

The Wilderness and its Fruits

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hempstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, July 28, 1850

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Hosea 2:14, 15

The prophecies of the Old Testament are often very obscure, and some almost unintelligible. This arises partly from the very nature of the subject, and partly from the highly figurative language in which they are couched. But, what adds to the difficulty, is our ignorance for the most part of the circumstances under which they were delivered, of the times to which they apply, and of the events which they dimly foreshadow.

But taking a broad view of prophetic Scripture, I consider that it admits for the most part of three distinct interpretations: *historical*, *experimental*, and *unfulfilled*; corresponding with the three times—*past*, *present*, and *future*.

1. Many prophecies of the Old Testament are already *fulfilled*; such as the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; the casting off of Israel; the calling of the Gentiles; the dispersion of the Jews. These prophecies have been fulfilled, their interpretation is strictly *historical*, and relates altogether to the *past*.

2. But there is a large portion of prophecy which is still

unfulfilled; such as the calling of the Jews; the second coming of Christ; and that glorious period still *future*, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

3. But, besides the interpretation of those prophecies which are *past* and therefore *fulfilled*, and those which are *future* and therefore *unfulfilled*, there is that which bears more immediately and directly upon the *present—experimental interpretation*. And indeed, without this, this part of God's word would be to us a dead letter. If it did not bear upon our own experience; if there were not a *spiritual* interpretation as well as a *literal*; if prophecy were not descriptive of God's dealings with the soul *now*, we might as well put our Bible into the drawer. We might almost take a thread and needle, and sew up the prophetic part of God's word; or tear it out of the Bible, if it have no reference to us. To the past we look back with admiration; to the *future* we look forward in hope; but the *present*, the *spiritual* and *experimental* interpretation of prophecy as bearing upon our own soul, is that which most deeply concerns us. Living under the dispensation of the Spirit, we need a spiritual interpretation.

These three interpretations we find sometimes in the very same chapter. We have an instance in the one before us. (Hos. 2.) In it we find a prophecy already *fulfilled*; "I will cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts; and I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them." The present state of Judea stands forth as a literal fulfilment of these words. The new moons, the sabbaths, and solemn feasts of Israel have ceased in the land, and her vines and fig-trees are destroyed. But we have reason to

believe that this chapter also contains prophecies which one day *will be literally fulfilled*; that when the Lord brings back his captive Zion, he will "betroth her unto him for ever in righteousness, in judgment, in lovingkindness, and in tender mercy; he will betroth her unto himself in faithfulness, and she shall know the Lord." And, united with these two, we have the *spiritual, experimental* interpretation shining throughout the whole chapter, as bearing upon the experience of God's children. It is in this latter point of view, that I shall, with God's blessing, now consider the words before us. We may observe in them two leading features.

First; the bringing of Israel into the wilderness.

Secondly; what God does to her when he has brought her there.

I.—"*Behold,*" he says, "*I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness.*" But what are we to understand by "the wilderness?" I think we may understand by it two things. *First, the world; secondly, the human heart.* For, we shall find, if the Lord enable, that to a child of God both the world, and the human heart as dissected and laid bare by the Spirit of God, bear marks and characters of "*a wilderness.*"

i. But what is "a wilderness?" We must comprehend the word literally, before we can understand it spiritually.

A "wilderness," then, is, *first*, a place where *no corn grows*. That is the very character of the Arabian desert. No grain grows there fit for man. But *secondly*, it is a place where *no corn can be made to grow*. Now, you know, in this country there are commons and heaths that do not bear grain in their present state; but they might be brought under cultivation and made to produce it. But there are wild, waste districts in

the Scottish Highlands, which could not by any cultivation be made to grow corn. So with the "wilderness." You might plough, sow, harrow, and roll it, but you would never have a crop. The sun would dry it up; there is no soil in which the plant could grow. It might spring up for a time; but with all our attempts, it would soon utterly wither away. And the *third* idea to make up a desert, and flowing out of the two former features, is, that it is a place of which *the inhabitants are always rovers, without a settled habitation*. They have no home, house, nor building, but live in tents; and are continually shifting the spot on which for a time they dwell.

Do not these three ideas very much make up the figure of a "wilderness?" See whether they are not applicable to two things in the experience of a child of God—*the world*, and his *own heart*.

1. *The world* is not "a wilderness" to a worldling. To him it is a beautiful estate, enclosed in a ring fence, with land easily cultivable and soil of the best quality, producing the richest crops, laden with golden harvests. But to *a child of God*, as I shall show you by and by, (if led into it,) the world is but a "wilderness;" from which no crop grows to feed his soul; from which by no exertions of his own can food be made to grow; and in which he is, and ever must be, a wanderer, not a settled inhabitant.

2. And this, too, with *the human heart*. We shall find, I think, these three ideas of "a wilderness" meeting also in the human heart, as laid bare by the keen dissecting knife of the Spirit to the spiritual eye of a child of God. Out of his heart no bread can come, for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" there is no food in it for his new nature; nothing of which he can say, 'This is what my soul can feed upon.' And though he may seek to cultivate it, and is bidden

and chidden to do so; and though he has tried often to put in the plough, to clean it with the hoe, to rake it with the harrow, to sow good seed, and to water it perhaps with the waterpot, yet, after all his attempts, the harvest is only a heap in the day of desperate sorrow, the soil being absolutely barren, totally uncultivable and unproductive, with all his fairest exertions. He is tossed up and down, in consequence, as the locust, finding nothing in his heart on which he can set his foot, on which he can build for eternity, or in which he can safely and happily dwell, as a fixed resting-place.

Now, bear these things in wind, and when I come to the "wilderness," as the Spirit of the Lord has promised to bring his people there, you will then see whether you have an experimental knowledge of these two things for yourselves.

ii. The Lord says, "*Behold, I will allure her.*" Does this mean the first work of the Spirit upon the soul? I believe not. The first work of the Spirit, we read in Scripture, and we find confirmed by experience, is, to convince of sin, to prick to the heart, to wound, to make the soul sensible of its state before God, and its utter alienation from him. Therefore, the word "*allure,*" cannot apply to the first work of the Spirit upon the soul. Men may talk of being drawn by love; but what is the religion of those who are thus drawn by love? What depth, what reality, what power, what life, what godliness is there in it? The word "*allure*" is not applicable, then, to the first beginning of a work. That usually commences with conviction, a sight and sense of sin, a cry for mercy, a feeling of wretchedness and ruin, and a despair of salvation in self.

But after the Lord has been pleased thus to pierce, to wound, to convince, and bring down, he often, perhaps usually, drops down some sweetness, blessedness, and consolation

into the soul. He gives it to taste a few dewdrops of his love, some honey-drops from the Rock of Ages. This I call the Spring of the soul. You know what a beautiful season spring is; when the leaves are clothing the trees, when the birds are singing upon the branches, when the flowers are springing out of the ground, when the chilly winds of winter are gone, when the balmy breezes blow from the south, when the sun rises high in the sky, and sheds gladness over the face of the renewed earth. Thus the soul has, generally speaking, a Spring; and, as there is but one spring in nature, so for the most part there is but one spring in grace. As regards our natural life, it is only once that we are young; and it is so spiritually; we only once enjoy that sweet season of which Job speaks, "As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." (Job 29:4.)

During, then, this youth of the soul, this Spring season, this "day of espousals," there is an "alluring" of the heart unto God. Now this we need. And why? Perhaps we are bound up with carnal companions, or by snares we cannot break; hampered by worldly relations, and their persecutions we cannot face; tied down with lusts and sins, and the chain of these we cannot burst; in the world, and unable to come out of it. Notwithstanding all the frights, terrors, alarms, and convictions that the soul may experience, (though these for a time may operate, and that powerfully); yet when their effect has ceased, it slips back into the old spot; it is not fairly or fully brought out. We want something beyond law and terrors to do that; we need something besides thunder and lightning to bring the soul fully unto God.

There is an old fable of the sun and Boreas, or the North wind, once having a strife as to which could first make a traveller throw aside his coat. The North wind had the first trial. But though he sent forth his chilling blasts, trying to

blow the traveller's coat off, yet the more that lusty Boreas blew, the tighter and closer did the traveller wrap his cloak around him. But when he had blown his worst and last, and was defeated, then the sun tried what he could do. He burst from the clouds in all his warmth and brightness, and shot his rays with such fervour, that the traveller soon threw aside his cloak, and fled to the wood. I dare say, the fable was meant to illustrate the difference between harshness and kindness; but it seems to bear upon our subject also. Law terrors, convictions, and alarms—these are like old Boreas, with his blustering cheeks; they will not bring the great coat off; you wrap the old cloak tighter round you. Something melting is wanted; something warming, cheering, reviving, comforting, and blessing. And when the Sun begins to shine, and a few rays of righteousness, warmth, light, life, and love beam upon the heart, then it does in a moment what law and terrors could not do in a century—it melts off the old garment, brings the soul unto Jesus, and into sweet union and communion with him. There is felt and seen, then, a beauty, a blessedness, a reality, a sweetness in the things of God, which the tongue cannot describe. By it the heart is drawn unto the Lord Jesus, to the truth as it is in Jesus, to the people of Jesus, and to the service of Jesus. World, friends, foes, relations are all disregarded; neither frowns nor smiles have any effect. There is such a sweetness then felt in the things of God, such a blessedness and reality, that the soul is "allured" by them out of everything that before held it back from union with a living Head.

Under these blessed feelings, a soul will do anything for Christ; will make any sacrifice, give up anything, bear anything, endure anything for the Lord Jesus. The Spring of nature is beautiful to see; but the Spring of grace is more beautiful to feel. Early days, if not the most profitable, yet are often the best days in our feelings.

Now, by these "allurements," sweetness, and blessedness, the Lord draws the soul into a profession of religion, into perhaps joining a church, taking up the cross, walking with the people of God, putting itself forward, and that in the utmost sincerity, to serve the Lord Jesus. And perhaps, we think, we shall enjoy this all our days. At this season, when we see old professors carnal and worldly-minded, and we feel full of life and zeal; some mourning and sighing, and we singing and dancing; others complaining of their bad hearts, when we scarcely know that we have a bad one; others cast down with temptations, and we not exposed to them; or groaning under trials, and we ignorant of them; we think that they must be deceived. We say, 'This is not religion; the religion we have is a very different thing; there is a sweetness in ours; there is a comfort, a blessedness in it.' Perhaps we write very hard things against these old professors; think they have been doing something very bad, and have sinned away their comforts; or that it is their own fault they are not so lively, so happy, and so comfortable as we. But we do not know what the Lord is doing by this "alluring," nor what his purposes are; that all this is to bring us "into the wilderness." And when he has got us there fairly and fully, then to shew us what the "wilderness" really is.

iii. But how does this take place? A "wilderness," I endeavoured to show represents generally two things—*the world* and *the human heart*.

Now, I dare say, when your soul was flourishing, *the world* in a measure flourished with you too. The Lord, generally speaking, calls his people young: being young, they have not many worldly trials: and therefore, very often natural youth and spiritual youth go hand in hand. There is a buoyancy, then, naturally, and spiritually, and the two are often closely

united. But now comes the "wilderness." Now comes the world, as opened up in its real character. Trial often begins with some heavy stroke of a worldly nature. This is sometimes the first stab that the soul gets when it comes into the "wilderness." Perhaps some *illness* robs us of health for life; or some *stroke in providence* casts down all our airy Babels: or some *disappointment*, it may be of a very tender nature, lays all the youthful hopes of the heart prostrate in the dust. Now, up to this time earth was not manifested as a "wilderness" world, nor was our heart altogether divorced from it. And though the Lord was sweet and precious, yet there were *worldly things* indulged in; *worldly society* perhaps not fully given up; *worldly practices* that the heart was not weaned from; *worldly connections* not fully broken through. John Newton speaks of his enjoying in early days the presence of the Lord sweetly in the woods, and yet spending the rest of the evening in carnal company. Now that seems very strange; yet perhaps you and I might have done something of the same kind. When I was a Fellow of my College at Oxford, soon after I felt the weight of eternal things, I have sat in the Common Room after dinner with the other Fellows, and amidst all the drinking of wine, and the hum and buzz of conversation, in which I took no part, have been secretly lifting up my heart to the Lord. But I could not go amongst them after I got into the wilderness. The reason was, I was not fully brought out; though there was a blessedness felt in the things of God, yet the evils of the world were not clearly manifested; temptation was not powerfully presented; and therefore, the danger of it was not felt nor feared. But now, the world begins to be opened up in its real character. Once it was your friend; now it has become your enemy: once it smiled upon you; now it frowns: once it did you good; now it slanders you, and does you all the evil it can: once you could enjoy it, but now it palls upon your appetite; disappointment, vexation, and sorrow embitter all;

and you find the world to be what God declares it, "a wilderness." No food grows in it; nothing that your soul can really be satisfied with; "vanity and vexation of spirit," are written upon all. Though you may try to get food out of it, all your attempts are blighted with disappointment; and you in consequence, finding no solid footing, become a wanderer, a pilgrim, and a stranger, tossed up and down in it, and having in it neither heart nor home.

2. But again. The *human heart*, as opened up to a child of God, is a "wilderness," too. You did not know this formerly; you did not know you had so bad a heart. When the Lord was first "alluring" you into the "wilderness," you could not see that you had no strength, no holiness, no wisdom in yourself; that your heart was a cage of unclean birds; that there was nothing spiritually good in it. In early days, we cannot discern between the Lord's strength and our own; between natural and spiritual feelings; between the zeal of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. Nor do we understand these things until our senses are exercised to discern good and evil. A clear line is not drawn at first in our soul between nature and grace; and therefore, our hearts in early days are not to us a "wilderness." We think we can cultivate them; why should we not? Cannot we encourage a spirit of prayer? Cannot we read God's word? Cannot we go to hear good men preach? Cannot we arrange certain seasons and hours in which to seek the Lord's face? Cannot we watch against besetting sins? Cannot we keep the door of our lips? Cannot we keep our eyes and hearts fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ? We are told to do these things; to cultivate grace; and we make the attempt. Are we successful? If we are, it is our ignorance that makes us think so. Let us have light to see, life to feel, and spiritual discernment to know what is of God, and what is of man; what grace is, and what the work of the Spirit is; what divine feelings are, and how distinct these are from the work of the

flesh; then we shall find that our heart not only does not bear food that we can feed upon to our soul's satisfaction; but cannot be made to bear it. It is a "wilderness," a wide waste, a barren sand, a desert, blown over by the Sirocco, parched by the sun, dried up and desolate, absolutely sterile and uncultivable.

Now, here in the "wilderness," we get stripped to the very bone; here we lose all our goodness, all our wisdom, all our strength, all our creature holiness, all our rags of fleshly righteousness. It is in the "wilderness" we get stripped; and till we come there, we do not know what stripping is. Then we feel poor creatures, ruined wretches; desolate, forsaken, abandoned, almost without hope or help; in self lost and undone. We look upon the world—all is vanity, vexation, and sorrow. We look within—all is dark, wild, and desolate; nothing but sin, and that continually: unbelief, infidelity, obscenity, filth, and blasphemy; everything hideous, every thing vile; nothing but evil without and within. This is stripping work; this is "the wilderness;" this is bringing a man to his senses; this is laying the creature low; this is making him know the depth of the fall; this is plucking up his fleshly religion, tearing out by the roots all his carnal hopes, leaving him naked, empty, and bare. All his holiness gone, all his zeal withered, all his strength turned into weakness, all his comeliness into corruption; and he standing before God utterly unable to work one spiritual feeling in his own heart.

Are *you* here? Have you ever been here? Is God bringing you here? Here we must come to learn what true religion is; here must we come to see the end of all perfection, and to feel that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." But does the Lord leave his people here? No.

II.—Which leads us to our *second* point. The Lord brings his

people there to do them good; to give them blessings; to work grace in their hearts; and to extend to them favour and mercy in a measure and degree hitherto unfelt.

But let us look at the catalogue of blessings provided for Israel when she comes into the "wilderness."

i. The first is; "I will speak comfortably unto her." It is in the margin, (and so it is in the Hebrew) "*to her heart.*" I shall take the two renderings: *first*, "to her *heart*;" *secondly*, "*comfortably.*"

1. It is in the "wilderness," then, that we learn *heart* religion. If you want God to speak to your heart, you must go into the "wilderness" for it. It is often headwork very much till we get there. Into the wilderness of human nature must we go, if God himself is to speak to our heart. And when you begin to feel what a heart you have, you will find the necessity of God speaking to it; for only so far as he speaks, have you any feeling, any life, any power in your religion. And O, when a man begins to find and feel what a "wilderness" heart he has—how anxious, how desirous he is that God would speak to his heart! How this shuts up his religion into a very narrow compass! How it cuts off the flesh of it, and brings him and his religion too into a nutshell! How it hacks to pieces all the ornaments that have been hung around it by self and the devil, and brings him to this point, (and a very trying point it is to be brought to), 'I have no religion of self; I cannot work a grain in mine own heart; I am dead, dark, stupid; God must speak to my soul: and if he do not speak, I am utterly destitute; I have no feeling, no life, no faith, no love, no strength, no holiness; I have nothing; I stand,' says the soul, 'before God without a thread.' 'Lord,' (the poor man cries under these painful exercises, toiling and struggling in the wilderness), 'speak to my soul; drop a word into my heart.'

And how anxious he is for God to speak! But how many sleepless nights have *you* passed because God does not speak to your heart? How many times do you roll backwards and forwards upon your bed because you cannot get the Lord to speak a word into your soul? Do you ever go groaning and sighing along the street because the Lord does not speak to you? or, are you gazing with a fool's eye into every picture-shop?

Now, if you are in the "wilderness," you will want the Lord to speak to your soul; and you will feel all your religion to hang upon this—that you have no more religion than springs out of God's word and work in your heart. And here you will look and wait, long, beg, and pray, 'Lord, in mercy speak to my poor soul.' The Lord has promised to do this; but he will not speak till he brings you to the spot where he has promised to do so. When he has "allured" you along into the wilderness, and got you fast there, he will now and then drop a word, give a promise, speak with soft melting whispers, make his word sweet and precious; and thus fulfil his promise, 'I will speak to her heart.'

2. But the word also means "*comfortably*." Now when the Lord was "alluring" your soul in the way I have described, you did not know much about comfort springing out of the Lord's speaking to your soul. You could hardly tell whence your comfort came. It did not come direct from the mouth of God; the Lord did not mean it at that time to come so. Every sermon seemed at that time blessed; but now perhaps it is only one word out of it. At that time, when you went upon your knees, it seemed as though you had sweet access to the throne of grace; every hymn was full of beauty; and every child of God you could take in your arms, embrace, and feel sweet communion with. And yet, all the time, when you look back, you cannot say this sprung out of any special words or

promises that God applied to your soul. There was a general sweetness, but not a particular one. It was more in the truth, in the people of God, in the blessedness of the things of God, in the doctrines of grace, than it was in special promises, or special applications of blood and love. But when you get into the "wilderness," you cannot do with what did very well in times of old. There are many children of God who love to hear a minister trace out evidences. 'O,' they say, 'this just suits me; I love to hear evidences.' But you get, after a time, beyond evidences. They will do for a babe; they will suit a child; but a man wants meat; a man can pick a bone. And so (I address myself now to those who know the "wilderness") you want something stronger, more solid, more weighty, more real, more effectual; you want testimonies, words, manifestations, a sweet discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is by being stripped in the "wilderness," that we are brought to look and long for the Lord's own special comfort; for we are brought to stand in need of it; and as we cannot get a drop of comfort by cultivating our own graces, we are obliged to beg for a few grains of comfort from the Lord himself. And what a mercy it is, that he has promised to speak "comfortably;" that when nobody else can speak comfort, when we cannot speak it to our own souls, and cannot get consolation from anything, the Lord can and does, according to his promise, speak "comfortably." He whispers peace, and blesses the soul with some testimony of its interest in the precious blood and love of his dear Son. That is the first thing the Lord has promised to do.

ii. The next is: *"I will give her her vineyards from thence."* A strange place! We should not go to Bagshot Heath or Woking Common to find "a vineyard;" and I am sure we should not go to the great Sahara, or the Arabian desert, to find grapes growing. But we might as well expect clusters of grapes upon Bagshot Heath, as fruitfulness by nature in the human heart.

Here, then, is the wonder. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." What! in the wilderness! when she has been trying to bring something out of her heart to please God and self with, and all her efforts are baffled! What! to give her vineyards there! Why, that is the mystery; that is the beauty; that is the blessedness; that is the sweetness—that the Lord can and does make the barren heart fruitful in the "wilderness."

Now, perhaps you have been toiling, tugging, working very hard to produce some fruit. 'Come,' say you, 'it will not do to go on like this. I must do something; I must pray more, read the word of God more, watch over my heart more, and seek the Lord more. I will do it too; nobody shall hinder me.' So some Monday morning, you begin and set to work, and take the Bible down. 'Yes,' say you, 'I will read two or three chapters this morning; I will go to prayer, and I will try if I cannot do something to be a real Christian.' All very good. But what do you get from it? What power, sweetness, or blessedness can you put into the word of God? What life and feeling can you put into your soul? Well, you have tried it again and again; and when you have cast up the account, it is nil, nothing, nought. Zero is the full amount! And you wonder where the fault is, till at last you begin to despair, and feel and say, 'I am a wretch, and ever shall be. God be merciful to such a wretch! Lord, look in tender compassion on such a monster, such a filthy creature that has done nothing, and can do nothing but sin.'

Now when the Lord is pleased to speak a word to the heart, and bless your soul with real comfort, what is the effect? It makes you fruitful. *Then* you can read the word of God—aye, and with blessedness too; then you can pray, and with sweet satisfaction too; then you can look up, and with eyes of affection too; and then you can be holy, and that by the real

sanctifying operations of the Spirit too. This is the way whereby all fruitfulness is produced; not by roller, plough, and harrow; seed basket and hoe; turning up the desert, and casting good corn there, to be like Pharaoh's ears only blasted by the East wind; but to be in the "wilderness;" to feel a needy, naked wretch, without hope or help in self, and to wait upon the Lord for him to speak a word to the soul, by his own blessed breath breathing into us a fruitfulness that our heart never could produce in itself. Here is genuine spirituality and true holiness: here is real fruitfulness. These are the graces of the Spirit, not the perishing works of the flesh.

What is thus wrought in the soul by the power of God is to the glory of God. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Now, if you had never known the "wilderness," what a barren heart and desperately wicked nature you have, you would not have wanted fruitfulness to come from God's own mouth into your soul. The starved, withered crop that nature produces would have been reaped and gathered into your garner, and you would have been pleased with the sheaves, though they were but straw and chaff.

As time is running on, I must just hastily skim over the other blessings which God has promised in the "wilderness."

iii. *"The valley of Achor for a door of hope."* Now the "valley of Achor" signifies the 'valley of trouble.' It was the valley in which Achan was stoned. And why stoned? Because he had taken the accursed thing; because his eye had been captivated by the Babylonish garment and golden wedge, and he had buried them in the tent. This may throw a light on what "the valley of Achor" is spiritually. Perhaps you have been guilty of Achan's sin; you have been taking the accursed thing; have been too deeply connected with the

world; have done things that God's displeasure is against. Let conscience speak in the bosom of each. The consequence has been, that you have got into the "valley of Achor!" Trouble, sorrow, and confusion are your lot; and you do not know whether the lot of Achan may not wait you there.

Now it is in this "valley of Achor," or sorrow, confusion, and fear, that the "door of hope" is opened. And what is "a door of hope?" What is a 'door' literally? Is not "a door" a place of exit and a place for entrance? By "a door" we go out, and by "a door" we come in. So "a door of hope" admits the visits of the Lord to the soul; and "a door of hope" admits the going out of the soul's breathings after God. Thus, every glimpse of mercy, every beam of love, and every ray of comfort; every sweet promise that drops into the soul, every intimation from God, every testimony of interest in Christ; every dewdrop, every honey-drop that falls into a parched wilderness heart—this is opening up "a door of hope."

But why "*in the valley of Achor?*" That we may cease to hope in self; that a sound and true gospel hope may enter within the veil as an anchor sure and stedfast, and there be no hope but in the precious blood of the Lamb, and in a sweet manifestation of that blood to the conscience. This is "the door of hope" through which the soul looks into the very presence of God; sees Jesus on the throne of grace, the sprinkled mercy-seat, and the great High Priest "able and willing to save to the uttermost."

Through this "door of hope," by which Christ is seen, the soul goes forth in desires, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings after him; and through this "door of hope" descend visits, smiles, tokens, testimonies, mercies, and favours. And thus, there is a "door of hope;" no longer barred, closed, and shut back, but thrown wide open in the bleeding side of an

incarnate God. And this is opened "in the valley of Achor," where we deserve to be stoned to death because we have touched the accursed thing; where we deserve nothing but damnation, the eternal vengeance of God, and to be made as Achan a monument of eternal wrath; yet, in this "valley of Achor," is opened up a blessed "door of hope."

iv. *"She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when the Lord brought her out of the land of Egypt."* Spring again! only a better spring. Youth again! "They shall renew their strength as the eagle." Here is a renewing of visits almost despaired of; of joys that seemed never to return; of hopes almost extinct; of consolations remembered, but remembered almost with fear, lest they should have been delusive. "She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came out of the land of Egypt."

But what a place to go and get into, to learn religion. How much more pleasant it would be to the flesh to take our Bible down, get a quire of paper, have a new pen, put some fresh ink into the ink bottle, and then to draw out our religion from the Bible; to believe all we read, take down all we see, and transplant it into our heart. But that is not the way; that would only stand in the letter. It would not do for eternity, nor for a dying bed. It would exalt the creature, but would depress the Creator. It might do for an hour, but it would not do for the judgment-day. And therefore, we have to learn our religion, if we learn it at all, in a way clean contrary.

Have you learned your religion thus? If you have, it will stand. There is a reality in it; it bears marks of God's grace and teaching. But if we have learned it except in this way, what reality, what power, what blessedness is there in it? None. We shall have to part with it when we want it most.

When we lie upon a death-bed, all our false religion will make to itself wings, and fly away; and when we stretch forth our hands for a little true hope, it is all gone.

Thus, we want something solid, real, spiritual, abiding; something of God and godliness, divine, heavenly, and supernatural; wrought in the soul by the almighty power, and breathed into our heart by the very mouth of God himself. That will stand, and no other will.

If the Lord has led you in his path, you have an evidence in your soul that these things are so; and you will know that this is the way; not because I say, so, nor because the Bible always says it, but because you have felt, experienced, and known these things by divine teaching and by divine testimony.