owen reminded his hearers and readers of the anticlericalism of those who referred, shockingly, to the clergy as “chemarims” and “locusts”—something Feake’s associate, John Simpson, had done.<sup>252</sup>

Parliament’s problems were not only confined to the increasingly radical views of the sects, as Owen specifically drew attention to the opposition that the new regime had faced from the Scottish Covenanters and was now facing given that the Netherlands had joined “the great antichristian interest.” This was all the more shocking given that in the previous year serious consideration had been given to a federal union of the two republics.<sup>253</sup>

Owen then turned to direct his hearers to the “ways and means of quietness”—namely, as suggested in the second observation, a discovery of God’s will in “faith and prayer,” both “public and private.” Owen was convinced that public fasts were either neglected, criticized, or observed with cold formality. This was a far cry from the observance he remembered from the 1640s and evidence that the nation had “certainly backslidden.” Nonetheless, he told his hearers that if his directions were followed, they would enjoy communion with God, the peace that flowed from it, and divine guidance.

Owen spoke of the “extremes” and “extravagances” of the various parties involved in the quest for a church settlement and, by contrast, sought to portray himself (and by implication the *Humble Proposals*) as being marked by moderation. On the one hand, he cautioned members of Parliament about neglecting their responsibilities: if “you shall say, you have nothing to do with religion as rulers of the nation, God will quickly manifest that he has nothing to do with you as rulers of the nation.” On the other hand, he warned about those who seek to “set up forms of government, to compel men to come under the line of them,” who wish the civil magistrate to “thrust in your sword to cut the lesser differences of brethren,” or those engaged in “the great design” of the antichrist—namely, “grasping temporal power, upon a spiritual account.” Owen portrayed his political theology as one characterized by moderation, summarizing his view in stating that the civil magistrate’s responsibility was that the gospel be “protected, preserved, [and] propagated” in the nation.

This led Owen on to one of the express purposes of the public fast: seeking God’s direction for the propagation of the gospel and preventing that which is contrary to sound doctrine and godliness. He began by offering a brief

<sup>252</sup> *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell*, 82–83. The term *Chemarim* occurs in the Authorized Version (KJV) translation of Zeph. 1:4.

<sup>253</sup> Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15–39.

summary of “what God has promised concerning magistrates, kings, rulers, judges, and nations, and their subserviency to the church.” As he had done in previous sermons, Owen appealed to passages from Isaiah and Revelation in support of his contention that magistrates had a duty to support the interest of the church, acting for its “good, welfare, and prosperity.” Owen insisted that these promises belonged to the gospel age and therefore “belong directly to us, and our rulers.” This was important because proponents of far-reaching toleration were arguing against magisterial restraint or coercion in matters of religion, dismissing the Old Testament’s teaching on the magistrate’s responsibilities in religious matters as applicable only to national Israel.<sup>254</sup> They did this very well aware that those in favor of religious coercion rested their case on the Old Testament laws against blasphemers and idolaters. Owen was providing different grounds for the magistrate’s power in matters of religion in these prophecies of a time when godly rulers would be raised up in the nations of the world. If the members of the Rump were to be such rulers, then they must

*put forth their power, and act in that capacity, wherein he has placed them in the world, for the good, furtherance, and prosperity of the truth and church of Christ: they shall protect them with their power, feed them with their substance, adorn them with their favor, and the privileges wherewith they are entrusted: they shall break their forcibly oppressing adversaries.*

Owen then offered five further principles relevant to the propagation of the gospel. First, the magistrate’s duty of protection extended to ensuring that the gospel was preached and propagated in the nation. Second, a nation that embraced the gospel would enjoy prosperity and be instrumental in the destruction of oppressive tyrants. Third, should a nation reject the gospel and refuse to serve Christ and his church, then Christ would, “sooner or later,” come against that nation in judgment. Fourth, the magistrate was not only responsible for seeking the good, peace, and prosperity of the people but also charged to “prevent, obviate, remove, [and] take away” those things that cause “confusion, destruction, [and] desolation.” The latter included not only threats to national security and various crimes but also those things that were “morally” opposed to the good and welfare of the nation, particularly those things that would bring God’s judgment on a nation. He offered obvious examples, such as murder and adultery, but suggested that there were other

<sup>254</sup> See, e.g., [Henry Vane], *Zeal Examined, or, A Discourse for Liberty of Conscience* [. . .] (London, 1652). George Thomason acquired his copy on June 15. For the attribution to Sir Henry Vane the younger, see Polizzotto, “The Campaign against *The Humble Proposals* of 1652,” 579.

provocations that required a similar response. This may be an oblique reference to the magistrate's responsibilities to act against certain forms of heresy and blasphemy. Finally, he also argued that the judicial laws given to Israel were no longer in force, though the moral elements of those laws remained binding once they had been "unclothed of their Judaical form."

Owen closed by laying down three rules by way of direction, pointing his readers to *Of Toleration* (1649) for a fuller treatment of the matter.<sup>255</sup> First, his readers needed to be fully persuaded of what the truth of the gospel was and what constituted error. Second, he insisted that "error and falsehood" had no right to any protection from the civil magistrate. Finally, he noted that "the plea of conscience," far from serving as a justification, could, on occasion, be an aggravating factor.

### GOD'S WORK IN FOUNDING ZION, AND HIS PEOPLE'S DUTY THEREUPON

#### Context of This Sermon to the Second Protectorate Parliament

In the summer of 1656, Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector, reluctantly issued writs for an extraordinary Parliament with elections set to take place in August. (Owen's brother Henry was one of those elected to an Irish constituency.)<sup>256</sup> The regime had little choice because of the "looming financial disaster" caused, not least, by the outbreak of war with Spain and the cost of maintaining armies in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>257</sup> Cromwell had thought that the conflict would have been funded by the seizure of Spanish silver, but this was not to be, given the blundering failure of the so-called Western Design in 1655.<sup>258</sup> The army Grandees and the Council of State failed to manage these elections quite as they had confidently intended. The elections had been fraught, and, from the regime's point of view, the results were even worse than those of the elections to the First Protectorate Parliament. Consequently, the decision was taken to exclude those members of Parliament who were hostile to the new constitution, the Instrument of Government, and critical of the political role of the army: nearly one hundred members out of four

<sup>255</sup> See *Complete Works of John Owen*, vol. 18.

<sup>256</sup> *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Owen, Henry (d. 1660?)." For evidence of his later career, see Gribben, *John Owen and English Politics*, 160–61, 257–61.

<sup>257</sup> Peter Gaunt, "'The Single Person's Confidants and Dependents'? Oliver Cromwell and his Protectoral Councillors," in *Cromwell and the Interregnum: The Essential Readings*, ed. David L. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 115; Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, 109.

<sup>258</sup> An expeditionary force that had been sent to seize Hispaniola in the West Indies.

hundred sixty were purged, and around sixty others withdrew in protest.<sup>259</sup> This was done on the basis that under the terms of this constitution they were not “persons of known integrity, fearing God, and of good conversation.” Those excluded included crypto royalists, rigid Presbyterians, and committed republicans. Of those who remained, there was “a sizeable bloc of MPs favourable to Presbyterianism who sought an anti-militarist return to the ancient constitution.”<sup>260</sup> As Patrick Little describes it, “very strong Presbyterian undercurrents” had remained through the early 1650s, and these “broke the surface” in this Parliament.<sup>261</sup> Many in Parliament were critical of the regime’s tolerant approach to religion, particularly where Quakers were concerned.

Owen addressed this second Protectorate Parliament on two occasions. The first was as the preacher at the grand and militaristic opening of the Parliament on September 17. On that day, the Lord Protector, accompanied in his coach by Lord Lambert, journeyed to the abbey with the members of the Council of State, and some three hundred soldiers. They arrived for ten o’clock in the morning to be greeted by the newly elected members of Parliament who had already gathered. The abbey where Owen would deliver this sermon was now “more than ever before the church of the state,” serving as “the religious heart of the regime.”<sup>262</sup> Although Austin Woolrych described Owen as preaching an “adulatory sermon,” it was, as we shall see, actually somewhat more ambiguous.<sup>263</sup>

Those in the abbey to hear Owen preach would have been unaware that outside, Miles Sindercombe (d. 1657) was engaged in a conspiracy to assassinate Cromwell as he left the building and proceeded to Parliament. A house had been rented near the abbey, and scaffolding had been erected to provide an elevated position for the gunmen. The plot was aborted at the last moment because the would-be assassins lost their nerve in the presence of the gathering crowds of onlookers.<sup>264</sup> After the service, Cromwell met

<sup>259</sup> Patrick Little and David L. Smith, *Parliaments and Politics during the Cromwellian Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87–91; Blair Worden, “Oliver Cromwell and the Council,” in *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, ed. Patrick Little (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2007), 100–03.

<sup>260</sup> Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 255.

<sup>261</sup> Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian Union with Ireland and Scotland* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2004), 233.

<sup>262</sup> Merritt, *Westminster 1640–60*, 106–7.

<sup>263</sup> Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 646.

<sup>264</sup> John Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe* [ . . . ], ed. Thomas Birch, 7 vols. (London, 1742), 5:774–77 (The examinations of John Cecil and John Toop, 9 Jan. 1656); *A Declaration of His Highness the Lord Protector and the Parliament for a Day of Publique Thanksgiving On Friday the Twentieth of February, 1656* (London, 1657), 3–5; *A True Narrative of the late Trayterous Plot Against the Person of His Highness, The Lord Protector* [ . . . ] (London, 1657), 5–6.

with the three hundred or so members of Parliament in the Painted Chamber of the medieval Palace of Westminster and gave a lengthy and at times rambling speech outlining the reasons for calling the present Parliament.<sup>265</sup> The heat was stifling, and Cromwell spoke for up to three hours. Security was a dominant theme in the light of the threat posed by royalists, Roman Catholics, and those radicals of the levelling sort. He praised the rule of the major generals and defended his war with Spain. In this address, the Lord Protector signaled his approval of what Owen had said, stating that he desired liberty for Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists, stating that this was “the peculiar Interest all this while Contested for.”<sup>266</sup> The members then moved to the House of Commons, and, after the election of the speaker of the House, it was agreed that the lieutenant of the Tower of London, Major General Sir John Barkstead (d. 1662),<sup>267</sup> and John Maidstone,<sup>268</sup> the steward of Cromwell's household, “should return the Thanks of the House to Doctor Owen for the pains by him taken in the Sermon preached before them” and that he be asked to prepare the sermon for publication.<sup>269</sup> News of Owen's preaching spread, as is evidenced by Ralph Josselin hearing about Owen's sermon two days after it was preached.<sup>270</sup> It was printed by Leonard Lichfield (d. 1657), so-called printer to the University of Oxford, for the Oxford bookseller Thomas Robinson. George Thomason had acquired his copy by October 25.

<sup>265</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:288–317.

<sup>266</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:306.

<sup>267</sup> One of Cromwell's “most reliable colleagues,” Barkstead was major general for Middlesex, London and Westminster and sat as the member of Parliament for Middlesex in the second Protectorate Parliament. He had commanded a regiment at the siege of Colchester and was a regicide. He described himself as “a follower of the congregational way” and was hostile to the Fifth Monarchism. He served as lieutenant of the Tower of London and was knighted by Cromwell at the beginning of 1656. Sir John went on to become a member of Cromwell's Other House in 1657. See Christopher Durston, *Cromwell's Major-Generals: Godly Government during the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 29, 51, 141–42, 156–57; and *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Barkstead, John (c. 1612–62).”

<sup>268</sup> From a minor gentry family in Essex, Maidstone had served in the Essex county militia. He became Cromwell's steward and cofferer and in the Second Protectorate Parliament he sat as member of Parliament for Colchester. See Andrew Barclay, “The Lord Protector and his Court,” in *Oliver Cromwell: New Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Little (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 206–7; *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Maidstone, John (1606–67)”; and Owen's letter to Maidstone from January 1658 in which he and other Visitors of the University of Oxford wrote to Maidstone describing his “known respect to things of honesty and good repute.”

<sup>269</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 327 (September 11–16, 1656), 7254; Thomas Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq.* [ . . . ], ed. J. T. Rutt, 4 vols. (London, 1828), 1:cxlvi; and *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:423.

<sup>270</sup> Ralph Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616–1683*, ed. Alan Macfarlane, *Records of Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 381.

On the title page, Owen included the text of Psalm 48:12–14. The published sermon was dedicated to the Lord Protector and Parliament, but Gribben describes Owen's preface as offering only "rather faint praise" to Cromwell.<sup>271</sup>

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen expounded the text "What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it" (Isa. 14:32). Owen had quoted this text in a previous sermon as a summary of "the great alterations that have been in these nations."<sup>272</sup> As Owen set this verse in its context, its relevance would have emerged to all contemporary hearers and readers. It came from a season when Judah was "low," "broken," and "divided" because of foreign enemies and domestic problems. The parallels would have been all too clear because at this time progress in the Anglo-Spanish war was slow, a far cry from the previous wars against the Scottish and the Dutch, and such was the nature of internal political tensions that the military and political leaders of the regime had felt forced to exclude over one hundred elected members of Parliament. Owen selected a text that drew particular attention to one of the most obvious errors of Hezekiah's reign.<sup>273</sup> Owen commented that "all would have been well" for Hezekiah "and his posterity" had he followed the clear instructions prepared for him by the prophet when the Babylonian envoys came. However, Hezekiah failed to act as required, and instead the man who had once stood firm against the threat of the Assyrian army now melted in the face of Babylonian flattery (Isa. 39:2). He made it very explicit that "His mistake herein, was the fatal ruin of Judah's prosperity," and this warning from the opening of the sermon frames all that follows.

It was Owen's contention that the "peculiar" work of God in the past few years had not been principally that of the setting up and pulling down of "new fabrics of government or ruling." He argued that God did not delight in one form of government more than another. This defense of the Protectorate was a tacit rebuke to civilian republicans like Sir Arthur Hesilrige, John Bradshaw, Thomas Scot, and John Weaver, who refused to accept the Protectorate and who were prominent among those members excluded from Parliament.<sup>274</sup> Rather, when it was asked, "What [God] has done in England," through the mid-seventeenth-century crisis, Owen's unequivocal answer was that God

<sup>271</sup> Gribben, "Owen and Politics," 96.

<sup>272</sup> *The Advantage of the Kingdom* (1651).

<sup>273</sup> Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 646.

<sup>274</sup> Carol S. Egluff, "The Search for a Cromwellian Settlement: Exclusions from the Second Protectorate Parliament," parts 1–2, *Parliamentary History* 17, no. 3 (1998): 178–97, 301–21.

had acted to “found Zion” and “establish the interest of his chosen.” By this Owen meant that God had destroyed those who sought “to overthrow Zion” and had given the peace, liberty, and freedom to gather gospel churches of “secret covenanted ones.” Cromwell would echo this sentiment later in the day with his comment that securing toleration for the godly was “the peculiar interest all this while contended for.”<sup>275</sup>

Owen summarized four “observations” “drawn from the words” of his text and then dealt with each in turn. He commented that he hoped to strike the balance of addressing his hearers with both due reverence and appropriate authority. He also voiced his conviction that not all in the abbey that day were regenerate. The first observation was about how the nations were “diligently inquiring concerning God’s dispensations among his people.” In the case of England, Owen thought that surrounding nations were making such inquiries because they envied the nation’s unique and exalted position and feared how the nation would grow and develop. The second observation concerned the answer that should be given to the nations when they were inquiring about what God had done. Owen recognized that not all could see what God had done because their vision was clouded and distorted by being taken up and preoccupied with their own agendas and rivalries. This diverted their attention from the great “providential alterations of the late times that have passed over us.” Owen was thinking of how the Laudian tyranny had been overthrown and those who had been imprisoned had been released and those exiled to the Netherlands or New England had been able to return home. He was horrified that some were contemplating a return to tyranny and superstition. His third observation was that “the great design of God in his mighty works and dispensations, is the establishment of his people and their proper interest.” Those whom God “by his providence raises up to rule and government” had an instrumental role in ensuring that the people of God had this freedom to worship. Owen warned that God would “pull down” rulers who did not discharge this responsibility. His final observation was that it was “the common interest” of God’s people that was to be preserved. Owen reiterated what he had “sundry years since, sundry times complained of to a parliament of this commonwealth”—namely, that too many were taken up with their own “peculiar interest” and therefore despised the “common interest.” He confessed that his optimism that things would change was withering by the day. Owen regarded these four observations as “foundations . . . laid in the words of the text” that led him to application.

<sup>275</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:306.

Owen's first "use" was a call on those in political power to consider how they would give an account of "what God has done in these nations." He hoped that their response would indicate enthusiastic support of "the old and common cause." This phrase was shorthand for the struggle of the civil war and was provocative because it was often used to rally opposition to the Protectorate. He warned against allowing personal "disquietness" to inadvertently "cast contempt on the work of God." Owen recognized that the counsel that he was about to offer would be regarded by many of his hearers as unlikely to yield results and potentially was even irrational. This was because Owen suggested that the godly themselves be consulted about what the common interest of Zion was, and he was aware that, to many, the various parties seemed hopelessly divided. He responded to this by employing a Ciceronian argument to prove what was the best option for a church settlement that would include all the godly of the nation. In a fragment of Cicero preserved in Augustine and mediated by Francis Bacon, Owen recounted how when asked which was the best school of philosophy, the ancient sects, such as the Stoics and the Epicureans, all put themselves first and assigned Plato to the second place. From this Cicero reasoned that because all parties were united in their views of what constituted the second-best option, it was in fact the best and preferred option. Owen applied this to the situation of the day: Presbyterians sought uniformity of doctrine, worship, and discipline; radical anticlericalists such as the Quakers sought an abolition of tithes and believed an ordained and educated ministry to be anti-Christian; and Fifth Monarchists were still calling for the rule of the saints. Owen reasoned that all the godly would put his own position, at the very least, in second place<sup>276</sup>—namely, that despite their differences, the godly would be able to live in peace with the civil magistrate, ensuring that the godly would be "preserved, protected, and secured."<sup>277</sup>

Owen offered five reasons in support of this. First, it comprehended all the godly, recognizing that not all churches were identical according to the degree of spiritual light they had received. Second, none who lived by faith

<sup>276</sup> Others would employ this motif. For example, at the opening of the second session of the second Protectorate Parliament in January 1658, the Lord Commissioner, Nathaniel Fiennes, advocated unity through a shared acceptance of the next best thing. See *Commons Journals* 7:582–87.

<sup>277</sup> Owen made a similar point in *The Kingdom of Christ* (1652), which is included in this volume, when he told members of Parliament of their responsibilities to ensure that the gospel may "be protected, preserved, propagated to and among the people which God has set you over." Similar language would be employed in chapter 24 of the Savoy Declaration of 1658. It stated that the magistrate was bound "to incourage, promote and protect the professors and profession of the Gospel." See *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (Letchworth, UK: Independent Press, 1959), 37.

and prayer in the late dispensations were excluded. Third, such an option prevented coercion, oppression, and persecution. Fourth, all the godly were united by the opposition of those who sought to destroy them. Finally, reiterating a point from earlier in the sermon, he insisted that God's great work had been focused on the church rather than on the establishment of "this or that form of the civil administration of human affairs." Owen remained ambivalent to particular forms of government, stating that the only thing promised about government was that it would be "laid in an orderly subserviency, to the common interest of the saints." Owen had made a very similar point in *The Kingdom of Christ, and the Power of the Civil Magistrate* (1652) in saying that "the civil powers of the world, after fearful shakings and desolations, shall be disposed of into a useful subserviency to the interest, power, and kingdom of Jesus Christ."

The second major application was to call his hearers to go to this work. To aid the government in this task he offered two directions. The first was to refuse to engage with any counsel that was inconsistent with this common interest because to do so would be to contend against the work of God. He was aware that there was much discussion about clamping down on toleration and "establishing a discipline in the church" and rejected any suggestion that he was arguing "for errors and unsettlement." Rather, he was calling for "mutual forbearance" until God intervened to unite his people. Owen exhorted his hearers to be "instrumental" in this process. True reformation would come about through a personal reformation and a reformation of "families" and "parishes." It would be accomplished by prayer, preaching, and the other means of grace. In all of this it was imperative that people did not forget that this work of God had been what the Wars of the Three Kingdoms had been about "from the beginning to the end."

Owen's second direction regarding how the government could go about this task in all its consultations, actions, and proposals was to make the work of establishing Zion its "polestar." That would lead to two priorities: pursuing peace domestically and building a pan-Protestant alliance internationally.<sup>278</sup> The latter would involve a plan to "gather into one common interest, the Protestant nations abroad in the world, that we may stand or fall together." In his speech later that day, Cromwell spoke of the recently elected Pope Alexander VII and his plan to "unite all the Popish Interest in all the Christian world against this nation about any, and against all the Protestant Interest

<sup>278</sup> Adam Quibell, "The Grounds, Method, Scope, and Impact of Independentism's Efforts for Union, 1654–1659," (PhD diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2024), 57–62.

in the world.”<sup>279</sup> At this time, there were efforts to broker peace among the Protestant nations in the Baltic who were engaged in the Second Northern War (1655–1660) in order to forge a defensive alliance between Sweden and England as part of a plan for a Protestant League. Correspondingly, the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Habsburg Empire were increasingly aligned and strengthened because of conflict between various Protestant nations.<sup>280</sup>

Owen's third major “use” was to carry on the work of reformation, encouraging and resourcing it as required. This would involve taking action against those who “under pretense of religion . . . disturb the civil peace.” By doing so, they would be “preservers of the good old cause of England.” This would require sincere seeking after God's will and “love and forbearance” as they sought to “regard, cleave to, promote, [and] protect” the common interest of Zion.

*GOD'S PRESENCE WITH A PEOPLE,  
THE SPRING OF THEIR PROSPERITY*

**Context of Owen's Fast Sermon**

On September 18, 1656, the day after the second Protectorate Parliament assembled, it resolved that “a day of public fasting and humiliation” be held throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Parliamentary preachers were to be Owen, his Oxford colleague Thomas Goodwin, and the prominent London preacher George Griffith. Owen was invited by Major General Thomas Kelsey (d. ca. 1676), Goodwin by Sir William Strickland (ca. 1596–1673), and Griffith by Major General Whalley (ca. 1607–ca. 1675). A committee was established to prepare the declaration for the fast. This received its second reading in Parliament on September 22 and was presented to Cromwell for approval. The date of the fast was changed to October 30, and the declaration was duly published on September 23.<sup>281</sup> It expressed concern about “the abominable Blasphemies vented and spread of late through the apostasie of, and the abuse of liberty by, many professing Religion” and sought for believers to be united by “Agreements in fundamentals.” The declaration called for prayer that God would defeat the designs of those who opposed the interest of Christ and his people and that, furthermore, God would grant his presence

<sup>279</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:299.

<sup>280</sup> Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 632–37; Barry Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 129–30; Michael Roberts, “Cromwell and the Baltic,” *The English Historical Review*, 76 (July 1961): 406–8.

<sup>281</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:423–24, 426–27, 447; Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 1:clxxix; Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 1:610.

to those in government so that they would be united in the work to which they were called.<sup>282</sup>

In the intervening period prior to the fast, news of Captain Richard Stayner's capture of two vessels from the Spanish plate fleet off Cadiz had reached London giving "a needed boost to government morale."<sup>283</sup> This news came at the beginning of October and served for many as a long-awaited providential sign, especially in the context of the ongoing war against Spain. An official account of the victory was published on October 4, and the sermons from the public thanksgiving on October 8 were published as Joseph Caryl's *A Sermon Pressing to, and Directing in, That Great Duty of Praising God* (1657) and John Rowe's *Mans Duty in Magnifying Gods Work* (1656).<sup>284</sup> Rowe was confident that such a providential mercy had "silenced the secret thoughts and reasonings of some, touching the engagement in this war; and who are too apt to say, that God never owned you since you undertook this business."<sup>285</sup>

Reports of the fast sermons from the service held on Thursday, October 30, at St Margaret's were published in *Mercurius Politicus*. The weekly newsbook summarized Owen's message to the purged Parliament as follows: "the great concernment of any people, is to know where lies the Spring of all their Success, and to what it is proportioned." It continued by describing how after opening the text the following doctrine was "raised" from it: "That Gods special presence with any people in providential dispensations for their good, depends upon their obediential abiding with him in National Administrations for his glory."<sup>286</sup> The news report also recorded summaries of Goodwin's sermon on Romans 15:8–9 and that by Griffith on 2 Chronicles 20:12. Outside of Westminster, Owen's old acquaintance Ralph Josselin kept the fast by preaching on Isaiah 5:25 but confessed that he found his own heart "very dead and unaffected."<sup>287</sup> The preachers were thanked on Friday, October 31, and invited to publish their sermons. Owen's work was printed by "R.N."

282 *A Declaration of His Highnes the Lord Protector and the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, for a Day of Solemn Fasting and Humiliation in the Three Nations* (London, 1656), 2–4.

283 Worden, "Cromwell and the Sin of Achan," 22. For details of the naval engagement in September, see: Bernard S. Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution, 1648–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 98–99.

284 *A True Narratve of the Late Success Which It Hath Pleased God to Give to Some Part of the Fleet of This Common-Wealth against the King of Spain's West India Fleet in Its Return to Cadiz* [. . .] (London, 1656).

285 John Rowe, *Mans Duty in Magnifying Gods Work* [. . .] (London, 1656), 20.

286 *Mercurius Politicus* 334 (October 29–November 6, 1656), 7354–355.

287 Josselin, *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, 384.

This is almost certainly a reference to Roger Norton (d. 1664), a printer in Blackfriars.<sup>288</sup> It was published by Philemon Stephens and was entered on the Stationers' Register only days after it was preached on November 6, 1656.<sup>289</sup> On the title page, Owen styled himself with the DD that he had been awarded by diploma on December 23, 1653. This was qualified by a description of himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ, in the work of the gospel."

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen took as his text the record of the "thanksgiving sermon" delivered by the prophet Azariah to King Asa (2 Chron. 15:2). Despite the seeming incongruity of doing so on "a day of humiliation," Owen thought the "instruction" suitable for the occasion because it summarized the "rules, and exhortations" that were necessary, given "the event, and issue of our affairs." The text recorded an event in the aftermath of Judah's great victory against "the huge host of the Ethiopians" who had come against Jerusalem (2 Chron. 14). Owen drew an explicit parallel between his preaching of the sermon and the prophet going out to meet those returning to Jerusalem in triumph carrying "abundant spoils." The point would not have been lost on his hearers—that as the sermon was being delivered "the Spanish prizes," the spoils taken from the captured "Silver Gallion," were in the process of being transferred to the Tower of London.<sup>290</sup> As the title of the published version of the sermon suggests, Owen was interested in "the spring" of such mercies, something even "the best of men" were quick to forget, and the "duty" that this placed on the recipients to "use and improve their peace." The importance of "duty" had been prominent in the thanksgiving sermons celebrating the capture of the treasure fleet that were delivered earlier in the month by Joseph Caryl (1602–1673) and John Rowe (1626–1677), as is evident in their respective titles: *A Sermon Pressing to, and Directing in, That Great Duty of Praising God* (1657) and *Mans Duty in Magnifying Gods Work* (1656). As Owen delivered his fast sermon, he was aware of the divisions and conflicting agendas that existed among the rulers of the nation about how to respond "in making peace or war" in dealings "with neighboring princes, and nations." As Owen set about "the opening of the

<sup>288</sup> Norton had printed John Trapp's commentary on the minor prophets for Philemon Stephens in 1654. Plomer, *Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers*, s.v. "Roger Norton."

<sup>289</sup> *Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers*, 2:94. At the end of the sermon, Stephens included a list of nineteen others titles by Owen which he was marketing. See Owen, *God's Presence with a People, the Spring of Their Prosperity* [ . . . ] (1656), 39.

<sup>290</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 333 (October 23–29, 1656), 7335; *Mercurius Politicus* 334 (October 29–November 6, 1656), 7365.

words," he explained that he would take his hearers to matters of "unspeakably greater importance" by dealing with two main questions.

First, Owen set about clarifying and explaining what exactly it meant for God to be with a people "in respect of providential dispensations." Not simply in that "general" sense of God's "ordering, disposing, guiding, [and] ruling" all the events of nations and their governments but in that "special" sense of being with a people in guidance, blessing, and preservation. This gave rise to his first "observation," the doctrinal proposition that the nation must recognize that the source of all its prosperity was the special presence of God and that it was therefore necessary "to attend to that which will give continuance thereunto."

Second, he posed the question about what it meant for a people to abide with God. Given the context, his particular concern here was abiding with God "in national administrations"—that is, how to order the affairs of the nation so that God would thereby be glorified. This led to the main doctrinal observation of the sermon, which stated that God's special presence with a people "depends on their obediential presence with him, in national administrations to his glory." A significant assumption underlying this position was that God's presence in respect of providential dispensations was "purely conditional," in the sense it was distinct from that of the gospel, resting on an entirely different "foundation" and operating according to a different principle. Nonetheless, God's presence with a people was always merciful rather than "merited," with the strength to fulfill the condition being itself given by God. For Owen, the evidence supporting this conditionality lay both in the history of God's dealings with his people of old and in the events of history. A king like Asa of Judah enjoyed seasons of blessing when he acted in obedience but also experienced divine curses for disobedience. For example, when Asa relied on King Ben-Hadad of Damascus for assistance against Baasha rather than trusting in the Lord, there was plague and war (2 Chron. 16:7–14). The same conditionality could be seen in the history of the Roman Empire. It flourished under those emperors "who ruled with God," and now, as Owen understood it, in its present form as the Holy Roman Empire, it endured "the fury and cruelty of Turk and Pope." This was because its present rulers were characterized by "unrighteousness, idolatry, luxury, and persecution." Owen was referring to how the Holy Roman Empire had been devastated by the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), a struggle over religion and the power of the emperor, particularly in Habsburg lands. One example of the rulers that Owen had in mind would be Ferdinand II, Holy Roman emperor from 1619. He was a champion of the Counter-Reformation, and his determination to re-establish Roman Catholicism across all his lands had been a significant cause

of that war.<sup>291</sup> At the same time, on the borders of the empire, the Ottomans were, once again, beginning to pursue their expansionist ambitions. As Owen saw it, the empire was experiencing all these things because its rulers did not abide with God. He issued two brief cautions by way of qualification. First, that outward “flourishing” and “prosperity” was not always proof of God’s special presence. This was important because a number of Roman Catholic nations continued to prosper, as did the Ottoman empire, which was at the beginning of the period of the Köprülü revival (1656–1702). Second, periods of affliction and distress, like what the Protectorate had endured in recent years, did not necessarily mean that God had withdrawn his special presence.

Owen’s first point of application was to give further instruction about how, through abiding with God, the nation could enjoy God’s special presence. He explained how, at the time of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, the pillar of cloud and fire that were symbolized God’s presence with his people. This “eminent pledge of the presence of God” guided the people on their journey toward “their resting place” and offered them “protection and defense” along the way. In a similar manner, the “assembly of Parliament” was also being led and directed by God toward a resting place. Owen also believed that God’s special presence had preserved the nation from enemies internal and external and, furthermore, “our own follies.” Here he referred to the first Protectorate Parliament that met from September 1654 to January 1655. Despite the best intentions of some, it succeeded in passing no legislation during its entire sitting. Owen explained that it was as if the cloud had settled on them, and so “they could not see how to take one step forward.”<sup>292</sup> As he saw it, England was still journeying through the wilderness, and God had been present at the last Parliament “to cause us to rest and cease.”<sup>293</sup> Thomas Goodwin had also employed this motif as he preached at the opening of the first Protectorate Parliament on September 4, 1654. In Cromwell’s speech as the nation’s new head of state, he made reference to this otherwise unpublished sermon by Goodwin: “the only parallel of God’s dealing with us that I know in the

<sup>291</sup> For the question of the influence of the pope on the Holy Roman emperors at this time, see Rubén González Cuerva and Luis Tercero Casado, “The Imperial Court during the Thirty Years War: A Battleground for Factions?” in *Factional Struggles: Divided Elites in European Cities and Courts (1400–1750)*, ed. Mathieu Caesar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 155–75.

<sup>292</sup> See David L. Smith, “Oliver Cromwell, the First Protectorate Parliament and Religious Reform,” in *Cromwell and the Interregnum: The Essential Readings*, ed. David L. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 167–82.

<sup>293</sup> Owen had, controversially, been chosen as a member of that Parliament representing the University of Oxford. See Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 94; *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Owen, Dr John (?1614–83).”

world, which was largely and wisely held forth to you this day, [is] *Israels* bringing out of *Egypt* through a Wilderness, by many Signes, and Wonders, towards a Place of Rest; I say towards it." According to the Lord Protector, Goodwin had spoken "largely and wisely" as he described how, even up to that point, the slow and painful journey through the wilderness had been delayed due to "unbelief, murmuring, repining, and other temptations and sinnes, wherewith God was provoked."<sup>294</sup> There had, of course, been times when God's presence had been "eclipsed," as for example in the failure of the campaign against the Spanish empire known as the Western Design. In April 1655, English forces were repulsed from Hispaniola having suffered heavy losses. News of the regime's first major defeat reached England in July. It was understood as a sign of divine displeasure and caused significant soul searching with days of fasting being held on November 21, 1655, and March 14, 1656.<sup>295</sup> Owen assured members of Parliament that not every defeat or disappointment was a sign of God's departure because often such providences were designed as trials whose purpose could be to bring about renewed enjoyment of God's presence. The cloud by which God ordinarily led his people was not the only "pledge of his presence with them." Owen explained that in "extraordinary seasons," there were "extraordinary manifestations" of God's glory, "eminent and glorious appearances," such as what occurred at Mount Sinai and the dedication of the tabernacle. Owen was confident that England had enjoyed such special providences. An example of what he had in mind could well have been the capture of the part of the Spanish treasure fleet.

In order to continue to enjoy God's special presence, the "rulers" of the nation had to abide with God. Owen distanced himself from the claims of the Fifth Monarchists, who advocated the rule of the saints over the masses, claiming that their methods "have not become sober men, much less saints of Christ."<sup>296</sup> Owen spoke favorably of how the present constitution, the

<sup>294</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:71, 81 (italics original). See also John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25.

<sup>295</sup> Worden, "Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan," 22–23.

<sup>296</sup> In February 1655, there were intelligence reports that Thomas Harrison, Christopher Feake and John Rogers were plotting against the government. See William Clarke, *Clarke Papers* [...], vols. 1–4, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Camden Society, 1891–1901), 2:244. In November 1655, John Thurloe, secretary of state, wrote to Henry Cromwell saying that "It is certayne, that the 5th monarchy men, (some of them I meane) have designes of puttinge us into blood." See Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, 4:190–91. Despite its leaders enduring periods of imprisonment, Fifth Monarchist agitation continued throughout 1656. See Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber 2008), 114–15.

Instrument of Government (1653–1657), had been “framed” and “balanced”: the Lord Protector governing with an elected unicameral Parliament and a Council of State, elected by the Parliament. As S. R. Gardiner memorably put it, that constitution steered “a middle course between the despotism of a ‘single person’ and the despotism of a ‘single House.’”<sup>297</sup> Woolrych describes how the “ghost” of Owen’s old friend Henry Ireton “hovers over the constitution of the Protectorate.”<sup>298</sup> Even with such a constitution, Owen confessed that his “heart trembles” at the thought that those who governed the commonwealth had their “rise” from a people who were so “dark and profane . . . full of enmity against the remnant.” He insisted that it was the duty of those in government “to consider all ways and means whereby the power of these nations may be in succeeding seasons, devolved on men of the like spirit.”<sup>299</sup> By “all ways and means,” Owen tacitly included the Council’s exclusion of a hundred elected members under article 17 of the Instrument of Government. Major General Kelsey, who had sponsored Owen’s invitation to preach, was a strong supporter of this policy of exclusion, stating, “The interest of God’s people is to be preferred before a thousand Parliaments” in order to prevent a return to slavery under “Egyptian taskmasters.”<sup>300</sup> By contrast, civilian republicans like Sir Arthur Hesilrige (1601–1661) and Thomas Scott (d. 1660), both of whom had been excluded, saw this as an act of “absolute arbitrary sovereignty” and further evidence of the army’s continued influence on the direction of government.<sup>301</sup> However, for Owen, such actions were necessary because if those in power were not “men interested personally in Christ,” then “England’s glory and happiness” would come to an end. This was not a new theme in Owen’s preaching. He told members of Parliament that this point was something that he had “delivered long ago, and many times in this place.”

Owen continued with application as he turned to deal with how to ensure that as the rulers of the nation they did not act in such a manner as to be “the cause of God’s departure from us.” First, it was necessary for the rulers of the nation to seek counsel and direction from God in all things, seeking his glory, sensing their own unworthiness, and walking in integrity and uprightness.

<sup>297</sup> S. R. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), lvi.

<sup>298</sup> Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate*, 377.

<sup>299</sup> Egloff, “Search for a Cromwellian Settlement,” 178–97, 301–21; Little and Smith, *Parliaments*, 80.

<sup>300</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:424, 447; Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, 5:384; Major General Kelsey sent in a number of objections to those elected in his county of Kent. See *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 10:87.

<sup>301</sup> C. H. Firth, *The Last Years of the Protectorate, 1656–1658*, 2 vols. (1909; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 1:21–23.

This involved public and private prayer and diligent use of days of fasting, such as the occasion on which Owen was preaching. Second, Owen urged his hearers to trust God for protection rather than relying on their own counsel and strength. God was glorified when his people trusted him in perplexing storms, submitting to God's providence rather than attempting to prescribe to God what must take place. Third, the rulers of the nation were to prioritize the interests of Christ and his people. He chose not to deal with this in detail because this had been a prominent theme in his sermon from the previous month at the opening of the Parliament, *God's Work in Founding Zion* (1656), which is included in this volume.

The concluding uses were threefold. First, as the prophet had said, the presence of God was to be the main concern of the Parliament rather than matters of military strength, political alliances, and foreign policy. Owen believed that through the events of the mid-century crisis, experience had taught that God's presence was the people's "life," "preservation," "protection," "prosperity," "safety," "success," and "peace." This was in line with Protectorate policy. Earlier that year, Cromwell had issued a fast-day declaration seeking to ascertain how the nation might recover God's "blessed presence."<sup>302</sup>

Second, with a pledge of God's presence, the Parliament could be confident in the face of all opposition. Owen rehearsed some of the difficulties that were raised by opponents of the government. There were those like Fifth Monarchists prophesying the "ruin and destruction" of the Parliament. Others raised the specter of the threat of Roman Catholic powers uniting against England. There were also concerns about how the war against Spain would be financed. Owen's response was simply, "If God be with us, who can be against us?"

The third "use" was to prioritize anything that would serve to confirm God's special presence. Here Owen underlined to them how on any occasion he had "opportunity to speak to you or any concerned in the government of this nation, in public or private," and he spoke about the need to protect and encourage "the remnant, the hidden people." This rehearsal of previous messages was useful because many members of Parliament were newcomers. Owen explained that this was because the civil power's treatment of the remnant would determine if God's presence would remain with the nation.

He closed the sermon by dealing with two areas of policy and reform that, if successfully implemented, could ensure God's presence would remain with his people. The first was the Cromwellian church settlement. Recognizing

<sup>302</sup> *A Declaration of His Highness Inviting the People of England and Wales to a Day of Solemn Fasting and Humiliation on March 28, 1656* (London, 1656), unpaginated.

that many were unhappy with the current model, he nonetheless expressed his confidence that it would eventually be seen to have been good for all the godly in the nation.<sup>303</sup> He did take the time to remind members of Parliament about the situation in Wales, where, he claimed, nearly all were “running into extremes” to the detriment of the propagation of the gospel.<sup>304</sup> He thus presented his position as a moderate middle way between, on the one hand, the “misguided zeal” of those like the Fifth Monarchists and, on the other, those committed to “formality,” who would be satisfied only by a return to “beggarly readers in every parish.” By claiming the middle ground, he sought to make his proposed settlement more reasonable and thereby made other proposals appear extreme and lacking the potential to be truly comprehensive. Owen's confidence in the Cromwellian church settlement would be tested in the coming months during the debate about what to do with the notorious Quaker James Nayler (1618–1660). This would only increase the tensions between those who supported some measure of liberty of conscience and those who sought to suppress the sects.

Owen urged members of Parliament to set the wheels in motion for the “righteous administrations of justice.” Mentioning how “many particulars lie before you; more will present themselves,” he opined that “troublesome times have always produced good laws” and urged them to provide for “good execution” of justice.<sup>305</sup> The “particulars” before Parliament included those

<sup>303</sup> Two Protectoral ordinances in March and September of 1654 established a national body of “Triers” to vet new clergy and county commissions known as “Ejectors” to expel “scandalous, ignorant, and insufficient ministers.” Cromwell spoke of how Thomas Goodwin's sermon had described how this system “endeavoured to put a stop to that heady way . . . of every man making himself a Minister, and a Preacher.” See Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:78. See also Ann Hughes, “‘The Public Profession of these Nations’: The National Church in Interregnum England,” in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 97–104; Christopher Durston, “Policing the Cromwellian Church: The Activities of the County Ejection Committees, 1654–1659,” in *Cromwellian Protectorate*, 189–206.

<sup>304</sup> See Lloyd Bowen, “‘This Murmuring and Unthankful Peevish Land’: Wales and the Protectorate,” in *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, 147. Around this time James Berry (d. 1691), the Cromwellian major general governing Wales, wrote of how this reformation “hath many enemies, and indeed here wants matter.” See Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, 5:334. Alexander Griffith (1600–1676), who had been ejected from his living, wrote a number of tracts against the Welsh commission for the propagation of the gospel. See Lloyd Bowen, “Preaching and Politics in the Welsh Marches, 1643–63: The Case of Alexander Griffith,” *Historical Research* 94 (2001): 28–50.

<sup>305</sup> Earlier in the month, Caryl had argued before Parliament that an appropriate response to the capture of the Spanish treasure fleet would be the promotion of justice in the nation. See Joseph Caryl, *A Sermon Pressing to, and Directing in, that Great Duty of Praising God* [. . .] (London, 1657), 37.

suggested by William Sheppard in *Englands Balme*. Owen's point was timely: two weeks after the second Protectorate Parliament convened, William Sheppard signed the preface to *Englands Balme*, at Whitehall. It was entered in the Stationers' Register on October 11, and by October 23 Thomason had acquired his copy.<sup>306</sup> The Protectorate administration indicated that it was prepared to back Sheppard's plan by creating him a serjeant-at-law just weeks later. Sheppard had spent the past two years working on this blueprint for the reform of English law aimed at establishing a new simplified and decentralized legal system. He proposed transferring much more responsibility to godly justices of the peace (assisted by a second rank of "all sober and civil men") while ensuring that "godless and wicked men" were "incapable of any office in the commonwealth."<sup>307</sup> Owen gave his endorsement to these serious and detailed plans for legal reform, hoping that the English Parliament might, at long last, make significant progress in this area. The sermon appears to have borne fruit. When the Lord Protector addressed the house on November 27, he praised members of Parliament for having achieved, in some measure, the very thing that Owen had been calling for: "though you have satte but A Little time . . . you have made many good Lawes the Effects whereof the people of the Common-wealth will with Comfort find hereafter."<sup>308</sup>

### PROVIDENTIAL CHANGES, AN ARGUMENT FOR UNIVERSAL HOLINESS

#### Dating and Context

This sermon was published posthumously in 1721, and, though undated, it is possible to suggest a plausible date for delivery early in 1657.<sup>309</sup> This was a particularly apt time for Owen to be reflecting on the changes brought by providence because by this stage "Owen was losing ground on all fronts."<sup>310</sup> Perhaps the most important initial clue to dating lies in Owen's lament of how "we scarce seem to be the same generation of men that we were fifteen

<sup>306</sup> William Sheppard, *Englands Balme: or, Proposals by Way of Grievance and Remedy* [. . .] (London, 1656); *Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers*, 2:90; Nancy L. Matthews, *William Sheppard, Cromwell's Law Reformer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58, 144–86.

<sup>307</sup> Sheppard, *Englands Balme*, 41–42.

<sup>308</sup> Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches, of Oliver Cromwell*, 3:319.

<sup>309</sup> In *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen* [. . .], ed. John Asty (London, 1721), it is numbered as sermons 8–11, running pages 49–78, and is given the title *Providential Changes, an Argument for Universal Holiness*.

<sup>310</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 169.

or sixteen years ago." There are good reasons to believe that this is a reference back to the golden era of 1641–1642 and therefore to believe that this sermon was preached in 1657. Gribben notes that in the spring of that year, Owen's "changing fortunes reflected broader changes in the political landscape," and in this sermon Owen makes three references to "constitutions" of government, particularly highlighting debates between rival parties over "newly framed constitutions."<sup>311</sup> Owen described providential "alterations" that had shown that "forms of government of old established," but also "newly framed constitutions" were "obnoxious" (that is subject) to "dissolution." The "old established" form was almost certainly that of king, Lords and Commons. The "newly framed" constitution would appear to be the Instrument of Government by which, in December 1653, Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector. Moves were underway to change this constitution by the autumn of 1656 in order to secure the regime by removing the influence of the army and placing it on a more parliamentary foundation. This sermon was not necessarily preached after the Instrument was replaced by another constitution called The Humble Petition and Advice in May 1657; rather, it could belong to earlier in the year when many had decided that the Instrument was unsatisfactory and stood in need of replacement.<sup>312</sup>

On two occasions, Owen spoke of "a plot," adapting the trope to rhapsodize about a plot for godly reformation that "the men of the world would have more just cause to fear, than ever they had of any," one that would "blow up their contrivance, disappoint their counsel, ruin their interest, shake heaven and earth." This evocative language is suggestive of the circumstances surrounding the arrest of the disgruntled former soldier and conspirator Miles Sindercombe, convicted of treason for plotting to bomb the protector's apartments at Whitehall and sentenced on February 9, 1657.<sup>313</sup> It is plausible to see Owen alluding to Sindercombe's plot because of its high profile at the time; secretary Thurloe's propaganda machine made great use of the foiled plot and the subsequent trial in order to give additional impetus to moves that were afoot for a new, more traditional constitutional settlement. The fact that Cromwell narrowly escaped death raised issues not only of security but also of political succession. In late February, a new draft constitution was introduced for debate; it would soon be renamed as the Humble Petition and

<sup>311</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 169.

<sup>312</sup> For details of the debates of January–March 1657, see Little, *Lord Broghill*, 145–60; and Christopher Durston, "The Fall of Cromwell's Major-Generals," *English Historical Review* 113 (1998): 34–37.

<sup>313</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* (February 5–12, 1657), 7588–592; *Publicke Intelligencer* (February 2–9, 1657), 1180.

Advice. Its supporters argued that it was essential for the long-term safety and stability of the three nations.<sup>314</sup> In the sermon, there are repeated references to how the three nations (England, Scotland, and Ireland) might be spared from God's punishment, and these are suggestive in the context of ongoing debates about how best to ensure the security of the nation.

The circumstantial evidence for a date in the first part of 1657 is strengthened with the realization that one of the reasons why Owen was willing to see the Instrument replaced was because of the unprecedented debate surrounding the trial of the Quaker preacher and writer James Nayler in December 1656. Upon his release from Exeter jail, Nayler achieved infamy by riding into Bristol with his followers in an attempt to recreate the events of Palm Sunday.<sup>315</sup> The parliamentary committee's report stated that "James Nayler did assume the gesture, words, honour, worship, and miracles of our blessed Saviour. Secondly, the names and incommunicable attributes and titles of our blessed Saviour." Therefore, he was deemed a "grand imposter and seducer of the people."<sup>316</sup> The intense debates over Nayler led to calls for his death, and the motion to do so was defeated by the narrow margin of ninety-six to eighty-two. Instead, he was whipped through the streets, had his tongue bored through, and was branded on his forehead as a blasphemer. All of this may lie behind Owen's reference to those who were prepared to contemplate "persecution, banishment, [and] blood" in order to enforce religious uniformity. The whole incident had demonstrated the inadequacies of the existing constitutional settlement because, under article 37 of the Instrument, Nayler was protected so long as he professed "faith in God by Jesus Christ."<sup>317</sup> Indeed, the Instrument had allowed Quakerism to flourish, and in this sermon Owen discusses how groups, like the Quakers, were seeking to emulate the outward practice of the Old Testament. The new constitution of the Humble Petition and Advice would avoid such debilitating ambiguity and define anti-Trinitarian heresy more clearly while, at the same time, offering a degree of liberty to the orthodox godly. It stated that "the true Protestant Christian religion . . . and no other" should be "held forth and asserted for the public profession of these nations" and it explicitly called for a "Confession of Faith."<sup>318</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Patrick Little, "John Thurloe and the Offer of the Crown to Oliver Cromwell," in *Oliver Cromwell: New Perspectives*, 235.

<sup>315</sup> John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2000), 153–54.

<sup>316</sup> Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 1:72–73.

<sup>317</sup> Little and Smith, *Parliaments and Politics*, 214–15.

<sup>318</sup> Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 416, 442, 454.

A further clue as to the dating of the sermon in early 1657 lies in what appears to be a reference to, as yet, unsatisfactory meetings of ministers called to discuss their controversies. In February, Owen and other ministers were involved in high-level meetings in London designed to settle the split in the Scottish Kirk between the rival Protester (or Remonstrant) party and the majority Resolutioner party.<sup>319</sup> In these discussions, Owen and the leading army officers clearly favored the Protestors (men like Patrick Gillespie, Sir Archibald Johnston, Lord Wariston, and James Guthrie), while the Resolutioners had the support of Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian government.<sup>320</sup>

Together, the evidence about a change in constitution, the plot, the Naylor case, and the ongoing meetings of ministers provide strong circumstantial evidence that this sermon should be located in early 1657. This is particularly fascinating given the scant but intriguing details surrounding the Parliamentary fast held on February 27 of that year. Owen had been invited to assist along with Philip Nye, Thomas Manton, Joseph Caryl, and Patrick Gillespie.<sup>321</sup> According to Archibald Johnston of Wariston, recently arrived in London as a representative of the Scottish Protesters, the atmosphere in the House was heated and Owen was only invited to preach “after two houres debate.”<sup>322</sup> However, when reporting on the fast, the weekly newsbook *Mercurius Politicus* mentioned only the involvement of Caryl, Nye and Manton. Furthermore, according to Gilbert Mabbott, “Yesterday Mr. Galeaspey and Mr. Nye preached in the Parliament House before the Members. The first was bitter, the 2d more moderate against King-shippe.”<sup>323</sup> Afterward, Parliament voted to thank Caryl, Gillespie, Manton, and Nye. No explanation is given for why Owen did not participate.<sup>324</sup> Dating this sermon offers a possible insight into the sorts of themes that Owen might have chosen to elaborate on had he delivered a sermon at the parliamentary fast. The potential for the sermon to reveal Owen’s thought about the significance of political events at this time is heightened because careful examination reveals the material itself was designed to be delivered on a national stage to a body of auditors whom Owen believed were “contemptible to the nation” because of their divisions. Part of Owen’s application in the sermon was specifically addressed to the civil magistrate, and, more generally, he was calling his

<sup>319</sup> Johnston of Wariston, *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston*, 3:62; *Register of the Consultations of the Ministers of Edinburgh and Some Other Brethren of the Ministry*, ed. William Stephen, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1921–1930), 1:349–50.

<sup>320</sup> Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 255–56.

<sup>321</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:497.

<sup>322</sup> Wariston, *Diary of Wariston*, 3:67.

<sup>323</sup> Clarke, *Clarke Papers*, 3:92.

<sup>324</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:497.

hearers to unite in a "project to save three nations" by accomplishing further reformation in "councils, counties, [and] cities."

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen opens this sermon with a reminder that 2 Peter was addressed to "strangers," those believing Jews who faced "extreme oppositions" from "their own countrymen, with and among whom they lived." In particular, they were mocked by "prophane persons and hardened sinners" because the "coming of the Lord" that they insisted on had not yet taken place. In response, Peter sets out to show the folly of such presumptuous scoffing while providing further instruction about the nature of the coming of Christ and the practical implications of this.

Owen began by setting his text in its context in order to show its "design" or purpose. This involved a discussion of Peter's appeal to the scoffing that Noah endured prior to the flood. By "word and deed," Noah warned of the approaching judgment of God through his preaching by constructing the ark. Those who witnessed this did not make "a due improvement" of it and continued to "live securely in sin," "willingly ignorant of the flood." An important point of Owen's interpretation turns on what is meant by the destruction of "the heavens and earth" by either water or fire (2 Pet. 3:5-7). He argued that this referred not to the destruction of "the fabric" of heaven and earth but to "persons." This was a prophetic "idiom" to describe the destruction of "the civil and religious state" (Isa. 34:4; Matt. 24; Rev. 6:14). Thus, for Owen, 2 Peter 3:7 did not refer in the first instance to the final day of judgment but was interpreted in a preterist manner as referring to the destruction of "the Judaical church and state." He understood the hope of a "new heavens and a new earth" to be a reference to the creation of "gospel ordinances" (cf. Heb. 12:26-28).

Owen turned to "open the words" of his text and to "fix upon the truth contained in them." He began with "the foundation" of the exhortation—namely, the certainty of Christ's coming in judgment against "the Judaical polity and church." For Owen, the political implications of this for his own day were abundantly clear, but it was not his "business" to deal with that beyond asserting that "there is no outward constitution nor frame of things in governments or nations, but it is subject to a dissolution, and may receive it, and that in a way of judgment." It was folly to think that a constitution that was "a mere human creation," "a mere product of the sayings and the wisdom of men," would endure once it had outlived its "usefulness to the great ends that Christ has to accomplish in the world." This was a theme in Owen's preaching from the late 1650s and one that would prompt the publication of his parliamentary

sermon from February 1659. This contradicted the views of some of those advocates of a return to monarchy, or “kinglings” as they were called—men like George Downing, who in January 1657 had urged Cromwell to take the crown because “Government is the foundation of security . . . Men go away, but constitutions never fall.”<sup>325</sup>

Having identified this “foundation,” Owen argued that there was a necessary “inference,” given “such providential alterations.” That is to say, a particular kind of response was required from the saints, one that was “boundless and endless,” concerned with all life (including a response acting in the capacity “as a magistrate”), and also “the worship of God according to the appointment and institution of Christ.” He summarized this as a proposition: “Great providential alterations or destructions made upon the account of Christ and his church, call for eminency of universal holiness and godliness in all believers.” Owen argued that all recognized that they were living in a “dispensation” in which there had been “many providential alterations” but expressed his astonishment that so few made a proper “improvement” of what they witnessed. There were “two great providential alterations and dissolutions” that concerned Christ and his church. The first concerned the events that Peter prophesied about in this text—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The second was “the destruction of Antichrist and his Babylonish kingdom.” For Owen, this was “the ocean of providence” into which “all the rivulets of lesser alterations do run.”

He offered several “grounds” in support of this proposition. This first was that in all these providential alterations, there was a “peculiar coming of Christ,” “the holy King of saints,” and his “special presence” required special holiness from the saints. The second was that every such coming was “a lesser day of judgment,” something to be understood “as pledges of the final judgment at the last day.” Here he chose to deal with the “secret judiciary acts” that Christ usually undertook in these in the alterations and desolations that his comings bring about. These providences have “a voice” that pleads with people about their sins. They are trials that expose the false profession of many “hypocrites.” Owen expostulated “Oh, that England might not yet be farther filled with instances and examples of this.” They also serve in the “blinding and hardening” of the wicked who, despite the initial appearance of wisdom and prudence, are shown to lack understanding as to the nature of Christ’s work of removing “old superstitions” and “forms of government.” This was a damning assessment of those who were advocating that the Cromwellian

<sup>325</sup> Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 1:364–66.

regime needed to return to traditional forms of government and enforce religious uniformity in worship. In such a dispensation, Christ also pleaded with the saints. Times of “peace and outward prosperity” brought with them “manifold temptations,” and the “afflictions, trials, and troubles” that accompanied Christ’s coming in judgment had the power to challenge the consciences of the godly about “secret lusts” and about ways in which they were out of step with Christ, particularly in endeavoring to hold on to “the shaken” and “passing things.” In such seasons, the Spirit was poured out in a special manner and there was much spiritual light from “the dispensation of the word.” Consequently, now was a time for “self-searching.”

As Owen proceeded to “the use,” he laid down two relevant “considerations” as initial premises for his application. The first was that not only the English but those in Europe and beyond knew that “we have had great providential alterations and dissolutions in these nations.” Both “civil and ecclesiastical” government had been shaken in an “unparalleled” manner, removing “persons, things, [and] forms of government of old established.” The shaking continued with Owen making clear that “newly framed constitutions” (such as the Instrument of Government) were also subject “to change or ruin.” The second premise was that all these “revolutions,” “desolations of nations, ruin of families, [and] alterations of government” had been brought about by a work of God. He then turned to “one principal inquiry” that would be the foundation of his application. He offered four reasons why “these providential alterations and dissolutions” related in a special way to “Christ and his interest in the world.” The first reason was based on spiritual experience: the saints enjoyed genuine, “self-evidencing” communion with Christ “in and about the works of his providence among us.” He was confident that this was not “the fancy or imagination of a deluded heart” because all the godly had shared in this experience during “the greatest straits and difficulties” (a reference to the 1640s). It was only since the nation had been delivered from its “bloody troubles” that this shared experience among the godly had been lost. Second, much had been accomplished for Christ, in particular the destruction of “false worship as established by a law” and “the casting down of combinations for persecution.” This was a reference to the Laudian era and moves to establish “an outside, formal worship, in opposition unto the spiritual worship of the gospel,” which led to the imprisonment and banishment of the godly. Now such “false worship” and “the most eminent persecutors of the saints” had been removed. Third, “glorious gospel light” had broken out, illuminating the nature of true worship. And, fourth, the events of recent history corresponded to “the predictions” of what would be accomplished in the last days regarding

the latter-day glory of the kingdom of Christ. Together, these constituted four reasons why Owen could confidently claim that “for many years” Christ had been present in a special manner. This had been a significant theme in his parliamentary sermon from October 1656.

Owen's first “use” was an examination of whether or not “all or any of us have answered the mind of Christ in these dispensations.” His assessment of “the generality of the people of the nation” was not positive. He feared for the future of England as he identified a litany of sins that demonstrated “contempt of the gospel”: for example, adherence to “old superstitious ways of worship.” Worship according to the Book of Common Prayer had, according to John Morrill, “earthed itself into the Englishman's consciousness and had sunk deep roots in popular culture,” and many were willing to support clergy who used the traditional forms.<sup>326</sup> A protectoral proclamation from November 1655 had ordered that from January 1, 1656, no clergyman should use the Book of Common Prayer privately, but the government did often turn a blind eye to prayer book services.<sup>327</sup> As Coffey points out, the diary of John Evelyn illustrates that he had “no difficulty in finding Prayer Book services” to attend in the late 1650s.<sup>328</sup> Owen was concerned about those who remained committed to the old forms and rhythms of worship and piety. This was a matter in which Owen himself “continued to be the subject of polemical dispute.”<sup>329</sup> Thomas Long (1621–1707) published his response to Owen's position in *An Exercitation concerning the Frequent Use of Our Lord's Prayer, in the Publicke Worship of God, and a View of What Hath Been Said by Dr Owen concerning the Subject* (1658).<sup>330</sup> However, Owen's main inquiry was to demonstrate how the saints themselves had failed to respond appropriately in several different ways. He first of all examined “their great differences among themselves about lesser things.” Such a divisive attitude was something that Christ abhorred. It was evidenced in being taken up, speaking and writing books about lesser things, in the “judging and censuring” of fellow believers as “sectaries, heretics, [and] schismatics,” and even in some being willing to entertain thoughts of “persecution, banishment, [and] blood” in order to enforce uniformity. This is striking in the context of the case of James Nayler, who had been tried and convicted by the second Protectorate Parliament under the Blasphemy Acts

<sup>326</sup> John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1993), 174.

<sup>327</sup> Coward, *Cromwellian Protectorate*, 60.

<sup>328</sup> Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England*, 159.

<sup>329</sup> Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 182.

<sup>330</sup> This was entered on the Stationers' Register on July 13, 1658. See *Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers*, 2:187.

of 1650. As a first offender, he was sentenced to prison for six months. However, many members of Parliament demanded a harsher sentence; a vote to have Nayler executed was only narrowly defeated, and his punishment was instead to be flogged, branded, and have his tongue bored through with a hot iron.<sup>331</sup> Owen was clearly concerned at attempts to limit religious liberty for the godly in the face of the increasing alarm at the spread of Quakerism, and his response was to call the godly to unite around fundamental doctrines. If the godly were divided from one another in lesser things, they were also, secondly, indistinct from the world in “great things.” Here he wished that the task in hand was more difficult. Owen gave particular attention to worldliness “in public actings” and “public aims.” In evocative language, given the kingship controversy, Owen believed that too many sought to “enthroned” some god of their own “fleshly imagination” and were taken up with their own “wealth” and “power.” The third area in which he believed there had not been an appropriate response lay in the area of “the advancement of the gospel.” Owen contended that what had been an unprecedented moment of opportunity was being squandered. Once again, a particular problem lay in the “multitude” of divisions that existed among the godly. Owen then pointed to “the scandalous apostasies of many professors” and “the general backsliding” away from a godly agenda that had united the saints “fifteen or sixteen years ago.” His examination revealed multiple provocations that required the saints to apply themselves to his second point of application.

Owen's second “use” was an exhortation to special holiness and godliness. This was not a consideration of the “general reasons” for holiness but “a peculiar pressing unto holiness” on the basis that this was a season in which “Christ is come among us, to the dissolution of the great things of the nations.” He called for the godly to come together and unite around prioritizing holy living. Owen offered several words of caution at this point. First, there was the prevalent danger of self-righteousness, something that had caused “many in our days” to abandon the gospel of justification by faith alone.<sup>332</sup> Self-righteousness produced “a bondage frame of spirit” and also led to a focus on outward forms. One of the groups that Owen may have had in mind when he spoke of the those who in their “word and prophecy” followed the

331 For an account of the relevance of this debate about Nayler and the Quakers, see John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 293–96.

332 For the debates about justification in the 1650s, particularly between Owen and Richard Baxter, see Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England*; and Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 55–100.

“outward appearance” of the Old Testament administration were the Quakers. Ecstatic prophecy was a distinctive practice of the Quakers at this time, and Owen himself had to contend with early Quakers who sought to emulate the prophetic acts of the Old Testament by walking seminaked through Oxford.<sup>333</sup> Perhaps the most high-profile example of such prophetic acts was Nayler’s entrance into Bristol in imitation of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. Owen’s second caution concerned the “wretched superstition” of “monastic uselessness” that he could detect in those who out of weariness deserted the work of God “and withdrew themselves into retirement.” He insisted that those who did not do the work of God actually opposed it. His final caution concerned the “the great scandal that has befallen the days wherein we live”—namely, to make religion “a cloak for carnal and secular ends.”

With these words of caution in place, Owen turned to address the motivations for such holy living. Since holiness was hindered by placing too much value on earthly things (“the power . . . riches, [and] pleasures of the world”), the realization that such things were perishing would promote holiness. The motivations that he chose to concentrate on were threefold. First, the duty of pursuing holiness would enable the believer to “maintain peace and quiet” in their souls, even in the midst of “outward pressures and calamities” such as those that came through “sword, fire, plots, [and] conspiracies.” Such peace did not, ultimately, come by means of “parliaments” or “armies” but instead was “kept up by the holiness” that God required. Second, taking this duty seriously could be an effective means to save “the nation wherein we live” by turning away the indignation of the Lord. Owen remained convinced that Christ had “a controversy with these nations” and that the provocations were such that ruin was deserved. The controversy began prior to the “troubles” of the civil wars with the Laudian persecution of the saints. Now, however, Owen contended that “the root” of Christ’s controversy with the three nations was because of “the sins of the saints themselves.” The pursuit of holiness was “the only means” that would serve “to deliver England out of the hand of the Lord.” This would require real reformation, “the great thing” that had been talked about for “many years,” and putting away the “contemptible” divisions that existed among the godly. Finally, holiness would bring glory to Christ by bearing witness to the world a belief that Christ had “come forth among us” to advance his kingdom and interest. Owen recognized that nearly “every party” spoke of the kingdom of Christ and that many did so in what

<sup>333</sup> See Hilary Hinds, *George Fox and Early Quaker Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 93–94; Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 76; Kenneth L. Carroll, “Early Quakers and Going Naked as a Sign,” *Quaker History* 67, no. 2 (1978): 69–79.

he regarded as a “carnal” manner, not least the Fifth Monarchists who had at this time renewed their agitation. By contrast, he insisted that while the kingdom we look for “be in this world,” it was not to be “of this world.” That meant that “a real difference” ought to be discernible in the lives of Christ’s people. His word of exhortation concluded with his insistence that in “the dispensations among us” special holiness was the only way to appropriately honor and glorify Christ.

*THE GLORY AND INTEREST OF NATIONS  
PROFESSING THE GOSPEL*

**Context of Owen’s Sermon to Richard’s Parliament**

Oliver Cromwell had died on September 3, 1658, the anniversary of his triumphs at Dunbar and Worcester. His eldest surviving son, Richard Cromwell (1626–1712), was to be his successor as Lord Protector. The months that followed were, as Owen acknowledged in this sermon, a time of relative peace and stability, but this was to be simply the calm before the storm.<sup>334</sup> With Oliver’s death, the end of the Protectorate was all but inevitable. Richard would soon lose control of the factions that his father had just managed to maintain in a delicate political balance.<sup>335</sup> The new protector did not have his father’s influence within the army; nor did he share his sympathy toward the sects. Instead, Richard appears to have favored the Presbyterians in both religion and politics.<sup>336</sup>

Richard and his Council of State rather reluctantly called a parliament in an attempt to deal with a deepening financial crisis: the treasury was in massive debt, army pay was in serious arrears, and a parliament was needed in order to agree to new taxes. This was to be the Protectorate’s third Parliament, and it was summoned on the basis of the electoral system that had been in place prior to the Instrument of Government and would include both Scottish and Irish members. Over half of the members elected to this very large and unmanageable Parliament were new to the house.<sup>337</sup> When it convened on January 27, 1659, the Protectoral Council made no attempt to exclude those

<sup>334</sup> Godfrey Davies, *The Restoration of Charles II, 1658–1660* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1955), 36–40.

<sup>335</sup> See for example Oliver’s response to the challenge to his authority in February 1658 in Gentles, *New Model Army*, 284.

<sup>336</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History of England and Wales 1658–1667* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 34.

<sup>337</sup> Davies, *Restoration of Charles II*, 46–8; G. B. Nourse, “Richard Cromwell’s House of Commons,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 60, no. 1 (1977): 98.

members who were hostile to the government.<sup>338</sup> This meant that the new Parliament was, in many ways, an unknown quantity. As Secretary Thurloe noted, there was “soe great a mixture in the house of commons, that no man knowes which way the major part will encline.”<sup>339</sup> The majority of members were provincial gentry and they demonstrated conservative instincts in matters of religion, often being moderate Presbyterian supporters of the Humble Petition and Advice. Hard-line republican commonwealths-men did exercise considerable influence in the House, but they remained a vocal minority. As Woolrych explains, they were “more anti-Cromwellian than a unified party,” being held together through a shared opposition to the Protectorate state.<sup>340</sup> Their number included men like Sir Henry Vane (1613–1662) and Sir Arthur Hesilrige (1601–1661), who repeatedly voiced their anger and opposition as they disrupted debates. There were also older members who returned to the House after having been excluded a decade beforehand by Pride’s Purge. They favored a more traditional settlement along the lines of the Treaty of Newport. Controlling these members of Parliament proved very challenging because men like Lord Broghill, who had been skilled in managing the politics of the Commons, had now been elevated to the Other House.<sup>341</sup> In all, this was a factious and deeply divided Parliament.

Thomas Goodwin preached at the opening of the Parliament, calling for unity and tolerance. The next day, Friday, January 28, the Commons agreed to hold a private fast the following week. The purpose of this “solemn Day of Humiliation” was for “Seeking of God, for his special Assistance and Blessing upon the Endeavours of this House.”<sup>342</sup>

Dr. Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) and Thomas Manton (bapt. 1620–1677) were chosen unanimously as the first two ministers to take part in the proceedings. Reynolds was now the leader of moderate Presbyterianism and had preached only days beforehand at the opening session of the Parliament.<sup>343</sup>

338 Godfrey Davies, “The Election of Richard Cromwell’s Parliament, 1658–9,” *English Historical Review* 63 (1948), 488–501; Jason Peacey, “The Protector Humbled: Richard Cromwell and the Constitution,” in *Cromwellian Protectorate*, 37; Little and Smith, *Parliaments and Politics*, 77–78.

339 Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe* 7:594.

340 Austin Woolrych, “Introduction,” in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953–1982), 7:16.

341 Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell’s House of Lords: Politics, Parliaments and Constitutional Revolution, 1642–1660* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2018), 195–216.

342 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:594.

343 For Reynolds’ activities at this time, see Christy Wang, “Edward Reynolds and the Making of a Presbyterian Bishop,” in *Reformed Conformity in England, 1559–1714*, ed. Jake Griesel and Esther Counsell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024), 199–221, esp. 212–13.

His invitation was to come from Francis Gerard (1617–1680), member of Parliament for Middlesex. Manton, rector of St Paul's, Covent Garden, was to be invited by Richard Knightley, member of Parliament for Northamptonshire and a known supporter of Presbyterianism. Knightley's London residence was in Manton's parish.<sup>344</sup> There was then some debate about the other ministers and the order in which they would be invited to participate. A broad range of figures favored the Presbyterian divine Edmund Calamy (1600–1666), including John Weaver (a leader of the republican commonwealth's-men), Dr. Thomas Clarges (General George Monck's agent in the Parliament), Edmund Hoskins (a traditionalist), and Sir Arthur Heselrige (another leader of the commonwealth's-men and a Presbyterian). Weaver was responsible for inviting Calamy to participate. Tellingly, Owen was supported by two senior figures in the army, his old supporter Major General Thomas Kelsey and also John Lambert. Kelsey was the member of Parliament for Dover and "a prominent opponent of the protectorate." He would soon emerge as "a prominent member of the Wallingford House party." Lambert had resigned on principle in July 1657 and had recently reemerged as the member of Parliament for Pontefract and "a leading figure in the anti-Cromwellian coalition."<sup>345</sup> Owen's invitation was to come from Kelsey. The venue was also the subject of debate. Some wished the fast to be held in public at St Margaret's Church, while others favored the sermons being heard in the privacy of the House. In the end, it was resolved to observe the fast in private despite the "inconveniences" such as "want of air" in a smaller and very crowded venue. It was argued that this would allow the ministers to speak "freely" in order to deal with the Parliament's "faults and duties." Furthermore, it was said that when the fasts were held at St Margaret's, "ill affected persons came frequently to such exercises not out of any zeal or devotion but to feel the pulse of the state, and to steer their counsels and affairs accordingly."<sup>346</sup>

It is possible to reconstruct something of what took place in the House on February 4 from contemporary reports. According to the parliamentary diary of Thomas Burton, it was an all-day event with "the exercises held from nine till six."<sup>347</sup> The Particular Baptist Colonel Sir Jerome Sankey (ca. 1621–ca. 1687) summarized Owen's message as comprising an urgent call to return to godly

<sup>344</sup> See *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Knightley, Richard (c. 1610–61)."

<sup>345</sup> Kelsey had issued the invitation and then thanked Owen for his sermon to the second Protectorate Parliament in October 1656, *God's Presence with a People* (1656). See *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Kelsey, Thomas (c. 1616–?1687)" and "Lambert, John (1619–84)."

<sup>346</sup> Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 3:11–15.

<sup>347</sup> Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 3:67.

reformation, as he wrote to inform Henry Cromwell of events: "Dr Owen preached first and very seriously asserted and pressed the whole cause and interest."<sup>348</sup> In terms of understanding Sankey's point, here it is worth noting that at that time his attachment to Major General Fleetwood (ca. 1618–1692) was "as strong as ever," and he hoped that "through God's mercy the foundations of a settlement will indeed be laid."<sup>349</sup> Sankey continued by outlining how Edward Reynolds followed and in his exposition of Philippians 2:1–2 "pressed hard to unity."<sup>350</sup> Sankey's summary is confirmed in the title of the version of the sermon that Reynolds prepared for the press, which he described as a plea for "Unity of Judgement and Love amongst Brethren."<sup>351</sup> These sermons were followed by Calamy preaching on how "The Lord Reigneth" from Psalm 93:4. Sankey judged the sermons by Reynolds and Calamy as "very moderate." Finally, Manton delivered a sermon on Deuteronomy 33:4–5, which was described as "the most earnest of them as to church worke."<sup>352</sup>

Parliament agreed to thank all four ministers for their "great Pains" in "carrying on the Work of Fasting and Humiliation this Day in the House, by Prayer and Preaching." Those who had invited them were charged with extending thanks and the invitation to print the sermons.<sup>353</sup>

### Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen selected a text whose purpose was to offer "relief against outward perplexing extremities" based on the presence of Christ with his remnant. It was, as Woolrych describes it, a "remarkable sermon" because Owen told the Parliament that the only reason why God had any regard for the English nation was for the sake of the saints but warned that God's glorious presence seemed to be departing.<sup>354</sup> Thus, as Cooper points out, "despite its title . . . there was very little glory about it."<sup>355</sup> William Goold detected "a spirit of anxiety

<sup>348</sup> Henry Cromwell, *The Correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655–1659: From the British Library Lansdown Manuscripts*, ed. Peter Gaunt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2007), 449.

<sup>349</sup> See *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Sankey, Jerome (c. 1621–86)"; Cromwell, *The Correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655–1659*, 459.

<sup>350</sup> Cromwell, *Correspondence of Henry Cromwell*, 449–50.

<sup>351</sup> Edward Reynolds, *The Substance of Two Sermons One Touching Composing of Controversies, Another Touching Unity of Judgement and Love Amongst Brethren* [. . .] (London, 1659), title page.

<sup>352</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 553 (Feb. 3–10, 1659), 215; Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton* 3:67; Cromwell, *Correspondence of Henry Cromwell*, 449–50.

<sup>353</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:599.

<sup>354</sup> A. H. Woolrych, "The Good Old Cause and the Fall of the Protectorate," *Historical Journal* 13, no. 2 (1957): 146–47.

<sup>355</sup> Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 235.

as to the future developments of providence.”<sup>356</sup> Owen told the members of Parliament who gathered in the House to hear him preach that they were “the remnant” that had survived the “great trials and desolations” of recent years. Now, at the beginning of this Parliament, great promises were being made to them, particularly concerning their “preservation and safety,” both “spiritual and temporal.” He summarized how the verse spoke of how “God by his creating power, in despite of all opposition will bring forth preservation for his people, guiding them in paths wherein they shall find peace and safety.” The promise was, however, expressed in conditional form with the requirement being holiness. Then, having explained the biblical typology necessary for the correct interpretation of the verse, he argued that the “substance” of the mercy that was promised could be comprehended in two propositions: first, “the presence of Christ with any people, is the glory of any people” and; second, that “the presence of God in special providence over a people, attends the presence of Christ in grace with a people.”

Owen explained that the true glory of a people did not lie in the “number” or “strength” of its armies; nor was it to be found the “wisdom,” “counsel,” and “politic contrivances” to order the affairs of the nation. Owen thought that he could give ample examples to prove this from “the days and seasons that have passed over [us].” Instead, he insisted that the glory of a people lay in the presence of Christ among them—not by way of a “bare profession” of the gospel, but as the saints, be they “few or many,” united to Christ by the Spirit. Such people were precious in the eyes of Christ, even if the world treated them with contempt. Owen knew that the saints were often despised by the world, especially through the “many temptations” that they faced, sometimes those associated with “public employment.” Yet it was the saints who were precious in God’s sight rather than “the glittering shows” of the world’s wealth and riches or “the state and magnificence of their governments” or “the beauty of their laws and order.” These saints were the secret to both the “preservation” and “prosperity” of England. This had been the case throughout “all our late revolutions.” The nation had not been preserved principally through the “prudence of councils” (they had been “divided, entangled, [and] ensnared”) or even through the strength of its armies. Rather the presence of Christ among “his secret ones” had been “the preservation of England, in the midst of all the changes and revolutions.” Owen contended that the oppressive regime of the 1630s was broken because of the prayers of those

<sup>356</sup> See the editorial introduction by William Goold in John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–1855), 8:454.

dismissed as “the fanatic crew.” He pointedly mentioned the “backsliding of some” from the cause, particularly by those who under various “pretenses” sought to undermine the freedom of the saints (this undoubtedly included those calling for Presbyterian uniformity). Such “slighting” of the saints led to the Second English Civil War and further conflict in Ireland and Scotland. In an autobiographical note, Owen reminded members of Parliament how through his preaching he had “opportunity to make observations of the passages of providence in those days, in all the three nations, in the times of our greatest hazards.” What he had observed was God, in his mercy, prospering the work of those who prioritized “the preservation of the interest of Christ in and with his people.”

Owen’s application was to call members of Parliament “to promote the interest of Christ in these nations.” This call applied to them as both individuals and civil magistrates. First, it was a call to those in that private fast to prioritize their own godliness in order to avoid the nation being brought through another providential shaking and alteration of government. Although he did not require each individual in government to be a converted believer, Owen had “no great expectation” of what magistrates who were not believers might accomplish.<sup>357</sup>

He then offered a very bleak assessment of national affairs. Despite the “outward peace” that the nation enjoyed, there was evidence that all was not well because he identified symptoms of “a profane, wicked, [and] carnal spirit.” Promoting the interest of Christ in England, Scotland, and Ireland also involved the Parliament taking action to oppose “that overflowing flood of profaneness, and opposition to the power of godliness, that is spreading itself over this nation.” In what must be seen as an indictment of the current Protectorate, he described how “the temptations of these days” had led to a return to “old forms and ways.” As Woolrych captures it, Owen “had long been a watch-dog against the forces of reaction.”<sup>358</sup> This “apostasy” also manifested itself in “rage and contempt of all the work of reformation that has been attempted among us.” He feared that “our ruin should come with more speed, than did our deliverance” and that the nation would “quickly return to its former station and condition, and that with the price of your dearest blood.” He employed an apt metaphor from Hosea to describe the state of the nation: “Gray hairs are here and there,” and he knows it not (Hos. 7:9). In other words, England was like a man unaware that he had suddenly grown

<sup>357</sup> Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 99.

<sup>358</sup> Woolrych, “The Good Old Cause and the Fall of the Protectorate,” 146.

old, weak, and near death.<sup>359</sup> Similarly, drawing on the Oracle of Doom from Amos 4:1–13, he suggested that the glory was departing. Gribben describes Owen as being alert to “a serious political danger” as he prayed that “we lose not our ground faster than we won it.”<sup>360</sup> Owen then adapted the language of the Good Old Cause to call his hearers back to “our good old principles on which we first engaged.” The Good Old Cause was a somewhat imprecise leitmotif that ran through the protests of the spring of 1659: “seldom explicitly defined, but always appealing emotionally to memories of a time when the Lord had lent His presence to all who fought His battles, and before their hopes of a new Jerusalem had dimmed amid the inevitable compromises with political realities during the last half-dozen years.”<sup>361</sup> It was a rallying cry for a loose alliance of those who were critical of the Protectorate but who were not necessarily in agreement on how the cause might best be restored. For Owen, it could only be through those in Parliament committing themselves to “value, encourage, and close with” the saints. Here Owen was endeavoring to unite those who differed in both “civil affairs” and “church matters” behind this common cause. This was no easy task in early 1659, when many were asserting particular forms of both church polity and political constitutions. As Toon writes, “His view that the unity of the true saints and their encouragement was of far greater importance than the promotion of any theory of the government of Church or State was, needless to say, not a popular one. At this time it seemed that each religious and political group was intent on promoting its own ends without regard to the good of the nation and its people.”<sup>362</sup>

Owen anticipated the objection that would be made that this task was almost impossible because the saints were hopelessly divided, mentioning “Prelatists,” “Presbyterians,” “Independents,” “Anabaptists,” and “Fifth Monarchy Men.” His response was a well-worn one: the only party he was pleading for was “the party of Christ” and that although there was “a great noise” about the differences between the various “denominations,” these differences were often “very little things in themselves.” He retained a millenarian confidence that Christ would, eventually, remove these differences and the church would flourish and be at peace. Consequently, such an objection was actually nothing more than a Satanic “cheat” to keep members of Parliament from following through with this duty.

<sup>359</sup> Jeremiah Burroughes, *Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Chapters of the Prophecy of Hosea* [. . .] (London, 1650), 679.

<sup>360</sup> Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 100.

<sup>361</sup> Woolrych, “Introduction,” 22.

<sup>362</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, 108–9.

Ominously, in the weeks that followed, Owen saw little evidence of the repentance and reformation he desired as the Commons became bogged down in constitutional wrangling. His fears were, it seemed, well founded: Richard was unable to manage the Parliament or to keep the support of the army.<sup>363</sup> At that time, Owen “gathered a church in the Independent way” among the grandees meeting at Wallingford House, the London home of Charles Fleetwood, one that was “not very well liked at Whitehall.”<sup>364</sup> In those tense days, as Owen prepared his sermon for publication, he appears to have relied on the notes of auditors “that I might not preach one sermon and print another.”

The work was entered on the Stationers' Register two months after it was preached on April 14, and it was published under the title *The Glory and Interest of Nations Professing the Gospel* (1659).<sup>365</sup> Gribben suggested this delay in publication may have been “politic,” given “the ambiguous political context.”<sup>366</sup> The timing was surely significant. The day beforehand, the officers of the army met at Wallingford House and spent “the whole day” of April 13 “in prayer and preaching.”<sup>367</sup> On April 14, some five hundred officers attended a General Council of the Army.<sup>368</sup> Details in the dedicatory preface suggest that one of the reasons why Owen eventually decided to accept the opportunity to publish the sermon was to correct “some mistakes” about what he had said that had been “exposed in print unto public view.” Owen may have been alluding to comments made about the Parliament's fast by the political theorist James Harrington (1611–1677), who in his pamphlet *The Art of Law-Giving* (1659) recounted a report he received about Owen's sermon: “But they say, Mr Dean Owen, to the Parliament at their fast, was positive that no government upon mere humane principles can be good or lasting.” By contrast, Harrington claimed that Manton sought to prove “that the government instituted by Moses consisted of kings, lords and commons.”<sup>369</sup> Harrington's work was prepared for the press on February 20 and was part of a pamphlet war over constitutional forms that raged that spring.<sup>370</sup> By April, the tensions

363 Godfrey Davies, “The Army and the Downfall of Richard Cromwell,” *The Huntingdon Library Bulletin* 7 (1935): 131–67.

364 Cromwell, *Correspondence of Henry Cromwell*, 475; and Woolrych, “Introduction,” 61.

365 *Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London*, 2:221.

366 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 199.

367 Clarke, *Clarke Papers*, 3:189.

368 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 288; Reece, *Army in Cromwellian England*, 196.

369 James Harrington, *The Political Works of James Harrington*, part 1, ed J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 652–53.

370 Rachel Hammersley, *James Harrington: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 233.

between Richard and his Parliament, on the one hand, and the army, on the other, had only increased. In this highly charged context, Owen sought to set the record straight about what he said in the sermon.<sup>371</sup> He claimed that there was nothing “from the beginning to the ending of the short discourse that does really interfere with any form of civil government in the world, administered according to righteousness and equity.” This would suggest that in mid-April, Owen was still willing to support some sort of Protectorate government, provided that it re-embraced what he judged to be godly priorities. His concern was not with the form of government (a dominant theme in these debates of those months) but with the Protectorate appearing to drift in a direction that might reverse the godly gains of the revolution. The differences among members over “civil affairs” were minor compared to “the continuance of the presence of God among us.” Owen encouraged members to reject party divisions and unite in order to promote the interest of Christ. As he saw it, a government based on “mere human” principles would not last, but should that government be based on godly principles, then there was a way forward. Here Owen differed from republicans who rejected the Protectorate on ideological grounds and the junior officers (among whom republican sentiment was spreading) who had already reached the point of regarding the Protectorate as being past fixing. Owen maintained that his principal design in the sermon, and one that he had “openly managed and pursued with all plainness of speech,” was that “the true real interest of these nations” was one focused on “the interest of Christ.” Nonetheless, there is little optimism in the sermon, and, indeed, “an element of disillusion may be read into his ambiguous dedication to Members.”<sup>372</sup>

In order that a godly oligarchy might put the revolution back on sure footing, on April 22, Owen and the senior officers met at Fleetwood's Wallingford House in Whitehall and decided to force Richard to dissolve Parliament.<sup>373</sup> However, the Army Grandees quickly lost control of the situation and, with few options before them, decided to support the growing movement favoring the recall of the Rump Parliament.<sup>374</sup> The rationale was laid out in *A Declaration of the Officers of the Army* presented on May 6. It arose from reflection upon how their commitment to carrying on the “great work” of “the Good Old Cause” had declined and how they had “been led to look back

<sup>371</sup> Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 714–20.

<sup>372</sup> *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Owen, Dr John (?1614–83).”

<sup>373</sup> Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 100.

<sup>374</sup> For the events associated with the recall of the Rump, see Henry Reece, *The Fall: Last Days of the English Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024), 78–122.

and examine the cause of the Lords withdrawing his wonted presence from us.”<sup>375</sup> Such analysis is entirely consistent with the vision Owen had laid out in the February sermon. Furthermore, Owen’s ambivalence toward political forms, articulated in this sermon, meant that he was willing to play an active role in facilitating this move and to preach to the reinstated Rump the day after it convened, on Sunday, May 8.<sup>376</sup> That morning was spent “in Praying and Hearing the Word, Dr. *Owen* praying and preaching before them.” Owen was thanked and invited to publish the sermon “with all convenient Speed” by Colonel John Jones and Major Salwey.<sup>377</sup> It was reported that “Doctor Owen entertained them with a comfortable Sermon.”<sup>378</sup> According to a Quaker source, Owen “calledst them dry Bones breathed into,” thus invoking a prophetic trope to speak of Parliament being divinely resurrected (Ezek. 37).<sup>379</sup> It seems likely that Owen would have shared the hope of the Army Grandees that the Council of State and Upper House would be replaced by a godly Senate, which would see through a program of reformation.<sup>380</sup> This was not to be, and in the coming months Owen would find himself at the very center of national political turmoil and collapse.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>375</sup> *A Declaration of the Officers of the Army, Inviting the Members of the Long Parliament, Who Continued sitting till the 20th of April, 1653 to Return to the Exercise and Discharge of Their Trust. Friday 6 May, 1659.* [ . . . ] (London, 1659), 2–3.

<sup>376</sup> *Mercurius Politicus* 566 (May 5–May 12, 1659), 424; Gribben, “Owen and Politics,” 101; Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 113.

<sup>377</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, 7:646. Jones, who had previously been a member of the Other House, became “an active member” of the restored Rump, playing “a prominent part in settling in the new government” and becoming a member of the new Council of State. The active republican Richard Salwey would also serve on the Council of State. He had been part of the group of Commonwealthmen who met with the Army Grandees to agree to the recall of the Rump in late April and early May. See *History of Parliament*, s.v. “Jones, John I (c. 1597–1660)” and “Salwey, Richard (1615–85).”

<sup>378</sup> *The Weekly Intelligencer of the Common-wealth* [ . . . ] (May 3–10, 1659), 8.

<sup>379</sup> *A Serious Letter to Dr. John Owen, Sent by a Small Friend of His, Relating to the Intendments of Wallingford-House; Also a Short Friendly Reply to a Late Pamphlet of His concerning Tithes* ([Oxford], [1660]), single sheet.

<sup>380</sup> Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 2:74.

<sup>381</sup> For a treatment of the events which ensued, see Ruth E. Mayers, 1659: *The Crisis of the Commonwealth* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2004). For Owen’s specific involvement, see Reece, *The Fall*, 176, 183, 195–96, 222, 312; Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 204–8.

# Outlines

## *THE STEADFASTNESS OF THE PROMISES, AND THE SINFULNESS OF STAGGERING*

- I. Introduction and contextualization
- II. A threefold description of Abraham's faith
  - A. Abraham's faith rested on the all-sufficiency of God
  - B. Abraham believed the promise of God
  - C. A fourfold description of the manner in which Abraham believed
    - 1. Abraham had hope
    - 2. Abraham's faith was strong
    - 3. Abraham was fully resolved
    - 4. Abraham did not stagger
- III. Main doctrinal observation: all staggering at the promises of God is from unbelief
  - A. The promise that Abraham would have seed of his own
    - 1. Abraham's situation when this promise was made
    - 2. The three elements of this promise of seed
    - 3. General and specific application
  - B. Staggering comes from unbelief
    - 1. Proof of this principle
    - 2. A twofold demonstration of the principle
      - a. Five theological reasons for confidence in the promises
        - i. God has done all that is necessary by way of confirmation
        - ii. God has the power and means to accomplish his promises

- iii. God is sincere in what he promises
- iv. God never forgets his promises
- v. Divine immutability ensures that the promises will not change
- b. Various providential reasons for confidence in the promises
- 3. Five applications of this principle
  - a. Those in power must learn to live by faith in all matters of policy and politics
  - b. God is faithful, so those in power must be faithful in propagation of the gospel, especially in Ireland
  - c. Those in power must believe the promises of the gospel
  - d. Warnings about the consequences of staggering in unbelief
  - e. Those in power must repent of all staggering in unbelief

*THE BRANCH OF THE LORD, THE BEAUTY OF SION*

- I. Introduction and contextualization
- II. Observation: Christ's church of saints is God's house
  - A. A threefold demonstration that the church is God's house
  - B. Three characteristics of God's house
    - 1. The church is a living house
    - 2. The church is a strong house
    - 3. The church is a glorious house
  - C. The church's relation to Jesus Christ
    - 1. Christ is the foundation, ark, altar, and candlestick of this house
      - a. Christ is the hidden foundation, supporting the whole weight of the building
      - b. Christ is the ark and mercy seat of this house
      - c. Christ is the altar of this house through his atonement and intercession
      - d. Christ is the candlestick, bringing light that shines out to the world

2. Christ is the owner, builder, watchman, inhabitant, and avenger of his house
  - a. Christ is the owner with a threefold title to this house by inheritance, purchase, and conquest
  - b. Three observations arising
    - i. Christ will defend his house
    - ii. Christ has the right to order his house
    - iii. Christ is jealous for his house
  - c. Christ builds his house with living stones
  - d. Two observations arising from this
    - i. The Master-builder puts life into dead stones
    - ii. Vows, promises, resolutions, and engagements are insufficient
  - e. Christ watches over his house in order to supply the needs of his people and to protect and avenge them
  - f. Three observations arising
    - i. Christ tries his church
    - ii. Christ protects his church
    - iii. Christ preserves his church
  - g. Christ inhabits his house by the Holy Spirit
  - h. Two observations arising
    - i. Clarifying the nature of union with Christ
    - ii. The Spirit is free to work as he pleases
  - i. Christ graciously makes the believer's heart his dwelling place
  - j. Christ inhabits the church as his royal court
  - k. Three observations arising
    - i. The intimacy of communion with Christ
    - ii. The danger of grieving his Spirit
    - iii. The value of the graces of Christ
  - l. Christ brings vengeance on all who persecute the saints of his house
3. Three general points of application
  - a. The privilege of being a living stone in this house
  - b. Not all assemblies have such status and privilege
  - c. History teaches persecutors of the true church will be destroyed

*THE ADVANTAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IN  
THE SHAKING OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD*

- I. God's works of providence
- II. The context of the text from Ezekiel
  - A. Two observations arising from a brief exposition of Ezekiel 17:22–23
    1. God's special work of advancing the kingdom of Christ
    2. All the nations will be brought into Christ's possession
- III. Exposition of the text
  - A. The work that God is doing
  - B. Introduction to the two main observations
    1. The reason for God's great works of providence
    2. The assurance that God's great work will be accomplished
- IV. First observation: In carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations
  - A. The three seasons in which these providential alterations take place
    1. The time of Christ and the apostles
    2. The growth of the church and the fall of the Roman Empire
    3. The Reformation and post-Reformation era
  - B. Two reasons for this observation
    1. Christ must take his inheritance out of the hands of his enemies
    2. The nature of this work involves vengeance, deliverance, and trial
  - C. Two applications arising
    1. In the British Civil Wars, God has been bringing down oppressors and raising up the saints
    2. Reasons to rejoice in these providential alterations
- V. Second observation: These providential alterations do not conform to the thoughts and expectations of many
  - A. Examples of this principle
    1. Examples from biblical history
    2. An example from recent history
  - B. Three reasons for this observation

1. The corrupt heart given over to judgment
  2. The glory of God
  3. Judicial hardening
  - C. One application arising: It is a foolish provocation to reject the work of God
- VI. General conclusion: Prepare to meet God
- A. A summary of what it means to prepare to meet the Lord
  - B. Meet God in his works of providence
    1. Cast down all opposition to Christ's kingdom in anticipation of the latter-day glory
      - a. Believe and pray, and those in power must be active in reformation
      - b. Consider the lessons of providence
    2. Reject all worldly glory
    3. Treasure the things of the kingdom
  - C. Meet God in worship
  - D. Meet God through holy living

*THE LABORING SAINT'S DISMISSION TO REST*

- I. Introduction and opening of the text
  - A. The servant is dismissed from his service
    1. The godly character and work of this servant
      - a. A loving, wise, and upright servant
      - b. A servant who rightly understood God's providential alterations
    2. A servant who died in service
    3. Observation: There is an appointed time for all servants to be dismissed
      - a. Daniel and Ireton were servants of similar character
        - i. Men of wisdom
        - ii. Lovers of God's people
        - iii. Righteous in public service
      - b. Daniel and Ireton both understood providential alterations
  - B. The servant is dismissed before the completion of his work
    1. The meaning of "the end"
    2. Observation: Servants often do not see their work completed

- C. The servant is released to rest
  - 1. Observation: Dismissed servants are at rest
- D. The servant is dismissed to rest until the end of days
  - 1. Observation: The intermediate state precedes the eternal state
  - 2. Observations concerning the appointed lot
- II. Treatment of the first observation: There is an appointed time for all servants to be dismissed
  - A. Three reasons for this doctrine
  - B. Two applications
    - 1. Servants should improve the time that has been allotted to them
      - a. Take Ireton as an example
      - b. A call to diligence
    - 2. Servants come and go, but the work is God's
- III. Treatment of the second observation: servants often do not see their work completed
  - A. Two reasons for this doctrine
  - B. Two applications
    - 1. Servants should seek their reward in the service itself
    - 2. Servants should be confident in their eternal hope
- IV. Treatment of the third observation: Saints are dismissed to their rest
  - A. This rest is freedom from sin, oppression, and grief
  - B. This glorious and satisfying rest is in God
- V. Treatment of the fourth observation: The intermediate state precedes the eternal state
- VI. Concluding application from Ireton's example

*CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST, AND  
THE POWER OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE ABOUT  
THE THINGS OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD*

- I. Introduction and opening of the text
  - A. The perplexing nature of the shaking of the nations
  - B. A survey of the establishment of the kingdom of Christ
    - 1. A survey of the progress within Daniel's vision
    - 2. The climax of the vision and a threefold analysis of Christ's kingdom

3. Five observations about the nature of Christ's kingdom
  - C. Seeking the mind of God
  - D. The peace that comes from a revelation of the mind of God
  - E. Summary of the three doctrines raised from the text
- II. Treatment of the main doctrine: The advancement of the kingdom of Christ often leaves the saints troubled and perplexed
  - A. Four reasons why the saints find themselves in such a condition
    1. The astonishing nature of what God is doing
    2. The mysterious manner in which God works
    3. The unsettling influence of the ungodly
    4. The unsettling effects of sin
  - B. Application: Instruction in how to find peace
    1. Be guided by the second observation: draw near to God in prayer
      - a. Three reasons to seek God in public and private prayer
    2. The magistrate should advance the cause of the gospel
      - a. Protect, promote, and propagate the gospel
      - b. Allow the church to be the church
  - C. Specific guidance to Parliament in the propagation of the gospel and in dealing with religious heterodoxy
    1. Understand the promises about God raising up godly rulers
      - a. These promises are for today
      - b. Magistrates are entrusted with particular responsibilities in matters of religion
      - c. Magistrates have a duty to use their power for the good of the church
    2. Understand five relevant principles
      - a. The gospel should be preached to every nation
      - b. Blessing and prosperity come to a nation that embraces the gospel
      - c. A nation that rejects the gospel will be rejected by God

- d. Magistrates have specific responsibilities in these matters
- e. Rightly understood, the Old Testament teaches these principles
- 3. Three rules for Parliament in the propagation of the gospel and in dealing with religious heterodoxy
  - a. Be committed to the truth of the gospel
  - b. There are no grounds for formally supporting error
  - c. The plea of conscience is insufficient grounds for rejecting this
- D. Conclusion

*GOD'S WORK IN FOUNDING ZION, AND  
HIS PEOPLE'S DUTY THEREUPON*

- I. Introduction and context
- II. Opening of the text and raising of four doctrines
  - A. Exposition of the inquiry: What shall one answer the messengers of the nations?
    - 1. Two doctrines raised from the exposition of the inquiry
  - B. First part of the exposition of the answer to the question: The Lord has founded Zion
    - 1. Doctrine raised from this first part of the answer
  - C. Second part of the exposition of the answer to the question: The poor of his people shall trust in it
    - 1. Doctrine raised from this second part of the answer
- III. Treatment of the first doctrine
  - A. Statement of the doctrine
  - B. Two reasons why the nations make such inquiries
    - 1. The nations are prompted by envy
    - 2. The nations are driven by fear
  - C. Application of the first doctrine
- IV. Treatment of the second doctrine
  - A. Statement of the doctrine
  - B. Two reasons why God's glorious works of providence may not be seen
    - 1. People may be blinded by selfishness
    - 2. People may be distracted by strife

- V. Treatment of the third doctrine
  - A. Statement of the doctrine
  - B. Three premises for this doctrine
    - 1. The people of God are to glorify him in their generation
    - 2. This generation should glorify God in the midst of divisions
    - 3. The people of God must submit to providence
  - C. Reasons for this doctrine
  - D. Application of the third doctrine, particularly to those in power
- VI. Treatment of the fourth doctrine
  - A. Statement of the doctrine
  - B. Two reasons why those in power have been slow to be persuaded
    - 1. Unwillingness to pursue the common interest of God's people
    - 2. The presumption that seeks to determine how God should work
  - C. First application: Those in power should be able to give an account of God's work in the English Revolution
    - 1. Objections answered
    - 2. Summary of what God has done for all the saints
    - 3. Specific application to those in power, supported by five reasons
    - 4. Summary of the answer that should be given
  - D. Second application: Directions to those in power about how to respond to what God is doing
    - 1. First direction: Reject any proposals for a church settlement that is incompatible with the common interest of the saints
      - a. Three words of caution
    - 2. Second direction: Be guided by the work of God in both domestic and foreign policy
  - E. Third application: Those in power must encourage, preserve, promote, and defend the work of the gospel
- VII. Concluding general directions

*GOD'S PRESENCE WITH A PEOPLE,  
THE SPRING OF THEIR PROSPERITY*

- I. Introduction and context
  - A. Doctrinal proposition raised from the preface
- II. Opening of the text in order to raise the main doctrinal observation
  - A. Distinguishing the four ways in which God may be said to be with a people
    1. By divine omnipresence
    2. By the incarnation
    3. By means of the covenant of grace
    4. By means of providence
  - B. Distinguishing the two ways in which a people may abide with God
    1. Personally
    2. Nationally
  - C. Main doctrine raised from the text
- III. Treatment of the main doctrine
  - A. Three initial premises
    1. The conditional nature of God's presence in respect of providential dispensations
    2. God's presence in providential dispensations is on the basis of mercy rather than merit
    3. God gives the ability to perform the conditions
  - B. Proofs confirming this doctrine
  - C. Two qualifications
    1. Outward prosperity is not necessarily evidence of God's special presence
    2. Trials do not necessarily mean that God has withdrawn his special presence
  - D. Application of the doctrine: Instruction
    1. Understand the nature of God's special presence with a nation
      - a. God will be present to guide and protect, even through political uncertainty
      - b. Special manifestations of God's presence with a nation, as seen in his works of providence, strengthen the saints

2. Understand how a nation can obtain and enjoy God's special presence
    - a. An essential prerequisite is a nation having godly rulers
    - b. Those in power must seek God's direction, trust him for protection, and submit to providence
    - c. Objections answered
  3. Those in power must prioritize the interest of Christ and his church
- IV. Three concluding applications
- A. Prioritize abiding with God at a national level in order to maintain God's special presence
  - B. Be reassured by providential signs of God's special presence with the nation
  - C. Maintain God's special presence through the Cromwellian church settlement and legal reform

*PROVIDENTIAL CHANGES, AN ARGUMENT  
FOR UNIVERSAL HOLINESS*

- I. Introduction and context
  - A. Peter's audience
    1. Scattered strangers
    2. Scoffed at by their countrymen
  - B. Peter's threefold purpose
  - C. Excursus: Consideration of the prophetic idiom of "heaven and earth"
- II. Opening the text in order to raise a doctrine
  - A. The foundation: Providential alterations will come, despite what scoffers say
  - B. The inference: This necessitates a heightened response of holiness
  - C. The exhortation: This is a call to comprehensive holiness
  - D. The call to universal holiness
- III. Treatment of the doctrine raised from the text
  - A. Statement of the doctrine
  - B. Defining the two great periods of providential alterations
    1. The destruction of the Jewish church and state in AD 70
    2. The destruction of the antichrist's church and state

- C. First ground of this doctrine: In providential alterations there is a special coming of Christ
  - 1. Objection answered
  - 2. The one who comes is holy
  - 3. The one who comes has kingly power and authority
  - 4. The one who comes has a loving heart of compassion
  - 5. Summary of the first ground of this doctrinal observation
- D. Second ground of this doctrine: In providential alterations Christ comes as judge
  - 1. Christ pleads with nations about their sin
  - 2. Christ exposes false professions of faith
  - 3. Christ engages in judicial hardening of the wicked
  - 4. Christ pleads with his people about their sins and temptations through a range of different ways and means
- E. Conclusion of the treatment of the first doctrinal observation
- IV. The providential alterations of the mid-century crisis is such a coming of Christ
  - A. Two initial premises about what has occurred
    - 1. England has been shaken
    - 2. This is a mighty work of God
  - B. Statement of the main question to determine
  - C. Four reasons for confidence
    - 1. The saints have experienced communion with God
      - a. Objections answered
    - 2. Oppression and idolatry have been removed
    - 3. Gospel light has come into the darkness
      - a. Objection answered
    - 4. The evidence suggests that prophecy is being fulfilled
- V. First main application: Examination of the response to this special coming of Christ
  - A. The response of the nation in general
  - B. The response of the saints in particular
    - 1. Division, rather than unity, and even the suggestion of persecution
    - 2. Many different forms of worldliness
    - 3. Failures with respect to the propagation of the gospel

4. Scandalous sin
5. Spiritual backsliding
- VI. Second main application: Exhortation and direction
  - A. Two initial premises about special motivations to comprehensive holiness
  - B. First direction: Serious consideration must be given to the promotion of generational holiness
    1. Words of caution
      - a. Beware the theological and practical dangers
        - i. Evidences of the prevalence of those dangers
      - b. Beware the danger of ceasing to serve God in this generation
      - c. Beware the danger of talking about holiness for unholy reasons
    2. Conclusion to the first direction
  - C. Second direction: Two essential ingredients for true holiness
    1. Stop loving earthly things
    2. Stop caring for perishing things
    3. Conclusion: Enlarge the heart with love for Christ
  - D. Third direction: Three motivations for this duty
    1. Holiness brings the inner peace that sustains the soul even in the loss of outer peace
    2. Holiness is the only way to save and reform the three nations
    3. Holiness will bring glory to Christ

*THE GLORY AND INTEREST OF NATIONS  
PROFESSING THE GOSPEL*

- I. Introduction and context
  - A. Promises made to a remnant in great distress
  - B. Promises of safety and preservation
- II. Opening the text to raise two doctrinal propositions
  - A. God is the source and pledge of these promises
    1. The creative power of God will preserve the remnant
    2. God will be present to guide and protect
  - B. Promises to a holy people
  - C. Exposition of the final clause of the text
  - D. Summary statement of the two doctrinal propositions

- III. Treatment of the main doctrine: The presence of Christ is the glory of any people
  - A. The glory of a people is not found in numbers, wisdom, strength, or wealth
  - B. The glory of a nation is Christ's presence with his people
    - 1. Empty profession is not the glory of a nation
    - 2. The fruitful profession of those united to Christ is the glory of a nation
  - C. Three reasons why the presence of Christ is the glory of a people
    - 1. The saints are precious in the eyes of God and have a great inheritance
    - 2. God's instruments may endure reproach, but by grace they are glorious
    - 3. The godly remnant preserves the nation and brings prosperity
  - D. The godly remnant preserved the nation during the English Revolution
  - E. Two applications of the doctrine
    - 1. Promote the interest of Christ in England, Scotland, and Ireland
      - a. Personal commitment to Christ is required, especially from those in power
      - b. Much is to be done because of declension and apostasy
      - c. A commitment to all the godly, regardless of their differences
      - d. First objection: Who is to be counted among the godly?
      - e. Response: Six considerations
      - f. Second objection: Are not the godly hopelessly divided?
      - g. Response: Three considerations
    - 2. Reassurance to the godly remnant

THE STEADFASTNESS  
OF THE PROMISES,  
AND THE SINFULNESS OF  
STAGGERING: OPENED IN  
A SERMON PREACHED  
AT MARGARET'S  
IN WESTMINSTER  
BEFORE PARLIAMENT  
FEBR. 28 1649

*Being a Day Set Apart for Solemn Humiliation  
throughout the Nation*

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By John Owen minister of the gospel

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London:  
Printed by Peter Cole, and are to be  
sold at his shop at the sign of  
the printing press in Cornhill, near the Royal  
Exchange, 1650



# [Dedication]<sup>1</sup>

TO THE COMMONS OF ENGLAND in Parliament assembled.

Sirs,

That God in whose hands your breath is, and whose are all your ways, having caused various seasons to pass over you, and in them all manifested that his “works are truth and his ways judgment,”<sup>2</sup> calls earnestly by them for that walking before him, which is required from them, who with other distinguishing mercies, are interested in the specialty of his protecting providence. As in a view of present enjoyments, to sacrifice to your net, and burn incense to your drag, as though by them your portion were fat and plenteous, is an exceeding provocation to the eyes of his glory.<sup>3</sup> So to press to the residue of your desires and expectations, by an arm of flesh, the designings and contrivances of carnal reason, with outwardly appearing mediums of their accomplishment, is no less an abomination to him. Though there may be a present sweetness to them that find “the life of the hand,”<sup>4</sup> yet their latter end will be, “to lie down in sorrow.”<sup>5</sup> That you might be prevailed on to give glory to God by steadfastness in believing, committing all your ways to him,<sup>6</sup> with patience in well doing,<sup>7</sup> to the contempt of

1 In the original, the words “Promises” and “Staggering” on the title page are set in all caps for emphasis. Further, the year 1649 should be corrected to 1650.

2 Dan. 4:37.

3 Hab. 1:16.

4 Isa. 57:10.

5 Isa. 50:11.

6 Ps. 37:5.

7 Gal. 6:9.

the most varnished appearance of carnal policy, was my peculiar aim, in this ensuing sermon.

That which added ready willingness to my obedience unto your commands for the preaching and publishing hereof, being a serious proposal for the advancement and propagation of the gospel in another nation,<sup>8</sup> is here again recommended to your thoughts, by

Your most humble servant,  
in our common Master,

J. O.

March 8, 1650.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A reference to Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> In the text: 1649.—Owen. This was the date on which the ordinance for the propagation of the gospel in Ireland was passed. See *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, eds. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, 3 vols. (London: HMSO, 1911), 2:355–57.

[Sermon]

# The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness of Staggering<sup>1</sup>

Opened in a Sermon Preached at Margaret's in Westminster,  
before Parliament 28 February 1650<sup>2</sup>

*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.*

ROMANS 4:20

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

In the first chapters of this epistle, the apostle from Scripture and the constant practice of all sorts of men, of all ages, Jews and Gentiles, wise and barbarians,<sup>3</sup> proves all the world, and every individual therein, to “have sinned and come short of the glory of God”:<sup>4</sup> and not only so, but that it was utterly impossible, that by their own strength, or by virtue of any assistance communicated, or privileges enjoyed, they should ever attain to a righteousness of their own,<sup>5</sup> that might be acceptable unto God.

Hereupon he concludes that discourse with these two positive assertions:

1. That for what is past, “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” Chapter 3:19.

1 In the original, the words “Promises” and “Staggering” are, again, set in all caps for emphasis.

2 In the text: Febr. 28 1649.—Owen. At the time, the new year was taken to begin on Lady Day, March 25.

3 Rom. 1:14.

4 Rom. 3:23.

5 Rom. 1:17; cf. Rom. 10:3; Phil. 3:9.

2. For the future, though they should labor to amend their ways, and improve their assistances and privileges to a better advantage than formerly, “yet by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God,” verse 20.

Now it being the main drift of the apostle, in this epistle, and in his whole employment, to manifest that God has not shut up all the sons of men, hopeless and remediless under this condition; he immediately, discovers and opens the rich supply, which God in free grace, has made and provided, for the delivery of his own from this calamitous estate, even by the righteousness of faith in Christ;<sup>6</sup> which he unfolds, asserts, proves, and vindicates from objections, to the end of the third chapter.

This being a matter of so great weight, as, comprising in itself the sum of the gospel wherewith he was entrusted; the honor and exaltation of Christ, which above all he desired; the great design of God to be glorious in his saints;<sup>7</sup> and, in a word, the chief subject of the ambassage<sup>8</sup> from Christ, to him committed (to wit, that they who neither have, nor by any means can attain, a righteousness of their own, by the utmost of their workings, may yet have that which is complete and unrefusable in Christ, by believing), he therefore strongly confirms it in the fourth chapter, by testimony and example of the Scripture, with the saints that were of old: thereby also declaring, that though the manifestation of this mystery,<sup>9</sup> were now more fully opened by Christ from “the bosom of the Father,”<sup>10</sup> yet indeed this was the only way for any to appear in the presence of God, ever since sin entered the world.

To make his demonstrations the more evident, he singles out one for an example, who was eminently known, and confessed by all to have been “the friend of God,”<sup>11</sup> to have been righteous and justified before him, and thereon to have held sweet communion with him all his days; to wit, Abraham, the father according to the flesh,<sup>12</sup> of all those who put in the strongest of all men for a share in righteousness, by the privileges they did enjoy, and the works they did perform.

Now concerning him, the apostle proves abundantly in the beginning of the fourth chapter, that the justification which he found, and the righteousness he attained, was purely that, and no other, which he before described; to wit, a righteousness in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the blood of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 3:22.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Thess. 1:10.

<sup>8</sup> I.e., the message entrusted to an ambassador.

<sup>9</sup> Col. 1:26.

<sup>10</sup> John 1:18.

<sup>11</sup> James 2:23.

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 4:1.

<sup>13</sup> Rom. 3:25.

Yea, and that all the privileges and exaltations of this Abraham, which made him so signal and eminent among the saints of God, as to be called the father of the faithful, were merely from hence, that this righteousness of grace, was freely discovered, and fully established unto him: an enjoyment being granted him in a peculiar manner, by faith, of that promise, wherein the Lord Christ with the whole spring of the righteousness mentioned, was enwrapped.

This the apostle pursues with sundry and various inferences, and conclusions, to the end of verse 17, chapter 4.

### A THREEFOLD DESCRIPTION OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

Having laid down this, in the next place he gives us a description of that faith of Abraham, whereby he became inheritor of those excellent things, from the adjuncts of it. That as his justification was proposed as an example of God's dealing with us by his grace, so his faith might be laid down as a pattern for us, in the receiving that grace.

Now, this he does, from—

1. The foundation of it, whereon it rested.
2. The matter of it, what he believed.
3. The manner of it, or how he believed.

#### **Abraham's Faith Rested on the All-Sufficiency of God**

1. From the bottom and foundation on which it rested, viz., the omnipotency or all-sufficiency of God, whereby he was able to fulfill whatever he had engaged himself unto by promise, and which he called him to believe, "He believed him who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were," verse 14.<sup>14</sup>

Two great testimonies are here of the power of God: (1) That he "quickeneth the dead," able he is to raise up those that are dead to life again. (2) He "calleth things that are not, as though they were": by his very call or word, gives being to those things which before were not: as when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), by that very word "commanding light to shine out of darkness" (2 Cor. 4:6).

These demonstrations of God's all-sufficiency he considers in peculiar reference to what he was to believe; to wit, that "he might be the father of many nations," verse 11, of the Jews, "according to the flesh" of Jews and Gentiles, according to the faith whereof we speak.

<sup>14</sup> Following Goold, this should be corrected to verse 17.

(1) For the first, “his body being now dead, and Sarah’s womb dead,” verse 19, he rests on God “as quickening the dead,” in believing that he “shall be the father of many nations.”

(2) For the other, that he should be a father of the Gentiles by faith, the Holy Ghost witnesses that they “were not a people” (Hos. 2:23), the implanting of them in his stock must be by a power “that calleth things that are not, as though they were”:<sup>15</sup> giving a new nature, and being unto them, which before they had not.

To bottom ourselves upon the all-sufficiency of God, for the accomplishment of such things, as are altogether impossible to anything, but that all-sufficiency, is faith indeed, and worthy our imitation: it is also the wisdom of faith, to pitch peculiarly on that in God, which is accommodated to the difficulties wherewith it is to wrestle: is Abraham to believe that from his dead body, must spring a whole nation? He rests on God, as “him that quickeneth the dead.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Abraham Believed the Promise of God**

2. His faith is commended from the matter of it, or what he did believe: which is said in general to be “the promise of God”: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief,” verse 20. And particularly the matter of that promise is pointed at, verses 11, 18, that he should be “the father of many nations”: that was, his being a “father of many nations,” of having “all nations blessed in his seed.” A matter entangled with a world of difficulties, considering the natural inability of his body, and the body of Sarah, to be parents of children.

*When God calls for believing, his truth and all-sufficiency being engaged, no difficulty nor seeming impossibilities, that the thing to be believed is or may be attended withal, ought to be of any weight with us. He who has promised, is able.*<sup>17</sup>

### **A Fourfold Description of the Manner in Which Abraham Believed**

3. From the manner of his believing, which is expressed four ways.

#### *Abraham Had Hope*

(1) “Against hope, he believed in hope”: verse 18. Here is a twofold hope mentioned, one that was against him, the other, that was for him.

[1] He “believed against hope,” that is, when all arguments that might beget hope in him, were against him. “Against hope,” is against all motives unto hope

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 4:17.

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 4:17.

<sup>17</sup> The italicization of the original is preserved because it marks out what Owen would, typically, refer to as an observation.

whatever. All reasons of natural hope were against him: what hope could arise, in, or by reason, that two dead bodies, should be the source and fountain of many nations? So that against all inducements of a natural hope he believed.

[2] He “believed in hope”: that is such hope as arose as his faith did from the consideration of God’s all-sufficiency; this is an adjunct of his faith, it was such a faith as had hope adjoined with it: and this believing in hope, when all reasons of hope were away, is the first thing that is set down, of the manner of his faith.

*In a decay of all natural helps, the deadness of all means, an appearance of an utter impossibility, that ever the promise should be accomplished, then to believe with unfeigned hope, is a commendable faith.*

### *Abraham’s Faith Was Strong*

(2) He was “not weak in faith”: verse 19, μὴ ἀσθενήσας, “not weak,” is the second thing. *Minime debilis*:<sup>18</sup> Beza. He was by “no means weak.” A negation that, by a figure (μείωσις)<sup>19</sup> does strongly assert the contrary, to that which is denied. He was no way weak; that is, he was very strong in faith, as is afterward expressed, verse 20, he “was strong in faith, giving glory to God.”

And the apostle tells you, wherein this his “not weakness” did appear: says he, “He considered not his own body being now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb”: verse 19. It was seen in this, that his faith carried him above the consideration of all impediments, that might lie in the way to the accomplishment of the promise.

*It is mere weakness of faith, that makes a man lie poring on the difficulties and seeming impossibilities that lie upon the promise.* We think it our wisdom, and our strength, to consider, weigh and look into the bottom of oppositions, and temptations, that arise against the promise. Perhaps it may be the strength of our fleshly, carnal reason; but certainly, it is the weakness of our faith: he that is “strong in faith,” will not so much as debate or consider the things, that cast the greatest seeming improbability, yea impossibility, on the fulfilling of the promise. It will not afford a debate or dispute of the cause, nor any consideration. “Being not weak in faith, he considered not.”

### *Abraham Was Fully Resolved*

(3) He was “fully persuaded,” verse 21, πληροφορηθεῖς, he was *persuasionis plenus*,<sup>20</sup> fully persuaded: this is the third thing that is observed in the manner

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Beza, *Annotationes majores in Nouum Jesu Christi Testamentum*, “Ad Romanos” (Geneva, 1594), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Gk. *meiosis*, a figure of speech involving understatement.

<sup>20</sup> Beza, “Ad Romanos,” 54.

of his believing. He fully, quietly, resolutely cast himself on this, that “he who had promised was able to perform it.” As a ship at sea (for so the word imports), looking about, and seeing storms and winds arising, sets up all her sails, and with all speed, makes to the harbor. Abraham seeing the storms of doubts and temptations, likely to rise against the promise made unto him, with full sail breaks through all, to lie down quietly in God’s all-sufficiency. And this is the third.

*Abraham Did Not Stagger*

(4) The fourth is, that “he staggered not,” verse 20. This is that which I have chosen to insist on unto you, as a choice part of the commendation of Abraham’s faith, which is proposed for our imitation: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.”

MAIN DOCTRINAL OBSERVATION

The words may be briefly resolved into this doctrinal proposition:

Obs[ervation]. *All staggering at the promises of God is from unbelief.*

What is of any difficulty in the text, will be cleared in opening the parts of the observation.

Men are apt to pretend sundry other reasons and causes of their staggering. The promises do not belong unto them, God intends not their souls in them, they are not such, and such, and this makes them stagger: when the truth is, it is their unbelief, and that alone, that puts them into this staggering condition. As in other things, so in this, we are apt to have many fair pretenses for foul faults. To lay the burden on the right shoulders, I shall demonstrate by God’s assistance, that it is not this, or that, but unbelief alone, that makes us stagger at the promises.

To make this the more plain, I must open these two things:

1. What is the promise here intended?
2. What it is, to stagger at the promise?

**The Promise That Abraham Would Have Seed of His Own**

*Abraham’s Situation When This Promise Was Made*

1. The promise here mentioned is principally that which Abraham believing, it was said eminently that “it was accounted to him for righteousness”: so the apostle tells us, verse 5 of this chapter: When this was, you may see Genesis 15:6; there it is affirmed, that “he believed the Lord, and it was accounted

to him for righteousness.” That which God had there spoken to him of, was about “the multiplying of his seed as the stars of heaven,”<sup>21</sup> whereas he was yet childless.

The last verse of chapter 14 leaves Abraham full of earthly glory. He had newly conquered five kings with all their host: honored by the king of Sodom, and blessed by the king of Salem; and yet in the first verse of chapter 15, God, “appearing to him in a vision,” in the very entrance, bids him “fear not”:<sup>22</sup> plainly intimating, that notwithstanding all his outward success and glory, he had still many perplexities upon his spirit, and had need of great consolation and establishment: Abraham was not clear in the accomplishment of former promises about the blessed seed, and so though he have all outward advancements, yet he cannot rest in them. Until a child of God be clear in the main, in the matter of the great promise, the business of Christ, the greatest outward successes and advantages, will be so far from quieting and settling his mind, that they rather increase his perplexities. They do but occasion him to cry, “Here is this and that; here is victory and success; here is wealth and peace; but here is not Christ.”

That this was Abraham’s condition, appears from verse 2 of that chapter, where God having told him that he was his “shield,” and his “exceeding great reward,” he replies, “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” As if he should have said, “Lord God, you told me when I was in Haran, now 19 years ago, that in me and my seed all the families of the earth should be blessed,” (Gen. 12:3). “That the blessed, blessing seed, should be of me: but now I wax old, all appearances grow up against the direct accomplishment of that word, and it was that which above all in following you, I aimed at; if I am disappointed therein, what shall I do? And what will all these things avail me? What will it benefit me to have a multitude of earthly enjoyments, and leave them in the close to my servant?”

I cannot but observe, that this sighing mournful complaint of Abraham, has much infirmity, and something of diffidence, mixed with it. He shakes in the very bottom of his soul, that improbabilities were growing up as he thought to impossibilities against him in the way of promise: yet hence also mark these two things:

(1) That he does not repine in himself, and keep up his burning thoughts in his breast, but sweetly breathes out the burden of his soul into the bosom

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 22:17.

<sup>22</sup> In the original, this is set in all caps for emphasis.

of his God: “Lord God,” says he, “what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless?” *It is of sincere faith, to unlade our unbelief in the bosom of our God.*<sup>23</sup>

(2) That God takes not his servant at the advantage of his complaining and diffidence: but lets that pass, until having renewed the promise to him, and settled his faith, then he gives in his testimony, that he believed God. *The Lord overlooks the weakness and causeless wailings of his, takes them at the best, and then gives his witness to them.*

### *The Three Elements of This Promise of Seed*

This I say was the promise whereof we spoke, that he should have a seed of his own, “like the stars that cannot be numbered” (Gen. 15:4–5). And herein are contained three things.

(1) The purely spiritual part of it, that concerned his own soul in Christ. God engaging about his seed, minds him of his own interest, in that seed which brings the blessing. Jesus Christ, with his whole mediation, and his whole work of redemption, is in this promise, with the enjoyment of God in covenant, “as a shield, and as an exceeding great reward.”<sup>24</sup>

(2) The kingdom of Christ, in respect of the propagation and establishment of it, with the multitude of his subjects, that also is in this promise.

(3) The temporal part of it, multitudes of children to a childless man: and “an heir from his own bowels.”<sup>25</sup>

### *General and Specific Application*

Now this promise, in these three branches, takes up your whole interest, comprises all you are to believe for, be you considered either as believers, or as rulers.

(1) As believers: so your interest lies in these two things: 1. that your own souls have a share and portion in the Lord Christ: 2. that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus be exalted and established.

(2) As rulers: that peace and prosperity may be the inheritance of the nation, is in your desires: look upon this in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, and so all these are in this promise.

To make this more plain, these being the three main things that you aim at, I shall lay before you three promises, suited to these several things, which or the like, you are to view in all your actings, all staggering at them being from unbelief.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Parker challenged Owen on this point in *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie* (London, 1671), 208.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 15:1.

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 15:4.

(1) The first thing you are to believe for, is the interest of your own souls in the covenant of grace, by Christ: as to this I shall only point unto that promise of the covenant, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins, and their iniquities, I will remember no more” (Heb. 8:12).

(2) The second is the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, in despite of all opposition: and for this among innumerable, take that of Isaiah 60:11. “Therefore thy gates shall be open continually, they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought; for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee, shall perish.”<sup>26</sup>

(3) The quiet and peace of the nation, which you regard as rulers, as it stands in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, comes also under the promise, for which take that of Jeremiah 30:20–21.

These being your three main aims, let your eye be fixed on these three, or the like promises; for in the demonstration and the use of the point, I shall carry along all three together: desiring that what is instanced in anyone, may be always extended to both the others.

### Staggering Comes from Unbelief

2. What is it to stagger at the promise: “He staggered not,” οὐ διεκρίθη, “he disputed not”; διακρίνομαι is properly to make use of our own judgment and reason, in discerning of things, of what sort they be. It is sometimes rendered, “to doubt” (Matt. 21:21); “If ye have faith” καὶ μὴ διακριθῆτε, “and doubt not”; that is, not use arguings and reasonings in yourselves concerning the promise and things promised. Sometimes it simply denotes to discern a thing as it is: so the word is used, διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα, “Discerning the body” (1 Cor. 11:29).

In the sense wherein it is here used, as also Matthew 21:21, it holds out, as I said, a self-consultation and dispute, concerning those contrary things that are proposed to us. So also Acts 10:20, Peter is commanded to obey the vision, μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, “nothing doubting”: what is that? Why, a not continuing to do, what he is said to have done, verse 17, “He doubted in himself what the vision he had seen should mean”: he rolled, and disputed it in his own thoughts, he staggered at it.

To stagger then at the promise, is to take into consideration the promise itself, and withal, all the difficulties that lie in the way for the accomplishment of it, as to a man’s own particular, and then so to dispute it in his thoughts, as not fully to cast it off, nor fully to close with it. For instance, the

<sup>26</sup> Isa. 60:11–12.

soul considers the promise of free grace in the blood of Jesus, looks upon it, weighs as well as it is able, the truth of God, who makes the promise, with those other considerations, which might lead the heart to rest firmly upon it; but withal, takes into his thoughts, his own unworthiness, sinfulness, unbelief, hypocrisy, and the like; which as he supposes, powerfully stave off the efficacy of the promise from him. Hence he knows not what to conclude: if he add a grain of faith, the scale turns on the side of the promise; the like quantity of unbelief, makes it turn upon him; and what to do he knows not: let go the promise he cannot, take fast hold he dares not; but here he staggers and wavers to and fro.

### *Proof of This Principle*

Thus the soul comes to be like Paul, in another case (Phil. 1:23). He considered his own advantage on the one side by his dissolution, and the profit of the churches by his abiding in the flesh on the other; and taking in these various thoughts, he cries out, he is in a strait, he staggered, he was betwixt two, and knew not which to choose: or as David, when he had a tender of several corrections made to him, says, "I am in a great strait" (2 Sam. 24:14); he sees evil in every one, and knows not which to choose.

A poor creature looking upon the promise sees, as he supposes, in a steadfast closing with the promise, that there lies presumption; on the other hand, certain destruction, if he believes not: and now he staggers, he is in a great strait: arguments arise on both sides, he knows not how to determine them, and so hanging in suspense, he staggers.

Like a man traveling a journey, and meeting with two several paths, that promise both fairly, and he knows not which is his proper way; he guesses, and guesses, and at length cries, "Well, I know not which of these ways I should go, but this is certain, if I mistake, I am undone, I'll go in neither, but here I'll sit down, and not move one step in either of them, until someone come, that can give me direction." The soul very frequently sits down in this hesitation, and refuses to step one step forward, till God come mightily and lead out the spirit to the promise, or the devil turn it aside to unbelief.

It is, as a thing of small weight in the air: the weight that it has, carries it downward; and the air, with some breath of wind, bears it up again: so that it waves to and fro: sometimes it seems as though it would fall, by its own weight, and sometimes again, as though it would mount quite out of sight, but poised between both, it tosses up and down, without any great gaining either way.

The promise, draws the soul upward, and the weight of its unbelief, that sinks it downward: sometimes the promise attracts so powerfully, you would

think the heart quite drawn up into it: and sometimes again unbelief presses down, that you would think it gone forever; but neither prevails utterly, the poor creature swags<sup>27</sup> between both, this is to stagger: like the two disciples going to Emmaus, “They talked together of the things that were happened” (Luke 24:14): debated the business: and verse 22 they gave up the result of their thoughts; they “trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel.”<sup>28</sup> They trusted once, but now seeing him slain and crucified, they know not what to say to it: What then? Do they quite give over all trusting in him? No, they cannot do so, verses [22–24]. Certain women had astonished them, and affirmed that he was risen: yea, and others also, going to his grave, found it so: hereupon they have communication within themselves, and are sad, verse 17, that is, they staggered; they were in a staggering condition: much appears for them, something against them, they know not what to do.

A poor soul that has been long perplexed in trouble and anxiety of mind, finds a sweet promise, Christ in a promise suited to all his wants, coming with mercy to pardon him, with love to embrace him, with blood to purge him, and is raised up to roll himself in some measure upon this promise: on a sudden, terrors arise, temptations grow strong, new corruptions break out, Christ in the promise dies to him, Christ in the promise is slain, is in the grave as to him; so that he can only sigh, and say, “I trusted for deliverance by Christ, but now all is gone again, I have little or no hope, Christ in the promise is slain to me.” What then? Shall he give over, never more inquire after this buried Christ, but sit down in darkness and sorrow? No, he cannot do so: this morning some new arguments of Christ’s appearance again upon the soul, are made out; it may be, Christ is not forever lost to him. What does he then? Steadfastly believe he cannot, totally give over he will not: he staggers: he is full of self-consultations and is sad. This it is to stagger at the promise of God. I come now to prove, that notwithstanding any pretenses whatever, all this staggering is from unbelief.

The two disciples, whom we now mentioned that staggered and disputed between themselves in their journey to Emmaus, thought they had a good reason, and a sufficient appearing cause of all their doubtings: “We hoped,” say they, “that it was he, that should have delivered Israel.” What do they now stand at? Alas! The “chief priests and rulers have condemned him to death, and crucified him” (Luke 24:20). And is it possible that deliverance should arise from a crucified man? This makes them stagger. But when our Savior

<sup>27</sup> I.e., moves unsteadily without control.

<sup>28</sup> Following Goold, the citation should be corrected to Luke 24:21.

himself draws nigh to them, and gives them the ground of all this, he tells them it is all from hence; they are “foolish and slow of heart to believe,” verse 25. Here is the rise of all their doubtings, even their unbelief. While you are slow of heart to believe, do not once think of establishment.

Peter venturing upon the waves at the command of Christ (Matt. 14), seeing “the wind to grow boisterous,” verse 29,<sup>29</sup> he also has a storm within, and cries out, “Oh save me”: what was now the cause of Peter’s fear and crying out? Why the wind and sea grew boisterous, and he was ready to sink: no such thing; but merely unbelief, want of faith: verse 31. “O thou of little faith” (says our Savior) “wherefore didst thou doubt?” It was not the great winds, but your little faith that made you stagger. And in three or four other places, upon several occasions, does our Savior lay all the wavering and staggering of his followers, as to any promised mercy, upon this score, as Matthew 6:30 and 8:26.

Ahaz being afraid of the combination of Syria and Ephraim against him, received a promise of deliverance by Isaiah (Isa. 7:7) whereupon the prophet tells him, and all Judah, that “if they will not believe, surely they shall not be established,” verse 9. He does not say, “If Damascus and Ephraim be not broken, you shall not be established”; no, the stick is not there: the fear that you will not be established, arises merely from your unbelief, that keeps you off from closing with the promise, which would certainly bring you establishment.

And this is the sole reason the apostle gives, why the word of promise being preached, becomes unprofitable; even because of unbelief: it was not “mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2).

### *A Twofold Demonstration of the Principle*

But these things will be more clear under the demonstration of the point; which are two:

#### Five Theological Reasons for Confidence in the Promises

(1) Dem[onstration]. When a man doubts, hesitates and disputes, anything in himself, his reasonings must have their rise, either from something within himself, or from something in the things concerning which he staggers: either *certitudo mentis*, “the assurance of his mind,” or *certitudo entis*, the “certainty of the thing itself,” is wanting.<sup>30</sup>

He that doubts whether his friend in a far country be alive or no, his staggering arises from the uncertainty of the thing itself: when that is made out,

<sup>29</sup> Following Goold, this should be corrected to verse 30.

<sup>30</sup> A distinction between the certainty of the object (*certitudo entis*) and the certainty of the mind about that object (*certitudo mentis*).

he is resolved, as it was with Jacob in the case of Joseph.<sup>31</sup> But he that doubts whether the needle in the compass, being touched with the lodestone,<sup>32</sup> will turn northward; all the uncertainty is in his own mind.

When men stagger at the promises, this must arise either from within themselves, or some occasion must be administered hereunto, from the promise. If from within themselves, that can be nothing but unbelief; an inbred obstacle to closing with, and resting on the promise, that is unbelief. If then we demonstrate that there is nothing in the promise, either as to matter or manner, or any attendancy of it, that should occasion any such staggering, we lay the burden and blame on the right shoulders, the sin of staggering on unbelief.

Now that any occasion is not administered, nor cause given, of this staggering, from the promise, will appear if we consider seriously whence any such occasion or cause should arise. All the stability of a promise, depends upon the qualifications of the promiser, to the ends and purposes of the promise. If a man make me a promise to do such and such things for me, and I question, whether ever it will be so, or no; it must be from a doubt of the want of one of these things in him that makes the promise: either [1] of truth, or [2] of ability to make good his word, because of the difficulty of the thing itself; or [3] of sincerity to intend me really, what he speaks of; or [4] of constant memory to take the opportunity of doing the thing intended; or [5] of stable-ness to be still of the same mind. Now if there be no want of any of these in him whose promises we speak of, there is then certainly no ground of our staggering, but only from our own unbelief.

*God Has Done All That Is Necessary by Way of Confirmation*

Let us now see whether any of these things, be wanting to the promises of God: and begin we with the first:

[1] Is there truth in these promises? If there be the least occasion in the world, to suspect the truth of the promises, or the veracity of the promiser, then may our staggering at them arise from thence, and not from our own unbelief. On this ground it is, that all human faith, that is bottomed merely on the testimony of man, is at best but a probable opinion: for every man is a liar, and possibly may lie, in that very thing, he is engaged to us in. Though a good man will not do so, to save his life, yet it is possible, he may be tempted, he may do so: but now the author of the promises whereof we speak is

<sup>31</sup> Gen. 45:27.

<sup>32</sup> I.e., iron oxide used as a magnet.

truth itself. The God of truth. Who has taken this as his special attribute, to distinguish him, from all other. He is the very God of truth; and holds out this very attribute in a special manner, in this very thing, in making of his promise. "He is faithful to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9) whence his word is said not only to be true, but "truth" (John 17:17), truth itself: "All flesh is as grass," but his "word abides for ever" (Isa. 40:6, 8).

But yet farther, that it may be evident, that from hence there can be no occasion of staggering. This God of truth, whose word is truth, has in his infinite wisdom, condescended to our weakness, and used all possible means, to cause us to apprehend the truth of his promises. The Lord might have left us in the dark, to have gathered out his mind and will toward us, from obscure expressions: and knowing of what value his kindness is, it might justly be expected that we should do so. Men in misery, are glad to lay hold of the least word, that drops from him that can relieve them, and to take courage and advantage upon it: as the servants of Ben-hadad, watched diligently, what would fall from the mouth of Ahab, concerning their master, then in fear of death: and when he had occasionally called him his brother, they presently laid hold of it, and cry, "Thy brother Benhadad" (1 Kings 20:33). God might have left us, and yet have manifested much free grace, to have gathered up falling crumbs or occasional droppings of mercy, and supply: that we should have rejoiced to have found out one word looking that way: but to shut up all objections, and to stop forever the mouth of unbelief, he has not only spoken plainly, but has condescended to use all the ways of confirming the truth of what he says and speaks, that ever were in use among the sons of men.

There be four ways, whereby men seek to obtain credit to what they speak, as an undoubted truth, that there may be no occasion of staggering.

{1} By often averring and affirming of the same thing. When a man says the same thing again and again, it is a sign that he speaks the truth, or, at least, that he would be thought so to do. Yea, if an honest man do clearly, fully, plainly, often engage himself to us in the same thing, we count it a vile jealousy not to believe the real truth of his intentions. Now the Lord in his promises often speaks the same things, he speaks once and twice. There is not anything that he has promised us, but he has done it, again, and again. For instance; as if he should say, "I will be merciful to your sins;" I pray believe me, for "I will pardon your iniquities," yea, it shall be so, "I will blot out your transgressions as a cloud."<sup>33</sup> There is not any want, whereunto we are liable, but thus he has dealt concerning it. As his command is line upon

<sup>33</sup> Isa. 44:22.

line, so is his promise. And this is one way, whereby God causes the truth of his promises to appear. To take away all color of staggering, he speaks once, yea twice, if we will hear.

{2} The second way of confirming any truth, is by an oath. Though we fear the truth of some men in their assertions, yet when once they come to swear anything in justice and judgment, there are very few so knowingly profligate, and past all sense of God, but that their asseverations<sup>34</sup> do gain credit, and pass for truth. Hence the apostle tells us, that “an oath for confirmation, is to men an end of all strife” (Heb. 6:16). Though the truth be before, ambiguous and doubtful, yet when any interposes with an oath, there is no more contest among men. That nothing may be wanting to win our belief to the promises of God, he has taken this course also, he has sworn to their truth, “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself” (Heb. 6:13). He confirms his promise by an oath. “Oh blessed we, for whose sake God swears! Oh most miserable, if we believe not the Lord even when He swears!”<sup>35</sup> When Christ came, “in whom all the promises of God, are, yea and amen,”<sup>36</sup> to make sure work of the truth of them, he is confirmed in his administration by an oath (Heb. 7:21). He was made a priest by “an oath by him that said, ‘The Lord sware, and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever’”: Now I pray, what is the cause of this great condescension in the God of heaven, to confirm that word, which in itself, is truth, by an oath? The apostle satisfies us as to the end aimed at (Heb. 6:17–18). This was (says he) the aim of God herein, that his people seeing him engaged by “two such immutable things” as his promise and his oath, may be assured that there is an utter impossibility, that any one word of his should come short of its truth; or that they firmly resting upon it, should be deceived thereby. And this is a second way.

{3} Another course whereby men confirm the truth of what they speak, is, by entering into covenant to accomplish what they have spoken. A covenant gives strength to the truth of any engagement. When a man has but told you he will do such and such things for you, you are full of doubts and fears, that he may break with you: but when he has indented in a covenant, and you can

<sup>34</sup> I.e., solemn affirmation or declaration.

<sup>35</sup> In the text: *O felices nos, quorum causâ Deus jurat; O infelices, si nec juranti Deo credimus!* This is a quotation from Tertullian *On Repentance* 4.8. For the Latin text, see Tertullian, *De paenitentia*, ed. Philippus Borleffs, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 76 (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1957), 149. For the English translation, see Tertullian, *On Repentance*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1886; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 3:660.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Cor. 1:20.

show it under his hand and seal, you look upon that, consider that, and are very secure. Even this way also has the Lord taken to confirm and establish his truths and promises, that all doubtings and staggerings may be excluded, he has wrapped them all up in a covenant, and brought himself into a federal engagement, that upon every occasion, and at every temptation, we may draw out his hand and seal, and say to Satan and our own false hearts: “See here, behold God engaged in covenant, to make good the word wherein he has caused me to put my trust: and this is his property, that he is a God keeping covenant”: so that having his promise redoubled, and that confirmed by an oath, all sealed and made sure by an unchangeable covenant, what can we require more, to assure us of the truth of these things: But yet further.

{4} In things of very great weight, and concernment, such as whereon lives, and the peace of nations do depend, men use to give hostages, for the securing each other of the faith and truth of all their engagements; that they may be mutual pledges of their truth and fidelity. Neither has the Lord left this way unused to confirm his promise. He has given us a hostage to secure us of his truth: one exceedingly dear to him; one always in his bosom, of whose honor, he is as careful, as of his own. Jesus Christ is the great hostage of his Father’s truth: the pledge of his fidelity in his promises. God has set him forth, and given him to us for this end. “Behold the Lord himself shall give you a sign” (a sign that he will fulfill his word), “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). That you may be assured of my truth, the virgin’s son shall be a hostage of it. “In him are all the promises of God yea and amen.” Thus also to his saints he gives the farther hostage of his Spirit, and the firstfruits of glory; that the full accomplishment of all his promises, may be contracted in a little, and presented to their view: as the Israelites had the pleasures of Canaan in the clusters of grapes brought from thence.<sup>37</sup>

Now from all this it is apparent, not only that there is truth in all the promises of God, but also that truth so confirmed, so made out, established, that not the least occasion imaginable, is thence administered to staggering or doubting. He that disputes the promise, and knows not how to close with them, must find out another cause of his so doing: as to the truth of the promise, there is no doubt at all, nor place for any.

*God Has the Power and Means to Accomplish His Promises*

[2] But secondly, though there be truth in the promise, yet there may want ability in the promiser to accomplish the thing promised, because of its

<sup>37</sup> Num. 13:23–24.

manifold difficulties. This may be a second cause of staggering, if the thing itself engaged for, be not compassable, by the ability of the engager. As if a skillful physician, should promise a sick man recovery from his disease, though he could rely upon the truth and sincerity of his friend, yet he cannot but question his ability as to this, knowing that to cure the least distemper, is not absolutely in his power: but when he promises, who is able to perform, then all doubting in this kind, is removed. See then whether it be so, in respect of these promises whereof we speak. When God comes to Abraham, to engage himself in that covenant of grace, from whence flow all the promises whereof we treat: he lays this down as the bottom of all, "I am," (says he) "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1) or "God all-sufficient," very well able to go through with whatever I promise. When difficulties, temptations, and troubles arise, remember who it is that has promised; not only he that is true and faithful, but he that is "God Almighty," before whom nothing can stand, when he will accomplish his word. And that this was a bottom of great confidence to Abraham, the apostle tells you, "Being fully persuaded that he who had promised, was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). When God is engaged by his word, his ability is especially to be eyed. The soul is apt to ask, "How can this be? It is impossible it should be so to me": but, "he is able that hath promised." And this, the same apostle holds out to us, to fix our faith upon, in reference to that great promise of recalling the Jews, and reimplanting them into the vine. "God," (says he) "is able to graft them in" (Rom. 11:23); though now they seem as dead bones, yet the Lord knows they may live; for he is able to breathe upon them,<sup>38</sup> and make them "terrible as an army with banners":<sup>39</sup> yea so excellent is this all-sufficiency, this ability of God to accomplish his whole word, that the apostle cautions us, that we do not bound it, as though it could go so far only, or so far: nay says he, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

When men come to close with the promise indeed, to make a life upon it, they are very ready to question and inquire, whether it be possible that ever the word of it, should be made good to them. He that sees a little boat swimming at sea, observes no great difficulty in it, looks upon it without any solicitousness of mind at all, beholds how it tosses up and down, without any fears of its sinking: but now, let this man commit his own life to sea in that bottom, what inquiries will he make? What a search into the vessel? "Is it possible," (says he) "this little thing should safeguard my life in the ocean?" It is so with us, in our view of the promises: while we consider them at large,

<sup>38</sup> Ezek. 37:1–10.

<sup>39</sup> Song 6:4.

as they lie in the word, alas! They are all true, all “yea and amen,” shall be all accomplished: but when we go to venture our souls upon a promise, in an ocean of wrath and temptations, then every blast we think will overturn it: it will not bear us above all these waves; is it possible we should swim safely upon the plank of a pinnacle<sup>40</sup> in the midst of the ocean?

Now here we are apt to deceive ourselves, and mistake the whole thing in question, which is the bottom of many corrupted reasonings and perplexed thoughts. We inquire whether it can be so to us as the word holds out; when the truth is, the question is not about the nature of the thing; but about the power of God. Place the doubt aright, and it is this, is God able to accomplish what he has spoken? Can he heal my backslidings? Can he pardon my sins? Can he save my soul? Now that there may be no occasion, or color of staggering upon this point, you see God reveals himself as an all-sufficient God: as one that is able to go through with all his engagements. If you will stagger, you may so do; this is certain, you have no cause to do so from hence; there is not any promise that ever God entered into, but he is able to perform it.

Object[ion]. But you will say, “Though God be thus able, thus all-sufficient, yet may there not be defects in the means whereby he works? As a man may have a strong arm able to strike his enemies to the ground, but yet if he strike with a feather, or a straw, it will not be done; not for want of strength in his arm, but of fitness and suitableness in the instrument, whereby he acts.” But,

Answ[er]. {1} God using instruments, they do not act according to their own virtue, but according to the influence of virtue by him to them communicated. Look to what end soever God is pleased to use any means, his choosing of them, fills them with efficacy to that purpose. Let the way and means of accomplishing what you expectest by the promise, be in themselves never so weak, yet know that, from God’s choosing of them, to that end, they shall be filled with virtue and efficacy to the accomplishment of it.

{2} It is expressly affirmed of the great mediums of the promise, that they also are able, that there is no want of power in them, for the accomplishment of the thing promised.

1st. There is the means procuring it, and that is Jesus Christ: the promises, as to the good things contained in them, are all purchased by him: and of him the apostle affirms expressly, that “he is able to save them to the uttermost, them that come to God by him” (Heb. 7:25).<sup>41</sup> No want here: no defect: he is able to do it to the uttermost; able to save them that are tempted (Heb. 2:18).

<sup>40</sup> I.e., a small light sailing vessel.

<sup>41</sup> In the original, the word “able” is set in all caps for emphasis.

2nd. There is the great means of manifestation, and that is the word of God: and of this also it is affirmed, that it is able. It has an all-sufficiency in its kind. Paul tells the elders of Ephesus, that “the word of grace is able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

3rd. There is the great means of operation, and that is the Spirit of grace: he works the mercy of the promise upon the soul: he also is able, exceeding powerful, to effect the end appointed. He has no bounds, nor measure of operation, but only his own will (1 Cor. 12:11).

Hence then it is apparent, in the second place, that there is no occasion for doubting; yea, that all staggering is excluded, from the consideration of the ability of the promiser, and the means whereby he works: if you continuest to stagger, you must get a better plea than this, “It cannot be, it is impossible”: I tell you, nay, but God is able to accomplish the whole word of his promise. But,

*God Is Sincere in What He Promises*

[3] There may be want of sincerity in promises and engagements, which while we do but suspect, we cannot choose but stagger at them. If a man make a promise to me, and I can suppose that he intends not as he says, but has reserves to himself of another purpose, I must needs doubt as to the accomplishment of what he has spoken. If the soul may surmise, that the Lord intends not him sincerely in his promises, but reserves some other thing in his mind, or that it shall be so to others and not to him, he must needs dispute in himself, stagger, and keep off from believing. This, then must be demonstrated, in the third place, that the promises of God; and God in all his promises, are full of sincerity, so that none need fear to cast himself on them, they shall be real unto him. Now, concerning this, observe,

{1} That God’s promises are not declarative of his secret purposes and intentions. When God holds out to any a promise of the pardon of sin, this does not signify to any singular man, that it is the purpose of God, that his sin shall be pardoned. For if so, then either all men must be pardoned to whom the word of promise comes, which is not: or else God fails of his purposes, and comes short of his intendments; which would render him, either impotent, that he could not; or mutable, that he would not, establish them: but, “who hath resisted his will?” (Rom. 9:19). He is the Lord, and he changes not (Mal. 1).<sup>42</sup> So that though everyone, to whom the promise is held out, has not the fruit of the promise; yet this derogates<sup>43</sup> not at all, from the sincerity of

42 Following Goold, the citation should be corrected to Mal. 3:6.

43 I.e., detracts.

God in his promises; for, he does not hold them forth to any such end and purpose, as to declare his intentions, concerning particular persons.

{2} There are some absolute promises, comprehensive of the covenant of grace, which, as to all those that belong to that covenant, do hold out thus much of the mind of God, that they shall certainly be accomplished in and toward them all. The soul may freely be invited to venture on these promises, with assurance of their efficacy toward him.

{3} This God principally declares in all his promises, of his mind and purpose, that every soul, to whom they shall come, may freely rest on; to wit, that faith in the promises, and the accomplishment of the promises, are inseparable. He that believes, shall enjoy; this is most certain, this God declares of his mind, his heart, toward us, that as for all the good things he has spoken of to us, it shall be to us, according to our faith. This I say the promises of God do signify of his purpose, that the believer of them shall be the enjoyer of them: in them “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). From the faith of God revealing, to the faith of man receiving: so that, upon the making out of any promise, you may safely conclude, that upon believing, the mercy, the Christ, the deliverance of this promise, is mine. It is true, if a man stand disputing and staggering, whether he have any share in a promise, and close not with it by faith, he may come short of it; and yet without the least impeachment of the truth of the promise, or sincerity of the promiser: for God has not signified by them, that men shall enjoy the good things of them, whether they believe, or not Thus far the promises of grace are general, and carry a truth to all, that there is an inviolable connection between believing, and the enjoyment of the things in them contained. And in this truth, is the sincerity of the promiser, which can never be questioned, without sin and folly. And this wholly shuts up the spirit from any occasion of staggering. “O ye of little faith! Wherefore do ye doubt?”<sup>44</sup> Ah! Lest our share be not in this promise; lest we are not intended in it: poor creatures! There is but this one way of keeping you off from it, that is, disputing it in yourselves by unbelief. Here lies the sincerity of God toward you, that believing, you shalt not come short of what you aim at. Here, then, is no room for staggering. If proclamation be made, granting pardon to all such rebels, as shall come in by such a season, do men use to stand questioning whether the state bear them any goodwill, or not? “No,” says the poor creature, “I will cast myself upon their faith and truth engaged in their proclamation whatever I have deserved in particular, I know they will be faithful in their promises.” The gospel proclamation is of pardon to

44 Matt. 14:31.

all comers in, to all believers: it is not for you, poor staggerer, to question, what is the intendment toward you in particular, but roll yourself on this, there is an absolute sincerity in the engagement<sup>45</sup> which you mayest freely rest upon. But,

*God Never Forgets His Promises*

[4] Though all be present, truth, power, sincerity; yet if he that makes the promise should forget, this were a ground of staggering. Pharaoh's butler, without doubt, made large promises to Joseph, and probably spoke the truth according to his present intention: afterward standing in the presence of Pharaoh, restored to favor, he had doubtless power enough to have procured the liberty of a poor innocent prisoner: but yet this would not do, it did not profit Joseph; because, as the text says, he "did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen. 40:23). This forgetting made all other things useless. But neither has this, the least color in divine promises. It was Zion's infirmity to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me" (Isa. 49:14): for, says the Lord, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, but I will not forget thee: behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me": verses 15–16.

The causes of forgetfulness are,

{1} Want of love. The things that men love not, they care not for: the matters of their love are continually in their thoughts. Now says God to Zion, "Why sayest thou, 'I have forgotten you'? Is it for want of love? Alas! The love of a most tender mother to her sucking child, comes infinitely short of my love to you: my love to you, is more fixed than so, and how should you be out of my mind? How should you be forgotten?" Infinite love will have infinite thoughtfulness and remembrance.

{2} Multiplicity of business: this with men is a cause of forgetting. I had done says one, as I promised, but multiplicity of occasions thrust it out of my mind, I pray excuse me: alas! "Though I rule all the world, yet you are graven upon the palms of my hands, and therefore your walls are continually before me." See also Psalm 77:9. Neither then is there as to this the least color given us, to stagger at the promise of God.

*Divine Immutability Ensures That the Promises Will Not Change*

[5] But lastly, where all other things concur, yet if the person promising be changeable, if he may alter his resolution, a man may justly doubt and debate

<sup>45</sup> In the original, the word "engagement" is set in all caps for emphasis.

in himself, the accomplishment of any promise made to him: "It is true," may he say, "he now speaks his heart and mind, but who can say he will be of this mind tomorrow? May he not be turned, and then what becomes of the golden mountains, that I promised myself upon his engagement?" Wherefore in the last place, the Lord carefully rejects all sinful surmises concerning the least change or alteration in him or any of his engagements. He is "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning" (James 1:18); no shadow, no appearance of any such thing.<sup>46</sup> "I am the Lord," (says he) "I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). The Lord knows, that if anything in us, might prevail with him to alter the word that is gone out of his mouth, we should surely perish. We are poor provoking creatures, therefore he lays out, not being consumed, only on this, even his own unchangeableness: this we may rest upon, "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?"<sup>47</sup>

And in these observations, have I given you the first demonstration of the point: *all staggering is from our own unbelief.*

#### Various Providential Reasons for Confidence in the Promises

(2) Dem[onstration]. The experience which we have of the mighty workings of God, for the accomplishment of all his promises, gives light unto this thing. We have found it true, that where he is once engaged, he will certainly go through unto the appointed issue, though it stand him in the laying out of his power and wisdom to the uttermost, "Thy bow was made quite naked according to the oaths of the tribes, thy word" (Hab. 3:9).<sup>48</sup> If God's oath be passed, and his word engaged; he will surely accomplish it, though it cost him the making of his bow quite naked, the manifestation of his power to the utmost.

It is true: never did any wait upon God for the accomplishment and fulfilling of a promise, but he found many difficulties fall out between the word and the thing. So was it with Abraham in the business of a son: and so with David in the matter of a kingdom. God will have his promised mercies to fall, as the dews upon the parched gasping earth, or "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2), very welcome unto the traveler, who has had the sun beat upon his head in his travel all the day. Zion is "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord," as "a royal diadem in the hand of her God" (Isa. 62:3). The precious stones of a diadem, must be cut and polished, before they be set in beauty and glory. God will have oftentimes the precious living stones of

<sup>46</sup> Following Goold, the citation should be corrected to James 1:17.

<sup>47</sup> Job 23:13.

<sup>48</sup> Owen's text from his thanksgiving sermons after the siege of Colchester was published as *Ebenezer* (1648). See *Complete Works of John Owen*, 18:225.

Zion, to have many a sharp cutting, before they come to be fully fixed in his diadem: but yet in the close, whatever obstacles stand in the way, the promise has still wrought out its passage: as a river, all the while it is stopped with a dam, is still working higher and higher, still getting more and more strength, until it bear down all before it, and obtain a free course to its appointed place: every time opposition lies against the fulfilling of the promise, and so seems to impede it for a season, it gets more and more power, until the appointed hour be come, and then the promise bears down all before it.

Were there anything imaginable, whereof we had not experience, that it had been conquered to open a door for the fulfilling of every word of God, we might possibly, as to the apprehension of that thing, stagger from some other principle, than that of unbelief.

What is there in heaven or earth, but God and his ministering spirits, that has not one time or other, stood up to its utmost opposition, for the frustrating of the word, wherein some or other of the saints of God have put their trust? Devils in their temptations, baits, subtleties, accusations, and oppositions: men in their counsels, reasonings, contrivances, interests, dominions, combinations, armies, multitudes, and the utmost of their endeavors: the whole frame of nature, in its primitive instituted course, fire, water, day, night, age, sickness, death; all in their courses have fought against the accomplishment of the promises: and what have they obtained by all their contendings? All disappointed, frustrated, turned back, changed, and served only to make the mercy of the promise, more amiable and glorious.

I would willingly illustrate this demonstration with an instance, that the almighty, all-conquering power that is in the promise, settling all staggering upon its own basis of unbelief,<sup>49</sup> might be the more evident.

I might here mention Abraham, with all the difficulties and appearing impossibilities, which the promise unto him did pass through, and cast to the ground, the mercy of it at length, arising out of the grave; for he received his son from the dead “in a figure” (Heb. 11:19): or I might speak of Joseph, Moses, or David: but I shall rather choose a precedent from among the works of God, in the days wherein we live: and that in a business concerning which we may set up our Ebenezer,<sup>50</sup> and say, “Thus far has God been a helper.”<sup>51</sup>

Look upon the affair of Ireland. The engagement of the great God of revenges against murder and treachery, the interest of the Lord Christ and his

49 In the original, the word “unbelief” is set in all caps for emphasis.

50 *Ebenezer* was the title of the published version of Owen’s thanksgiving sermons after the siege of Colchester.

51 1 Sam. 7:12.

kingdom against the man of sin,<sup>52</sup> furnished the undertakers with manifold promises to carry them out to a desired, a blessed issue. Take now a brief view of some mountains of opposition, that lie in the way against any success in that place; and hear the Lord saying to every one of them, “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before my people thou shalt be made a plain” (Zech. 4:7).

Not to mention the strivings and stragglings of two manner of people in the womb of this nation, totally obstructing for a long time the bringing forth of any deliverance for Ireland:<sup>53</sup> nor yet, that mighty mountain (which some misnamed a Level) that thought at once to have locked an everlasting door upon that expedition:<sup>54</sup> I shall propose some few (of many) that have attended it.

[1] The silence that has been in heaven for half an hour as to this business:<sup>55</sup> the great cessation of prayers in the heavens, of many churches, has been no small mountain in the way of the promise. When God will do good for Zion, he requires that his remembrancers give him no rest, until he do it (Isa. 62:7). And yet sometimes in the close of their supplications, gives them an answer “by terrible things” (Ps. 65:5). He is sometimes “silent” to the prayers of his people (Ps. 28:1). Is not then a grant rare, when his people are silent as to prayers? Of how many congregations in this nation, may the prayers, tears, and supplications for carrying on of the work of God in Ireland,<sup>56</sup> be written with the lines of emptiness? What a silence has been in the heaven of many churches, for this last half hour? How many that began with the Lord in that work, did never sacrifice at the altar of Jehovah-nissi:<sup>57</sup> nor consider that the Lord has sworn to have war with such Amalekites as are there “from generation to generation” (Ex. 17:15–16)? They have forgotten, that Ireland was the first of the nations that laid wait for the blood of God’s people desiring to enter into his rest; and therefore “their latter end shall be to perish for ever” (Num. 24:20). Many are as angry as Jonah,<sup>58</sup> not that Babylon is spared, but that it is not spared. Has not this been held out as a mountain? What will you now do, when such or such, these and those men, of this or that party, look upon you “as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth afore it

52 2 Thess. 2:3.

53 Gen. 25:22. The Long Parliament had planned to take action against the rebels in Ireland in the spring of 1642, but this had been delayed because of the civil wars in England.

54 The Burford Mutiny of May 1649 involved the refusal of Leveller-inspired soldiers to participate in the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.

55 Rev. 8:1.

56 In the original, the word “Ireland” is set in all caps for emphasis.

57 I.e., the Lord is my banner.

58 Jonah 4:9.

groweth up: wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom,”<sup>59</sup> that will not so much as say, “The blessing of the Lord be upon you, we bless you in the name of the Lord?”<sup>60</sup> But now! Shall the faithlessness of men, make the “faith of God of none effect”?<sup>61</sup> Shall the kingdom of Christ suffer because some of those that are his, what through carnal wisdom, what through spiritual folly, refuse to come forth “to his help against the mighty”?<sup>62</sup> No, doubtless! “The Lord sees it, and it displeases him; he sees that “there is no man, and wonders that there is no intercessor”: (even marvels that there are no more supplications on this behalf) “Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him, and his own righteousness it sustained him: he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head: and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak: according to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies, to the islands he will repay recompense” (Isa. 59:15–18).<sup>63</sup> Some men’s not praying, shall not hinder the promises accomplishing. They may sooner discover an idol in themselves, than disappoint the living God. This was a mountain.

[2] Our own advices and counsels have often stood in the way of the promises bringing forth: this is not a time nor place for narrations: so I shall only say to this in general; that if the choicest and most rational advices of the army, had not been overruled by the providence of God, in all probabilities, your affairs had been more than ten degrees backward, to the condition wherein they are.<sup>64</sup>

[3] The visible opposition of the combined enemy in that nation seemed, as to our strength, unconquerable. The wise man tells us, “A threefold cord is not easily broken”<sup>65</sup> Ireland had a fivefold cord to make strong bands for Zion, twisted together: never (I think) did such different interests bear with one another, for the compassing of one common end.

He that met the lion, the fox, and the ass traveling together, wondered *quo unâ iter facerent*:<sup>66</sup> whither these ill-matched associates did bend their

<sup>59</sup> Ps. 129:6–7.

<sup>60</sup> Ps. 129:8.

<sup>61</sup> Rom. 3:3.

<sup>62</sup> Judg. 5:23.

<sup>63</sup> Owen appealed to this text in *The Branch of the Lord* (1650), which is included in this volume, as he presented Christ as “the great avenger of his house.”

<sup>64</sup> See the comments in the editor’s introduction to the sermon about these various factors.

<sup>65</sup> Eccl. 4:12.

<sup>66</sup> Lat. “where they were going together.” Owen also uses this quotation and illustration in his sermon preaching at the thanksgiving for the suppression of the Levellers. This an allusion to

course! Neither did his marveling cease, when he heard they were going a pilgrimage, in a business of devotion.

He that should meet Protestants, covenanted Protestants, that had sworn in the presence of the great God to extirpate popery and prelacy, as the Scots in Ulster;<sup>67</sup> others, that counted themselves under no less sacred bond, for the maintenance of prelates, service book, and the like; as the whole party of Ormond's adherents:<sup>68</sup> joined with a mighty number, that had for eight years together, sealed their vows to the Romish religion, with our blood and their own;<sup>69</sup> adding to them those that were profound to revolt up and down, as suited their own interest, as some in Munster;<sup>70</sup> all closing with that party, which themselves had labored to render most odious and execrable, as most defiled with innocent blood: he, I say, that should see all these, after seven years' mutual conflicting, and imbruing their hands in each other's blood, to march all one way together, cannot but marvel, *quo unâ iter facerent*, whither they should journey so friendly together. Neither surely, would his admiration be lessened, when he should hear, that the first thing they intended and agreed upon, was, to cover the innocent blood of forty-one;<sup>71</sup> contrary to that promise: "Behold, the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the

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the fable of the lion, the ass, and the fox who went hunting together, agreeing to divide the spoil equally among themselves. The ass divided the large fat stag into three equal measures, but then the lion killed the ass and asked the fox to divide the spoil. For this version of the fable, see Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* [. . .] (London, 1586), 154.

67 The Ulster Scots, who had sworn the Solemn League and Covenant, were so horrified by the regicide that they joined a coalition against the English Parliament. For the formal condemnation of the actions of the English Parliament by the Belfast Presbytery, see *A Necessary Representation of the Present Evills, and Eminent Dangers to Religion, Lawes, and Liberties, Arising from the Late, and Present Practises of the Sectarian Party in England: Together with and Exhortation to Duties Relating to the Covenant, unto All within Our Charge; and to All the Well-Affected within This Kingdome, by the Presbytery at Belfast, February 15th 1649* (Belfast, 1649).

68 James Butler, Marquis of Ormond (1610–1688), had returned to Ireland in October 1648 and was at the head of the largely Protestant Old English "Ormondists."

69 This is a reference to the Catholic Confederacy, established at Kilkenny in 1642, which in 1648 had its own internal conflict between those who put loyalty to the king first and those who prioritized papal loyalty. In early January 1649, Ormond signed a peace treaty with the Irish Confederates that promised toleration for Roman Catholics in return for support in the royalist cause. For analysis of what is termed the second Ormond peace of 1649, see Mícheál Ó Siochrú, *Confederate Ireland, 1642–49: A Constitutional and Political Analysis* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), 198–200.

70 The southern Protestant port towns of Munster—such as Youghal, Cork, and Kinsale—had sided with the English Parliament for much of the 1640s, but in April 1648, under the command of Lord Inchiquin, they switched allegiance to the royalist cause. Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian Union with Ireland and Scotland* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2004), 51–52.

71 Those who had died in the 1641 Irish Rebellion.

earth, for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain” (Isa. 26:21). And nextly, to establish Catholic religion, or the kingdom of Babel, in the whole nation, in opposition to the engaged truth, and, in our days, visibly manifested power of the Lord Jesus: with sundry such like things, contrary to their science<sup>72</sup> and conscience, their covenant and light,<sup>73</sup> yea the trust and honesty, of most of the chief leaders of them.

Now how can the promise stand in the way of this hydra? What says it to this combined opposition?

{1} Why first, says the Lord, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 11:21). Their covering shall be too short, and narrow, to hide the blood which God will have disclosed.

{2} And nextly, though they will give their power to the beast, and fight against the Lamb,<sup>74</sup> consenting in this, who agree in nothing else in the world; yet they shall be broken in pieces; though they associate themselves, they shall be broken in pieces. If Rezin, and the son of Remaliah, Syria and Ephraim, old adversaries, combine together for a new enmity against Judah;<sup>75</sup> if covenant and prelacy, popery and treachery, blood and (as to that) innocency, join hand in hand,<sup>76</sup> to stand in the way of the promise; yet I will not in this join with them says the Lord. Though they were preserved all distinctly in their several interests for seven years, in their mutual conflicts, that they might be scourges to one another; yet if they close, to keep off the engagement of God in the word of his promise, not much more than the fourth part of one year, shall consume some of them to nothing, and fill the residue with indignation and anguish.

By what means God has mightily and effectually wrought, by mixing folly with their counsels, putting fear, terror, and amazedness upon all their undertakings, to carry on his own purpose, I could easily give considerable instances. That which has been spoken in general may suffice to bottom us on this, that while we are in the way of God, all staggering at the issue, is from unbelief; for he can, he will do more such things as these.

72 I.e., knowledge; understanding of truth.

73 The Solemn League and Covenant contained the pledge “to endeavour the extirpation of popery.” S. R. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625–60*, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 188.

74 Rev. 17:13–14.

75 2 Kings 16:5.

76 Here “covenant” refers to the Ulster Scots Presbyterians; “prelacy” to Protestant royalists under Ormond; “popery” to the Irish Catholic Confederates, particularly under the influence of Rinuccini; “treachery” to the likes of Lord Inchiquin; and “blood” to those who had participated in the violence of 1641. See Martyn Calvin Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse: Preaching, Prophecy and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 39.

*Five Applications of This Principle*

Those in Power Must Learn to Live by Faith in  
All Matters of Policy and Politics

Use 1. My first use shall be as unto temporals; for they also (as I told you) come under the promise, not to be staggered at, with the limitations before mentioned. Learn hence then to live more by faith in all your actings: believe, and you shall be established.<sup>77</sup> I have in the days of my pilgrimage, seen this evil under the sun: many professors of the gospel, called out to public actings, have made it their great design to manage all their affairs with wisdom and policy, like the men of the residue of the nations. Living by faith, upon the promises has appeared to them, as too low a thing, for the condition and employment wherein they now are: now they must plot, and contrive, and design, lay down principles of carnal fleshly wisdom, to be pursued to the uttermost: and what I pray has been the issue of such undertakings?

(1) First, the power of religion has totally been devoured, by that lean, hungry, never-to-be-satisfied beast of carnal policy: no signs left that it was ever in their bosoms. Conformity unto Christ in gospel graces, is looked on as a mean contemptible thing: some of them have fallen to downright atheism, most of them to wretched formality in the things of God. And then,

(2) Secondly, their plots and undertakings, have generally proved tympanous<sup>78</sup> and birthless: vexation and disappointment has been the portion of the residue of their days. The ceasing to lean upon the Lord, and striving to be wise in our actings, like the men of the world, has made more Rehoboams,<sup>79</sup> than any one thing in this generation.

What now lies at the bottom of all this? Merely staggering at the promise through unbelief. What building is that like to be, which has a staggering foundation? When God answers not Saul, he goes to the devil.<sup>80</sup> When the promise will not support us, we go to carnal policy: neither can it otherwise be. Engaged men, finding one way to disappoint them, presently betake themselves to another. If men begin once to stagger at the promise, and to conclude in their fears, that it will not receive accomplishment, that the fountain will be dry, they cannot but think it high time to dig cisterns for themselves.<sup>81</sup> When David says, he shall one day perish by the hand of Saul

<sup>77</sup> 2 Chron. 20:20.

<sup>78</sup> I.e., hollow and empty.

<sup>79</sup> 1 Kings 12 records how Rehoboam went out to war against Israel with one hundred eighty thousand troops but then turned back.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Sam. 28:6–7.

<sup>81</sup> Jer. 2:13.

(whatever God had said to the contrary) his next advice is, "Let me go to the Philistines":<sup>82</sup> and what success he had in that undertaking, you know. Political diversions from pure dependence on the promise, do always draw after them a long time of entanglements.

Give me leave to give a word of caution, against one or two things, which men staggering at the promises through unbelief, do usually in their carnal wisdom run into, for the compassing of the thing aimed at, that they may not be found in your honorable assembly.

[1] Take heed of a various<sup>83</sup> management of religion, of the things of God, to the advantage of the present posture and condition of your affairs. The things of Christ should be as Joseph's sheaf, to which all others should bow.<sup>84</sup> When they are made to cringe, and bend, and put on a flattering countenance, to allure any sort of men into their interest, they are no more the things of Christ. I would it had not been too evident formerly, that men entangled in their affairs, enjoying authority, have with all industry and diligence, pursued such and such an appearance of religion; not that themselves were so passionately affected with it, but merely for the satisfaction of some in that, whose assistance and compliance they needed for other things.<sup>85</sup> Oh let not the things of God, be immixed any more with carnal reasonings. His truths are all eternal and unchangeable. Give them at once the sovereignty of your souls, and have not the least thought of making them bend, to serve your own ends, though good and righteous. Think not to get the promise like Jacob,<sup>86</sup> by representing yourselves in the things of God, for other than you are.

[2] Hide no truth of God as to that way of manifestation which to you is committed, for fear it should prove prejudicial to your affairs. That influence and signature of your power, which is due to any truth of God, let it not be withheld by carnal reasonings. I might farther draw out these, and such like things as these; the warning is, to live upon the faith of that promise, which shall surely be established, without turning aside to needless, crooked paths of your own.

God Is Faithful, So Those in Power Must Be Faithful in  
Propagation of the Gospel, Especially in Ireland

Use 2. Secondly. Be faithful in doing all the work of God whereunto you are engaged, as he is faithful in working all your works whereunto he is engaged.

<sup>82</sup> 1 Sam. 27:1.

<sup>83</sup> I.e., characterized by change or vacillation.

<sup>84</sup> Gen. 37:7.

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps a reference to some in Parliament making concessions to the Presbyterian interest.

<sup>86</sup> Gen. 27.

Your work whereunto (while you are in his ways) God is engaged, is your safety and protection. God's work whereunto you are engaged is the propagating of the kingdom of Christ, and the setting up of the standard of the gospel. So far as you find God going on with your work, go you on with his. How is it that Jesus Christ, is in Ireland only as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies? And none to hold him out as a lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends? Is it the sovereignty and interest of England that is alone to be there transacted? For my part, I see no farther into the mystery of these things,<sup>87</sup> but that I could heartily rejoice, that innocent blood being expiated, the Irish might enjoy Ireland so long as the moon endures,<sup>88</sup> so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish. But God having suffered those sworn vassals of the man of sin, to break out into such ways of villainy, as render them obnoxious unto vengeance, upon such rules of government among men, as he has appointed; is there therefore nothing to be done but to give a cup of blood into their hands?<sup>89</sup> Doubtless the way whereby God will bring the followers after the beast to condign destruction, for all their enmity to the Lord Jesus, will be, by suffering them to run into such practices against men, as shall righteously expose them to vengeance, according to acknowledged principles among the sons of men. But is this all? Has he no farther aim? Is not all this to make way for the Lord Jesus to take possession of his long since promised inheritance? And shall we stop at the first part? Is this to deal fairly with the Lord Jesus? Call him out to the battle, and then keep away his crown? God has been faithful in doing great things for you, be faithful in this one, do your utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.

Give me leave to add a few motives to this duty.

(1) They want it: no want like theirs who want the gospel. I would there were for the present, one gospel preacher, for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland.<sup>90</sup> The land mourns, and the people perish for want of knowledge.<sup>91</sup> Many run to and fro, but it is upon other designs; knowledge is not increased.

(2) They are sensible of their wants, and cry out for supply. The tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin after the manifestations of Christ, are ever in

<sup>87</sup> The word "mystery" is set in all caps for emphasis and presumably is designed to call to mind the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7).

<sup>88</sup> Ps. 72:5. In Powell's sermon he held out the hope for the people of Ireland "that those people that were so contemptible, are like to have the greatest presence of God amongst them." See Powell, *Christ Exalted Above All Creatures*, 96.

<sup>89</sup> Ps. 75:8.

<sup>90</sup> In the original, the word "Ireland" is set in all caps for emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Hos. 4:6.

my view. If they were in the dark, and loved to have it so, it might something close a door upon the bowels of our compassion; but they cry out of their darkness, and are ready to follow everyone whosoever, to have a candle. If their being gospelless, move not our hearts, it is hoped, their importunate<sup>92</sup> cries will disquiet our rest: and wrest help, as a beggar does an alms.

(3) Seducers and blasphemers will not be wanting to sow their tares,<sup>93</sup> which those fallowed fields will receive, if there be none to cast in the seed of the word. Some are come over thither already without call, without employments, to no other end, but only to vaunt themselves to be God; as they have done in the open streets, with detestable pride, atheism, and folly: so that as Ireland<sup>94</sup> was heretofore termed by some in civil things a frippery<sup>95</sup> of bankrupts, for the great number of persons of broken estates that went thither: so doubtless in religion, it will prove a frippery of monstrous, enormous, contradictious opinions,<sup>96</sup> if the work of preaching the word of truth, and soberness be not carried on. And if this be the issue of your present undertakings, will it be acceptable, think you, to the Lord Jesus, that you have used his power and might, to make way for such things, as his soul abhors?<sup>97</sup>

[1] Will it be for his honor, that the people whom he has sought to himself with so high a hand, should at the very entrance of his taking possession, be leavened with those high and heavenly notions, which have an open, and experimented tendency to earthly, fleshly, dunghill practices?<sup>98</sup> Or,

[2] Will it be for the credit and honor of your profession of the gospel,<sup>99</sup> that such a breach should be under your hand? That it should be (as it were) by your means? Will it not be a sword, and an arrow, and a maul<sup>100</sup> in the hands of your observers? Who can bear the just scandal that would accrue? Scandal to the magistrates, scandal to the ministers of this generation, in neglecting such an opportunity of advancing the gospel, sleeping all the day while others sow tares?<sup>101</sup>

92 I.e., persistent and pressing in making requests.

93 Matt. 13:24–30.

94 In the original, the word “Ireland” is, again, set in all caps for emphasis.

95 I.e., cheap ostentation

96 For a discussion of chronic issues of debt and bankruptcy in Ireland at this time, see P. Roebuck, “Landlord Indebtedness in Ulster in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Irish Population, Economy and Society: Essays in Honour of the Late K. H. Connell*, ed. J. M. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 135–55.

97 In the original, “Lord Jesus,” “power,” “might,” and “things” are set in all caps for emphasis.

98 Perhaps a reference to the so-called Ranter phenomenon.

99 In the original, the two references to “gospel” in this paragraph are set in all caps for emphasis.

100 I.e., a heavy hammer or a mace.

101 Matt. 13:25.

[3] Where will be the hoped, the expected consolation of this great affair, when the testimony and pledge of the peculiar presence of Christ among us upon such an issue shall be wanting?<sup>102</sup>

What then shall we do? This thing is often spoken of, seldom driven to any close!

{1} Pray; “Pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would send out,” that he would thrust forth, “labourers into his harvest.”<sup>103</sup> The laborers are ready to say, “There is a lion in the way”:<sup>104</sup> difficulties to be contended withal: and to some men it is hard seeing a call of God through difficulties.<sup>105</sup> when if it would but clothe itself with a few carnal advantages, how apparent is it to them? They can see it through a little cranny. Be earnest then with the Master of these laborers, in whose hand is their life and breath, and all their ways; that he would powerfully constrain them, to be willing to enter into the fields that are white for the harvest.<sup>106</sup>

{2} Make such provision, that those who will go may be fenced from outward straits and fears, so far as the uncertainty of human affairs in general, and the present tumultuating<sup>107</sup> perturbations<sup>108</sup> will admit. And let not I beseech you, this be the business of an unpursued order. But,

{3} Let some be appointed (generals die and sink by themselves) to consider this thing, and to hear what sober proposals may be made by any, whose hearts God shall stir up to so good a work.<sup>109</sup>

This I say is a work wherein God expects faithfulness from you: stagger not at his promises, nor your own duty. However by all means possible, in this business, I have striven to deliver my own soul.

Once more, to this of faith, let me stir you up to another work of love: and that in the behalf of many poor perishing creatures, that want all things needful for the sustentation of life. Poor parentless children, that lie begging, starving, rotting in the streets, and find no relief; yea, persons of quality, that have lost their dearest relations in your service, seeking for bread, and finding none. Oh that some thoughts of this also, might be seriously committed to them that shall take care for the gospel.

<sup>102</sup> In the original, “Christ” and “issue” are set in all caps for emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> Matt. 9:38.

<sup>104</sup> Prov. 26:13.

<sup>105</sup> In the original, “God” is set in all caps for emphasis.

<sup>106</sup> John 4:35.

<sup>107</sup> I.e., stirred up and disturbed.

<sup>108</sup> I.e., irregular unrest and disorder.

<sup>109</sup> In the original, “proposals” is set in all caps for emphasis. This is a reference to the proposals for the propagation of the gospel in Ireland.

### Those in Power Must Believe the Promises of the Gospel

Use 3. I desire now to make more particular application of the doctrine, as to things purely spiritual: until you know how to believe for your own souls, you will scarcely know how to believe for a nation. Let this then teach us, to lay the burden and trouble of our lives upon the right shoulder. In our staggerings,<sup>110</sup> our doubtings, our disputes, we are apt to assign this and that reason of them; when the sole reason indeed is our unbelief. Were it not for such a cause, or such a cause, I could believe; that is, were there no need of faith. That is faith must remove the mountains that lie in the way, and then all will be plain.<sup>111</sup> It is not the greatness of sin, nor continuance in sin, nor backsliding into sin, that is the true cause of your staggering, whatever you pretend: the removal of all these is from that promise, whose stability and certainty, I before laid forth: but solely from your unbelief, that “root of bitterness” which springs up and troubles you.<sup>112</sup> It is not the distance of the earth from the sun, nor the sun’s withdrawing itself, that makes a dark and gloomy day, but the interposition of clouds and vaporous exhalations. Neither is your soul beyond the reach of the promise; nor does God withdraw himself, but the vapors of your carnal, unbelieving heart, do cloud you. It is said of one place, “Christ could do no great work there”: Why so? For want of power in him? Not at all: but merely for want of faith in them; it was “because of their unbelief.”<sup>113</sup> The promise can do no great work upon your heart, to humble you, to pardon, to quiet you; is it for want of fullness and truth therein? Not at all: but merely for want of faith in you, that keeps it off. Men complain, that were it not for such things, and such things, they could believe; when it is their unbelief that casts those rubs<sup>114</sup> in the way. As if a man should cast nails and sharp stones in his own way, and say, verily I could run, were it not for those nails and stones; when he continues himself to cast them there. You could believe, were it not for these doubts, and difficulties, these staggering perplexities, when alas! They are all from your unbelief.

### Warnings about the Consequences of Staggering in Unbelief

Use 4. See the sinfulness of all those staggering doubts and perplexities, wherewith many poor souls have almost all their thoughts taken up: such as is the root, such is the fruit. If the tree be evil, so will the fruit be also. Men

<sup>110</sup> In the original, “staggerings” is set in all caps for emphasis.

<sup>111</sup> Isa. 40:4; Matt. 17:20–21.

<sup>112</sup> Heb. 12:15.

<sup>113</sup> Mark 6:5–6.

<sup>114</sup> I.e., obstacles and impediments.

do not gather grapes from brambles.<sup>115</sup> What is the root that bears this fruit of staggering? Is it not the evil root of unbelief? And can any good come from thence? Are not all the streams of the same nature with the fountain? If that be bitter, can they be sweet? If the body be full of poison, will not the branches have their venom also? Surely if the mother (unbelief) be the mouth of hell, the daughters (staggingings) are not the gates of heaven.

Of the sin of unbelief, I shall not now speak at large: it is in sum, the universal opposition of the soul unto God: all other sins arise against something or other of his revealed will: only unbelief sets up itself in a direct contradiction, to all of him that is known. Hence the weight of condemnation in the gospel, is constantly laid on this sin: "He that believeth not, on him the wrath of God abideth; he shall be damned."<sup>116</sup> Now as every drop of seawater retains the brackishness<sup>117</sup> and saltness of the whole, so every stagginging doubt that is an issue of this unbelief, has in it the unsavoriness and distastefulness unto God, that is in the whole.

Further, to give you a little light into what acceptance our stagginging thoughts find with the Lord, according to which must be our esteem of all that is in us.

Observe, that—

- (1) They grieve him.
- (2) They provoke him.
- (3) They dishonor him.

(1) Such a frame grieves the Lord. Nothing more presses true love, than to have an appearance of suspicion. Christ comes to Peter and asks him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:15). Peter seems glad of an opportunity to confess him, and his love to him, whom not long since he had denied; and answers readily, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."<sup>118</sup> But when Christ comes with the same question again and again, the Holy Ghost tells us, "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the 3rd time, 'Lovest thou me?'"<sup>119</sup> It exceedingly troubled Peter, that his love should come under so many questionings, which he knew to be sincere. The love of Christ to his, is infinitely beyond the love of his, to him. All our doubtings are nothing

<sup>115</sup> Luke 6:44.

<sup>116</sup> John 3:36.

<sup>117</sup> I.e., salty or unpleasant taste.

<sup>118</sup> John 21:16.

<sup>119</sup> John 21:17.

but so many questionings of his love. We cry, "Lord Jesus, lovest you us?" And again, "Lord Jesus, lovest you us?" And that with distrustful hearts and thoughts, that it is not, it cannot be. Speaking of the unbelieving Jews, the Holy Ghost tells us, Jesus was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). And as it is bitter to him in the root, so also in the fruit. Our staggerings and debates when we have a word of promise; is a grief to his Holy Spirit, as the unkindest return we can make unto his love.

(2) It provokes him. "How can this be," (says Zacharias) "that I should have a son?" "This shall be," (says the Lord) "and you yourself for your questioning shalt be a sign of it, thou shalt be dumb and not speak" (Luke 1).<sup>120</sup> His doubting was a provocation: and our Savior expresses no less in that bitter reproof to his disciples upon their wavering, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (Matt. 17:17). That is, in this unbelieving frame. Poor souls are apt to admire the patience of God in other matters; that he spared them in such and such sins, at such and such times of danger, but his exceeding patience toward them in their carnal reasonings, and fleshly objections against believing; this they admire not. Nay, generally they think it should be so: God would not have them one step further. Nay, they could be more steadfast in believing as they suppose, might it stand with the good will of God: when all this while, this frame of all others, is the greatest provocation to the Lord; he never exercises more forbearance, than about this kind of unbelief.

When the spies had gone into Canaan, had seen the land, and brought of the good fruit of it, then to repine, then to question whether God would bring them into it or no:<sup>121</sup> this caused the Lord "to swear in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest."<sup>122</sup> When God has brought men to the borders of heaven, discovered to them the riches and excellency of his grace, admitted them to enter as spies into the kingdom of glory, then to fall a staggering, whether he intends them an entrance or no; is that which lies heavy on him. The like may be said of all promised mercies, and deliverances whatsoever.

That this is a provocation, the Lord has abundantly testified, inasmuch as for it he has oftentimes snatched sweet morsels from the mouths of men, and turned aside the stream of mercies, when it was ready to flow in upon them. "If;" (says he) "ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Isa. 7:9). The very mercy but now promised, concerning your deliverance, shall be withheld. Oh stop not success from Ireland, by unbelief.

<sup>120</sup> Luke 1:18–20.

<sup>121</sup> Num. 13–14.

<sup>122</sup> Ps. 95:11.

(3) It dishonors God. In the close of this verse, it is said, Abraham was “strong in faith” (or staggered not), “giving glory to God.” To be established in believing, is to give God the greatest glory possible. Every staggering thought that arises from this root of unbelief, robs God of his glory.

[1] It robs him of the glory of his truth: “He that believeth not, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not his record” (1 John 5:10). Let men pretend what they please (as most an end,<sup>123</sup> we give in specious pretenses for our unbelief), the bottom of all is, the questioning of the truth of God in our false hearts.

[2] It robs him of the glory of his fidelity or faithfulness in the discharge of his promises: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). He has engaged his faithfulness in this business of the forgiveness of iniquities: he whose right it is, calling that in question, calls the faithfulness of God in question.

[3] It robs him of the glory of his grace: in a word, if a man should choose to set himself in a universal opposition unto God, he can think of no more compendious<sup>124</sup> way than this. This then is the fruit, this the advantage of all our staggering, we rob God of glory, and our own souls of mercy.

#### Those in Power Must Repent of All Staggering in Unbelief

Use 5. Be ashamed of, and humbled for, all your staggerings at the promises of God, with all your fleshly reasonings, and carnal contrivances issuing therefrom. For the most part, we live upon successes, not promises: unless we see and feel the print of victories, we will not believe. The engagement of God, is almost quite forgotten in our affairs. We travel on without Christ, like his mother, and suppose him only to be in the crowd: but we must return to seek him where we left him, or our journeying on, will be to no purpose.<sup>125</sup> When Job, after all his complaining, had seen “the end of the Lord,”<sup>126</sup> he cries out, “Now I abhor myself in dust and ashes.”<sup>127</sup> You have seen “the end of the Lord” in many of his promises: oh that it might prevail to make you abhor yourselves in dust and ashes, for all your carnal fears and corrupt reasonings, upon your staggerings.

When David enjoyed his promised mercy, he especially shames himself, for every thought of unbelief, that he had while he waited for it: “I said,” (says he) “in my haste, that all men were liars.”<sup>128</sup> And now he is humbled for

<sup>123</sup> I.e., as almost always.

<sup>124</sup> I.e., direct and concise.

<sup>125</sup> Luke 2:44–46.

<sup>126</sup> James 5:11.

<sup>127</sup> Job 42:6.

<sup>128</sup> Ps. 116:11.

it. Is this to be thankful, to forget our provoking thoughts of unbelief, when the mercy is enjoyed? The Lord set it home upon your spirits, and give it to receive its due manifestation.

(1) If there be any counsels, designs, contrivances, on foot among us, that are bottomed on our staggering at the promise under which we are, oh let them be instantly cast down to the ground. Let not any be so foolish, as to suppose that unbelief will be a foundation for quiet habitations. You are careful to avoid all ways that might dishonor you, as the rulers of so great a nation: oh be much more careful about such things as will dishonor you as believers: that's your greatest title, that's your chiefest privilege. Search your own thoughts, and if any contrivance, any compliance be found springing up, whose seed was sown by staggering at the promise; root them up, and cast them out, before it be too late.

(2) Engage your hearts against all such ways for the future: say unto God, "How faithful are you in all your ways! How able to perform all your promises! How have you established your word in heaven and earth! Who would not put their trust in you? We desire to be ashamed, that ever we should admit in our hearts, the least staggering at the stability of your word."

(3) Act as men bottomed upon unshaken things: that are not at all moved by the greatest appearing oppositions: "He that believeth will not make haste".<sup>129</sup> be not hasty in your resolves, in any distress. Wait for the accomplishment of the vision, for it will come.<sup>130</sup> So long as you are in the way of God, and do the work of God, let not so much as your desires be too hasty, after appearing strengthenings, and assistance. Whence is it that there is among us, such bleating after the compliance of this or that party of the sons of men, perhaps priding themselves in our acting upon unbelief;<sup>131</sup> as though we proclaimed, that without such and such, we cannot be protected in the things of God? Let us (I beseech you) live above those things, that are unworthy of the great name, that is called upon us.

Oh that by these, and the like ways, we might manifest our self-condemnation, and abhorrency, for all that distrust and staggering at the word of God, which arising from unbelief, has had such deplorable issues upon all our counsels and undertakings.

*FINIS.*<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Isa. 28:16.

<sup>130</sup> Hab. 2:3.

<sup>131</sup> 1 Sam. 15:14.

<sup>132</sup> Lat. "The End."

