

THE
Voice of the PROPHETS
CONSIDERED
IN A
DISCOURSE or SERMON,

SHewing what is WISDOM for men in a FALLEN
ESTATE;

AND also, what is WISDOM for a People in a CIVIL
STATE.

With an Observation on THIS TIME.

*But where shall Wisdom be found, and where is the Place
of Understanding.* JOB.

*Should ye not hear the Words which the Lord hath tried
by the former Prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and
in Prosperity?* ZECHARIAH.

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PROV. 9. 12.

If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy self ; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

LET us consider that we are in the Presence of an Holy GOD, who made us, and gives us every good thing we enjoy ; who will bring every Work into Judgment with every secret Thing.—It becomes us therefore with the utmost awe and reverence, to behave ourselves so as not to Break his holy Law, or merit his Divine displeasure : You may remember, that within these few years past there has been several Judgments threatened against this Land and Nation. The first that I shall mention, was in what is commonly called the *Chebueto* fleet, a large fleet sent from *France* against the *Colonies* ; big enough according to humane understanding, to have Destroyed our shipping, and at least to have laid our Sea-Ports in the utmost Ruin and Desolation. The *English* fleet at that time by contrary winds, a meer act of providence, hindered from coming to our Relief. But mark, the French fleet taken with a Dreadful Distemper on their passage ; they put into *Chebueto*, where they Died by Thousands, and were not suffered to do the *Colonies* the least Damage.

A case something similar to what we have told us, Judg. 7. 2. *And the Lord said unto Gideon, the People that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their Hands ; lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, mine own Hand hath saved me.*

Another instance of Judgment threatened against us, was in the beginning of the last War ; Gen. Braddick was defeated by the French and Indians, who came in like a Flood on some of the Southern Colonies, burning Houses, killing and taking Captive many of our People ; it seemed

seemed as though they would devour the whole land : But mark—in the conclusion of the war, the French, quite from St. Lawrence river to the Mississippi, were brought into subjection. Which brings to my mind the prophecy of Amos, who, after he had reprov'd Israel for divers sins, says, chap. 7. 1. *Thus hath the Lord shewed unto me, and behold he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth, and lo, it was the latter growth, after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee ; by whom shall Jacob arise ? for he is small. The Lord repented for this : It shall not be, saith the Lord. Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me, and behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee ; by whom shall Jacob arise ? for he is small. The Lord repented for this : This also shall not be, saith the Lord God.—Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plum-line in the midst of my people Israel.—*Have we not reason to believe, from these signs, that there is something among us that is very offensive in the eyes of an holy God, that must be reformed, ere we can expect to prosper. O that there were now a number of praying Amoses, who would say, O that the Lord would spare his people ! it may be that they will repent.—Are we now engaged in a more dreadful war, blood a running, killing one another ? as in Rev. 6. 4.

I do not determine wherefore it is that the hand of the Lord is gone out against us : I shall here only observe, that God sometimes brings his judgments by instruments, to whom his people have done no wrong ; see Judges 10. 6, and onward, *And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim and Ashtaroth.—And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And what harm had the children*
of

of Judah done to the Babylonians ? yet how they destroyed and captivated them !—But what was the matter ? for Jer. 7. 5.—7. *If ye thoroughly amend your ways, and your doings ; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour ; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods, to your hurt : then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.*

But it is possible some of you may say, at least in your hearts, ‘ We are wise men, and understand our interest exceeding well ; who can teach us ? ’—But I desire you to remember, that even the wisest of men have sometimes need of being put in mind of things they well knew. I will therefore consider the words in the following order,

First. Endeavour to show from the scripture, what is true wisdom for men in a fallen condition :

And in the next place, endeavour to show what is true wisdom for a people in a civil state.

Thirdly, That whosoever shall scorn the word of God, that they alone shall bear it.

And *Lastly,* Shew, in some measure, what it is they shall bear.

First, What is wisdom for men in a fallen state ? But let us first observe, that there is what hath been called wisdom, see *Daniel*, 5. 15. *And now the wise men, the Astrologers ;* who were probably such men, as by the help of the devil, pretended to foretel future events ; but this is so far from the true wisdom intended in the text, that it is the most dreadful folly !

Another sort of wisdom is mentioned in *1. Cor.* 2. 13. *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the holy Ghost teacheth :* There is such a thing then as what is called man's wisdom ; of this sort of wisdom, I suppose the apostle Paul had a large share before his conversion, being brought up to learning,

learning, who had the witness of miracles, and zealous in what he called religion ; yet persecuted the christians untill he received a light from heaven.

We have an account, *John 3.* of *Nichodemus* likewise a ruler of the Jews, who probably had a great share of human understanding or man's wisdom, although he was so far convinced by the miracles, that he said to our Saviour, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him :* Yet when our Saviour told him, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,* he understands nothing of this by his human wisdom, but says, *How can a man be born when he is old ?* And further saith, *How can these things be ?*—How ignorant was he of the new-birth, or the new heart which delighteth in hallelujahs and adoration to God ! And we are told in plain words, *1 Cor. 2. 14. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* And our Saviour himself says, *John 6. 45. It is written in the Propets, And they shall be all taught of God—Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*

My answer then to the first question (which is, What is wisdom for men in a fallen estate) shall be, That it is their wisdom to go to God by solemn prayer, for his mercy in teaching them, and to bring them into true religion by his mighty power, and that with an honest intention to be conformed to the will of God ; for God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth, *John 4. 24.* For if the heart doth not believe that God is righteous to reject its request, the prayer is like a demand : and it is therefore the wisdom of sinners to beg of God to show them how vile they are, and know that God is sovereign of his gifts, or they would cease to be free grace. And I hope there are none

of you so wise in your own eyes, as to think you have no need that God should teach you. Have you more wit than Nichodemus, or St. Paul, who were both taught of God?—And indeed, could men go to heaven by their own wit and invention, to whom would they sing praise? Would it be to themselves, while they neglect or despise to glorify God? What, self-saved, and self-glorified! No; if any are saved, it must be by the gift of God.

Which brings me in the second place, to say, that whosoever shall scorn to beg of God, to renew his heart, and to be taught, he alone shall bear it; for it is written, 'As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God: So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God,' *Rom. 14. 11, 12.* 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting,' *Gal. 6. 7, 8.* And the text is a full confirmation of this. 'If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.' But what shalt he bear; the answer is, 'The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty Angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,' *2. Thess. 1. 7, 8, 9.* 'Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,' *Mat. 25. 41.* The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,' *Mat. 13. 41, 42.* 'And I say unto you my friends, be not affraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can

can do. But I will fore-warn you, whom you shall fear; fear him which after he hath killed the body, hath power to cast into hell: Yea, I say unto you, fear him,' *Luke*, 12. 4. Can any person get any thing by scorning or slighting the counsels of their maker; to be cast into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his engels, where the soul dies not, and the fire is not quenched. I conclude this point, with this word, fly from the wrath to come.

In the next place, or *secondly*, I shall endeavour to show what is wisdom for men in a civil state:—To this I answer, It is wisdom for a people to do righteously, or what is the same, to keep the ten commands, for we have the words of the most high and holy God, the former of all things, see *Deut.* 16. 20. 'That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' *Levit.* 18. 5. 'Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.'

For instance; Suppose a people should have no law to punish the breaking any one of the first four of these commands, and of consequence have no regard to God; how dreadful must be their doom: see what was said to the children of Israel; Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen, let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation, *Judges*, 10. 14.

Let us consider the fifth command, which is, Honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Now if there were no obedience or respect paid to parents, or rulers, how would every villain invade the property of others, spending their time in it so that there could be no sustenance for the people; and if there were no law against murder, how would people be in danger of losing their lives, it would doubtless take so much time in preserving

serving them, as that they would not be able to raise any support for life.

And see what is said against breaking the seventh command. *Job, 31. 11.* 'For this is an heinous crime, yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine increase. And with respect to the eighth command, were there no law to punish stealing, how would many think it easier to steal for a living, than to labor, which of natural consequence, will ruin any people, and witness is the eyes of the law; how could the breaking of any one of these commands be punished, if there were nothing but false witness; and the tenth command, which includes the whole, or all honesty to our neighbour, to be neglected will be equally ruinous.

But you will doubtless ask in a more particular manner, when a nation, or a people, may be truly said to break any one of these commands? To this I answer, That a people, or nation, may be guilty of one villain's stealing a horse, for when the judges willingly and knowingly, clear the thief, when they know he is guilty, they are partakers with the thief; and indeed, for want of a proper enquiry into truth, they may become guilty: So when a people shall see that their judges do unrighteousness, and willingly clear the thief; if they do not endeavor to know and displace such judges, they all become guilty; for the people are commanded to see that righteousness takes place: see *Deut. 16. 18.* *Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with just judgment.*

This command was given to the people, they ought therefore to have put in officers by election, and to be sure to be left out when they did not do righteously. What greater encouragement to wickedness, than to have no judges; and what greater encouragement to the wicked,

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ed, than hinder their being found out and punished ; how severely were the children of Israel punished when they made no judges, but left every man to do as he pleased, or that which was right in his own eyes ; see the end of judges : should they not have made righteous judges a terror to evil doers, how guilty then of the blood of the Levites wife, and how dangerous was it to put in officers for life, if the people were justly charged for what they knew, and suffered their representatives to do.

Again, kings or rulers may be greatly to blame another way. For instance, suppose a king, or rulers, should take from the people ninety-nine parts of an hundred of the produce from the people, or the value, and lay it up for themselves, or give it to pensioners, or charity men, and enable them to carry on rioting, and drunkenness, while the people are greatly distressed to maintain it ; it may be as great a burden, as to be slaves : and how wicked is it to rate the people to maintain rioting, and drunkenness, right in the face of Gods commands, for even kings are not to make themselves rich beyond bounds with the people's money ; see *Deut. 17. 17. Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.* Nevertheless, there is no doubt but that kings and rulers ought to have a reasonable and honorable recompence for their labor. See *Rom. 13. 6. For this cause pay you tribute also for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.*

I should think it proper, under this enquiry, for us to consider the conduct of the children of Israel, and see wherein they were blamed, and when they were not : For God is the same, yesterday, to day, and forever ? Therefore those things that were displeasing to him then, are displeasing to him now if they are acted. And I do not remember any threatening against the children of Israel for injustice, untill after Solomon's time : the question will then be, How did they conduct in that time ? see *Deut. 24. 10. When thou dost lend thy brother any thing,*
thou

thou shalt not go unto his house to fetch his pledge. Did they indeed when they sold, or lent one another any thing, take a pledge as a witness to the debt ? I answer, Doubtless they did ; or what is the meaning of a pledge. Wherefore it is evident they took care beforehand to know how to do justice. But see Deut. 24. 12, 13. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge : In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down.

Why truly did they not trust one another longer than from morning to night ; for what profit could a pledge be that must be given up before the debt was paid. I answer, That the creditor could show the pledge to a number of the neighbours, and thereby get witnesses that the debtor owes for goods delivered ? In that case a creditor might recover his cause, or else it was lost, for what advantage was it to have a pledge or witnesses, if a person could recover upon his own sayso, or by making a false book, and swear it was truly and justly charg'd, nor could they make a book against any person for four times so much as the debtor would have given a pledge for ; nor for things for which satisfaction had been made. Should they not have been as really punished had they had no law to prevent making false accompts, as they were for not having law, or judges, to prevent the wickedness done to the Levites wife ; werefore they did well to take care beforehand, that one should not defraud or wrong another. If we can find in their practice, what was the mind and will of God, let us hear it. But to return ; It is probable, when persons thought themselves wronged, and could get no pledge ; they went immediately to trial. I shall here produce the account of an action that was brought and tried in one of their courts, present, king Solomon judge, 1. Kings, 3. 16, to the end. *Then came there two women that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him : and the one woman said, O my lord, I, and this woman dwell in one house ;*

house ; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house : and it came to pass, the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also, and we were together : there was no stranger with us in the house ; save we two in the house. And this woman's child died in the night, because she overlaid it. And she arose at mid-night and took my son from beside me, while thine hand-maid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom ; and when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold it was dead ; but when I had considered it in the morning, behold it was not my son which I did bear : and the other woman said nay ; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son : and this said no, but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king. Then said the king, the one saith this is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead : and the other saith nay ; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living. And the king said bring me a sword, and they brought a sword before the king ; and the king said divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was, unto the king (for her bowels yearned upon her son) and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it : But the other said, let it be neither mine, nor thine, but divide it. Then the king answered and said, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it ; she is the mother thereof. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged, and they feared the king ; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment.

Here observe, we have no account of any writ, or any officer to bring the defendant before the king, for it likely was looked upon as a token of guilt, to be unwilling to attend the court : we have no account of any attorney to abate the writ, or plead demuror, or special plea ; nor even to say, that the plaintiff had produced no witness to prove her cause ; neither could they go from court, to court, untill they had spent in the trial, three times so much

much as the cause was worth : But the judge hears the story from the parties, and by policy finds out from them which was the true mother, and orders, that she should have her own child.

But where lay the great wisdom think you ; was it in judging that a woman should have her own child, or in searching the matter.

See what is spoken by Job, who seems to have been a judge : *chap. 29. 16. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. I break the jaws of the wicked, and pluck the spoile out of his teeth.*

But from Solomons time, to their going into captivity, there are repeated threatenings for injustice, and violence, see *Micah. 2. 1. Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds : when the morning is light, they practice it because it is in the power of their hands—And they covet fields, and take them by violence, and houses, and take them away : so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage :—Therefore, thus saith the Lord ; Behold against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks : see also Jer. 22. 3. Thus saith the Lord ; Execute ye judgment, and righteousness ; and deliver the spoiled out of the hands of the oppressor ; and do no wrong ; do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow ; neither shed innocent blood in this place ; for if you do this thing, indeed then shall there enter in by the gates of this house, kings setting upon the throne of David rideing in chariots, and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by my self, saith the Lord ; That this house shall become a desolation.*

But did they do all this injustice, and violence, without any pretence of law ? No, they did not ; for we read, *Micah, 6. 16. For the statutes of Omry are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab ; and Hab. 1. 4. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth, for the wicked doth compass about the righteous ; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.*

But

But what was their law do you think ; was it like a fish-net, that would catch all the little fish, and let all the great fish go through ? I answer yes ; it probably was : but you will ask, how can that be ? I answer, That under a plausible pretence of doing justice ; that when either party thought themselves wronged, they might review or appeal, from court, to court ; until they had spent three times so much in the trial, as the cause was worth. The great men, by having very large fees for managing the causes, probably run off with the most of the money, while they left the poor to suffer for want. Who having recovered hardly enough to pay the cost, they lost all that was taken from them by injustice, or violence ; How did this deliver the *spoiled*. And when any one person did injustice, or violence to another, he was obliged to go to law, or loose his right ; and who knows but what that was next to his life ; was not the nation guilty of this. And what were they better to to have a law which cost more than could be recovered by it ; could it relieve a distressed person who had been wronged by injustice or violence. But if the righteous lost all, what become of the mistaken party, who likely lost more than three times all : Was not such a law, like an iron brier, that tore the flesh off every one that came near it : wherefore every mite of cost that was made in trials more than was absolutely necessary, was unjust ; no better than other injustice. Let us conclude this point, with these words, 2. *Chro.* 19. 6. *To the judges, Take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment.* And whosoever shall break any one of the laws of God, they alone shall bear it : for if a people shall have no law to punish the breaking any of these commandments, this is the natural tendency to bring them to ruin, as has been observed before ; if a people shall carefully punish the breakers of these commands, it is strange if any one escapes

escapes without punishment, shame, and disgrace ; however, they will certainly be under the curse, see *Deut. 27. 26. Cursed be he that confermeth not all the words of this law, to do them ; and all the people shall say amen.* Observe the word confirm ; for all are required to confirm this law. Therefore, here is a curse pronounced against every one who has a right to chuse rulers who doth not endeavour to chuse such as will be most likely to keep this law.

Here is a curse pronounced against every one who doth not endeavor to know what rulers do not do well in keeping this law ; who shall throw away his power, or doth not endeavor to displace, or leave out such rulers as do not do well in keeping this law. Here is a curse pronounced against every one who although he has not a right to chuse rulers eye or ear who shall do any thing which he knows is likely to hinder the keeping this law. Here is a curse pronounced against every judge or other who shall not endeavor the keeping this law. In fine, here is a curse pronounced against all the breakers of this law : and who hath ever hardened himself against his creator, and hath prospered ; therefore, every one that scorneth he alone shall bear it. But what shall he bear ? I answer, That whosoever shall scorn to obey the law of God, shall bear his wrath and displeasure. See what (if it be practiced) will be an instance of this, *Exod. 22. 22. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child ; if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely bear their cry ; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.* And I have heard, there is a distemper among the nations, which is the most dreadfull and mortal to the well people, for when a number of men shall make unjust rules, they will not only enjoy the displeasure of God, but they, and their's must be tried by the same law, see *Prov. 28. 10. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in*
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evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit ; but the upright shall have good things in possession : and Job, 18. 8. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. I remember an old observation that has been made ; That when the children of Israel had good rulers, to whom they heard so much as that they could execute the laws, they always prospered ; on the other hand, when they had bad rulers, to whom they hearkened, then they suffered greatly : and those rulers fared the worst, witness Jereboam, Jehoiachim Baasha, and Ahab. I conclude this point with that in *Job, 27. 8. For what is the hope of a hypocrite, tho' he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul.*

And now let us conclude this part, with a word of exhortation to the hearers. As we are probationers here, for eternity : Let us set apart some time in every day, wherein to consider solemnly what will become of us in another world ; and if we are in any distress, and see that the rod of God is upon us ; let us mistrust whether there be not something in our practice that we have overlooked, that is offensive to an holy God. Let us seek to God by fasting and prayer, to teach us what is amiss : see the example of David, when there was three years famine year after year ; and David enquired of the Lord, *2. Samuel, 21. 1.* Let us examine carefully how our actions agree with the rules of the word of God, see *Zach. 7. 7. Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets : and whatever is amiss let us reform, and restore righteousness ; then by fasting and prayer seek to God for forgiveness, and mercy ; who can tell if God will direct, and prosper our enterprises, or find a way of redemption, that we perish not.* I conclude the whole, with that in *Isa. 50. 10. Who is among you that feareth the Lord ; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light : Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* AMEN.