



Volume 4 of the Spurgeon Speaks series helps you find true rest—the lasting peace that comes from confidence in God. Spurgeon points you to the biblical promises God has made. Those words weren't just valid for ancient Israelites or Victorian-era preachers. God's eternal promises can give you rest today!

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TITLE:

The Rainbow

TEXT:

Genesis 9:16

SUMMARY:

Just as the rainbow represents a covenant of grace that is everlasting, such is the covenant between God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the token of the covenant for us, a reminder for the elect that God has saved them. He is much more than the rainbow, as Jesus sits eternally enthroned as the mediator of the greater covenant of grace.

NOTABLE QUOTES:

“He gave them a covenant—a covenant embellished with a divine symbol and ratified with His own signature written out in all the colors of beauty.”

“And so when God covenanted with Christ, it was not, ‘I will save my people if they do this,’ but, ‘I will’ and ‘they shall,’ from first to last.”

“God has never failed His people nor cast away His chosen; not one promise has lost its fulfillment nor one word its faithfulness.”

The Rainbow

The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

GENESIS 9:16

THE STORY OF NOAH'S PRESERVATION in the ark is a suggestive representation of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is, we think, especially intended to depict that part of our salvation that lies in the washing of regeneration. In the same way as baptism is the outward symbol of regeneration, so also is the ark, "in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" [1 Pet. 3:20]. The ark was immersed in those dreadful rains and awful cataracts that deluged the earth, and Noah's family was buried in that ark to all the world. But by this burial they were floated out of the old condemned world into the new world of life and grace. Death to the world, and burial in the ark, were the means of their safety.

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“There is also an antitype which now saves us,” says the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 3:21), “baptism not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism is a most significant picture of regeneration, but it is in no sense the cause of the new birth. Baptism saves no one except, as Peter says, in figure; but as a figure, it is eminently full of divine teaching. It sets forth the great truth that the believer, standing today in the old world, is buried to that world. His rising from the liquid tomb is the figure of His resurrection in Christ into a new world as a new man, “that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Would to God that we thought more of being dead with Christ, buried with Him, and risen with Him.

Do you not think, dear friends, that the history of Noah may be viewed as typical and instructive? Noah came out of the ark—no longer cooped up and penned within its narrow limits. He walked abroad, and the whole world was before him where to choose. Was not that a picture of the freedom of the believer who has been “buried with Christ” and enjoys the possession of God’s free Spirit? For him there is no spirit of bondage; he is free as a child in his Father’s house. All things are his, by gift of God, to use and to enjoy; he has learned the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free, and if the Son makes us free, we are free indeed.

When Noah slaughtered the bull and the other clean animals and offered them upon the altar, did he not show the believer’s employment? For we also offer acceptable sacrifices of prayer and praise unto God, and we ourselves are living sacrifices unto

God. Did He not as much as say to all generations of saints, “You, being thus delivered from a death that you deserve, are to spend your lives as priests unto your God”? When the Lord was pleased on that day to bless Noah and his family, bidding them be fruitful, did He not set forth the fruitfulness that belongs to believers, so that, abiding in Christ, they “bring forth much fruit”? May not that benediction teach us how earnestly we should seek to be spiritually the parents of immortal souls, travailing in birth till Christ be formed in them?

When the divine Father gave them dominion over the birds, the fish, and all cattle, did not this portray the power that believers have over lust, sin, and evil? And did it not prophesy the subjugation of all things by the power of their faith, so that they who become “priests” in sacrifice become also “kings” by virtue of the charter of dominion the heavenly Father bestows upon them?

When He permitted them to eat flesh, did He not set forth that food on which true believers feed, who now eat His flesh and drink His blood who has become the spiritual food of our souls? Is it straining the allegory if I close these spiritualizings by observing that the security that God then gave to Noah and his descendants is that same security under which we stand? He gave them a covenant—a covenant embellished with a divine symbol and ratified with His own signature written out in all the colors of beauty. We too stand under a covenant that has its own faithful witness in heaven, more transcendently illustrious and beautiful than the rainbow—the person of Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Leaving, however, all those points, we come to this. We have scriptural reason for asserting that the fact that the world shall no more be destroyed by a flood is typical of a yet more ancient compact that God made with Christ that He would be unto His people a God, and they should be His chosen ones, world without end, such as we see in Isaiah 45. The covenant of Noah, then, is typical of the great covenant made with Christ on behalf of His people; and the rainbow, as the symbol of the covenant with Noah, is typical of our Lord Jesus, who is the Lord's witness to the people.

You read in Revelation 4:3 that "there was a rainbow around the throne," showing that the bow is not a temporary symbol for earth only but is a symbol of everlasting and heavenly things. In the tenth chapter of the book of Revelation, if I mistake not, you will find that the mighty angel with the book in his right hand, who shall put one foot upon the sea and another upon the land, is described as having his head crowned with a rainbow. In this place our Lord Jesus Christ, in His mediatorial capacity, wears the symbol of the covenant about His brow. In the other passage our Lord, as King, is represented as sitting upon the throne, surrounded with the insignia of the covenant of grace that encompasses the throne. So there are no goings forth of His majesty and His power and His grace, except in a covenant way and after a covenant sort, since the rainbow must be passed before the bright rays of His power and love can reach humans.

This brings us now into the center of our discourse. We have to talk of two things—the tenor of the covenant and the token of the covenant—running a parallel all the way through between

the two covenants. The tenor of Noah's covenant is the tenor of the covenant of grace—just as the rainbow represents, and in some sense is, the token of the covenant of grace also.

WHAT IS ITS TENOR?

It is a covenant of pure grace. There was nothing in Noah why God should make a covenant with him. He was a sinner—and proved himself to be so in a most shocking manner within a few days. He was one of the best of men, but the best of men are but men at the best and can have no claim upon the favor of God. He was saved by faith as the rest of us must be, and faith we all know is inconsistent with any claim of merit. At least one of his sons we must set down as being an open and abandoned sinner, and in him there could have been no ground why God should make a covenant with him. We have no reason to imagine that Noah ever sought this covenant. He did offer a sacrifice, but we do not know that he ventured to indulge the idea that God would enter into bonds with him not to destroy the earth.

We imagine that the very first cloud that swept across the sky would excite the patriarch's alarm, the first drop that fell would damp his comfort. As a preacher of righteousness he understood well enough that on grounds of justice he had no claim upon the Most Holy God, and he would not venture to plead any merit of his own. But out of pure favor—just as out of the mountain's side the sparkling fountain gushes freely without the labor or art of man, so this covenant of sparing

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mercy sprang spontaneously from the overflowing, ever bounteous, and loving heart of God.

Certainly it is so with that greater covenant, for this was made with Christ, and as there were no men to supplicate, it could not have been due to their intercession. As there were no men to merit anything, it could not be bought by their worthiness, and as divine foreknowledge well knew that man would be evil, no foresight of human goodness could have suggested it. And yet, because “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion,” the gracious God, whose heart was swelling like the deep sea with floodtides of lovingkindness, was pleased to strike hands with Christ, our covenant and federal head, and from grace and grace alone to enter into engagements with Him on our account.

The covenant, we note, was all of promise. You will be struck, if you read these verses, how it runs over and over again “I establish,” “it shall come to pass,” “I will,” “it shall,” “I will.” He who knows the difference between “you shalt” and “I will” is a good theologian. The old covenant of works is “you shalt.” “You shalt not commit adultery; you shalt not kill; you shalt not steal.” Death always comes to us by that covenant of command, but the new covenant is “I will,” and life comes to us by its promises. The covenant of grace runs like this: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from your idols.” If there be a “you shall,” it is not by way of command but by way of promise. “I will,” and “you shall!” O dear friends, one’s heart rejoices to think of

those potent shalls and wills—those immoveable pillars which death and hell cannot shake—the shalls and wills of a God who speaks, and it is done, who commands, and it stands fast. I do not see an if, nor a but, nor yet the shadow of a shade of a ghost of a peradventure in it. It is all “I will, I will, I will” from beginning to end. And so when God covenanted with Christ, it was not, “I will save my people if they do this,” but “I will” and “they shall” from first to last.

The apostle Paul is very clear on this. In that most blessed epistle to the Galatians he calls this “the covenant of promise” and marks the difference between Ishmael, “the son of the bond-woman” according to nature and according to works, and Isaac, the child of the promise and the gift of God, above nature. You and I do not stand today under a covenant that demands anything of us: unconditional favors, unlimited mercies, made sure to all the seed by the oath and promise, the shall and will of God!

Further, this covenant has hitherto been faithfully kept. It cheered my heart, when thinking this matter over, to remember that although I depend upon covenant faithfulness, I am not alone in that dependence, for every living thing upon the face of the earth lives by virtue of the immutable covenant of God. Covenant engagements preserve the world from flood; were it not for that covenant, the tops of the mountains might be covered tomorrow. A covenant tenure is a very sure one, seeing that these thousands of years the world has never been destroyed by a flood. The earth standing in the water and out of the water, since the fathers fell asleep, according to the testimony of scoffers themselves, abides still the same, and so does

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the covenant of grace. It has never been removed or altered, nor have its promises been broken. O saint, you dwell in tabernacles that shall never be taken down! God has never failed His people nor cast away His chosen; not one promise has lost its fulfillment nor one word its faithfulness.

Beloved, there is this about Noah's covenant, and about the covenant of grace: it does not depend in any degree at all upon man. The bow is put in the cloud, but it does not say, "And when you shall look upon the bow, and you shall remember my covenant, then I will not destroy the earth," but it is gloriously put not upon our memory, which is fickle and frail, but upon God's memory, which is infinite and immutable. "The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant." Oh! It is not my remembering God; it is God's remembering me. It is not my laying hold of His covenant but His covenant laying hold on me. Glory be to God! Even the remembrance of the covenant is not left to our memories, for we might forget, but our Lord cannot, will not, forget the saints, whom He has graven on the palms of His hands.

It is with us today as it was with Israel in Egypt. The blood was upon the doorframe and upon the two side posts, but God did not say, "When you see the blood, I will pass over you" but "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." My looking to Jesus brings me joy and peace, but it is God's looking to Jesus that secures my salvation and that of all His elect. For it is impossible for our God to look at Christ and then to be angry with us for sins already punished in Him. No, dear friends, it is not left with us even to be saved by remembering the covenant.

Not a single thread of the creature mars the fabric. Here we have the pure gold, and not an atom of alloy. It is not of man, neither by man, but of the Lord alone. We should remember the covenant, and we shall do it, through divine grace, but the hinge of the matter does not lie there; it is God's remembering us, not our remembering Him.

And hence for all these reasons it is an everlasting covenant. Forever has God established this covenant in heaven. Even so the covenant of grace is not intended to be fleeting and temporary. If it concerns you today, it is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." If the covenant blesses you at this hour, it shall bless you in old age, in the article of death, at resurrection, and throughout eternity. No time can change one of its stipulations. You may walk the centuries and fly down the ages far into eternity, but you can never discover such a thing as the change or failure of one single article of the covenant of grace; its jots and tittles are sure to all the seed.

Would to God you and I studied more the doctrine of this covenant of grace. Our Puritan forefathers preached much about it. Those Scotch theologians, who were a second band of Puritans, were always dwelling upon the covenants. He who studies the doctrines of the covenant is not very likely to make a mangle-mangle of his ministry or to preach a yes-and-no gospel. My dear friends, when you think of the covenant of law and the covenant of grace and remember that they are contrary the one to the other, it must come out forcibly before you that we may address the gospel to the sinner as a sinner, without a fitness on his part; that we may still believe in God's love to the

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saint, even though he has sinned; and that notwithstanding all the misbehavior of any of the chosen people, their salvation is never in jeopardy, never at hazard, so far as God's will and God's power are concerned. He who vowed to save them, and loved them in Christ, and has given them faith will most assuredly save them and bring them to glory. The earth shall be destroyed with water long before one of God's elect shall be damned. It shall be destroyed with fire, we know, but when "the mountains depart" and "the hills are removed," the covenant of His grace shall still stand, and He will be mindful of all who have an interest in it.

WHEN WILL WE SEE THE TOKEN OF THE COVENANT?

The covenant needs no token, as far as God is concerned; tokens are given for us because of our littleness of heart, our unbelief, our constant forgetfulness of God's promise. The rainbow is the symbol of Noah's covenant, and Jesus Christ, who is the covenant, is also the symbol of that covenant to us. He is the faithful witness in heaven.

Let us notice when we may expect to see the token of the covenant. The rainbow is only to be seen painted upon a cloud. Expect no tokens, except when you need them. The Lord Jesus, when He can, will trust us to our faith; for it is, on the whole, more healthy, more strengthening to us to "walk by faith, not by sight." Tokens are helps for our childhood; they would be unnecessary to us were we men. Tokens, to men whose faith

is in vigorous order, would be as crutches to a man who is not lame or as glasses to those whose eyes are perfect.

The Lord is pleased to give tokens when tokens are wanted, and hence He gives them, as He gives rainbows, when there is a cloud. When the greatest cloud that ever gathered upon earth had covered Calvary with blackness, when the sun itself had suffered eclipse, when human sin and divine wrath had made a tempest so black and terrible that all the earth was in affright, then on that black cloud was painted the rainbow—for Jesus was lifted up, and amidst that thick darkness He, the expiation and the atonement, offered up Himself and poured forth His blood.

When the sinner's conscience is dark with clouds, when he remembers his past sin, when he mourns and laments before God, Jesus Christ is revealed to him as the covenant rainbow, speaking peace. And when the believer's trials surround him, when temptations beset him, when he suffers depression of spirits, then how sweet it is to behold the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's rainbow, hung over the cloud of all our sins, our sorrows, and our woes. Look, believer, when you have a cloud—look for a token, and be not satisfied without it. Let us hasten to the Rock of our salvation and beseech Him to give us a comfortable sight of Jesus, who shall will the covenant to our souls again.

Nor does a cloud alone give a rainbow; there must be rain. There can be no rainbows unless there be the crystal drops to reflect the light of the sun. So, beloved, our sorrows must not only threaten, but they must really fall upon us. There had been no Christ for us if the vengeance of God had been merely a threatening cloud. It must fall in terrible drops upon Him.

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Christ, who sets forth to us the vengeance and the love of God at the same time, had not come to us unless there had been a real vengeance and a real punishment of sin. Until there is a real anguish in the sinner's conscience, there is no Christ for him, and until the chastisement you feel becomes grievous to you, you cannot expect to see Jesus Christ. Perhaps some of us have but slight views of Christ, and few have visits from Him, because we have so few troubles; and the reason most saints in these days do not live so near to Jesus as they were wont to do in the centuries gone by may be because we have not so many of those showers of persecution that fell at that season. There must be drops of rain, or else no rainbow; some fallings of vengeance, or else no sight of Christ.

But then, there must be a sun; for clouds and drops of rain make not rainbows unless the sun shines. Beloved, our God, who is as the sun to us, always shines, but we do not always see Him. Clouds hide His face, but no matter what drops may be falling or clouds threatening, if He does but shine, there will be a rainbow at once. When the blessed Spirit "sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts," when we can say, "Abba, Father," and a Father's love and a Father's peace are breathed upon us, then we see Jesus Christ, beholding the Father in the person of His Son.

It is said that when we see the rainbow, that particular shower is over. Certain it is, that when Christ comes, our troubles are over; when we behold Jesus, our sins are gone—our doubts and fears subside at His command. When He walks the water of the sea, there will be a calm. But others say that the rainbow is the showery arch and heralds bad weather. And probably this

is quite as true. Certainly, whenever you get a love token from Christ, you may expect some trouble, for He brings His people into the banqueting house either before a battle, or after it. Melchizedek came to meet Abraham when the kings had all been slaughtered; but sometimes our Melchizedek brings the bread and wine just before the battle commences. We are not always to be living upon love tokens; our beloved Jesus would rather make us live by simple faith, and therefore we walk in darkness, and see no light. Still, rainbows are delightful sights, and a vision of Jesus is rapturous and transporting, but you cannot expect to see Him unless it is when the storm is over, or when another storm is coming on, or when the cloud is there, or the drops are falling, or the light of God's countenance is especially shining upon you.

WHAT DO WE SEE IN OUR COVENANT WITNESS IN HEAVEN?

We see in Him what we see in the rainbow: transcendent glory and beauty. One might stand and gaze on the rainbow with wonder and admiration and never be weary. I do not know whether you have noticed paintings of rainbows—did you ever see a good one? Will you ever see a good one? Rainbows cannot be painted; the thing is impossible. There is such a melting and blending of colors that human art shall never be able to rival the art of God. The master painter, with the black cloud for His palette and the sun's rays for His pencil, paints so that no artist shall rival Him. But shall I compare my Lord Jesus to the rainbow? I

do Him an injustice. You never saw a picture of His face that satisfied you, and you never will. The masters can paint Judas; there are some fine heads of Peter; sweet guesses at John; they can paint Mary Magdalene, but never Jesus Christ. No artist who ever lived can catch His expression of countenance, much less put it on canvas. And as to the beauty of His character, must we not burst out with the spouse in the Canticles, "He is altogether lovely"?

The rainbow has been recognized by ancient poets and bards as an appointed messenger of God. Homer calls it the messenger of the gods, and the old mythologies speak of it as the Iris, the messenger of Juno. They knew not who had sent it, nor what was the errand on which it came. Still they recognized it as a divine ambassador. And surely such is Christ, the messenger of the covenant whom we delight in, God's great ambassador, who is "our peace," "the desire of all nations," who shall yet come, and shall be hailed as "King of kings, and Lord of lords." O blessed rainbow! Jesus! When shall thy beauties be beheld by mortal eyes? When shall all kings fall down before thee, and yield their scepters and their crowns to you?

In the rainbow and in Christ I see vengeance satisfied. Is not the bow the symbol of the warrior's power? With far-reaching arrows he draws the string, and woe unto his enemies; but when a hero hangs up his bow upon the wall, what does he mean but that warfare is over and peace is proclaimed? When he loosens the bow and leaves it without the string and without an arrow, it means that he will go no more out to hunt his adversaries; his arrows shall be no more "drunk with the blood of the slain." He

lays the bow aside, hangs it up on high, and leaves it unstrung, without an arrow. Such is the rainbow. A bow, it is true, but a bow hung up—a bow without string or arrow. And such is Christ, God's bow. Jesus, the arrow of God, the polished shaft in the quiver of the Most High. But there I see Him: a bow still—still mighty to destroy—but yet a bow without a string. He threw that away when He came from heaven to earth and lay slumbering in the manger. A bow without an arrow! Beloved, Christ is vengeance satisfied. Those wounds, those bright and burnished jewels of His hands, betoken that God demands no more of man.

The rainbow, yet again, is a token that vengeance itself has become on our side. You see, it is an unbroken "bow." He did not snap it across his knee. It is a bow still. Vengeance is there, justice is there, but which way is it pointed? It is turned upward, not to shoot arrows down on us but for us, if we have faith enough to string it and to make it our glorious bow—to draw it with all our might, to send our prayers, our praises, our desires, up to the bright throne of God. Mighty is that man, omnipotent is his faith, who has power to bend that bow and draw it and shoot his prayers to heaven.

Nay, more, inasmuch as it is a bow not black, nor blood-red, but a bow painted with the colors of holiday and delight, it seems to me as if heaven hangs out its streamers of joy, while angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" They pull the banners from the standards of glory, and they hang them out across the sky. Heaven hangs out its glorious banners to show that God is so completely

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satisfied with Christ and so at peace with man that He joys in man's joy and rejoices in man's rejoicing. Look up, believer, to the person of Christ, behold the joy of God, and your soul will be full of ecstasy and delight.

In the rainbow we see the one color of light, which appears to us to be but white, broken up, refracted, distributed, blended, harmonized, brought out in all its distinct elements. There is no doubt that there are more colors in light than our eyes have ever seen. The spectrum of the eye can only compass a certain quantity of the colors; but beneath the lowest, and above the highest, there are others. There is infinitely more in God than you and I will ever be able to see. One of the best sights of light, as dissolved and analyzed, is to be had in the rainbow. There you see the colors arranged in their proper order, and you are able to mark the red melting into the orange, and the orange into the yellow, and the yellow yet again into the green, and the green into the blue, and the blue into the indigo and the violet. They are all there—not one put out of place, not one left out.

The character of God is one, like His essence; yet to us, that we may read it, it must be broken up, but not thrown out of harmony. He that has seen Christ “has seen the Father.” He that sees the rainbow sees “Light.” He that sees Christ sees the Father: God's justice meeting and blending into His truth, God's truth melting into His mercy, that mercy melting into His love, that love in contact with His faithfulness, and so every attribute standing side by side with its next of kin, the whole of them absolutely necessary to complete the glory of that arch, and every one of them necessarily to be put in its proper place to

make the arch a harmony and a very music of colors.

Beloved, such is Jesus Christ. If we could but understand Jesus Christ, we could not make mistakes about God. In Jesus I see blood-red justice, justice as fierce as if there were no mercy; but what love I see also! What boundless love! They are all so clearly there. The whole of God written out in Christ! And yet, I warn you, we can never see the whole of God—in this life never. We may, without straining a point, say the most we can ever see even in Christ, as revealed to us, is just a glorious semi-circle of truth—an arch, like a divine ladder, by which we may mount to the very loftiness of God Himself. But there is another half you and I have not seen, and we shall not see it till we get to the throne of God. Moreover, that rainbow that is in heaven differs from ours; for there it is “like unto an emerald.” The green preponderates. The mild luster of the mercy of God, and His love, will seem to triumph over the fiery sardius and jacinth of His justice.

HOW OUGHT WE TO ACT WITH REGARD TO JESUS CHRIST?

First, let us act like little children. Little children run in clapping their hands with glee; “Father, there’s a rainbow!” Out they run to look at it, and they wonder whether they could find the end of it. They wish you would let them run till they could catch it; they look, and look, and look, and look, and when the shower begins to abate and dies out, they are so sorrowful because they have lost the splendid vision.

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Beloved, let us be children. Whenever we think of Christ let us be little children, and look, and look, and look again; and let us long to get at Him, for, unlike the rainbow, we can get at Him. I recommend you follow that divine rainbow till you reach the foot of it, and till you embrace it.

While we gaze, ought we not praise and admire? One or two of the nations of antiquity had it as a part of their religion always to sing hymns when they saw the rainbow. Should not we whenever we see Christ? Should it not be a red-letter day marked in our diary? "This day let us praise His name."

And again, when we see Christ, we ought to confess our sin with humility. An old writer says that the Jews confess their sins when they see the rainbow. I am sure, whenever we see Christ, we ought to remember the deluge of wrath from which He has delivered us, the flames of hell from which He has saved us; and so, humbly bowing ourselves in the dust, let us love, and praise, and bless His name.

To some of you there is nothing in this sermon, because you have never laid hold on the covenant. You have never believed in Jesus. Remember that a simple faith in Christ is the evidence of your being in the covenant. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, then your name is written in the roll of the blessed; but if you will not believe in Him, however excellent your character, however goodly your works, you shall perish in your sins. Believe and, believing, you put yourself under the divine arch of the blessed covenant. You shall see its glorious colors with exultation and delight, and you shall be secure, whatever catastrophes shall shake the earth, whatever calamities shall trouble the race of man.

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