

# Christ the Desire of All Nations

by John Flavel

*"And the desire of all nations shall come."* Haggai 2:7.

The first chapter of Haggai is mainly spent in reproving the negligence of the Jews, who, being discouraged from time to time, had delayed the rebuilding of the temple. In the meantime they employed their care and cost in building and adorning their own houses: but, at last, being persuaded to set about the work, they met with this discouragement, that such was the poverty of the present time, that the second structure would not match the magnificence and splendor of the first. In Solomon's days the nation was wealthy, but now it was drained; so that there would be no comparison between the second and the first. To this great discouragement the prophet applies this relief: that whatsoever should be lacking in external pomp and glory, should be more than recompensed by the presence of Jesus Christ in this second temple. For Christ, "the desire of all nations," he says, shall come into it. Which, by the way, may give us this useful note: The presence of Jesus Christ gives a more real and excellent glory to the places of his worship, than any external beauty or outward ornaments whatsoever can bestow upon them. Our eyes, like the disciples, are apt to be dazzled with the sparkling stones of the temple, and, in the meantime, to neglect and overlook that which gives it the greatest honour and beauty.

But to return. In these words we have both the description of Christ, and an arrow pointing at the time of his incarnation: he is called "the desire of all nations," and the time of his coming in the flesh is clearly implied to be during the time of the second temple. Where, by the way, we find a valid reason to stand amazed at and bemoan the blindness of the Jews. They admit the truth of this prophecy and are not able to deny the destruction of the second temple, many hundred years past, yet will not be brought to acknowledge the incarnation of the true Messiah.

But to the point. Christ, called the desire of all nations, was to come into the world in the time of the second temple, Mal. 3:12, after grievous shocks and shakings of the world. They were to make way for his coming; for so our prophet here speaks, "I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come," to which the apostle alludes, in Heb. 12:26, applying this prophecy to Jesus Christ. Here Christ is called the "desire of all nations," putting the act of desiring in the place of the thing desired: as in Ezek. 24:16. "The desire of your eyes," that is to say, the desirable wife of your bosom; so here, the "desire of all nations," is Christ, the object of the desires of God's elect in all nations of the world. He is a Saviour infinitely desirable in himself, and actually desired by all the people of God, dispersed among all races, tongues, and nations of the world. Therefore note,

*Doctrine: That the desires of God's elect in all kingdoms, and among all people of the earth, are, and shall be drawn out after and fixed upon, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The merciful God beholding the universal ruins of the world by sin, has provided a universal remedy for his own elect, in every part of the earth. Christ is not restricted to any one kingdom or nation in the world; but intended to be God's salvation to the ends of the earth; and accordingly speaks the apostle, Col 3:11 "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." In the explanation of this point two things must be enquired into:

1. Why Christ is called the desire of all nations.
2. Upon what account the people of God, in all nations, desire him.

Let us begin with an examination of why he is called the desire of all nations, and what that phrase may mean. There are several things that are supposed, or included in it.

First, God the Father has appointed him as a common remedy for the sins and miseries of his people, in all parts and quarters of the world. So in the covenant of redemption, between the Father and the Son, the Lord expresses himself, Isa 49:6 "It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth." This is similar to the prophecy of

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Isa 52:15 "So shall He sprinkle many nations." If God had not appointed him for this, he could not be desired by all nations.

And, indeed, the grace of God admirably shines forth in the freeness of it, that even the most barbarous nations are not excluded from the benefits of redemption by Christ. This is what the apostle delights, that Christ should be preached to the Gentiles, 1 Tim. 3:16. They were a people that seemed to be lost in the darkness of idolatry; yet even for them Christ was given by the Father, "Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for your possession." (Psalm 2:8)

Secondly, Christ is called the desire of all nations, plainly because of the sufficiency that is in him to supply the needs of the whole world. As the sun in the heavens suffices all nations for light and influence, so does the Sun of righteousness suffice for the redemption, justification, sanctification and salvation of the people of God all over the world; Isa 45:22, "Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth."

Thirdly, it implies the reality that is in godliness. It shows you that religion is no imagination, as the atheistic world would try to persuade us; and this evidently appears in the uniform effects of it upon the hearts of all men, in all nations of the world, that are truly religious. All their desires, like so many needles touched by one and the same loadstone, move towards Jesus Christ, and all meet together in one and the same blessed object, Christ. Were it possible for the people of God to come out of all nations, races and languages in the world, into one place, and there confer and compare the desires and workings of their hearts, though they never saw each other's faces, nor heard of each other's names, yet, as face corresponds to face in a glass, so would their desires after Christ correspond to each other. All hearts work after him in the same manner; what one says, all say: These are my troubles and burdens, these my wants and miseries; the same things are my desires and fears: one and the same Spirit works in all believers throughout the world. This could never be if religion were but an imagination, as some call it; or a fraud or conspiracy, as others call it: hallucinations are as various as faces; and conspiracies presuppose mutual acquaintance and conference.

Fourthly, Christ, the desire of all nations, implies the vast extent his kingdom has, and shall have in the world; out of every nation under heaven some shall be brought to Christ, and to heaven by him. Though the number of God's elect, compared with the multitudes of the ungodly in

all nations, is but a remnant, a little flock; and, in that comparative sense, there are few that shall be saved; yet considered absolutely, and in themselves, they are a vast number, which no man can number, Matt 8:11 "Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." It is in order to accomplish this that the gospel, like the sun in the heavens, travels around the world. It arose in the east, and takes its course towards the western world; rising, by degrees, upon the remote, idolatrous nations of the earth: out of all which a number is to be saved. Even "Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God," Psalm 68:31. This consideration should move us to pray earnestly for the poor Heathens, who yet sit in darkness and the shadow of death. There is yet hope for them.

Fifthly, it holds forth this, that when God opens the eyes of men to see their sin and danger by it, nothing but Christ can give them satisfaction: it is not the amenity, fertility, riches and pleasures, the inhabitants of any kingdom of the world do enjoy, that can satisfy the desires of their souls: when once God touches their hearts with the sense of sin and misery, then Christ, and no one but Christ, is desirable and necessary in the eyes of such persons. Many kingdoms of the world abound with riches and pleasures; the providence of God has carved liberal portions of the good things of this life to many of them, and scarcely left any thing lacking to their desires that the world can afford. Yet all this can give no satisfaction without Jesus Christ, the desire of all nations, the one thing necessary, when once they come to see the necessity and excellency of him. When this happens, give them whatever you wish of the world, nevertheless they must have Christ, the desire of their souls.

Thus we see upon what grounds and reasons Christ is called the desire of all nations.

objection. But there remains one great objection against this truth, which must be resolved, namely: if Christ is the desire of all nations, how is it possible that Jesus Christ finds no reception in so many nations of the world? For among many peoples Christianity is hissed at, and Christians are not tolerated to live among them? They see no "beauty in him that they should desire him." (Isa 53:2)

Answer. First, we must remember the nations of the world have their times and seasons of conversion; those that once embraced Christ, have now lost him, and idols are now set up in the places where he once was

sweetly worshipped. The sun of the gospel is gone down upon them, and now shines in another Hemisphere; and so the nations of the world are to have their distinct days and seasons of illumination. The gospel, like the sea, gains in one place what it loses in another; and in the times and seasons appointed by the Father, they come successively to be enlightened in the knowledge of Christ; and then shall the promise be fulfilled, Isa 49:7 "Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: 'Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful.'"

Secondly, let it also be remembered, that although Christ may be rejected by the rulers and body of many nations; yet he is the desire of all the elect of God dispersed and scattered among those nations.

In the next place, we are to enquire upon what account Christ becomes the desire of all nations, i.e. of all those in all the nations of the world, that belong, to the election of grace. And the true ground and reason thereof is, because only Christ has in himself that which relieves their emptiness, and answers to all their need. As, First, they are all, by nature, under condemnation, Rom. 5:16,18. under the curse of the law; against which nothing is found in heaven or earth able to relieve their consciences but the blood of sprinkling, the pure and perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus. And hence it is that Christ becomes so desirable in the eyes of poor sinners, all the world over. If any thing in ordinary nature could be found to pacify and purge the consciences of men from guilt and fear, Christ would never be desirable in their eyes; but finding no other remedy but the blood of Jesus, to him, therefore, shall all the ends of the earth look for righteousness, and for peace.

Secondly, all nations of the world are polluted with the filth of sin, both in nature and practice, which they shall see, and bitterly bewail, when the light of the gospel shall shine among them; and the same light, by which this shall be discovered, will also reveal that the only remedy of this evil lies in the spirit of Christ, the only fountain opened to all nations for sanctification and cleansing. This will make the Lord Jesus incomparably desirable in their eyes. O how welcome will he be who comes to them, not by blood only, but by water also, I John 5:6.

Thirdly, when the light of the gospel shall shine upon the nations, they shall then see that because of the guilt and filth of sin, they are all barred out of heaven. Those doors are chained up against them, and that no one but Christ can open an entrance for them into that kingdom of God. For, "no one comes to the Father except through me," John 14:6. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," Acts 4:12. Hence the hearts of sinners shall pant after him, as a hart pants for the water brooks. And thus you see upon what grounds Christ becomes the desire of all nations. Five applications flow from this point:

1. For information.
2. For examination.
3. For consolation.
4. For exhortation.
5. For direction.

First Application: for information.

Is Christ the desire of all nations? *How vile a sin is it then for any nation, upon whom the light of the gospel has shined, to reject Jesus Christ?* They would say as those in Job 21:14, "Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of your ways." They would thrust away his worship, government, and servants; and in effect say, as it is Luke 19:14, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Thus did the Jews, Acts 13:46. They put away Christ from among themselves, and thereby judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. This is at once a fearful sin, and a dreadful warning. How soon did vengeance overtake them like the overthrow of Sodom? O, let it be for a warning to all nations to the end of the world. He would have gathered the children of Israel under his wings as a hen does her brood, even when the Roman Eagle was hovering over them, but they would not, therefore their houses were left to them desolate, their city and temple made a heap.

2. If Jesus Christ be the desire of all nations, *how incomparably happy then must that nation be, that enjoys Christ in the power and purity of his gospel-ordinances!* If Christ under a veil made Canaan a glorious land, [as it is called in] Dan. 11:41, what a glorious place must that nation be that beholds him with open face in the bright sun-shine of the gospel! O England, know your happiness and the day of your visitation! What others

desire, you enjoy: provoke not the Lord Jesus to depart from you by corrupting his worship, longing after idolatry, abusing his messengers, and oppressing his people, lest his spirit depart from you.

Second Application: for examination.

If Christ is the desire of all nations, examine whether he is the desire of your souls in particular; otherwise you shall have no benefit by him. Are your desires after Christ true spiritual desires? Reflect, I beseech you, upon the attitudes and tempers of your heart. Can you say of your desires after Christ, as Peter did of his love to Christ? "Lord, you know all things, you know that I desire you." Examine your desires as to their sincerity by the following tests:

1. Are they passionate and earnest? Does Christ have the supreme place in your desires? Do you esteem all things to be but dross and dung in comparison to the excellencies of Jesus Christ your Lord? (Phil. 3:8) Is he to you as the refuge city to the man slayer? (Heb. 6:18,19) As a spring of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land? (Isa. 31:2) Such passionate desires are true desires.
2. Are your desires after Christ universal; that is to say, is every thing in Christ desirable in your eyes? The hypocrite, like the harlot, is for a divided Christ; they would be called by his name, but depend upon themselves, Isa. 4:1. If his holiness and government, his cross and sufferings are desirable for his own sake: such universal desires are right desires.
3. Are your desires after Christ industrious desires, using all the means of accomplishing what you desire? You say you desire Christ, but what will you do to obtain your desires? If you serve him carefully and incessantly in all the ways of duty; if you will strive in prayer, labour to believe, cut off right hands, and pluck out right eyes, in other words— be content to part with the most profitable and pleasant ways of sin that you may enjoy Christ, the desire of your souls; then your desires are right desires.
4. Are your desires after Christ permanent desires, or only a sudden motion or impulse which later fades away? If your desires after Christ abide upon your hearts, if your longings be after him at all times, though not in the same height and degree, then your desires are right desires. Christ always dwells in the desires of his people; they can feel him in their desires, when they cannot discern him in their love or delight.

5. Will your desires after Christ admit no satisfaction, nor find rest anywhere but in the enjoyment of Christ? Then your desires are right desires. The soul that desires Christ can never be at rest till it comes home to Christ, 2 Cor. 5:2, Phil. 1:23. The devil can satisfy others with the riches and pleasure of this world, as children are quieted with rattles; but if nothing but Christ can rest and accomplish your desires, surely such restless desires are right desires.

6. Do your desires after Christ spring from a deep sense of your need and want of Christ? Has conviction opened your eyes to see your misery, to feel your burdens, and to make you aware that your remedy lies only in the Lord Jesus? Then your desires are right desires. Bread and water are made necessary and desirable by hunger and thirst; by these things examine the truth of your desires after Christ.

Third Application: for consolation.

o you indeed, upon serious examination, find such desires after Christ as were described above? O, bless the Lord for that day when Christ, the Desire of all nations, became the desire of your souls; and for your comfort, know that you are happy and blessed souls at present.

1. You are blessed in this, that your eyes have been opened to see both the need and worth of Christ. Had not Christ applied his precious eye-salve to the eyes of your mind, you could never have desired him; you would have said with them in Isa. 53:2, "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Or, as they asked the spouse, Song 5:9 "What is your beloved more than another beloved?" O, blessed souls, enlightened of the Lord, to see those things that are hid from them that perish!

2. You are blessed in this, that your desires after Christ are a sure evidence that the desire of Christ is towards you: had he not first desired you, you could never have desired him. We may say of desires, as it is said of love, we desire him because he first desired us: your desires after Christ are inflamed from the desires of Christ after you.

3. You are blessed in this, that your desires shall surely be satisfied, Matt. 5:6, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Prov. 10:24, "The desires of the righteous shall be granted." God never raised such desires as these in the souls of his people, to be a torment to them for ever.



4. You are blessed in this, that God has guided your desires to make the best choice that ever was made in the world, while the desires of others are hunting after riches, pleasure, and honour in the world; toiling themselves like children in pursuit of a painted butterfly, which when they have caught, only discolours their fingers. God, meanwhile, directed your desires to Christ, the most excellent object in heaven or earth. Any good will satisfy some men; O, happy soul, if none but Christ can satisfy you! (Psa 4:6)

5. You are blessed in this, that there is a work of grace certainly wrought upon your soul; and these very desires after Christ are a part thereof.

6. You are blessed in this, that these desires after Christ keep your soul active and working after him continually in the ways of duty, Psa 27:4 "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." Desire will be a continual spring to diligence and industry in the ways of duty; the desire of the end awakens the use of means, Prov. 16:26. Others may fall asleep and cast off duty, but it will be hard for you to do so, whose souls burn with desire after Christ.

7 You are blessed in this, that your desires after Christ will make death much the sweeter and easier to you, Phil 1:23 "For I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." When a Christian was once asked, whether he was willing to die, he answered in return, "Let him be unwilling to die, who is unwilling to go to Christ." And much like it, was the reply of another, *Vivere renuo, ut Christo vivam*: I refuse this life, to live with Christ.

Fourth Application: for exhortation.

In the fourth place, let me exhort and persuade all to make Jesus Christ the desire and choice of their souls. Here I present the extent and design of the gospel: O that I could effectively press home this exhortation upon your hearts; let me offer some moving considerations to you, and may the Lord apply them to your hearts.

1. Every creature naturally desires its own preservation; do not you desire the preservation of your precious and immortal soul? If you do, then make Christ your desire and choice, without whom they can never be preserved, Jude 1.

2. Do not your souls earnestly desire the bodies they live in? How tender are they over them, how careful to provide for them? (Though they pay an expensive rent for those tenements they live in.) Is not union with Christ infinitely more desirable than the union of soul and body? O covet union with him! Then shall your souls be happy, when your bodies drop off from them at death, 2 Cor. 5:1,2. Indeed, soul and body shall be happy in him, and with him forevermore.
3. How do the men of this world devote themselves to the enjoyments of it? They pant after the dust of the earth; they rise early, sit up late, eat the bread of carefulness; and all this for vanity indeed— Shall a worldling do more for earth, than you for heaven? Shall the creature be so earnestly desired, and Christ neglected?
4. What do all your desires in this world benefit you, if you go christless? Suppose you had the desire of your hearts in these things, how long should you have comfort in them, if you miss Christ?
5. Does Christ desire you, who have nothing lovely or desirable in you? And have you no desires after Christ, the most lovely and desirable one in both worlds? "His desires are towards you," Prov. 8:31. O make him the desire and choice of your souls.
6. How absolutely necessary is Jesus Christ to your souls? Bread and water, breath and life, are not so necessary as Christ is; "One thing is necessary," Luke 10:42, and that one thing is Christ. If you miss your desires in other things, you may yet be happy; but if you miss Christ you are undone for ever.
7. How suitable a good is Christ to your souls! He has within himself whatsoever they want, 1 Cor. 1:30. Set your hearts where you will, nothing will be found to match and suit them, as Christ does.
8. How great are the benefits that will come to you by Jesus Christ! In him you will have a rich inheritance settled upon you: all things shall be yours, when you are Christ's, 1 Cor. 3:22. And is not such a Christ worth desiring?
9. All your well grounded hopes of glory are built upon your union with Christ, 1 Cor. 1:21. If you miss Christ, you must die without hope. Will not this draw your desires to him?
10. Suppose you were at the judgment seat of God, where you must shortly stand, and saw the terrors of the Lord in that day; the sheep divided from the goats; the sentences of absolution and condemnation passed by the great and awful Judge upon the righteous and wicked: would not Christ then be desirable in your eyes? As ever you expect to

stand with comfort at that bar, let Christ be the desire and choice of your souls now.

Fifth Application: for direction.

o these, or any other considerations, put you upon this enquiry— *how shall I get my desires kindled and enflamed towards Christ?* Alas! my Dheart is cold and dead, not a serious desire is stirring in it after Christ. To you I shall offer the following directions:

Direction 1. Redeem some time every day for meditation; get out of the noise and clamour of the world, Psa 4:4, and seriously consider how the present state of your soul stands, and how it is likely to go with you in eternity: here all sound conversion begins, Psa 69:29.

Direction 2. Consider seriously that lamentable state in which you came into the world. You are a child of wrath by nature, under the curse and condemnation of the law: so that either your state must be changed, or you will inevitably be damned, John 3:3.

Direction 3. Consider the way and course you have taken since you came into the world, proceeding from iniquity to iniquity. What command of God have you not violated a thousand times over? What sin is committed in the world, that you are not one way or other guilty of before God? How many secret sins are upon your score, unknown to the most intimate friend you have in the world? Either this guilt must be separated from your souls, or your souls from God for all eternity.

Direction 4. Think upon the severe wrath of God reserved for every sin; "The wages of sin is death," Rom. 6:23. And how intolerable the fulness of that wrath must be when a few drops sprinkled upon the conscience in this world are so insupportable, that has made some to choose suicide rather than life. Yet this wrath must abide for ever upon you, if you do not get an interest in Jesus Christ, John 3:36.

Direction 5. Ponder well the happy state and condition they are in who have obtained pardon and peace by Jesus Christ, Psa 32:1,2. And seeing the grace of God is free, and you are set under the means of it; why may not you be as likely to find it as others?

Direction 6. Seriously consider the great uncertainty of your time and the preciousness of the opportunities of salvation, never to be recovered when they are once past, John 9:4. Let this arouse you to lay hold upon

those golden seasons while they are yet with you; that you may not bewail your folly and madness, when they are out of your reach. Direction 7. Associate yourselves with serious Christians; get into their acquaintance, and beg their assistance; beseech them to pray for you; and see that you rest not here, but be frequently upon your knees, begging of the Lord a new heart and a new state.

In conclusion of the whole, let me beseech and beg all the people of God, as upon my knees, to take heed, and beware, lest by the carelessness and scandal of their lives they quench the weak desires beginning to kindle in the hearts of others. You know what the law of God demands for striking a woman with child, so that her fruit go from her, Exod. 21:22,23. O shed not soul-blood, by stifling the hopeful desires of any after Christ.

*Blessed be God for Jesus Christ, the desire of all nations.*