

Antislavery, Amnesia, and the Archive? A Sermon on Paul in Captivity in Caesarea, Delivered by Ira Hart in Stonington, Connecticut, 1811

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The remembrance of New England's slave system and critique of its archive often concern scholars at the beginning of the second quarter of the twenty-first century. The archive of slavery has long been understood as more fragmented and incomplete than collections related to other historical phenomena of similar magnitude. New England achieved its nineteenth and twentieth-century reputation as a free region through a cultural amnesia that pushed its slaves and their enslavers out of public memory. One challenge for remembrance and interpretation is that both enslavement and opposition to the slave system were discussed in idioms that we no longer use. A second challenge is that some documentary materials concerning slavery and abolition were recorded and collected, i.e., archived, in ways that concealed their connections to the slave system.

An 1811 manuscript sermon on Acts 24:25, "The fatal consequences of Procrastination," (Figure 1) by Ira Hart (1771–1829, Yale 1797, ordained 1798), held at the Library of Congress, exemplifies these challenges.¹ A transcription is presented here, with an introduction, not only to offer an interpretation but also to participate in transcribing and publishing such works for the sake of recovering a history that has been obscured. The sermon was delivered in 1811, in Stonington, Connecticut, yet the manuscript suggests that Hart had been refining his thoughts on Acts 24:25 since at least 1799.² Departing from other ministers' practice, which involved writing the first date on which a sermon was preached at the top of the first page, then cramming others around that date or in the margins, Hart seems, for this manuscript, to have worked backward. He dated the sermon 1811, then listed earlier dates of delivery, evidently culled from other sermon notes. His method of recording dates suggests that he considered this to be an important

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¹ Sermon notes by Ira Hart, 1799–180[?] [1811], Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Palmer-Loper Family Papers, Part II: Miscellany, 1667–1979, Box II: 13, LCCN mm79035410, ID No. MSS35410.

² Biographical information on Ira Hart (not to be confused with his son of the same name) appears in Richard Anson Wheeler, *History of the Town of Stonington, County of New London, Connecticut, from its First Settlement in 1649 to 1900* (New London: Press of the Day, 1900), 89, 416.

work, perhaps the culmination of a decade's worth of thought and speech. Its importance may have been, I conjecture below, its criticism of the slave system—although the sermon never mentioned slavery.

Slavery in Connecticut underwent a momentous change from 1774 to 1811.³ The state legislature banned future importation of enslaved persons in 1774. A gradual emancipation act freed all black people born after March 1, 1784. From 1805 to 1809, the first women and men liberated under the 1784 act became freedpeople, at age twenty-one for women and twenty-five for men. The *post nati* legislative action of 1784 was part of a long-term process involving other legislation and other forms of gaining freedom, such as individual manumission, that ended only when the state legislature abolished slavery in 1848. This process we now call gradual emancipation. Hart's life, from his childhood to his death, occurred within it. Born in Farmington, Connecticut, in 1771, Hart was a young child at the time of the 1774 act and an adolescent at the time of the 1784 one; soon he would travel to New Haven to enroll at Yale College. New Haven had a substantial black population, some free and some enslaved.⁴ In New Haven, Hart studied under Ezra Stiles (1727–1795) and Timothy Dwight (1752–1817). Both Stiles and Dwight were, in the context of their times, seemingly benevolent patrons of black New Englanders. Stiles had supported black people in Rhode Island as well as in Connecticut, conducting prayer meetings and singing hymns with black believers and providing financial support to freedpeople, including his own former slaves, when they were short on money.⁵ Similarly, Dwight promoted charitable endeavors such as schools for black children and missions in Africa. Dwight critiqued the abuses

³ In 1774, Connecticut held the largest enslaved population in New England. Enslaved labor was important in port towns such as Stonington. Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1969 [og. pub. 1942]), 74–77. The concentration of slaves in coastal Connecticut is described in Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 16, 205–6. Gradual emancipation in Connecticut is described in Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 68–71. I have relied throughout on these foundational works of scholarship, not only for the history of Connecticut slavery but also for Melish's argument concerning amnesia, race, and slavery. Gradual emancipation as a process, not an event, is emphasized in David Menschel, "Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery, 1784–1848," *The Yale Law Journal* 111, no. 1 (October 2001): 183–222, although the author inaccurately claims that historians have minimized means of gaining freedom or ending enslavement other than the 1784 *post nati* action.

⁴ Robert Austin Warner, *New Haven Negroes: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 1–11.

⁵ Ezra Stiles recorded numerous interactions with African Americans in his diary. Cited below are references to his diary in which he recorded personal interactions with black people. I provide these without commentary to show the breadth of his interactions across racial lines, including, of course, in years in which Hart studied with him. Not cited are numerous comments he made about black people of whom he had heard, for instance, in the slave trade or in the War of Independence, but never met. Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D.*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), I: 25, 28, 39, 52, 68, 81, 97, 108, 151, 174, 183, 204–9, 213–14, 220, 239–40, 247–48, 260, 269, 271, 283, 315, 335, 339, 348, 355, 364–65, 373, 394, 404, 412–13, 415, 424, 436, 438–39, 441, 447, 462, 521, 524–25, 533–34, 542, 548, 618, 628, 630, 647, 654, 658, 664; II: 236, 255, 269, 271–72, 365, 376, 395, 410; III: 50–51, 76, 78, 82, 96, 100–104, 116, 163, 204, 219, 307, 327, 332, 335, 381, 400, 402, 431, 437, 449, 456, 494, 504.

of the slave system and, in a religious frame, he considered the rise of the Atlantic slave trade to be an act of the Antichrist and a prelude to a battle during Armageddon between enslavers and their challengers.⁶ Thus, Hart spent his adolescence and young adulthood in an alembic formed by a New England state in the midst of interdicting slavery and freeing slaves, a port city with a substantial black population, and a school of Calvinist theology that, at the least, promoted interracial benevolence and, at the most, defined the antislavery crusade as a battle to be won before the postslavery millennium would occur. Stiles, Dwight, and Hart critiqued the slave system in an idiom that was available to them, even if it seems lukewarm or misdirected today.

Hart preached among Native Americans at Brothertown, New York, in the mid-to-late 1790s, possibly as a missionary under Dwight's supervision. His connection to Connecticut remained intact. Hart almost certainly already knew Elijah Wampey, Jr. (1765–ca. 1812), a member of the Tunxis, born in Farmington, who moved to Brothertown, where he and Hart apparently met again. Returning to Connecticut, Hart served as minister of the Congregational church in Middlebury from 1798 to 1809, when he was dismissed as “the result of a struggle that was very fierce and long continued.” Almost immediately, following Dwight's recommendation, he assumed the pulpit of the First Congregational church in Stonington in 1809 and remained in it until his death on October 29, 1829.⁷

The sermon transcribed below suggests the reason for the struggle in Middlebury. In telling “sinners the plain truth...expos[ing] their vices” (see p. 13 of the transcription below), Hart was prodding social and economic leaders for their seemingly lax religion and, implicitly, perhaps, procrastination in dealing with the moral sin of slavery in the decades-long process of Connecticut's gradual emancipation. Many New Divinity ministers lost their pulpits as a result of confrontations

⁶ A fund-raising sermon for schools for black children was printed as Timothy Dwight, *The Charitable Blessed: A Sermon, Preached in the First Church in New-Haven, August 8, 1810* (New Haven: Sidney's Press, 1810). An appeal for funds for African missions (instead of spending on entertainment) appears in Timothy Dwight, *An Essay on the Stage* (London: Sharp, Jones, & Co., 1824), 137–40. Two examples of Dwight's understanding of the slave trade as a step in Armageddon are Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, in Two Parts, Delivered July 23, 1812* (New Haven: Howe and Deforest, 1812), 44, and Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, in Two Parts, Delivered August 20, 1812* (New York: J. Seymour, 1812), 4, 26. Peter Hinks, “Timothy Dwight, Congregationalism, and Early Antislavery,” in *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*, ed. Steven Mintz and John Stauffer (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 148–61, summarizes Dwight's writings concerning race and slavery. Tara A. Bynum, *Reading Pleasures: Everyday Black Living in Early America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023), sees some of the black New Englanders who lived in Stiles and Dwight's orbit from their own perspective. Michael Monescalchi, “Converted Republic: Lemuel Haynes, Timothy Dwight, and the Anti-Racist Politics of the Republican Sermon,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 53, no. 1 (2024): 211–30, shows Dwight's antiracist, evangelical version of republicanism. It seems almost certain that Hart knew that Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), literary executor of Dwight's grandfather Jonathan Edwards had formed, in 1801, in Newport, Rhode Island, an evangelical society devoted to black people. See John T. Lowe, “Abolitionism as an Expression of Benevolence in Edwardsean Thought,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 12, no. 1/2 (December 2022), 25.

⁷ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York* (New Haven: Published by Timothy Dwight, 1822), 3: 182–84. Leonard Bacon et al., *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut* (New Haven: William L. Kingsley, 1861), 421, 485.

with their flocks. Hart was no exception, yet, after Middlebury, he found a permanent home in Stonington. He thrived there, it seems, for two reasons. First, his theological tutor, Dwight, recently appointed president of Yale College, seemingly promoted him as a man who could effectively evangelize in a mixed-race environment, since Hart had already evangelized among Native Americans. Second, Stonington was, amid gradual emancipation, coming to see itself as a white community, whereas a generation earlier it had counted a substantial number (16%) of its inhabitants as black or Native American. I argue below that if Hart opposed the slave system, he paradoxically contributed to the purported whiteness of Stonington in the way he critiqued slavery.

In the 1790s, Dwight conveyed this unstable sense of Stonington as a mixed-race community in desperate need of evangelists at the same time as it was becoming whiter. The indigenous population was declining, he wrote, while erroneous religion was flooding the town. Of Stonington, he wrote that a “considerable number of Indians reside in this township. . . . These Indians have continually declined in their numbers, notwithstanding their decrease has been checked by their cohabitation with the blacks.” The white population was marked by an overabundance of religious enthusiasm. “There was no Congregational minister here,” he wrote, “and the Baptist preachers were mere uneducated farmers or mechanics. Public worship, therefore, was either not celebrated at all, or celebrated in a forbidding and vulgar manner.” It made sense for Dwight to recommend Hart as an orthodox minister of the newly founded First Congregational church in Stonington. Despite Dwight’s conviction that Stonington’s white and non-white residents alike needed an educated Congregational minister, demographic notes added to his description of Stonington suggest that its non-white population was disappearing: “In the year 1756, Stonington contained 3,518 inhabitants: blacks 200: Indians 365; in 1774, 5,412: blacks 219: Indians 245; in 1790, 5,648; in 1800, 5,437: blacks 42; and in 1810, 3,043. The same year, North Stonington contained 2,534: total 5,577.”⁸ In sum, it made sense to him to think that Stonington held a mixed-race population, albeit one that was becoming whiter, and that Stonington’s residents of all colors needed an orthodox minister, particularly, apparently, one who had had experience preaching among Native Americans, even as the non-white population was declining.

With Dwight’s comments on demography in Stonington now in hand, we are ready to ask: how might a sermon that never mentioned slavery be understood, in its time or in ours, as antislavery? And how might a sermon that never mentioned race be interpreted as amnesiac in relation to enslavement and the presence of black people in the local community? The answer lies in Hart’s use of a New Divinity method of preaching, here applied to slavery. This was a typological method, rooted in hermeneutics, that defined the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as one of types and antitypes, precursors and fulfillments. By the late

⁸ Dwight, *Travels*, 3: 26–35.

eighteenth century, American Calvinists were applying this relationship both to contemporary American history and to the slave system. Dwight's epic poem, *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785), for instance, applied typology to American history; Lemuel Haynes's essay "Liberty Further Extended" (1776) and his sermon *Divine Decrees* (1814) applied it to the slave system.⁹ Authors like Dwight, Haynes (1753–1833), and Hart created parallels that allowed them to discuss two subjects at once, since the contemporary (the antitype) was, in the flow of Christian history, embedded in the ancient (the type). This was their antislavery idiom, which had great power among typologically-informed readers.

Hart's sermon on Acts 24:25 explicitly addressed Paul's sea voyage, his confrontation with hostile Jews, the sustenance provided by his friends, and his interactions with the Roman governor, Felix, while it implicitly, I speculate here, discussed the slave trade, the hostility of whites toward blacks, and the relationship between enslavers on the one hand and their critics and the enslaved on the other hand. The explicit and the implicit paralleled in one text constituted typology in action. Such indirect critiques of the slave system, if Hart's sermon is one of them, seem hard to swallow from later perspectives, but typology was a staple of the New Divinity. When the "plain truth" in a sermon aggressively critiqued the sins committed by its auditors, it incorporated common theological understandings such as the existence of Old Testament types and New Testament and contemporary antitypes.

If we understand Hart as a critic of slaveholders, sermons like his nonetheless fostered New Englanders' amnesia concerning their region's history of slavery. In Hart's sermon, slavery was everywhere yet nowhere. Indeed, antislavery was everywhere yet nowhere. Only typology allowed works such as this to make sense as criticism of the slave system. Without a typological hermeneutic, the sermon would appear to be solely a commentary on Paul and Felix. Such commentaries, despite their authors' intentions, helped white New Englanders eject the history of slaveholding from their region's public memory. As typology faded as an interpretive tool in the nineteenth century, whiteness remained. The sharp edge of the New Divinity critique of the slave system was dulled, indeed the tool was lost, once typology disappeared from the common stock. Today, we live two centuries after the disappearance of typology from the instruments used to interpret scripture, so reading a sermon like Hart's (whether or not we accept that it concerned slavery) demands the acquisition of a lost way of thinking.

⁹ Timothy Dwight, *The Conquest of Canaan; A Poem, in Eleven Books* (Hartford: Elisha Babcock, 1785); "Liberty Further Extended": A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes," ed. Ruth Bogin, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (January 1983): 85–105; Lemuel Haynes, *Divine Decrees, an Encouragement to the Use of Means* (Rutland: William Fay, 1805). The best-known work on American typologizing is Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Here I differ from Bercovitch in my focus on ordinary works that reflect the presence of typology in popular culture instead of on leading artistic and political texts.

A type/antitype parallel could be detailed and intricate. This is true of Hart's sermon. In what follows, I offer only the major points in the parallelism. Acts 24:25 occurs in the midst of Paul's sea journeys from Ephesus to Caesarea to Jerusalem, which result in his captivity by the Roman guard after he raises the ire of some of the Jews he encounters. While captive, Paul is brought before the Roman governor Felix, and his wife, Drusilla, to speak of the Messiah. Felix sympathizes somewhat with Paul, and he allows Paul's friends to succor him, yet he never frees him. Eventually, Paul, still captive, is taken to Rome (Acts 27–28). Acts 21–28 follows Paul through several sea voyages. The typological relationship implied is, I argue, to English transoceanic travel as well as to the Atlantic slave trade. Stonington was a seafaring town, so the type to which it was the antitype was close at hand. Paul visited cities that were easily seen as precursors of America: Caesarea, Jerusalem, and, finally, Rome, each one in need of salvation, likely parallels in the minds of Calvinists. Crucially, Paul also recounts his conversion on the road to Damascus, which became central in the sermon since Felix and, by implication, contemporary enslavers, refuse to follow the evangelist into the holy light. Paul encounters enemies and friends, a precursor of a common trope of antislavery writings and the slave narrative. His enemies are cast as nominal believers who follow a warped version of the law while ignoring the spirit—again, a trope of abolitionist views of slave traders and slaveholders. One of his friends is Philip, the follower of Christ most known for baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, a staple figure in early abolitionism. And, of course, Paul is taken captive, harassed by the Jews who reject his Messiah and seized by the Romans who protect him yet put him on trial and never free him.

It is as a captive that Paul is most a type both of the slave and of the slave system's enemy. It is his interaction with Felix and his Jewish wife, Drusilla, that is most revealing. Felix, a Roman, calls Paul to testify, for he has an inkling of Christ's message, yet he also wants a bribe. Drusilla attends. As Paul speaks, Felix trembles. Felix has some sense of the glory of God and of the future punishment of sinners, and he experiences the beginnings of compunction. Yet he remains greedy and adulterous (he had taken Drusilla from another man), and he dismisses Paul with the mention of a possible future meeting. This episode allowed Hart to make two antislavery moves. First, Hart observed that the Old Testament types of Felix and Drusilla were Ahab and Jezebel, who had killed Naboth, taken his land, and disinherited (or murdered) his sons. Like Felix and like enslavers, Ahab and Jezebel manipulated understanding of the law in order to condemn Naboth. The story of Naboth's death and the seizure of his lands was, for American Calvinists, a ready type of the sins within the slave system. Second, Hart focused on the state of mind that converted someone from toleration of the slave system to opposition to it. The type was Paul on the road to Damascus. Felix started on that road through his trembling, but he veered off it.

The nineteenth-century antitype included, in Hart's view, both the mental and emotional horrors that slaves suffered and the anxiety that free people should

experience when they confronted the fact of enslavement in their society.¹⁰ This was a pillar of American Calvinist opposition to the slave system: that an adequate confrontation with the slave system was a deeply emotional and unsettling experience that left one feeling naked before an omnipotent God. Indeed, ministers in this tradition tried their best to blend the conversion experience and antislavery feelings, so that if a preacher could induce extreme anxiety over sin and salvation he could also, in the same moment, incite a fear that the self would disintegrate if one tolerated the slave system any longer. This anxiety was a central experience both of slaves who were suffering under enslavement and of opponents of the slave system who were facing an existential crisis over its continuance. In Acts, Felix trembled in Paul's company: the typological reading of Hart's sermon is that its auditors and readers would do the same 1750 years after Paul's time in Caesarea.

Read typologically, Hart's sermon may well have been a jab at slave traders, slaveholders, and those who cooperated with them. These men and women at best understood slavery as a sin for which atonement could be delayed. The fear and trembling that Paul and Felix felt—one fruitfully, one fruitlessly—was the moment before the collapse of the self in the sight of the God who, for Christians of the early nineteenth century, condemned the sins of man-stealing and slaveholding. Saul had let his self slide away, and he became Paul. Felix had the chance but turned away, procrastinating his salvation for a better season. American enslavers still had the opportunity in 1811. The message of the sermon was to avoid Felix's error, not to tremble then leave Paul captive, but rather to tremble and then follow divine will in freeing early-nineteenth-century captives with expediency. What Felix failed to do was what white Americans must do.

Local circumstances in Stonington seem present in the text too. Seafaring is obvious. Greed and adultery were also commonly mentioned in critiques of the slave system. Furthermore, it is possible, once again only with typology in mind, that Hart was paralleling Paul to Venture Smith (ca. 1729–1805), Stonington's best-known black resident, whose autobiographical narrative appeared in 1798.¹¹

¹⁰ A different southern New England minister, Alexander Viets Griswold, preaching in Bristol, Rhode Island, another port town connected to the slave system, used the same technique at about the same time. In a series of sermons delivered shortly after the 1808 interdiction by the U.S. Congress of the international slave trade, Griswold not only linked the compunction inherent in the conversion experience with anxiety over the existence of American slavery but also made the same typological references to Ahab and Naboth that Hart made. Griswold was one of the evangelical Episcopalians who declared themselves, like the New Divinity men, to be followers of Jonathan Edwards. Some of his sermon manuscripts are preserved at University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I., University Archives and Special Collections, Rhode Island Episcopal Church Records, St. Michael's Episcopal Church (Bristol, Rhode Island) Records, Mss. Gr. 185 (1718–1999), Series 3, Box 1, Folder 17. A recent analysis is John Saillant, "A Black Woman's Baptism in the Episcopal Church: Prudence Gabriel in an Hour of Crisis, 1812," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 92, no. 4 (December 2023): 581–611.

¹¹ *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself* (New London: C. Holt, 1798). Additionally, it seems likely that Hart was familiar with at least some works published by Charles Holt (ca. 1771–1852), the freethinking newspaper editor of the *Bee* and printer of Smith's *Narrative*. Among these were a pseudonymous satire on overly ingenious typology, purporting to interpret Acts 19:34 (1797); Joel Barlow (1754–1812, Yale 1778),

Hart and Smith both moved about in southern New England in ways, whether by land or by salt water, that were common for preachers and mariners alike. As an adolescent or young man, Smith had lived nearby in Rhode Island, in Narragansett, and was taken by his master to Fishers Island, part of New York yet just a few miles from Stonington. In a brief effort at escaping enslavement, he fled to nearby Long Island. The Irishman who convinced Smith to run came to be, after their capture, imprisoned in New London, only about twelve miles from Stonington. Smith later moved to Long Island and entered the Rhode Island trade, during which time he indentured his son to a Rhode Islander, in whose care he died at sea. In his old age, Smith relocated to East Haddam, southwest of Hartford, while Hart had begun his ministerial work with his first pulpit, in Middlebury, southeast of Hartford.

Smith's narrative was published in New London in 1798, one year before Hart assumed his first pulpit. Smith died in 1805, when Hart was still in Middlebury. Smith is never mentioned, but there were many common points that may have been familiar to Hart's audience and that were the very substance of typology. Both Paul and Smith traveled by sea. Both were from socially prominent families, Paul an educated Jew and Smith son of an African king. Both changed their name and both submitted voluntarily to captivity. Both were falsely accused. Both were opposed by a woman, Paul by Drusilla and Smith by his master's wife. Both spoke directly to their oppressors and both freed others, Paul the Jews and Gentiles whom he freed spiritually through preaching, and Smith his wife and children whom he purchased from their masters. And both became authors, Paul of his epistles and Smith of his autobiography. Hart understood both the enslaved and the enemies of the slave system as antitypes of Paul, so it makes sense that as he preached in Stonington, the town's best-known black resident could come to mind.

At last, the archive itself merits comment. Hart's holograph sermon manuscript was preserved in the Palmer-Loper Family Papers at the Library of Congress. The preservation by the families of this one sermon—with no other sermons at all and no other document by Hart—suggests that at least one family member considered it important. The Palmer and Loper families knew of slaves and slaveholders. Several of the documents in the collection refer to local slaveholder Peleg Brown; these include manuscripts referring to Prudence Gabriel, a girl whom Brown once owned, along with her mother, and who left Stonington for Providence, Rhode Island, possibly in 1796, after her master's death. She became a

The Hasty-Pudding (1797); two printings (1798) of an account of the yellow fever in New London that satirize the federal authorities; an edition of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography (1798); a fictional and satirical letter (1800) attributed, absurdly, to Puritan divine Joseph Belcher (1669–1723); orations and polemical works (1801–1805), including one (1802) on the American Revolution by antislavery Baptist John Leland (1754–1841); and two editions of a “military catechism” (1805, 1806), which was a guide for enforcing discipline in a militia company. There is, of course, no proof that Hart read Smith's *Narrative* or had it in mind in 1811, but the evident importance of the subjects on which Holt published leads me to believe that Hart was probably familiar with his press, even if one man was a freethinker and the other a stalwart of orthodoxy.

freedwoman there.¹² I uncovered Hart's holograph manuscript while researching Gabriel's life in a series of journeys from Michigan to Rhode Island and Washington, D.C. Some remarkable friends, correspondents, and institutions supported this research.¹³ This shared knowledge and financial support, along with the several journeys required, brought me to the moment when I was holding an 1811 sermon archived with papers that concerned slavery yet, upon first read, had little to do with those other manuscripts. The slave system and the battle against it are still in the archive in now-unfamiliar, often forgotten idioms. We can reverse the amnesia that has shrouded them.

¹² Documents concerning Prudence Gabriel are found in Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Palmer-Loper Family Papers, 1667–1994, Part II: Correspondence, 1762–1972, Box II:1, Folder 14. Saillant, "A Black Woman's Baptism," 581–84.

¹³ Therese Seay shared her research into her family, which includes Gabriel, with me by email in 2016, sparking my desire to read further at the Library of Congress; Linda J. Borish authorized travel funds from the Western Michigan University Department of History Burnham-Macmillan Endowment; The Historical Society of the Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Women's History Project awarded me further travel funds in 2018 and 2022, respectively; Joanne Pope Melish introduced me to the University of Rhode Island Archives and Special Collections; Barbara Bair discussed with me the Library of Congress holdings and ways of understanding their provenances.

Middlebury Decr 1799 No. 10
 The fatal consequences of
 Procrastination
 Middlebury Nov^r Dec^r 4 1799
 Salem April 18 1802
 Stonington April 22 1810
 Stonington Road Sept 14 1811

Acts 24..25
 "And as the reasons of righteous
 ness temperance & judgment
 to come shall tremble, and say
 unto Him Go thy way for this
 time when I have a more
 convenient season I will call for

Figure 1. Sermon notes by Ira Hart, 1799–180[?] [1811], Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Palmer-Loper Family Papers, Part II: Miscellany, 1667–1979, Box II: 13, p. 1, LCCN mm79035410, ID No. MSS35410.

The Sermon¹⁴

Middlebury Dec^r 1799 A°. 10

The fatal consequences of Procrastination

Middlebury ~~Nov~~ Dec^r 9 1799 & Aug 17 1800

Salem April 18 1802

Stonington April 22nd 1810 Borough

Stonington Road Sept^r 11 1811

Acts 24..25

“And as He reasoned of righteousness, temperance & judgement to come Felix trembled, and said unto Him Go thy way for this time when I have a more convenient season I will call for thee” [end p. 1] In discoursing from the text it will be proper to notice

[I] The preacher of this sermon

II The [Char]acter of his hearers

III The effects produced

IV Apply the subject to ourselves

I &—It was the Apostle Paul a prisoner accused by the Jews of sedition and heresy. He was sent by the chief Captain Lysias to Felix the Roman Gov^r to save him from the rage of the Jews. The Jews were resolved on his destruction

¹⁴ The manuscript is fourteen sheets, with damage to the edges and with a few small sections of paper missing due to tears, bound loosely with string on one edge. In this diplomatic transcription, [sic] is used for spellings that might appear today to be erroneous, split words are included on the page where they first appear, and surmises about missing words or characters are noted with brackets. The author numbered most but not all pages; these numerals are included here only in brackets. The arrangement of dates on the first page suggests that this is a draft of 1811 (despite the Library of Congress catalog date of “1799–180[?]”), and that the other included dates were earlier occasions on which Hart had preached from this same text. One inference from the manuscript is that he preached at least six times from Acts 24:25 from 1799–1811; another is that this text was so meaningful to him that he recorded the dates when he preached from it. There is no textual evidence suggesting the sermon was ever revised, yet some would have been normal as the years passed and as he gained a new pulpit. It thus seems likely that this is a final draft of a sermon that Hart had been preaching for more than a decade.

and when they could not destroy him by a secret conspiraicey [sic], they appeared before the bar of Felix, & there accused him of sedition & heresy & on these charges desired that he might be delivered to them or put to death. At the request of Felix Paul makes his defence, alone and unassisted & in the midst of enemies whom the Gov^r [end p. 2] from motives of interest could not but wish to oblige. In the course of the trial it appeared that the difference between Paul ^{and the Jews} was confined to doctrines & matters of religion & concerning one Jesus whom Paul affirmed to be risen from the dead. The trial was adjourned, but the curiosity of the gov^r being excited, & perceiving Paul to be a man of talents, He wished to hear something more particular concerning faith in Christ. Paul was accordingly sent for, to preach before the court of Felix. He labored under great disadvantages[.] He was a prisoner, his [char]acter was attacked by the grand Jewish council & no friends appeared in his support yet in this situation, he would not lose an opportunity of preaching the doctrines to come.

II To consider the [char]acter of his hearers

Two only are mentioned Felix & his [end p. 3] wife Drusilla. But it is probable that there were others present, some of the courtiers of Felix or some of his family & connections. Felix himself was guilty, according to Josephus of bribery, & his wife Drusilla was an abandoned woman who had left her husband & lived in Adultery with Felix. His living with Her in this situation, is a proof that he was abandoned & unprincipled himself. Before these hearers Paul reasoned of righteousness and judgement to come, subjects applicable to their [char]acters. He reasoned of righteousness “that is of faithfulness in public offices.[”] This was a sharp reproof to Felix who stood ready for money to acquit Paul whether he was guilty of the charges alledged [sic] against him or not. He reasoned of temperance, or continence[.] This reprovved them both for

they lived in a state of adultery. He reasoned of a judgement to come, where they should stand before God and [end p. 4] receive the reward of their iniquities. Tho nothing more is mentioned yet he doubtless preached to them the doctrine of faith & repentance[.] For it said in the preceding verse that Felix sent for Paul & heard him concerning the faith in X [Christ]. He doubtless exhibited before them the odious nature of sin & their sin in particular. He held up [Christ] & him crucified as the only hope of sinners; that this savior was risen from the dead & now called all Jews & Gentiles to repentance[.] He held up the great doctrine of a future Judgement when [Christ] should appear in the glory of his Father & with 10,000 of his saints, & sit down on the throne of Judgement; that at this awful tribunal, the secrets of their hearts & the wickedness of their lives would be made known; that from this judgement there was no appeal & the soul [page torn]; wh[ich] not had an interest in Christ [page torn] must lie [end p. 5] down in everlasting misery. I proceed now to shew

III The effects produced by this sermon.

1 Felix trembled. Notwithstanding the unfavorable circumstances attending the Apostle; his words were powerful. The holy spirit set them home on the conscience of Felix & He trembled. The truth flashed in his face, for he knew that the whole discourse on righteousness temperance & Judgement to come was against Him. The thought of appearing before God in judgement made Him tremble. He was discerned in the light of the Apostles discourse that He was wholly unprepared for this solemn Meeting with Jesus of Nazareth[.] It brought death, eternal things and the awful Majesty of God, into view. It is no wonder Felix trembled. A sight [paper torn] of his abominations in view [paper torn] of eternity & the holy orator of [paper torn] God was sufficient [end p. 6] to make Him trembling alive to his present situation. A proper sense of sin will

make any sinner tremble to appear before the bar of Christ in Judgement. Felix doubtless sent for Paul, to see a display of Genius & hear him argue & defend his principles of religion & prove the divinity & resurrection of Christ. But how great must have been his disappointment when the Apostle with all the force of genius & human learning, assisted by the unerring spirit of God; addressed to him a solemn discourse on righteousness, temperance & judgement to come. Felix knew he had none of these virtues & also that He was ~~openly~~ shamefully guilty of the opposite vices. Surprised, ashamed & convicted, He trembled. He felt the force of truth. His conscience searched the words of the apostle saying [end p. 7] “Thou art the Man.”

2 Tho He was convicted yet He was not converted. The discourse of the Apostle effected nothing but legal conviction. Notwithstanding his trembling, & the stings of an awakened conscience He had no love for the truth. He did not expect to hear such reproof from a prisoner, & He found it in his heart to say to the Apostle “Go thy way for this time when I have a more convenient season, I will call for Thee.” He did not so much as thank the Apostle for his ~~se~~ Sermon; He felt under no obligation to him for his solemn warning to flee from the wrath to come. The Apostle was barely suffered to go his way, without rebuke for his plainness of speech; with the bare compliment of being sent for again at a more convenient season [end p. 8] This was only a more refined way of telling the Apostle; “That the truths that He had spoken were alarming indeed; but that other business prevented an immediate attention to them. In short the things ~~wh~~-you have spoken if true are disagreeable truths. I will endeavor to attend to them at some future time, & then it is possible I may send for you.” Well might the holy Apostle exclaim—If these things are true they demand your first attention, & you may lose all by delay. Now is a convenient ^{season} & I am ready to give you all the assistance in my power. But

this would not avail even with trembling Felix. “The Apostle must go his way for this time,[”] a more convenient season never came & wretched Felix died in his sins & was fated to that judgement he was warned of by the Apostle then [end p. 9] to meet face to face his offended Judge & receive the reward of his iniquities and fatal procrastination. It is true He sent for Paul often & communed with him but, it appears He was seeking only a bribe to set him at liberty, & there is no intimation that he or his wife Drusilla wished to hear another sermon on “righteousness, temperance and judgement to come.”

It was proposed

IV To apply the subject to ourselves.

1 We learn the duty of Gospel Ministers. They must imitate the example of Paul & strike at the consciences of their hearers. Whatever may be their vices however they may hope to be amused with a display of eloquence or argumentation [end p. 10] they should hear the odious nature of sin & the solemnities of a future judgement. There is a general way of preaching which leaves the heart unaffected & the conscience. Paul did not preach in this manner to Felix & if ministers deal in generals without a particular application to the hearts & consciences of Men; they do not imitate the example of Christ of Peter, of Paul, of Stephen & the rest of the Apostles. Some people feel as if Ministers should not be particular in their applications; but what was the manner of Pauls preaching. He reasoned of righteousness & Judgement to come. His sermon was pointed to the very sins of Felix, & it made him tremble. There is no other way of preaching divine truth which is at all calculated to alarm the consciences of men[.] David heard the general discourse of Nathan, but He took none of it [end p. 11] to himself, till he was told “Thou art the man.” Sinners will forever put by divine truth from themselves, unless in some way or other the idea is impressed upon them that they are the

very persons to whom the truth applies[.] The Duty of a Minister then is plain To expose the nature of sin; to hold up the necessity^{of} an interest in [Christ] and to warn the hearers of a Judgement to come. They ought never to be discouraged, for they never know when God is about to set home his truth to the heart. The appearance of Pauls a[u]dience was most discouraging; yet God made even a Felix to tremble. We can never tell beforehand what class of hearers, God will impress. Ministers ought not to spare People in high stations. Paul was preaching before the Gov^r, yet he held up the same truths, as to the lowest [end p. 12] Sinner. People in high stations are Sinners, & cannot be saved without the same repentance of Sin as others. Their souls are equally precious, and must not be flattered into ruin. We must tell sinners the plain truth; we must expose their vices; we must level the truth at their consciences & then submit both the truth & them, to the disposal of God.

2. We remark how easily God can make a proud rebellious sinner tremble. Felix was a proud Adulterer; a Man in high station surrounded by flattering Courtiers yet the words of a poor Prisoner shook him like a leaf in the wind. Paul was nothing but a weak instrument. The truth itself could not have produced this effect. For there is [no] account that these same truths affected the heart of Drusilla. But of Felix God said let him tremble and He [end p. 13] trembled. The same effects are produced on any sinner, when God speaks it is done. A motion of God's power will make the most hardened abandoned sinner tremble & cry out in agony of spirit. When God moves in conviction Sinners are alarmed & when he moves in regeneration they are reconciled to his [char]acter[.], to his laws, to his gov^t, to his doctrines, & to His Son Jesus Christ. What an astonishing change, produced with more ease, than a mote is born in the air. The proud heart is humbled, the arrogant spirit is made to resemble the dove. Past injuries are forgiven. Gross, open & secret sins are

forsaken & become a grief to the soul. The renewing power of Gods spirit will make an infidel, a warm advocate for the cross of Christ. It will make the adulterer like Felix, temperate, [end p. 14] and an opposer of truth one of its most strenuous and warm friends.

3 We remark the importance of hearing the gospel. Felix trembled while hearing divine truth[.] Sinners who wilfully [sic] refuse to hear the gospel, & absent themselves from the house of God; neglect the very place where He is accustomed to impress his truth upon the conscience, & the very means He has so often blessed in making sinners tremble at a judgement to come. Those therefore who for trivial excuses or because divine truth is disagreeable, neglect [in] public slights the institutions of God, & labor, by the most effectual means in their power, to cast a bar in the way of conviction and salvation. They must bear their own guilt, they are enemies to their own happiness, & without repentance, will mourn [end p. 15] forever, the destruction of their own immortal souls.

4. We remark that Felix patient[ly] heard divine truth. Pauls sermon on “righteousness, temperance, & Judgement to come” cut him to the heart & expound his wickedness in the most unequivocal terms. The sermon was unexpectedly disagreeable & close—it made him tremble, & this was also disagreeable; it made him appear vile & odious. But what was his conduct to Paul. Did He reproach him[,] Did He vilify his sermon? Did he speak against the truth delivered, or against Paul? No such thing. This example of Felix is so far well worth the imitation of those who hear the gospel. Take the example & see whether Felix uttered a single sarcasm or reproach against Paul, for a sermon [end p. 16] which struck his own particular vices, which cut up all his hopes, & brought him trembling to the awful bar of Judgement. Surely if Ministers preach no more pointed & personal than a Paul; they are entitled to

the forbearance of a Felix.

5. We learn the danger of procrastination. Tho Felix trembled & withheld all reproaches against Paul; yet he had no heart to repent & believe the gospel. He gave him this truth “Go thy way for this time when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee.” Paul might be hurt at this dismissal however polite, but He could not complain; for in thus dismissing him Felix dismissed divine truth, God, [Christ], & salvation. The more convenient season never came. He got rid of his trembling, & sunk down to his [end p. 17] former Adultery & stupidity. This example was recorded by the Spirit of God to enforce the important order of making religion our first & great concern. Felix trembled but He put off [Christ] till more convenient season & finally perished[.] Sinners who are like him in conduct; must be his companions in misery. There is no excuse for delaying the business of religion. Other business may be put before religion; but religion must on no account be delayed till tomorrow—“We know not what a day may bring forth.” On no principles, either of reason or revelation could Felix excuse his conduct; and my hearers if you conduct like him you are also without. The language of scripture is express. “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.” Today if ye will hear my voice harden not your hearts. Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation [end p. 18] It is unnecessary to multiply texts of Scripture on this subject[.] It is contrary to the voice of reason to put off religion a single day. Is not the soul of more value than a world. Is it not an immortal spirit which will survive the shafts of Death which will burst from the grave & blaze thro eternity, in the bla flames of infinite love, or in the fire of the damned. It is contrary to the dictates of reason and conscience to pursue a less good, and neglect a greater. Felix chose a less, & put off the interests of his soul—He was irrational in this conduct & stands self condemned. If you my hearers choose a less good &

neglect your immortal souls, your conduct is a open violation of reason & in this respect you cease to act like rational creatures. You have no excuse for this abuse of your rational faculties. Reason declares that the care of the soul is the most important of all cares, & should [end p. 19] engage your first attention. The soul is the Man or the woman: take away the soul, and they dwindle into brutes. When Persons neglect their soul they neglect themselves, they neglect their own most precious interests. Let me plead the cause of your own souls. Let me urge you to regard yourselves. While out of [Christ] you neglect your own happiness. You voluntarily subject your own soul to endless ruin. You daily provoke God despise [Christ] & his salvation. Procrastination is a fatal delusion. It has slain its thousand; & 10,000. There will never be again ^{a day} so favorable as the present day. Tomorrow will bring its cares, and an additional load of guilt. Tomorrow cannot be so favorable as today for your sins will not only be [end p. 20] multiplied, but the habits of sin will be strengthened, to make repentance more painful & difficult: to encrease the load of remorse & to give the soul a farther cast from God. How delusive then the idea of waiting for a more convenient [season], wh[ich] in the very nature of the earth cannot exist. Oh fatal procrastination! By you God is provoked—the Savior despised—the Holy Ghost resisted—The ~~body~~ load of sin increased—The habit of sin strengthened & the immortal part of man daily exposed to the flames of divine wrath. Suppose a ~~Person~~ Traveller should arrive on the banks of the Hudson & sit down without food or clothing determined to make no effort to pass the river until the stream ran dry. The stream unmindful of this Traveller [end p. 21] would glide onto the end of the world & he must perish in his folly. The Man who procrastinates & putts [sic] off his temporal business, will be always hurri[ed] to do a little—The habit will also encrease—but the soul which like Felix says to [Paul], to the Ministers of the gospel, & to divine truth go thy way

for this time—wait untill I have a more convenient season; will remain spiritually poor, the habit must be broken, or the consequences will be inevitable destruction. The soul is committed to our care as a gem or a diamond of inestimable value. The circumstances are something the same with those mentioned 1 Kings 20..39 “And as the King passed by, the prophet cried unto the King; & he said Thy servant went out into the midst of the [end p. 22] battle & behold a man turned aside & brought a man unto me, & said Keep this man, if by any means He is missing—thy life shall be for his life or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver—And as thy servant was busy here and there He was gone—And the King said so shall thy judgement be Thou thyself hast decided it.[”] Your souls are thus a most sacred deposit, your life must go for the life of your souls. If you are busy here and there and it is gone & you plead this in excuse—so will your judgement be; your excuse will be your condemnation. You have no right to be [page torn] to the neglect of your immortal soul [page torn] Let me then plead [page torn] the cause of your [page torn] souls. If you are [page torn] aged, your hour [page torn] [end p. 23] lost the best season to take proper care of your souls. A further delay therefore, will be going from bad to worse. You can bear me witness that the convenient season has not yet arrived tho you are old & greyheaded. To delay longer, is almost certain death. Those who are young enjoy the best season they ever will enjoy. They are bound to listen to the language of experience & not hazard their souls on an uncertain hereafter. Remember Felix & tremble lest lest [sic] old age come upon you & find you rooted like the antient oak in habits of sin & spiritual sloth; or death cut [page torn] the things of life asunder [page torn] and close the various [page torn] of probation. Let [page torn] every youth remain [page torn] in that the fear [page torn] the Lord that [end p. 24] is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding.” Those who perswade you

that religion is improper for youth, are your worst enemies; & those who urge you to seek the happiness of your souls are your friends & your only friends. Let me plead the cause of your souls, dear youth & urge you not to put of[f] this momentous business untill a more convenient season. Be afraid that season will never come. Why will you not listen to the voice of God, the voice of reason & the voice of experience—they all unite in pointing out the present time as a day of acceptance with God. Remember therefore your Creator in the days of thy youth before the evil days come & the years draw nigh in which Thou shalt [end p. 25] say, I have no pleasure.

6 & lastly

We learn the propriety of enforcing the whole with the consideration of a future judgement. Paul preached of righteousness, temperance and judgement to come. It was doubtless the terrors of the judgement which made Felix tremble. He would not regard the sin of bribery & adultery, but for the awful consideration that these sins must come into judgement with every secret thing & without repentance would draw down divine wrath upon his affrighted soul. Sinners in this day of gospel light, ought like Him to tremble at the thought of a future judgement. Oh [end p. 26] Sinners! There is an awful day approaching, in which you all both small and great, both old & young, must stand round the bar of your Redeemer, the Lord J C and answer to every thought, to every word and to every action of your lives. You cannot avoid this day—It is appointed of God & fixed as his own eternal nature that the world shall come before him in Judgement. Then your state will be fixed forever. There can be no appeal from this sentence. In human affairs, men often solace themselves under a disadvantageous decision, by appealing to a higher court, where they hope to appear under more advantageous circumstances. But there is no appeal from the [end p. 27] court of heaven in which God in the person

of his son sits in final judgement. Well may sinners tremble at this day, a day in wh[ich] a word from Christ fixes their eternal doom[.] Be entreated then to make your peace with the judge secure his favor not only by trembling but by immediate repentance. Receive Christ this day lest He be angry & you perish forever. Banish the fatal idea of procrastination—Now is a convenient & now is an accepted time—Now is emphatically a day of salvation.

May God bless this word thro[ugh] Jesus Christ. Amen [end p. 28]