

## **Waters which do not Drown and Flames which do not Burn**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, June 15, 1858

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:1, 2

The promises are strewn thickly through the pages of God's inspired word—as thickly, and, viewed by a spiritual eye, more gloriously than the stars which stud the midnight sky. These promises, so countless in number, so glorious in nature, are more certain in the fulfilment than the very rising or setting of those heavenly orbs; for their full accomplishment rests not on fixed laws of creation, but on what is more stable than creation itself, even the eternal counsel, determinate will, and unchangeable faithfulness of the Almighty Promiser. The goodness of man, the unworthiness of the creature, no more hasten and no more arrest their fulfilment than they do the course of the stars or the movement of the sun. Were it so, not one of these promises could ever have its due fulfilment, for their basis would be as fleeting as a summer cloud. Did they rest in any measure upon such a contingency as the obedience of man, every promise that God has given must fall to the ground unaccomplished, for fallen man is inherently incapable of rendering a pure obedience, and no other is available or acceptable. But, resting as they do upon the faithfulness of an unchanging and unchangeable Jehovah, his very glory is

interested in their complete accomplishment.

But, apart from the question of their fulfilment, there are two things declared by the Holy Ghost of the promises generally, which are as important as they are blessed. 1. He says of them, by the pen of Paul, that "all the promises of God *in him are yea, and in him Amen*, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20.) That is, all the promises are so ratified and established in the Son of his love; if I may use the expression, they are all so lodged by the will of God in the hands and heart of Christ, that they can no more fall out of his hands and heart than Christ himself can fall from his mediatorial throne. The promises can only cease to be fulfilled when Christ ceases to be the fulfiller, for he lives at the right hand of the Father to carry into accomplishment every promise recorded in the pages of inspired truth. 2. The second thing said of them is—"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by *these ye might be partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:4.) Thus the promises provide for our *sanctification* as well as for our *salvation*; for when applied to the heart by the power of God, they instrumentally raise up a new and divine nature, and thus deliver us from the power and prevalence of those worldly lusts in which thousands live in present corruption, and die in everlasting perdition.

We have in the words before us a cluster of blessed promises made to Jacob and to Israel. But the question at once arises, Whom are we to understand by Jacob and Israel here? To elucidate this question, we must bear in mind that there is an Israel after the flesh and an Israel after the spirit. Now Israel after the flesh, that is, the lineal descendants of Abraham, in the first instance inherited the promises, as the apostle declares—"To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory,

and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and *the promises?*" (Rom. 9:4.) But these privileges they forfeited by rejecting the Son of God, for in rejecting him they cast away the promises made in and by him. Thus "they were broken off" as the apostle says in the same epistle, "because of unbelief." (Rom. 11:20.) They were once a good olive tree and stood in the garden of the Lord, bearing fruit to his praise; but they rejected the Son of God, for when he came unto his own, his own received him not (John 1:11); and therefore God for a time, for his rejection of them is not final, broke off the natural branches, and grafted into the stock the Gentiles, the believing Gentiles, that they might partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. (Rom. 11:17, 18.) In this way, Israel after the spirit, that is, the election of grace among the Gentiles, passed into the place of Israel after the flesh. And it is for this reason that the promises of old addressed to Israel and Jacob now belong to the believing church of God; for the Gentile church has passed by grace and faith into that state before God out of which the Jewish Church passed by her unbelief and her rejection of the Lord of life and glory.

It is, then, to believing Jacob—it is to spiritual Israel—in other words, the living family of God, that the Lord the Spirit addresses those comforting and encouraging promises in our text, which he prefaces by the words which so often drop in the Scriptures—from his heart and mouth—"Fear not." Knowing how subject Israel is to fears; how weak and helpless she is, and how when the Lord is not present to sustain her footsteps, she falls into doubts, as a child falls into the road when the mother lets go her hand, he bids her "Fear not," that she may be encouraged to look up in faith and hope that he will never leave or forsake her, but still be with her even to the end.

But you will find all through the word of God—and our text is no exception—that the promises are usually adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the saints of God—that they are not, so to speak, cast before them without any discrimination; not tossed down at their feet heedlessly and carelessly, as corn is scattered broadcast in a field; but are addressed to them for the most part as passing through affliction and trial—as being in circumstances that need the promise, and require that help which it holds forth and gives. Thus, in our text, when the Lord has spoken to Jacob and to Israel, and bade them "fear not," he adds—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

In opening up the words before us, I shall, with God's blessing—

I.—*First*, endeavour to show *the broad basis*, the strong foundation upon which the promises rest, which is in the Lord having done four things on behalf of his people:—1, He has *created* them; 2, He has *redeemed* them; 3, He has *called* them; and, 4, He has *taken possession* of them—the last being implied by the words—"Thou art mine." And *because* he has done these things for them, he virtually engages that he will be with them when they pass through flood and fire.

II.—*Secondly*, the *state, case, and condition* of mind to which those promises are spoken, and to which they are so eminently adapted, which is, when Israel has to *pass through the waters* and wade through the rivers; when she has to *walk through the fire*, and to be encompassed with the flame.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *gracious promises* which the Lord makes to

Israel in these circumstances of distress and peril: that in passing through the waters *he will be with her*; as she goes through the rivers, *they shall not overflow her*; when she walks through the fire, *she shall not be burned*; and when surrounded by the flame, *it shall not kindle upon her*.

I.—The Lord does not give his promises in a promiscuous, indiscriminating way. He does not, if I may use the expression, throw them down for anybody to pick up; nor does he deal wantonly and heedlessly with these blessed treasures. But though he gives them, and that most lovingly and affectionately, yet it is only to those for whom he has designed them in his own eternal mind, and for whom he has done or intends to do a saving, sanctifying work.

i: Thus, before he gives the promise to Israel, the Lord lays a broad basis of interest in him by declaring that he has *created* him and *formed* him. He thus claims him as his peculiar property, as the express work of his creating hand. For who can have such a title to him as his own Creator? As he elsewhere speaks—"This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." (Isai. 43:21.) But this right of creation embraces various particulars. 1. God, in the operations of his Almighty hand, created *both our body and soul*; and holy writ tells us how he created both. In creating man's body, he formed it out of the dust of the ground. He gave it life, but he did not bestow upon it immortality. He made it capable of sin and death. But in creating man's soul, God breathed into it the breath of life, and thus made it an heir of immortality. Yet immunity from sin was no more given to the soul than to the body; though sin and the entrance of death by sin did not destroy the immortality that God gave it when he breathed into it the breath of life. But in creating the soul immortal, how wonderfully has God formed it, and given it such qualities as to fit it for the eternal enjoyment of

himself! What an understanding has he blessed it with—what affections he has given—what capacities of happiness—what powers of thought, reasoning, and expression—what faculties of admiration and adoration, which, when renewed by grace and developed, as they will be one day beyond all present conception, will be capable of apprehending and enjoying God in Christ in all his glorious perfections and eternal majesty. How curiously, too, has he wrought our body! What consummate wisdom has he stamped upon every part of it! How wonderfully has he formed this earthly tabernacle that it may be a receptacle for our soul during its time state; and afterwards, when fully purified from the stain of corruption and perfectly conformed to the glorious body of the Lord Jesus, may be a fit companion for the immortal soul throughout the countless ages of eternity. 2. The *time when, the place where, we came into being*, were also ordained and arranged of God. In this sense he may be said to have "created" and "formed" us, by fixing the bounds of our habitation, giving us that station in society, and placing us exactly in that position of life which he saw were best adapted to our spiritual profit, most conducive to his own glory, and harmonising most thoroughly with his own eternal good counsel. It is not by chance, then, that we are what we are as men and women. It was not blind fortune or casual accident which fixed your first birth, any more than that it was chance which fixed your second birth; so that what we are as present members of society, as occupying our various positions and stations in life, we are by divine appointment and in pursuance of the original design of him in "whom we live, and move, and have our being."

3. But the words "*created and formed*" have a deeper meaning than this. They have respect not merely to the body and soul which God gave us, and to our present position in life, but point also to our *eternal standing in the Son of God's*

*love*. Christ is spoken of in Scripture as possessing a mystical body, of which he is the glorious Head, as the apostle speaks, "And not holding the Head from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2:19.) Now every member of this mystical body has its appointed and determinate place in the mind of God, and is brought forth in time as he eternally designed it. I do not understand the words "creating" and "forming" here as referring so much to the work of regenerating grace, though I do not exclude that meaning, as to the mystical creation of the members of Christ, which "were written in his book and in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them." (Psa. 139:16.) Thus the "substance" of Christ, that is, his mystical body, "was not hid" from the searching eye of God, when it was "made in secret," in the secret purposes of God, "and curiously wrought," that is, beautifully put together "in the lowest parts of the earth," as the place destined of God, where the members were successively to appear in their time state. (Psa. 139:15.) As the covenant Head of his mystical body, the blessed Lord is represented as the Father's "daily delight, rejoicing always before him;" and "while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world," as "rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and his delight being with the sons of men." (Prov. 8:26-31.) There are "vessels of mercy which God has afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. ix. 23); and those were created and formed in the mind of God, as a potter forms in his mind the exact figure of the vessel, its size, shape, and use before he casts it on the wheel or moulds it, whilst lying there, with his fingers.

ii. But the Lord also tells Israel that he has *redeemed* as well as created her; and this has additionally engaged him to be upon her side for ever and ever. This has made him a

promise making and a promise keeping God; for it has engaged not only the love of his heart, but the faithfulness of his nature. But for the fall there would have been no promises; therefore no display of God's faithfulness in fulfilling them. The covenant of grace was made before the fall, but with a fore-view of it; and therefore all the promises made in the covenant regard man as a fallen sinner. Redemption was a part of the covenant; but the very meaning of the word points to a state of slavery and bondage. We were not created slaves. It is a state into which we sank through the Adam fall. Adam may be said literally to have sold himself to Satan; and for what? For an apple. He sold himself and all his posterity at that miserable price. He was tempted by Satan, through the instrumentality of his wife, to break the express command of God; and by that one act of wilful, voluntary disobedience,

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe;"

and cast himself and us into a pit of misery and wretchedness, out of which we never should have come but for the bloodshedding and obedience of the Son of God. The Lord Jesus, we read, "loved the Church and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25.) But when did he begin to love it, if we may use such a word as begin of love eternal? Surely before the fall. He saw her fall, as we might see a beloved wife fall into a river or from a window. So Jesus saw Adam fall into disobedience, and saw all the members of his mystical body ruined in the same awful crash. The abyss of sin and guilt, of misery and woe, of alienation and enmity, of separation and death, into which the Church at that moment sank, was not hidden, from the eyes of the Son of God as he lay in his Father's bosom. He saw her wallowing in filth and guilt, under condemnation and wrath, and reduced to a state of hopelessness and helplessness of which we can form no



adequate conception. But this did not change the love of his heart. He loved her in the midst of, in spite of all her sin, filth, and folly. She never fell out of his heart; and this in due time he showed by coming into the world as her Redeemer to deliver her by his precious bloodshedding and death from sin, death, hell, and despair. Though not only by original but by personal and actual sin, the Church was sunk into awful depths of guilt, yet he redeemed her, paid the full, the stipulated price for her—nothing less than his own life, his own blood; and by his sufferings and sorrows in the garden, and on the cross, by offering up in sacrifice his pure and spotless humanity, his holy body and soul, he redeemed her to God; he bought her back from death and hell, from sin and Satan, from the curse of the Law, and every pain and penalty which she had incurred as a trespasser and a transgressor, as a debtor and as a criminal. He washed away her sins in his most precious blood, worked out for her a robe of righteousness which he put upon her and in which she outshines the very angels, and will one day bring her with him in glory to astonish and judge a guilty world.

iii. But the Lord adds also in the text that he had *called her by her name*; that is, he had specially and spiritually called her by his grace—had separated her by regenerating work upon her heart from a state of carnality and death. As God called Abraham to go out of Chaldea into a land which he knew not, so does he now call his people out of the world to a spiritual and experimental knowledge of himself as the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. And this he intimates by the expression—"I have called thee by thy name;" for in calling her by her name, he had set upon her his own distinguishing mark. As a shepherd brands his sheep with the name of the owner, so when the Lord calls a soul by his grace, he puts his own mark upon it. Or as when a person calls us by our own name, it implies that he knows us and

that we know him, so the Lord implies by the expression that he knows the Church with a knowledge of love and approbation.

iv. The last stone, so to speak, laid in our text as a part of this strong foundation for all the promises to rest upon is, that he has *taken possession* of her; for he says "*Thou art mine.*" Now this is the sweetest and most blessed declaration of all the four, for in it the Lord assures her that not only has he created and formed her, redeemed her, and called her by her name, but that, by manifesting himself to her soul, and revealing his love and blood to her heart, he has taken possession of her affections, and thus made her manifestly and eternally his; so that he can look down from heaven to earth, and say, "Thou art mine—mine by electing purpose; mine by redeeming love; mine by calling grace; and mine by possessing power. It is as when the bridegroom after a long and faithful courtship, when a thousand difficulties and obstacles are at last surmounted, and marriage has made them one, clasps his beloved bride to his arms and whispers into her ear, "Now, thou art mine."

II.—But to come to our second point. The path of God's people from earth to heaven is for the most part one of much affliction, sorrow, and tribulation; and thus they are called from time to time to *pass through waters* and wade through *rivers*—to *walk through fires* and be surrounded by *the flame* of hot furnaces. But when they are placed in those circumstances, then it is that the Lord's promises are suitable to them, and this is the season when those promises are applied and sealed upon their heart and conscience.

i. But what is it "*to pass through the waters?*" "Waters" in Scripture are often used to signify trouble and sorrow. "I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me."

(Psalm 69:2.) "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Psal. 42:7.) Thus the Church here is represented as passing through the waters, that is, the floods of trouble and sorrow through which she wades heavenward and homeward.

1. Some of these waters are *temporal* afflictions. Few of the Lord's people escape a large measure of those afflictions which spring out of and are connected with their earthly circumstances. As denizens of earth; as husbands, wives, and parents; as earning their bread with the sweat of their brow; as taking a part in the great battle of life in this day of unprincipled competition, where the weak are relentlessly trodden down by the strong; as necessarily in the world though mercifully not of it, the saints of God have assuredly a large measure of earthly anxieties, sorrows, and cares. But mercy meets them even here. They need to be weaned from the world—to have the strongest bitters put into the sweetest cup—to be divorced from that love of earthly things which is so natural to us. The Lord therefore sends upon them many painful and severe afflictions. And these sometimes break forth upon them as waters; the idea being that of a flood bursting forth unexpectedly and with such extreme violence that but for the repressing hand of God it would carry them away. How many of the dear saints of God are now suffering under his afflicting hand! How many are now *lying on beds of languishing and pain!* We pass through the streets; we see the young, the healthy, and the strong, some bustling with business and some sauntering for amusement, with health and animation on every face. But do we see the pale sickly invalids, except now and then a poor consumptive one just come out for a little air? And who knows how many of these afflicted ones are the Lord's, and are now passing through these waters to that happy land of which "the inhabitant shall not say I am sick." How many, too, of the Lord's people are

depressed with troubles and anxieties that spring from *their providential circumstances*? And often hears the expression, "Riches cannot give happiness;" but we rarely find the converse added, "Poverty can bring great misery." The Lord can indeed support under the heaviest load of pecuniary troubles; but there can be no doubt that providential difficulties, and the anxieties connected with them rack and tear the mind almost more than any other temporal affliction. How many too are clad in mourning both in body and mind *under distressing bereavements*, rending as it were their very heartstrings asunder. We see men's faces, and they may wear an outward show of cheerfulness; but could we read their hearts, we should see many of the Lord's family bowed down with sorrow and care, as being surrounded on every hand with difficulties and perplexities to which they see no present termination.

2. But these "waters" may also signify *spiritual* afflictions; for these are the most trying of all the griefs and sorrows that can befall the saints of God. When the Psalmist, or rather the Lord speaking in the person of the Psalmist, said, "I am come into deep waters" (Psal. 64:2), he meant the waters of deep soul trouble. These waters are a deep and abiding sense of God's wrath as a consuming fire; the curse of a broken law drying up the spirit; the distressing weight and burden of guilt upon a man's conscience which he cannot get away from, and which seem a foretaste of the agonies of hell; the fears of perishing under the justly deserved anger of God, and sinking in death into the gloomy regions of endless despair.

3. "Waters" further signify *great and powerful temptations*. As we read of the dragon that "He cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." (Rev. 12:15); so, as in the

case of Job, Satan casts floods of temptation into the soul to drown it, if possible, in unbelief, rebellion, and self-pity, till hope and help seem almost gone.

II. *Rivers* also are spoken of in our text. Now "*waters*" burst out occasionally; but "*rivers*" are ever flowing. Thus "the rivers" spoken of in our text may be applied to those continual streams of grief and trouble which seem the allotted portion of some of the Lord's people. In the case of some, troubles come in gushes; now a cessation; then another gush. But in the case of others, troubles are continual; they never seem out of them, but, like the Psalmist, their "sore runs in the night and ceaseth not;" and, as Job complains, "the Almighty does not suffer them to take breath," or "let them alone till they swallow down their spittle." (Job 7:19; 9:18.) If the former are "waters," the latter are "rivers," for the first break out in gushes, but the last flow in unceasing streams.

iii. But we read also in our text of "*the fire.*" The figure is changed, because the Holy Ghost will not limit himself here or elsewhere to one comparison. He seizes figure after figure to convey his mind and meaning; plainly and distinctly. Fire shall try the saint of God as well as water, that his power may be as much seen and his grace be as conspicuous in flame as in flood, in the hot furnace as in the deep waters. Several things in Scripture are compared to fire, and singly or in combination constitute "the fiery trial" spoken of as intended to try the Church of God. (1 Peter 4:12.)

1. Thus *the Law* is spoken of as a fire; for it is called "a fiery law which went from God's right hand." (Deut. 33:2.) It was given with thunders and lightnings; and the Lord himself descended upon Mount Sinai in a fire. (Exod. 19:18.) The apostle, therefore, calls it "the mountain that burned with

fire" (Heb. 12:18), as distinct from Sion, the city of the living God. All this fire and smoke with these terrific thunders and lightnings were figurative of God as a consuming fire. For there is a fearful curse attached to the law,—“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” And this dreadful curse will burn up and consume all found under it. Now when this holy and righteous law is applied to the conscience, its curse comes in through the breach, and this curse being the fire of God's indignation against sin, it burns up all our fleshly righteousness; for it consumes everything which is not in strict accordance with its demands and its spirituality.

2. But as the figure of fire may be extended to all that burns, it may comprehend *the workings of our vile heart*, the corruptions of our base and fallen nature. These are fires, because they tend, except as restrained by the grace of God, to consume both body and soul. There is a fire of lust, of pride, of rebellion, of enmity, of daring determination, and unbending obstinacy, which all, when “set on fire of hell,” like the tongue of which James speaks, would destroy us here and hereafter, unless the Lord were with us as with the three children in the hot fiery furnace.

3. Then there are also the *grievous assaults* of Satan, what the Scripture calls “the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16), which Satan, himself consuming in a perpetual fire, casts into the mind, and which seem to inflame all that is there combustible.

III.—But the Lord promises—and this brings us to our third point—that when Israel passes through the waters, *he will be with her*, and through the rivers, *they shall not overflow her*; when she walks through the fire, *she shall not be burned*, neither *shall the flame kindle upon her*. Who can support the

soul when it is passing through afflictions and trials except the Lord himself? There is everything in nature to sink and give way under the afflicting strokes of God's hand. There is no patience in the human mind—no resignation—no submission to the will of God. When his afflicting strokes come, they find in us nothing but rebellion, peevishness, and discontent.

I. The Lord, then, must manifestly, *by his presence and grace, be with his saints* when they are passing through the waters and through the rivers, that they may not give way to that rebellion, peevishness, and discontent that their hearts are full of. They want the Lord to be with them, that they may feel submission to his afflicting strokes. For when he is with them, by speaking a word home with power to their heart, by manifesting his presence, shedding abroad his love, and revealing his goodness and mercy, strength is communicated to the soul, so that when it passes through the waters it finds that secret and sacred support which bears it up and preserves it from sinking into, and being carried away by them. In fact, the promise—"I will be with thee," embraces everything that God can give in a way of sensible support; for if he is with the soul, he is with it in all his grace and love, in all his presence and power. There is, there can be, no greater blessing, no stronger support than this. Nor is there a single trouble, grief, or sorrow, which cannot be borne when the Lord is sensibly present, and lays his everlasting arms underneath the soul. And this he has pledged himself ever to do when his beloved Jacob and redeemed Israel pass through the waters, however high they may rise, however loudly the waves and billows may roar.

But again the promise runs—"The rivers shall *not overflow thee.*" The natural tendency of these rivers is to sweep away, drown, and overwhelm. Let *sin* only be suffered to break

forth out of the depths of our carnal mind in its awful depth, in its dreadful extent and unmitigated fury; let only one lust or one evil passion burst forth in all its magnitude and to the utmost extent of its capabilities; and what would be the consequences? Such as any person of the commonest feeling of morality would shudder to think of. For whence come all those horrid crimes which shock society but from the depths of sin and evil which exist in every heart? Or let temptation be permitted to assail us in any or all its various forms, and let it meet with the sin that lies in our nature as so much ready-laid material, and the consequence would be that we should be swept away into destruction and perdition. We should commit the unpardonable sin, cast ourselves upon the rocks of despair, or be swept away by the stream into such an abyss of rebellion and alienation, that return to God would almost seem impossible. Our very character would be gone; we should disgrace our families and our own religious name, and concerning faith make utter shipwreck. But the Lord has promised that when we pass through the waters he will be with us, and through the rivers, however deep, however high they may swell, they shall not overflow us; we shall not be carried away by them far away from God and godliness; they shall not drown us in their rage and fury, dash us against the rocks, and leave our bleeding caresses stripped and naked upon the riverbank. But the rivers shall be so restrained by the power of God, that though they may rise, they shall rise only to a certain height; though they may swell and roar, it shall not be with such extreme violence as to overwhelm and drown the soul.

How many of the dear saints of God, when they have been brought into tribulation and sorrow, have found the fulfilment of this most gracious promise! And is there not one of these waters through which all must go—that deep and rapid Jordan which everyone must pass through? How dark and



gloomy those waters have appeared to the eyes of many a child of God, in whom is continually fulfilled the experience of the words—"Who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." But how often have these waters only been terrible in prospect, in anticipation. How different has been the reality. When he comes down to the river's bank and his feet dip in these waters, and it appears as though they would rise higher and higher, the Lord suddenly appears in his power and presence, and then the water sinks. He speaks a word of peace to his soul upon a dying bed—reveals Christ in his love and grace and blood—removes those doubts, fears, and disturbing thoughts which have perplexed him for years, and brings into his heart a holy calm, a sweet peace, assuring him that all is well with him both for time and eternity. Has he not then the fulfilment of the promise—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee?"

Or there may be another saint of God plunged very deeply into and almost sunk under temporal troubles—who is afflicted in body, or distressed in circumstances almost beyond endurance, or bereaved of the tenderest object of his heart's affections, or passing through trials which almost madden him, and under which he is in daily fear of losing his very reason. In these waters, the Lord has promised to be with him; and how often he fulfils this gracious promise. He applies some word to his soul, or supports him by his felt presence, or enables him to look up and believe that "all these afflictions are but for a moment," and are "working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And thus he is sustained as he passes through the waters. It is as if the Lord went through the waters with him step by step, and kept putting his hand under his head, or laid his everlasting arms beneath his shoulders. When he can feel this divine support he can lean upon the Lord, for he is manifestly supporting him. Is not this as if the Lord were

whispering all the time into his soul—"Fear not; I have redeemed thee; thou art mine? When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. The waters are deep, but they shall not overflow thee." Now as the soul is passing through these waters and finds the Lord's gracious support, then it feels that so long as the Lord supports, it cannot sink or be overwhelmed; for his power is so great, his love so strong, his presence so sweet, and his promises so sure, that the waters lose all their terror.

And so through the rivers: *"they shall not overflow thee."* The Lord says to them—"Thus far shalt thou go, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." As he held back the Red Sea that Israel might have its waters as a wall on their right hand and on their left; as he cut off the waters of Jordan which came down from above, that they stood upon a heap when the soles of the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in its brim (Josh. 3:15, 16); so as the saint of God passes through the rivers which lie between him and the heavenly Canaan, God, by his power and grace, prevents them from overflowing his soul. They may rise very high; dark may the flood appear, deep the stream, and rapid the current; but there is a restraint put upon them by the Almighty hand of God, that however "the waters thereof roar and be troubled," the soul shall not be drowned in or overwhelmed by them.

It is only as we are brought into great and overwhelming trials that we are enabled to realise the sweetness of these promises. We may look at them at a distance and believe them to be true; or we may witness their fulfilment in others; but we must be brought into personal afflictions, and not only see the waters spread before our eyes, but they must come nearer and nearer, until we cry, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul" (Psal. 69:1), that we

may prove how faithful the Lord is to his word of promise. When, then, these waters gradually approach, or suddenly rush in, we look round and find that none can help us. Our dearest friends can do us no good. They may see us in great family troubles; or mourning under the most heart-rending bereavements; or stretched upon a bed of languishing and pain. They may pity our sufferings; but they cannot relieve them. Religious friends and spiritual ministers may visit us in great depths of mental distress; may see our conscience bleeding under the wounds inflicted by the chastening and rebuking hand of God. They may pity and try to comfort us, but all their words fall short; or, like Job's friends, they may sit wondering and stupefied, unable to speak a word, as doubting our case, distrusting our religion, or feeling unable to judge how the scale will turn. Then the soul possessed of life divine is obliged to go to the Lord, and look unto him and to him alone; as David, as Jonah, as Hezekiah, as Jeremiah, as Habakkuk, as Micah, and many other a saint of God has done, and again and again will do. David beautifully describes the experience of the soul thus taught and led, thus afflicted and delivered—"The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears." (Psalm 18:5, 6.) Then what follows? "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." "He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me because he delighted in me." (Psalm 16:19.) May we experience this sweet deliverance when we shall be called to pass through the rivers which still lie between us and Canaan! At the bare prospect, as the river in the dim distance rolls on before our eyes, and we see that we must cross it,—and, alas! there is neither bridge nor ferry, we may shrink with dismay. As a parent may come in and see his darling child stricken with mortal disease, croup or

diphtheria, and in the killing prospect of the dreadful issue, may cry out with torn heart—"I can never bear to see that child stretched before my eyes a pale and motionless corpse;" or as a husband, when his beloved wife, about to be a mother, sinks in nature's trying hour, stands trembling and appalled at the dreadful anticipation, so the very sight of these rivers, so deep and overwhelming, has filled many a child of God with terror and amazement. How deeply, then, he needs the application and the fulfilment of the promise; and that the Lord Himself should whisper into his soul—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." It is almost as if the Lord said—"Here are waters, and thou must pass through them; they are not to be evaded, for they lie before thee in the road whereby thou must pass. Here are rivers, and there is no bridge over them: thou must go through them. But," says the Lord, "I will not leave thee to go through them alone, for they would drown thee. I will go with thee, and in passing through them I will take care so to restrain them that they shall not overflow thee." Thus, the more the soul knows of the trials and temptations, the troubles and afflictions of the way, and the more deep and bitter its experience of their magnitude, the more it proportionally knows, and the more it wonders at and admires the exceeding riches of his grace. Nor is there any other way whereby the Lord's pity and compassion—for "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," (James 5:11,) can be experimentally realised, or his power and faithfulness manifestly be made known.

ii. Nor is he less gracious or less faithful as regards the furnace. "When thou walkest through the fire, *thou shalt not be burned.*" What! a miracle like this? Shall it be with the believing soul as it was with the three children, who were cast literally into a burning fiery furnace, and yet the Son of

God was so with them in it that the very smell of fire had not passed upon their garments? Can the child of grace walk in the midst of the fires and not be burned? Yes, he can, because God has promised it. His gracious command to his people is, "Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires." (Isai. 24:15.) But how can they glorify him in the fires if the fire consume them? Thus he can walk through *the fire of the law*, and yet not be burned up by it; because Jesus has fulfilled the law, and has therefore taken away its damning penalty. It may blaze upon him, but it cannot consume him, for Christ has redeemed him from its curse, being made a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13.) He may feel the heat, but he cannot be destroyed by the flame; for that, so to speak, spent and burnt itself out when it exhausted its fury against the pure and sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. So with the fire of *temptation*. He may have to walk through it. Many vile and wicked lusts may strive for the mastery; a thousand sins may be tempting and engaging his carnal mind; and they may partly win the day—may partly gain upon him, so that he may feel or fear their burning heat. But he shall not be burned up by them; they shall not destroy body and soul; the Lord will keep the flame of lust, rebellion, and infidelity from consuming him utterly. *Satan*, too, may cast his fiery darts; but the Lord will take care that they shall not destroy any one of his redeemed ones. They may set on fire the hay, wood, and stubble of the carnal mind; but they cannot destroy the gold, silver, and precious stones of the new man of grace. They may burn up a fleshly religion and consume the filthy rags of a more Pharisaic righteousness; but they cannot injure one member of the new man; they cannot touch any one part of God's gracious work upon the heart, or destroy anything that he has wrought in the soul by his own Spirit or his own power. Bear in mind that there are two things essentially indestructible—the finished work of the Son of God, and the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart. But

both these works meet with all the opposition of earth and hell, and are borne, amidst sighs and groans, sufferings and sorrows, to their triumphant issue.

But the Lord further adds—"*Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee;*" that is, so as to burn and destroy thee. You may have had many fiery darts from Satan; but have they not all passed away, and you are still unharmed? You may have had many workings of wickedness in your wretched nature, many deep and foul corruptions oozing forth, but God did not permit them to break out so as to destroy body and soul. You may have many rivers still to ford, many furnaces still to endure; but the Lord having redeemed you, called you, and taken possession of you by his Spirit and grace, will be with you to the end, to bring you safe through every flood and fire, and set you before his face in glory.

Now the great thing is to have some evidence in our own conscience that the Lord has engaged to do these things for us. What we want is, to have some clear and sure proof that the promise is for us—to have some testimony that the Lord, by his Spirit and grace, has wrought that work of grace upon our souls which gives us a manifested interest in every promise made to Jacob and Israel. Now this we may know in some measure by comparing what we are and have as the work of God's hands, with what God has laid down in the words before us. He tells us that he has created, redeemed, and taken possession of Jacob and Israel. Has he created, redeemed, called, and taken possession of us? Have we any sweet persuasion or gracious confidence in our souls that the Lord has *created* us to his own honour and praise? Has he given us any testimony that he has *redeemed* us by the blood of his dear Son? Has he made us feel the bondage and slavery of sin, and given us to know anything of the value of the atonement, whereby alone we can be feelingly and

experimentally redeemed from it? Have we any evidence that he has *called* us by his grace, put his fear in our hearts; and quickened us into spiritual life? Have we any testimony that he has *taken possession* of our breast by manifesting himself to our soul, revealing himself, and fixing our heart wholly and solely upon his blessed Majesty? We must have some evidence in our heart that we have experienced these things before we can realise our interest in promises like these. But if he has wrought anything such as I have described in our soul, we may still expect to pass through waters and through rivers, to walk through fire and through flame; but we may also expect, as we pass through them, that the Lord will fulfil his gracious word, and that what he has said of promised help, support, and deliverance he will never leave void of full accomplishment.