If we can learn any thing concerning what is before us, from the language of prophecy, great calamities, such as the world has never yet experienced, will precede that happy state of things, in which “the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and these calamities will chiefly affect those nations which have been the seat of the great antichristian power; or, as all Protestants, and I believe justly, suppose, have been subject to the see of Rome. And it appears to me highly probable, as I hinted in my last discourse on this occasion, that the present disturbances in Europe are the beginning of those very calamitous times.

It is enough for us to know the certainty of these great events, that our faith may not fail on the approach of the predicted calamity, confident that it will have the happiest issue in God’s own time. For the same Being who foretold the evil which we shall see come to pass, has likewise foretold the good that is to follow it.

That the second coming of Christ will be coincident with the commencement of the millennium, or the future peaceable and happy state of the world (which, according to all the prophecies, will take place after the restoration of the Jews) is evident from what Peter said, in his address to the Jews, on the occasion of his healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, Acts iii.19.

This great event of the late revolution in France appears to me, and many others, to be not improbably the accomplishment of the following part of the Revelation, chap. xi.3: “And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men (or literally, names of men) seven thousand, and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to God.”

An earthquake, as I have observed, may signify a great convulsion, and revolution, in states; and as the Papal dominions were divided into ten parts, one of which, and one of the principal of them, was France, it is properly called a tenth part of the city, or of the mystical Babylon. And if by names of men, we understand their titles, such as those of the nobility, and other hereditary distinctions, all of which are now abolished, the accomplishment of the prediction will appear to be wonderfully exact.

1. Firsts were proclaimed by the British government to obtain divine sanction for the war against France, which had begun in February 1793. Priestley’s sermon, however, was not what the government had in mind.
What could have been more unexpected than the events of any one of the last four years, at the beginning of it? What a total revolution in the ideas, and conduct of a whole nation! What a total subversion of principles, what reverses of fortune, and what a waste of life! In how bloody and eventful a war are we engaged, how inconsiderable in its beginning, how rapid and wide in its progress, and how dark with respect to its termination! At first it resembled Elijah's cloud, appearing no bigger than a man's hand [1 Kings 18.44]; but now it covers, and darkens, the whole European hemisphere!

Now, whatever we may think, as politicians (and with us every man will have his own opinion, on a subject so interesting to us all) I would, in this place, admonish you not to overlook the hand of God in the great scene that is now opening upon us. Nothing can ever come to pass without his appointment, or permission; and then, whatever be the views of men, we cannot doubt, but that his are always wise, righteous, and good. Let us, therefore, exercise faith in him, believing that though “clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are for ever the habitation of his throne” [Psalm 97.2]. All those who appear in the theatre of public affairs, in the field, or the cabinet, both those whom we praise, and those whom we blame, are equally instruments in his hands, and execute all his pleasure. Let this reflection, then, in our cooler moments (and I hope we shall endeavour, in all the tumult of affairs, to make these as many as possible), lead us to look more to God, and less to man; and consequently, in all the troubles in which we may be involved, repose the most unshaken confidence in him, and hence “in patience possess our own souls” [Luke 21.19], especially when it is evident that it is wholly out of our power to alter the course of events. If we be careful so to live as to be at all times prepared to die, what have we to fear, even though, as the Psalmist says, the “earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea?” [Psalm 46.2]. Whatever turn the course of things may take, it cannot then be to our disadvantage. What, then, should hinder our contemplating the great scene, that seems now to be opening upon us, awful as it is, with tranquillity, and even with satisfaction, from our firm persuasion, that its termination will be glorious and happy?