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Waiting on God for Rain.

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Waiting on God for Rain,

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S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

IN A TIME OF

D R O U G H T,

July 24, 1805.

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PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD.

[Springfield, Mass.]

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[1805]

WAITING ON GOD FOR RAIN.

JEREMIAH XIV. 22.

Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait on thee; for thou hast made all these things.

THIS chapter is called 'the word of the Lord, which came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth,' or concerning the *drought*, as the seventy Greek interpreters render the word. This drought, and the distresses which ensued, the prophet thus describes; "Judah mourneth, and the cities thereof languish; the people are black with famine; they cast themselves on the ground, and their cry is gone up to heaven. Their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters; they came to the pits and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty. They were ashamed and confounded; they covered their heads, because the ground is chapt, for there is no rain on the earth. The plowmen were ashamed and covered their heads. The hind also calved in the field, and forsook her young, because there was no grass; and the wild asses stood in the high places; they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes also failed because there was no grass."

The distresses of the famine were increased by the terrors of the sword; for it was a time of war; the country was invaded and Jerusalem besieged by the Assyrian army. Hence the prophet says "If I go

into the field, then behold the slain with the sword; and if I go into the city, then behold them, who are sick with famine."

This dreadful and complicated calamity was the occasion of that humble and fervent prayer, which the prophet makes in the latter part of the chapter. "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing? We looked for peace, and there is no good; for a time of health, and behold trouble. We acknowledge, O God, our wickedness and the iniquities of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us for thy name's sake. Remember; break not thy covenant with us."

Why he thus applies to God for relief, he in the text assigns two reasons; one is that relief could come from no other source; the other is that God could easily grant it. "Are there any among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou He, O Lord God? Therefore we wait on thee, for thou hast made all these things."

The words of our text present us with these two observations, That God is the only author of rain; and that for this blessing we must wait on him.

That the agency of God is the cause of rain the prophet proves by two arguments. 1st, the insufficiency of all other supposed causes; and 2dly, the sufficiency of God's power manifested in the creation of all things.

1st. The insufficiency of all other causes.

The pretended divinities of the heathens were insufficient to cause rain.

The objects to which the heathens paid their devotions, and which they regarded as the authors of all good, the prophet calls *vanities*, to express their utter inability to perform any of those things, which were ascribed to them.

The worshipping of stocks and stones, and images

graven by art and man's device indicates a degree of ignorance and stupidity, into which we never should have supposed men capable of falling, had there not been undeniable proofs of its reality. The ridiculous folly of this species of idolatry the prophet exposes with all the force of sacred satire ; for it is too palpably absurd to deserve a grave and sober confutation. " The customs of the people are vain ; for one cutteth a tree out of the forest with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold ; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not. They must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil ; neither is it in them to do good. The people are altogether brutish. The stock is a doctrine of vanities. The gods which have not made the earth and the heavens, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens."

Nor was there less absurdity in paying adoration to particular animals, or to the ~~inanimate~~ bodies ; for tho' these are not the works of ~~the hands~~, yet they are in themselves as remote from a power to bestow blessings on men, as the most despicable piece of inanimate matter.

There was, however, a species of idolatry practised among the heathens, a little more refined, tho' not at all more pious and rational. This was the worship of *demons*, or of the *souls* of departed *heroes*. These were the *Baalim*, so often mentioned in scripture, as the gods of the heathens. These, as well as images and animals, the prophet rejects, as having no share in the government of nature ; for he says, " There are not ANY among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain."

It appears, indeed, from the book of Job, that satan, when God gave him permission, had power to disturb the atmosphere and raise storms ; but as he is only a creature, all his power must be depend-

ent on the will, and subject to the controul of the Creator. And from the wisdom and goodness of God we may be assured, that he never has, and never will put into the hands of such a malevolent spirit so important a branch of his providence, as the government of the seasons.

That created spirits, as well as men, may be made instruments of God's providential designs, and may, according to their superior capacities, be employed in a higher sphere, than mortals, there is no reason to doubt. But to suppose, that the regulation of the seasons, or the management of any part of the general government of the world, is committed to their hands, and left to their direction, without the superintendance of God's wisdom, power and goodness, is to suppose, that he has quitted his throne, and laid aside his sovereignty.

That evil spirits, as well as good, are absolutely under God's controul, we are abundantly taught in scripture, and particularly in the book of Job, in which we see that Satan could do nothing to afflict that good man, without a particular permission was given him. We may, therefore, justly wonder at the easy credulity of some Christians in giving credit to the fabulous and romantic stories, which they hear, concerning the works of evil spirits; such as their granting favorable winds to seamen on certain conditions; and their watching over hidden treasures, and raising storms to defend them. If such relations were founded in facts, they would prove, that evil spirits have the government of the elements in their hands. The prophet expressly teaches us, that the vanities of the heathens cannot give rain, and consequently, that they cannot raise winds and storms, except when they are specially empowered and permitted by the great author and governor of nature. On the same ground we must reject many idle reports relating to astrology and witchcraft; such as the prediction of men's fortunes,

