

AN ACCEPTABLE PRESENT TO THE LORD OF HOSTS

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"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of Hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto: a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion."
Isa 18:7

When presents are made to earthly monarchs, they are almost always of a costly and valuable nature. In fact, it would seem an insult to offer to an earthly monarch any present that did not, in some degree, correspond to the exalted situation, which he occupies. But "Gods thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9)

"The present" that is "brought unto the Lord of Hosts," spoken of in the text, is of a very different character from what is usually offered to earthly sovereigns. A nation flourishing in arts and arms, occupying a fertile and extensive territory, carrying on a wide and lucrative commerce, and sending its fleets and armies all over the globe—such a people might well be a present acceptable to an earthly monarch. But when we look at the text, and see what sort of people is presented to the Lord of Hosts, we find a nation of a very different character brought unto him. We read there of a people "scattered and peeled," of a nation "meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled;" and that this broken, and, as they might naturally be called,

useless people, are brought "to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion," as an acceptable offering to him who lives and reigns there.

Now, reason would dictate, and, indeed, it is the prevalent religion of the day, that an offering, which is to be made to the Lord of Hosts, should be such a one as agrees with his holy and righteous character. We find, therefore, the generality of ministers exhorting everybody to give to the Lord the prime of their life, their strongest affections, their noblest mental and bodily faculties, with all the piety, zeal, diligence, and holiness that they can muster, and to lay them down at the feet of the Lord of Hosts as an offering acceptable in his sight. And though this never is done, and, from the utterly fallen state of man, never can be done, we find the preachers no less constantly exhorting, and the people no less perpetually approving of this as the only excellent way.

But when we look at the text **(and we must adhere to the word of God, however contrary to our carnal reason)** we find that "the present which is to be brought to the Lord of Hosts," is not of a righteous people, a people zealous, and diligent, a people active in good words and works, "but people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion." Without further preface then, I shall, from these words, endeavour, with Gods blessing, to describe what the character, the experimental character I mean, of that people is which is "brought as a present unto the Lord of Hosts."

But we must bear in mind that the people of God are always to be looked at in two points of view. First, as standing in the

Son of God, their eternal Covenant Head; and, secondly, as standing in Adam, their temporal covenant head. Viewed in Christ, they stand accepted in him "without spot or blemish, or any such thing." The church, as an unspotted, lovely bride, was betrothed unto Christ in eternity before ever she fell in Adam. Thus in this sense therefore, the church, as the spotless wife of the Lamb, is a present fit for the Lord of Hosts, for she stands righteous in Christs righteousness, holy in Christs holiness, comely in Christs comeliness, and perfect in Christs perfection. But, viewed in fallen Adam, as a partaker of his depraved nature, and viewed experimentally when brought to know the plague of her heart, she stands "full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores."

The people spoken of in the text, as presented to the Lord of Hosts, correspond to the church in this latter point of view. We will, therefore, with Gods blessing, examine in detail the description here given of them; and I think we shall find six distinct marks stamped upon them by the blessed Spirit. These six marks are, that they are "scattered," "peeled," "terrible," "meted out," "trodden under foot," and their land one which "the rivers have spoiled." Every one of these striking epithets deserves, and, therefore, demands a distinct and separate examination.

The Holy Ghost, then, has stamped the people of God in the text with these peculiar marks; for I do not consider that, experimentally viewed, a particular section, a distinct part of Gods people, are here intended, as though some experience were described in the text which a few only of the living family are acquainted with. But I view the text as descriptive of **all the family** of God, and that the marks stamped upon them here are such as are universally affixed to all the manifested election of grace.

I. The first mark stamped upon the people of God is that they are a "**scattered**" people. Considered even locally, as far as their earthly habitations are concerned, we find this "scattered" condition of Gods people to be a matter of fact, a thing of daily and universal experience. Wherever we go we find that the people of God are a scattered family. It was so in times of old. The church at Jerusalem was speedily "scattered" abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). James writes "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1); and Peter to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus..." (1Peter 1:1). Thus now we do not find whole towns and villages of Gods people, but dispersed by twos and threes through the country; a few in one town, and a few in another; one or two in this village, and one or two in that; generally the butt and scoff of all the rest; abhorred by a world lying dead in sin. And, indeed, when we consider how few in number Gods quickened people are, it must needs be so. The world at large "lieth in wickedness," while the elect are but "one of a city, and two of a family" (**the subdivision of a tribe**) (Jeremiah 3:14), "two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof."

But the word "scattered" not merely implies their dispersion, locally considered—that they are a scanty, and, therefore, a scattered people, but it also has reference to the work of the blessed Spirit in their souls, as making them to be internally, what they are externally—scattered in feelings as well as in persons.

When the Holy Ghost takes a vessel of mercy in hand, his first work is to scatter. He moves in that track which he gave to Jeremiah when he commissioned him "to root out and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," as well as "to build, and to plant." This divine work was known

experimentally by Hannah when she said, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up: The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up" (1Samuel 2:6,7). The first work, then, of the Spirit of God in the heart is to scatter to the four winds of heaven everything in self that is comely and pleasing to the flesh. All a mans self-righteousness when the Lord lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet is broken to pieces. We may, indeed, with much pains, great diligence, and severe labour, gather together the broken fragments: but no sooner have we got together what the Spirit has dispersed than the Lord blows upon them again and scatters them once more to the four corners of the earth.

Nor is his **self-righteousness**, his legal obedience, and his hope of heaven founded thereon, scattered only, but that also which wears an **evangelical garb**, such as all his holiness and all his attempts to make himself spiritual, all his diligence to recommend himself to the favour of God by laying hold of the gospel, with all his anxiety to read, understand, and experimentally enjoy the word of God, all that he would thus heap up, and fain persuade himself that by so doing he was a believer in Christ, is scattered and dispersed: so that when he looks at his religion he finds it a thorough wreck. His religion now no longer resembles a ship in harbour, with all her masts, and yards, and rigging perfect, just ready to ride proudly over the wide waste of waters, but it rather resembles the same ship driven by a storm upon the rocks, with the waves beating over her, and just about to part asunder.

The Spirit of the Lord is compared in Scripture to the north wind ("**Awake, O north wind,**") (Song 4:16), which is rough and searching, and blows away the chaff from the

threshing floors. It is the blowing of this north wind, which tries the living family before they are led to see what the mind of the Spirit is in thus acting. They try sometimes, for instance, to collect their thoughts in prayer, and fix their affections upon God: but all is scattered in a moment. They look at their evidences, try to bring them together, and out of them to make a good hope through grace: but when they come to weigh them up singly one by one, a gust of conviction or of doubt springs up which so scatters all these evidences that there seems to be scarcely one left. They seek after spirituality of mind, and to have their affections set on things above, not on things on the earth. But no sooner do they feel their hearts and affections mounting upwards, than some vile thought rushes in, which brings a train of others, like a troop of unclean birds falling upon a sacrifice. When they come to a place of worship they beg, perhaps, with some earnestness on the road, that the word may come to their souls with power from God himself: but no sooner does the preacher begin his prayer or sermon than something carnal, sensual, or devilish rushes into their minds, or some gust of unbelief or infidelity blows across them which scatters all their thoughts, and leaves them no collectedness, fixedness, or attention. Thus, to their dismay, instead of being able to get together a religion in which they may stand firm; instead of amassing a store of hopes and evidences to which they may confidently look as a safe and happy passport into eternity, the more they look the less religion they find; and all that they have gathered together becomes one mass of confusion. This was the case with Job when the Lord had scattered his religion, when, as Elihu said, "God thrusteth him down, not man" (Job 32:13), and he poured forth that bitter lamentation, "I am full of confusion."

II. But we will go on to consider another mark stamped upon them—"peeled." In order to get at the spiritual meaning

of this expression, I must call your attention to what is written in (Ezekiel 29:18), where the Lord said to his prophet—"Son of Man, Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and **every shoulder was peeled.**" But what made their shoulders peel? The burdens which they bore. The soldiers in Nebuchadnezzars army had to carry the mattock and spade, to throw up the fortifications against Tyre. The soldiers in ancient times wore very heavy armour, and carried upon their shoulders spears and other weapons of war, by the continual pressure of which the skin was often literally peeled off. Thus, when the nation spoken of in the text is said to be "**peeled,**" it implies that they are a burdened people, nay, more, that they are a **continually** burdened people. It was not one days service before Tyre that made the shoulders of Nebuchadnezzars army peel, but the continued labours which they were called to perform, the unceasing burdens which they had to bear. And thus the expression in the text implies that the people of God are not burdened merely once or twice in their lives; but that theirs is an unceasing warfare, a succession of burdens, and that they can never put their armour off, or lay the weapons of their spiritual warfare aside, but that they must continue to watch and fight, toil and suffer to the end of their days as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

This mark, then, demolishes at a blow all those crude fancies and visionary ideas of men, who assert that the child of God never has but one spiritual burden in his life, that of sin under the law, when first quickened into spiritual life; and that, when relieved of that load by a gospel deliverance, he never more groans under the weight of sin, but rejoices and triumphs in Christ over death, sin, and hell, until he changes time for eternity. One would think that the testimony of Paul was sufficient to disprove this when he said, "We that are in

this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2Corinthians 5:4); and again, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But I think that the simple expression of the text, that the people who are brought as a present to the Lord of Hosts are "a **peeled** people," is sufficient to shew that the family of God are appointed to wear upon their shoulders continual burdens.

But what are these burdens? The burden of **sin** is one which the children of God more especially labour under in the first teachings of the Spirit; and this at that time not so much from the workings of their corrupt nature, into the desperate depravity of which they are not at first usually led, but from the guilt of **actual sin** committed by them. But there is also the **burden of temptation**, which never seizes a man so powerfully as after he has known something of the power of atoning blood. And thus the people of God who, in their first exercises, have to bear heavy burdens of guilt and convictions of sin, after they have received some manifestations of Gods favour, have to bear the burden of temptation. Indeed Gods children could not bear the heavy burdens of temptation at first. The raw recruit, who is learning his drill on the common, is not sent into battle immediately. He has to be taught how to handle and use his arms and all the exercises needful to make him into a soldier, before he can endure actual service. So the child of God is not sent to fight Gods battles when merely learning his drill. But when he is, in some degree, inured in service, then he is sent to undergo the actual hardship of war.

Unless a living soul has some standing ground in Christ, he cannot endure the burden of temptation. If the powerful blasts of temptation came upon one who had no standing in the divine life, they would sweep him away. But when the Lord has given the soul some standing in Christ, through

some knowledge of him, it is founded upon a rock, so that however assaulted and apparently overwhelmed, it is not carried away by the floods of temptation that come out of the dragon. Infancy, naturally, is not the season for hard labour. On whom do we lay the heaviest burdens? The child or the man? Who are selected to carry the greatest weights? The weak or the strong? Is it not in grace as it is in nature that the stronger the man the heavier the burden? the broader the shoulders the weightier the load? How unscriptural, then, as well as how contrary to the teachings of the Spirit in exercised souls, is that vain idea that a man, after his first convictions and deliverance, is to slumber in his arm chair for the rest of his life, as a pensioner who has obtained his discharge, never again to see the flash of the sabre, or hear the thunder of the artillery. Such a doctrine as this is contradicted by the experience of the saints in all ages. These have ever found that the stronger a man is in Christ the heavier are his burdens; the richer his enjoyment of the love of God, the more powerful are his temptations: the firmer his standing in the Son of God, the more fellowship has he with Christ in his sufferings.

But the leading and special idea contained in the expression "**peeled,**" is a feeling of soreness and rawness. The skin peeled off makes the shoulder additionally pained by the burdens laid upon it. Thus the consciences of Gods living family are tender, and very susceptible of impressions. And herein they mainly differ from dead, hardened professors. Temptations are no burden to a seared conscience. The internal enmity of the human heart against God, the foul obscenities and daring blasphemies that the prince of darkness breathes into the carnal mind, are no burden to a man dead in a profession: nor, usually speaking, are they acquainted with the one, or assaulted by the other.

But when the conscience is made and kept alive before God, and the heart is tender and contrite so as to feel the impression of the divine fingers, when it is thus tremblingly and shrinkingly alive to the slightest touch of the heavenly hand, it is in an equal and similar degree sensitive also to temptation. And the more tender the conscience is, the more poignantly, for the most part, will temptations be felt. The more alive that the fear of God is in the heart, the more clearly will sin be perceived, and the more will it be hated and abhorred. You may depend upon it, that no persons are further from God than those who are really Antinomians. I say **really** such, for the name is often falsely applied to such as believe and preach a free-grace gospel, and walk in the fear of the Lord. But I mean such characters in the professing church as "continue in sin, that grace may abound," and, under shelter of the doctrines of grace, live and act contrary to the precepts of the gospel. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." I would as soon think of uniting with notorious drunkards and libertines as with high professing Calvinists who, by their loose talk and conversation, cause the truth to be evil spoken of.

III. The third mark given of this people is that they are "from a people **terrible** from their beginning hitherto," that is, up to the time when the present was made. There is a little difficulty in the language of the text here; it says, "and **from** a people terrible from their beginning hitherto;" as though the people scattered and peeled, were to be taken **out of another** people who were terrible. This need not, however, create, I think, an insuperable obstacle. The word "from" seems to have reference to the word "present:" and as we read that the present is to be made "**of** a people scattered and peeled," so the present "**from** a people terrible from their beginning," appears simply to mean that the people

who are terrible are made a present of to the Lord. This seems to harmonize best with the general drift of the text. This expression **terrible** seems to my mind to carry with it two ideas. First, that they were spiritually acquainted with the terrors of God: and, secondly, that they were a terror to others. Now all the family of God, each in his measure **(though we can lay down no standard of depth or duration)** must know something of Jehovah as terrible in majesty: must have a sense in their souls of his inflexible justice, his hatred of evil, his eternal purity, and spotless holiness.

I am not going to define—I think it impossible to define, as I just now hinted—how deep those convictions shall be, or how long they shall last; but I believe every living soul, before it passes from time into eternity, must see something of Gods countenance as of purer eyes than to behold evil, and thus come before him with "reverence and godly fear." It would appear that the people here spoken of were "terrible from their beginning hitherto," that is, that they knew more or less of the Lord as terrible in majesty all through the stages of their spiritual life up to the moment of which the text speaks—till they were presented to the Lord of Hosts. Not that they knew him as such always, that is, continually, prolongedly as such; but that from time to time there were flashes in their conscience, whereby God was made known to them as terrible in majesty.

For instance, if they were overtaken by any backsliding, the terrors of God were arrayed against them. If they gave way to base lusts, the terrors of Gods holy countenance were made manifest in their souls. If they were caught by idolatrous affections, or entangled in the base workings of their carnal mind, they could not cloak these things over before the eyes of him with whom they had to do. They could

not treat sin as a light matter, or say, "my sins are all washed away, and now sin and I have shaken hands and become good friends. It can do me no harm, nor destroy my soul." The living family, whose consciences have been made tender, cannot indulge such presumptuous notions, for they feel the flashes of Gods anger against sin in their consciences: and whatever sweet sense they may have had of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ, sin will be ever a terror to them. Though there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, yet there will always be, as the case of David sufficiently proves, anger in the mind of God against the sin of his people.

But there is another sense in which we may take the word **terrible**, and that is, that the people of God are a terror to others. We find this intimated in the two witnesses mentioned in (Revelation 11:1). We read there of two witnesses who were to "prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth," and were "the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth" (Revelation 11:3,4). I believe that these two witnesses, primarily and chiefly, signify the ministers of Gods truth; and that they are two in number, agreeably to that word—"In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." But, in a secondary sense, every manifested child of God is a witness for God and his truth. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God" (Isaiah 43:12).

Now it is said of these witnesses that they "tormented them that dwelt on the earth;" and, therefore, when they were slain, those "that dwelt upon the earth rejoiced over them, and made merry, and sent gifts one to another;" so glad were they to get rid of them. Thus not only every faithful minister of Gods truth, but every quickened child of God also

torments those that dwell upon the earth, that is, the carnal, who make the earth their paradise and home, and all whose affections are earthly and sensual. Every one in whose heart is the fear of the Lord, is, in a measure, a terror to the carnal. Paul made Felix tremble; and John Knox struck terror into the heart of Mary, Queen of Scots. There is an indescribable something in a child of God, which carries conviction even to those who are enemies to vital godliness. Their very principles are a terror to them. The doctrines of grace, for instance, which they hold, torment, and are a terror to Arminians, and their godly and consistent life makes them terrible to Antinomians. As, when Moses came down from the mount, his face shone, and the people "were afraid to come nigh him" (Exodus 34:30), the beams of divine communion visible in him striking a secret awe into their consciences, so "the divine nature" of which the people of God are "partakers" (2Peter 1:4), that is "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." strikes a secret terror into the ungodly. Their very presence infuses a secret awe.

Let, for instance, any one of you who is known to be one of the sect everywhere spoken against, go into a chapel where there is a dead minister in the pulpit, you strike him with more awe than a thousand of his usual congregation. He hates you and yet he fears you: for he knows you are a witness against him. Thus the people of God are a terror to the carnal; and God means them to be such. When they cease to be a terror to others, when they cease to torment them that dwell upon the earth, they cease to deliver a faithful testimony. O may I be a terror to Gods enemies! O may God so endue me with the Holy Ghost that I may so take forth the precious from the vile, and preach his word with such faithfulness and power, as to make myself terrible to all his enemies; whether they are despisers of grace, or

pretenders to grace; whether they grovel in the sink hole of Arminianism, or are towering on the barren heights of dead Calvinism. And terrible "from their beginning" too.

From the first day that the people of God are quickened to fear his great name, they are terrible to the carnal, and sometimes, perhaps, more then, in the early warmth of their zeal and boldness, than afterwards. We may, in some degree, measure the strength and activity of the divine life in our souls by this test; for directly we turn aside unto evil, and the power of that holy anointing is diminished which makes us a terror to others, we fall from the position in which God has placed us; and from our high standing as witnesses of the truth as it is in Jesus. Samson, with his locks cut, struck no terror into the Philistines.

IV. But to pass on. The next mark of this peculiar people is, that they are "meted out." The word "**mete**," is the old English word for "measure." "With what measure ye **mete**, it shall be measured to you again." This people, then, that are to be presented to the Lord of Hosts are a nation "**meted out**," that is, measured up. This expression points not so much to their persons as to their religion; and declares that their faith is tried in the furnace. Their experience is measured by Gods standard, and thus judgment is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet in their souls.

Most certainly wherever God the Holy Ghost begins and carries on a work of grace in the heart, he will weigh up, and mete out, from time to time, all a mans religion, and try every inch of the way whether it lies straight and level with the word and will of God. Depend upon it that the Lord who "weigheth the spirits" (Proverbs 16:2), and by whom "actions are weighed" (1Samuel 2:3), will put into his righteous and unerring scales both nature and grace, both human and

divine teaching, and make us know which is full weight in heavens court.

The religion of the present day is too much to confuse everything of an experimental nature; to cover and obscure the work of grace in the heart. There is even among those who are sound in the doctrines of truth little or no discrimination of character, no appealing to conscience, no tracing out the lines of distinction between grace and nature, no exposing the awful delusions of Satan as an angel of light, no pointing out the dreadful deceitfulness and hypocrisy of our fallen nature. But the generally approved and well nigh universally followed system is to throw around all professors, whose creed is sound and life consistent, a mantle of universal charity, and ask them no inconvenient questions. But there can be no question that God will never suffer our religion, if, indeed, he has mercifully taken us in hand, to be huddled up in this confused way; but he will measure it all by his standard, and refine it in his crucible. It is in this way that we learn the reality and genuineness of his work. Thus, if he give faith, he will bring that faith to the touchstone, and prove it with heavy trials.

It is in grace as in nature. When we would ascertain the exact weight of a thing, we put it into one scale, and a standard weight into the other, till the scales are even. So when the Lord puts faith in one scale, he puts a burden in the other to try whether it is standard weight. And the greater the faith the heavier the trial. The father of the faithful had to slay his own son. If he communicate a measure of hope, there will be many things that cause despondency to be put into the opposite scale, that despondency and hope may be well balanced. If the love of God be shed abroad in the soul, there will be trials and temptations to prove it. Thus the child of God learns the meaning of the words. "Your work of faith,

and labour of love, and patience of hope" (1Thessalonians 1:3). Every token for good, every sip of mercy, every manifestation of love is examined and searched into, weighed up and balanced in the court of conscience, to know whether it is full weight or not. And in this nice and accurate scrutiny not only is religion weighed up, but also that which is **not** religion. Sins, open and secret, backslidings, idolatrous affections, covetous desires, presumptuous confidences, rotten hopes, and vain props—all are weighed up in the balances of the sanctuary. And as that which is received from God, when put into the balances, will be found sterling and genuine; so all that did not come from God, all that sprang from nature and the flesh, all vain confidence, bold claims, and presumptuous notions, when put into the scales, will have **tekel** stamped upon them—"Weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

It is thus that "the dross is taken away from the silver, and there comes forth a vessel for the finer." This is the trial of faith, which is to be "found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1Peter 1:7). This is the rod upon the lot of the children; for "judgment must begin at the house of God; the righteous scarcely be saved;" and the Lord "sits as a refiner and purifier of silver to purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto him an offering in righteousness."

And now tell me, soul, what is thy case? Do you know anything of this measuring work? Is your religion, more or less, daily and weekly weighed in the unerring balances of the sanctuary? And do you find a secret hand in your conscience, that from time to time, as it were, takes your religion and measures it before your eyes, stamping some as genuine, and some as false; some as from God and some as from Satan; some as the fruit of heavenly teaching, and

some as springing from a deceitful and hypocritical heart? Be assured, if you are a people to be presented to the Lord of Hosts, in the day when he maketh up his jewels, your religion must be weighed in Gods balances, and stamped by him as genuine before you close your eyes in death.

V. A fifth mark given in the text of this accepted people is, that they are **"trodden under foot."**

This expression seems to indicate two things—firstly, the treatment they receive from a world lying dead in sin and dead in a profession: and secondly, the feelings that pass through their own hearts. If God has made your hearts honest before him, if he has communicated spiritual life to your souls, you will be "trodden under foot." The world, dead in sin, will trample you beneath their proud hoofs; and the world, dead in profession, will make your body as the ground, and as the street that they may go over. The laws of our land may, indeed, prevent any such literal treatment of our persons: but do they spare what is equally, in our right minds, dear to us? Does not the self-righteous Arminian tread under foot the doctrines we dearly love? Does he not call them doctrines, which lead to licentiousness, and say that they are the invention of men, the fruit of a heated brain, and not to be found in the Scripture? Nay, have not some, in the height of their zeal for freewill, gone so far as to call them "doctrines of devils," and "damnable doctrines," awful speeches indeed to come from the mouths of professing men.

And as the Arminian, on the one side, will trample down the doctrines, so will the notional Calvinist, on the other, tread under foot your experience, and stamp his iron-bound heel upon all the convictions of your burdened spirit, and the trials of your troubled soul. Those who are at ease in Zion,

dwelling "careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure" (Judges 18:7), who are never exercised or tempted, but "lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall," and, therefore, "are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Amos 6:4, 6), will trample under foot the exercises, temptations, and burdens of living souls. And of all professors, none, I believe, will trample under foot the living family more than conscience-seared Antinomians. The godly fear, the tenderness of conscience, the respect to the Lords ordinances, and the obedience to his precepts which the regenerated family manifest, provoke the contempt and enmity of those who have a scheme of doctrines clear in their brain, but whose hearts are rotten as touchwood. Nor will they shew less contempt of your rising hopes and tender affections, and all the ebbings and flowings of divine life in your soul: despising and treading under foot everything short of or different from, the presumptuous confidence in which they stand themselves.

Expect, if you are a people whom God has formed for himself to shew forth his praise, to be trodden under foot: to have your motives misrepresented, your words to be the butt of calumny, and your actions to become food for the lying tongue to propagate its malicious falsehoods. To be despised and contemned of all men, and yet to be beloved and blessed by their God is the universal lot of all the living in Jerusalem.

But there is another sense in which we may understand the expression, "trodden under foot," and that is, as I have hinted before, in the feelings of their own hearts. In this sense they may be said to tread **themselves** under foot. In my right mind, I seem to care little to be trodden under foot by the contempt of professor and profane. I have, indeed,

even felt pleasure at being counted worthy to suffer reproach for Christs sake. But to be trodden under foot by myself; to feel that I deserve to be trodden under the righteous feet of Jehovah into a never-ending hell, and on account of my numerous and base iniquities to merit to be trodden under foot by the saints of God—this, this cuts deep.

And not only so, but to have myself to trample down all that I once thought was religion, my holiness, piety, and consistency, zeal, knowledge, and devotedness, to have to take them with my own hands, and cast them on the stones, and trample them under feet—this cuts deeper still. But the Lord will bring us to this spot, to tread under foot all creature-righteousness, and natural piety, as well as all the zeal, activity, and restless diligence that springs from, and feeds the flesh. As Babylons children, they must be taken and dashed against the stones (Psalm 137:9). God will teach us, sooner or later, to trample under foot everything but the blood and righteousness of the Lamb as our salvation and justification: and to reject all wisdom that does not spring out of himself.

VI. The last mark which is given in the text of this peculiar people is, "Whose land the rivers have spoiled." This people, then, had once a land: yea, what they thought was a goodly land, one rich in natural gifts, and teeming with everything bright to the eye, and alluring to the senses. This is the land of our nativity, our "Ur of the Chaldees," our Egypt. What a fair and bright land was this in the days of our romantic youth! And have we not in those days, stood, as it were, upon some lofty height, and looked with eager delight upon the scene of happiness that we fancied lay outstretched before us, promising to ourselves days of health, and wealth, and comfort in this world? But the rivers have spoiled the land. The waters of Gods providential dispensations have

flowed over it, and utterly marred it. Instead of being now a fair land, it has become a sandbank. We were looking for happiness in the things of time and sense. Some bosom idol, some bright prospect, some well-planned scheme, some dream of love or ambition was to be our paradise; not knowing that the sword of the cherubim, which turned every way, was planted at the gate. Rivers have burst forth from unexpected quarters, and forever spoiled that land for our resting place.

But, again, there is another land, which we once fancied to be fair and beautiful—the land of natural religion. We cultivated with much pains and diligence the soil of our own hearts—we toiled, dug, and planted; but reaped not; sowed, but gathered no crop into the garner. The rivers of conviction, flowing out of the sanctuary, spoiled the land. Have you not found, that when you were cultivating piety, a flood of conviction broke out and spoiled all the crop? Or when you had ploughed, and sowed, and harrowed the field, and were looking forward to the growth of diligence, zeal, prayer, praise, faith, hope and love, instead of finding a harvest to reap, a flood of doubt and fear, conviction and distress, burst forth, and carried away not only the crop, but well nigh the cultivator himself. And yet, perhaps, when the flood had gone off, and the rivers a little ceased from the land, you began to cultivate it again. After the crop was swept away, you tried hard after another; but no sooner did you begin to work, and get the seed sown, and the field in a husband-like order, than the rivers flowed over it, and spoiled it again.

But there is another sense in which the words may be taken; and that is as indicating the rivers of mercy and peace that flow out of the love of God through the channel of the Saviours blood. What is this world? It is polluted. It is not our

rest. It is defiled by sin, and marred by sorrow, so that a child of God can here find no abiding city. Rivers of conviction out of God as a God of justice, and of mercy out of God as a God of love, flowing in different channels, but tending to the same purpose, have spoiled the land: and it is a fair and goodly land no more.

Here, then, is a description of the people of God, of those that are to be presented to the Lord of Hosts. Does it not seem a singular description? It is not, indeed, generally received by the professors of the day, but that does not alter its reality or its truth. But there is a certain period spoken of in the text when they are to be presented, for it says, "**In that time** shall the present be brought unto the Lord of Hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion." And what time is this but that which is described in the preceding verses? "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches."

"**In that time,** " when it seems fit for nothing, but to be stubbed and burnt as a useless stump. When it is fit for nobody, and apparently still less fit for God, is the present to be made to the Lord of Hosts. Then will this people, scattered and peeled, be brought by the Holy Ghost, an acceptable offering unto God, as being washed in the blood of his Son, and clothed in his spotless righteousness. And observe **where** they are to be brought, the spot where the offering is to be made, "to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, the Mount Zion." And what is Zion, but the place "where God has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore?"

Brought to Zion where Jehovah reigns in the hearts of his redeemed, and where the "blood of sprinkling speaketh better things than that of Abel." Brought to see its solemnities, to be enriched with its treasures, and rejoice in its glory.

Thus if we are brought as a present to the Lord of Hosts, we shall come to Mount Zion—to the city of the living God, to banquet upon the Gospel feast, to eat and drink Gospel wine and milk, without money and without price. And by what road, and through what teaching? As having been pious from youth? As having been educated religiously in the Sunday School? As having said so many prayers, and having performed so many pious exercises? As having mastered our besetting sins and fiery passions? As being better than others, holier than others, more religious than others? If we come so, we come not as the text speaks. Such qualifications will not render us an acceptable gift to the Lord of Israel.

The nation that is presented to him is "scattered" upon the mountains without a Shepherd: "peeled" under the heavy weight of trials and temptations; "terrible" to themselves and to others, from the work of God in their hearts; "meted out" by the Spirit of the Lord putting a standard in their conscience, to bring all that they are and have to the test; "trodden under feet" by men, and by themselves; without a country, without a home; for "their land the rivers have spoiled." But in this abject state of destitution, poverty, nakedness, and necessity, brought as an acceptable present to the Lord of Hosts—to the place where he hath recorded his name—even to Zion, where he lives and reigns, as the God of all grace.

If this is true, and who can gainsay it? If these are the works of God, and who can deny that they are? then, only, so far as

we have some divine and experimental acquaintance with these things in our souls, have we any Scriptural testimony, that we are either come to, or are on our way towards Zion.

And, may I not add, if you live and die without knowing somewhat of this experience, you will never enter the gates of glory, but be among those to whom the Lord will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!"