

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
**THE REV . JOHN NEWTON**

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF  
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,  
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

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CONTAINING  
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,  
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,  
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,  
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,  
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED  
**MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.**

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

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1830.

# MESSIAH

OR  
FIFTY EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES

ON THE SERIES OF

## SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES

WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT OF HANDEL'S CELEBRATED

### ORATORIO

OF THAT NAME,

PREACHED IN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1785,

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,

LOMBARD STREET,

LONDON.

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—————Ah!

Tantamne rem, tam negligenter, agere !      TER.

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this!—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

TO THE  
PARISHIONERS OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,  
AND  
ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,  
LONDON,  
THESE SERMONS  
ON THE  
MESSIAH  
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY THE  
AUTHOR,  
TO REMAIN AS A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT  
FOR THEIR PERSONS,  
AND HIS SOLICITUDE FOR THEIR WELFARE,  
WHEN HIS PRESENT RELATION  
TO THEM, AS THEIR MINISTER,  
SHALL BE DISSOLVED.

## SERMON III.

### THE SHAKING OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

*Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts. HAGGAI. ii. 6, 7.*

GOD shook the earth when he proclaimed his law to Israel from Sinai. The description, though very simple, presents to our thoughts a scene unspeakably majestic, grand, and awful. The mountain was in flames at the top, and trembled to its basis, Exod. xix. 16–19. Dark clouds, thunderings and lightnings filled the air. The hearts of the people, of the whole people, trembled likewise; and even Moses himself said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Then, as the apostle, referring to this passage, observes, the voice of the Lord shook the earth, Heb. xii. 26. But the prophet here speaks of another, a greater, a more important, and extensive concussion. Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake not the earth only, but also the heavens.

If we really believe that the scriptures are true, that the prophecies were delivered by holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and that they shall all be certainly fulfilled,—how studious should we be to attain a right understanding of passages and events, in which we are so nearly interested, that our hearts may be duly affected by them! But, alas! experience and observation strongly confirm the remark of the poet,

Men are but children of a larger growth.

If you put a telescope into the hands of a child, he will probably admire the outside, especially if it be finely ornamented. But the use of it, in giving a more distinct view of distant objects, is what the child has no conception of. The music of the Messiah is but an ornament of the words, which have a very weighty sense. This sense no music can explain, and when rightly understood, will have such an effect as no music can produce. That the music of the Messiah has a great effect in its own kind, I can easily believe. The ancients, to describe the power of the music of Orpheus, pretend, that when he played upon his harp, the wild beasts thronged around him to listen, and seemed to forget their natural fierceness. Such expressions are figurative, and designed to intimate, that, by his address and instructions, he civilized men of fierce and savage dispositions. But if we were to allow the account to be true in the literal sense, I should still suppose that the wild beasts were affected by his music only while they heard it, and that it did not actually change their natures, and render lions and tigers gentle as lambs, from that

time forward. Thus I can allow, that they who heard the Messiah might be greatly impressed during the performance; but when it was ended, I suppose they would retain the very same dispositions they had before it began. And many, I fear, were no more affected by this sublime declaration of the Lord's design to shake the heavens and the earth, than they would have been, if the same music had been set to the words of a common ballad.

The Jews, when they returned from captivity, and undertook to rebuild the temple of the Lord, met with many discouragements. They were disturbed by the opposition and arts of their enemies, who at one time so far prevailed, as to compel them, for a season, to intermit the work. And when the foundation of the temple was laid, the joy of those who hoped soon to see the solemn worship of God restored, was damped by the grief of others, who remembered the magnificence of the first temple, and wept to think how far the second temple would come short of it, Hag. ii. 3. In these circumstances, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to animate the people by a promise, that, inferior as the second temple might appear, compared with that which Solomon built, the glory of the latter house should be greater than the glory of the former, Ezra iii. 12, 13. Had this depended upon a profusion of silver and gold, the Lord could have provided it: for "the silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." But the glory spoken of was of a different kind. The presence of Messiah in the second temple would render it far more honourable and glorious, though less pompous, than the temple of Solomon; and would be attended with greater consequences than even the manifestation of the God of Israel on Mount Sinai. Then he only shook the earth; but under the second temple he would shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, to introduce the kingdom of Messiah.

We may consider from the words,

I. A character of Messiah,—“The Desire of all nations.”

II. The effects of his appearance,—“Shaking the heavens and the earth.”

III. His “filling the house with glory.” This clause of ver. 7 is not in the passage set to music; but as it is an eminent part of the prophecy, I shall not exclude it.

I. Messiah is here styled, “The Desire of all nations.” The propriety of this title may be illustrated by two considerations.

1. Before he came into the world to save sinners, an expectation prevailed in many nations, that a great deliverer and friend of mankind was at hand. This was, perhaps, partly the effect of some ancient traditions, founded on the promises of God respecting the seed of the woman, the traces of which, though much corrupted by, the addition of fables, were not worn out—but might be chiefly owing to several dispersions of the people of Is-

rael, and imperfect notices, derived from the scriptures in their hands. The sense of many prophecies concerning Messiah, though misapplied, is remarkably expressed in a short poem of Virgil, written a few years before our Saviour's birth. This eclogue (iv.), of which we have a beautiful imitation in our own language by Mr. Pope, affords a sufficient proof that the Heathens had an idea of some illustrious personage, who would shortly appear, and restore peace, prosperity, and all the blessings of their imaginary golden age to mankind. The miseries and evils with which the world was filled, made the interposition of such a deliverer highly desirable. There were even a few among the Heathens, such as Socrates and his immediate disciples, who seem to have felt the necessity of a divine teacher; and to be sensible that man, in a state of nature, was too depraved, and too ignorant, to be either able or disposed to worship God acceptably without one. There is reason to believe, that the revelation which we enjoy, though despised by too many who affect to be called philosophers in modern times, would have been highly prized by the wisest and best of the philosophers of antiquity. Socrates thought men were not capable of knowing and expressing their own wants, nor of asking what was good for themselves, unless it should please God to send them an instructor from heaven, to teach them how to pray. And therefore,

2. The need that all nations had of such a Saviour, is sufficient to establish his right to this title, admitting they had no knowledge or expectation of him. If we could suppose a nation involved for ages in the darkness of night, though they had no previous notion of light, yet light might be said to be their desire, because the light, whenever they should enjoy it, would put an end to their calamity, would answer their wants, and, in that sense accomplish their wishes; for if they could not directly wish for light, they would naturally wish for relief. The Heathens were miserably bewildered. They had a thirst for happiness, which could not be satisfied by any, or all the expedients and pursuits within their reach. They had fears and forebodings of conscience, for which they knew no remedy. They were so sensible, both of their guilt and their weakness, that, being ignorant of the character of the true God, and of that forgiveness which is with him, in times of extremity they frequently offered the most expensive sacrifices to the objects of their idolatrous superstition, even the blood and lives of their children, Micah, vi. 6. When Messiah appeared, as he was the glory of Israel, so he was a light to the Gentiles, as we shall have opportunity of observing more at large hereafter. He, therefore, who came purposely to bless the nations, by turning them from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God, may justly be called their desire, though in the time of their ignorance, they could form no suitable conception of him.

II. "I will shake the heavens and the earth."—This part of the prophecy has been, in a measure, literally fulfilled. At his birth, a new star appeared. At his death, the sun withdrew his shining, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, and the dead arose. During his life, he often suspended and overruled the stated laws of nature, and exercised supreme power over the visible and invisible worlds. He shook the kingdom of darkness, spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them by his cross. He shook the kingdoms of the earth; the idols trembled and disappeared before his gospel, till at length the Roman empire renounced Heathenism, and embraced the Christian name.

But the language of prophecy is highly figurative. Mountains and trees, land and water, sun and moon, heaven and earth, often signify nations, people, and governments; and particularly, heaven and earth are used to denote the religious and political establishment of Israel; or, as we say, their constitution in church and state. This, without doubt, is the primary sense here. The appearance of Messiah shall be connected with the total dissolution of the Jewish economy. The whole of their Levitical institution was fulfilled, superseded, and abrogated by Messiah, which was solemnly signified by the rending of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom at his death. And a few years afterwards the temple itself was destroyed, by which event, the worship of God according to the law, of which the temple-service was an essential part, was rendered utterly impracticable. Their civil state likewise was dissolved; they were extirpated from the promised land, and dispersed far and wide among the nations of the earth. Though, in one sense, they are preserved, by the wonderful providence of God, as a distinct people, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; in another sense, they are not a people, having neither settlement nor government, but living as strangers and foreigners in every country where their lot has been cast, Hos. iii. 4. Nothing like this can be found in the history of mankind. It is an obvious, striking, and perpetual proof of the truth of the scriptures. What was foretold concerning them by Moses and the succeeding prophets, is accomplished to a demonstration before our eyes. How unlikely was it once that it should be thus! yet thus it must be, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. And all that he has spoken is equally sure. He will yet again shake the heavens and the earth, dissolve the frame of nature, and execute his threatened judgments upon all those who do not receive and obey his gospel.

III. "He shall fill this house with glory." He did so, when he condescended to visit it in person. The blind and the lame came thither to him, and he healed them, Matth. xxi. 13–16. Children felt his power, and sung hosannah to the son of David, a title appropriate to Messiah; and when the

Pharisees rebuked them, he said, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out," Luke xix. 40. As the Lord in his own house, he purged the temple, and drove out those who profaned it, and not one of his enemies durst offer the least resistance to his will. And when he left it the last time, with sovereign authority, he denounced that awful sentence, which was soon afterwards executed by the Romans, both upon the temple and the nation, Matth. xxiii. 37. His glory filled the temple when he was an infant, so that Simeon and Anna then acknowledged his character, and spake of him to those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, Luke, ii. 25, 38. Especially his glory was manifested, when he proclaimed himself the fountain of life, and invited every thirsty weary sinner to come to him, to drink and live for ever, John vii. 37.

The temple of Jerusalem has been long since destroyed. But he has still a house, a house not made with hands. This is his church, comprising all the members of his mystical body. He dwells in each of them individually; he dwells in and among them collectively. Where two or three are met in his name, where his ordinances are administered and prized, where his gospel is faithfully preached and cordially received, there he is present in the midst of them. There his glory is seen, his voice heard, his power felt, his goodness tasted, and the savour of his name is diffused as a precious ointment, which refreshes the heart of his people, renews their strength, and comforts them under all their sorrows and cares. The glory and magnificence of the temple-worship, even in the days of Solomon, was faint compared with the glory displayed to the hearts of believers who worship him in spirit and in truth, under the New-Testament dispensation. But it can only be perceived by an enlightened and spiritual mind. To outward appearance all may be low and humiliating. The malice of their enemies has often constrained his people to assemble in woods and on mountains, in places under ground, or in the dead of the night, to secrete themselves from informers. But vaulted roofs and costly garments, the solemn parade of processions, music and choristers, and the presence of nobles and dignitaries, are not necessary to constitute the glory of gospel-worship. It is enough that he, in whose name they meet, condescends to visit them with the power and influence of his Spirit, to animate and hear their prayers, to feed them with the good word of his grace, and to fill them with joy and peace in believing. If they have these blessings, they desire no more, they are compensated for all their difficulties and hardships; and, however unnoticed and despised by the world, they can say, "This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven," Gen. xxviii. 7. For they approach by faith to the city of the living God, the Jerusalem which is above, to the worship which is carried on day without night, by the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just



men made perfect, Heb. xii. 22.

But every member of this mystical temple, being by nature afar off from God, experiences a previous change, which may be not unfitly described by the terms of my text. Before the Lord takes possession of his people, and in order to it, he shakes the heavens and the earth. Their former views of God and of themselves are altered by a light which penetrates the soul. All that they have been building in religion till then is shaken and overturned. Their vain hopes are shaken to the foundation. This concussion makes way for the perception of his glory as a Saviour. In this day of his power they are made willing to throw open the gates of their hearts, that the King of glory may enter.

But as I do not stand here to amuse you with a declamation on a subject in which you are not immediately interested, and as my office as a preacher both warrants and requires me to address myself not only to your understandings but likewise to your consciences, I must be allowed, before I conclude, to propose this question to your consideration, Is Messiah, the desire of all nations, the object of your chief desire? How much depends upon the answer? Do you wish to know your present state in the sight of God? If you are faithful to yourselves you may be satisfied, provided you will abide by the decision of scripture. God is well pleased in his Son; if you are well-pleased with him, if he is precious to you, and the desire of your soul is supremely directed to him, then you assuredly possess the beginning, the foretaste, and the earnest of eternal life. If you so enter into the descriptions given in the Bible of his person, love, office, and glory, as to place your whole dependence upon him, to devote yourselves simply to him, and to place your happiness in his favour, then you are happy indeed! happy even at present, though not exempted from a share in the afflictions incident to this mortal state. For your sins are pardoned, your persons are accepted in the Beloved: to you belong the promises of guidance, protection, and supply through life, victory over death, and then a crown of glory which fadeth not away. To say all in a few words, God is your Father, and heaven is your home.

But on the other hand, if you trust in yourselves that you are righteous and good, at least comparatively so; if your attachment to the business or the pleasures of the world engrosses your thoughts and application, so that you have no leisure to attend to the record which God has given of his Son, or no relish for the subject, you have been hitherto guilty of treating the most glorious display of the wisdom and goodness of God with contempt. Many persons thus employed and thus disposed, bear respectable characters in civil life, from which I do not wish to detract. But however amiable you may be in the judgment of your fellow-creatures, you are a sinner in the

sight of God, and will be treated by him as an enemy to his government and glory, if you finally persist in a rejection of his gospel. The great point which will determine your state for eternity, will be this, What think you of Christ? For it is written, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha," 1 Cor. xvi. 22. He must and will fall under the curse and condemnation of the law, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Today, therefore, while it is called today (for tomorrow is not ours), may you hear his voice, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you!