

# Leviathan

## Part 3. A Christian Commonwealth

Thomas Hobbes

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis. . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported, between [brackets], in normal-sized type.

Hobbes wrote Leviathan in Latin and in English; it is not always clear which parts were done first in English and which in Latin. The present text is based on the English version, but sometimes the Latin seems better and is followed instead. Edwin Curley's fine edition of the English work (Hackett, 1994) has provided all the information used here regarding the Latin version, the main lines of the translations from it, and other information given here between square brackets.—Biblical references are given at the end.

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### **Contents**

<b>Chapter 32. The sources of Christian politics</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>Chapter 33. The number, age, aim, authority, and interpreters of the books of the Bible</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Chapter 36. The word of God and of the prophets</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>Chapter 37. Miracles and their use</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Chapter 38. The biblical meanings of 'eternal life', 'hell', 'salvation', 'the world to come' and 'redemption'</b>	<b>187</b>

## Part 3. A Christian Commonwealth

### Chapter 32. The sources of Christian politics

[Hobbes entitles this chapter 'The principles of Christian politics', using 'principle' to mean 'source'—that being one of the word's two common meanings in the early modern period. In this chapter he doesn't offer any 'principles' in the sense of fundamental doctrinal propositions, but he does arrive at 'principles' in the sense of sources or bases for judgments in Christian politics.] Up to here I have derived the rights of sovereign power and the duty of subjects purely from the principles of nature that we have either **(1)** found to be true in our experience or **(2)** agreed to be true as a matter of word-use; that is, I have based my account on **(1)** the nature of men as we know it through experience and on **(2)** generally accepted definitions of words that are essential to all political reasoning. But my next topic is the nature and rights of a *Christian Commonwealth*; and in this topic a lot depends on supernatural revelations of what God wants; so what I have to say must be based not only on God's natural word but also on his prophetic word—i.e. not only on nature but also on divine revelation.

But we shouldn't renounce our senses and experience, or our natural reason, which is the undoubted word of God. For these faculties of ours are the coins that he has put into our hands to manage until our blessed Saviour comes again; so we shouldn't tuck them away, folded up in the napkin of an unquestioning faith, but should 'spend' them in the purchase of justice, peace and true religion. There are many things in God's word that are above reason—i.e. that can't be either demonstrated or confuted through natural

reason—but there's nothing in it that is contrary to natural reason. When it seems that there is, that's because we have either interpreted clumsily or reasoned incorrectly.

Therefore, when anything in the Bible is too hard for us to understand, we are told to put our understanding under the command of the words. Faced with a mystery that isn't comprehensible and doesn't fall under any rule of natural science, we shouldn't try to sift a philosophical truth out of it by means of logic. The mysteries of our religion are like wholesome pills for the sick: swallowed whole, they have the power to cure; but chewed, they are mostly vomited up again without having any other effect.

When I speak of putting our understanding under the command of words, I'm not talking about making our intellectual faculty subservient to the opinions of any other *man*, but about obediently submitting one's will to an authority to which obedience is *owed*. Let's be clear about what the scope of our will is. We can't voluntarily alter

what we sense,  
what we remember,  
whether and how we understand things,  
how we reason, or  
what we believe.

These are necessary upshots of the things we see, hear, and consider; they aren't effects of our will, though our use of our will is an effect of them. So what's involved in putting our understanding and reason under the command of the words

is this: •not contradicting what is said, •speaking as we are commanded to by lawful authority, and •living accordingly. What all that adds up to is •having trust and faith in him who speaks, even though our minds are incapable of getting any *notions* from the words he utters.

When God speaks to man, he must do so •either immediately or •through the mediation of another man to whom God had formerly spoken immediately. *How* does God speak to a man immediately? Those to whom he *has* spoken understand this well enough, but for the rest of us it is hard, if not impossible, to know what is involved. If someone tells me that God has spoken to him supernaturally and immediately, and I am not convinced, I can't easily see what argument he can produce to oblige me to believe it. It's true that if he is my sovereign he may oblige me to obedience, so that I don't by act or word •declare that I don't believe him; but he can't oblige me to •believe him if my reason persuades me that what he says is false. And if someone who doesn't have such authority over me makes the same claim—i.e. that God has spoken immediately to him—I am free to disbelieve him and to say so.

•Let me be clear about *what* it is that I disbelieve in such a case. The claim that 'God has spoken to me •immediately' isn't the same as

'God has spoken to me in the Holy Scripture', which involves •mediation of the prophets or the apostles or the Church, which is how God speaks to all Christian men. Nor is it the same as

(1) 'God has spoken to me in a dream', which means merely that the speaker dreamed that God spoke to him! That won't convince us that God really spoke to him—not if we know that •dreams are for the most part natural, and can arise from previous thoughts, and that •dreams of *that* sort come from self-conceit and foolish

arrogance and the dreamer's false opinion that he is so godly or virtuous that he deserves the favour of extraordinary revelation. And if the truth of the matter is

(2) 'I saw a vision of God speaking to me', or

(3) 'I heard the voice of God speaking to me',

that means merely that he dreamed between sleeping and waking. People often take their dreams to be visions, because they haven't properly taken in that they were asleep. Then there is

(4) 'What I am saying comes from supernatural inspiration',

which means only that he finds himself intensely wanting to speak, or that he has some strong opinion about himself for which he can't offer any natural and sufficient reason. God almighty *can* speak to a man by •dreams, •visions, •voice, and •inspiration, but He doesn't require us to believe that He has so done to someone who claims that He has, because such a person, being a man, may err and indeed may lie.

Well, then, how can we—to whom God has never revealed His will immediately (except through natural reason)—know when we should obey His •supposed• commands when they are delivered by someone who claims to be a prophet? Of four hundred 'prophets' whom the King of Israel asked to advise him concerning his war against Ramoth Gilead, Micaiah was the only true one.<sup>1</sup> The prophet who was sent to prophesy against the altar set up by Jeroboam<sup>2</sup> was a true prophet and seems (judging by the two miracles that were done in his presence) to have been sent by God; and yet he was deceived by another old prophet who persuaded him to •eat and drink with him, telling him •lyingly• that this was God's command. [The point is that the former prophet had been commanded by God not to do •this.] If one prophet can deceive another, how are *we* to know what the will of God is, other than that through our reason? Going by Holy Scripture, I answer thus:

A true prophet can be known by **(1)** the doing of miracles **and (2)** his not teaching any religion other than the one that is already established.

Note that I say 'and'; for neither of these is sufficient on its own:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams rises amongst you, and prophesies some miracle that then does occur; if he then says 'Let us follow strange gods, ones that you have not known until now', *do not listen to him* etc. . . That prophet and dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has told you to revolt from the Lord your God. [Adapted from Deuteronomy 13:1-5. The omission indicated by the ellipsis is Hobbes's.]

Two things should be noticed here. **(1)** God won't allow miracles alone to count as decisive evidence that a prophet is genuine; he may be using them merely as a test of how firmly we are devoted to Him, as it says in the third verse, 'For the Lord your God is testing you, to learn whether you love Him with all your heart and all your soul'. The works of the Egyptian sorcerers, though not as great as those of Moses, were nevertheless great miracles, 'but we'll agree that those sorcerers weren't true prophets who had been immediately spoken to by the true God'. **(2)** However great the miracle may be, if it tends to stir up revolt against the king or whoever governs by the king's authority, the miracle-worker is to be regarded merely as someone sent to make a trial of our allegiance. 'How did the *king* get into the story?' In this context, the words 'revolt from the Lord your God' are equivalent to 'revolt from your king'. That's because the Israelites had made God their king by a pact at the foot of Mount Sinai; and God ruled them solely through Moses, who was the only one who spoke with God, and from time to time declared God's commandments to the people. Similarly, after our saviour Christ had made his disciples acknowledge

him as the Messiah (i.e. God's anointed, whom the Jewish nation daily expected to come as their king, though they refused him when he did come), he took care to warn them of the dangers of miracles:

There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and they will do great wonders and miracles, even to the extent of seducing (if it were possible) the very elect.<sup>3</sup>

[The elect' are those who have been elected or selected or chosen for salvation. The word will turn up several times more.] This shows that false prophets may have the power of miracles, but we aren't to accept their teachings as God's word. St. Paul told the Galatians that 'if anyone preaches to you a Gospel other than the one I have preached to you, let him be accursed—even if the person is myself or an angel from heaven.'<sup>4</sup> The Gospel in question said that Christ was King; so St Paul in these words is putting his curse on any preaching against the power of the king. For his speech is addressed to those who by his preaching had already accepted Jesus as the Christ, i.e. the King of the Jews.

And just as **(1)** miracles don't show that the miracle-worker has had an immediate revelation from God, if he doesn't preach the doctrine that God has established, so also **(2)** preaching that doctrine doesn't prove that the preacher has had an immediate revelation, if it isn't accompanied by miracles. For if a man who doesn't teach false doctrine but also doesn't produce any miracles claims to be a prophet, his claim should be disregarded. [Hobbes backs this up with a quotation from Deuteronomy 18:21,22, a rather cloudy passage whose gist is this:

If you are wondering 'How can we know that the word of a "prophet" is not the word of the Lord?', the answer is this: If the prophet says in the name of the Lord that such-and-such will happen, and it doesn't, then

he was speaking not on the basis of the word of the Lord but rather from the pride of his own heart, and you have nothing to fear from him.

Then Hobbes continues:] But someone may want to ask: ‘When the “prophet” has foretold something, how are we to know whether or not it *will* happen?’ ·Good question!· For he may foretell it as something •that will occur after a certain long time, longer than a human lifetime, or indefinitely •that it will happen ‘at some time’; and in either of those cases this test for whether someone is a genuine prophet is no use. So the miracles that oblige us to believe a prophet ought to be confirmed by an event that occurs right then or very soon thereafter. That’s why we find that Scripture endorses only one mark of someone’s being a true prophet, i.e. having received an immediate revelation, namely

his **(2)** the teaching of the religion that God has established, and **(1)** his producing a *present* miracle.

·This is a single test for prophet-hood, with two essential

parts; because· neither of them is on its own sufficient to oblige anyone else to accept what the ‘prophet’ says.

In our day, miracles no longer occur; so we have no basis for accepting the claimed revelations or inspirations of any man—no obligation to listen to any doctrine that doesn’t square with the Holy Scriptures. Ever since the time of the apostles, the •Scriptures have filled the gap, making up for the lack of any other prophecy; and from •them we can easily deduce all the rules and precepts we need for the knowledge of our duty to God and to man, doing this through wise and learned interpretation and careful thinking, with no need for supernatural inspiration or immediate input from God. This Scripture is where I shall find the sources for what I have to say concerning the rights of those who are the supreme governors on earth of Christian Commonwealths, and of the duty of Christian subjects towards their sovereigns. With that aim in view, I’ll devote my next chapter to the books, writers, scope and authority of the Bible.

### Chapter 33. The number, age, aim, authority, and interpreters of the books of the Bible

·NUMBER·

By ‘the books of Holy Scripture’ I mean the ones that ought to be the rules of Christian life. And because all the rules of life that men are in conscience bound to follow are *laws*, the question of the Scripture is the question of what is law—natural law and civil law—throughout Christendom [i.e. throughout all Christian commonwealths]. The Bible doesn’t

settle what laws every Christian king *shall* establish in his own dominions, but it does settle what laws he *shall not* establish. Now, I have proved that sovereigns are the sole legislators in their own dominions; so the only books of the Bible that are law in each nation are the ones established as such by the sovereign authority.

It’s true that God is the sovereign of all sovereigns; so

when he speaks to any subject, he ought to be obeyed, whatever any earthly ruler might command to the contrary. But the question is not ‘Ought we to obey God?’ but rather ‘What has God commanded us to do, and when did he command it?’ And for today’s Christians, who have no supernatural revelation, the answer has to come from the application of the natural reason that guided them—in the interests of peace and justice—to obey the authority of their various commonwealths, i.e. the authority of their lawful sovereigns. According to this obligation, the only books of the Old Testament that I accept as Holy Scripture are the ones whose acceptance has been commanded by the authority of the Church of England. What books these are is well enough known, so I don’t need to list them. [Hobbes then sketches the different positions that different authorities in the early Church took about exactly which books belong in the Old Testament proper—i.e. which are parts of the ‘canon’ or official list—and which belong in the Apocrypha. Then:]

As for the books of the New Testament, they are equally accepted as canonical by all Christian churches, and by all sects of Christians that admit any books at all as canonical.

·AGE·

The historical records don’t tell us who wrote the sacred books, so if we are to discover that, it will have to be by the light of the books themselves. This light may not show who wrote each book, but it does show roughly when each was written; and we’ll see that this often provides evidence about who *didn’t* write this or that book. [In the ensuing discussion, Hobbes will mention by name every Book of the Old Testament.]

Let us start with the Pentateuch, i.e. the first five books of the Old Testament. They are called ‘the five Books of Moses’, but that doesn’t mean that he wrote them. The Old Testament contains books with the titles ‘the Book of Joshua’,

‘the Book of Judges’, ‘the Book of Ruth’, and ‘the Books of the Kings’, but we don’t regard those titles as proving that the books in question were written by Joshua, the Judges, Ruth, and the Kings respectively. A book-title is as likely to name the book’s subject as to name its author: ‘The History of Livy’ names the •writer, but ‘The History of Alexander’ names the •subject. And there is pretty good evidence that Moses *didn’t* write all of the Pentateuch. We read in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, concerning Moses’ tomb, ‘that no man knows of his tomb to this day’,<sup>5</sup> where ‘this day’ refers to the time at which those words were written. That makes it clear that the words were written after Moses’ funeral. . . . It might be claimed that the last chapter was written by someone else, while the rest of the Pentateuch was written by Moses. Well, consider this from the first book of the Pentateuch: ‘And Abraham passed through the land to the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh, and the Canaanite was then in the land.’<sup>6</sup> This couldn’t have been written by Moses, . . . who died before the Canaanite came there. [Hobbes gives one more example, this time from the book of Numbers. Then:] So it is clear enough that the five ‘Books of Moses’ were written after his time, though it’s not so clear *how* long after.

Still, although Moses didn’t compile those books entirely, and in the form in which we have them, he *did* write everything in them that the books themselves say that he wrote—for example, the volume of the law, which seems to be contained in Deuteronomy 11–27 and was also commanded to be written on stone tablets when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. Moses wrote this himself, and delivered it to the priests and elders of Israel, to be read every seventh year to all Israel at their gathering for the feast of tabernacles. And this is the law which, transcribed by the priests and Levites, God commanded to be read by the kings of the future people of Israel.

The Book of Joshua was also written long after the time of Joshua; this can be inferred from many passages in the book itself. Joshua had set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, to mark the people's passing there, and the writer says of the stones 'They are there unto this day'<sup>7</sup>—where the phrase 'unto this day' signifies a time so long past as to be beyond the memory of man. [Hobbes presents two more passages in the Book of Joshua, in each of which the phrase 'unto this day' indicates that the passages were written long after the time of Joshua,<sup>8</sup> and says that many others of the same sort are scattered throughout that book.]

[Similar arguments can be constructed, Hobbes says, for the Books of Judges, of Ruth, of Samuel, of the Kings, of the Chronicles, of Ezra, of Nehemia, and of Esther, for most of which he gives specific references. Most of them are to passages in which events chronicled in the Book in question are written about in a way indicating that for the writer the events were in the distant past. Then:]

The Book of Job contains no indication of when it was written. There is good enough evidence that Job was not a fictional character,<sup>9</sup> but the book seems not to be a history, but rather a treatment of the question, much disputed in ancient times, 'Why have wicked men so often prospered in this world, and good men afflicted?' This is confirmed by something that St Jerome reports concerning the form of his book in the Hebrew language, namely that it starts and ends in prose, while all the rest of it—starting with Job's complaint (Job 3:3 to 42:11)—is in verse with six beats to a line. Thus the dispute is all in verse, with a prose preface and epilogue. Verse was often used in ancient times in philosophy, especially moral philosophy; but it's an unlikely form for •complaints about one's own suffering or for •words of comfort to a suffering friend.

The Psalms were written mostly by David, for the use of the choir. To these have been added some songs of Moses and other holy men, some of them (such as 126 and 137) after the return from the captivity; which shows that the Psalms were compiled, and put into the form they now have, after the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon.

[The Proverbs, Hobbes says, are 'a collection of wise and godly sayings' that were written by Solomon and two people who came after him, and] the collection of them into this one book was the work of some other godly man that lived after all three of them.

The Books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are entirely Solomon's work, except perhaps for the opening verse of each: 'The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem' and 'The song of songs, which is Solomon's'. These seem to have been added later, when the books of Scripture were gathered into one body of the law, so as to preserve not only the doctrine of the two Books but also the fact about their authorship.

Of the seventeen prophets, the most ancient are Zephaniah, Jonas, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micaiah, who lived in the time of Amaziah and Azariah, Kings of Judah. But the Book of Jonah isn't really a statement of his prophecy, for all there is to *that* is these few words, 'Forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed'. What it *is* is a history or narration of Jonas's unruly disobedience and his disputing God's commandments; so he isn't likely to have been the author of the book! But the Book of Amos is his prophecy.

Jeremiah, Obadiah, Nahum and Habakkuk prophesied in the time of Josiah.

Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during the captivity.

The Books of Joel and Malachi don't make clear when they prophesied. But the inscriptions or titles of their books,

·added to all the other evidence I have mentioned·, make it clear enough that the whole Old Testament was put together in the form in which we now have it, •after the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon and •before the time of ·the Greek king of Egypt· Ptolemaeus Philadelphus [282–246 BCE], who had it translated into Greek by seventy men sent to him from Judea for that purpose. [Hobbes adds that there is confirmation of this in the apocryphal Book of Esdras. He remarks that the Books in the Apocrypha have been recommended to us by the Church as instructive, although they are not allowed into the canon of the Old Testament. Then:] That's all I have to say about the dating of the books of the Old Testament.

All the writers of the New Testament lived at most a few decades after Christ's ascent ·into heaven·, and all of them had seen our Saviour or ·even· been his disciples, except for St. Paul and St. Luke. So everything that they wrote is as ancient as the time of the apostles. But the time when the books of the New Testament were accepted, and acknowledged by the Church as being written by those people, is not so ancient. Just as the books of the Old Testament come to us from a time no earlier than that of Esdras, who was directed by God's spirit to retrieve them when they were lost, so also the books of the New Testament can't be derived from any time earlier than when the governors of the Church collected, approved, and recommended them to us as the writings of the apostles and disciples whose names they bear. (It needs to be borne in mind that there weren't many copies of these books, and that it wouldn't be easy for any one individual to own a complete set of them.) The first listing of all the books of the Old and New Testaments is in the 'Canons of the Apostles' that are supposed to have been collected by Clement, the first Bishop of Rome after St Peter. But that is only *supposed*, and by many people it is questioned. So the

first authority we *know* to have recommended the Bible. . . .as containing the writings of the prophets and apostles is the Council of Laodicea, which was held in the 364 CE. By this time the great doctors of the Church, ambitious as they were, no longer looked up to Christian emperors as •shepherds of the people, and instead counted them among the sheep. (Non-Christian emperors—wolves!) And they tried to get their doctrines accepted not as

•advice and information, from preachers

but rather as

•laws, from absolute governors

—thinking that such frauds would tend to make the people more obediently pious. Furthermore, the only copies of the books of the New Testament were in the hands of the ecclesiastics. Despite all this, I am convinced that they didn't push their fraud so far as to falsify •the Bible, because if they had done so, they would surely have made •them more favourable to their power over Christian princes and civil governments than they are. So I don't see any reason to doubt that the Old and New Testaments, as we have them now, are true records of the things that were done and said by the prophets and the apostles. . . .

·AIM·

Although these books were written by a variety of men, it's obvious that they were all written in the same spirit: all the writers were working together for a single goal, namely the setting forth of the rights of the kingdom of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The book of Genesis traces

•the genealogy of God's people from the creation of the world to the going into Egypt;

the other four 'Books of Modes' contain

•their election of God as their king, and the laws that he laid down to govern them;

the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Samuel (up to 1 Samuel 9:2 when Saul makes his first appearance) describe

- the acts of God's people up to the time when they threw off God's yoke and demanded a king of the same
- human sort as the neighbouring nations had;

and the rest of the history of the Old Testament traces

- the succession of the line of David up to the time of the captivity,

—the line from which was to spring the restorer of the kingdom of God, our blessed Saviour, God the Son. The books of the prophets

- foretold his coming.

Then the Evangelists wrote about

- his life and actions, and his claim to the kingdom while he lived on earth;

and, lastly, the Books of the Acts and Letters of the apostles declare

- the coming of God, the Holy Ghost, and the authority He left with them and their successors for the direction of the Jews and for the invitation of the Gentiles.

So you can see that the histories and the prophecies of the Old Testament and the gospels and epistles of the New Testament have had one and the same aim, to convert men to obedience to God—(1) in Moses and the priests, (2) in the man Christ, and (3) in the apostles and the successors to apostolical power. At different times these three represented the person of God: •Moses and his successors, the high priests and kings of Judah, in the Old Testament; •Christ himself at the time when he lived on earth; and •the Apostles and their successors from the day of Pentecost (when the Holy Ghost descended on them) to the present day.

•AUTHORITY•

The different Christian sects have disagreed strongly about the answer to the question

(1) Where do the Scriptures get their authority from?

That question is also presented sometimes in other terms, such as

(2) How do we know that the Scriptures are the word of God?

(3) Why do we believe the Scriptures to be the word of God?

The main reason why it is so hard to get an agreement on the answer to this is that the question itself is defective. Everyone believes that the first and original author of the Bible is God; it's obvious that (1) that's where the authority comes from; so *that's* not what the dispute is about. Nor does the argument concern how we *know* that they are God's word; all Christians *believe* that they are, but (2) no-one can *know* this unless God himself has revealed it to him supernaturally. As for (3) the question about reasons for belief: some people are led to believe for one reason, others for other reasons; there isn't any single general answer to that question. The right way to formulate the question is: By what authority are the Scriptures made law?

To the extent that they don't differ from the laws of nature, they are certainly the law of God, and carry their authority with them, legible to everyone who has the use of natural reason. This is the same authority that every other moral doctrine has that is consonant to reason; and laws of this kind are not *made*—they are *eternal*.

If they are *made* law by God himself, then they are of the same kind as written law; and in that case they are laws

for—are binding on—a person only if God has published them *to him* so thoroughly that he can't excuse himself by saying he didn't know they were God's. And that has to be someone to whom God has supernaturally revealed •that the Scriptures are his laws, or •that those who published them were sent by Him.

•What about the rest of us, to whom God hasn't supernaturally revealed *anything*? If we are obliged to obey those laws, it must be by the authority of the person whose commands already have the force of law, i.e. the authority of the Commonwealth residing in the sovereign, who alone has the legislative power. If it isn't the legislative authority of the Commonwealth that gives them the force of law, it will have to be some other public or private authority derived from God. •Let us look at those two options separately. (1) If the authority is private, it obliges only the particular person whom God has been pleased to reveal it. For if every man were obliged to accept as God's law everything that particular men shove at him with a •claim of private inspiration or revelation, no divine law could be acknowledged. (•It can easily happen that such a •claim is false. Men do out of pride and ignorance take their own dreams, extravagant fancies, and fits of madness to be testimonies of God's spirit; or out of ambition claim to have received divine testimonies, knowing that they are lying.) (2) If the authority is public, it has to be the authority either of the Commonwealth or of the Church. [In what comes next, Hobbes is relying on the account he has given in chapter 16 of how an institution such as the Church can be 'a person'.] If it's the Church, •then we need to think about what sort of entity the Church *is*. If it is one person, then

•the Church is a Commonwealth of Christians; called a 'Commonwealth' because it consists of men united in one person, their sovereign; and called a 'Church' because it

consists in Christian men united in one Christian sovereign. If the Church isn't one person, then it has no authority at all; it can't give any commands or perform any actions; it has no power over anything or right to have anything; it has no reason, or voice, or will; for all these qualities are *personal*. Now if the totality of Christians isn't contained in one Commonwealth, they are not one person; there's no universal Church that has any authority over them; and in that case Scriptures aren't made laws by the universal Church. And if on the other hand there is one Commonwealth containing all the Christians, then all Christian monarchs and states are •reduced to the ranks of• private persons, and can be judged, deposed and punished by a universal sovereign of all Christendom. Now consider these two alternatives regarding Christian kings and the sovereign assemblies in Christian Commonwealths—

- They are absolute in their own territories, immediately under God;
- They are subject to one Vicar of [= 'stand-in for'] Christ who is the established head of the universal Church; they can be judged, condemned, deposed, and put to death, as he shall think expedient or necessary for the common good.

The question about the authority of the Bible comes down to this: *Which of these two statements is correct?*

•INTERPRETERS•

That question can't be answered until we have thought hard and in detail about the kingdom of God; and that will also be our basis for judging who is *authorized* to interpret the Bible. For anyone who has a lawful power over any writing to make it law also has the power also to approve or disapprove any interpretation of that writing.

\* \* \* \* \*

[The next two chapters—about 18 pages—are omitted:

Chapter 34: The meaning of ‘spirit’, ‘angel’, and ‘inspiration’ in the books of the Bible.

Chapter 35: The meaning in Scripture of ‘kingdom of God’, ‘holy’, ‘sacred’, and ‘sacrament’.]

## Chapter 36. The word of God and of the prophets

When ‘the word of God’ or ‘the word of man’ is mentioned, it doesn’t signify an isolated *word* that isn’t accompanied by other words so that something is *said*. Rather, it signifies a complete act of speech or discourse, in which the speaker affirms, denies, commands, promises, threatens, wishes, or interrogates. . . .

Again, if we say ‘the word of God’ or ‘the word of man’, the word ‘of’ sometimes **(1)** links the words •to the speaker (meaning the words that God has spoken, or that a man has spoken), for example in the phrase ‘the Gospel of St. Matthew’; and sometimes it **(2)** links them •to the subject of those words, as when we read in the Bible ‘The words of the days of the kings of Israel’, meaning the words *about* the acts that were performed in those days. [Hobbes continues with some densely referenced evidence that in the Bible ‘the word of God’ often means ‘the truths *about* God’, for example:] Acts 12:24 says ‘The word of God grew and multiplied’, which is easy to understand if it is talking about the evangelical doctrine, but hard and strange if it is referring to the voice or speech of God.

Considering these two meanings that ‘the word of God’

is given in Scripture, it’s clear that in sense **(2)**, in which it refers to the doctrine of Christian religion, the whole of Scripture is ‘the word of God’; but in sense **(1)** much of Scripture is not ‘the word of God’. That is, the whole of Scripture is **(2)** *about* God, but a lot of it is not **(1)** *said by* God. For example, the words ‘I am the Lord thy God’ etc., down to the end of the Ten Commandments, were spoken by God to Moses; but the preface ‘God spoke these words and said’ is to be understood as said not by God but by the writer of the holy history.

·And now we have a further distinction to attend to. Occurrences of ‘the word of God’ in which it refers to **(2)** what God has said, are to be understood sometimes literally and sometimes metaphorically. Literally when referring to the words God has spoken to His prophets; metaphorically when referring to God’s wisdom, power, and eternal decree in making the world. [We are about to meet the word ‘fiat’, used as an English noun. Its original sense is that of a Latin verb, meaning ‘Let there be...’ or ‘Let it be the case that . . .’.] God’s fiats ‘Let there be light’, ‘Let there be a firmament’, ‘Let us make man’ etc. are ‘the word of God’ in that metaphorical sense. It’s that

same sense that is involved in. . . . 'He upholds all things by the word of His power'<sup>10</sup> and 'The worlds were framed by the word of God'<sup>11</sup>. . . .

·That is one metaphorical sense of 'the word of God'; there is also another·. The phrase is sometimes used in Scripture to refer to the *effect* of God's word—i.e. the thing that was affirmed, commanded, threatened, or promised by God's word. . . . Elijah said to God 'I have done all these thy words'<sup>12</sup> as a way of saying 'I have done all these things at your word or commandment'. And 'Where is the word of the Lord?'<sup>13</sup> is a way of asking 'Where is the evil that He threatened?'. . . . And it's in this sense that St. John the Evangelist (and no-one else, I think) calls our Saviour himself 'the word' of God: 'And the word was made flesh'<sup>14</sup>—referring to the word or promise that Christ would come into the world. . . . Our Saviour is there called 'the word' not because he was •the promise but because he was •the thing that was promised. . . . So there's nothing here about the incarnation [= 'the becoming-flesh'] of a *word*; it's all about the incarnation of God the son, who is called 'the word' because his incarnation was the performance of a promise—a word·.

There are also places in Scripture where 'the word of God' is used to refer to words that are not necessarily spoken by prophet or a holy man but are just and reasonable. The Pharaoh Necho was an idolater; yet his words to the good King Josiah, advising him not to interfere Necho's coming battle against Carchemish, are said to have come 'from the mouth of God' (Josiah ignored the advice and was killed in the battle)<sup>15</sup>. . . .

So 'the word of God' is sometimes to be taken for the dictates of reason and justice, when this is said in the Bible to be written 'in man's heart', as in Psalms 37:31, Jeremiah 31:33, and many other such places.

·WHAT DOES 'PROPHET' MEAN?·

Now for the title 'prophet' as it occurs in Scripture. It is used in three ways. A 'prophet' can be

- someone who speaks on God's behalf to man, or on man's behalf to God;
- someone who foretells things that are to come;
- someone who speaks incoherently, like a man who is distracted.

The usage in which a 'prophet' speaks on God's behalf to the people is the most common one. Thus, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others were 'prophets' in this sense. And it's in this sense that the high priest was a 'prophet', because he went alone into the most holy place to put a question to God, and was to declare God's answer to the people. For example, when Caiaphas said that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, St. John says that 'He spoke not this of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that one man should die for the nation.'<sup>16</sup> [That is: He wasn't speaking for himself, but in his role as high priest he prophesied it, meaning that he said it on God's behalf.] Those who taught the people in Christian congregations are said to have 'prophesied'.<sup>17</sup> And a similar sense of 'prophet' is at work when. . . . God says to Moses: 'See, I have made thee a God to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.'<sup>18</sup>

As for 'prophet' meaning someone who speaks on man's behalf to God: That sense is at work when God calls Abraham a prophet, saying to Abimelech in a dream 'Now therefore restore ·to· the man his wife, for he is a prophet, and shall pray for thee'.<sup>19</sup> From this we gather that it's not wrong to label as 'prophets' the members of Christian churches who are called to say public prayers on behalf of the congregation. [After giving two more biblical examples of this use of 'prophet', Hobbes moves to an even weaker sense of it, thus:]

When St. Paul says “Every man that prays or prophesies with his head covered . . .” and so on, and ‘every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered. . .’,<sup>20</sup> he treats ‘prophesying’ as merely praising God in psalms and holy songs. (Women were allowed to do that in the church, but not to speak to the congregation.) . . .

When ‘prophesy’ is used to mean *predict*, i.e. foretell future contingent events, the label ‘prophet’ was given not only to •men who were God’s spokesmen and foretold to others events that God had foretold to them, but also to •all the impostors who claimed to foretell future events, though they really did no such thing. . . . As I pointed out in chapter 12, there are many kinds •of impostors• whose reputations as prophets among the common people are •raised more by a single success (even when a stretch was needed to get the outcome to fit the prediction) than they are •lowered by countless failures! Prophecy isn’t an art; and prophecy understood as prediction isn’t a steady job but a special temporary employment by God, usually of good men but sometimes also of wicked ones. . . . Among the gentiles, incoherent speech was taken to be a kind of prophecy, because the ‘prophets’ of their oracles—intoxicated by a spirit or vapour from the cave of the Pythian Oracle at Delphi—said in their madness things that were so loose they could be made to fit any event. . . . In the Scripture too I find ‘prophecy’ being understood in that way, in these words: ‘And the evil spirit came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house.’<sup>21</sup>

Amidst all these different meanings that the Bible gives to the word ‘prophet’, the commonest is the one that understands a ‘prophet’ to be *someone to whom God speaks immediately, telling the prophet something that he is to pass on to others on God’s behalf*.

•HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?•

This brings us to the question: *How* does God speak to such a prophet? You may think that God can’t have a voice and a language because he doesn’t, strictly speaking, have a tongue or any other organs that men have. The prophet David argues thus: ‘Shall He that made the eye, not see? or He that made the ear, not hear?’<sup>22</sup> Understood literally and taken on the face of it, the argument seems to imply that because God made all the parts of a man’s body he has the same use of those parts as we have; but if you think about some of our parts you’ll realize that this would be an utterly unjustifiable insult against God. David may have been meaning not to argue for a conclusion about God’s nature but merely to signify an intention to honour Him; for seeing and hearing are honourable attributes, and may be attributed to God as a way of declaring (within the limits of our conceptions) His almighty power. So we should understand God’s ‘speaking’ to men immediately to be the way, whatever it may be, in which God makes men understand His will. He has many ways of doing this, and we should look for them only in the Bible. Although the Bible often says that God spoke to this or that person, without saying how, there are also many passages that tell us what •the signs were by which the prophet was to recognize His presence and commandment; and we can understand •these as constituting *how* God ‘spoke’ on those occasions.

[What follows is a densely referenced and fairly uninteresting report on God’s speaking to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and others right through to the end of the New Testament. Such episodes divide, Hobbes says, into •ones where the Bible doesn’t say how God communicated and •ones that say that God spoke through a vision or in a dream. Then:]

Only to Moses did God speak in a more extraordinary

manner, on Mount Sinai and elsewhere. . . . But Moses, and after him the high priests, were prophets who stood especially high in God's favour; and God himself said explicitly that whereas he had spoken to other prophets in dreams and visions, he would speak to His servant Moses in the way that a man speaks to his friend. The words are these:

If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak to him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house; with him I will speak mouth to mouth, not in dark speeches but quite openly, and he will behold the likeness of the Lord. (Numbers 12:6-8)

And again:

The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. (Exodus 33:11)

And yet these 'speeches' of God to Moses were really performed through the mediation of one or more •angels; we are explicitly told this in Acts 7:35,53 and in Galatians, 3:19. That means that these communications occurred in •visions—though clearer visions than the other prophets had. That fits with God's saying 'If there arise amongst you a prophet, or dreamer of dreams. . .',<sup>23</sup> in which 'dreamer of dreams' is offered as an interpretation of 'prophet'. Also: 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions'.<sup>24</sup> Here again the word 'prophesy' is explained in terms of dreams and visions. That's also how God spoke to Solomon when he promised him wisdom, riches, and honour; for the Bible says: 'And Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream.'<sup>25</sup> In general, then, the extraordinary prophets in the Old Testament became informed about the word of God only through their dreams or visions, i.e. from the imaginings that they had in their sleep or in an ecstasy. In every true

prophet these imaginings were supernatural, whereas in false prophets they were natural if they occurred at all. . . .

Of the men who were prophets by a perpetual calling in the Old Testament, some were •supreme and some •subordinate. The supreme ones included Moses, and after him the high priests, each for his own time, as long the priesthood had sovereign authority. [They also included certain kings, Hobbes says, discussing this with many biblical references. Then:] So Moses and the high priests and the pious kings. . . were all sovereign prophets. But it's not clear how God spoke to them. Here are four ideas about that.

**(1)** When Moses went up to God on Mount Sinai it was a dream or vision, such as other prophets had.

This, however, is contrary to the distinction that God made between Moses and other prophets.<sup>26</sup>

**(2)** God spoke or appeared to Moses as He is in His own nature.

This denies that God is infinite, invisible, incomprehensible.

**(3)** God spoke to Moses by inspiration, or by infusing him with the Holy Spirit.

•This won't do either. The Holy Spirit is God; so if Moses was infused with the Holy Spirit he was on a par with Christ, who St Paul says is the only one who literally has God *in* him.<sup>27</sup> [Actually, Paul writes: 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily', not 'For *only* in him . . .'.]

**(4)** God spoke to Moses by the Holy Spirit.

This brings in only the graces or gifts of the Holy Spirit, which means that there was nothing supernatural about it. For God disposes men to piety, justice, mercy, truth, faith, and all kinds of moral and intellectual virtue by doctrine, example, and various natural and ordinary causes •that can be regarded as graces or gifts of the Holy Spirit.

None of these four is an acceptable account of how God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, or of how he spoke to the

high priests from the mercy-seat. So we just don't know how God spoke to those sovereign prophets of the Old Testament, whose role it was to put questions to Him. In the time of the New Testament the only sovereign prophet was our Saviour, who was both •God who spoke *and* •the prophet to whom He spoke.

As for subordinate prophets of perpetual calling [i.e. full-time tenured second-rank prophets], I find nothing in the Bible proving that God spoke to them supernaturally. His 'speaking' to them seems to have been done in the way in which God naturally inclines men to piety, to belief, to righteousness, and to other virtues. Men are naturally pushed and pulled towards Christian virtues by various factors, including •their temperament, •how they have been instructed, •how they were brought up, and so on. And •although this process is entirely natural, it's all right for us to attribute it to the operation of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit (which we in our language call 'the Holy Ghost'), because every good inclination is •ultimately God's work. But God's activities aren't always supernatural. So when a prophet is said to speak 'in the spirit', or 'by the spirit of God', we should take that to mean no more than that he speaks according to God's will as declared by the supreme prophet. For the commonest meaning of the word 'spirit' is as referring to a man's intention, his mind, or his disposition.

In Moses' time there were seventy men besides himself who prophesied in the camp of the Israelites. In Numbers 11:25 we are told *how* God spoke to them:

The Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke unto Moses, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it to the seventy elders. And it came to pass, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

This shows clearly that their prophesying to the people was

subservient and subordinate to the prophesying of Moses. God took some of Moses' spirit—i.e. his intentions, his state of mind, his disposition—gave this to them, so that they prophesied as Moses wanted them to—otherwise they wouldn't have been allowed to prophesy at all. [Hobbes adds further evidence for this, from verse 27. Then:]

A second thing that the passage from Numbers shows is that •'the Spirit of God' in that context refers merely to •a willingness to obey and assist Moses in the administration of the government. . . . And it also appears that the seventy had been appointed by Moses himself, as elders and officers of the people [and Hobbes gives evidence for that].

On many occasions God spoke also through the outcome of a lottery that had been organized by someone He had put in authority over His people. There was the drawing of lots that Saul organized to settle a question about wrongdoing by Jonathan,<sup>28</sup> and the 'lots that Joshua cast before the Lord in Shiloh, to divide the land of Canaan amongst the Israelites'<sup>29</sup>. . . .

And all these ways God has of 'speaking' turn up in the New Testament too. To the Virgin Mary, a vision of an angel; to Joseph in a dream; to Paul on the road Damascus, a vision of our Saviour; to Peter . . . in prison, a vision of an angel; and to all the Apostles and writers of the New Testament, by the graces of His spirit; and to the Apostles again, the choosing by lottery of Matthias to take the place of Judas Iscariot among the disciples.

So we have the result that all prophecy involves

•vision or dream (and when they are *natural* the vision is a dream), or •some special gift of God, of so rare a kind that it astonishes everyone who encounters it; and the further result that such gifts as the most extraordinary dreams and visions may come from God not only •immediately in a supernatural way but also •through in-

termediate causes in a manner that is natural. That's why we need to use reason and judgment to distinguish natural gifts from supernatural ones, and natural from supernatural visions or dreams. We had better be very circumspect and cautious about obeying the voice of •a man who claims to be a prophet and demands that we obey God by doing the things that—according to •him, 'speaking in God's name'—pave the way to happiness. For someone who claims to be teaching men the way to great happiness is offering to *govern* them, i.e. to rule and reign over them. This is something that all men naturally want, so anyone who lays claim to it should be suspected of being an ambitious cheat; and we shouldn't obey him unless we have examined and tested him. The only exception is when the man in question is the civil sovereign, or someone authorized by him, in which case we have already given him our obedience by instituting a Commonwealth.

You might ask 'Is every one of us *allowed* to examine the credentials of prophets and spirits?' Well, if we weren't, there'd be no point in displaying signs that would enable everyone to distinguish those whom they ought to follow from those whom they ought not to follow; and the facts about those signs *have* been displayed—both for prophets<sup>30</sup> and for spirits.<sup>31</sup> In the light of this, and of the fact that there is

- so much prophesying in the Old Testament, and
- so much preaching in the New Testament *against* prophets,

and the fact that there have been

- so many more false prophets than true ones,

everyone should be very wary about obeying the directions of any 'prophet'. *Have* there been many more false prophets than true ones? Well, when Ahab consulted four hundred prophets, Micaiah was the only one of them who wasn't a false impostor.<sup>32</sup> And a little before the time of the captivity, the prophets were generally liars. Speaking through

Jeremiah, the Lord said:

The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, nor spoken unto them: they prophesy to you a false vision, a thing of naught, and the deceit of their heart.<sup>33</sup>

God went so far as to *command* the people—speaking with the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah—*not* to obey them: 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy to you. They make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord.'<sup>34</sup>

In Old Testament times there were many quarrels among the visionary prophets, with one challenging another and asking 'with a sneer' 'When did the spirit leave me and go over to you?', as happened between Micaiah and the rest of the four hundred. They also called one another liars, as in Jeremiah, 14:14. And there were great controversies about this among the New Testament prophets claiming to have the Holy Spirit. Because of all this, every man back then *was*, and every man now *is*, bound to use his natural reason to apply to all prophecy the rules God has given us to distinguish the true from the false.

The rules he gave in the Old Testament were: •preaching doctrine compatible with what Moses, the sovereign prophet, had taught them; and •having a miraculous power to foretell what God was going to bring about. . . . And in the New Testament there was just one sign of someone's being a genuine prophet, namely •his preaching the doctrine that Jesus is the Christ, i.e. the king of the Jews, who had been promised in the Old Testament. Anyone who •denied that article 'of the faith' was a •false prophet, whatever miracles he might seem to perform; and anyone who •taught it was a •true prophet. [Hobbes adds some dispensable biblical details. The Latin version includes something notable:]

The preacher of the gospel who confesses and preaches that Jesus is the Christ is a prophet of God, whether the preacher is a pious man or not. For a prophet does not become a prophet by his morals or his faith, but by legitimate authority.

So everyone should **(1)** consider who is the sovereign prophet, i.e. who is God's deputy on earth, having—next under God—the authority of governing Christian men. They should **(2)** observe for a rule any doctrine that he—the sovereign prophet, speaking in the name of God—has commanded to be taught; and on the basis of that should **(3)** examine and test the truth of the doctrines that self-described prophets advance, with or without miracles. And if they find such 'prophets' teaching doctrines contrary to that rule—i.e. contrary to the doctrines endorsed by the sovereign prophet—they should **(4)** refer these prophets to the sovereign, and **(5)** leave it to him to uphold these prophets or forbid them, as he sees fit. If he disavows them, everyone should **(6)** no more obey their voice; and if he approves them,

everyone should **(7)** obey those prophets as men to whom God has given a part of the spirit of their sovereign. [Hobbes presents **(4,5)** through a comparison with what happened when some of the Israelites complained to Moses that they had doubts about the authority of some people who were prophesying in the camp.<sup>35</sup>]

When Christian men don't take their Christian sovereign to be God's prophet, they have only two options. (1) They can take their own dreams to be the prophecy they mean to be governed by, and the swelling of their own hearts to be the spirit of God; or (2) they can allow themselves to be led by some foreign prince, or by some of their fellow subjects who can bewitch them by slandering the government and launching a rebellion, with no miracles to confirm their genuineness except, with some of them, the 'miracle' of extraordinary success in carrying out *and getting away with* their plans, thus destroying all laws, both divine and human, and dragging all order, government, and society back to the primitive chaos of violence and civil war.

## Chapter 37. Miracles and their use

By 'miracles' I mean the astonishing works of God—so they're also called 'wonders'. They are also called 'signs', because their main function is to *signify* what God commands in situations where men's individual natural reason leaves them unsure about what God has and what he hasn't commanded. . . .

If we are to understand what miracles there are, therefore,

we must first understand what the works are that men wonder at and call astonishing. There are just two features of an event that make men wonder at it: •its being *strange*, i.e. of a kind that has seldom if ever occurred; and •its being of such a kind that they can't imagine its having occurred from natural causes and think must have come from the immediate hand of God. •For something to count as

a miracle, it must have *both* these features. We don't regard an event as miraculous if we see some possible natural cause of it, however unusual events of that kind are; and if an event is of a kind that has often occurred, we don't call it a miracle even if we are quite unable to imagine a natural way for it to come about.

[Hobbes provides examples. If a horse were to speak, that would be both strange and hard to think of as naturally caused. When a horse begets a foal, we have no idea what the mechanism was, but it's a familiar kind of event and therefore not miraculous. The first rainbow ever seen was a miracle, and was indeed a sign from God that there would be no more universal floods. But rainbows are now common, so they aren't miracles either to those who know how they are caused or to those who don't. Then:] There are many rare and in that sense *strange* works produced by the art of man which we don't count as miraculous, because we know that they were produced not by the immediate hand of God but by mediation of human activity.

People vary in how much knowledge and experience they have, so they vary in what they are wonder-struck by; from which it follows that something may be a miracle to one person yet not to another. That's how it comes about that ignorant and superstitious men make great 'wonders' of things that other men don't wonder at all because they know that those things come from nature (which isn't the same as coming from the *immediate* hand of God.) Solar and lunar eclipses are examples of this. . . . Another example: a cunning and unscrupulous man x takes advantage of an ignorant and unwary man y as follows: x secretly gets information about private actions of y's, then tells y what he (y) did on some previous occasion; this knowledge of x's strikes y as a miraculous thing; but amongst wise and cautious men such 'miracles' are hard to perform [meaning that they are hard

get away with]!

It's part of the nature of a miracle that it is it performed so as to get us to believe God's messengers, servants, and prophets—believe that those men are called, sent, and employed by God—which will make us more disposed to obey them. Consider •the creation of the world, and •the destruction of all living creatures in the universal flood—these were astonishing works, but they aren't usually called 'miracles' because they weren't performed to procure credit for any prophet or other servant of God. However wonderful a work may be, what astonishes us is not •that it could be done (because we believe that God can do anything) but •that He did it at the prayer or word of a man. But the works of God in Egypt, done by the hand of Moses, were 'miracles' properly so-called. because they were done in order to make the people of Israel believe that Moses had been. . . .sent to them by God. After God had commanded him to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, Moses said 'They will not believe me, but will say the Lord has not appeared unto me,'<sup>36</sup> and God gave him power to turn the rod he had in his hand into a serpent, and again to turn it back into a rod. . . .to make the Israelites 'believe that the Lord God of their fathers had appeared before them.'<sup>37</sup> And when he had done these miracles [i.e. the rod miracle and two others omitted here] before the people, it is said that 'they *believed* him.'<sup>38</sup> But they still didn't dare to *obey* him, because they were afraid of Pharaoh. So the other things that were done to plague Pharaoh and the Egyptians, all of them tending to make the Israelites believe in Moses, were 'miracles' strictly so-called. And if you look into all the miracles done by the hand of Moses and all the other prophets up to the time of the captivity, and those of our Saviour and his apostles afterwards, you'll find that their purpose was always to create or strengthen people's belief that they—those miracles—were sent by God.

The aim of miracles in Scripture was to create belief not in *all* men. . . .but only in the *elect*, i.e. only in those who God had decided should become His subjects. For example, the miraculous plagues of Egypt weren't aimed at converting Pharaoh. God had told Moses in advance that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he wouldn't let the people go; and when at last he did let them go, he hadn't been persuaded to this by miracles, but forced to it by plagues.

The evangelist Matthew tells us that He didn't perform many miracles in His own region, because of the unbelief of people there;<sup>39</sup> And Mark says not that He •didn't perform many but rather that he •couldn't perform any.<sup>40</sup> It wasn't that

- he lacked the power

(it would be blasphemy to say that he did); nor was it that

- miracles aren't intended to convert incredulous men to Christ

(all the miracles of Moses, of the prophets, of our Saviour and of his apostles were aimed at adding men to the Church).

The point was, rather, that

- the end of miracles was to add to the Church not
- all men but only •men whom God had elected for salvation.

Because our Saviour was sent from his Father, he couldn't use his power to convert people whom his Father had rejected. [Hobbes next comments adversely on those who try to reconcile the two statements by mistranslating the one by Mark. Then:]

What I have said here about the nature and use of miracles enables us to define 'miracle' thus: A miracle is something that God does—but not through the laws of nature that he established in the Creation—to show His elect that someone has been sent as a special minister to help them towards salvation.

This definition implies that what happens in any miracle isn't the effect of any power in the prophet, because it's an immediate effect of the hand of God; which means that God did it without using the prophet as a subordinate cause.

Something else that follows from the definition: No devil, angel, or other created spirit can perform a miracle. When a created spirit makes something happen, either **(1)** it happens through natural causes, so that the event doesn't come from 'the immediate hand of God' and is therefore not a miracle; or **(2)** it happens in some other way—through an incantation, i.e. through *words*—which means that the miracle-worker has some power of his own that doesn't come from God; and everybody rejects *that*.

Some biblical texts seem to attribute the power of working wonders, equal to some of the immediate miracles that God Himself performs, to certain arts of magic and incantation. [He cites passages in Exodus 7 and 8 reporting three miracles by Moses that were duplicated by 'the magicians of Egypt'. Then:] Won't this incline us to attribute miracles to enchantments—i.e. to the causal power of the sound of words—and to think that this is proved in those passages and others? But Scripture never tells us what an enchantment *is*. Many people think it's the production of strange effects by spells and words; but if they are wrong, and

'enchantment' is merely imposture and delusion, brought about by ordinary means, and so far from being supernatural that all it depends on. . . .is the ordinary ignorance, stupidity, and superstition of mankind,

then the biblical texts that seem to endorse the power of magic, witchcraft, and enchantment *must* have a different meaning from the one they seem at first sight to have.

For it's obvious that words have no effect except on those who understand them, and their effect on *them* is only to

signify the intentions or feelings of the speaker and thereby produce hope, fear, or other emotions or thoughts in the hearer. Therefore when—as in Exodus 7 and 8—a rod seems to be a serpent or waters seem to be blood, or any other miracle seems to be done by enchantment, if it isn't done for the instruction of God's people then the only thing that is enchanted (i.e. affected by the words) is not the rod, or the water, or anything else *except the spectator!* So the 'miracle' consists simply in someone's deceiving someone else, and that's no miracle—indeed it is very easy to do.

That's because men in general are ignorant and prone to error—especially men who know little about natural causes or about the aspects of human nature that make men so easy to deceive by countless easy tricks. **(1)** Before there was knowledge of the movements of the planets, what a reputation for miraculous power a man could get by telling people that at such and such a day and time the sun would be darkened! **(2)** If juggling hadn't become a quite ordinary activity, a juggler could handle his goblets and other trinkets in such a way as to make people think that to perform these wonders he must have at least the power of the Devil. **(3)** A man that has acquired the skill of speaking by breathing *in*, . . . so that the weakness of his voice seems to result not from voice's being weakly produced but from its coming from far away, can make many people believe that it's a voice from heaven—or whatever he chooses to tell them. **(4)** And for a crafty man who has enquired into the secrets of another man, and learned about his actions and adventures in the confiding sort of conversation that men have with one another, will have no trouble telling these things back to the man he first got them from; yet many have, by doing just that, acquired the reputation of being magicians. . . . And if we look at cases where two or more impostors are working together, there's nothing—however impossible—that people

can't be led to believe. **(5)** Two conspirators—one seeming lame, the other seeming to cure him with a charm—will deceive many people. **(6)** But many more will be deceived if there is a group of conspirators—one to seem lame, another to 'cure' him, and all the rest to bear witness!

As I said in chapter 36, the best precaution against this general tendency to rush into accepting supposed miracles is the prescription that God gave through Moses,<sup>41</sup> namely that we shouldn't take anyone to be a prophet

**(1)** if he teaches any religion other than the one established by God's lieutenant, or

**(2)** if, although he teaches the same religion, the events that he predicts don't happen.

God's lieutenant was Moses; so it follows that •at that time he was to be consulted concerning what doctrine he had established, before the people could rightly give credit to a supposed miracle or prophet. Aaron and his successors were to be consulted to determine what doctrines were established •at their times. And •at any time, the question of what doctrines are then established is to be answered by the sovereign governor of God's people next under God Himself, i.e. by the head of the Church at that time. And if after due consultation we find that the supposed miracle satisfies condition **(1)**, we should still withhold our acceptance of it until we have checked it out against condition **(2)**. For that we must see the miracle being done, using all possible means to check on whether it is really done; and—if it is really done—whether it's something that a man couldn't do by his natural power, so that it requires the immediate hand of God. And we must appeal to God's lieutenant for an answer to *this* question—i.e. to the person or governmental entity to whom we have submitted our private judgments in all doubtful cases. For example, suppose this were to

happen:

Someone claims that after certain words have been spoken over a piece of bread, God immediately turns it from being *bread* to being *a god* or *a man*, or *both*; yet it still looks still as much like bread as ever it did.

There's no reason for any of us to think that this change has really happened, or to base our fear of God on its having happened, until we consult God—by consulting his stand-in or lieutenant—about whether it has happened or not. If he says that it hasn't, then we needn't pay any attention to this purported prophet or miracle-worker—'He has spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not fear him', as Moses says. If God's lieutenant says that the change from bread to god or man *did* take place, we mustn't contradict him. Another kind of example: If we are *told about* a miracle but don't ourselves *see* it, we should consult the lawful Church by consulting its lawful head—about how far we should go in the direction of believing these reports or miracles. That is the usual situation these days of people who live under Christian sovereigns. In our time we never see any such

wondrous work, performed by a charm or a word or a prayer, that would lead a quite stupid person to think it was supernatural. So for us now the question concerns the status not of a supposed miracle that we have seen, but of a supposed miracle that we have heard or read about—we want to know whether a *reported* miracle really was one. . . . To put it bluntly, we want to know whether the report is true or a lie. And this is not to be judged by each person's •private thinking or private conscience; it's a matter for •public thinking, i.e. the reasoning of God's supreme lieutenant. And indeed we have already made him a judge, by giving him a sovereign power to do everything necessary for our peace and defence.

There are no constraints on *thought*; so a private man is always free to *believe* anything he likes concerning acts that have been announced as miracles. . . . But when it comes to *expressing* one's belief, private reason must submit to public reason, i.e. to God's lieutenant. Who *is* this lieutenant of God, this head of the Church? I shall consider that question when its time comes.

## Chapter 38. The biblical meanings of 'eternal life', 'hell', 'salvation', 'the world to come' and 'redemption'

Civil society can't survive without justice. And justice requires that those who have the sovereignty of the Commonwealth shall have the power of life and death and of other less extreme rewards and punishments. A Commonwealth couldn't possibly survive if someone other than the sovereign had the power to give greater rewards than life and to inflict greater punishments than death. Well now, •eternal life •in a state of bliss• is a greater reward than •present life, and •eternal torment is a greater punishment than •ordinary physical death; so the questions arise:

- What does Holy Scripture mean by 'eternal life' and 'eternal torment'?
- For what offences (and offences against whom) are men to be eternally tormented?
- For what actions are men to be rewarded by eternal life?

Anyone who wants by obeying authority to avoid the calamities of confusion and civil war has reason to look for answers to those questions. (I offer my interpretations of biblical passages in a spirit of submission to the interpretation of the Bible authorized by the Commonwealth whose subject I am.)

### •ETERNAL LIFE: HOW ACQUIRED AND WHERE SPENT•

The first thing we find is this: Adam was created in such a condition of life that he would have enjoyed life in the Paradise of Eden for ever, if he hadn't broken God's commandment. In Eden there was the •tree of life, whose fruit he was allowed to eat so long as he refrained from eating fruit from the •tree of knowledge of good and evil, which he was forbidden to do. When he ate fruit from the forbidden tree,

God thrust him out of Paradise, 'lest he should put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and live forever'.<sup>42</sup> This seems to say that if Adam hadn't sinned, he would have had an eternal life on earth; and that it was his first sin that made him and his posterity *mortal*. . . . When God said 'On the day when you eat that fruit, you will surely die,'<sup>43</sup> he must have meant that what would immediately ensue was not •Adam's actual death but •his becoming mortal and sure to die.

. . . .Jesus Christ has satisfied for [Hobbes's phrase] the sins of all that believe in him, thereby recovering for all believers the eternal life that was lost by the sin of Adam. That is the comparison that St Paul is making here: 'As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life.'<sup>44</sup> And more clearly here: 'For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'<sup>45</sup>

Where are men to enjoy the eternal life that Christ has obtained for them? The passages just quoted seem to answer 'On earth'. If St Paul's comparison is proper, what was lost through Adam—namely eternal life *on earth*—is what is regained through Christ. [Hobbes cites a passage in Psalm 133 and two from Revelation 21 that seem to confirm that those who are saved will have eternal life on earth. Then:] And the very same thing is confirmed in the episode where the Apostles that were watching Christ ascending, and were addressed by two men in white clothing (i.e. two angels) who said: 'This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into

heaven, will come ·back· in the way you have seen him go up into heaven.<sup>46</sup> They seem to have meant that he would come down to govern them eternally *here*, and not take them up so that he could govern them *in heaven*. This fits with the restoration of 'the kingdom of God' that was instituted under Moses, and was a political government of the Jews on earth.

[Then a paragraph devoted to this rather strained argument: Jesus said that resurrected people do not marry. That would be essential if eternal life were to be spent on earth; because the earth, if it were the scene of endless procreation and no death, 'in a small time would not have been able to provide them place to stand on'.]

There's another respect in which the eternal life that Adam lost is like the eternal life that our Saviour has recovered by his victory over death: namely, that just as Adam lost eternal life by his sin and yet lived on for a while, so the faithful Christian recovers eternal life through Christ's sacrifice and yet dies a natural death and remains dead for a while—specifically, until the resurrection. . . .

In what follows, I shall take it that 'heaven' refers to those parts of the world that are furthest from earth—where the stars are, or above the stars in another higher heaven (though that isn't mentioned in Scripture, and there's no reason to believe it). Now, I can't find any biblical text from which one can easily extract the meaning that the place where men are to live eternally after the resurrection is *the heavens*. The name 'the Kingdom of Heaven' refers to the kingdom of the king who dwells in heaven, and that kingdom was the ·earthly kingdom of· the people of Israel. . . . And when Christ through the preaching of his ministers has persuaded the Jews to return, and called the gentiles into obedience to him, there will be a new kingdom—a kingdom of heaven—because God will then be our king. His throne

is heaven, but the Scriptures don't say anything implying that man will *ascend* to his happiness any higher than God's footstool, the earth. [Two passages are quoted implying that certain good men who have died are not in heaven. Then:]

Someone might object that although their ·bodies were not to ascend until the general day of judgment, their ·souls were in heaven as soon as they left their bodies; and that might seem to be confirmed by something our Saviour said. In the course of using the words of Moses as evidence for the resurrection, he said: 'That the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the ·burning· bush, when he calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". ·That presupposes the resurrection of the dead·, for the Lord is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for they all live unto him.'<sup>47</sup>

But if these words refer only to the immortality of the soul, they don't at all prove what our Saviour intended to prove, which was the resurrection of the body—i.e. the immortality of the *man*. [The next sentence seems not to follow from the preceding one; but its initial 'Therefore' is Hobbes's.] Therefore our Saviour means that what made those patriarchs immortal was not ·a property that follows from the essence and nature of mankind, but rather ·the will of God, who chose to endow the faithful with eternal life, as a sheer gift. . . . ·There is widespread acceptance of the doctrine· that

the soul of man is a living creature that doesn't depend on the body, and is inherently eternal, so that men can have immortality that isn't given to them on judgment day;

but there is no scriptural basis for this (except for the immortality of Enoch<sup>48</sup> and Elijah<sup>49</sup>). Throughout Job 14, Job bewails this mortality of nature, but he doesn't contradict the view that immortality will be given at the resurrection. [Hobbes quotes Job comparing the total death of a man with

the way a drought-stricken tree may be revived by water,<sup>50</sup> and as saying two verses later that men won't rise again until the heavens no longer exist; and he quotes 2 Peter 3:7,12 as equating 'when the heavens no longer exist' with 'on the day of judgment'. Then:] Therefore when Job says 'man rises not till the heavens be no more', that's the same as saying that immortal life (or 'immortal soul'—in biblical terms that's the same thing) doesn't begin in man until the resurrection and day of judgment; and is caused not by human nature as such but by the promise. For St. Peter does *not* say:

'Because of our own inherent nature we look for new heavens and a new earth',

but rather

'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth.'

[Hobbes winds up this part of his argument by reverting to his thesis—defended in chapter 35 [omitted from this version]—that 'the kingdom of God is a civil commonwealth where God Himself is sovereign' and that its place will be *on earth*. He remarks that although he bases this on biblical passages that are 'not few nor obscure', it will surprise many people. In presenting it, he says, he is merely conducting one part of his project of stopping men from killing one another over theological points.]

·METAPHORS ABOUT HELL·

Just as the •kingdom of God and •eternal life seem from Scripture to be located on earth, so also do •God's enemies and their •torments after ·the day of· judgment. In Scripture the place where all men remain until the resurrection. . . .is usually referred to by terms that signify under ground. . . . But as for the place of the damned after the resurrection, nowhere in the Bible is there any indication of *where* it is—only of who will be there. [Hobbes goes through a number

of biblical passages where damnation is spoken of, noting that no clear indication of place is found in any of them; though they do mention 'in a deep pit', 'under the ground' and 'under the water'. He also quotes passages suggesting that the damned will be tied hand and foot, and will be in utter darkness. His last remark on this topic concerns the name 'Hell', thus:]

There was a place near Jerusalem called the Valley of the Children of Hinnon, in one part of which •the Jews had committed most grievous idolatry, sacrificing their children to the idol Moloch, •God had afflicted His enemies with most grievous punishments, and •Josiah had burned the priests of Moloch on their own altars (for all this see 2 Kings 23). That place was used afterwards to receive the city's filth and garbage, and occasionally fires were lit to purify the air and take away the stink of carrion. Because of this abominable place, the Jews from then on used the name 'Gehenna', i.e. 'Valley of Hinnon', to name the place of the damned. And this 'Gehenna' is the word that is now usually translated as 'hell'; and the fires that sometimes burned there—i.e. in the real Valley of Hinnon—have generated the notion of everlasting and unquenchable fire ·in hell·.

Nobody interprets Scripture as saying that after the day of judgment the wicked will all be eternally punished ·in the garbage dump· in the Valley of Hinnon; or that they will come back to life so as to be underground or underwater forever after; or that after the resurrection they'll never again see one another or move from place to place. So we are compelled to take the things the Bible says about 'hell fire' as meant *metaphorically*; but all metaphors have some real basis that can be expressed literally; so we still have a question before us—namely what the literal underlay is of the Bible's metaphors about where hell is and about the nature of its torments and of those who administer them.

## ·TORMENTERS AND TORMENTS·

We are told about the nature and properties of the tormenters by the names they are given:

Satan, the enemy, Diabolus (·or Devil·), the accuser,  
Abaddon, the destroyer.

The labels 'Satan', 'Devil', 'Abaddon', are not individual names with no conceptual significance; they refer not to their individual bearer(s) but only to an office [here = 'job or role'] or quality; so they are general terms, which oughtn't to be left untranslated, as they are in the Latin and modern Bibles. Left untranslated, they give the impression of being proper names of demons, making men that much easier to seduce into believing the doctrine of devils, which at that time was the religion of the gentiles and was contrary to that of Moses and of Christ.

As for location: Because 'the Enemy' etc. refer to the enemy of those who will be in the kingdom of God, if God's kingdom after the resurrection will be on the earth, . . . the enemy and *his* kingdom must be on earth also. And that's how it was before the Jews deposed God: God's kingdom was in Palestine, and the surrounding nations were the kingdoms of the enemy; so 'Satan' means any earthly enemy of the Church.

The torments of hell are expressed sometimes by 'weeping, and gnashing of teeth',<sup>51</sup> sometimes by 'the worm of conscience',<sup>52</sup> sometimes by 'fire' as in 'where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched', sometimes by 'shame, and contempt', as in 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt'.<sup>53</sup> These are all metaphorical ways of signifying grief and discontent of mind arising from the sight of that eternal happiness of others which they themselves have lost because of their unbelief and disobedience. And because they—the damned—can't have

any sense of the happiness of others except by comparison with their own actual miseries, it follows that they are to suffer bodily pains and calamities such as befall those who don't just live under evil and cruel governors but also have the eternal king of the saints, God almighty, as an enemy.

Among these bodily pains we have to include a 'second death' that is to come to every one of the wicked. ·That is mentioned explicitly only in the book of Revelation,<sup>54</sup> but it doesn't conflict with anything in the rest of the Bible·; for although Bible is clear that everyone will be raised from the dead, it doesn't promise any of the wicked an eternal life. On the question of what bodies men will have when they are brought back to life, St. Paul writes that 'the body is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour and raised in glory; it is sown in weakness and raised in power'.<sup>55</sup> The bodies of the wicked can't be described in terms of 'glory' and 'power', and ·on the other hand· a 'second death' can't describe anything that happens to those who die only once. . . .

The fire prepared for the wicked is everlasting; that is, the condition of being physically and mentally tortured after the resurrection will last for ever; and in that sense the fire will be unquenchable and the torments everlasting. But it doesn't follow that someone who is cast into that fire will be eternally burned and tortured, and never be destroyed or die. There are many biblical passages that affirm everlasting fire and torments into which men can be thrown one after another for ever, but I don't find any affirming that any individual person will have an eternal life throughout which he will be tormented. On the contrary, the Bible promises an everlasting *death*, which is the second death: 'For after death and the grave shall have delivered up the dead which were in them, and every man be judged according to his works; death and the grave shall also be cast into the lake of fire.

This is the second death.' Clearly, there is to be a second death of everyone who is condemned on the day judgment, after which he will die no more.

·SALVATION·

[Hobbes devotes four rather dull pages to biblical evidence regarding *where* the saved people are to enjoy their eternity of bliss. His view, of course, is that they will spend their happy eternity on this earth. Of more interest is a final page on the question of how redemption is/was brought about, i.e. *how* Jesus Christ's death on the cross brought it about that some people are saved. Thus:] The •salvation of a sinner requires a preceding •redemption. Once someone is guilty of a sin, he is liable for the penalty of it, and either he or someone else on his behalf must pay whatever ransom is demanded by whoever is offended by the sin and has the sinner in his power. The offended person is almighty God, who has everything in his power; so salvation can't be acquired without the prior payment of whatever ransom God has chosen to require.

This 'ransom' isn't taken to be a satisfaction for sin equivalent to the offence—i.e. something that *makes it all right again*, something that somehow cancels the sin—because no sinner can do *that*, and no righteous man can ever do it for him. When someone •harms another person, he may make amends for this by restitution or compensation, but •sin can't

be taken away by compensation. If it were, the liberty to sin would be something that might be bought and sold. But sins may be *pardoned* if the sinner is repentant, and this pardon may be given either •gratis or •on the payment of whatever penalty God chooses to accept. In the Old Testament, what God usually accepted was some sacrifice or offering [Hobbes's word is 'oblation'].

There is nothing *wrong* about forgiving sin when punishment has been threatened. Even among men, while anyone is bound by his •promise of something good, no-one is bound by his threats; still less do threats bind God, who is infinitely more merciful than men.

So our saviour Christ didn't redeem us by clearing the account, making it as though the sins hadn't occurred and thus making it *unjust* for God to punish sinners with eternal death. What he did through his death was this: at his first coming ·into the world· he made a sacrifice and offering of himself, which God chose to require for the salvation, at his second coming, of anyone who in the meantime repented and believed in Him. This redemptive act isn't always in Scripture called a 'sacrifice' an 'offering', and is sometimes called a 'price', but we mustn't understand 'price' to imply •something whose value was such that our saviour could *claim* that his offended Father pardon us, but only •something that God the Father chose in his mercy to demand.

\* \* \* \* \*

[The remaining chapters of Part 3 are omitted. Here are their titles, and the length of each in Curley's edition (Hackett):

39: The biblical meaning of the word 'church' (2)

40: The rights of the kingdom of God in Abraham, Moses, the high priests, and the kings of Judah (10)

41: The office of our blessed Saviour (7)

42: Ecclesiastical power (65!)

43: What is necessary for a man's reception into the Kingdom of Heaven (13)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 22.  
<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 13.  
<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:24.  
<sup>4</sup> Galatians: 1:8.  
<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 34:6.  
<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:6.  
<sup>7</sup> Joshua 4:9.  
<sup>8</sup> Joshua 5:9, 7:26.  
<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 14:14, James 5:11.  
<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 1:3.  
<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 11:3.  
<sup>12</sup> 1 Kings 18:36.  
<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah 17:15.  
<sup>14</sup> John 1:1.  
<sup>15</sup> 2 Chronicles 35:21-3.  
<sup>16</sup> John 11:51.  
<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:3.  
<sup>18</sup> Exodus 7:1.  
<sup>19</sup> Genesis 20:7.  
<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:4,5.  
<sup>21</sup> 1 Samuel, 18:10.  
<sup>22</sup> Psalm 94:9.  
<sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1.  
<sup>24</sup> Joel 2:28.  
<sup>25</sup> 1 Kings 3:15.  
<sup>26</sup> Numbers 12:6-8.  
<sup>27</sup> Colossians, 2:9.  
<sup>28</sup> 1 Samuel 14:42.  
<sup>29</sup> Joshua 18:10.  
<sup>30</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-5.  
<sup>31</sup> 1 John 4:1-3.  
<sup>32</sup> 1 Kings 22.  
<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah 14:14.  
<sup>34</sup> Jeremiah 23:16.  
<sup>35</sup> Numbers 11:27.  
<sup>36</sup> Exodus 4:1.  
<sup>37</sup> Exodus 4:5.  
<sup>38</sup> Exodus 4:31.  
<sup>39</sup> Matthew 13:58.  
<sup>40</sup> Mark 6:5.  
<sup>41</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22.  
<sup>42</sup> Genesis 3:22.  
<sup>43</sup> Genesis 2:17.  
<sup>44</sup> Romans 5:18-19.  
<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.  
<sup>46</sup> Acts 1:11.  
<sup>47</sup> Luke 20:37-8.  
<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 11:5.  
<sup>49</sup> 2 Kings 2:11.  
<sup>50</sup> Job 14:7-10.  
<sup>51</sup> Matthew 8:12.  
<sup>52</sup> Isaiah 66:24, Mark, 9:44,46,48.  
<sup>53</sup> Daniel 12:2.  
<sup>54</sup> Revelation 2:11, 20:13-14, 21:8.  
<sup>55</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:42-3.