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## Preface

### **An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The First Book of 1Kings**

Many histories are books of kings and their reigns, to which the affairs of their kingdoms are reduced; this is a piece of honour that has commonly been paid to crowned heads. The holy Scripture is the history of the kingdom of God among men, under the several administrations of it; but there the King is one and his name one. The particular history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the kingdom of God among them; for still it is a sacred history, much more instructive and not less entertaining than any of the histories of the kings of the earth, to which (those of them that are of any certainty) it is prior in time; for though there were kings in Edom before there was any king in Israel, Gen. 36:31 (foreigners, in that point of state, got the precedency), yet the history of the kings of Israel lives, and will live, in holy Writ, to the end of the world, whereas that of the kings of Edom is long since buried in oblivion; for the honour that comes from God is durable, while the honour of the world is like a mushroom, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night.—The Bible began with the story of patriarchs, and prophets, and judges, men whose converse with heaven was more immediate, the record of which strengthens our faith, but is not so easily accommodated to our case, now that we expect not visions, as the subsequent history of affairs like ours under the direction of common providence; and here also we find, though not many types and figures of the Messiah, yet great expectations of him; for not only prophets, but kings, desired to see the great mysteries of the gospel, Lu. 10:24—The two books of Samuel are introductions to the books of the Kings, as they relate the origin of the royal government in Saul and of the royal family in David. These two books give us an account of David's successor, Solomon, the division of his kingdom, and the succession of the several kings both of Judah and Israel, with an abstract of their history down to the captivity. And as from the book of Genesis we may collect excellent rules of economics, for the good governing of families, so from these books we may collect rules of politics, for the directing of public affairs. There is in these books special regard had to the house and lineage of David, from which Christ came. Some of his sons trod in his steps, and others did not. The characters of the kings of Judah may be thus briefly given:—David the devout, Solomon the wise, Rehoboam the simple, Abijah the valiant, Asa the upright, Jehoshaphat the religious, Jehoram the wicked, Ahaziah the profane, Joash the backslider, Amaziah the rash, Uzziah the mighty, Jotham the peaceable, Ahaz the idolater, Hezekiah the reformer, Manasseh the penitent, Amon the obscure, Josiah the tender-hearted, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, all wicked, and such as brought ruin quickly on themselves and their kingdom. The number of the good and bad is nearly equal, but the reigns of the good were generally long and those of the bad short, the consideration of which will make the state of Israel not altogether so bad in this period as at first it seems. In this first book we have, I. The death of David, ch. 1 and 2. II. The glorious reign of Solomon, and his building the temple (ch. 3–10), but the cloud his sun set under, ch. 11. III. The division of the kingdoms in Rehoboam, and his reign and Jeroboam's, ch. 12–14. IV. The reigns of Abijah and Asa over Judah, Baasha and Omri over Israel, ch. 15 and 16. V. Elijah's miracles, ch. 17–19. VI. Ahab's success against Benhadad, his wickedness and

fall, ch. 20–22. And in all this history it appears that kings, though gods to us, are men to God, mortal and accountable.

## Chapter 1

In this chapter we have, I. David declining in his health (v. 1-4). II. Adonijah aspiring to the kingdom, and treating his party, in order to it (v. 5-10). III. Nathan and Bathsheba contriving to secure the succession to Solomon, and prevailing for an order from David for the purpose (v. 11-31). IV. The anointing of Solomon accordingly, and the people's joy therein (v. 32-40). V. The effectual stop this put to Adonijah's usurpation, and the dispersion of his party thereupon (v. 41-49). VI. Solomon's dismissal of Adonijah upon his good behaviour (v. 50-53).

### Verses 1-4

David, as recorded in the foregoing chapter, had, by the great mercy of God, escaped the sword of the destroying angel. But our deliverances from or through diseases and dangers are but reprieves; if the candle be not blown out, it will burn out of itself. We have David here sinking under the infirmities of old age, and brought by them to the gates of the grave. He that *cometh up out of the pit shall fall into the snare*; and, one way or other, *we must needs die*. 1. It would have troubled one to see David so infirm. He as old, and his natural heat so wasted that no clothes could keep him warm, v. 1. David had been a valiant active man and a man of business, and very vehement had the flame always been in his breast; and yet now his blood is chilled and stagnated, he is confined to his bed, and there can get no heat. He was now seventy years old. Many, at that age, are as lively and fit for business as ever; but David was now chastised for his former sins, especially that in the matter of Uriah, and felt from his former toils and the hardships he had gone through in his youth, which then he made nothing of, but was now the worse for. *Let not the strong man glory in his strength*, which may soon be weakened by sickness, or at last will be weakened by old age. Let young people *remember their Creator in the days of their youth*, before these evil days come. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do with all our might, because the night comes, the night of old age, in which no man can work; and, when our strength has gone, it will be a comfort to remember that we used it well. 2. It would have troubled one to see his physicians so weak and unskilful that they knew no other way of relieving him than by outward applications. No cordials, no spirits, but, (1.) *They covered him with clothes*, which, where there is any inward heat, will keep it in, and so increase it; but, where it is not, they have none to communicate, no, not royal clothing. Elihu makes it a difficulty to understand *how our garments are warm upon us* (Job 37:17); but, if God deny his blessing, men *clothe themselves, and there is none warm* (Hag. 1:6), David here was not. (2.) They foolishly prescribed nuptials to one that should rather have been preparing for his funeral (v. 2-4); but they knew what would gratify their own corruptions, and perhaps were too willing to gratify his, under colour of consulting his health. His prophets should have been consulted as well as his physicians in an affair of this nature. However, this might be excused then, when even good men ignorantly allowed themselves to have many wives. We now have not so learned of Christ, but are taught that one man must have but one wife (Mt. 19:5), and further that *it is good for a man not to touch a woman*, 1 Co. 7:1. That Abishag was married to David before she lay with him, and was his secondary wife, appears from its being imputed as a great crime to Adonijah that he desired to marry her (ch. 2:22) after his father's death.

## Verses 5-10

David had much affliction in his children. Amnon and Absalom had both been his grief; the one his first-born, the other his third, 2 Sa. 3:2, 3. His second, whom he had by Abigail, we will suppose he had comfort in; his fourth was Adonijah (2 Sa. 3:4); he was one of those that were born in Hebron; we have heard nothing of him till now, and here we are told that he was a comely person, and that he was next in age, and (as it proved) next in temper to Absalom, v. 6. And, further, that in his father's eyes he had been a jewel, but was now a thorn.

I. His father had made a fondling of him, v. 6. He had not displeased him at any time. It is not said that he never displeased his father; it is probably that he had done so frequently, and his father was secretly troubled at his misconduct and lamented it before God. But his father had not displeased him, by crossing him in his humours, denying him any thing he had a mind to, or by calling him to an account as to what he had done and where he had been, or by keeping him to his book or his business, or reproving him for what he saw or heard of that he did amiss; he never said to him, *Why hast thou done so?* because he saw it was uneasy to him, and he could not bear it without fretting. It was the son's fault that he was displeased at reproof and took it for affront, whereby he lost the benefit of it; and it was the father's fault that, because he saw it displeased him, he did not reprove him; and now he justly smarted for indulging him. Those who honour their sons more than God, as those do who keep them not under good discipline, thereby forfeit the honour they might expect from their sons.

II. He, in return, made a fool of his father. Because he was old, and confined to his bed, he thought no notice was to be taken of him, and therefore *exalted himself*, and said, *I will be king*, v. 5. Children that are indulged learn to be proud and ambitious, which is the ruin of a great many young people. The way to keep them humble is to keep them under. Observe Adonijah's insolence. 1. He looked upon the days of mourning for his father to be at hand, and therefore he prepared to succeed him, though he knew that by the designation both of God and David Solomon was to be the man; for public notice had been given of it by David himself, and the succession settled, as it were by act of parliament, in pursuance of God's appointment, 1 Chr. 22:9; 23:1. This entail Adonijah attempted by force to cut off, in contempt both of God and his father. Thus is the kingdom of Christ opposed, and there are those that say, "We will not have him to reign over us." 2. He looked upon his father as superannuated and good for nothing, and therefore he entered immediately upon the possession of the throne. He cannot wait till his father's head be laid low, but it must now be said, *Adonijah reigns* (v. 18), and, *God save king Adonijah*, v. 25. His father is not fit to govern, for he is old and past ruling, nor Solomon, for he is young, and not yet able to rule; and therefore Adonijah will take the government upon him. It argues a very base and wicked mind for children to insult over their parents because of the infirmities of their age. 3. In pursuance of this ambitious project, (1.) He got a great retinue (v. 5), *chariots and horsemen*, both for state and strength, to wait on him, and to fight for him. (2.) He made great interest with no less than Joab, the general of the army, and Abiathar the high priest, v. 7. That he should make his court to those who by their influence in church and camp were capable of doing him great service is not strange; but we may well wonder by what arts they could be drawn to follow him and help him. They were old men, who had been faithful to David in the most difficult and troublesome of his times, men of sense and experience, who, one would think, would not easily be wheedled. They could not propose any

advantage to themselves by supporting Adonijah, for they were both at the top of their preferment and stood fast in it. They could not be ignorant of the entail of the crown upon Solomon, which it was not in their power to cut off, and therefore it was their interest to oblige him. But God, in this matter, left them to themselves, perhaps to correct them for some former misconduct with a scourge of their own making. We are told (v. 8) who those were that were of such approved fidelity to David that Adonijah had not the confidence so much as to propose his project to them—Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. A man that has given proofs of his resolute adherence to that which is good shall not be asked to do a bad thing. (3.) He prepared a great entertainment (v. 9) at En-rogel, not far from Jerusalem; his guests were the king's sons, and the king's servants, whom he feasted and caressed to bring them over to his party; but Solomon was not invited, either because he despised him or because he despaired of him, v. 10. Such as serve their own belly, and will be in the interest of those that will feast them what side soever they are of, are an easy prey to seducers, Rom. 16:18. Some think that Adonijah slew these sheep and oxen, even fat ones, for sacrifice, and that it was a religious feast he made, beginning his usurpation with a show of devotion, as Absalom under the colour of a vow (2 Sa. 15:7), which he might do the more plausibly when he had the high priest himself on his side. It is a pity that any occasion should ever be given to say, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum—In the name of the Lord begins all evil*, and that all religious exercises should be made to patronise all religious practices.

### **Verses 11-31**

We have here the effectual endeavours that were used by Nathan and Bathsheba to obtain from David a ratification of Solomon's succession, for the crushing of Adonijah's usurpation. 1. David himself knew not what was doing. Disobedient children think that they are well enough off if they can but keep their good old parents ignorant of their bad courses; but a *bird of the air will carry the voice*. 2. Bathsheba lived retired, and knew nothing of it either, till Nathan informed her. Many get very comfortably through this world that know little how the world goes. 3. Solomon, it is likely, knew of it, but was as a deaf man that heard not. Though he had years, and wisdom above his years, yet we do not find that he stirred to oppose Adonijah, but quietly composed himself and left it to God and his friends to order the matter. Hence David, in his Psalm for Solomon, observes that while men, in pursuit of the world, in vain *rise early and sit up late, God giveth his beloved (his Jedidiah) sleep*, in giving them to be easy, and to gain their point without agitation, Ps. 127:1, 2. How then is the design brought about? I. Nathan the prophet alarms Bathsheba by acquainting her with the case, and puts her in a way to get an order from the king for the confirming of Solomon's title. He was concerned, because he knew God's mind, and David's and Israel's interest; it was by him that God had named Solomon *Jedidiah* (2 Sa. 12:25), and therefore he could not sit still and see the throne usurped, which he knew was Solomon's right by the will of him from whom promotion cometh. When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from heaven, no marvel that prophets were so much interested and employed in that matter; but now that common providence rules the affairs of the kingdom of men (Dan. 4:32) the subordinate agency must be left to common persons, and let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men. Nathan applied to Bathsheba, as one that had the greatest concern for Solomon, and could have the freest access to David. He informed her of Adonijah's attempt (v. 11), and that it was not with David's consent or knowledge. He suggested to her that not only Solomon

was in danger of losing the crown, but that he and she too were in danger of losing their lives if Adonijah prevailed. A humble spirit may be indifferent to a crown, and may be content, notwithstanding the prospect of it, to sit down short of the possession of it. But the law of self-preservation, and the sixth commandment, obliges us to use all possible endeavours to secure our own life and the life of others. Now, says Nathan, let me *give thee counsel how to save thy own life and the life of thy son*, v. 12. Such as this is the counsel that Christ's ministers give us in his name, to give all diligence, not only *that no man take our crown* (Rev. 3:11), but that we *save our lives*, even the lives of our souls. He directs her (v. 13) to go to the king, to remind him of his word and oath, that Solomon should be his successor; and to ask him in the most humble manner, *Why doth Adonijah reign?* He thought David was not so cold but this would warm him. Conscience, as well as a sense of honour, would put life into him upon such an occasion as this; and he promised (v. 24) that, while she was reasoning with the king in this matter, he would come in and second her, as if he came accidentally, which perhaps the king might look upon as a special providence (and he was one that took notice of such evidences, 1 Sa. 25:32, 33), or, at least, it would help to awaken him so much the more.

II. Bathsheba, according to Nathan's advice and direction, loses no time, but immediately makes her application to the king, on the same errand on which Esther came to king Ahasuerus, to intercede for her life. She needed not wait for a call as Esther did, she knew she should be welcome at any time; but it is remarked that when she visited the king Abishag was ministering to him (v. 15), and Bathsheba took no displeasure either at him or her for it, also that she *bowed and did obeisance to the king* (v. 16), in token of her respect to him both as her prince and as her husband; such a genuine daughter was she of Sarah, who obeyed Abraham, calling him *lord*. Those that would find favour with superiors must show them reverence, and be dutiful to those whom they expect to be kind to them. Her address to the king, on this occasion, is very discreet. 1. She reminded him of his promise made to her and confirmed with a solemn oath, that Solomon should succeed him, v. 17. She knew how fast this would hold such a conscientious man as David was. 2. She informed him of Adonijah's attempt, which he was ignorant of (v. 18): "Adonijah reigns, in competition with thee for the present and in contradiction to thy promise for the future. The fault is not thine, for thou knewest it not; but now that thou knowest it thou wilt, in pursuance of thy promise, take care to suppress this usurpation." She told him who were Adonijah's guests, and who were in his interest, and added, but "*Solomon thy servant has he not called*, which plainly shows he looks upon him as his rival, and aims to undermine him, v. 19. It is not an oversight, but a contempt of the act of settlement, that Solomon is neglected." 3. She pleads that it is very much in his power to obviate this mischief (v. 20): *The eyes of all Israel are upon thee*, not only as a *king*, for we cannot suppose it the prerogative of any prince to bequeath his subjects by will (as if they were his goods and chattels) to whom he pleases, but as a *prophet*. All Israel knew that David was not only himself *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, but that the *Spirit of the Lord spoke by him* (2 Sa. 23:1, 2), and therefore waiting for and depending upon a divine designation, in a matter of such importance, David's word would be an oracle and a law to them; this therefore (says Bathsheba) they expect, and it will end the controversy and effectually quash all Adonijah's pretensions. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*. Note, Whatever power, interest or influence, men have, they ought to improve it to the utmost for the preserving and advancing of the kingdom of the Messiah, of which Solomon's kingdom was a type. 4. She suggested the imminent peril which she and her son would be in if this matter

was not settled in David's life-time, v. 21. "If Adonijah prevail, as he is likely to do (having Joab the general and Abiathar the priest on his side) unless speedily suppressed, Solomon and all his friends will be looked upon as traitors and dealt with accordingly." Usurpers are most cruel. If Adonijah had got into the throne, he would not have dealt so fairly with Solomon as Solomon did with him. Those hazard everything who stand in the way of such as against right force their entrance.

III. Nathan the prophet, according to his promise, seasonably stepped in, and seconded her, while she was speaking, before the king had given his answer, lest. if he had heard Bathsheba's representation only, his answer should be dilatory and only that he would consider of it: but out of the mouth of two witnesses, two such witnesses, the word would be established, and he would immediately give positive orders. The king is told that Nathan the prophet has come, and he is sure to be always welcome to the king, especially when either he is not well or has any great affair upon his thoughts; for, in either case, a prophet will be, in a particular manner, serviceable to him. Nathan knows he must render honour to whom honour is due, and therefore pays the king the same respect now that he finds him sick in bed as he would have done if he had found him in his throne: He *bowed himself with his face to the ground*, v. 23. He deals a little more plainly with the king than Bathsheba had done. In this his character would support him, and the present languor of the king's spirits made it necessary that they should be roused. 1. He makes the same representation of Adonijah's attempt as Bathsheba had made (v. 25, 26), adding that his party had already got to such a height of assurance as to shout, *God save king Adonijah*, as if king David were already dead, taking notice also that they had not invited him to their feast (*Me thy servant has he not called*), thereby intimating that they resolved not to consult either God or David in the matter, for Nathan was *secretioribus consiliis—intimately acquainted with the mind of both*. 2. He makes David sensible how much he was concerned to clear himself from having a hand in it: *Hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me?* (v. 24), and again (v. 27), *"Is this thing done by my lord the king?* If it be, he is not so faithful either to God's word or to his own as we all took him to be; if it be not, it is high time that we witness against the usurpation, and declare Solomon his successor. If it be, why is not Nathan made acquainted with it, who is not only in general, the king's confidant, but is particularly concerned in this matter, having been employed to notify to David the mind of God concerning the succession; but, if my lord the king knows nothing of the matter (as certainly he does not), what daring insolence are Adonijah and his party guilty of!" Thus he endeavoured to incense David against them, that he might act the more vigorously for the support of Solomon's interest. Note, Good men would do their duty if they were reminded of it, and put upon it, and told what occasion there is for them to appear; and those who thus are their remembrancers do them a real kindness, as Nathan here did to David.

IV. David, hereupon, made a solemn declaration of his firm adherence to his former resolution, that Solomon should be his successor. Bathsheba is called in (v. 28), and to her, as acting for and on behalf of her son, the king gives these fresh assurances. 1. He repeats his former promise and oath, owns that he had *sworn unto her by the Lord God of Israel that Solomon would reign after him*, v. 30. Though he is old, and his memory begins to fail him, yet he remembers this. Note, An oath is so sacred a thing that the obligations of it cannot be broken, and so solemn a thing that the impressions of it, one would think, cannot be forgotten. 2. He ratifies it with another, because the occasion called for it: *As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even so will I certainly do this day*, without dispute, without delay. His form of swearing

seems to be what he commonly used on solemn occasions, for we find it, 2 Sa. 4:9. And it carries in it a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him, in bringing him safely through the many difficulties and hardships which had lain in his way, and which he now makes mention of to the glory of God (as Jacob, when he lay a dying, Gen. 48:16), thus setting to his seal, from his own experience, that that was true which the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him. Ps. 34:22, *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants*. Dying saints ought to be witnesses for God, and speak of him as they have found. Perhaps he speaks thus, on this occasion, for the encouragement of his son and successor to trust in God in the distresses he also might meet with.

V. Bathsheba receives these assurances (v. 31), 1. With great complaisance to the king's person; she did reverence to him; while Adonijah and his party affronted him. 2. With hearty good wishes for the king's health; *Let him live*. So far was she from thinking that he lived too long that she prayed he might live for ever, if it were possible, to adorn the crown he wore and to be a blessing to his people. We should earnestly desire the prolonging of useful lives, however it may be the postponing of any advantages of our own.

#### **Verses 32-40**

We have here the effectual care David took both to secure Solomon's right and to preserve the public peace, by crushing Adonijah's project in the bud. Observe,

I. The express orders he gave for the proclaiming of Solomon. The persons he entrusted with this great affair were Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, men of power and interest whom David had always reposed a confidence in and found faithful to him, and whom Adonijah had passed by in his invitation, v. 10. David orders them forthwith, with all possible solemnity, to proclaim Solomon. They must take with them *the servants of their lord*, the lifeguards, and all the servants of the household. They must set Solomon on the mule the king used to ride, for he kept not such stables of horses as his son afterwards did. He appoints them whither to go (v. 33 and v. 34, 35), and what to do. 1. Zadok and Nathan, the two ecclesiastical persons, must, in God's name, anoint him king; for though he was not the first of his family, as Saul and David were, yet he was a younger son, was made king by divine appointment, and his title was contested, which made it necessary that hereby it should be settled. This unction was typical of the designation and qualification of the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one, on whom the Spirit, that oil of gladness, was poured without measure, Heb. 1:9, Ps. 89:20. And all Christians, being *heirs of the kingdom* (Jam. 2:5), do from him *receive the anointing*, 1 Jn. 2:27. 2. The great officers, civil and military, are ordered to give public notice of this, and to express the public joy upon this occasion by sound of trumpet, by which the law of Moses directed the gracing of great solemnities; to this must be added the acclamations of the people: "*Let king Solomon live, let him prosper, let his kingdom be established and perpetuated, and let him long continue in the enjoyment of it;*" so it had been promised concerning him. Ps. 72:15, *He shall live*. 3. They must then bring him in state to the city of David, and he must sit upon the throne of his father, as his substitute now, or viceroy, to despatch public business during his weakness and be his successor after his death: *He shall be king in my stead*. It would be a great satisfaction to David himself, and to all parties concerned, to have this done immediately, that upon the demise of the king there might be no dispute, or agitation, in the public affairs. David was far from

grudging his successor the honour of appearing such in his life-time, and yet perhaps was so taken up with his devotions on his sick-bed that, if he had not been put in mind of it by others, this great good work, which was so necessary to the public repose, would have been left undone.

II. The great satisfaction which Benaiah, in the name of the rest, professed in these orders. The king said, "Solomon shall reign for me, and reign after me." "Amen" (says Benaiah heartily); "as the king says, so say we; we are entirely satisfied in the nomination, and concur in the choice, we give our vote for Solomon, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, and since we can bring nothing to pass, much less establish it, without the concurrence of a propitious providence, *The Lord God of my lord the king say so too!*" v. 36. This is the language of his faith in that promise of God on which Solomon's government was founded. If we say as God says in his word, we may hope that he will say as we say by his providence. To this he adds a prayer for Solomon (v. 37), that God would be with him as he had been with David, and make his throne greater. He knew David was not one of those that envy their children's greatness, and that therefore he would not be disquieted at this prayer, nor take it as an affront, but would heartily say *Amen* to it. The wisest and best man in the world desires his children may be wiser and better than he, for he himself desires to be wiser and better than he is; and wisdom and goodness are true greatness.

III. The immediate execution of these orders, v. 38–40. No time was lost, but Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed, and there Zadok (who, though he was not as yet high priest, was, we may suppose, the suffragan, the Jews called him the *sagan*, or second priest) anointed him by the direction of Nathan the prophet and David the king, v. 39. In the tabernacle, where the ark was now lodged, was kept among other sacred things, the holy oil for many religious services thence Zadok took a *horn of oil*, which denotes both power and plenty, and therewith anointed Solomon. We do not find that Abiathar pretended to anoint Adonijah: he was made king by a feast, not by an unction. Whom God calls, he will qualify, which was signified by the anointing; usurpers had it not. *Christ* signifies *anointed*, and he is the king whom God hath *set upon his holy hill of Sion*, according to decree, Ps. 2:6, 7. Christians also are *made to our God* (and by him) *kings*, and they have an *unction from the Holy One*, 1 Jn. 2:20. The people, hereupon, express their great joy and satisfaction in the elevation of Solomon, surround him with their Hosannas—*God save king Solomon*, and attend him with their music and shouts of joy, v. 40. Hereby they declared their concurrence in the choice, and that he was not forced upon them, but cheerfully accepted by them. The power of a prince can be little satisfaction to himself, unless he knows it to be a satisfaction to his people. Every Israelite indeed rejoices in the exaltation of the Son of David.

### **Verses 41-53**

We have here,

I. The tidings of Solomon's inauguration brought to Adonijah and his party, in the midst of their jollity: *They had made an end of eating*, and, it should seem, it was a great while before they made an end, for all the affair of Solomon's anointing was ordered and finished while they were at dinner, glutting themselves. Thus those who *serve not our Lord Christ*, but oppose him, are commonly such as *serve their own belly* (Rom. 16:18) and *made a god of it*, Phil. 3:19. Their long feast intimates likewise that they were very secure and confident of their interest, else they would not have lost so much time. The old world

and Sodom were *eating and drinking*, secure and sensual, when their destruction came, Lu. 17:26, etc. When *they made an end of eating*, and were preparing themselves to proclaim their king, and bring him in triumph into the city, they *heard the sound of the trumpet* (v. 41), and a *dreadful sound it was in their ears*, Job 15:21. Joab was an old man, and was alarmed at it, apprehending the city to be in an uproar; but Adonijah was very confident that the messenger, being a *worthy man, brought good tidings*, v. 42. Usurpers flatter themselves with the hopes of success, and those are commonly least timorous whose condition is most dangerous. But how can those who do evil deeds expect to have good tidings? No, the worthiest man will bring them the worst news, as the priest's son did here to Adonijah, v. 43. "*Verily, the best tidings I have to bring you is that Solomon is made king*, so that your pretensions are all quashed." He relates to them very particularly, 1. With what great solemnity *Solomon was made king* (v. 44, 45), and that he was now *sitting on the throne of the kingdom*, v. 46. Adonijah thought to have stepped into the throne before him, but Solomon was too quick for him. 2. With what general satisfaction Solomon was made king, so that that which was done was not likely to be undone again. (1.) The people were pleased, witness their joyful acclamations, v. 45. (2.) The courtiers were pleased: *The king's servants* attended him with an address of congratulation upon this occasion, v. 47. We have here the heads of their address: They *blessed king David*, applauded his prudent care for the public welfare, acknowledged their happiness under his government, and prayed heartily for his recovery. They also prayed for Solomon, that God would make his name better than his father's, which it might well be when he had his father's foundation to build upon. A child, on a giant's shoulders, is higher than the giant himself. (3.) The king himself was pleased: He *bowed himself upon the bed*, not only to signify his acceptance of his servants' address, but to offer up his own address to God (v. 48): "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, who, as Israel's God, for Israel's good, has brought this matter to such a happy issue, *my eyes even seeing it.*" Note, It is a great satisfaction to good men, when they are going out of the world, to see the affairs of their families in a good posture, their children rising up in their stead to serve God and their generation, and especially to see peace upon Israel and the establishment of it.

II. The effectual crush which this gave to Adonijah's attempt. It spoiled the sport of his party, dispersed the company, and obliged every man to shift for his own safety. *The triumphing of the wicked is short*. They were building a castle in the air, which, having no foundation, would soon fall and crush them. They were afraid of being taken in the fact, while they were together hatching their treason, and therefore each one made the best of his way.

III. The terror Adonijah himself was in, and the course he took to secure himself. he was now as much depressed as he had been elevated, v. 42, 50. He had despised Solomon as not worthy to be his guest (v. 10), but now he dreads him as his judge: He *feared because of Solomon*. Thus those who oppose Christ and his kingdom will shortly be made to tremble before him, and call in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from his wrath. He *took hold on the horns of the altar*, which was always looked upon as a sanctuary, or place of refuge (Ex. 21:14), intimating hereby that he durst not stand a trial, but threw himself upon the mercy of his prince, in suing for which he relied upon no other plea than the mercy of God, which was manifested in the institution and acceptance of the sacrifices that were offered on that altar and the remission of sin thereupon. Perhaps Adonijah had formerly slighted the service of the altar, yet now he courts the protection of it. Many who in the day of

their security neglect the great salvation, under the arrests of the terrors of the Lord would gladly be beholden to Christ and his merit, and, when it is too late, will *catch hold of the horns of the altar*.

IV. His humble address to Solomon for mercy. By those who brought Solomon tidings where he was, he sent a request for his life (v. 51): *Let king Solomon swear to me that he will not slay his servant*. He owns Solomon for his prince, and himself his servant, dares not justify himself, but *makes supplication to his judge*. It was a great change with him. He that in the morning was grasping at a crown is before night begging for his life. Then Adonijah reigned, now Adonijah trembles, and cannot think himself safe unless Solomon promise, with an oath, not to put him to death.

V. The orders Solomon gave concerning him. He discharges him upon his good behaviour, v. 52, 53. He considered that Adonijah was his brother, and that it was the first offence. Perhaps, being so soon made sensible of his error and then not persisting in his rebellion, he might prove not only a peaceable, but a serviceable subject, and therefore, if he will conduct himself well for the future, what is past shall be pardoned: but if he be fond disaffected, turbulent, and aspiring, this offence shall be remembered against him, he shall be called up upon his former conviction (as our law speaks), and execution shall be awarded against him. Thus the Son of David receives those to mercy that have been rebellious: if they will return to their allegiance, and be faithful to their Sovereign, their former crimes shall not be mentioned against them; but, if still they continue in the interests of the world and the flesh, this will be their ruin. Adonijah is sent for, and told upon what terms he stands, which he signifies his grateful submission to, and then is told to go to his house and live retired there. Solomon not only gave him his life, but his estate, thus *establishing his throne by mercy*.

## Chapter 2

In this chapter we have David setting and Solomon at the same time rising. I. The conclusion of David's reign with his life. 1. The charge he gives to Solomon upon his death-bed, in general, to serve God (v. 1-4), in particular, concerning Joab, Barzillai, and Shimei (v. 5-9). 2. His death and burial, and the years of his reign (v. 10, 11). II. The beginning of Solomon's reign (v. 12). Though he was to be a prince of peace, he began his reign with some remarkable acts of justice, 1. Upon Adonijah, whom he put to death for his aspiring pretensions (v. 13-25). 2. Upon Abiathar, whom he deposed from the high priesthood for siding with Adonijah (v. 26, 27). 3. Upon Joab, who he put to death for his late treasons and former murders (v. 28-35). 4. Upon Shimei, whom, for cursing David, he confined to Jerusalem (v. 36-38), and three years after, for transgressing the rules, put to death (v. 39-46).

### Verses 1-11

David, that great and good man, is here a dying man (v. 1), and a dead man, v. 10. It is well there is another life after this, for death stains all the glory of this, and lays it in the dust. We have here,

I. The charge and instructions which David, when he was dying, gave to Solomon, his son and declared successor. He feels himself declining, and is not backward to own it, nor afraid to hear or speak of dying: *I go the way of all the earth*, v. 2. Heb. *I am walking in it*. Note, Death is a way; not only a period of this life, but a passage to a better. It is *the way of all the earth*, of all mankind who dwell on earth, and are themselves earth, and therefore must return to their earth. Even the sons and heirs of heaven must *go the way of all the earth*, they must needs die; but they walk with pleasure in this way, *through the valley of the shadow of death*, Ps. 23:4. Prophets, and even kings, must go this way to brighter light and honour than prophecy or sovereignty. David is going this way, and therefore gives Solomon directions what to do.

1. He charges him, in general, to keep God's commandments and to make conscience of his duty, v. 2-4. He prescribes to him, (1.) A good rule to act by—the divine will: "Govern thyself by that." David's charge to him is to *keep the charge of the Lord his God*. The authority of a dying father is much, but nothing to that of a living God. There are great trusts which we are charged with by the Lord our God—let us keep them carefully, as those that must give account; and excellent statutes, which we must be ruled by—let us also keep them. The written word is our rule. Solomon must himself do *as was written in the law of Moses*. (2.) A good spirit to act with: Be *strong and show thyself a man*, though in years but a child. Those that would keep the charge of the Lord their God must put on resolution. (3.) Good reasons for all this. This would effectually conduce, [1.] To the prosperity of his kingdom. It is the way to *prosper in all thou doest*, and to succeed with honour and satisfaction in every undertaking. [2.] To the perpetuity of it: *That the Lord may continue* and so confirm *his word which he spoke concerning me*. Those that rightly value the treasure of the promise, that sacred *depositum*, cannot but be solicitous to preserve the entail of it, and very desirous that those who come after them may do nothing to cut it off. Let each, in his own age, successively, keep God's charge, and then God will be sure to continue his word. We never let fall the promise till we let fall the precept. God had promised David that the Messiah should come from his loins, and that promise was absolute: but the promise that there should

not fail him *a man on the throne of Israel* was conditional—if his seed behave themselves as they should. If Solomon, in his day, fulfil the condition, he does his part towards the perpetuating of the promise. The condition is that he walk before God in all his institutions, in sincerity, with zeal and resolution; and, in order hereunto, that he *take heed to his way*. In order to our constancy in religion, nothing is more necessary than caution and circumspection.

2. He gives him directions concerning some particular persons, what to do with them, that he might make up his deficiencies in justice to some and kindness to others. (1.) Concerning Joab, v. 5 David was now conscious to himself that he had not done well to spare him, when he had made himself once again obnoxious to the law, but the murder of Abner first and afterwards of Amasa, both of them great men, *captains of the hosts of Israel*. He slew them treacherously (*shed the blood of war in peace*), and injuriously to David: *Thou knowest what he did to me* therein. The murder of a subject is a wrong to the prince, it is a loss to him, and is against the peace of our sovereign lord the king. These murders were particularly against David, reflecting upon his reputation, he being, at that time, in treaty with the victims, and hazarded his interest, which they were very capable of serving. Magistrates are the avengers of the blood of those they have the charge of. It aggravated Joab's crime that he was neither ashamed of the sin nor afraid of the punishment, but daringly wore the girdle and shoes that were stained with innocent blood, in defiance of the justice both of God and the king. David refers him to Solomon's wisdom (v. 6), with an intimation that he left him to his justice. Say not, "He has a hoary head; it is a pity it should be cut off, for it will shortly fall of itself." No, let it not *go down to the grave in peace*. Though he has been long reprieved, he shall be reckoned with at last; time does not wear out the guilt of any sin, particularly that of murder. (2.) Concerning Barzillai's family, to whom he orders him to be kind for Barzillai's sake, who, we may suppose, by this time, was dead, v. 7. When David, upon his death-bed, was remembering the injuries that had been done, he could not forget the kindnesses that had been shown, but leaves it as a charge upon his son to return them. Note, the kindnesses we have received from our friends must not be buried either in their graves or ours, but our children must return them to theirs. Hence, perhaps, Solomon fetched that rule (Prov. 27:10), *Thy own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not*. Paul prays for the house of Onesiphorus, who had often refreshed him. (3.) Concerning Shimei, v. 8, 9. [1.] His crime is remembered: *He cursed me with a grievous curse*; the more grievous because he insulted him when he was in misery and poured vinegar into his wounds. The Jews say that one thing which made this a grievous curse was that, besides all that is mentioned (2 Sa. 16), Shimei upbraided him with his descent from Ruth the Moabitess. [2.] His pardon is not forgotten. David owned he had sworn to him that he would not himself put him to death, because he seasonably submitted, and cried *Peccavi—I have sinned*, and he was not willing, especially at that juncture, to use the sword of public justice for the avenging of wrongs done to himself. But, [3.] His case, as it now stands, is left with Solomon, as one that knew what was fit to be done and would do as he found occasion. David intimates to him that his pardon was not designed to be perpetual, but only a reprieve for David's life: *"Hold him not guiltless*; do not think him any true friend to thee or thy government, nor fit to be trusted. He has no less malice than he had then, though he has more sense to conceal it. He is still a debtor to the public justice for what he did then; and, though I promised him that I would not put him to death, I never promised that my successor should not. His turbulent spirit will soon give thee an occasion, which thou shouldst not fail to take, for the bringing of his *hoary head*

*to the grave with blood.*" This proceeded not from personal revenge, but a prudent zeal for the honour of the government and the covenant God had made with his family, the contempt of which ought not to go unpunished. Even a hoary head, if a guilty and forfeited head, ought not to be any man's protection from justice. *The sinner, being a hundred years old, shall be accursed,* Isa. 65:20.

II. David's death and burial (v. 10): He *was buried in the city of David*, not in the burying place of his father, as Saul was, but in his own city, which he was the founder of. There were set the thrones, and there the tombs, of the house of David. Now *David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption,* Acts 13:36, and see Acts 2:29. His epitaph may be taken from 2 Sa. 23:1. Here lies *David the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel*, adding his own words (Ps. 16:9), *My flesh also shall rest in hope*. Josephus says that, besides the usual magnificence with which his son Solomon buried him, he put into his sepulchre a vast deal of money; and that 1300 years after (so he reckons) it was opened by Hircanus the high priest, in the time of Antiochus, and 3000 talents were taken out for the public service. The years of his reign are here computed (v. 11) to be forty years; the odd six months which he reigned above seven years in Hebron are not reckoned, but the even sum only.

### **Verses 12-25**

Here is, I. Solomon's accession to the throne, v. 12. He came to it much more easily and peaceably than David did, and much sooner saw his government established. It is happy for a kingdom when the end of one good reign is the beginning of another, as it was here.

II. His just and necessary removal of Adonijah his rival, in order to the establishment of his throne. Adonijah had made some bold pretensions to the crown, but was soon obliged to let them fail and throw himself upon Solomon's mercy, who dismissed him upon his good behaviour, and, had he been easy, he might have been safe. But here we have him betraying himself into the hands of Solomon's justice, and falling by it, the righteous God leaving him to himself, that he might be punished for his former treason and that Solomon's throne might be established. Many thus ruin themselves, because they know not when they are well off, or well done to; and sinners, by presuming on God's patience, treasure up wrath to themselves. Now observe,

1. Adonijah's treasonable project, which was to marry Abishag, David's concubine, not because he was in love with her, but because, by her, he hoped to renew his claim to the crown, which might stand him in stead, or because it was then looked upon as a branch of the government to have *the wives of the predecessor*, 2 Sa. 12:8. Absalom thought his pretensions much supported by lying with his father's concubines. Adonijah flatters himself that if he may succeed him in his bed, especially with the best of his wives, he may by that means step up to succeed him in his throne. Restless and turbulent spirits reach high. It was but a small game to play at, as it should seem, yet he hoped to make it an after-game for the kingdom, and now to gain that by a wife which he could not gain by force.

2. The means he used to compass this. he durst not make suit to Abishag immediately (he knew she was at Solomon's disposal, and he would justly resent it if his consent were not first obtained, as even Ishbosheth did, in a like case, 2 Sa. 3:7), nor durst he himself apply immediately to Solomon, knowing that he lay under his displeasure; but he engaged Bathsheba to be his

friend in this matter, who would be forward to believe it a matter of love, and not apt to suspect it a matter of policy. Bathsheba was surprised to see Adonijah in her apartment, and asked him if he did not come with a design to do her a mischief, because she had been instrumental to crush his late attempt. "No," says he, "I come *peaceably* (v. 13), and to beg a favour" (v. 14), that she would use the great interest she had in her son to gain his consent, that he might marry Abishag (v. 16, 17), and, if he may but obtain this, he will thankfully accept it, (1.) As a compensation for his loss of the kingdom. He insinuates (v. 15), "Thou knowest the kingdom was mine, as my father's eldest son, living at the time of his death, *and all Israel set their faces on me.*" This was false; they were but a few that he had on his side; yet thus he would represent himself as an object of compassion, that had been deprived of a crown, and therefore might well be gratified in a wife. If he may not inherit his father's throne, yet let him have something valuable that was his father's, to keep for his sake, and let it be Abishag. (2.) As his reward for his acquiescence in that loss. He owns Solomon's right to the kingdom: "*It was his from the Lord.* I was foolish in offering to contest it; and now that it is turned about to him I am satisfied." Thus he pretends to be well pleased with Solomon's accession to the throne, when he is doing all he can to give him disturbance. *His words were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart.*

3. Bathsheba's address to Solomon on his behalf. She promised to speak to the king for him (v. 18) and did so, v. 19. Solomon received her with all the respect that was due to a mother, though he himself was a king: He *rose up to meet her, bowed himself to her,* and caused her *to sit on his right hand,* according to the law of the fifth commandment. Children, not only when grown up, but when grown great, must give honour to their parents, and behave dutifully and respectfully towards them. *Despise not thy mother when she is old.* As a further instance of the deference he paid to his mother's wisdom and authority, when he understood she had a petition to present to him, he promised not to say her nay, a promise which both he and she understood with this necessary limitation, provided it be just and reasonable and fit to be granted; but, if it were otherwise, he was sure he should convince her that it was so, and that then she would withdraw it. She tells him her errand at last (v. 21): *Let Abishag be given to Adonijah thy brother.* It was strange that she did not suspect the treason, but more strange that she did not abhor the incest, that was in the proposal. But either she did not take Abishag to be David's wife, because the marriage was not consummated, or she thought it might be dispensed with to gratify Adonijah, in consideration of his tame submission to Solomon. This was her weakness and folly: it was well that she was not regent. Note, Those that have the ear of princes and great men, as it is their wisdom not to be too prodigal of their interest, so it is their duty never to use it for the assistance of sin or the furtherance of any wicked design. Let not princes be asked that which they ought not to grant. It ill becomes a good man to prefer a bad request or appear in a bad cause.

4. Solomon's just and judicious rejection of the request. Though his mother herself was the advocate, and called it *a small petition,* and perhaps it was the first she had troubled him with since he was king, yet he denied it, without violation of the general promise he had made, v. 20. If Herod had not had a mind to cut off John Baptist's head, he would not have thought himself obliged to do it by a general promise, like this, made to Herodias. The best friend we have in the world must not have such an interest in us as to bring us to do a wrong thing, either unjust or unwise. (1.) Solomon convinces his mother of the

unreasonableness of the request, and shows her the tendency of it, which, before, she was not aware of. His reply is somewhat sharp: "*Ask for him the kingdom also*, v. 22. To ask that he may succeed the king in his bed is, in effect, to ask that he may succeed him in his throne; for that is it he aims at." Probably he had information, or cause for a strong suspicion, that Adonijah was plotting with Joab and Abiathar to give him disturbance, which warranted him to put this construction upon Adonijah's request. (2.) He convicts and condemns Adonijah for his pretensions, and both with an oath. He convicts him out of his own mouth, v. 23. His own tongue shall fall upon him; and a heavier load a man needs not fall under. Bathsheba may be imposed upon, but Solomon cannot; he plainly sees what Adonijah aims at, and concludes, "He has *spoken this word against his own life*; he is snared in the words of his own lips; now he shows what he would be at." He condemns him to die immediately: *He shall be put to death this day*, v. 24. God had himself declared with an oath that he would establish David's throne (Ps. 89:35), and therefore Solomon pledges the same assurance to secure that establishment, by cutting off the enemies of it. "As God liveth, that establisheth the government, Adonijah shall die, that would unsettle it." Thus the ruin of the enemies of Christ's kingdom is as sure as the stability of his kingdom, and both are as sure as the being and life of God, the founder of it. The warrant is immediately signed for his execution, and no less a man than Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, general of the army, is ordered to be the executioner, v. 25. It is strange that Adonijah may not be heard to speak for himself: but Solomon's wisdom did not see it needful to examine the matter any further; it was plain enough that Adonijah aimed at the crown, and Solomon could not be safe while he lived. Ambitious turbulent spirits commonly prepare for themselves the instruments of death. Many a head has been lost by catching at a crown.

#### **Verses 26-34**

Abiathar and Joab were both aiding and abetting in Adonijah's rebellious attempt, and it is probable were at the bottom of this new motion made of Adonijah for Abishag, and it should seem Solomon knew it, v. 22. This was, in both, an intolerable affront both to God and to the government, and the worse because of their high station and the great influence their examples might have upon many. They therefore come next to be reckoned with. They are both equally guilty of the treason, but, in the judgment passed upon them, a difference is made and with good reason.

I. Abiathar, in consideration of his old services, is only degraded, v. 26, 27. 1. Solomon convicts him, and by his great wisdom finds him guilty: "*Thou art worthy of death*, for joining with Adonijah, when thou knewest on whose head God intended to set the crown." 2. He calls to mind the respect he had formerly shown to David his father, and that he had both ministered to him in holy things (*had borne before him the ark of the Lord*), and also had tenderly sympathized with him in his afflictions and been afflicted in them all, particularly when he was in exile and distress both by Saul's persecution and Absalom's rebellion. Note, Those that show kindness to God's people shall have it remembered to their advantage one time or other. 3. For this reason he spares Abiathar's life, but deposes him from his offices, and confines him to his country seat at Anathoth, forbids him the court, the city, the tabernacle, the altar, and all inter-meddling in public business, with an intimation likewise that he was upon his good behaviour, and that though Solomon did not put him to death at this time he might another time, if he did not conduct himself well. But, for the present, he was only thrust out from being priest, as rendered unworthy that high station

by the opposition he had given to that which he knew to be the will of God. Saul, for a supposed crime, had barbarously slain Abiathar's father, and eighty-five priests, their families, and city. Solomon spares Abiathar himself, though guilty of a real crime. Thus was Saul's government ruined and Solomon's established. As men are to God's ministers, they will find him to them. 4. The depriving of Abiathar was the fulfilling of the threatening against the house of Eli (1 Sa. 2:30), for he was the last high priest of that family. It was now above eighty years since the ruin was threatened; but God's judgments, though not executed speedily, will be executed surely.

II. Joab, in consideration of his old sins, is put to death.

1. His guilty conscience sent him to the horns of the altar. He heard that Adonijah was executed and Abiathar deposed, and therefore, fearing his turn would be next, he fled for refuge to the altar. Many that, in the day of their security, care not for the service of the altar, will be glad of the protection of it in the day of their distress. Some think Joab designed thereby to devote himself for the future to a constant attendance upon the altar, hoping thereby to obtain his pardon, as some that have lived a dissolute life all their days have thought to atone for their crimes by retiring into a monastery when they are old, leaving the world when it has left them and no thanks to them.

2. Solomon ordered him to be put to death there for the murder of Abner and Amasa; for these were the crimes upon which he thought fit to ground the sentence, rather than upon his treasonable adherence to Adonijah. Joab was indeed worthy of death for turning after Adonijah, in contempt of Solomon and his designation to the throne, *though he had not turned after Absalom*, v. 28. Former fidelity will not serve to excuse any after treachery; yet, besides that, Joab had merited well of the house of David, to which and to his country he had done a great deal of good service in his day, in consideration of which, it is probable, Solomon would have pardoned him his offence against him (for clemency gives great reputation and establishment to an infant government), and would have only displaced him as he did Abiathar; but he must die for the murders he had formerly been guilty of, which his father had charged Solomon to call him to an account for. The debt he owed to the innocent blood that was shed, by answering its cries with the blood of him that shed, he could not pay himself, but left it to his son to pay it, who, having power wherewithal, failed not to do it. On this he grounds the sentence, aggravating the crime (v. 32), that *he fell upon two men more righteous and better than he*, that had done him no wrong nor meant him any, and, had they lived, might probably have done David better service (if the blood shed be not only innocent, but excellent, the life more valuable than common lives, the crime is the more heinous), that David knew not of it, and yet the case was such that he would be suspected as privy to it; so that Joab endangered his prince's reputation in taking away the life of his rivals, which was a further aggravation. For these crimes, (1.) He must die, and die by the sword of public justice. *By man must his blood be shed*, and it lies upon his own head (v. 32), as theirs does whom he had murdered, v. 33. Woe to the head that lies under the guilt of blood! Vengeance for murder was long in coming upon Joab; but, when it did come, it remained the longer, being here entailed *upon the head of his seed for ever* (v. 33), who, instead of deriving honour, as otherwise they might have done, from his heroic actions, derived guilt, and shame, and a curse, from his villainous actions, on account of which they fared the worse in this world. The seed of such evil doers shall never be renowned. (2.) He must die at the altar, rather than escape. Joab resolved not

to stir from the altar (v. 30), hoping thereby either to secure himself or else to render Solomon odious to the people, as a profaner of the holy place, if he should put him to death there. Benaiah made a scruple of either killing him there or dragging him thence; but Solomon knew the law, that the altar of God should give no protection to wilful murderers. Ex. 21:14, *Thou shalt take him from my altar that he may die*, may die a sacrifice. In case of such sins as the blood of beasts would atone for the altar was a refuge, but not in Joab's case. He therefore orders him to be executed there, if he could not be got thence, to show that he feared not the censure of the people in doing his duty, but would rectify their mistake, and let them know that the administration of justice is better than sacrifice, and that the holiness of any place should never countenance the wickedness of any person. Those who, by a lively faith, take hold on Christ and his righteousness, with a resolution, if they perish, to perish there, shall find in him a more powerful protection than Joab found at the horns of the altar. Benaiah slew him (v. 34), with the solemnity, no doubt, of a public execution. The law being thus satisfied, he was *buried in his own house in the wilderness*, privately, like a criminal, not pompously, like a soldier; yet no indignity was done to his dead body. It is not for man to lay the iniquity upon the bones, whatever God does.

3. Solomon pleased himself with this act of justice, not as it gratified any personal revenge, but as it was the fulfilling of his father's orders and a real kindness to himself and his own government. (1.) Guilt was hereby removed, v. 31. By returning the innocent blood that had been shed upon the head of him that shed it, it was taken away from him and from the house of his father, which implies that the blood which is not required from the murderer will be required from the magistrate, at least there is danger lest it should. Those that would have their houses safe and built up must put away iniquity far from them. (2.) Peace was hereby secured (v. 33) upon David. He does not mean his person, but, as he explains himself in the next words, Upon *his seed, his house, and his throne*, shall there be *peace for ever from the Lord*; thus he expresses his desire that it may be so and his hope that it shall be so. "Now that justice is done, and the cry of blood is satisfied, the government will prosper." Thus *righteousness and peace kiss each other*. Now that such a turbulent man as Joab is removed there shall be peace. *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness*, Prov. 25:5. Solomon, in this blessing of peace upon his house and throne, piously looks upward to God as the author of it. "It shall be peace from the Lord, and peace for ever from the Lord." The Lord of peace himself give us that peace which is everlasting.

### **Verses 35-46**

Here is, I. The preferment of Benaiah and Zadok, two faithful friends to Solomon and his government, v. 35. Joab being put to death, Benaiah was advanced to be general of the forces in his room, and, Abiathar being deposed, Zadok was made high priest in his room, and therein was fulfilled the word of God, when he threatened to cut off the house of Eli (1 Sa. 2:35), *I will raise me up a faithful priest, and will build him a sure house*. Though sacred offices may be disgraced, they shall not be destroyed, by the mal-administration of those that are entrusted with them, nor shall God's work ever stand still for want of hands to carry it on. No wonder that he who was a king so immediately of God's making was empowered to make whom he thought fit high priest; and he exercised this power with equity, for the ancient right was in Zadok, he being of the family of Eleazar, whereas Eli and his house were of Ithamar.

II. The course that was taken with Shimei. He is sent for, by a messenger, from his house at Bahurim, expecting perhaps no better than Adonijah's doom, being conscious of his enmity to the house of David; but Solomon knows how to make a difference of crimes and criminals. David had promised Shimei his life for his time. Solomon is not bound by that promise, yet he will not go directly contrary to it. 1. He confines him to Jerusalem, and forbids him, upon any pretence whatsoever, to go out of the city any further than the brook Kidron, v. 36, 37. He would suffer him to continue at his country seat lest he should make mischief among his neighbours, but took him to Jerusalem, where he kept him prisoner at large. This might make Shimei's confinement easy to himself, for Jerusalem was beautiful for situation, *the joy of the whole earth*, the royal city, the holy city (he had no reason to complain of being shut up in such a paradise); it would also make it the more safe for Solomon, for there he would have him under his eye and be able to watch his motions; and he plainly tells him that if he ever go out of the rules he shall certainly die for it. This was a fair trial of his obedience, and such a test of his loyalty as he had no reason to complain of. He has his life upon easy terms: he shall live if he will but be content to live at Jerusalem. 2. Shimei submits to the confinement, and thankfully takes his life upon those terms. He enters into recognizance (v. 38), under the penalty of death, not to stir out of Jerusalem, and owns that the saying is good. Even those that perish cannot but own the conditions of pardon and life unexceptionable, so that their blood, like Shimei's, must rest upon their own heads. Shimei promised, with an oath, to keep within his bounds, v. 42. 3. Shimei forfeits his recognizance, which was the thing Solomon expected; and God was righteous in suffering him to do it, that he might now suffer for his old sins. Two of his servants (it seems, though he was a prisoner, he lived like himself, well attended) ran from him to the land of the Philistines, v. 39. Thither he pursued them, and thence brought them back to Jerusalem, v. 40. For the keeping of it private he *saddled his ass* himself, probably went in the night, and came home he thought undiscovered. "Seeking his servants," says bishop Hall, "he lost himself; those earthly things either are, or should be, our servants. How commonly do we see men run out of the bounds set by God's law, to hunt after them, till their souls incur a fearful judgment!" 4. Solomon takes the forfeiture. Information is given him that Shimei has transgressed, v. 41. The king sends for him, and, (1.) charges him with the present crime (v. 42, 43), that he had put a great contempt upon the authority and wrath both of God and the king, that he had broken *the oath of the Lord* and disobeyed the commandment of his prince, and by this it appeared what manner of spirit he was of, that he would not be held by the bonds of gratitude or conscience. Had he represented to Solomon the urgency of the occasion, and begged leave to go, perhaps Solomon might have given him leave; but to presume either upon his ignorance or his connivance was to affront him in the highest degree. (2.) He condemns him for his former crime, cursing David, and throwing stones at him in the day of his affliction: *The wickedness which thy heart is privy to*, v. 44. There was no need to examine witnesses for the proof of the fact, his own conscience was instead of a thousand witnesses. That wickedness which men's *own hearts* alone *are privy to* is enough, if duly considered, to fill them with confusion, in expectation of its return upon *their own heads*; for if the heart be privy to it, God is greater than the heart and knoweth all things. Others knew of Shimei's cursing David, but Shimei himself knew of the wicked principles of hatred and malice against David which he displayed in cursing him and that his submission was but feigned and forced. (3.) He blessed himself and his government (v. 45.): *King Solomon shall be blessed*, notwithstanding Shimei's impotent

curses, which perhaps, in fury and despair, he now vented freely: *Let them curse, but bless thou. And the throne of David shall be established*, by taking away those that would undermine it. It is a comfort, in reference to the enmity of the church's enemies, that, how much soever they rage, it is a vain thing they imagine. Christ's throne is established, and they cannot shake it. (4.) He gives orders for the execution of Shimei immediately, v. 46. All judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus, and, though he be King of peace, he will be found a King of righteousness; and this will shortly be his word of command concerning all his enemies, that would not have him to reign over them: *Bring them forth, and slay them before me*; the reproaches of those that blasphemed him will fall on themselves, to their eternal condemnation.

### Chapter 3

Solomon's reign looked bloody in the foregoing chapter, but the necessary acts of justice must not be called cruelty; in this chapter it appears with another face. We must not think the worse of God's mercy to his subjects for his judgments on rebels. We have here, I. Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (v. 1). II. A general view of his religion (v. 2-4). III. A particular account of his prayer to God for wisdom, and the answer to that prayer (v. 5-15). IV. A particular instance of his wisdom in deciding the controversy between the two harlots (v. 16-28). And very great he looks here, both at the altar and on the bench, and therefore on the bench because at the altar.

#### Verses 1-4

We are here told concerning Solomon,

I. Something that was unquestionably good, for which he is to be praised and in which he is to be imitated. 1. He *loved the Lord*, v. 3. Particular notice was taken of God's love to him, 2 Sa. 12:24. He had his name from it: *Jedidiah—beloved of the Lord*. And here we find he returned that love, as John, the beloved disciple, was most full of love. Solomon was a wise man, a rich man; yet the brightest encomium of him is that which is the character of all the saints, even the poorest, He *loved the Lord*, so the Chaldee; all that love God love his worship, love to hear from him and speak to him, and so to have communion with him. 2. He *walked in the statutes of David his father*, that is, in the statutes that David gave him, ch. 2:2, 3; 1 Chr. 28:9, 10 (his dying father's charge was sacred, and as a law to him), or in God's statutes, which David his father walked in before him; he kept close to God's ordinances, carefully observed them and diligently attended them. Those that truly *love God* will make conscience of *walking in his statutes*. 3. He was very free and generous in what he did for the honour of God. When he offered sacrifice he offered like a king, in some proportion to his great wealth, a *thousand burnt-offerings*, v. 4. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly; and those that truly love God and his worship will not grudge the expenses of their religion. We may be tempted to say, *To what purpose is this waste?* Might not these cattle have been given to the poor? But we must never think that wasted which is laid out in the service of God. It seems strange how so many beasts should be burnt upon one altar in one feast, though it continued seven days; but the fire on the altar is supposed to be more quick and devouring than common fire, for it represented that fierce and mighty wrath of God which fell upon the sacrifices, that the offerers might escape. *Our God is a consuming fire*. Bishop Patrick quotes it as a tradition of the Jews that the smoke of the sacrifices ascended directly in a straight pillar, and was not scattered, otherwise it would have choked those that attended, when so many sacrifices were offered as were here.

II. Here is something concerning which it may be doubted whether it was good or no. 1. His marrying Pharaoh's daughter, v. 1. We will suppose she was proselyted, otherwise the marriage would not have been lawful; yet, if so, surely it was not advisable. He that *loved the Lord* should, for his sake, have fixed his love upon one of the Lord's people. Unequal matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men have often been of pernicious consequence; yet some think that he did this with the advice of his friends, that she was a sincere convert (for the gods of the Egyptians are not reckoned among the strange gods which his

strange wives drew him in to the worship of, ch. 11:5, 6), and that the book of Canticles and the 45th Psalm were penned on this occasion, by which these nuptials were made typical of the mystical espousals of the church to Christ, especially the Gentile church. 2. His worshipping in the high places, and thereby tempting the people to do so too, v. 2, 3. Abraham built his altars on mountains (Gen. 12:8; 22:2), and worshipped in a grove, Gen. 21:33. Thence the custom was derived, and was proper, till the divine law confined them to one place, Deu. 12:5, 6. David kept to the ark, and did not care for the high places, but Solomon, though in other things he *walked in the statutes of his father*, in this came short of him. He showed thereby a great zeal for sacrificing, but to obey would have been better. This was an irregularity. Though there was as yet no house built, there was a tent pitched, to the name of the Lord, and the ark ought to have been the centre of their unity. It was so by divine institution; from it the high places separated; yet while they worshipped God only, and in other things according to the rule, he graciously overlooked their weakness, and accepted their services; and it is owned that *Solomon loved the Lord*, though he *burnt incense in the high places*, and let not men be more severe than God is.

### **Verses 5-15**

We have here an account of a gracious visit which God paid to Solomon, and the communion he had with God in it, which put a greater honour upon Solomon than all the wealth and power of his kingdom did.

I. The circumstances of this visit, v. 5. 1. The place. It was in Gibeon; that was the great high place, and should have been the only one, because there the tabernacle and the brazen altar were, 2 Chr. 1:3. There Solomon offered his great sacrifices, and there God owned him more than in any other of the high places. The nearer we come to the rule in our worship the more reason we have to expect the tokens of God's presence. Where God records his name, there he will meet us and bless us. 2. The time. It was by night, the night after he had offered that generous sacrifice, v. 4. The more we abound in God's work the more comfort we may expect in him; if the day has been busy for him, the night will be easy in him. Silence and retirement befriend our communion with God. His kindest visits are often in the night, Ps. 17:3. 3. The manner. It was in a dream, when he was asleep, his senses locked up, that God's access to his mind might be the more free and immediate. In this way God used to speak to the prophets (Num. 12:6) and to private persons, for their own benefit, Job 33:15, 16. These divine dreams, no doubt, were plainly distinguishable from those in which there are divers vanities, Eccl. 5:7.

II. The gracious offer God made him of the favour he should choose, whatever it might be, v. 5. He saw the glory of God shine about him, and heard a voice saying, *Ask what I shall give thee*. Not that God was indebted to him for his sacrifices, but thus he would testify his acceptance of them, and signify to him what great mercy he had in store for him, if he were not wanting to himself. Thus he would try his inclinations and put an honour upon the prayer of faith. God, in like manner, condescends to us, and puts us in the ready way to be happy by assuring us that we shall have what we will for the asking, Jn. 16:23; 1 Jn. 5:14. What would we more? *Ask, and it shall be given you*.

III. The pious request Solomon hereupon made to God. He readily laid hold of this offer. Why do we neglect the like offer made to us, like Ahaz, who said, *I will not ask?* Isa. 7:12. Solomon prayed in his sleep, God's grace assisting him; yet it was a lively prayer. What we are most in care about, and which makes the greatest impression upon us when we are awake,

commonly affects us when we are asleep; and by our dreams, sometimes, we may know what our hearts are upon and how our pulse beats. Plutarch makes virtuous dreams one evidence of increase in virtue. Yet this must be attributed to a higher source. Solomon's making such an intelligent choice as this when he was asleep, and the powers of reason were least active, showed that it came purely from the grace of God, which wrought in him these gracious desires. If his *reins* thus *instruct him in the night season*, he must *bless the Lord* who *gave him counsel*, Ps. 16:7. Now, in this prayer,

1. He acknowledges God's great goodness to his father David, v. 6. He speaks honourably of his father's piety, that he had *walked before God in uprightness of heart*, drawing a veil over his faults. It is to be hoped that those who praise their godly parents will imitate them. But he speaks more honourably of God's goodness to his father, the mercy he had shown to him while he lived, in giving him to be sincerely religious and then recompensing his sincerity and the great kindness he had kept for him, to be bestowed on the family when he was gone, in *giving him a son to sit on his throne*. Children should give God thanks for his mercies to their parents, for the sure mercies of David. God's favours are doubly sweet when we observe them transmitted to us through the hands of those that have gone before us. The way to get the entail perpetuated is to bless God that it has hitherto been preserved.

2. He owns his own insufficiency for the discharge of that great trust to which he is called, v. 7, 8. And here is a double plea to enforce his petition for wisdom:—(1.) That his place required it, as he was successor to David ("*Thou hast made me king instead of David*, who was a very wise and good man: Lord, give me wisdom, that I may keep up what he wrought, and carry on what he began") and as he was ruler over Israel: "Lord, give me wisdom to rule well; for they are a numerous people, that will not be managed without much care, and they are thy people, whom thou hast chosen, and therefore to be ruled for thee, and the more wisely they are ruled the more glory thou wilt have from them." (2.) That he wanted it. As one that had a humble sense of his own deficiency, he pleads, "*Lord, I am but a little child* (so he calls himself, a child in understanding, though his father called him *a wise man*, ch. 2:9); *I know not how to go out or come in* as I should, nor to do so much as the common daily business of the government, much less what to do in a critical juncture." Note, Those who are employed in public stations ought to be very sensible of the weight and importance of their work and their own insufficiency for it, and then they are qualified for receiving divine instruction. Paul's question (*Who is sufficient for these things?*) is much like Solomon's here, *Who is able to judge this thy so great a people?* v. 9. Absalom, who was a wise man, trembles at the undertaking and suspects his own fitness for it. The more knowing and considerate men are the better acquainted they are with their own weakness and the more jealous of themselves.

3. He begs of God to give him wisdom (v. 9); *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart*. He calls himself *God's servant*, pleased with that relation to God (Ps. 116:16) and pleading it with him: "I am devoted to thee, and employed for thee; give me that which is requisite to the services in which I am employed." Thus his good father prayed, and thus he pleaded. Ps. 119:125, *I am thy servant, give me understanding*. An understanding heart is God's gift, Prov. 2:6. We must pray for it (James 1:5), and pray for it with application to our particular calling and the various occasions we have for it; as Solomon, *Give me an understanding*, not to please my own curiosity with, or puzzle my neighbours, but *to judge thy people*. That is the best

knowledge which will be serviceable to us in doing our duty; and such that knowledge is which enables us to *discern between good and bad*, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be imposed upon by false colours in judging either of others' actions or of our own.

4. The favourable answer God gave to his request. It was a pleasing prayer (v. 10): *The speech pleased the Lord*. God is well pleased with his own work in his people, the desires of his own kindling, the prayers of his Spirit's inditing. By this choice Solomon made it appear that he desired to be good more than great, and to serve God's honour more than to advance his own. Those are accepted of God who prefer spiritual blessings to temporal, and are more solicitous to be found in the way of their duty than in the way to preferment. But that was not all; it was a prevailing prayer, and prevailed for more than he asked. (1.) God gave him wisdom, v. 12. He fitted him for all that great work to which he had called him, gave him such a right understanding of the law which he was to judge by, and the cases he was to judge of, that he was unequalled for a clear head, a solid judgment, and a piercing eye. Such an insight, and such a foresight, never was prince so blessed with. (2.) He gave him riches and honour over and above into the bargain (v. 13), and it was promised that in these he should as much exceed his predecessors, his successors, and all his neighbours, as in wisdom. These also are God's gift, and, as far as is good for them, are promised to all that *seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof*, Mt. 6:33. Let young people learn to prefer grace to gold in all that they choose, because *godliness has the promise of the life that now is*, but *the life that now is* has not *the promise of godliness*. How completely blessed was Solomon, that had both wisdom and wealth! He that has wealth and power without wisdom and grace is in danger of doing hurt with them; he that has wisdom and grace without wealth and power is not capable of doing so much good with them as he that has both. Wisdom is good, is so much the better, with an inheritance, Eccles. 7:11. But, if we make sure of wisdom and grace, these will either bring outward prosperity with them or sweeten the want of it. God promised Solomon riches and honour absolutely, but long life upon condition (v. 14). *If thou wilt walk in my ways, as David did, then I will lengthen thy days*. He failed in the condition; and therefore, though he had riches and honour, he did not live so long to enjoy them as in the course of nature he might have done. Length of days is wisdom's right-hand blessing, typical of eternal life; but it is in her left hand that riches and honour are, Prov. 3:16. Let us see here, [1.] That the way to obtain spiritual blessings is to be importunate for them, to wrestle with God in prayer for them, as Solomon did for wisdom, asking that only, as the *one thing needful*. [2.] That the way to obtain temporal blessings is to be indifferent to them and to refer ourselves to God concerning them. Solomon had wisdom given him because he did ask it and wealth because he did not ask it.

5. The grateful return Solomon made for the visit God was pleased to pay him, v. 15. He awoke, we may suppose in a transport of joy, awoke, and *his sleep was sweet to him*, as the prophet speaks (Jer. 31:26); being satisfied of God's favour, he was satisfied with it, and he began to think *what he should render to the Lord*. He had made his prayer at the high place at Gibeon, and there God had graciously met him; but he comes to Jerusalem to give thanks *before the ark of the covenant*, blaming himself, as it were, that he had not prayed there, the ark being the token of God's presence, and wondering that God had met him any where else. God's passing by our mistakes should persuade us to amend them. There he, (1.) Offered a great sacrifice

to God. We must give God praise for his gifts in the promise, though not yet fully performed. David used to *praise God's word*, as well as his *works* (Ps. 56:10, and particularly, 2 Sa. 7:18), and Solomon trod in his steps. (2.) He made a great feast upon the sacrifice, that those about him might rejoice with him in the grace of God.

### **Verses 16-28**

An instance is here given of Solomon's wisdom, to show that the grant lately made him had a real effect upon him. The proof is fetched, not from the mysteries of state and the policies of the council-board, though there no doubt he excelled, but from the trial and determination of a cause between party and party, which princes, though they devolve them upon their judges, must not think it below them to take cognizance of. Observe,

I. The case opened, not by lawyers, but by the parties themselves, though they were women, which made it the easier to such a piercing eye as Solomon had to discern between right and wrong by their own showing. These two women were harlots, kept a public house, and their children, some think, were born of fornication, because here is no mention of their husbands. It is probable the cause had been heard in the inferior courts, before it was brought before Solomon, and had been found special, the judges being unable to determine it, that Solomon's wisdom in deciding it at last might be the more taken notice of. These two women, who lived in a house together, were each of them delivered of a son within three days of one another, v. 17, 18. They were so poor that they had no servant or nurse to be with them, so slighted, because harlots, that they had no friend or relation to accompany them. One of them overlaid her child, and, in the night, exchanged it with the other (v. 19, 20), who was soon aware of the cheat put upon her, and appealed to public justice to be righted, v. 21. See, 1. What anxiety is caused by little children, how uncertain their lives are, and to how many dangers they are continually exposed. The age of infancy is the valley of the shadow of death; and the lamp of life, when first lighted, is easily blown out. It is a wonder of mercy that so few perish in the perils of nursing. 2. How much better it was in those times with children born in fornication than commonly it is now. harlots then loved their children, nursed them, and were loth to part with them; whereas now they are often sent to a distance, abandoned, or killed. But thus it was foretold that *in the last days perilous times should come*, when people should be without natural affection, 2 Tim. 3:1, 3.

II. The difficulty of the case. The question was, Who was the mother of this living child, which was brought into court, to be finally adjudged either to the one or to the other? Both mothers were vehement in their claim, and showed a deep concern about it. Both were peremptory in their asseverations: "It is mine," says one. "Nay, it is mine," says the other. Neither will own the dead child, though it would be cheaper to bury that than to maintain the other: but it is the living one they strive for. The living child is therefore the parent's joy because it is their hope; and may not the dead children be so? See Jer. 31:17. Now the difficulty of the case was that there was no evidence on either side. The neighbours, though it is probable that some of them were present at the birth and circumcision of the children, yet had not taken so much notice of them as to be able to distinguish them. To put the parties to the rack would have been barbarous; not she who had justice on her side, but she who was most hardy, would have had the judgment in her favour. Little stress is to be laid on extorted evidence. Judges and juries have need of wisdom to find out truth when it thus lies hid.

III. The determination of it. Solomon, having patiently heard what both sides had to say, sums up the evidence, v. 23. And now the whole court is in expectation what course Solomon's wisdom will take to find out the truth. One knows not what to say to it; another, perhaps, would determine it by lot. Solomon calls for a sword, and gives orders to divide the living child between the two contenders. Now, 1. This seemed a ridiculous decision of the case, and a brutal cutting of the knot which he could not untie. "Is this," think the sages of the law, "the wisdom of Solomon?" little dreaming what he aimed at in it. *The hearts of kings, such kings, are unsearchable*, Prov. 25:3. There was a law concerning the dividing of a living ox and a dead one. (Ex. 21:35), but that did not reach this case. But, 2. It proved an effectual discovery of the truth. Some think that Solomon did himself discern it, before he made this experiment, by the countenances of the women and their way of speaking: but by this he gave satisfaction to all the company, and silenced the pretender. To find out the true mother, he could not try which the child loved best, and must therefore try which loved the child best; both pretended to a motherly affection, but their sincerity will be tried when the child is in danger. (1.) She that knew the child was not her own, but in contending for it stood upon a point of honour, was well content to have it divided. She that had overlaid her own child cared not what became of this, so that the true mother might not have it: *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it*. By this it appeared that she knew her own title to be bad, and feared Solomon would find it so, though she little suspected she was betraying herself, but thought Solomon in good earnest. If she had been the true mother she would not have forfeited her interest in the child by agreeing so readily to this bloody decision. But, (2.) She that knew the child was her own, rather than the child should be butchered, gives it up to her adversary. How feelingly does she cry out, *O, my lord! give her the living child*, v. 26. "Let me see it hers, rather than not see it at all." By this tenderness towards the child it appeared that she was not the careless mother that had overlaid the dead child, but was the true mother of the living one, that could not endure to see its death, having compassion on the son of her womb. "The case is plain," says Solomon; "what need of witnesses? *Give her the living child*; for you all see, by this undissembled compassion, *she is the mother of it*." Let parents show their love to their children by taking care of them, especially by taking care of their souls, and, with a holy violence, snatching them as brands out of the burning. Those are most likely to have the comfort of children that do their duty to them. Satan pretends to the heart of man, but by this it appears that he is only a pretender, that he would be content to divide with God, whereas the rightful sovereign of the heart will have all or none.

IV. We are told what a great reputation Solomon got among his people by this and other instances of his wisdom, which would have a great influence upon the ease of his government: *They feared the king* (v. 28), highly revered him, durst not in any thing oppose him, and were afraid of doing an unjust thing; for they knew, if ever it came before him, he would certainly discover it, *for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him*, that is, that wisdom with which God had promised to endue him. *This made his face to shine*, Eccl. 8:1. *This strengthened him*, Eccl. 7:19. This was better to him *than weapons of war*, Eccl. 9:18. For this he was both feared and loved.

## Chapter 4

An instance of the wisdom God granted to Solomon we had in the close of the foregoing chapter. In this we have an account of his wealth and prosperity, the other branch of the promise there made him. We have here, I. The magnificence of his court, his ministers of state (v. 1-6), and the purveyors of his household (v. 7-19), and their office (v. 27, 28). II. The provisions for his table (v. 22, 23). III. The extent of his dominion (v. 21-24). IV. The numbers, case, and peace, of his subjects (v. 20-25). V. His stables (v. 26). VI. His great reputation for wisdom and learning (v. 29-34). Thus great was Solomon, but our Lord Jesus was greater than he (Mt. 12:42), though he took upon him the form of a servant; for divinity, in its lowest humiliation, infinitely transcends royalty in its highest elevation.

### Verses 1-19

Here we have,

I. Solomon upon his throne (v. 1): *So king Solomon was king*, that is, he was confirmed and established king *over all Israel*, and not, as his successors, only over two tribes. He was a king, that is, he did the work and duty of a king, with the wisdom God had given him. Those preserve the name and honour of their place that mind the business of it and make conscience of it.

II. The great officers of his court, in the choice of whom, no doubt, his wisdom much appeared. It is observable, 1. That several of them are the same that were in his father's time. Zadok and Abiathar were then priests (2 Sa. 20:25), so they were now; only then Abiathar had the precedency, now Zadok. Jehoshaphat was then recorder, or keeper of the great seal, so he was now. Benaiah, in his father's time, was a principal man in military affairs, and so he was now. Shisha was his father's scribe, and his sons were his, v. 3. Solomon, though a wise man, would not affect to be wiser than his father in this matter. When sons come to inherit their father's wealth, honour, and power, it is a piece of respect to their memory, *caeteris paribus—where it can properly be done*, to employ those whom they employed, and trust those whom they trusted. Many pride themselves in being the reverse of their good parents. 2. The rest were priests' sons. His prime-minister of state was *Azariah the son of Zadok the priest*. Two others of the first rank were the sons of Nathan the prophet, v. 5. In preferring them he testified the grateful respect he had for their good father, whom he loved *in the name of a prophet*.

III. The purveyors for his household, whose business it was to send in provisions from several parts of the country, for the king's tables and cellars (v. 7) and for his stables (v. 27, 28), that thus, 1. His house might always be well furnished at the best hand. Let great men learn hence good house-keeping, to be generous in spending according to their ability, but prudent in providing. It is the character of the virtuous woman that she *bringeth her food from afar* (Prov. 31:14), not far-fetched and dear-bought, but the contrary, every thing bought where it is cheapest. 2. That thus he himself, and those who immediately attended him, might be eased of a great deal of care, and the more closely apply themselves to the business of the state, not troubled about much serving, provision for that being got ready to their hand. 3. That thus all the parts of the kingdom might be equally benefited by the taking off of the commodities that were the productions of their country and the circulating of the coin. Industry would hereby be encouraged, and consequently wealth increased, even in those tribes that lay most remote from

the court. The providence of God extends itself to all *places of his dominions* (Ps. 103:22); so should the prudence and care of princes. 4. The dividing of this trust into so many hands was prudent, that no man might be continually burdened with the care of it nor grow exorbitantly rich with the profit of it, but that Solomon might have those, in every district, who, having a dependence upon the court, would be serviceable to him and his interest as there was occasion. These commissioners of the victualling-office, not for the army or navy (Solomon was engaged in no war), but for the household, are here named, several of them only by their surnames, as great men commonly call their servants: *Ben-hur, Ben-dekar, etc.*, though several of them have also their proper names prefixed. Two of them married Solomon's daughters, Ben-Abinadab (v. 11) and Ahimaaz (v. 15), and no disparagement to them to marry men of business. Better match with the officers of their father's court that were Israelites than with the sons of princes that were *strangers to the covenant of promise*. The son of Geber was in Ramoth-Gilead (v. 19), and Geber himself was in the country of Sihon and Og, which included that and Mahanaim, v. 14. He is therefore said to be *the only officer in that land*, because the other two, mentioned v. 13, 14, depended on him, and were subordinate to him.

### **Verses 20-28**

Such a kingdom, and such a court, surely never any prince had, as Solomon's are here described to be.

I. Such a kingdom. Never did the crown of Israel shine so brightly as it did when Solomon wore it, never in his father's days, never in the days of any of his successors; nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah as it was then. The account here given of it is such as fully answers the prophecies which we have concerning it in Ps. 72, which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ. 1. The territories of his kingdom were large and its tributaries many; so it was foretold that he should *have dominion from sea to sea*, Ps. 72:8–11. Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, who were his subjects by choice, but over all the neighbouring kingdoms, who were his subjects by constraint. All the princes from the river Euphrates, north-east to the border of Egypt south-west, not only added to his honour by doing him homage and holding their crowns from him, but added to his wealth by serving him, and bringing him presents, v. 21. David, by his successful wars, compelled them to this subjection, and Solomon, by his admirable wisdom, made it easy and reasonable; for it is fit that the fool should be *servant to the wise in heart*. If they gave him presents, he gave them instructions, and still *taught the people knowledge*, not only his own people, but those of other nations: and *wisdom is better than gold*. He had *peace on all sides*, v. 24. None of all the nations that were subject to him offered to shake off his yoke, or to give him any disturbance, but rather thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised that he shall have the *heathen for his inheritance* and that *princes shall worship him*, Isa. 49:6, 7; 53:12. 2. The subjects of his kingdom and its inhabitants, were many and cheerful. (1.) They were numerous and country was exceedingly populous (v. 20): *Judah and Israel were many*, and that good land was sufficient to maintain them all. *They were as the sand of the sea in multitude*. Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham concerning the increase of his seed (Gen. 22:17), as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, Gen. 15:18. This was their strength and beauty, the honour of their prince, the terror of their enemies, and an advancement of the wealth of the nation. If they grew so numerous that the place was any where too strait for them, they might remove with advantage into the countries that were subject to them. God's spiritual Israel are many,

at least they will be so when they come all together, Rev. 7:9. (2.) They were easy, they dwelt safely, or with confidence and assurance (v. 25), not jealous of their king or of his officers, not disaffected either to him or one to another, nor under any apprehension or danger from enemies foreign or domestic. They were happy and knew it, safe and willing to think themselves so. They dwelt every man under *his vine and fig-tree*. Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vineyards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king (1 Sa. 8:14), but what they had they could call their own: he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of his property. Those that had vines and fig-trees ate the fruit of them themselves; and so great was the peace of the country that they might, if they pleased, dwell as safely under the shadow of them as within the walls of a city. Or, because it was usual to have *vines by the sides of their houses* (Ps. 128:3), they are said to *dwell under their vines*. (3.) They were cheerful in the use of their plenty, *eating and drinking, and making merry*, v. 20. Solomon did not only keep a good table himself, but enabled all his subjects, according to their rank, to do so too, and taught them that God gave them their abundance that they might use it soberly and pleasantly, not that they might hoard it up. *There is nothing better* than for a man to *eat the labour of his hands* (Eccl. 2:24), and that *with a merry heart*, Eccl. 9:7. His father, in the Psalms, had led his people into the comforts of communion with God, and now he led them into the comfortable use of the good things of this life. This pleasant posture of Israel's affairs extended, in place, from Dan to Beer-sheba—no part of the country was exposed nor upon any account uneasy; and it continued a long time, *all the days of Solomon*, without any material interruption. Go where you would, you might see all the marks of plenty, peace, and satisfaction. The spiritual peace, and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus were typified by this. *The kingdom of God is not*, as Solomon's was, *meat and drink*, but, what is infinitely better, *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*.

II. Such a court Solomon kept as can scarcely be paralleled. We may guess at the vast number of his attendants, and the great resort there was to him, by the provision that was made daily for his table. Of bread there were so many measures of flour and meal as, it is computed, would richly serve 3000 men (Carellus computes above 4800 men), and the provision of flesh (v. 23) was rather more in proportion. What vast quantities were here of beef, mutton, and venison, and the choicest of all *fatted things*, as some read that which we translate *fatted fowl!* Ahasuerus, once in his reign, made a *great feast*, to *show the riches of his kingdom*, Esth. 1:3, 4. But it was much more the honour of Solomon that he kept a constant table and a very noble one, not of dainties or deceitful meats (he himself witnessed against them, Prov. 23:3), but substantial food, for the entertainment of those who came to hear his wisdom. Thus Christ fed those whom he taught, 5000 at a time, more than ever Solomon's table would entertain at once: and all believers have in him a continual feast. Herein he far outdoes Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the bread that perishes, but *with that which endures to eternal life*. It added much both to the strength and glory of Solomon's kingdom that he had such abundance of horses, 40,000 for chariots and 12,000 for his troops, 1000 horse, perhaps, in every tribe, for the preserving of the public peace, v. 26. God had commanded that their king should not multiply horses (Deu. 17:16), nor, according to the account here given, considering the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, did he multiply horses in proportion to his neighbours; for we find even the Philistines bringing into the field 30,000 chariots (1 Sa. 13:5) and the Syrians at least 40,000 horse, 2 Sa. 10:18. The same officers that provided for his house provided also for his

stable, v. 27, 28. Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without confusion. Solomon, that had vast incomes, lived at a vast expense, and perhaps wrote that with application to himself, Eccl. 5:11. *When goods increase those are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes, unless withal they have the satisfaction of doing good with them?*

### **Verses 29-34**

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth, and here we have a general account of it.

I. The fountain of his wisdom: *God gave it him*, v. 29. He owns it himself. Prov. 2:6, *The Lord giveth wisdom*. He gives the powers of reason (Job 38:36), preserves and improves them. The ordinary advances of them are owing to his providence, the sanctification of them to his grace, and this extraordinary pitch at which they arrived in Solomon to a special grant of his favour to him in answer to prayer.

II. The fulness of it: *He had wisdom and understanding, exceeding much*, great knowledge of distant countries and the histories of former times, a quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had. It is called *largeness of heart*; for the heart is often put for the intellectual powers. He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying things together. Some, by his *largeness of heart*, understand his courage and boldness, and that great assurance with which he delivered his dictates and determinations. Or it may be meant of his disposition to do good with his knowledge. He was very free and communicative, had the gift of utterance as well as wisdom, was as free of his learning as he was of his meat, and grudged neither to any that were about him. Note, It is very desirable that those who have large gifts of any kind should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; and this is *from the hand of God*, Eccl. 2:24. He shall *enlarge the heart*, Ps. 119:32. The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the Greeks borrowed theirs; but the greatest scholars of these nations came short of Solomon, v. 30. If nature excels art, much more does grace. The knowledge which God gives by special favour goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men there were in Solomon's time, who were in great repute, particularly Heman, and others who were Levites, and employed by David in the temple-music, 1 Chr. 15:19. Heman was *his seer in the word of God*, 1 Chr. 25:5. Chalcol and Darda were own brothers, and they also were noted for learning and wisdom. But *Solomon excelled them all* (v. 30), he out-did them and confounded them; his counsel was much more valuable.

III. The fame of it. It was talked of *in all nations round about*. His great wealth and glory made his wisdom much more illustrious, and gave him those opportunities of showing it which those cannot have that live in poverty and obscurity. The jewel of wisdom may receive great advantage by the setting of it.

IV. The fruits of it; by these the tree is known: he did not bury his talent, but showed his wisdom,

1. In his compositions. Those in divinity, written by divine inspiration, are not mentioned here, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end monuments of his wisdom, and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us *wise unto salvation*. But, besides these, it appears by what he spoke, or dictated to be written from him, (1.) That he was a moralist, and a man of great prudence, for he spoke 3000 *proverbs*, wise sayings, apophthegms, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. The

world is much governed by proverbs, and was never better furnished with useful ones than by Solomon. Whether those proverbs of Solomon that we have were any part of the 3000 is uncertain. (2.) That he was a poet and a man of great wit: *His songs were 1005*, of which one only is extant, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his *Song of songs*. His wise instructions were communicated by proverbs, that they might be familiar to those whom he designed to teach and ready on all occasions, and by *songs*, that they might be pleasant and move the affections. (3.) That he was a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning and insight into the mysteries of nature. From his own and others' observations and experience, he wrote both of plants and animals (v. 33), descriptions of their natures and qualities, and (some think) of the medicinal use of them.

2. In his conversation. There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to *hear the wisdom of Solomon*, v. 34. Kings that had heard of it sent their ambassadors to hear it and to bring them instructions from it. Solomon's court was the staple of learning, and the rendezvous of philosophers, that is, the lovers of wisdom, who all came to light their candle at his lamp and to borrow from him. Let those who magnify the modern learning above that of the ancients produce such a treasure of knowledge any where in these latter ages as that was which Solomon was master of; yet this puts an honour upon human learning, that Solomon was praised for it, and recommends it to the great men of the earth, as well worthy their diligent search. But, *Lastly*, Solomon was, herein, a type of Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and hidden for use; for he is *made of God to us wisdom*.

## Chapter 5

The great work which Solomon was raised up to do was the building of the temple; his wealth and wisdom were given him to qualify him for that. In this, especially, he was to be a type of Christ, for "he shall build the temple of the Lord," Zec. 6:12. In this chapter we have an account of the preparations he made for that and his other buildings. Gold and silver his good father had prepared in abundance, but timber and stones he must get ready; and about these we have him treating with Hiram king of Tyre. I. Hiram congratulated him on his accession to the throne (v. 1). II. Solomon signified to him his design to build the temple and desired him to furnish him with workmen (v. 2-6). III. Hiram agreed to do it (v. 7-9). IV. Solomon's work was accordingly well done and Hiram's workmen were well paid (v. 10-18).

### Verses 1-9

We have here an account of the amicable correspondence between Solomon and Hiram. Tyre was a famous trading city, that lay close upon the sea, in the border of Israel; its inhabitants (as should seem) were none of the devoted nations, nor ever at enmity with Israel, and therefore David never offered to destroy them, but lived in friendship with them. It is here said of Hiram their king that he was *ever a lover of David*; and we have reason to think he was a worshipper of the true God, and had himself renounced, though he could not reform, the idolatry of his city. David's character will win the affections even of those that are without. Here is,

I. Hiram's embassy of compliment to Solomon, v. 1. He sent, as is usual among princes, to condole with him on the death of David, and to renew his alliances with him upon his succession to the government. It is good keeping up friendship and communion with the families in which religion is uppermost.

II. Solomon's embassy of business to Hiram, sent, it is likely, by messengers of his own. In wealth, honour, and power, Hiram was very much inferior to Solomon, yet Solomon had occasion to be beholden to him and begged his favour. Let us never look with disdain on those below us, because we know not how soon we may need them. Solomon, in his letter to Hiram, acquaints him,

1. With his design to build a temple to the honour of God. Some think that temples among the heathen took their first rise and copy from the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness, and that there were none before that; however there were many houses built in honour of the false gods before this was built in honour of the God of Israel, so little is external splendour a mark of the true church. Solomon tells Hiram, who was himself no stranger to the affair, (1.) That David's wars were an obstruction to him, that he could not build this temple, though he designed it, v. 3. They took up much of his time, and thoughts, and cares, were a constant expense to him and a constant employment of his subjects; so that he could not do it so well as it must be done, and therefore, it not being essential to religion, he must leave it to be done by his successor. See what need we have to pray that God will *give peace in our time*, because, in time or war, the building of the gospel temple commonly goes on slowly. (2.) That peace gave him an opportunity to build it, and therefore he resolved to set about it immediately: *God has given me rest* both at home and abroad, and there is no adversary (v. 4), no *Satan* (so the word is), no

instrument of Satan to oppose it, or to divert us from it. Satan does all he can to hinder temple work (1 Th. 2:18; Zec. 3:1), but when he is bound (Rev. 20:2) we should be busy. When there is *no evil occurrent*, then let us be vigorous and zealous in that which is good and get it forward. When the churches have rest let them be edified, Acts 9:31. Days of peace and prosperity present us with a fair gale, which we must account for if we improve not. As God's providence excited Solomon to think of building the temple, by giving him wealth and leisure, so his promise encouraged him. God had told David that his *son should build him a house*, v. 5. He will take it as a pleasure to be thus employed, and will not lose the honour designed him by that promise. It may stir us up much to good undertakings to be assured of good success in them. Let God's promise quicken our endeavours.

2. With his desire that Hiram would assist him herein. Lebanon was the place whence timber must be had, a noble forest in the north of Canaan, particularly expressed in the grant of that land to Israel—*all Lebanon*, Jos. 13:5. So that Solomon was proprietor of all its productions. The *cedars of Lebanon* are spoken of as, in a special manner, the *planting of the Lord* (Ps. 109:16), being designed for Israel's use and particularly for temple service. But Solomon owned that though the trees were his the Israelites had not *skill to hew timber* like the Sidonians, who were Hiram's subjects. Canaan was *a land of wheat and barley* (Deu. 8:8), which employed Israel in the affairs of husbandry, so that they were not at all versed in manufactures: in them the Sidonians excelled. Israel, in the things of God, are a *wise and understanding people*; and yet, in curious arts, inferior to their neighbours. True piety is a much more valuable gift of heaven than the highest degree of ingenuity. Better be an Israelite skilful in the law than a Sidonian skilful to hew timber. But, the case being thus, Solomon courts Hiram to send him workmen, and promises (v. 6) both to *assist* them (*my servants shall be with thy servants*, to work under them), and to *pay* them (*unto thee will I give hire for thy servants*); for the labourer, even in church-work, though it be indeed its own wages, *is worthy of his hire*. The evangelical prophet, foretelling the glory of the church in the days of the Messiah, seems to allude to this story, Isa. 60, where he prophesies, (1.) That the *sons of strangers* (such were the Tyrians and Sidonians) shall *build up the wall* of the gospel temple, v. 10. Ministers were raised up among the Gentiles for the edifying of the body of Christ. (2.) That *the glory of Lebanon* shall be brought to it to *beautify it*, v. 13. All external endowments and advantages shall be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom.

3. Hiram's reception of, and return to, this message.

(1.) He received it with great satisfaction to himself: He *rejoiced greatly* (v. 7) that Solomon trod in his father's steps, and carried on his designs, and was likely to be so great a blessing to his kingdom. In this Hiram's generous spirit rejoiced, and not merely in the prospect he had of making an advantage to himself by Solomon's employing him. What he had the pleasure of he gave God the praise of: *Blessed be the Lord, who has given to David* (who was himself a wise man) *a wise son to rule over this great people*. See here, [1.] With what pleasure Hiram speaks of Solomon's wisdom and the extent of his dominion. Let us learn not to envy others either those secular advantages or those endowments of the mind wherein they excel us. What a great comfort it is to those that wish well to the Israel of God to see religion and wisdom kept up in families from one generation to another, especially in great families and those that have great influence on others! where it is so, God must have the glory of it.

If to godly parents be given a godly seed (Mal. 2:15), it is a token for good, and a happy indication that the entail of the blessing shall not be cut off.

(2.) He answered it with great satisfaction to Solomon, granting him what he desired, and showing himself very forward to assist him in this great and good work to which he was laying his hand. We have here his articles of agreement with Solomon concerning this affair, in which we may observe Hiram's prudence. [1.] He deliberated upon the proposal, before he returned an answer (v. 8): *I have considered the things*. It is common for those that make bargains rashly afterwards to wish them unmade again. The virtuous woman *considers a field* and then *buys it*, Prov. 31:16. Those do not lose time who take time to consider. [2.] He descended to particulars in the articles, that there might be no misunderstanding afterwards, to occasion a quarrel. Solomon had spoken of hewing the trees (v. 6), and Hiram agrees to what he desired concerning that (v. 8); but nothing had been said concerning carriage, and this matter therefore must be settled. Land-carriage would be very troublesome and chargeable; he therefore undertakes to bring all the timber down from Lebanon by sea, a coasting voyage. Conveyance by water is a great convenience to trade, for which God is to have praise, who taught man that discretion. Observe what a definite bargain Hiram made. Solomon must appoint the place where the timber shall be delivered, and thither Hiram will undertake to bring it and be responsible for its safety. As the Sidonians excelled the Israelites in timber-work, so they did in sailing; for Tyre and Sidon were *situate at the entry of the sea* (Eze. 27:3): they therefore were fittest to take care of the water-carriage. *Tractant fabrilis fabri—Every artist has his trade assigned*. And, [3.] If Hiram undertake for the work, and *do all Solomon's desire concerning the timber* (v. 8), he justly expects that Solomon shall undertake for the wages: "*Thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household* (v. 9), not only for the workmen, but for my own family." If Tyre supply Israel with craftsmen, Israel will supply Tyre with corn, Eze. 27:17. Thus, by the wise disposal of Providence, one country has need of another and is benefited by another, that there may be mutual correspondence and dependence, to the glory of God our common parent.

### **Verses 10-18**

Here is, I. The performance of the agreement between Solomon and Hiram. Each of the parties made good his engagement. 1. Hiram delivered Solomon the timber, according to his bargain, v. 10. The trees were Solomon's, but perhaps—*Materiam superabat opus—The workmanship was of more value than the article*. Hiram is therefore said to deliver the trees. 2. Solomon conveyed to Hiram the corn which he had promised him, v. 11. Thus let justice be followed (as the expression is, Deu. 16:20), justice on both sides, in every bargain.

II. The confirmation of the friendship that was between them hereby. *God gave Solomon wisdom* (v. 12), which was more and better than any thing Hiram did or could give him; but this made Hiram love him, and enabled Solomon to improve his kindness, so that they were both willing to ripen their mutual love into a mutual league, that it might be lasting. It is wisdom to strengthen our friendship with those whom we find to be honest and fair, lest new friends prove not so firm and so kind as old ones.

III. The labourers whom Solomon employed in preparing materials for the temple. 1. Some were Israelites, who were employed in the more easy and honourable part of the work, felling trees and helping to square them, in conjunction with

Hiram's servants; for this he appointed 30,000, but employed only 10,000 at a time, so that for one month's work they had two months' vacation, both for rest and for the despatch of their own affairs at home, v. 13, 14. It was temple service, yet Solomon takes care that they shall not be over-worked. Great men ought to consider that their servants must rest as well as they. 2. Others were captives of other nations, who were to bear burdens and to hew stone (v. 15), and we read not that these had their resting times as the other had, for they were doomed to servitude. 3. There were some employed as directors and overseers (v. 16), 3300 that ruled over the people, and they were as necessary and useful in their place as the labourers in theirs; here were many hands and many eyes employed, for preparation was now to be made, not only for the temple, but for all the rest of Solomon's buildings, at Jerusalem, and here in the forest of Lebanon, and in other places of his dominion, of which see ch. 9:17–19. He speaks of the vastness of his undertakings (Eccl. 2:4, *I made me great works*), which required this vast number of workmen.

IV. The laying of the foundation of the temple; for that is the building his heart is chiefly upon, and therefore he begins with that, v. 17, 18. It should seem, Solomon was himself present, and president, at the founding of the temple, and that the first stone (as has been usual in famous buildings) was laid with some solemnity. *Solomon commanded and they brought costly stones* for the foundation; he would do every thing like himself, generously, and therefore would have some of the costliest stones laid, or buried rather, in the foundation, though, being out of sight, worse might have served. Christ, who is laid for a foundation, is an elect and precious stone (Isa. 28:16), and the foundations of the church are said to be *laid with sapphires*, Isa. 54:11, compare Rev. 21:19. That sincerity which is our gospel perfection obliges us to lay our foundation firm and to bestow most pains on that part of our religion which lies out of the sight of men.

## Chapter 6

Great and long preparation had been making for the building of the temple, and here, at length, comes an account of the building of it; a noble piece of work it was, one of the wonders of the world, and taking in its spiritual significancy, one of the glories of the church. Here is, I. The time when it was built (v. 1), and how long it was in the building (v. 37, 38). II. The silence with which it was build (v. 7). III. The dimensions of it (v. 2, 3). IV. The message God sent to Solomon, when it was in the building (v. 11–13). V. The particulars: windows (v. 4), chambers (v. 5, 6, 8–10), the walls and flooring (v. 15–18), the oracle (v. 19–22), the cherubim (v. 23–30), the doors (v. 31–35), and the inner court (v. 36). Many learned men have well bestowed their pains in expounding the description here given of the temple according to the rules of architecture, and solving the difficulties which, upon search, they find in it; but in that matter, having nothing new to offer, we will not be particular or curious; it was then well understood, and every man's eyes that saw this glorious structure furnished him with the best critical exposition of this chapter.

### Verses 1-10

Here, I. The temple is called *the house of the Lord* (v. 1), because it was, 1. Directed and modelled by him. Infinite Wisdom was the architect, and gave David the plan or pattern by the Spirit, not by word of mouth only, but, for the greater certainty and exactness, in writing (1 Chr. 28:11, 12), as he had given to Moses in the mouth a draught of the tabernacle. 2. Dedicated and devoted to him and to his honour, to be employed in his service, so his as never any other house was, for he manifested his glory in it (so as never in any other) in a way agreeable to that dispensation; for, when there were carnal ordinances, there was a *worldly sanctuary*, Heb. 9:1, 10. This gave it its *beauty of holiness*, that it was *the house of the Lord*, which far transcended all its other beauties.

II. The time when it began to be built is exactly set down. 1. It was just 480 years after the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt. Allowing forty years to Moses, seventeen to Joshua, 299 to the Judges, forty to Eli, forty to Samuel and Saul, forty to David, and four to Solomon before he began the work, we have just the sum of 480. So long it was after that holy state was founded before that holy house was built, which, in less than 430 years, was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar. It was thus deferred because Israel had, by their sins, rendered themselves unworthy of this honour, and because God would show how little he values external pomp and splendour in his service: he was in no haste for a temple. David's tent, which was clean and convenient, though it was neither stately nor rich, nor, for aught that appears, ever consecrated, is called the *house of the Lord* (2 Sa. 12:20), and served as well as Solomon's temple; yet, when God gave Solomon great wealth, he put it into his heart thus to employ it, and graciously accepted him, chiefly because it was to be a shadow of good things to come, Heb. 9:9. 2. It was in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the first three years being taken up in settling the affairs of his kingdom, that he might not find any embarrassment from them in this work. It is not time lost which is spent in composing ourselves for the work of God, and disentangling ourselves from every thing which might distract or divert us. During this time he was adding to the preparations which his father had made (1 Chr. 22:14), hewing the stone, squaring the timber, and getting every thing ready, so

that he is not to be blamed for slackness in deferring it so long. We are truly serving God when we are preparing for his service and furnishing ourselves for it.

III. The materials are brought in, ready for their place (v. 7), so ready that there was *neither hammer nor ax heard in the house while it was in building*. In all building Solomon prescribes it as a rule of prudence to *prepare the work in the field*, and *afterwards build*, Prov. 24:27. But here, it seems, the preparation was more than ordinarily full and exact, to such a degree that, when the several parts came to be put together, there was nothing defective to be added, nothing amiss to be amended. It was to be the temple of God of peace, and therefore no iron tool must be heard in it. Quietness and silence both become and befriend religious exercises: God's work should be done with as much care and as little noise as may be. The temple was thrown down with axes and hammers, and those that threw it down roared *in the midst of the congregation* (Ps. 74:4, 6); but it was built up in silence. Clamour and violence often hinder the work of God, but never further it.

IV. The dimensions are laid down (v. 2, 3) according to the rules of proportion. Some observe that the length and breadth were just double to that of the tabernacle. Now that Israel had grown more numerous the place of their meeting needed to be enlarged (Isa. 54:1, 2), and now that they had grown richer they were the better able to enlarge it. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap so.

V. An account of the windows (v. 4): They were *broad within, and narrow without*, Marg. Such should the eyes of our mind be, reflecting nearer on ourselves than on other people, looking much within, to judge ourselves, but little without, to censure our brethren. The narrowness of the lights intimated the darkness of that dispensation, in comparison with the gospel day.

VI. The chambers are described (v. 5, 6), which served as vestries, in which the utensils of the tabernacle were carefully laid up, and where the priests dressed and undressed themselves and left the clothes in which they ministered: probably in some of these chambers they feasted upon the holy things. Solomon was not so intent upon the magnificence of the house as to neglect the conveniences that were requisite for the offices thereof, that every thing might be done decently and in order. Care was taken that the beams should not be fastened in the walls to weaken them, v. 6. Let not the church's strength be impaired under pretence of adding to its beauty or convenience.

#### **Verses 11-14**

Here is, I. The word God sent to Solomon, when he was engaged in building the temple. God let him know that he took notice of what he was doing, *the house he was now building*, v. 12. None employ themselves for God without having his eye upon them. *"I know thy works, thy good works."* He assured him that if he would proceed and persevere in obedience to the divine law, and keep in the way of duty and the true worship of God, the divine loving-kindness should be drawn out both to himself (*I will perform my word with thee*) and to his kingdom: "Israel shall be ever owned as my people; I will *dwell among them*, and *not forsake them*." This word God sent him probably by a prophet, 1. That by the promise he might be encouraged and comforted in his work. Perhaps sometimes the great care, expense, and fatigue of it, made him ready to wish he had never begun it; but this would help him through the difficulties of it, that the promised establishment of his family and kingdom would abundantly recompense all his pains. An eye to the promise will carry us cheerfully through our work; and those who

wish well to the public will think nothing too much that they can do to secure and perpetuate to it the tokens of God's presence. 2. That, by the condition annexed, he might be awakened to consider that though he built the temple ever so strong the glory of it would soon depart, unless he and his people continued *to walk in God's statutes*. God plainly let him know that all this charge which he and his people were at, in erecting this temple, would neither excuse them from obedience to the law of God nor shelter them from his judgments in case of disobedience. Keeping God's commandments is better, and more pleasing to him, than building churches.

II. The work Solomon did for God: *So he built the house* (v. 14), *so* animated by the message God had sent him, *so* admonished not to expect that God should own his building unless he were obedient to his laws: "Lord, I proceed upon these terms, being firmly resolved to walk in thy statutes." The strictness of God's government will never drive a good man from his service, but quicken him in it. Solomon built and finished, he went on with the work, and God went along with him till it was completed. It is spoken both to God's praise and his: he grew not weary of the work, met not with any obstructions (as Ezra 4:24), did not out-build his property, nor do it by halves, but, having begun to build, was both able and willing to finish; for he was a wise builder.

### **Verses 15-38**

Here, I. We have a particular account of the details of the building.

1. The wainscot of the temple. It was of cedar (v. 15), which was strong and durable, and of a very sweet smell. The wainscot was curiously carved with knops (like eggs or apples) and flowers, no doubt as the fashion then was, v. 18.
2. The gilding. It was not like ours, washed over, but *the whole house*, all the inside of the temple (v. 22), even the floor (v. 30), he *overlaid with gold*, and the most holy place with *pure gold*, v. 21. Solomon would spare no expense necessary to make it every way sumptuous. Gold was under foot there, as it should be in all the living temples: the abundance of it lessened its worth.
3. The oracle, or *speaking-place* (for so the word signifies), *the holy of holies*, so called because thence God spoke to Moses, and perhaps to the high priest, when he consulted with the breast-plate of judgment. In this place *the ark of the covenant was to be set*, v. 19. Solomon made every thing new, and more magnificent than it had been, except the ark, which was still the same that Moses made, with its mercy-seat and cherubim; that was the token of God's presence, which is always the same with his people whether they meet in tent or temple, and changes not with their condition.
4. The cherubim. Besides those at the ends of the mercy-seat, which covered the ark, (1.) Solomon set up two more, very large ones, images of young men (as some think), with wings made of olive-wood, and all overlaid with gold, v. 23, etc. This most holy place was much larger than that in the tabernacle, and therefore the ark would have seemed lost in it, and the dead wall would have been unsightly, if it had not been thus adorned. (2.) He carved cherubim upon all the walls of the house, v. 29. The heathen set up images of their gods and worshipped them; but these were designed to represent the servants and attendants of the God of Israel, the holy angels, not to be themselves worshipped (*see thou do it not*), but to show how great he is whom we are to worship.

5. The doors. The folding doors that led into the oracle were but a fifth part of the wall (v. 31), those into the temple were a fourth part (v. 33); but both were beautified with cherubim engraven on them, v. 32, 35.

6. The inner court, in which the brazen altar was at which the priests ministered. This was separated from the court where the people were by a low wall, three rows of hewn stone tipped with a cornice of cedar (v. 36), that over it the people might see what was done and hear what the priests said to them; for, even under that dispensation, they were not kept wholly either in the dark or at a distance.

7. The time spent in this building. It was but seven years and a half from the founding to the finishing of it, v. 38. Considering the vastness and elegance of the building, and the many appurtenances to it which were necessary to fit it for use, it was soon done. Solomon was in earnest in it, had money enough, had nothing to divert him from it, and many hands made quick work. He finished it (as the margin reads it) with all the appurtenances thereof, and with all the ordinances thereof, not only built the place, but set forward the work for which it was built.

II. Let us now see what was typified by this temple. 1. Christ is the true temple; he himself spoke of the temple of his body, Jn. 2:21. God himself prepared him his body, Heb. 10:5. *In him dwelt the fulness of the Godhead*, as the *Shechinah* in the temple. In him meet all God's spiritual Israel. Through him we have access with confidence to God. All the angels of God, those blessed cherubim, have a charge to worship him. 2. Every believer is a living temple, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, 1 Co. 3:16. Even the body is such by virtue of its union with the soul, 1 Co. 6:19. We are not only wonderfully made by the divine providence, but more wonderfully made anew by the divine grace. This living temple is built upon Christ as its foundation and will be perfected in due time. 3. The gospel church is the mystical temple; it grows to a *holy temple in the Lord* (Eph. 2:21), enriched and beautified with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, as Solomon's temple with gold and precious stones. Only Jews built the tabernacle, but Gentiles joined with them in building the temple. Even strangers and foreigners are built up *a habitation of God*, Eph. 2:19, 22. The temple was divided into the holy place and the most holy, the courts of it into the outer and inner; so there are the visible and the invisible church. The door into the temple was wider than that into the oracle. Many enter into profession that come short of salvation. This temple is built firm, upon a rock, not to be taken down as the tabernacle of the Old Testament was. The temple was long in preparing, but was built at last. The top-stone of the gospel church will, at length, be brought forth with shoutings, and it is a pity that there should be the clashing of axes and hammers in the building of it. Angels are ministering spirits, attending the church on all sides and all the members of it. 4. Heaven is the everlasting temple. There the church will be fixed, and no longer movable. The streets of the new Jerusalem, in allusion to the flooring of the temple, are said to be *of pure gold*, Rev. 21:21. The cherubim there always attend the throne of glory. The temple was uniform, and in heaven there is the perfection of beauty and harmony. In Solomon's temple there was no noise of axes and hammers. Every thing is quiet and serene in heaven; all that shall be stones in that building must in the present state of probation and preparation be fitted and made ready for it, must be hewn and squared by divine grace, and so made meet for a place there.

## Chapter 7

As, in the story of David, one chapter of wars and victories follows another, so, in the story of Solomon, one chapter concerning his buildings follows another. In this chapter we have, I. His fitting up several buildings for himself and his own use (v. 1–12). II. His furnishing the temple which he had built for God, 1. With two pillars (v. 13–22). 2. With a molten sea (v. 23–26). 3. With ten basins of brass (v. 27–37), and ten layers upon them (v. 38, 39). 4. With all the other utensils of the temple (v. 40–50). 5. With the things that his father had dedicated (v. 51). The particular description of these things was not needless when it was written, nor is it now useless.

### Verses 1-12

Never had any man so much of the spirit of building as Solomon had, nor to better purpose; he began with the temple, built for God first, and then all his other buildings were comfortable. The surest foundations of lasting prosperity are those which are laid in an early piety, Mt. 6:33. 1. He built a house for himself (v. 1), *where he dwelt*, v. 8. His father had built a good house; but it was no reflection upon his father for him to build a better, in proportion to the estate wherewith God had blessed him. Much of the comfort of this life is connected with an agreeable house. He was thirteen years building this house, whereas he built the temple in little more than seven years; not that he was more exact, but less eager and intent, in building his own house than in building God's. He was in no haste for his own palace, but impatient till the temple was finished and fit for use. Thus we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction. 2. He built *the house of the forest at Lebanon* (v. 2), supposed to be a country seat near Jerusalem, so called from the pleasantness of its situation and the trees that encompassed it. I rather incline to think that it was a house built in the forest of Lebanon itself, whither (though far distant from Jerusalem) Solomon (having so many chariots and horses, and those dispersed into chariot-cities, which probably were his stages) might frequently retire with ease. It does not appear that his throne (mentioned v. 7) was at the house of the forest of Lebanon, and it was not at all improper to put his shields there as in a magazine. Express notice is taken of his buildings, not only in Jerusalem, but in Lebanon (ch. 9:19), and we read of the tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus (Cant. 7:4), which probably was part of this house. A particular account is given of this house, that being built in Lebanon, a place famed for cedars, the pillars, and beams, and roof, were all cedar (v. 2, 3), and, being designed for pleasant prospects, there were three tiers of windows on each side, *light against light* (v. 4, 5), or, as it may be read, *prospect against prospect*. Those whose lot is cast in the country may be well reconciled to a country life by this, that some of the greatest princes have thought those the most pleasant of their days which they have spent in their country retirements. 3. He built piazzas before one of his houses, either that at Jerusalem or that in Lebanon, which were very famous—a porch of pillars (v. 6), perhaps for an exchange or a guard-house, or for those to walk in that attended him about business till they could have audience, or for state and magnificence. He himself speaks of Wisdom's building her house, and *hewing out her seven pillars* (Prov. 9:1), for the shelter of those that, three verses before (ch. 8:34), are said to *watch daily at her gates and to wait at the posts of her doors*. 4. At his house where he dwelt in Jerusalem he built a great hall, or porch of judgment, where was set the throne, or king's bench, for the trial of causes,

in which he himself was appealed to (*placita coram ipso rege tenenda—causes were to be adjusted in the king's presence*), and this was richly wainscoted with cedar, from the floor to the roof, v. 7. He had there also *another court within the porch*, nearer his house, of similar work, for his attendants to walk in, v. 8. 5. He built a house for his wife, where she kept her court, v. 8. It is said to be *like the porch*, because built of cedar like it, though not in the same form; this, no doubt, was nearer adjoining to his own palace, yet perhaps if it had been as near as it ought to have been Solomon would not have multiplied wives as he did. The wonderful magnificence of all these buildings is taken notice of, v. 9, etc. All the materials were the best of their kind. The foundation-stones were costly for their size, four or five yards square, or at least so many yards long (v. 10), and the stones of the building were costly for the workmanship, hewn and sawn, and in all respects finely wrought, v. 9, 11. The court of his own house was like that of the temple (v. 12, compare ch. 6:36); so well did he like the model of God's courts that he made his own by it.

### **Verses 13-47**

We have here an account of the brass-work about the temple. There was no iron about the temple, though we find David preparing for the temple *iron for things of iron*, 1 Chr. 29:2. What those things were we are not told, but some of the things of brass are here described and the rest mentioned.

I. The brasier whom Solomon employed to preside in this part of the work was Hiram, or Hiram (2 Chr. 4:11), who was by his mother's side an Israelite, of the tribe of Naphtali, by his father's side a man of Tyre, v. 14. If he had the ingenuity of a Tyrian, and the affection of an Israelite to the house of God (the head of a Tyrian and the heart of an Israelite), it was happy that the blood of the two nations mixed in him, for thereby he was qualified for the work to which he was designed. As the tabernacle was built with the wealth of Egypt, so the temple with the wit of Tyre. God will serve himself by the common gifts of the children of men.

II. The brass he made use of was the best he could get. All the brazen vessels were of *bright brass* (v. 45), *good brass*, so the Chaldee, that which was strongest and looked finest. God, who is the best, must be served and honoured with the best.

III. The place where all the brazen vessels were cast was the plain of Jordan, because the ground there was stiff and clayey, fit to make moulds of for the casting of the brass (v. 46), and Solomon would not have this dirty smoky work done in or near Jerusalem.

IV. The quantity was not accounted for. The vessels were *unnumbered* (so it may be read, v. 47, as well as *unweighed*), *because they were exceedingly numerous*, and it would have been an endless thing to keep the account of them; *neither was the weight of the brass*, when it was delivered to the workmen, searched or enquired into; so honest were the workmen, and such great plenty of brass they had, that there was no danger of wanting. We must ascribe it to Solomon's care that he provided so much, not to his carelessness that he kept no account of it.

V. Some particulars of the brass-work are described.

1. Two brazen pillars, which were set up *in the porch of the temple* (v. 21), whether under the cover of the porch or in the open air is not certain; it was between the temple and the court of the priests. These pillars were neither to hang gates upon nor to

rest any building upon, but purely for ornament and significancy. (1.) What an ornament they were we may gather from the account here given of the curious work that was about them, chequer-work, chain-work, net-work, lily-work, and pomegranates in rows, and all of bright brass, and framed no doubt according to the best rules of proportion, to please the eye. (2.) Their significancy is intimated in the names given them (v. 21): *Jachin—he will establish*; and *Boaz—in him is strength*. Some think they were intended for memorials of the pillar of cloud and fire which led Israel through the wilderness: I rather think them designed for memorandums to the priests and others that came to worship at God's door, [1.] To depend upon God only, and not upon any sufficiency of their own, for strength and establishment in all their religious exercises. When we come to wait upon God, and find our hearts wandering and unfixed, then by faith let us fetch in help from heaven: *Jachin—God will fix this roving mind. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*. We find ourselves weak and unable for holy duties, but this is our encouragement: *Boaz—in him is our strength*, who works in us both to will and to do. *I will go in the strength of the Lord God*. Spiritual strength and stability are to be had at the door of God's temple, where we must wait for the gifts of grace in the use of the means of grace. [2.] It was a memorandum to them of the strength and establishment of the temple of God among them. Let them keep close to God and duty, and they should never lose their dignities and privileges, but the grant should be confirmed and perpetuated to them. The gospel church is what God will establish, what he will strengthen, and what the gates of hell can never prevail against. But, with respect to this temple, when it was destroyed particular notice was taken of the destroying of these pillars (2 Ki. 25:13, 17), which had been the tokens of its establishment, and would have been so if they had not forsaken God.

2. A brazen sea, a very large vessel, above five yards in diameter, and which contained above 500 barrels of water for the priests' use, in washing themselves and the sacrifices, and keeping the courts of the temple clean, v. 23, etc. It stood raised upon the figures of twelve oxen in brass, so high that either they must have stairs to climb up to it or cocks at the bottom to draw water from it. The Gibeonites, or Nethinim, who were to draw water for the house of God, had the care of filling it. Some think Solomon made the images of oxen to support this great cistern in contempt of the golden calf which Israel had worshipped, that (as bishop Patrick expresses it) the people might see there was nothing worthy of adoration in those figures; they were fitter to make posts of than to make gods of. Yet this prevailed not to prevent Jerusalem's setting up the calves for deities. In the court of the tabernacle there was only a laver of brass provided to wash in, but in the court of the temple a sea of brass, intimating that by the gospel of Christ much fuller preparation is made for our cleansing than was by the law of Moses. That had a laver, this has a sea, *a fountain opened*, Zec. 13:1.

3. Ten bases, or stands, or settles, of brass, on which were put ten lavers, to be filled with water for the service of the temple, because there would not be room at the molten sea for all that had occasion to wash there. The bases on which the lavers were fixed are very largely described here, v. 27, etc. They were curiously adorned and set upon wheels, that the lavers might be removed as there was occasion; but ordinarily they stood in two rows, five on one side of the court and five on the other, v. 39. Each laver contained forty baths, that is, about ten barrels, v. 38. Those must be very *clean that bear the vessels of the Lord*. Spiritual priests and spiritual sacrifices must be washed in the laver of Christ's blood and of regeneration. We must wash often,

for we daily contract pollution, must cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. Plentiful provision is made for our cleansing; so that if we have our lot for ever among the unclean it will be our own fault.

4. Besides these, there was a vast number of brass pots made to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings in, which the priests and offerers were to feast upon before the Lord (see 1 Sa. 2:14); also shovels, wherewith they took out the ashes of the altar. Some think the word signifies *flesh-hooks*, with which they took meat out of the pot. The basins also were made of brass, to receive the blood of the sacrifices. These are put for all the utensils of the brazen altar, Ex. 38:3. While they were about it they made abundance of them, that they might have a good stock by them when those that were first in use wore out and went to decay. Thus Solomon, having wherewithal to do so, provided for posterity.

#### **Verses 48-51**

Here is, 1. The making of the gold work of the temple, which it seems was done last, for with it the work of the house of God ended. All within doors was gold, and all made new (except the ark, with its mercy-seat and cherubim), the old being either melted down or laid by—the golden altar, table, and candlestick, with all their appurtenances. The altar of incense was still *one*, for Christ and his intercession are so: but he made ten golden tables, 2 Chr. 4:8 (though here mention is made of that one only *on which the show-bread was*, v. 48, which we may suppose was larger than the rest and to which the rest were as side-boards), and *ten golden candlesticks* (v. 49), intimating the much greater plenty both of spiritual food and heavenly light which the gospel blesses us with than the law of Moses did our could afford. Even the hinges of the door were of gold (v. 50), that every thing might be alike magnificent, and bespeak Solomon's generosity. Some suggest that every thing was made thus splendid in God's temple to keep the people from idolatry, for none of the idol-temples were so rich and fine as this: but how little the expedient availed the event showed. 2. The bringing in of the dedicated things, which David had devoted to the honour of God, v. 51. What was not expended in the building and furniture was laid up in the treasury, for repairs, exigencies, and the constant charge of the temple-service. What the parents have dedicated to God the children ought by no means to alienate or recall, but should cheerfully devote what was intended for pious and charitable uses, that they may, with their estates, inherit the blessing.

## Chapter 8

The building and furniture of the temple were very glorious, but the dedication of it exceeds in glory as much as prayer and praise, the work of saints, exceed the casting of metal and the graving of stones, the work of the craftsman. The temple was designed for the keeping up of the correspondence between God and his people; and here we have an account of the solemnity of their first meeting there. I. The representatives of all Israel were called together (v. 1, 2), to keep a feast to the honour of God, for fourteen days (v. 65). II. The priests brought the ark into the most holy place, and fixed it there (v. 3-9). III. God took possession of it by a cloud (v. 10, 11). IV. Solomon, with thankful acknowledgments to God, informed the people touching the occasion of their meeting (v. 12-21). V. In a long prayer he recommended to God's gracious acceptance all the prayers that should be made in or towards this place (v. 22-53). VI. He dismissed the assembly with a blessing and an exhortation (v. 54-61). VII. He offered abundance of sacrifices, on which he and his people feasted, and so parted, with great satisfaction (v. 62-66). These were Israel's golden days, days of the Son of man in type.

### Verses 1-11

The temple, though richly beautified, yet while it was without the ark was like a body without a soul, or a candlestick without a candle, or (to speak more properly) a house without an inhabitant. All the cost and pains bestowed on this stately structure are lost if God do not accept them; and, unless he please to own it as the place where he will record his name, it is after all but a ruinous heap. When therefore *all the work* is ended (ch. 7:51), the *one thing needful* is yet behind, and that is the bringing in of the ark. This therefore is the end which must crown the work, and which here we have an account of the doing of with great solemnity.

I. Solomon presides in this service, as David did in the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem; and neither of them thought it below him to follow the ark nor to lead the people in their attendance on it. Solomon glories in the title of the *preacher* (Eccl. 1:1), and the *master of assemblies*, Eccl. 12:11. This great assembly he summons (v. 1), and he is the centre of it, for to him they all assembled (v. 2) *at the feast in the seventh month*, namely, the feast of tabernacles, which was appointed on the fifteenth day of that month, Lev. 23:34. David, like a very *good* man, brings the ark to a *convenient* place, near him; Solomon, like a very *great* man, brings it to a *magnificent* place. As every man has received the gift, so let him minister; and let children proceed in God's service where their parents left off.

II. All Israel attend the service, their judges and the chief of their tribes and families, all their officers, civil and military, and (as they speak in the north) the heads of their clans. A convention of these might well be called *an assembly of all Israel*. These came together, on this occasion, 1. To do honour to Solomon, and to return him the thanks of the nation for all the good offices he had done in kindness to them. 2. To do honour to the ark, to pay respect to it, and testify their universal joy and satisfaction in its settlement. The advancement of the ark in external splendour, though it has often proved too strong a temptation to its hypocritical followers, yet, because it may prove an advantage to its true interests, is to be rejoiced in (with trembling) by all that wish well to it. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments. Those that appeared before the Lord did not appear

empty, for they all sacrificed sheep and oxen innumerable, v. 5. The people in Solomon's time were very rich, very easy, and very cheerful, and therefore it was fit that, on this occasion, they should consecrate not only their cheerfulness, but a part of their wealth, to God and his honour.

III. The priests do their part of the service. In the wilderness, the Levites were to carry the ark, because then there were not priests enough to do it; but here (it being the last time that the ark was to be carried) the priests themselves did it, as they were ordered to do when it surrounded Jericho. We are here told, 1. What was in the ark, nothing but the two tables of stone (v. 9), a treasure far exceeding all the dedicated things both of David and Solomon. The pot of manna and Aaron's rod were *by* the ark, but not *in* it. 2. What was brought up with the ark (v. 4): *The tabernacle of the congregation*. It is probable that both that which Moses set up in the wilderness, which was in Gibeon, and that which David pitched in Zion, were brought to the temple, to which they did, as it were, surrender all their holiness, merging it in that of the temple, which must henceforward be the place where God must be sought unto. Thus will all the church's holy things on earth, that are so much its joy and glory, be swallowed up in the perfection of holiness above. 3. Where it was fixed in its place, the place appointed for its rest after all its wanderings (v. 6): *In the oracle of the house*, whence they expected God to speak to them, even in the most holy place, which was made so by the presence of the ark, *under the wings of the great cherubim* which Solomon set up (ch. 6:27), signifying the special protection of angels, under which God's ordinances and the assemblies of his people are taken. The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubim, to direct the high priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in, once a year, to sprinkle the blood there; so that still they continued of some use, though there was no longer occasion for them to carry it by.

IV. God graciously owns what is done and testifies his acceptance of it, v. 10, 11. The priests might come into the most holy place till God manifested his glory there; but, thenceforward, none might, at their peril, approach the ark, except the high priest, on the day of atonement. Therefore it was not till the priests had come out of the oracle that the *Shechinah* took possession of it, in a cloud, which filled not only the most holy place, but the temple, so that the priests who burnt incense at the golden altar could not bear it. By this visible emanation of the divine glory, 1. God put an honour upon the ark, and owned it as a token of his presence. The glory of it had been long diminished and eclipsed by its frequent removes, the meanness of its lodging, and its being exposed too much to common view; but God will now show that it is as dear to him as ever, and he will have it looked upon with as much veneration as it was when Moses first brought it into his tabernacle. 2. He testified his acceptance of the building and furnishing of the temple as good service done to his name and his kingdom among men. 3. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and, by what they saw, confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses concerning the glory of God's appearance to their fathers, that hereby they might be kept close to the service of the God of Israel and fortified against temptations to idolatry. 4. He showed himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was now about to make; and not only so, but took up his residence in this house, that all his praying people might there be encouraged to make their applications to him. But the glory of God appeared in a cloud, a dark cloud, to signify, (1.) The darkness of that dispensation in comparison with the light of the gospel, by which, *with open face, we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the*

*Lord.* (2.) The darkness of our present state in comparison with the vision of God, which will be the happiness of heaven, where the divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what he is not, but then we shall see him as he is.

### **Verses 12-21**

Here, I. Solomon encourages the priests, who came out of the temple from their ministration, much astonished at the dark cloud that overshadowed them. The disciples of Christ *feared when they entered into the cloud*, though it was a *bright cloud* (Lu. 9:34), so did the priests when they found themselves wrapped in a thick cloud. To silence their fears, 1. He reminds them of that which they could not but know, that this was a token of God's presence (v. 12): *The Lord said he would dwell in the thick darkness*. It is so far from being a token of his displeasure that it is an indication of his favour; for he had said, *I will appear in a cloud*, Lev. 16:2. Note, Nothing is more effectual to reconcile us to dark dispensations than to consider what God hath said, and to compare his word and works together; as Lev. 10:3, *This is that which the Lord hath said*. God is light (1 Jn. 1:5), and he dwells in light (1 Tim. 6:16), but he dwells with men *in the thick darkness*, makes that his pavilion, because they could not bear the dazzling brightness of his glory. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself*. Thus our holy faith is exercised and our holy fear is increased. Where God dwells in light faith is swallowed up in vision and fear in love. 2. He himself bids it welcome, as worthy of all acceptation; and since God, by this cloud, came down to take possession, he does, in a few words, solemnly give him possession (v. 13): *"Surely I come,"* says God. *"Amen,"* says Solomon, *"Even so, come, Lord."* The house is thy own, entirely thy own, *I have surely built it for thee*, and furnished it for thee; it is for ever thy own, *a settled place for thee to abide in for ever*; it shall never be alienated nor converted to any other use; the ark shall never be removed from it, never unsettled again." It is Solomon's joy that God has taken possession; and it is his desire that he would keep possession. Let not the priests therefore dread that in which Solomon so much triumphs.

II. He instructs the people, and gives them a plain account concerning this house, which they now saw God take possession of. He spoke briefly to the priests, to satisfy them (a word to the wise), but *turned his face about* (v. 14) from them *to the congregation* that stood in the outer court, and addressed himself to them largely.

1. He blessed them. When they saw the dark cloud enter the temple they blessed themselves, being astonished at it and afraid lest the thick darkness should be utter darkness to them. The amazing sight, such as they had never seen in their days, we may suppose, drove every man to his prayers, and the vainest minds were made serious by it. Solomon therefore set in with their prayers, and blessed them all, as one having authority (*for the less is blessed of the better*); in God's name, he spoke peace to them, and a blessing, like that with which the angel blessed Gideon when he was in a fright, upon a similar occasion. Jdg. 6:22, 23, *Peace be unto thee. Fear not; thou shalt not die*. Solomon *blessed them*, that is, he pacified them, and freed them from the consternation they were in. To receive this blessing, they all stood up, in token of reverence and readiness to hear and accept it. It is a proper posture to be in when the blessing is pronounced.

2. He informed them concerning this house which he had built and was now dedicating.

(1.) He began his account with a thankful acknowledgment of the good hand of his God upon him hitherto: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, v. 15. What we have the pleasure of God must have the praise of. He thus engaged the congregation to lift up

their hearts in thanksgivings to God, which would help to still the tumult of spirit which, probably, they were in. "Come," says he, "let God's awful appearances not drive us from him, but draw us to him; *let us bless the Lord God of Israel.*" Thus Job, under a dark scene, *blessed the name of the Lord.* Solomon here blessed God, [1.] For his promise which he *spoke with his mouth to David.* [2.] For the performance, that he had now *fulfilled it with his hand.* We have then the best sense of God's mercies, and most grateful both to ourselves and to our God, when we run up those streams to the fountain of the covenant, and compare what God does with what he has said.

(2.) Solomon is now making a solemn surrender or dedication of this house unto God, delivering it to God by his own act and deed. Grants and conveyances commonly begin with recitals of what has been before done, leading to what is now done: accordingly, here is a recital of the special causes and considerations moving Solomon to build this house. [1.] He recites the want of such a place. It was necessary that this should be premised; for, according to the dispensation they were under, there must be but one place in which they must expect God to record his name. If, therefore, there were any other chosen, this would be a usurpation. But he shows, from what God himself had said, that there was no other (v. 16): *I chose no city to build a house in for my name;* therefore there is occasion for the building of this. [2.] He recites David's purpose to build such a place. God chose the person first that should rule his people (*I chose David,* v. 16) and then put it into *his heart to build a house* for God's name, v. 17. It was not a project of his own, for the magnifying of himself; but his good father, of blessed memory, laid the first design of it, though he lived not to lay the first stone. [3.] He recites God's promise concerning himself. God approved his father's purpose (v. 18): *Thou didst well, that it was in thy heart.* Note, Sincere intentions to do good shall be graciously approved and accepted of God, though Providence prevent our putting them in execution. *The desire of a man is his kindness.* See 2 Co. 8:12. God accepted David's good will, yet would not permit him to do the good work, but reserved the honour of it for his son (v. 19): *He shall build the house to my name;* so that what he had done was not of his own head, nor for his own glory, but the work itself was according to his father's design and his doing it was according to God's designation. [4.] He recites what he himself had done, and with what intention: *I have built a house,* not for my own name, but *for the name of the Lord God of Israel* (v. 20), and *set there a place for the ark,* v. 21. Thus all the right, title, interest, claim, and demand, whatsoever, which he or his had or might have in or to this house, or any of its appurtenances, he resigns, surrenders, and gives up, to God for ever. It is for his name, and his ark. In this, says he, *the Lord hath performed his word that he spoke.* Note, Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promises to him. The more we do for God the more we are indebted to him; for our sufficiency is of him, and not of ourselves.

### **Verses 22-53**

Solomon having made a general surrender of this house to God, which God had signified his acceptance of by taking possession, next follows Solomon's prayer, in which he makes a more particular declaration of the uses of that surrender, with all humility and reverence, desiring that God would agree thereto. In short, it is his request that this temple may be deemed and taken, not only for a house of sacrifice (no mention is made of that in all this prayer, that was taken for granted), but a *house of prayer for all people;* and herein it was a type of the gospel church; see Isa. 56:7, compared with Mt. 21:13. Therefore

Solomon opened this house, not only with an extraordinary sacrifice, but with an extraordinary prayer.

I. The person that prayed this prayer was great. Solomon did not appoint one of the priests to do it, nor one of the prophets, but did it himself, *in the presence of all the congregation of Israel*, v. 22. 1. It was well that he was able to do it, a sign that he had made a good improvement of the pious education which his parents gave him. With all his learning, it seems, he learnt to pray well, and knew how to express himself to God in a suitable manner, *pro re nata—on the spur of the occasion*, without a prescribed form. In the crowd of his philosophical transactions, his proverbs, and songs, he did not forget his devotions. He was a gainer by prayer (ch. 3:11, etc.), and, we may suppose, gave himself much to it, so that he excelled, as we find here, in praying gifts. 2. It was well that he was willing to do it, and not shy of performing divine service before so great a congregation. He was far from thinking it any disparagement to him to be his own chaplain and the mouth of the assembly to God; and shall any think themselves too great to do this office for their own families? Solomon, in all his other glory, even on his ivory throne, looked not so great as he did now. Great men should thus support the reputation of religious exercises and so honour God with their greatness. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, the great intercessor for all over whom he rules.

II. The posture in which he prayed was very reverent, and expressive of humility, seriousness, and fervency in prayer. He *stood before the altar of the Lord*, intimating that he expected the success of his prayer in virtue of that sacrifice which should be offered up in the fulness of time, typified by the sacrifices offered at that altar. But when he addressed himself to prayer, 1. He *kneeled down*, as appears, v. 54, where he is said to *rise from his knees*; compare 2 Chr. 6:13. Kneeling is the most proper posture for prayer, Eph. 3:14. The greatest of men must not think it below them to *kneel before the Lord their Maker*. Mr. Herbert says, "Kneeling never spoiled silk stocking." 2. *He spread forth his hands towards heaven*, and (as it should seem by v. 54) continued so to the end of the prayer, hereby expressing his desire towards, and expectations from, God, as a *Father in heaven*. He spread forth his hands, as it were to offer up the prayer from an open enlarged heart and to present it to heaven, and also to receive thence, with both arms, the mercy which he prayed for. Such outward expressions of the fixedness and fervour of devotion ought not to be despised or ridiculed.

III. The prayer itself was very long, and perhaps much longer than is here recorded. At the throne of grace we have liberty of speech, and should use our liberty. It is not making long prayers, but making them for a pretence, that Christ condemns. In this excellent prayer Solomon does, as we should in every prayer,

1. Give glory to God. This he begins with, as the most proper act of adoration. He addresses himself to God as the *Lord God of Israel*, a God in covenant with them And, (1.) He gives him the praise of what he is, in general, the best of beings in himself ("*There is no God like thee*, none of the powers in heaven or earth to be compared with thee"), and the best of masters to his people: "*Who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants*; not only as good as thy word in keeping covenant, but better than thy word in keeping mercy, doing that for them of which thou hast not given them an express promise, provided they *walk before thee with all their heart*, are zealous for thee, with an eye to thee." (2.) He gives him thanks for what he had done, in particular, for his family (v. 24): "*Thou hast kept with thy servant David*, as with thy other servants, *that which thou promisedst him*." The promise was a great favour to him, his support and joy, and now performance is the crown of it: *Thou hast fulfilled*

*it, as it is this day.* Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises call for enlarged praises.

2. He sues for grace and favour from God.

(1.) That God would perform to him and his the mercy which he had promised, v. 25, 26. Observe how this comes in. He thankfully acknowledges the performance of the promise in part; hitherto God had been faithful to his word: "*Thou hast kept with thy servant David that which thou promisedst him*, so far that his son fills his throne and has built the intended temple; *therefore now keep with thy servant David that which thou hast further promised him*, and which yet remains to be fulfilled in its season." Note, The experiences we have had of God's performing his promises should encourage us to depend upon them and plead them with God: and those who expect further mercies must be thankful for former mercies. Hitherto God has helped, 2 Co. 1:10. Solomon repeats the promise (v. 25): *There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne*, not omitting the condition, *so that thy children take heed to their way*; for we cannot expect God's performance of the promise but upon our performance of the condition. And then he humbly begs this entail (v. 26): *Now, O God of Israel! let thy word be verified.* God's promises (as we have often observed) must be both the guide of our desires and the ground of our hopes and expectations in prayer. David had prayed (2 Sa. 7:25): *Lord, do as thou hast said.* Note, Children should learn of their godly parents how to pray, and plead in prayer.

(2.) That God would have respect to this temple which he had now taken possession of, and that his eyes might be *continually open towards it* (v. 29), that he would graciously own it, and so put an honour upon it. To this purpose,

[1.] He premises, *First*, A humble admiration of God's gracious condescension (v. 27): "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Can we imagine that a Being infinitely high, and holy, and happy, will stoop so low as to let it be said of him that he dwells upon the earth* and blesses the worms of the earth with his presence—the earth, that is corrupt, and overspread with sin—cursed, and reserved to fire? *Lord, how is it?*" *Secondly*, A humble acknowledgment of the incapacity of the house he had built, though very capacious, to contain God: "*The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee*, for no place can include him who is present in all places; even this house is too little, too mean to be the residence of him that is infinite in being and glory." Note, When we have done the most we can for God we must acknowledge the infinite distance and disproportion between us and him, between our services and his perfections.

[2.] This premised, he prays in general, *First*, That God would graciously hear and answer the prayer he was now praying, v. 28. It was a humble prayer (*the prayer of thy servant*), an earnest prayer (such a prayer as is a *cry*), a prayer made in faith (*before thee*, as the Lord, and my God): "Lord, *hearken to it, have respect to it*, not as the prayer of Israel's king (no man's dignity in the world, or titles of honour, will recommend him to God), but as the prayer of thy servant." *Secondly*, That God would in like manner hear and answer all the prayers that should, at any time hereafter, be made in or towards this house which he had now built, and of which God had said, *My name shall be there* (v. 29), his own prayers (*Hearken to the prayers which thy servant shall make*), and the prayers of all Israel, and of every particular Israelite (v. 30): "*Hear it in heaven, that is indeed thy dwelling-place*, of which this is but a figure; and, *when thou hearest, forgive the sin that separates between them and God, even the iniquity of their holy things.*" a. He supposes that God's people will ever be a prayer people; he resolves to adhere to

that duty himself. *b.* He directs them to have an eye, in their prayers, to that place where God was pleased to manifest his glory as he did not any where else on earth. None but priests might come into that place; but, when they worshipped in the courts of the temple, it must be with an eye towards it, not as the object of their worship (that were idolatry), but as an instituted medium of their worship, helping the weakness of their faith, and typifying the mediation of Jesus Christ, who is the true temple, to whom we must have an eye in every thing wherein we have to do with God. Those that were at a distance looked towards Jerusalem, for the sake of the temple, even when it was in ruins, Dan. 6:10. *c.* He begs that God will *hear the prayers*, and *forgive the sins*, of all that look this way in their prayers. Not as if he thought all the devout prayers offered up to God by those who had no knowledge of this house, or regard to it, were therefore rejected; but he desired that the sensible tokens of the divine presence with which this house was blessed might always give sensible encouragement and comfort to believing petitioners.

[3.] More particularly, he here puts divers cases in which he supposed application would be made to God by prayer in or towards this house of prayer.

*First*, If God were appealed to by an oath for the determining of any controverted right between man and man, and the oath were taken before this altar, he prayed that God would, in some way or other, discover the truth, and judge between the contending parties, v. 31, 32. He prayed that, in difficult matters, this throne of grace might be a throne of judgment, from which God would right the injured that believingly appealed to it, and punish the injurious that presumptuously appealed to it. It was usual to swear by the temple and altar (Mt. 23:16, 18), which corruption perhaps took its rise from this supposition of an oath taken, not *by* the temple or altar, but *at* or *near* them, for the greater solemnity.

*Secondly*, If the people of Israel were groaning under any national calamity, or any particular Israelite under any personal calamity, he desired that the prayers they should make in or towards this house might be heard and answered.

*a.* In case of public judgments, war (v. 33), want of rain (v. 35), famine, or pestilence (v. 37), and he ends with an *et cetera*—any plague or sickness; for no calamity befalls other people which may not befall God's Israel. Now he supposes, (*a.*) That the cause of the judgment would be sin, and nothing else. "If they be *smitten before the enemy*, if there be no rain, it is *because they have sinned against thee*." It is sin that makes all the mischief. (*b.*) That the consequence of the judgment would be that they would cry to God, and make supplication to him in or towards that house. Those that slighted him before would solicit him then. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee. In their afflictions they will seek me early* and earnestly. (*c.*) That the condition of the removal of the judgment was something more than barely praying for it. He could not, he would not, ask that their prayer might be answered unless they did also *turn from their sin* (v. 35) and *turn again to God* (v. 33), that is, unless they did truly repent and reform. On no other terms may we look for salvation in this world or the other. But, if they did thus qualify themselves for mercy, he prays, [*a.*] That God would hear from heaven, his holy temple above, to which they must look, through *this* temple. [*b.*] That he would forgive their sin; for then only are judgments removed in mercy when sin is pardoned. [*c.*] That he would *teach them the good way wherein they should walk*, by his Spirit, with his word and prophets; and thus they might be both profited by their trouble (for *blessed is the man whom God chastens and teaches*), and prepared for

deliverance, which then comes in love when it finds us brought back to the good way of God and duty. [d.] That he would then remove the judgment, and redress the grievance, whatever it might be—not only accept the prayer, but give in the mercy prayed for.

b. In case of personal afflictions, v. 38–40. "If any man of Israel has an errand to thee, here let him find thee, here let him find favour with thee." He does not mention particulars, so numerous, so various, are the grievances of the children of men. (a.) He supposes that the complainants themselves would very sensibly feel their own burden, and would open that case to God which otherwise they kept to themselves and did not make any man acquainted with: They *shall know every man the plague of his own heart*, what it is that pains him, and (as we say) where the shoe pinches, and shall spread their hands, that is, spread their case, as Hezekiah spread the letter, in prayer, towards this house; whether the trouble be of body or mind, they shall represent it before God. Inward burdens seem especially meant. Sin is the plague of our own heart; our indwelling corruptions are our spiritual diseases. Every Israelite indeed endeavours to know these, that he may mortify them and watch against the risings of them. These he complains of. This is the burden he groans under: *O wretched man that I am!* These drive him to his knees, drive him to the sanctuary. Lamenting these, *he spreads forth his hands* in prayer. (b.) He refers all cases of this kind, that should be brought hither, to God. [a.] To his omniscience: "*Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, not only the plagues of their hearts, their several wants and burdens" (these he knows, but he will know them from us), "but the desire and intent of the heart, the sincerity or hypocrisy of it. Thou knowest which prayer comes from the heart, and which from the lips only." The hearts of kings are not unsearchable to God. [b.] To his justice: *Give to every man according to his ways*; and he will not fail to do so, by the rules of grace, not the law, for then we should all be undone. [c.] To his mercy: *Hear, and forgive, and do* (v. 39), *that they may fear thee all their days*, v. 40. This use we should make of the mercy of God to us in hearing our prayers and forgiving our sins, we should thereby be engaged to fear him while we live. *Fear the Lord and his goodness. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.*

c. The case of the stranger that is not an Israelite is next mentioned, a proselyte that comes to the temple to pray to the God of Israel, being convinced of the folly and wickedness of worshipping the gods of his country. (a.) He supposed that there would be many such (v. 41, 42), that the fame of God's great works which he had wrought for Israel, by which he proved himself to be above all gods, nay, to be God alone, would reach to distant countries: "*Those that live remote shall hear of thy strong hand, and thy stretched-out arm*; and this will bring all thinking considerate people to pray towards this house, that they may obtain the favour of a God that is able to do them a real kindness." (b.) He begged that God would accept and answer the proselyte's prayer (v. 43): *Do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for*. Thus early, thus ancient, were the indications of favour towards the *sinners of the Gentiles*: as there was then *one law for the native and for the stranger* (Ex. 12:49), so there was one gospel for both. (c.) Herein he aimed at the glory of God and the propagating of the knowledge of him: "O let the stranger, in a special manner, speed well in his addresses, that he may carry away with him to his own country a good report of the God of Israel, *that all people may know thee and fear thee* (and, if they know thee aright, they will fear thee) *as do thy people Israel.*" So far was Solomon from monopolizing the knowledge and service of God, and wishing to have

them confined to Israel only (which was the envious desire of the Jews in the days of Christ and his apostles), that he prayed that *all people might fear God as Israel did*. Would to God that all the children of men might receive the adoption, and be made God's children! *Father, thus glorify thy name*.

d. The case of an army going forth to battle is next recommended by Solomon to the divine favour. It is supposed that the army is encamped at a distance, somewhere a great way off, sent by divine order *against the enemy*, v. 44. "When they are ready to engage, and consider the perils and doubtful issues of battle, and put up a prayer to God for protection and success, with their eye *towards this city and temple*, then *hear their prayer*, encourage their hearts, strengthen their hands, cover their heads, and so maintain their cause and give them victory." Soldiers in the field must not think it enough that those who tarry at home pray for them, but must pray for themselves, and they are here encouraged to hope for a gracious answer. Praying should always go along with fighting.

e. The case of poor captives is the last that is here mentioned as a proper object of divine compassion. (a.) He supposes that Israel will sin. He knew them, and himself, and the nature of man, too well to think this a foreign supposition; *for there is no man that sinneth not*, that does not enough to justify God in the severest rebukes of his providence, no man but what is in danger of falling into gross sin, and will if God leave him to himself. (b.) He supposes, what may well be expected, that, if Israel revolt from God, God will be *angry with them*, and *deliver them into the hand of their enemies*, to be carried captive into a strange country, v. 46. (c.) He then supposes that they will bethink themselves, will consider their ways (for afflictions put men upon consideration), and, when once they are brought to consider, they will repent and pray, will confess their sins, and humble themselves, saying, *We have sinned and have done perversely* (v. 47), and *in the land of their enemies will return to God*, whom they had forsaken in their own land. (d.) He supposes that in their prayers they will look towards their own land, the holy land, Jerusalem, the holy city, and the temple, the holy house, and directs them so to do (v. 48), for his sake who gave them that land, chose that city, and to whose honour that house was built. (e.) He prays that then God would *hear their prayers*, *forgive their sins*, *plead their cause*, and incline their enemies to *have compassion on them*, v. 49. 50. God has all hearts in his hand, and can, when he pleases, turn the strongest stream the contrary way, and make those to pity his people who have been their most cruel persecutors. See this prayer answered, Ps. 106:46. He *made them to be pitied of those that carried them captive*, which, if it did not release them, yet eased their captivity. (f.) He pleads their relation to God, and his interest in them: "They are thy people, whom thou hast taken into thy covenant and under thy care and conduct, thy inheritance, from which, more than from any other nation, thy rent and tribute of glory issue and arise (v. 51), *separated from among all people* to be so and by distinguishing favours appropriated to thee," v. 53.

*Lastly*, After all these particulars, he concludes with this general request, that God would hearken to all his praying people *in all that they call unto him for*, v. 52. No place now, under the gospel, can be imagined to add any acceptableness to the prayers made in or towards it, as the temple then did. That was a shadow: the substance is Christ; whatever we ask in his name, it shall be given us.

**Verses 54-61**

Solomon, after his sermon in Ecclesiastes, gives us the conclusion of the whole matter; so he does here, after this long prayer; it is called his *blessing the people*, v. 55. He pronounced it standing, that he might be the better heard, and because he blessed as one having authority. Never were words more fitly spoken, nor more pertinently. Never was congregation dismissed with that which was more likely to affect them and abide with them.

I. He gives God the glory of the great and kind things he had done for Israel, v. 56. He stood up to *bless the congregation* (v. 55), but began with blessing God; for we must in *every thing give thanks*. Do we expect God should do well for us and ours? let us take all occasion to speak well of him and his. He blesses God who has given, he does not say wealth, and honour, and power, and victory, to Israel, but *rest*, as if that were a blessing more valuable than any of those. Let not those who have rest under-value that blessing, though they want some others. He compares the blessings God had bestowed upon them with the promises he had given them, that God might have the honour of his faithfulness and the truth of that word of his which he has *magnified above all his name*. 1. He refers to the *promises given by the hand of Moses*, as he did (v. 15, 24) to those which were made to David. There were promises given by Moses, as well as precepts. It was long ere God gave Israel the promised rest, but they had it at last, after many trials. The day will come when God's spiritual Israel will *rest from all their labours*. 2. He does, as it were, write a receipt in full on the back of these bonds: *There has not failed one word of all his good promises*. This discharge he gives in the name of all Israel, to the everlasting honour of the divine faithfulness, and the everlasting encouragement of all those that build upon the divine promises.

II. He blesses himself and the congregation, expressing his earnest desire and hope of these four things:-1. The presence of God with them, which is all in all to the happiness of a church and nation and of every particular person. This great congregation was now shortly to be scattered, and it was not likely that they would ever be all together again in this world. Solomon therefore dismisses them with this blessing: "*The Lord be present with us*, and that will be comfort enough when we are absent from each other. *The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers* (v. 57); *let him not leave us*, let him be to us to day, and to ours for ever, what he was to those that went before us." 2. The power of his grace upon them: "*Let him be with us*, and continue with us, not that he may enlarge our coasts and increase our wealth, but *that he may incline our hearts to himself, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments*," v. 58. Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, with which we should covet earnestly to be blessed. Our hearts are naturally averse to our duty, and apt to decline from God; it is his grace that inclines them, grace that must be obtained by prayer. 3. An answer to the prayer he had now made: "*Let these my words be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night*, v. 59. Let a gracious return be made to every prayer that shall be made here, and that will be a continual answer to this prayer." What Solomon asks here for his prayer is still granted in the intercession of Christ, of which his supplication was a type; that powerful prevailing intercession *is before the Lord our God day and night*, for our great Advocate attends continually to this very thing, and we may depend upon him to maintain our cause (against the adversary that accuses us *day and night*, Rev. 12:10) *and the common cause of his people Israel, at all times*, upon all occasions, as the matter shall require, so as to speak for us *the word of the day in its day*, as the original here reads it, from which we shall receive grace sufficient, suitable, and seasonable, *in every time of need*. 4. The glorifying of God in the

enlargement of his kingdom among men. Let Israel be thus blessed, thus favoured; not that all people may become tributaries to us (Solomon sees his kingdom as great as he desires), but *that all people may know that the Lord is God*, and he only, and may come and worship him, v. 60. With this Solomon's prayers, like *the prayers of his father David, the son of Jesse, are ended* (Ps. 72:19, 20): *Let the whole earth be filled with his glory*. We cannot close our prayers with a better summary than this, *Father, glorify thy name*.

III. He solemnly charges his people to continue and persevere in their duty to God. Having spoken to God for them, he here speaks from God to them, and those only would fare the better for his prayers that were made better by his preaching. His admonition, at parting, is, *"Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God*, v. 61. Let your obedience be universal, without dividing—upright, without dissembling—constant, without declining;" this is evangelical perfection.

### **Verses 62-66**

We read before that Judah and Israel were eating and drinking, and very cheerful under their own vines and fig-trees; here we have them so in God's courts. Now they found Solomon's words true concerning Wisdom's ways, that they are ways of pleasantness.

I. They had abundant joy and satisfaction while they attended at God's house, for there, 1. Solomon offered a great sacrifice, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, enough to have drained the country of cattle if it had not been a very fruitful land. The heathen thought themselves very generous when they offered sacrifices by *hundreds* (*hecatombs* they called them), but Solomon out-did them: he offered them by *thousands*. When Moses dedicated his altar, the peace-offerings were twenty-four *bullocks, and of rams, goats, and lambs*, 180 (Num. 7:88); then the people were poor, but now that they had increased in wealth more was expected from them. Where God sows plentifully he must reap accordingly. All these sacrifices could not be offered in one day, but in the several days of the feast. Thirty oxen a day served Solomon's table, but thousands shall go to God's altar. Few are thus minded, to spend more on their souls than on their bodies. The flesh of the peace-offerings, which belonged to the offerer, it is likely, Solomon treated the people with. Christ fed those who attended him. The brazen altar was not large enough to receive all these sacrifices, so that, to serve the present occasion, they were forced to offer many of them *in the middle of the court*, (v. 64), some think on altars, altars of earth or stone, erected for the purpose and taken down when the solemnity was over, others think on the bare ground. Those that will be generous in serving God need not stint themselves for want of room and occasion to be so. 2. He kept a feast, the feast of tabernacles, as it should seem, after the feast of dedication, and both together lasted fourteen days (v. 65), yet they said not, *Behold, what a weariness is this!*

II. They carried this joy and satisfaction with them to their own houses. When they were dismissed they blessed the king (v. 66), applauded him, admired him, and returned him the thanks of the congregation, and then *went to their tents joyful and glad of heart*, all easy and pleased. God's goodness was the matter of their joy, so it should be of ours at all times. They rejoiced in God's blessing both on the royal family and on the kingdom; thus should we go home rejoicing from holy ordinances, and go on our way rejoicing for God's goodness to our Lord Jesus (of whom David his servant was a type, in the advancement and establishment of his throne, pursuant to the covenant of redemption), and to all believers, his spiritual Israel, in their

sanctification and consolation, pursuant to the covenant of grace. If we rejoice not herein always it is our own fault.

## Chapter 9

In this chapter we have, I. The answer which God, in a vision, gave to Solomon's prayer, and the terms he settled with him (v. 1-9). II. The interchanging of grateful kindnesses between Solomon and Hiram (v. 10-14). III. His workmen and buildings (v. 15-24). IV. His devotion (v. 25). V. His trading navy (v. 26-28).

### Verses 1-9

God had given a real answer to Solomon's prayer, and tokens of his acceptance of it, immediately, by the *fire from heaven* which consumed the sacrifices (as we find 2 Chr. 7:1); but here we have a more express and distinct answer to it. Observe, I. In what way God gave him this answer. He appeared to him, as he had done at Gibeon, in the beginning of his reign, in a dream or vision, v. 2. The comparing of it with that intimates that it was the very night after he had finished the solemnities of his festival, for so that was, 2 Chr. 1:6, 7. And then v. 1, speaking of Solomon's finishing all his buildings, which was not till many years after the dedication of the temple, must be read thus, *Solomon finished* (as it is 2 Chr. 7:11), and v. 2 must be read, *and the Lord had appeared*.

II. The purport of this answer. 1. He assures him of his special presence in the temple he had built, in answer to the prayer he had made (v. 3): *I have hallowed this house*. Solomon had dedicated it, but it was God's prerogative to hallow it—to sanctify or consecrate it. Men cannot make a place holy, yet what we, in sincerity, devote to God, we may hope he will graciously accept as his; and *his eyes and his heart shall be upon it*. Apply it to persons, the living temples. Those whom God hallows or sanctifies, whom he sets apart for himself, have his eye, his heart, his love and care, and this perpetually. 2. He shows him that he and his people were for the future *upon their good behaviour*. Let them not be secure now, as if they might live as they please now that they have the *temple of the Lord* among them, Jer. 7:4. No, this house was designed to protect them in their allegiance to God, but not in their rebellion or disobedience. God deals plainly with us, sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, and lets us know what we must trust to. God here tells Solomon, (1.) That the establishment of his kingdom depended upon the constancy of his obedience (v. 4, 5): *"If thou wilt walk before me as David did, who left thee a good example and encouragement enough to follow it (and advantage thou wilt be accountable for if thou do not improve it), if thou wilt walk as he did, in integrity of heart and uprightness"* (for that is the main matter—no religion without sincerity), *"then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom, and not otherwise,"* for on that condition the promise was made, Ps. 132:12. If we perform our part of the covenant, God will not fail to perform his; if we improve the grace God has given us, he will confirm us to the end. Let not the children of godly parents expect the entail of the blessing, unless they tread in the steps of those that have gone before them to heaven, and keep up the virtue and piety of their ancestors. (2.) That the ruin of his kingdom would be the certain consequence of his or his children's apostasy from God (v. 6): *"But know thou, and let thy family and kingdom know it, and be admonished by it, that if you shall altogether turn from following me"* (so it is thought it should be read), *"if you forsake my service, desert my altar, and go and serve other gods"* (for that was the covenant-breaking sin), *"if you or your children break off from me, this house will not save you. But, [1.] Israel, though a holy nation, will be cut*

off (v. 7), by one judgment after another, till they become a proverb and a by-word, and the most despicable people under the sun, though now the most honourable." This supposes the destruction of the royal family, though it is not particularly threatened; the king is, of course, undone, if the kingdom be. [2.] "The temple, though a holy house, which God himself has *hallowed for his name*, shall be abandoned and laid desolate (v. 8, 9): *This house which is high.*" They prided themselves in the stateliness and magnificence of the structure, but let them know that it is not so high as to be out of the reach of God's judgments, if they vilify it so as to exchange it for groves and idol-temples, and yet, at the same time, magnify it so as to think it will secure the favour of God to them though they ever so much corrupt themselves. *This house which is high.* Those that *now pass by it are astonished* at the bulk and beauty of it; the richness, contrivance, and workmanship, are admired by all spectators, and it is called a stupendous fabric; but, if you forsake God, its height will make its fall the more amazing, and those that pass by will be as much astonished at its ruins, while the guilty, self-convicted, self-condemned, Israelites, will be forced to acknowledge, with shame, that they themselves were the ruin of it; for when it shall be asked, *Why hath the Lord done thus to his house?* they cannot but answer, It was *because they forsook the Lord their God*. See Deu. 29:24, 25. Their sin will be read in their punishment. They deserted the temple, and therefore God deserted it; they profaned it with their sins and laid it common, and therefore God profaned it with his judgments and laid it waste. God gave Solomon fair warning of this, now that he had newly built and dedicated it, that he and his people might not be high-minded, but fear.

#### **Verses 10-14**

What agreement was made between Solomon and Hiram, when the building-work was to be begun, we read before, ch. 5. Here we have an account of their fair and friendly parting when the work was done. 1. Hiram made good his bargain to the utmost. He had furnished Solomon with materials for his buildings, according to all his desire (v. 11), and with gold, v. 15. So far was he from envying Solomon's growing greatness and reputation, and being jealous of him, that he helped to magnify him. Solomon's power, with Solomon's wisdom, needs not be dreaded by any of his neighbours. God honours him; therefore Hiram will. 2. Solomon, no doubt, made good his bargain, and gave Hiram *food for his household*, as was agreed, ch. 5:9. But here we are told that, over and above that, he gave him twenty cities (small ones we may suppose, like those mentioned here, v. 19) *in the land of Galilee*, v. 11. It should seem, these were not allotted to any of the tribes of Israel (for the border of Asher came up to them, Jos. 19:27, which intimates that it did not include them), but continued in the hands of the natives till Solomon made himself master of them, and then made a present of them to Hiram. It becomes those that are great and good to be generous. Hiram came to see these cities, and did not like them (v. 12): *They pleased him not*. He called the country the land of *Cabul*, a Phoenician word (says Josephus) which signifies *displeasing*, v. 13. He therefore returned them to Solomon (as we find, 2 Chr. 8:2), who repaired them, and then *caused the children of Israel to inhabit them*, which intimates that before they did not; but, when Solomon received back what he had given, no doubt he honourably gave Hiram an equivalent in something else. But what shall we think of this? Did Solomon act meanly in giving Hiram what was not worth his acceptance? Or was Hiram humoursome and hard to please? I am willing to believe it was neither the one nor the other. The country was truly valuable, and so were the cities in it, but not agreeable to Hiram's genius. The Tyrians were merchants, trading men, that lived in fine

houses, and became rich by navigation, but knew not how to value a country that was fit for corn and pasture (that was business that lay out of their way); and therefore Hiram desired Solomon to take them again, he knew not what to do with them, and, if he would please to gratify him, let it be in his own element, by becoming his partner in trade, as we find he did, v. 27. Hiram, who was used to the clean streets of Tyre, could by no means agree with the miry lanes in the land of Cabul, whereas the best lands have commonly the worst roads through them. See how the providence of God suits both the accommodation of this earth to the various dispositions of men and the dispositions of men to the various accommodations of the earth, and all for the good of mankind in general. Some take delight in husbandry, and wonder what pleasure sailors can take on a rough sea; others take as much delight in navigation, and wonder what pleasure husbandmen can take in a dirty country, like the land of Cabul. It is so in many other instances, in which we may observe the wisdom of him whose all souls are and all lands.

### **Verses 15-28**

We have here a further account of Solomon's greatness.

I. His buildings. He raised a great levy both of men and money, because he projected a great deal of building, which would both employ many hands and put him to a vast expense, v. 15. And he was a wise builder, who sat down first, and counted the cost, and would not begin to build till he found himself able to finish. Perhaps there was some complaint of the heaviness of the taxes, which the historian excuses from the greatness of his undertakings. He raised it, not for war (as other princes), which would spend the blood of his subjects, but for building, which would require only their labour and purses. Perhaps David observed Solomon's genius to lie towards building, and foresaw he would have his head and hands full of it, when he penned that song of degrees for Solomon, which begins, *Except the Lord build the house, those labour in vain that build it* (Ps. 127:1), directing him to acknowledge God in all his ways, and, by prayer and faith in his providence, to take him along with him in all his designs of this kind. And Solomon verily began his work at the right end, for he built God's house first, and finished that before he began his own; and then God blessed him, and he prospered in all his other buildings. If we begin with God, he will go on with us. Let the first-fruits be his, and the after-fruits will the more comfortably be ours, Mt. 6:33. Solomon built a church first and then he was enabled to build houses, and cities, and walls. Those consult not their own interest that defer to the last what they design for pious uses. The further order in Solomon's buildings is observable. God's house first for religion, then his own for his own convenience, then a house for his wife, to which she removed as soon as it was ready for her (v. 24), then Millo, the town-house or guild-hall, then the wall of Jerusalem, the royal city, then some cities of note and strength in the country, which were decayed and unfortified, Hazor, Megiddo, etc. As he rebuilt these at his own charge, the inhabitants would be not only his subjects, but his tenants, which would increase the revenues of the crown for the benefit of his successors. Among the rest, he built Gezer, which Pharaoh took out of the hands of the Canaanites, and made a present of to his daughter, Solomon's wife, v. 16. See how God *maketh the earth to help the woman*. Solomon was not himself a warlike prince, but the king of Egypt, who was, took cities for him to build. Then he built cities for convenience, for store, for his chariots, and for his horsemen, v. 19. And, *lastly*, he built for pleasure in Lebanon, for his hunting perhaps, or other diversions

there. Let piety begin, and profit proceed, and leave pleasure to the last.

II. His workmen and servants. In doing such great works, he must needs employ abundance of workmen. The honour of great men is borrowed from their inferiors, who do that which they have the credit of. 1. Solomon employed those who remained of the conquered and devoted nations in all the slavish work, v. 20, 21. We may suppose that they renounced their idolatry and submitted to Solomon's government, so that he could not, in honour, utterly destroy them, and they were so poor that he could not levy money on them; therefore he served himself of their labour. Herein he observed God's law (*Lev. 25:44, Thy bondmen shall be of the heathen*), and fulfilled Noah's curse upon Canaan, *A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren*, Gen. 9:25. 2. He employed Israelites in the more creditable services (v. 22, 23): *Of them he made no bondmen*, for they were God's freemen, but he made them soldiers and courtiers, and gave them offices, as he saw them qualified, among his chariots and horsemen, appointing some to support the service of the inferior labourers. Thus he preserved the dignity and liberty of Israel and honoured their relation to God as a kingdom of priests.

III. His piety and devotion (v. 25): *Three times in a year* he offered burnt-offerings extraordinary (namely, at the three yearly feasts, the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles) in honour of the divine institution, besides what he offered at other times, both stately and upon special occasions. With his sacrifices he burnt incense, not himself (that was king Uzziah's crime), but the priest for him, at his charge, and for his particular use. It is said, He offered *on the altar which he himself built*. He took care to build it, and then, 1. He himself made use of it. Many will assist the devotions of others that neglect their own. Solomon did not think his building an altar would excuse him from sacrificing, but rather engage him the more to it. 2. He himself had the benefit and comfort of it. Whatever pains we take, for the support of religion, to the glory of God and the edification of others, we ourselves are likely to have the advantage of it.

IV. His merchandise. He built a fleet of trading ships at Ezion-geber (v. 26), a port on the coast of the Red Sea, the furthest stage of the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness, Num. 33:35. Probably that wilderness now began to be peopled by the Edomites, which it was not then. To them this port had belonged, but, David having subdued the Edomites, it now pertained to the crown of Judah. The fleet traded to Ophir in the East Indies, supposed to be that which is now called *Ceylon*. Gold was the commodity traded for, substantial wealth. It should seem, Solomon had before been Hiram's partner, or put a venture into his ships, which made him a rich return of 120 talents (v. 14), which encouraged him to build a fleet of his own. The success of others in any employment should quicken our industry; for *in all labour there is profit*. Solomon sent his own servants as factors, and merchants, and super-cargoes, but hired Tyrians for sailors, for they had *knowledge of the sea*, v. 27. Thus one nation needs another, Providence so ordering it that there may be mutual commerce and assistance; for not only as Christians, but as men, we are members one of another. The fleet brought home to Solomon 420 *talents of gold*, v. 28. Canaan, the holy land, the glory of all lands, had no gold in it, which teaches us that that part of the wealth of this world which is for hoarding and trading is not the best part of it, but that which is more immediately for the present support and comfort of life, our own and others'; such were the productions of Canaan. Solomon got much by his merchandise, but, it should seem, David got much more by his conquests. What were Solomon's 420 *talents* to David's 100,000 *talents of gold*? 1 Chr. 22:14; 29:4.

Solomon got much by his merchandise, and yet has directed us to a better trade, within reach of the poorest, having assured us from his own experience of both that the *merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than fine gold*, Prov. 3:14.

## Chapter 10

Still Solomon looks great, and every thing in this chapter adds to his magnificence. We read nothing indeed of his charity, of no hospitals he built, or alms-houses; he made his kingdom so rich that it did not need them; yet, no question, many poor were relieved from the abundance of his table. A church he had built, never to be equalled; schools or colleges he need not build any, his own palace is an academy, and his court a rendezvous of wise and learned men, as well as the centre of all the circulating riches of that part of the world. I. What abundance of wisdom there was there appears from the application the queen of Sheba made to him, and the great satisfaction she had in her entertainment there (v. 1–13), and others likewise (v. 24). II. What abundance of wealth there was there appears here by the gold imported, with other things, yearly (v. 14, 15), and in a triennial return (v. 22). Gold presented (v. 25), and gold used in targets and shields (v. 16, 17), and vessels (v. 21). A stately throne made (v. 18–20). His chariots and horsemen (v. 26). His trade with Egypt (v. 28, 29). And the great plenty of silver and cedars among his people (v. 27). So that, putting all together, it must be owned, as it is here said (v. 23), that "king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches, and for wisdom." Yet what was he to the King of kings? Where Christ is, by his word and Spirit, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is there."

### Verses 1-13

We have here an account of the visit which the queen of Sheba made to Solomon, no doubt when he was in the height of his piety and prosperity. Our Saviour calls her *the queen of the south*, for Sheba lay south of Canaan. The common opinion is that it was in Africa; and the Christians in Ethiopia, to this day, are confident that she came from their country, and that Candace was her successor, who is mentioned Acts 8:27. But it is more probable that she came from the south part of Arabia the happy. It should seem she was a queen regent, sovereign of her country. Many a kingdom would have been deprived of its greatest blessings if a Salique law had been admitted into its constitution. Observe,

I. On what errand the queen of Sheba came—not to treat of trade or commerce, to adjust the limits of their dominions, to court his alliance for their mutual strength or his assistance against some common enemy, which are the common occasions of the congress of crowned heads and their interviews, but she came, 1. To satisfy her curiosity; for she had heard of his fame, especially for wisdom, and she came to prove him, whether he was so great a man as he was reported to be, v. 1. Solomon's fleet sailed near the coast of her country, and probably might put in there for fresh water; perhaps it was thus that *she heard of the fame of Solomon*, that he excelled in wisdom all the children of the east, and nothing would serve her but she would go herself and know the truth of the report. 2. To receive instruction from him. She came to *hear his wisdom*, and thereby to improve her own (Mt. 12:42), that she might be the better able to govern her own kingdom by his maxims of policy. Those whom God has called to any public employment, particularly in the magistracy and ministry, should, by all means possible, be still improving themselves in that knowledge which will more and more qualify them for it, and enable them to discharge their trust well. But, it should seem, that which she chiefly aimed at was to be instructed in the things of God. She was religiously inclined, and had heard not only of the fame of Solomon, but *concerning the name of the Lord* (v. 1), the great name of that

God whom Solomon worshipped and from whom he received his wisdom, and with this God she desired to be better acquainted. Therefore does our Saviour mention her enquiries after God, by Solomon, as an aggravation of the stupidity of those who enquire not after God by our Lord Jesus Christ, though he, having lain in his bosom, was much better able to instruct them.

II. With what equipage she came, with a very great retinue, agreeable to her rank, intending to try Solomon's wealth and generosity, as well as his wisdom, what entertainment he could and would give to a royal visitant, v. 2. Yet she came not as one begging, but brought enough to bear her charges, and abundantly to recompense Solomon for his attention to her, nothing mean or common, but gold, and precious stones, and spices, because she came to trade for wisdom, which she would purchase at any rate.

III. What entertainment Solomon gave her. He despised not the weakness of her sex, blamed her not for leaving her own business at home to come so long a journey, and put herself and him to so much trouble and expense merely to satisfy her curiosity; but he made her welcome and all her train, gave her liberty to put all her questions, though some perhaps were frivolous, some captious, and some over-curious; he allowed her to *commune with him of all that was in her heart* (v. 2) and gave her a satisfactory answer to *all her questions* (v. 3), whether natural, moral, political, or divine. Were they designed to try him? he gave them such turns as abundantly satisfied her of his uncommon knowledge. Were they designed for her own instruction? (as we suppose most of them were), she received abundant instruction from him, and he made things surprisingly easy which she apprehended insuperably difficult, and satisfied her that there was *a divine sentence in the lips of this king*. But he informed her no doubt, with particular care, concerning God, and his law and instituted worship. He had taken it for granted (ch. 8:42) that *strangers would hear of his great name*, and would come thither to enquire after him; and now that so great a stranger came we may be sure he was not wanting to assist and encourage her enquiries, and give her a description of the temple, and the officers and services of it, that she might be persuaded to serve the Lord whom she now sought.

IV. How she was affected with what she saw and heard in Solomon's court. Divers things are here mentioned which she admired, the buildings and furniture of his palace, the provision that was made very day for his table (when she saw that perhaps she wondered where there were mouths for all that meat, but when she saw the multitude of his attendants and guests she was as ready to wonder where was the meat for all those mouths), the orderly sitting of his servants, every one in his place, and the ready attendance of his ministers, without any confusion, their rich liveries, and the propriety with which his cup-bearers waited at his table. These things she admired, as adding much to his magnificence. But, above all these, the first thing mentioned (which contained all) is his wisdom (v. 4), of the transcendency of which she now had incontestable proofs: and the last thing mentioned, which crowned all, is his piety, the *ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord*, with what gravity and seriousness, and an air of devotion in his countenance, he appeared, when he went to the temple to worship God, with as much humility then as majesty at other times. Many of the ancient versions read it, *The burnt-offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord*; she observed with what a generous bounty he brought his sacrifices, and with what a pious fervour he attended the offering of them; never did she see so much goodness with so much greatness. Every thing was so

surprising that there was no more spirit in her, but she stood amazed; she had never seen the like.

V. How she expressed herself upon this occasion. 1. She owned her expectation far out-done, though it was highly raised by the report she heard, v. 6, 7. She is far from repenting her journey or calling herself a *fool* for undertaking it, but acknowledges it was well worth her while to come so far for the sight of that which she could not believe the report of. Usually things are represented to us, both by common fame and by our own imagination, much greater than we find them when we come to examine them; but here the truth exceeded both fame and fancy. Those who, through grace, are brought to experience the delights of communion with God will say that the one-half was not told them of the pleasures of Wisdom's ways and the advantages of her gates. Glorified saints, much more, will say that it was a true report which they heard of the happiness of heaven, but that the thousandth part was not told them, 1 Co. 2:9. 2. She pronounced those happy that constantly attended him, and waited on him at table: "*Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants* (v. 8); they may improve their own wisdom by hearing thine." She was tempted to envy them and to wish herself one of them. Note, It is a great advantage to be in good families, and to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise, and good, and communicative. Many have this happiness who know not how to value it. With much more reason may we say this of Christ's servants, *Blessed are those that dwell in his house, they will be still praising him*. 3. She blessed God, the giver of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the author of his advancement, who had made him king, (1.) In kindness to him, that he might have the larger opportunity of doing good with his wisdom: He *delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel*, v. 9. Solomon's preferment began in the prophet's calling him *Jedidiah, because the Lord loved him*, 2 Sa. 12:25. It more than doubles our comforts if we have reason to hope they come from God's delight in us. *It was his pleasure concerning thee* (so it may be read) *to set thee on the throne*, not for thy merit's sake, but because it so seemed good unto him. (2.) In kindness to the people, *because the Lord loved Israel for ever*, designed them a lasting bliss, long to survive him that laid the foundations of it. "He has made thee king, not that thou mayest live in pomp and pleasure, and do what thou wilt, but *to do judgment and justice*." This she kindly reminded Solomon of, and no doubt he took it kindly. Both magistrates and ministers must be more solicitous to do the duty of their places than to secure the honours and profits of them. To this she attributes his prosperity, not to his wisdom, for bread is not always *to the wise* (Eccl. 9:11), but whoso *doeth judgment and justice*, it shall be *well with him*, Jer. 22:15. Thus *giving of thanks* must be *made for kings*, for good kings, for such kings; they are what God makes them to be.

VI. How they parted. 1. She made a noble present to Solomon of *gold and spices*, v. 10. David had foretold concerning Solomon that *to him should be given of the gold of Sheba*, Ps. 72:15. The present of gold and spices which the wise men of the east brought to Christ was signified by this, Mt. 2:11. Thus she paid for the wisdom she had learned and did not think she bought it dearly. Let those that are taught of God give him their hearts, and the present will be more acceptable than this of gold and spices. Mention is made of the great abundance Solomon had of his own, notwithstanding she presented and he accepted this gold. What we present to Christ he needs not, but will have us so to express our gratitude. The almug-trees are here spoken of (v. 11, 12) as extraordinary, because perhaps much admired by the queen of Sheba. 2. Solomon was not behind-hand with her: *He gave her whatsoever, she asked*, patterns, we may suppose, of those things that were curious, by which she

might make the like; or perhaps he gave her his precepts of wisdom and piety in writing, *besides that which he gave her of his royal bounty*, v. 13. Thus those who apply to our Lord Jesus will find him not only greater than Solomon, and wiser, but more kind; whatsoever we ask, it shall be done for us; nay, he will, out of his divine bounty, which infinitely exceeds royal bounty, even Solomon's, do for us *more than we are able to ask or think*.

### **Verses 14-29**

We have here a further account of Solomon's prosperity.

I. How he increased his wealth. Though he had much, he still coveted to have more, being willing to try the utmost the things of this world could do to make men happy. 1. Besides the gold that came from Ophir (ch. 9:28), he brought so much into his country from other places that the whole amounted, every year, to 666 *talents* (v. 14), an ominous number, compare Rev. 13:18, and Ezra 2:13. 2. He received a great deal in customs from the merchants, and in land-taxes from the countries his father had conquered and made tributaries to Israel, v. 15. 3. He was Hiram's partner in a Tharshish fleet, of and for Tyre, which imported once in three years, not only gold, and silver, and ivory, substantial goods and serviceable, but apes to play with and peacocks to please the eye with their feathers, v. 22. I wish this may not be an evidence that Solomon and his people, being overcharged with prosperity, by this time grew childish and wanton. 4. He had presents made him, every year, from the neighbouring princes and great men, to engage the continuance of his friendship, not so much because they feared him or were jealous of him as because they loved him and admired his wisdom, had often occasion to consult him as an oracle, and sent him these presents by way of recompence for his advice in politics, and (whether it became his grandeur and generosity or no we will not enquire) he took all that came, even garments and spices, horses and mules, v. 24, 25. 5. He traded to Egypt for horses and linen-yarn (or, as some read it, *linen-cloth*), the staple commodities of that country, and had his own merchants or factors whom he employed in this traffic and who were accountable to him, v. 28, 28. The custom to be paid to the king of Egypt for exported chariots and horses out of Egypt was very high, but (as bishop Patrick understands it) Solomon, having married his daughter, got him to compound for the customs, so that he could bring them up cheaper than his neighbours, which obliged them to buy them of him, which he was wise enough no doubt to make his advantage of. This puts an honour upon the trading part of a nation, and sets a tradesman not so much below a gentleman as some place him, that Solomon, one of the greatest men that ever was, thought it no disparagement to him to deal in trade. In all labour there is profit.

II. What use he made of his wealth. He did not hoard it up in his coffers, that he might have it to look upon and leave behind him. He has, in his Ecclesiastes, so much exposed the folly of hoarding that we cannot suppose he would himself be guilty of it. No, God that had given him riches, and wealth, and honour, gave him also power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, Eccles. 5:19.

1. He laid out his gold in fine things for himself, which he might the better be allowed to do when he had before laid out so much in fine things for the house of God. (1.) He made 200 targets, and 300 shields, of beaten gold (v. 16, 17), not for service, but for state, to be carried before him when he appeared in pomp. With us, magistrates have *swords* and *maces* carried before them, as the Romans had their *rods* and *axes*, in token of their power to correct and punish the bad, to whom they are to be a

terror. But Solomon had *shields* and *targets* carried before him, to signify that he took more pleasure in using his power for the defence and protection of the good, to whom he would be a praise. Magistrates are *shields of the earth*. (2.) He made a stately throne, on which he sat, to give laws to his subjects, audience to ambassadors, and judgment upon appeals, v. 18–20. It was made of ivory, or elephants' teeth, which was very rich; and yet, as if he had so much gold that he knew not what to do with it, he *overlaid that with gold*, the best gold. Yet some think he did not cover the ivory all over, but here and there. He rolled it, flowered it, or inlaid it, with gold. The stays or arms of this stately chair were supported by the images of lions in gold; so were the steps and paces by which he went up to it, to be a memorandum to him of that courage and resolution wherewith he ought to execute judgment, not fearing the face of man. *The righteous*, in that post, *is bold as a lion*. (3.) He made all his drinking vessels, and all the furniture of his table, even at his country seat, of pure gold, v. 21. He did not grudge himself what he had, but took the credit and comfort of it, such as it was. That is good that does us good.

2. He made it circulate among his subjects, so that the kingdom was as rich as the king; for he had no separate interests of his own to consult, but sought the welfare of his people. Those princes are not governed by Solomon's maxims who think it policy to keep their subjects poor. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, who is not only rich himself, but enriches all that are his. Solomon was instrumental to bring so much gold into the country, and disperse it, that *silver was nothing accounted of*, v. 21. There was such plenty of it in Jerusalem that it was as the stones; and cedars, that used to be great rarities, were as common *as sycamore trees*, v. 27. Such is the nature of worldly wealth, plenty of it makes it the less valuable; much more should the enjoyment of spiritual riches lessen our esteem of all earthly possessions. If *gold in abundance* would make silver to seem so despicable, shall not wisdom, and grace, and the foretastes of heaven, which are far better than gold, make earthly wealth seem much more despicable?

*Lastly*, Well, thus rich, thus great, was Solomon, and thus did he *exceed all the kings of the earth*, v. 23. Now let us remember, 1. That this was he who, when he was *setting out in the world*, did not ask for the wealth and honour of it, but asked for *a wise and understanding heart*. The more moderate our desires are towards earthly things the better qualified we are for the enjoyment of them and the more likely to have them. See, in Solomon's greatness, the performance of God's promise (ch. 3:13), and let it encourage us to *seek first the righteousness of God's kingdom*. 2. That this was he who, having tasted all these enjoyments, wrote a whole book to show the vanity of all worldly things and the vexation of spirit that attends them, their insufficiency to make us happy and the folly of setting our hearts upon them, and to recommend to us the practice of serious godliness, as that which is the whole of man, and will do infinitely more towards the making of us easy and happy than all the wealth and power that he was master of, and which, through the grace of God, is within our reach, when the thousandth part of Solomon's greatness is a thousand times more than we can ever be so vain as to promise ourselves in this world.

## Chapter 11

This chapter begins with as melancholy a "but" as almost any we find in all the Bible. Hitherto we have read nothing of Solomon but what was great and good; but the lustre both of his goodness and of his greatness is here sullied and eclipsed, and his sun sets under a cloud. I. The glory of his piety is stained by his departure from God and his duty, in his latter days, marrying strange wives and worshipping strange gods (v. 4-8). II. The glory of his prosperity is stained by God's displeasure against him and the fruits of that displeasure. 1. He sent him an angry message (v. 9-13). 2. He stirred up enemies, who gave him disturbance, Hadad (v. 14-22), Rezon (v. 23-25). 3. He gave away ten tribes of his twelve, from his posterity after him, to Jeroboam, whom therefore he sought in vain to slay (v. 26-40), and this is all that remains here to be told concerning Solomon, except his death and burial (v. 41-43), for there is nothing perfect under the sun, but all is so above the sun.

### Verses 1-8

This is a sad story, and very surprising, of Solomon's defection and degeneracy.

I. Let us enquire into the occasions and particulars of it. Shall Solomon fall, that was the beauty of Israel, and so great a blessing of his generation? Yes, it is too true, and the scripture is faithful in relating it, and repeating it, and referring to it long after, Neh. 13:26. *There was no king like Solomon who was beloved of his God, yet even him did outlandish women cause to sin.* There is the summary of his apostasy; it was the woman that *deceived him*, and was *first in the transgression*.

1. He doted on strange women, *many strange women*. Here his revolt began. (1.) He gave himself to women, which his mother had particularly cautioned him against. Prov. 31:3, *Give not thy strength unto women* (perhaps alluding to Samson, who lost his strength by giving information of it to a woman), for it is that which, as much as any thing, destroys kings. His father David's fall began with the lusts of the flesh, which he should have taken warning by. The love of women has *cast down many wounded* (Prov. 7:26) and *many* (says bishop Hall) *have had their head broken by their own rib*. (2.) He took many women, so many that, at last, they amounted to 700 wives and 300 concubines, 1000 in all, and not one good one among them, as he himself owns in his penitential sermon (Eccl. 7:28), for no woman of established virtue would be one of such a set. God had, by his law, particularly forbidden the kings to multiply either horses or wives, Deu. 17:16, 17. How he broke the former law, in multiplying horses, and having them *out of Egypt* too (which was expressly prohibited in that law) we read ch. 10:29, and here we are told how he broke the latter (which proved of more fatal consequence) in multiplying wives. Note, Less sins, made gold with, open the door to greater. David had multiplied wives too much, and perhaps that made Solomon presume it lawful. Note, If those that are in reputation for religion in any thing set a bad example, they know not what a deal of mischief they may do by it, particularly to their own children. One bad act of a good man may be of more pernicious consequence to others than twenty of a wicked man. Probably Solomon, when he began to multiply wives, intended not to exceed his father's number. But the way of sin is down-hill; those that have got into it cannot easily stop themselves. Divine wisdom has appointed one woman for one man, did so at first; and those who do not think one enough will not think two or three enough. Unbridled lust will be unbounded, and the loosened hind will wander endlessly. But this was not all: (3.) They were strange women, Moabites,

Ammonites, etc., of the nations which God had particularly forbidden them to intermarry with, v. 2. Some think it was in policy that he married these foreigners, by them to get intelligence of the state of those countries. I rather fear it was because the daughters of Israel were too grave and modest for him, and those foreigners pleased him with the looseness and wantonness of their dress, and air, and conversation. Or, perhaps, it was looked upon as a piece of state to have his seraglio, as his other treasures, replenished with that which was far-fetched; as if that were too great an honour for the best of his subjects which would really have been a disgrace to the meanest of them—to be his mistresses. And, (4.) To complete the mischief, *Solomon clave unto these in love*, v. 2. He not only kept them, but was extravagantly fond of them, set his heart upon them, spent his time among them, thought every thing well they said and did, and despised Pharaoh's daughter, his rightful wife, who had been dear to him, and all the ladies of Israel, in comparison of them. Solomon was master of a great deal of knowledge, but to what purpose, when he had no better a government of his appetites?

2. He was drawn by them to the worship of strange gods, as Israel to Baal-peor by the daughters of Moab. This was the bad consequence of his multiplying wives. We have reason to think it impaired his health, and hastened upon him the decays of age; it exhausted his treasure, which, though vast indeed, would be found little enough to maintain the pride and vanity of all these women; perhaps it occasioned him, in his latter end, to neglect his business, by which he lost his supplies from abroad, and was forced, for the keeping up of his grandeur, to burden his subjects with those taxes which they complained of, ch. 12:4. But none of these consequences were so bad as this: *His wives turned away his heart after other gods*, v. 3, 4. (1.) He grew cool and indifferent in his own religion and remiss in the service of the God of Israel: *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God* (v. 4), nor did he *follow him fully* (v. 6), like David. We cannot suppose that he quite cast off the worship of God, much less that he restrained or hindered it (the temple-service went on as usual); but he grew less frequent, and less serious, in *his ascent to the house of the Lord* and his attendance on his altar. He left his first love, lost his zeal for God, and did not persevere to the end as he had begun; therefore it is said *he was not perfect*, because he was not *constant*; and he followed not God fully, because he turned from following him, and did not continue to the end. His father David had many faults, but he never neglected the worship of God, nor grew remiss in that, as Solomon did (his wives using all their arts to divert him from it), and *there* began his apostasy. (2.) He tolerated and maintained his wives in their idolatry and made no scruple of joining with them in it. Pharaoh's daughter was proselyted (as is supposed) to the Jews' religion, but, when he began to grow careless in the worship of God himself, he used no means to convert his other wives to it; in complaisance to them, he built chapels for their gods (v. 7, 8), maintained their priests, and occasionally did himself attend their altars, making a jest of it, asking, "What harm is there in it? Are not all religions alike?" which (says bishop Patrick) has been the *disease of some great wits*. When he humoured one thus, the rest would take it ill if he did not, in like manner, gratify them, so that he did it for all his wives (v. 8), and at last came to such a degree of impiety that he set up a high place for *Chemosh in the hill that is before Jerusalem*, the *mount of Olives*, as if to confront the temple which he himself had built. These high places continued here, not utterly demolished, till Josiah's time, 2 Ki. 23:13. This is the account here given of Solomon's apostasy.

II. Let us now pause awhile, and lament Solomon's fall; and we may justly stand and wonder at it. *How has the gold become*

*dim! How has the most fine gold changed! Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and be horribly afraid, as the prophet exclaims in a like case, Jer. 2:12.*

1. How strange, (1.) That Solomon, in his old age, should be ensnared with fleshly lusts, youthful lusts. As we must never presume upon the strength of our resolutions, so neither upon the weakness of our corruptions, so as to be secure and off our guard. (2.) That so wise a man as Solomon was, so famed for a quick understanding and sound judgment, should suffer himself to be made such a fool of by these foolish women. (3.) That one who had so often and so plainly warned others of the danger of the love of women should himself be so wretchedly bewitched with it; it is easier to see a mischief, and to show it to others, than to shun it ourselves. (4.) That so good a man, so zealous for the worship of God, who had been so conversant with divine things, and who prayed that excellent prayer at the dedication of the temple, should do these sinful things. Is this Solomon? Have all his wisdom and devotion come to this at last? Never was gallant ship so wrecked; never was crown so profaned.

2. What shall we say to all this? Why God permitted it it is not for us to enquire; his way is in the sea and his path in the great waters; he knew how to bring glory to himself out of it. God foresaw it when he said concerning him that should build the temple, *If he commit iniquity*, etc., 2 Sa. 7:14. But it concerns us to enquire what good use we may make of it. (1.) Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. We see how weak we are of ourselves, without the grace of God; let us therefore live in a constant dependence on that grace. (2.) See the danger of a prosperous condition, and how hard it is to overcome the temptations of it. Solomon, like Jeshurun, waxed fat and then kicked. The food convenient, which Agur prayed for, is safer and better than the food abundant, which Solomon was even surfeited with. (3.) See what need those have to stand upon their guard who have made a great profession of religion, and shown themselves forward and zealous in devotion, because the devil will set upon them most violently, and, if they misbehave, the reproach is the greater. It is the evening that commends the day; let us therefore fear, lest, having run well, we seem to come short.

### **Verses 9-13**

Here is, I. God's anger against Solomon for his sin. The thing he did *displeased the Lord*. Time was then the Lord *loved Solomon* (2 Sa. 12:24) and delighted in him (ch. 10:9), but now *the Lord was angry with Solomon* (v. 9), for there was in his sin, 1. The most base ingratitude that could be. He turned from the Lord *who had appeared unto him twice*, once before he began to build the temple (ch. 3:5) and once after he had dedicated it, ch. 9:2. God keeps account of the gracious visits he makes us, whether we do or no, knows how often he has appeared *to us and for us*, and will remember it against us if we *turn from him*. God's appearing to Solomon was such a sensible confirmation of his faith as should have for ever prevented his worshipping *any other god*; it was also such a distinguishing favour, and put such an honour upon him, as he ought never to have forgotten, especially considering what God said to him in both these appearances. 2. The most wilful disobedience. This was the very thing concerning which *God had commanded him—that he should not go after other gods*, yet he was not restrained by such an express admonition, v. 10. Those who have dominion over men are apt to forget God's dominion over them; and, while they demand obedience from their inferiors, to deny it to him who is the Supreme.

II. The message he sent him hereupon (v. 11): *The Lord said unto Solomon* (it is likely by a prophet) that he must expect to

smart for his apostasy. And here, 1. The sentence is just, that, since he had revolted from God, part of his kingdom should revolt from his family; he had given God's glory to the creature, and therefore God would give his crown to his servant: "*I will rend the kingdom from thee, in thy posterity, and will give it to thy servant, who shall bear rule over much of that for which thou hast laboured.*" This was a great mortification to Solomon, who pleased himself no doubt with the prospect of the entail of his rich kingdom upon his heirs for ever. Sin brings ruin upon families, cuts off entails, alienates estates, and lays men's honour in the dust. 2. Yet the mitigations of it are very kind, for David's sake (v. 12, 13), that is, for the sake of the promise made to David. Thus all the favour God shows to man is for *Christ's sake*, and for the sake of the covenant made with him. The kingdom shall be rent from Solomon's house, but, (1.) Not immediately. Solomon shall not live to see it done, but it shall be rent *out of the hand of his son*, a son that was born to him by one of his strange wives, for his mother was an Ammonitess (1 Ki. 14:31) and probably had been a promoter of idolatry. What comfort can a man take in leaving children and an estate behind him if he do not leave a blessing behind him? Yet, if judgments be coming, it is a favour to us if they come not in our days, as 2 Ki. 20:19. (2.) Not wholly. One tribe, that of Judah, the strongest and most numerous, shall remain to the house of David (v. 13), for Jerusalem's sake, which David built, and for the sake of the temple there, which Solomon built; these shall not go into other hands. Solomon did not quickly nor wholly turn away from God; therefore God did not quickly nor wholly take the kingdom from him.

Upon this message which God graciously sent to Solomon, to awaken his conscience and bring him to repentance, we have reason to hope that he humbled himself before God, confessed his sin, begged pardon, and returned to his duty, that he then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he bitterly laments his own folly and madness (ch. 7:25, 26), and warns others to take heed of the like evil courses, and to *fear God* and *keep his commandments*, in consideration of *the judgment to come*, which, it is likely, had made him tremble, as it did Felix. That penitential sermon was as true an indication of a heart broken for sin and turned from it as David's penitential psalms were, though of another nature. God's grace in his people works variously. Thus, though Solomon fell, *he was not utterly cast down*; what God had said to David concerning him was fulfilled: *I will chasten him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him*, 2 Sa. 7:14, 15. Though God may suffer those whom he loves to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. Solomon's defection, though it was much his reproach and a great blemish to his personal character, yet did not so far break in upon the character of his reign but that it was afterwards made the pattern of a good reign, 2 Chr. 11:17, where the kings are said to have done well, while *they walked in the way of David and Solomon*. But, though we have all this reason to hope he repented and found mercy, yet the Holy Ghost did not think fit expressly to record his recovery, but left it doubtful, for warning to others not to sin upon presumption of repenting, for it is but a peradventure whether *God will give them repentance*, or, if he do, whether he will give the evidence of it to themselves or others. Great sinners may recover themselves and have the benefit of their repentance, and yet be denied both the comfort and credit of it; the guilt may be taken away, and yet not the reproach.

#### **Verses 14-25**

While Solomon kept closely to God and to his duty there was *no adversary nor evil occurrent* (ch. 5:4), nothing to create him

any disturbance or uneasiness in the least; but here we have an account of two adversaries that appeared against him, inconsiderable, and that could not have done any thing worth taking notice of if Solomon had not first made God his enemy. What hurt could Hadad or Rezon have done to so great and powerful a king as Solomon was if he had not, by sin, made himself mean and weak? And then those little people menace and insult him. If God be on our side, we need not fear the greatest adversary; but, if he be against us, he can make us fear the least, and the very grasshopper shall be a burden. Observe, I. Both these adversaries God stirred up, v. 14, 23. Though they themselves were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, God made use of them to serve his design of correcting Solomon. The principal judgment threatened was deferred, namely, the rending of the kingdom from him, but he himself was made to feel the smart of the rod, for his greater humiliation. Note, Whoever are, in any way, adversaries to us, we must take notice of the hand of God stirring them up to be so, as he bade Shimei curse David; we must look through the instruments of our trouble to the author of it and hear the Lord's controversy in it.

II. Both these adversaries had the origin of their enmity to Solomon and Israel laid in David's time, and in his conquests of their respective countries, v. 15, 24. Solomon had the benefit and advantage of his father's successes both in the enlargement of his dominion and the increase of his treasure, and would never have known any thing but the benefit of them if he had kept closely to God; but now he finds evils to balance the advantages, and that David had made himself enemies, who were thorns in his sides. Those that are too free in giving provocation ought to consider that perhaps it may be remembered in time to come and returned with interest to theirs after them; having so few friends in this world, it is our wisdom not to make ourselves more enemies than we need must.

1. Hadad, an Edomite, was an adversary to Solomon. We are not told what he did against him, nor which way he gave him disturbance, only, in general, that he was an adversary to him: but we are told, (1.) What induced him to bear Solomon a grudge. David had conquered Edom, 2 Sa. 8:14. Joab put all the males to the sword, v. 15, 16. A terrible execution he made, avenging on Edom their old enmity to Israel, yet perhaps with too great a severity. From this general slaughter, while Joab was burying the slain (for he left not any alive of their own people to bury them, and buried they must be, or they would be an annoyance to the country, Eze. 39:12), Hadad, a branch of the royal family, then a little child, was taken and preserved by some of the king's servants, and conveyed to Egypt, v. 17. They halted by the way, in Midian first, and then in Paran, where they furnished themselves with men, not to fight for them or force their passage, but to attend them, that their young master might go into Egypt with an equipage agreeable to his quality. There he was kindly sheltered and entertained by Pharaoh, as a distressed prince, as well provided for, and so recommended himself that, in process of time, he married the queen's sister (v. 19), and by her had a child, which the queen herself conceived such a kindness for that she brought him up in Pharaoh's house, among the king's children. (2.) What enabled him to do Solomon a mischief. Upon the death of David and Joab, he returned to his own country, in which, it should seem, he settled and remained quiet while Solomon continued wise and watchful for the public good, but from which he had opportunity of making inroads upon Israel when Solomon, having sinned away his wisdom as Samson did his strength (and in the same way), grew careless of public affairs, was off his guard himself, and had

forfeited the divine protection. What vexation Hadad gave to Solomon we are not here told, but only how loth Pharaoh was to part with him and how earnestly he solicited his stay (v. 22): *What hast thou lacked with me?* "Nothing," says Hadad; "but let me go to my own country, my native air, my native soil." Peter Martyr has a pious reflection upon this: "Heaven is our home, and we ought to keep up a holy affection to that, and desire towards it, even when the world, the place of our banishment, smiles most upon us." Does it ask, What have you lacked, that you are so willing to be gone? We may answer, "Nothing that the world can do for us; but still let us go thither, where our hope, and honour, and treasure are."

2. Rezon, a Syrian, was another adversary to Solomon. When David conquered the Syrians, he headed the remains, lived at large by spoil and rapine, till Solomon grew careless, and then he got possession of Damascus, reigned there (v. 24) and over the country about (v. 25), and he created troubles to Israel, probably in conjunction with Hadad, all the days of Solomon (namely, after his apostasy), or he was an enemy to Israel during all Solomon's reign, and upon all occasions vented his then impotent malice against them, but till Solomon's revolt, when his defence had departed from him, he could not do them any mischief. It is said of him that *he abhorred Israel*. Other princes loved and admired Israel and Solomon, and courted their friendship, but here was one that abhorred them. The greatest and best of princes and people, however much they may in general be respected, will yet perhaps be hated and abhorred by some.

#### **Verses 26-40**

We have here the first mention of that infamous name *Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin*; he is here brought upon the stage as an adversary to Solomon, whom God had expressly told (v. 11) that he would give the greatest part of his kingdom to his servant, and Jeroboam was the man. We have here an account,

I. Of his extraction, v. 26. He was of the tribe of Ephraim, he next in honour to Judah. His mother was a widow, to whom Providence had made up the loss of a husband in a son that was active and ingenious, and (we may suppose) a great support and comfort to her.

II. Of his elevation. It was Solomon's wisdom, when he had work to do, to employ proper persons in it. He observed Jeroboam to be a very industrious young man, one that minded his business, took a pleasure in it, and did it with all his might, and therefore he gradually advanced him, till at length he made him receiver-general for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, or perhaps put him into an office equivalent to that of lord-lieutenant of those two counties, for he was ruler of the burden, or tribute, that is, either of the taxes or of the militia of the house of Joseph. Note, Industry is the way to preferment. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business, that will take care and pains, and go through with it? he shall stand before kings, and not always be on the level with mean men.* Observe a difference between David, and both his predecessor and his successor: when Saul saw a *valiant man he took him to himself* (1 Sa. 14:52); when Solomon saw an *industrious* man he preferred him; but David's *eyes were upon the faithful in the land, that they might dwell with him*: if he saw a godly man, he preferred him, for he was a man after God's own heart, whose *countenance beholds the upright*.

III. Of his designation to the government of the ten tribes after the death of Solomon. Some think he was himself plotting against Solomon, and contriving to rise to the throne, that he was turbulent and aspiring. The Jews say that when he was

employed by Solomon in building Millo he took opportunities of reflecting upon Solomon as oppressive to his people, and suggesting that which would alienate them from his government. It is not indeed probable that he should say much to that purport, for Solomon would have got notice of it, and it would have hindered his preferment; but it is plainly intimated that he had it in his thoughts, for the prophet tells him (v. 37), *Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth*. But this was the *cause*, or rather this was the *story*, of the lifting up of his hand against the king: Solomon made him ruler over the tribes of Joseph, and, as he was going to take possession of his government, he was told by a prophet in God's name that he should be king, which emboldened him to aim high, and in some instances to oppose the king and give him vexation. 1. The prophet by whom this message was sent was *Ahijah of Shiloh*; we shall read of him again, ch. 14:2. It seems, Shiloh was not so perfectly forsaken and forgotten of God but that, in remembrance of the former days, it was blessed with a prophet. He delivered his message to Jeroboam in the way, his servants being probably ordered to retire, as in a like case (1 Sa. 9:27), when Samuel delivered his message to Saul. God's word was not the less sacred and sure for being delivered to him thus obscurely, under a hedge it may be. 2. The sign by which it was represented to him was the rending of a garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten, v. 30, 31. It is not certain whether the garment was Jeroboam's, as is commonly taken for granted, or Ahijah's, which is more probable: *He* (that is, the prophet) *had clad himself with a new garment*, on purpose that he might with it give him a sign. The rending of the kingdom from Saul was signified by the rending of Samuel's mantle, not Saul's, 1 Sa. 15:27, 28. And it was more significant to give Jeroboam ten pieces of that which was not his own before than of that which was. The prophets, both true and false, used such signs, even in the New Testament, as Agabus, Acts 21:10, 11. 3. The message itself, which is very particular, (1.) He assures him that he shall be king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, v. 31. The meanness of his extraction and employment shall be no hindrance to his advancement, when the God of Israel says (by whom kings reign), *I will give ten tribes unto thee*. (2.) He tells him the reason; not for his good character or deserts, but for the chastising of Solomon's apostasy: "Because he, and his family, and many of his people with him, *have forsaken me, and worshipped other gods*," v. 33. It was because they had done ill, not because he was likely to do much better. Thus Israel must know that it is not *for their righteousness* that they are made masters of Canaan, but for the wickedness of the Canaanites, Deu. 9:4. Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince. In telling him that the reason why he rent the kingdom from the house of Solomon was because they had forsaken God, he warns him to take heed of sinning away his preferment in like manner. (3.) He limits his expectations to the ten tribes only, and to them in reversion after the death of Solomon, lest he should aim at the whole and give immediate disturbance to Solomon's government. He is here told, [1.] That two tribes (called here *one tribe*, because little Benjamin was in a manner lost in the thousands of Judah) should remain sure to the house of David, and he must never make any attempt upon them: *He shall have one tribe* (v. 32), and again (v. 36), *That David may have a lamp*, that is, a shining name and memory (Ps. 132:17), and his family, as a royal family, may not be extinct. He must not think that David was rejected, as Saul was. No, God would not take his loving-kindness from him, as he did from Saul. The house of David must be supported and kept in reputation, for all this, because out of it the Messiah must arise. *Destroy it not*, for that *blessing is in it*. [2.] That Solomon must keep possession during his life, v. 34, 35. Jeroboam therefore must not offer to

dethrone him, but wait with patience till his day shall come to fall. Solomon shall be *prince, all the days of his life*, not for his own sake (he had forfeited his crown to the justice of God), but for *David my servant's sake, because he kept my commandments*. Children that do not tread in their parents' steps yet often fare the better in this world for their good parents' piety. (4.) He gives him to understand that he will be upon his good behaviour. The grant of the crown must run *quamdiu se bene gesserit—during good behaviour*. "If thou wilt *do what is right in my sight, I will build thee a sure house*, and not otherwise" (v. 38), intimating that, if he forsook God, even his advancement to the throne would in time lay his family in the dust; whereas the seed of David, though afflicted, should not be afflicted for ever (v. 39), but should flourish again, as it did in many of the illustrious kings of Judah, who reigned in glory when Jeroboam's family was extirpated.

IV. Jeroboam's flight into Egypt, v. 40. In some way or other Solomon came to know of all this, probably from Jeroboam's own talk of it; he could not conceal it as Saul did, nor keep his own counsel; if he had, he might have staid in his country, and been preparing there for his future advancement; but letting it be known, 1. Solomon foolishly sought to kill his successor. Had not he taught others that, whatever devices are in men's hearts, *the counsel of the Lord shall stand*? And yet does he himself think to defeat that counsel? 2. Jeroboam prudently withdrew into Egypt. Though God's promise would have secured him any where, yet he would use means for his own preservation, and was content to live in exile and obscurity for a while, being sure of a kingdom at last. And shall not we be so, who have a better kingdom in reserve?

#### **Verses 41-43**

We have here the conclusion of Solomon's story, and in it, 1. Reference is had to another history then extant, but (not being divinely inspired) since lost, *the Book of the Acts of Solomon*, v. 41. Probably this book was written by a chronologer or historiographer, whom Solomon employed to write his annals, out of which the sacred writer extracted what God saw fit to transmit to the church. 2. A summary of the years of his reign (v. 42): *He reigned in Jerusalem* (not, as his father, part of his time in Hebron and part in Jerusalem), *over all Israel* (not as his son, and his father in the beginning of his time, over Judah only), *forty years*. His reign was as long as his father's, but not his life. Sin shortened his days. 3. His death and burial, and his successor, v. 43. (1.) He followed his fathers to the grave, slept with them, and was buried in David's burying-place, with honour no doubt. (2.) His son followed him in the throne. Thus the graves are filling with the generations that go off, and houses are filling with those that are growing up. As the grave cries, "Give, give," so land is never lost for want of an heir.

## Chapter 12

The glory of the kingdom of Israel was in its height and perfection in Solomon; it was long in coming to it, but it soon declined, and began to sink and wither in the very next reign, as we find in this chapter, where we have the kingdom divided, and thereby weakened and made little in comparison with what it had been. Here is, I. Rehoboam's accession to the throne and Jeroboam's return out of Egypt (v. 1, 2). II. The people's petition to Rehoboam for the redress of grievances, and the rough answer he gave, by the advice of his young counsellors, to that petition (v. 3–15). III. The revolt of the ten tribes thereupon, and their setting up Jeroboam (v. 16–20). IV. Rehoboam's attempt to reduce them and the prohibition God gave to that attempt (v. 21–24). V. Jeroboam's establishment of his government upon idolatry (v. 25–33). Thus did Judah become weak, being deserted by their brethren, and Israel, by deserting the house of the Lord.

### Verses 1-15

Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, yet we read but of one son he had to bear up his name, and he a fool. It is said (Hos. 4:10), *They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase*. Sin is a bad way of building up a family. Rehoboam was the son of the wisest of men, yet did not inherit his father's wisdom, and then it stood him in little stead to inherit his father's throne. Neither wisdom nor grace runs in the blood. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man. Rehoboam came to the crown at forty years old, when men will be wise if ever they will, yet he was then foolish. Wisdom does not go by age, nor is it the multitude of years nor the advantage of education that reaches it. Solomon's court was a mart of wisdom and the rendezvous of learned men, and Rehoboam was the darling of the court; and yet all was not sufficient to make him a wise man. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. No dispute is made of Rehoboam's succession; upon the death of his father, he was immediately proclaimed. But,

I. The people desired a treaty with him at Shechem, and he condescended to meet them there. 1. Their pretence was to make him king, but the design was to unmake him. They would give him a public inauguration in another place than the city of David, that he might not seem to be king of Judah only. They had ten parts in him, and would have him among themselves for once, that they might recognize his title. 2. The place was ominous: at *Shechem*, where Abimelech set up himself (Jdg. 9); yet it had been famous for the convention of the states there, Jos. 24:1. Rehoboam, we may suppose, knew of the threatening, that the kingdom should be rent from him, and hoped by going to Shechem, and treating there with the ten tribes, to prevent it: yet it proved the most impolitic thing he could do, and hastened the rupture.

II. The representatives of the tribes addressed him, praying to be eased of the taxes they were burdened with. The meeting being appointed, they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker. This they needed not to have done: he knew what God had designed him for, and would have come though he had not been sent for, for now was his time to expect the possession of the promised crown. In their address, 1. They complain of the last reign: *Thy father made our yoke grievous*, v. 4. They complain not of his father's idolatry and revolt from God; that which was the greatest grievance of all was none to them, so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, as if God or Moloch were all one, so they might but live

at ease and pay no taxes. Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust. Never did people live more at ease than they did, nor in great plenty. Did they pay taxes? It was to advance the strength and magnificence of their kingdom. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the Israelites. Were the taxes a burden? How could that be, when Solomon imported bullion in such plenty that silver was, in a manner, as common as the stones? So that they did but render to Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Nay, suppose there was some hardship put upon them, were they not told before that this would be the manner of the king and yet they would have one? The best government cannot secure itself from reproach and censure, no, not Solomon's. Factious spirits will never want something to complain of. I know nothing in Solomon's administration that could make the people's yoke grievous, unless perhaps the women whom in his latter days he doted on were connived at in oppressing them. 2. They demand relief from him, and on this condition will continue in their allegiance to the house of David. They asked not to be wholly free from paying taxes, but to have the burden made lighter; this was all their care, to save their money, whether their religion was supported and the government protected or no. All seek their own.

III. Rehoboam consulted with those about him concerning the answer he should give to this address. It was prudent to take advice, especially having so weak a head of his own; yet, upon this occasion, it was impolitic to take time himself to consider, for thereby he gave time to the disaffected people to ripen things for a revolt, and his deliberating in so plain a case would be improved as an indication of the little concern he had for the people's ease. They saw what they must expect, and prepared accordingly. Now, 1. The grave experienced men of his council advised him by all means to give the petitioners a kind answer, to give them good words, to promise them fair, and this day, this critical day, to serve them, that is, to tell them that he was their servant, and that he would redress all their grievances and make it his business to please them and make them easy. "Deny thyself (say they) so far as to do this for this once, and they will be *thy servants for ever*. When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts will reconcile and fix them to Solomon's family still." Note, The way to rule is to serve, to do good, and stoop to do it, to become all things to all men and so win their hearts. Those who are in power really sit highest, and easiest, and safest, when they take this method. 2. The young men of his council were hot and haughty, and they advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the people's demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness, (1.) That he did not prefer aged counsellors, but had a better opinion of the young men that had grown up with him and with whom he was familiar, v. 8. Days should speak. It was a folly for him to think that, because they had been his agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were therefore fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. Great wits have not always the most wisdom; nor are those to be relied on as our best friends that know how to make us merry, for that will not make us happy. It is of great consequence to young people, that are setting out in the world, whom they associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those that feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and further them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin. (2.) That he did not prefer moderate counsels, but was pleased with those that put him upon harsh and rigorous methods, and advised him to double the taxes, whether there was occasion for so doing or no, and to tell them in plain

terms that he would do so, v. 10, 11. These young counsellors thought the old men expressed themselves but dully, v. 7. They affect to be witty in their advice, and value themselves on that. The old men did not undertake to put words into Rehoboam's mouth, only counselled him to speak good words; but the young men will furnish him with very quaint and pretty phrases, with pointed and pert similitudes: *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins*, etc. That is not always the best sense that is best worded.

IV. He answered the people according to the counsel of the young men, v. 14, 15. He affected to be haughty and imperious, and fancied he could carry all before him with a high hand, and therefore would rather run the risk of losing them than deny himself so far as to give them good words. Note, Many ruin themselves by consulting their humour more than their interest. See,

1. How Rehoboam was infatuated in his counsels. He could not have acted more foolishly and impolitically. (1.) He owned their reflections upon his father's government to be true: *My father made your yoke heavy*; and therein he was unjust to his father's memory, which he might easily have vindicated from the imputation. (2.) He fancied himself better able to manage them, and impose upon them, than his father was, not considering that he was vastly inferior to him in capacity. Could he think to support the blemishes of his father's reign who could never pretend to come near the glories of it? (3.) He threatened not only to squeeze them by taxes, but to chastise them by cruel laws and severe executions of them, which should be not as whips only, but as scorpions, whips with rowels in them, that will fetch blood at every lash. In short, he would use them as brute beasts, load them and beat them at his pleasure: not caring whether they loved him or no, he would make them fear him. (4.) He gave this provocation to a people that by long ease and prosperity were made wealthy, and strong, and proud, and would not be trampled upon (as a poor cowed dispirited people may), to a people that were now disposed to revolt, and had one ready to head them. Never, surely, was man so blinded by pride and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing is more fatal.

2. How God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was *from the Lord*, v. 15. He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and *hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace*, that the kingdom might be rent from him. Note, God serves his own wise and righteous purposes by the imprudences and iniquities of men, and snares sinners in the work of their own hands. Those that lose the kingdom of heaven throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by their own wilfulness and folly.

#### **Verses 16-24**

We have here the rending of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the house of David, to effect which,

I. The people were hold and resolute in their revolt. They highly resented the provocation that Rehoboam had given them, were incensed at his menaces, concluded that that government would in the progress of it be intolerably grievous which in the beginning of it was so very haughty, and therefore immediately came to this resolve, one and all: *What portion have we in David?* v. 16. They speak here very unbecomingly of David, that great benefactor of their nation, calling him *the son of Jesse*, no greater a man than his neighbours. How soon are good men, and their good services to the public, forgotten! The rashness of their resolution was also much to be blamed. In time, and with prudent management, they might have settled the original contract with Rehoboam to mutual satisfaction. Had they enquired who gave Rehoboam this advice, and taken a course to

remove those evil counsellors from about him, the rupture might have been prevented: otherwise their jealousy for their liberty and property well became that free people. *Israel is not a servant, is not a homeborn slave; why should he be spoiled?* Jer. 2:14. They are willing to be ruled, but not to be ridden. Protection draws allegiance, but destruction cannot. No marvel that *Israel falls away from the house of David* (v. 19) if the house of David fall away from the great ends of their advancement, which was to be *ministers of God to them for good*. But thus to rebel against the seed of David, whom God had advanced to the kingdom (entailing it on his seed), and to set up another king in opposition to that family, was a great sin; see 2 Chr. 13:5-8. To this God refers, Hos. 8:4. *They have set up kings, but not by me*. And it is here mentioned to the praise of the tribe of Judah that they *followed the house of David* (v. 17, 20), and, for aught that appears, they found Rehoboam better than his word, nor did he rule with the rigour which at first he threatened.

II. Rehoboam was imprudent in the further management of this affair, and more and more infatuated. Having foolishly thrown himself into a quick-sand, he sunk the further in with plunging to get out. 1. He was very unadvised in sending Adoram, who was *over the tribute*, to treat with them, v. 18. The tribute was the thing, and, for the sake of that, Adoram was the person, they most complained of. The very sight of him, whose name was odious among them, exasperated them, and made them outrageous. He was one to whom they could not so much as give a patient hearing, but *stoned him to death* in a popular tumult. Rehoboam was now as unhappy in the choice of his ambassador as before of his counsellors. 2. Some think he was also unadvised in quitting his ground, and making so much haste to Jerusalem, for thereby he deserted his friends and gave advantage to his enemies, who had gone to their tents indeed (v. 16) in disgust, but did not offer to make Jeroboam king till Rehoboam had gone, v. 20. See how soon this foolish prince went from one extreme to the other. He hectorated and talked big when he thought all was his own, but sneaked and looked very mean when he saw himself in danger. It is common for those that are most haughty in their prosperity to be most abject in adversity.

III. God forbade his attempt to recover by the sword what he had lost. What was done was of God, who would not suffer that it should be undone again (as it would be if Rehoboam got the better and reduced the ten tribes), nor that more should be done to the prejudice of the house of David, as would be if Jeroboam got the better and conquered the two tribes. The thing must rest as it is, and therefore God forbids the battle. 1. It was brave in Rehoboam to design the reducing of the revolters by force. His courage came to him when he had come to Jerusalem, v. 21. There he thought himself among his firm friends, who generously adhered to him and appeared for him. Judah and Benjamin (who feared the Lord and the king, and meddled not with those that were given to change) presently raised an army of 180,000 men, for the recovery of their king's right to the ten tribes, and were resolved to stand by him (as we say) with their lives and fortunes, having either not such cause, or rather not such a disposition, to complain, as the rest had. 2. It is more brave in Rehoboam to desist when God, by a prophet, ordered him to lay down his arms. He would not lose a kingdom tamely, for then he would have been unworthy the title of a prince; and yet he would not contend for it in opposition to God, for then he would have been unworthy the title of an Israelite. To proceed in this war would be not only to *fight against their brethren* (v. 24), whom they ought to love, but to fight against their God, to whom they ought to submit: *This thing is from me*. These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses and troubles, that God is the

author of them and our brethren are the instruments of them; let us not therefore meditate revenge. Rehoboam and his people *hearkened to the word of the Lord*, disbanded the army, and acquiesced. Though, in human probability, they had a fair prospect of success (for their army was numerous and resolute, Jeroboam's party weak and unsettled), though it would turn to their reproach among their neighbours to lose so much of their strength and never have one push for it, to make a flourish and do nothing, yet, (1.) They regarded the command of God though sent by a poor prophet. When we know God's mind we must submit to it, how much soever it crosses our own mind. (2.) They consulted their own interest, concluding that though they had all the advantages, even that of right, on their side, yet they could not prosper if they fought in disobedience to God; and it was better to sit still than to rise up and fall. In the next reign God allowed them to fight, and gave them victory (2 Chr. 13), but not now.

### **Verses 25-33**

We have here the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam. He built Shechem first and then Penuel—beautified and fortified them, and probably had a palace in each of them for himself (v. 25), the former in Ephraim, the latter in Gad, on the other side Jordan. This might be proper; but he formed another project for the establishing of his kingdom which was fatal to the interests of religion in it.

I. That which he designed was by some effectual means to secure those to himself who had now chosen him for their king, and to prevent their return to the house of David, v. 26, 27. It seems, 1. He was jealous of the people, afraid that, some time or other, they would kill him and go again to Rehoboam. Many that have been advanced in one tumult have been hurled down in another. Jeroboam could not put any confidence in the affections of his people, though now they seemed extremely fond of him; for what is got by wrong and usurpation cannot be enjoyed nor kept with any security or satisfaction. 2. He was distrustful of the promise of God, could not take his word that, if he would keep close to his duty, *God would build him a sure house* (ch. 11:38); but he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

II. The way he took to do this was by keeping the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. That was the place God had chosen, to put his name there. Solomon's temple was there, which God had, in the sight of all Israel, and in the memory of many now living, taken solemn possession of in a cloud of glory. At the altar there the priest of the Lord attended, there all Israel were to keep the feasts, and thither they were to bring their sacrifices. Now,

1. Jeroboam apprehended that, if the people continued to do this, they would in time return to the house of David, allured by the magnificence both of the court and of the temple. If they cleave to their old religion, they will go back to their old king. We may suppose, if he had treated with Rehoboam for the safe conduct of himself and his people to and from Jerusalem at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, it would not have been denied him; therefore he fears not their being driven back by force, but their going back voluntarily to Rehoboam.

2. He therefore dissuaded them from going up to Jerusalem, pretending to consult their ease: *"It is too much for you to go so far to worship God, v. 28. It is a heavy yoke, and it is time to shake it off; you have gone long enough to Jerusalem"* (so some

read it); "the temple, now that you are used to it, does not appear so glorious and sacred as it did at first" (sensible glories wither by degrees in men's estimation); "you have freed yourselves from other burdens, free yourselves from this: why should we now be tied to one place any more than in Samuel's time?"

3. He provided for the assistance of their devotion at home. Upon consultation with some of his politicians, he came to this resolve, to set up two golden calves, as tokens or signs of the divine presence, and persuade the people that they might as well stay at home and offer sacrifice to those as go to Jerusalem to worship before the ark: and some are so charitable as to think they were made to represent the mercy-seat and the cherubim over the ark; but more probably he adopted the idolatry of the Egyptians, in whose land he had sojourned for some time and who worshipped their god Apis under the similitude of a bull or calf. (1.) He would not be at the charge of building a golden temple, as Solomon had done; two golden calves are the most that he can afford. (2.) He intended, no doubt, by these to represent, or rather make present, not any false god, as Moloch or Chemosh, but the true God only, the God of Israel, the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, as he declares, v. 28. So that it was no violation of the first commandment, but the second. And he chose thus to engage the people's devotion because he knew there were many among them so in love with images that for the sake of the calves they would willingly quit God's temple, where all images were forbidden. (3.) He set up two, by degrees to break people off from the belief of the unity of the godhead, which would pave the way to the polytheism of the Pagans. He set up these two at Dan and Beth-el (one the utmost border of his country northward), the other southward, as if they were the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. Beth-el lay close to Judah. He set up one there, to tempt those of Rehoboam's subjects over to him who were inclined to image-worship, in lieu of those of his subjects that would continue to go to Jerusalem. He set up the other at Dan, for the convenience of those that lay most remote, and because Micah's images had been set up there, and great veneration paid to them for many ages, Jdg. 18:30, 31. *Beth-el* signifies *the house of God*, which gave some colour to the superstition; but the prophet called it *Beth-aven, the house of vanity*, or iniquity.

4. The people complied with him herein, and were fond enough of the novelty: They *went to worship before the one, even unto Dan* (v. 30), to that at Dan first because it was first set up, or *even* to that at Dan, though it lay such a great way off. Those that thought it much to go to Jerusalem, to worship God according to his institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far, to Dan, to worship him according to their own inventions. Or they are said to go to one of the calves at Dan because Abijah, king of Judah, within twenty years, recovered Beth-el (2 Chr. 13:19), and it is likely removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then they had only that at Dan to go to. *This became a sin*; and a great sin it was, against the express letter of the second commandment. God had sometimes dispensed with the law concerning worshipping in one place, but never allowed the worship of him by images. Hereby they justified their fathers in making the calf at Horeb, though God had so fully shown his displeasure against them for it and threatened to visit for it in the day of visitation (Ex. 32:34), so that it was as great a contempt of God's wrath as it was of his law; and thus they added sin to sin. Bishop Patrick quotes a saying of the Jews, That till Jeroboam's time the Israelites sucked but one calf, but from that time they sucked two.

5. Having set up the gods, he fitted up accommodations for them; and wherein he varied from the divine appointment we are

here told, which intimates that in other things he imitated what was done in Judah (v. 32) as well as he could. See how one error multiplied into many. (1.) He made a house of high-places, or of altars, one temple at Dan, we may suppose, and another at Beth-el (v. 31), and in each many altars, probably complaining of it as an inconvenience that in the temple at Jerusalem there was but one. The multiplying of altars passed with some for a piece of devotion, but God, by the prophet, puts another construction upon it, Hos. 8:11. *Ephraim has made many altars to sin.* (2.) He made priests of the lowest of the people; and the lowest of the people were good enough to be priests to his calves, and too good. He made priests *from the extremest parts of the people*, that is, some out of every corner of the country, whom he ordered to reside among their neighbours, to instruct them in his appointments and reconcile them to them. Thus were they dispersed as the Levites, but *were not of the sons of Levi*. But the priests of the high-places, or altars, he ordered to reside in Beth-el, as the priests at Jerusalem (v. 32), to attend the public service. (3.) The feast of tabernacles, which God had appointed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he adjourned to the fifteenth day of the eighth month (v. 32), *the month which he devised of his own heart*, to show his power in ecclesiastical matters, v. 33. The passover and pentecost he observed in their proper season, or did not observe them at all, or with little solemnity in comparison with this. (4.) He himself assuming a power to make priests, no marvel if he undertook to do the priests' work with his own hands: *He offered upon the altar*. This is twice mentioned (v. 32, 33), as also that he burnt incense. This was connived at in him because it was of a piece with the rest of his irregularities; but in king Uzziah it was immediately punished with the plague of leprosy. He did it himself, to make himself look great among the people and to get the reputation of a devout man, also to grace the solemnity of his new festival, with which, it is likely, at this time he joined the feast of the dedication of his altar. And thus, [1.] Jeroboam sinned himself, yet perhaps excused himself to the world and his own conscience with this, that he did not do so ill as Solomon did, who worshipped other gods. [2.] He *made Israel to sin*, drew them off from the worship of God and entailed idolatry upon their seed. And hereby they were punished for deserting the *thrones of the house of David*. The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, for the adjusting of the annals of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, supposes that Jeroboam changed the calculation of the year and made it to contain but eleven months, and that by those years the reigns of the kings of Israel are measured till Jehu's revolution and no longer, so that during this interval eleven years of the annals of Judah answer to twelve in those of Israel.

## Chapter 13

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Jeroboam attending his altar at Beth-el, and there we find him in the beginning of this, when he received a testimony from God against his idolatry and apostasy. This was sent to him by a prophet, a man of God that lived in Judah, who is the principal subject of the story of this chapter, where we are told, I. What passed between him and the new king. 1. The prophet threatened Jeroboam's altar (v. 1, 2), and gave him a sign (v. 3), which immediately came to pass (v. 5). 2. The king threatened the prophet, and was himself made another sign, by the withering of his hand (v. 4), and the restoring of it upon his submission and the prophet's intercession (v. 6). 3. The prophet refused the kindness offered him thereupon (v. 7–10). II. What passed between him and the old prophet. 1. The old prophet fetched him back by a lie, and gave him entertainment (v. 11–19). 2. He, for accepting it, in disobedience to the divine command, is threatened with death (v. 20–22). And, 3. The threatening is executed, for he is slain by a lion (v. 23, 24), and buried at Beth-el (v. 25–32). 4. Jeroboam is hardened in his idolatry (v. 33, 34). "Thy judgments, Lord, are a great deep."

### Verses 1-10

Here is, I. A messenger sent to Jeroboam, to signify to him God's displeasure against his idolatry, v. 1. The army of Judah that aimed to ruin him was countermanded, and might not draw a sword against him (ch. 12:24); but a prophet of Judah is, instead thereof, sent to reclaim him from his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin; for God delights not in the death of sinners, but would rather they would burn and live. How bold was the messenger that durst attack the king in his pride and interrupt the solemnity he was proud of! Those that go on God's errand must not fear the face of man; they know who will bear them out. How kind was he that sent him to warn Jeroboam of the wrath of God *revealed from heaven* against his *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness!*

II. The message delivered in God's name, not whispered, but cried with a loud voice, denoting both the prophet's courage, that he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it, and his earnestness, that he desired to be heard and heeded by all that were present, who were not a few, on this great occasion. It was directed, not to Jeroboam nor to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which would sooner hear and yield than those who were mad upon their idols and deaf to divine calls. Yet, in threatening the altar, God threatened the founder and worshippers, to whom it was as dear as their own souls, and who might conclude, "If God's wrath fasten upon the lifeless guiltless altar, how shall we escape?" That which was foretold concerning the altar (v. 2) was that, in process of time, a prince of the house of David, Josiah by name, should pollute this altar by sacrificing the idolatrous priests themselves upon it, and burning the bones of dead men. Let Jeroboam know and be sure, 1. That the altar he now consecrated should be desecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure for ever. 2. That the *priests of the high places* he now made should themselves be made sacrifices to the justice of God, and the first and only sacrifices upon this altar that would be pleasing to him. If the offering be such as is an abomination to God, it will follow, of course, that the offerers must themselves fall under his wrath, which will abide upon them, since it is not otherwise transmitted. 3. That this should be done by a branch *of the house of David*. That family which he and his kingdom had despised

and treacherously deserted should recover so much power as to demolish that altar which he thought to establish; so that right and truth should at length prevail, both in civil and sacred matters, notwithstanding the present triumphs of those that were given to change the fear both *of God and the king*. It was about 356 years ere this prediction was fulfilled, yet it was spoken of as sure and nigh at hand, for a thousand years with God are but as one day. Nothing more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet Josiah was here named above 300 years before he was born. Nothing future is hidden from God. There are *names in the book* of the divine prescience (Phil. 4:3), *names written in heaven*.

III. A sign is given for the confirming of the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invisible power and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered (v. 3), which came to pass immediately, v. 5. This was, 1. A proof that the prophet was sent of God, *who confirmed the word with this sign following*, Mk. 16:20. 2. A present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. How could the gift be acceptable when the altar that should sanctify it was an abomination? 3. It was a reproach to the people, whose hearts were harder than these stones and rent not under the word of the Lord. 4. It was a specimen of what should be done to it in the accomplishment of this prophecy by Josiah; it was now rent, in token of its being then ruined.

IV. Jeroboam's hand withered, which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, v. 4. Instead of trembling at the message, as he might well have done, he assaulted him that brought it, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned and contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. *Rebuke a sinner and he will hate thee*, and do thee a mischief if he can; yet God's prophets must rather expose themselves than betray their trust: he that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man, as he did Jeroboam's here by withering his hand, so that he could neither hurt the prophet nor draw it in to help himself. When his hand was stretched out to burn incense to his calves it was not withered; but, when it is stretched out against a prophet, he shall have no use of it till he humble himself. Of all the wickedness of the wicked there is none more provoking to God than their malicious attempts against his prophets, of whom he has said, *Touch them not, do them no harm*. As this was a punishment of Jeroboam, and answering to the sin, so it was the deliverance of the prophet. God has many ways of disabling the enemies of his church from executing their mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God, in justice, harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this, and much more dreadful.

V. The sudden healing of the hand that was suddenly dried up, upon his submission, v. 6. That word of God which should have touched his conscience humbled him not, but this which *touched his bone and his flesh* brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now, 1. Not from his calves, but from God only, from his power and his favour. He wounded, and no hand but his can make whole. 2. Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet, whom he had just now threatened and aimed to destroy. The time may come when those that hate the preaching would be glad of the prayers of faithful ministers. "Pray to the Lord thy God," says Jeroboam; "thou hast an interest in him; improve it for me." But observe, He did not desire the prophet to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, only that *his hand might be*

*restored*; thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would *take away this death* only (Ex. 10:17), not this *sin*. The prophet, as became a man of God, renders good for evil, upbraids not Jeroboam with his impotent malice, nor triumphs in his submission, but immediately addresses himself to God for him. Those only are entitled to the blessing Christ pronounced on the persecuted that learn of him to pray for their persecutors, Mt. 5:10, 44. When the prophet thus honoured God, by showing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this further honour upon him, that at his word he recalled the judgment and by another miracle healed the withered hand, that by the goodness of God Jeroboam might be led to repentance, and, if he were not broken by the judgment, yet might be melted by the mercy. With both he seemed affected for the present, but the impressions wore off.

VI. The prophet's refusal of Jeroboam's kind invitation, in which observe, 1. That God forbade his messenger to eat or drink in Beth-el (v. 9), to show his detestation of their execrable idolatry and apostasy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, lest we have infection from them or give encouragement to them. He must not *turn back the same way*, but deliver his message, as it were, *in transitu—as he passes along*. He shall not seem to be sent on purpose (they were unworthy such a favour), but as if he only called by the way, his spirit being stirred, like Paul's at Athens, as he *passed and saw their devotions*. God would, by this command, try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be *rebellious, like that rebellious house*, Eze. 2:8. 2. That Jeroboam was so affected with the cure of his hand that though we read not of his thanksgivings to God for the mercy, or of his sending an offering to the altar at Jerusalem in acknowledgment of it, yet he was willing to express his gratitude to the prophet and pay him for his prayers, v. 7. Favours to the body will make even graceless men seem grateful to good ministers. 3. That the prophet, though hungry and weary, and perhaps poor, in obedience to the divine command refused both the entertainment and the reward proffered him. He might have supposed his acceptance of it would give him an opportunity of discoursing further with the king, in order to his effectual reformation, now that he was convinced; yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but, like a faithful careful messenger, hastens home when he has done his errand. Those have little learned the lessons of self-denial that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

### **Verses 11-22**

The man of God had honestly and resolutely refused the king's invitation, though he promised him a reward; yet he was over-persuaded by an old prophet to come back with him, and dine in Beth-el, contrary to the command given him. Here we find how dearly his dinner cost him. Observe with wonder,

I. The old prophet's wickedness. I cannot but call him a false prophet and a bad man, it being much easier to believe that from one of such a bad character should be extorted a confirmation of what the man of God said (as we find, v. 32) than that a true prophet, and a good man, should tell such a deliberate lie as he did, and father it upon God. *A good tree could never bring forth such corrupt fruit*. Perhaps he was trained up among the sons of the prophets, in one of Samuel's colleges not far off, whence he retained the name of a prophet, but, growing worldly and profane, the spirit of prophecy had departed from him. If he had been a good prophet he would have reproved Jeroboam's idolatry, and not have suffered his sons to attend his altars, as, it should seem, they did. Now, 1. Whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God is not certain. One may hope

that he did it in compassion to him, concluding he wanted refreshment, and out of a desire to be better acquainted with him and more fully to understand his errand than he could from the report of his sons; yet his sons having told him all that passed, and particularly that the prophet was forbidden to eat or drink there, which he had openly told Jeroboam, I suppose it was done with a bad design, to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him; for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, usually aiming to destroy them, but sometimes, as here, to debauch them and draw them from their duty. Thus they *gave the Nazarites wine to drink* (Amos 2:12), that they might glory in their fall. But, 2. It is certain that he took a very bad method to bring him back. When the man of God had told him, "I may not, and therefore I will not, return to eat bread with thee" (his resolutions concurring with the divine command, v. 16, 17), he wickedly pretended that he had an order from heaven to fetch him back. He imposed upon him by asserting his quondam character as a prophet: *I am a prophet also as thou art*; he pretended he had a vision of an angel that sent him on this errand. But it was all a lie; it was a banter upon prophecy, and profane in the highest degree. When this old prophet is spoken of (2 Ki. 23:18) he is called *the prophet that came out of Samaria*, whereas there was no such place as Samaria till long after, ch. 16:24. Therefore I take it he is so called there, though he was of Beth-el, because he was like those who were afterwards *the prophets of Samaria, who caused God's people Israel to err*, Jer. 23:13.

II. The good prophet's weakness, in suffering himself to be thus imposed upon: *He went back with him*, v. 19. He that had resolution enough to refuse the invitation of the king, who promised him a reward, could not resist the insinuations of one that pretended to be a prophet. God's people are more in danger of being drawn from their duty by the plausible pretences of divinity and sanctity than by external inducements; we have therefore need to *beware of false prophets*, and not *believe every spirit*.

III. The proceedings of divine justice hereupon; and here we may well wonder that the wicked prophet, who told the lie and did the mischief, went unpunished, while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and severely punished for it. What shall we make of this! The judgments of God are unfathomable. *The deceived and the deceiver are his*, and he *giveth not account of any of his matters*. Certainly there must be a judgment to come, when these things will be called over again, and when those that sinned most and suffered least, in this world, will receive according to their works. 1. The message delivered to the man of God was strange. His crime is recited, v. 21, 22. It was, in one word, disobedience to an express command. Judgment is given upon it: *Thy carcass shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers*, that is, "Thou shalt never reach thy own house, but shalt be a carcass quickly, nor shall thy dead body be brought to *the place of thy fathers' sepulchres*, to be interred." 2. Yet it was more strange that the old prophet himself should be the messenger. Of this we can give no account but that God would have it so, as he spoke to Balaam by his ass and read Saul his doom by the devil in Samuel's likeness. We may think God designed hereby, (1.) To startle the lying prophet, and make him sensible of his sin. The message could not but affect him the more when he himself had the delivering of it, and had so strong an impression made upon his spirit by it that he cried out, as one in an agony, v. 21. He had reason to think, if he must die for his disobedience in a small matter who sinned by surprise, of how much sorer punishment he should be thought worthy who had belied an angel of

God and cheated a man of God by a deliberate forgery. *If this were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* Perhaps it had a good effect upon him. Those who preach God's wrath to others have hard hearts indeed if they fear it not themselves. (2.) To put the greater mortification upon the prophet that was deceived, and to show what those must expect who hearken to the great deceiver. Those that yield to him as a tempter will be terrified by him as a tormentor; whom he now fawns upon he will afterwards fly upon, and whom he now draws into sin he will do what he can to drive to despair.

#### **Verses 23-34**

Here is, I. The death of the deceived disobedient prophet. The old prophet that had deluded him, as if he would make him some amends for the wrong he had done him or help to prevent the mischief threatened him, furnished him with an ass to ride home on; but by the way a lion set upon him, and killed him, v. 23, 24. He did but return back to refresh himself when he was hungry, and behold he must die for it; see 1 Sa. 14:43. But we must consider, 1. That his offence was great, and it would by no means justify him that he was drawn into it by a lie; he could not be so certain of the countermand sent by another as he was of the command given to himself, nor had he any ground to think that the command would be recalled, when the reason of it remained in force, which was that he might testify his detestation of the wickedness of that place. He had great reason to suspect the honesty of this old prophet, who did not himself bear his testimony, nor did God think fit to make use of him as a witness against the idolatry of the city he lived in. However, he should have taken time to beg direction from God, and not have complied so soon. Did he think this old prophet's house safer to eat in than other houses at Beth-el, when God had forbidden him to eat in any? That was to refine upon the command, and make himself wiser than God. Did he think to excuse himself that he was hungry? Had he never read that *man lives not by bread alone*? 2. That his death was for the glory of God; for by this it appeared, (1.) That nothing is more provoking to him than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, which makes his proceedings against our first parents, for eating the forbidden fruit, the easier to be accounted for. (2.) That God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, his nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. Perhaps God by this intended, in a way of righteous judgment, to harden Jeroboam's heart, since he was not reformed by the withering of his hand; for he would be apt to make a bad use of it, and to say that the prophet was well enough served for meddling with his altar, he had better have staid at home; any, he would say that Providence had punished him for his insolence, and the lion had done that which his withered hand might not do. However, by this God intended to warn all those whom he employs strictly to observe their orders, at their peril.

II. The wonderful preservation of his dead body, which was a token of God's mercy remembered in the midst of wrath. The lion that gently strangled him, or tore him, did not devour his dead body, nor so much as tear the ass, v. 24, 25, 26. Nay, what was more, he did not set upon the travellers that passed by and saw it, nor upon the old prophet (who had reason enough to fear it) when he came to take up the corpse. His commission was to kill the prophet; hitherto he should go, but no further. Thus God showed that, though he was angry with him, his anger was turned away, and the punishment went *no further than death*.

III. The care which the old prophet took of his burial. When he heard of this unusual accident, he concluded it was *the man of*

*God, who was disobedient to his Master (and whose fault was that?), therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion, v. 26.* It would well have become him to ask why the lion was not sent against him and his house, rather than against the good man whom he had cheated. He *took up the corpse, v. 29.* If there by any truth in the vulgar opinion, surely the corpse bled afresh when he touched it, for he was in effect the murderer, and it was but a poor reparation for the injury to inter the dead body. Perhaps when he cheated him into his ruin he intended to laugh at him; yet now his conscience so far relents that he weeps over him, and, like Joab at Abner's funeral, is compelled to be a mourner for him whom he had been the death of. They said, *Alas! my brother, v. 30.* The case was indeed very lamentable that so good a man, a prophet so faithful, and so bold in God's cause, should, for one offence, die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power. *Thy way, O God! is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.* We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some the flesh is destroyed that the spirit may be saved, while with others the flesh is pampered that the soul may ripen for hell.

IV. The charge which the old prophet gave his sons concerning his own burial, that they should be sure to bury him in the same grave where the man of God was buried (v. 3): "*Lay my bones beside his bones, close by them, as near as may be, so that my dust may mingle with his.*" Though he was a lying prophet, yet he desired to *die the death of a true prophet.* "Gather not my soul with the sinners of Beth-el, but with the man of God." The reason he gives is because *what he cried against the altar of Beth-el, that men's bones should be burnt upon it, shall surely come to pass, v. 32.* Thus, 1. He ratifies the prediction, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses* (and one of them such a one as St. Paul quotes, Titus 1:12, *one of themselves, even a prophet of their own*) *the word might be established,* if possible to convince and reclaim Jeroboam. 2. He does honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose *word* would not fall to the ground, though *he* did. Ministers die, die prematurely it may be; but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and does not die with them. 3. He consults his own interest. It was foretold that men's bones should be burnt upon Jeroboam's altar: "Lay mine (says he) close to his, and then they will not be disturbed;" and it was, accordingly, their security, as we find, 2 Ki. 23:18. Sleeping and waking, living and dying, it is safe being in good company. No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb; but it is spoken of 2 Ki. 23:17, where Josiah asks, *What title is that?* and is told, *It is the sepulchre of the man of God that came from Judah, who proclaimed these things which thou hast done;* so that the epitaph upon the prophet's grave preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Beth-el, which it would not have been so remarkably if he had died and been buried elsewhere. The cities of Israel are here called *cities of Samaria,* though that name was not yet known; for, however the old prophet spoke, the inspired historian wrote in the language of his own time.

V. The obstinacy of Jeroboam in his idolatry (v. 33): *He returned not from his evil way;* some hand was found that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly because the prophet who disturbed him before was in his grave (Rev. 11:10) and because the prophecy was for a great while to come. Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but neither threats nor signs, neither judgments nor mercies, wrought upon him, so strangely was he wedded to his calves. He did not reform, no, not his priesthood, but whoever would, he filled his hand, and made him priest,

though ever so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever; *and this became sin*, that is, a snare first, and then a ruin, to Jeroboam's house, to *cut it off*, v. 34. Note, The diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, are the fruit of sin; he promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it, and sunk his family. Those betray themselves that think by any sin to support themselves.

## Chapter 14

The kingdom being divided into that of Judah and that of Israel, we must henceforward, in these books of Kings, expect and attend their separate history, the succession of their kings, and the affairs of their kingdoms, accounted for distinctly. In this chapter we have, I. The prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's house (v. 7–16). The sickness of his child was the occasion of it (v. 1-6), and the death of his child the earnest of it (v. 17, 18), together with the conclusion of his reign (v. 19, 20). II. The history of the declension and diminution of Rehoboam's house and kingdom (v. 21–28) and the conclusion of his reign (v. 29–31). In both we may read the mischievous consequences of sin and the calamities it brings on kingdoms and families.

### Verses 1-6

How Jeroboam persisted in his contempt of God and religion we read in the close of the foregoing chapter. Here we are told how God proceeded in his controversy with him; for when God judges he will overcome, and sinners shall either bend or break before him.

I. His child fell sick, v. 1. It is probable that he was his eldest son, and heir-apparent to the crown; for at his death all the kingdom went into mourning for him, ch. 13. His dignity as a prince, his age as a young prince, and his interest in heaven as a pious prince, could not exempt him from sickness, dangerous sickness. Let none be secure of the continuance of their health, but improve it, while it continues, for the best purposes. Lord, *behold, he whom thou lovest*, thy favourite, he whom Israel loves, their darling, *is sick*. *At that time*, when Jeroboam prostituted the profaned the priesthood (ch. 13:33), his child sickened. When sickness comes into our families we should enquire whether there be not some particular sin harboured in our houses, which the affliction is sent to convince us of and reclaim us from.

II. He sent his wife in disguise to enquire of Ahijah the prophet *what should become of the child*, v. 2, 3. The sickness of his child touched him in a tender part. The withering of this branch of the family would, perhaps, be as sore an affliction to him as the withering of that branch of his body, ch. 13:4. Such is the force of natural affection; our children are ourselves but once removed. Now,

1. Jeroboam's great desire, under this affliction, is to know *what shall become of the child*, whether he will live or die. (1.) It would have been more prudent if he had desired to know what means they should use for the recovery of the child, what they should give him, and what they should do to him; but by this instance, and those of Ahaziah (2 Ki. 1:2) and Benhadad (2 Ki. 8:8), it should seem they had then such a foolish notion of fatality as took them off from all use of means; for, if they were sure the patient would live, they thought means needless; if he would die, they thought them useless; not considering that duty is ours, events are God's, and that he that ordained the end ordained the means. Why should a prophet be desired to show that which a little time will show? (2.) It would have been more pious if he had desired to know wherefore God contended with him, had begged the prophet's prayers, and cast away his idols from him; then the child might have been restored to him, as his hand was. But most people would rather be told their fortune than their faults or their duty.

2. That he might know the child's doom, he sent to Ahijah the prophet, who lived obscurely and neglected in Shiloh, blind

through age, yet still blest with the visions of the Almighty, which need not bodily eyes, but are rather favoured by the want of them, the eyes of the mind being then most intent and least diverted. Jeroboam sent not to him for advice about the setting up of his calves, or the consecrating of his priests, but had recourse to him in his distress, when the gods he served could give him no relief. *Lord, in trouble have those visited thee* who before slighted thee. Some have by sickness been reminded of their forgotten ministers and praying friends. He sent to Ahijah, because he had *told him he should be king*, v. 2. "He was once the messenger of good tidings, surely he will be so again." Those that by sin disqualify themselves for comfort, and yet expect their ministers, because they are good men, should speak peace and comfort to them, greatly wrong both themselves and their ministers.

3. He sent his wife to enquire of the prophet, because she could best put the question without naming names, or making any other description than this, "Sir, I have a son ill; will he recover or not?" The heart of her husband safely trusted in her that she would be faithful both in delivering the message and bringing him the answer; and it seems there were none of all his counsellors in whom he could repose such a confidence; otherwise the sick child could very ill spare her, for mothers are the best nurses, and it would have been much fitter for her to have staid at home to tend him than go to Shiloh to enquire what would become of him. If she go, she must be *incognito—in disguise*, must change her dress, cover her face, and go by another name, not only to conceal herself from her own court and the country through which she passed (as if it were below her quality to go upon such an errand, and what she had reason to be ashamed of, as Nicodemus that came to Jesus by night, whereas it is no disparagement to the greatest to attend God's prophets), but also to conceal herself from the prophet himself, that he might only answer her question concerning her son, and not enter upon the displeasing subject of her husband's defection. Thus some people love to prescribe to their ministers, limit them to smooth things, and care not for having the *whole counsel of God declared* to them, lest it prove to prophesy *no good concerning them, but evil*. But what a strange notion had Jeroboam of God's prophet when he believed that he could and would certainly tell what would *become of the child*, and yet either could not or would not discover who was the mother! Could he see into the thick darkness of futurity, and yet not see through the thin veil of this disguise? Did Jeroboam think the God of Israel like his calves, just what he pleased? *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*.

III. God gave Ahijah notice of the approach of Jeroboam's wife, and that she came in disguise, and full instructions what to say to her (v. 5), which enabled him, as she came in at the door, to call her by her name, to her great surprise, and so to discover to all about him who she was (v. 6): *Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thyself to be another?* He had no regard, 1. To her rank. She was a queen, but what was that to him, who had a message to deliver to her immediately from God, before whom all the children of men stand upon the same level? Nor, 2. To her present. It was usual for those who consulted prophets to bring them tokens of respect, which they accepted, and yet were no hirelings. She brought him a handsome country present (v. 3), but he did not think himself obliged by that to give her any finer language than the nature of her message required. Nor, 3. To her industrious concealment of herself. It is a piece of civility not to take notice of those who desire not to be taken notice of; but the prophet was no courtier, nor gave flattering titles; plain dealing is best, and she shall know, at the first word,

what she has to trust to: *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings*. Note, Those who think by their disguises to hide themselves from God will be wretchedly confounded when they find themselves disappointed in the day of discovery. Sinners now appear in the garb of saints, and are taken to be such; but how will they blush and tremble when they find themselves stripped of their false colours, and are called by their own name: "Go out, thou treacherous false-hearted hypocrite. *I never knew thee. Why feignest thou thyself to be another?*" Tidings of a portion with hypocrites will be heavy tidings. God will judge men according to what they are, not according to what they seem.

### **Verses 7-20**

When those that set up idols, and keep them up, go to enquire of the Lord, he determines to answer them, not according to the pretensions of their enquiry, but *according to the multitude of their idols*, Eze. 14:4. So Jeroboam is answered here.

I. The prophet anticipates the enquiry concerning the child, and foretels the ruin of Jeroboam's house for the wickedness of it. No one else durst have carried such a message: a servant would have smothered it, but his own wife cannot be suspected of ill-will to him.

1. God calls himself the *Lord God of Israel*. Though Israel had forsaken God, God had not cast them off, nor given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms. He is Israel's God, and therefore will take vengeance on him who did them the greatest mischief he could do them, debauched them and drew them away from God.

2. He upbraids Jeroboam with the great favour he had bestowed upon him, in making him king, exalting him from among the people, the common people, to be prince over God's chosen Israel, and taking the kingdom *from the house of David*, to bestow it upon him. Whether we keep an account of God's mercies to us or no, he does, and will set even them in order before us, if we be ungrateful, to our greater confusion; otherwise he gives and upbraids not.

3. He charges him with his impiety and apostasy, and his idolatry particularly: *Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee*, v. 9. Saul, that was rejected, never worshipped idols; Solomon did it but occasionally, in his dotage, and never made Israel to sin. Jeroboam's calves, though pretended to be set up in honour of the God of Israel, that brought *them up out of Egypt*, yet are here called *other gods*, or *strange gods*, because in them he worshipped God as the heathen worshipped their strange gods, because by them he *changed the truth of God into a lie* and represented him as altogether different from what he is, and because many of the ignorant worshippers terminated their devotion in the image, and did not at all regard the God of Israel. Though they were calves of gold, the richness of the metal was so far from making them acceptable to God that they *provoked him to anger*, designedly affronted him, under colour of pleasing him. In doing this, (1.) He had not set David before him (v. 8): *Thou hast not been as my servant David*, who, though he had his faults and some bad ones, yet never forsook the worship of God nor grew loose nor cold to that; his faithful adherence to that gained him this honourable character, that he *followed God with all his heart*, and herein he was proposed for an example to all his successors. Those did not do well that did not do like David. (2.) He had not *set God before him*, but (v. 9), *"Thou hast cast me behind thy back, my law, my fear; thou hast neglected me, forgotten me, and preferred thy policies before my precepts."*

4. He foretels the utter ruin of Jeroboam's house, v. 10, 11. He thought, by his idolatry, to establish his government, and by that

he not only lost it, but brought destruction upon his family, the universal destruction of all the males, whether shut up or left, married or unmarried. (1.) Shameful destruction. They shall be taken away as dung, which is loathsome and which men are glad to be rid of. He worshipped dunghill-deities, and God removed his family as a great dunghill. Noble and royal families, if wicked, are no better in God's account. (2.) Unusual destruction. Their very dead bodies should be meat for the dogs in the street, or the birds of prey in the field, v. 11. Thus evil pursues sinners. See this fulfilled, ch. 15:29.

5. He foretels the immediate death of the sick child, v. 12, 13.

(1.) In mercy to him, lest, if he live, he be infected with the sin, and so involved in the ruin, of his father's house. Observe the character given of him: *In him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam*. He had an affection for the true worship of God and disliked the worship of the calves. Note, [1.] Those are good *in whom are good things towards the Lord God of Israel*, good inclinations, good intentions, good desires, towards him. [2.] Where there is but *some* good thing of that kind it will be found: God, who seeks it, sees it be it ever so little and is pleased with it. [3.] A little grace goes a great way with great people. It is so rare to find princes well affected to religion that, when they are so, they are worthy of double honour. [4.] Pious dispositions are in a peculiar manner amiable and acceptable when they are found in those that are young. The divine image in miniature has a peculiar beauty and lustre in it. [5.] Those that are good in bad times and places shine very brightly in the eyes of God. A good child *in the house of Jeroboam* is a miracle of divine grace: to be there untainted is like being in the fiery furnace unhurt, unsinged. Observe the care taken of him: he only, of all Jeroboam's family, shall die in honour, shall be buried, and shall be lamented as one that lived desired. Note, Those that are distinguished by divine grace shall be distinguished by divine providence. This hopeful child dies first of all the family, for God often *takes those soonest whom he loves best*. Heaven is the fittest place for them; this earth is not worthy of them.

(2.) In wrath to the family. [1.] It was a sign the family would be ruined when *he* was taken by whom it might have been reformed. The righteous are removed from the evil to come in this world, to the good to come in a better world. It is a bad omen to a family when the best in it are buried out of it; when what was valuable is picked out the rest is for the fire. [2.] It was likewise a present affliction to the family and kingdom, by which both ought to have been bettered; and this aggravated the affliction to the poor mother that she should not reach home time enough to see her son alive: *When thy feet enter into the city, just then the child shall die*. This was to be a sign to her of the accomplishment of the rest of the threatenings, as 1 Sa. 2:34.

6. He foretels the setting up of another family to rule over Israel, v. 14. This was fulfilled in Baasha of Issachar, who conspired against Nadab the son of Jeroboam, in the second year of his reign, murdered him and all his family. *"But what? Even now. Why do I speak of it as a thing at a distance? It is at the door. It shall be done even now."* Sometimes God makes quick work with sinners; he did so with the house of Jeroboam. It was not twenty-four years from his first elevation to the final extirpation of his family.

7. He foretels the judgments which should come upon the people of Israel for conforming to the worship which Jeroboam had established. *If the blind lead the blind*, both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall *fall into the ditch*. It is here foretold, v. 15, (1.) That they should never be easy, nor rightly settled in their land, but continually *shaken like a reed in the water*. After

they left the house of David, the government never continued long in one family, but one undermined and destroyed another, which must needs occasion great disorders and disturbances among the people. (2.) That they should, ere long, be totally expelled out of their land, that good land, and given up to ruin, v. 16. This was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria. Families and kingdoms are ruined by sin, ruined by the wickedness of the heads of them. *Jeroboam did sin, and made Israel to sin*. If great men do wickedly, they involve many others both in the guilt and in the snare; multitudes *follow their pernicious ways*. They go to hell with a long train, and their condemnation will be the more intolerable, for they must answer, not only for their own sins, but for the sins which others have been drawn into and kept in by their influence.

II. Jeroboam's wife has nothing to say against the word of the Lord, but she goes home with a heavy heart to their house in *Tirzah, a sweet delightful place*, so the name signifies, famed for its beauty, Cant. 6:4. But death, which will stain its beauty and embitter all its delights, cannot be shut out from it. Hither she came, and here we leave her attending the funeral of her son, and expecting the fate of her family. 1. *The child died* (v. 17), and justly did all Israel mourn, not only for the loss of so hopeful a prince, whom they were not worthy of, but because his death plucked up the flood-gates, and made a breach, at which an inundation of judgments broke in. 2. Jeroboam himself died soon after, v. 20. It is said (2 Chr. 13:20), *The Lord struck him* with some sore disease, so that he died miserably, when he had reigned twenty-two years, and left his crown to a son who lost it, and his life too, and all the lives of his family, within two years after. For a further account of him the reader is referred to the annals of his reign, drawn up by his own secretaries, or to the public records, like those in the Tower, called here, *The Book* or register, *of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*, to which recourse might then be had; but, not being divinely inspired, these records are long since lost.

### **Verses 21-31**

Judah's story and Israel's are intermixed in this book. Jeroboam out-lived Rehoboam, four or five years, yet his history is despatched first, that the account of Rehoboam's reign may be laid together; and a sad account it is.

I. Here is no good said of the king. All the account we have of him here is, 1. That he was forty-one years old when he began to reign, by which reckoning he was born in the last year of David, and had his education, and the forming of his mind, in the best days of Solomon; yet he lived not up to these advantages. Solomon's defection at last did more to corrupt him than his wisdom and devotion had done to give him good principles. 2. That he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, *the city where God put his name*, where he had opportunity enough to know his duty, if he had but had a heart to do it. 3. That his mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess; this is twice mentioned, v. 21, 31. It was strange that David would marry his son Solomon to an Ammonitess (for it was done while he lived), but it is probable that Solomon was in love with her, because she was *Naamah, a beauty* (so it signifies), and his father was loth to cross him, but it proved to have a very bad influence upon posterity. Probably she was daughter to Shobi the Ammonite, who was kind to David (2 Sa. 17:27), and David was too willing to requite him by matching his son into his family. None can imagine how lasting and how fatal the consequences may be of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. 4. That he had continual war with Jeroboam (v. 30), which could not but be a perpetual uneasiness to him. 5. That when he had reigned but seventeen years he died, and left his throne to his son. His father, and grandfather, and

grandson, that reigned well, reigned long, forty years apiece. But sin often shortens men's lives and comforts.

II. Here is much evil said of the subjects, both as to their character and their condition.

1. See here how wicked and profane they were. It is a most sad account that is here given of their apostasy from God, v. 22–24. Judah, the only professing people God had in the world, *did evil in his sight*, in contempt and defiance of him and the tokens of his special presence with them; *they provoked him to jealousy*, as the adulterous wife provokes her husband by breaking the marriage-covenant. Their fathers had been bad enough, especially in the times of the judges, but they did abominable things, *above all that their fathers had done*. The magnificence of their temple, the pomp of their priesthood, and all the secular advantages with which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them to it. Nothing less than the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high* will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him. The account here given of the wickedness of the Jews agrees with that which the apostle gives of the wickedness of the Gentile world (Rom. 1:21, 24), so that both *Jew and Gentile are alike under sin*, Rom. 3:9. (1.) They became *vain in their imaginations* concerning God, and *changed his glory into an image*, for they built themselves *high places, images, and groves* (v. 23), profaning God's name by affixing to it their images, and God's ordinances by serving their idols with them. They foolishly fancied that they exalted God when they worshipped him on high hills and pleased him when they worshipped him under the pleasant shadow of green trees. (2.) They were given up to vile affections (as those idolaters Rom. 1:26, 27), for there were *sodomites in the land* (v. 24), *men with men working that which is unseemly*, and not to be thought of, much less mentioned, without abhorrence and indignation. They dishonoured God by one sin and then God left them to dishonour themselves by another. They profaned the privileges of a holy nation, therefore God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, to imitate the abominations of the accursed Canaanites; and herein the Lord was righteous. And, when they did *like those that were cast out*, how could they expect any other than to be cast out like them?

2. See here how weak and poor they were; and this was the consequence of the former. Sin exposes, impoverishes, and weakens any people. Shishak, king of Egypt, came against them, and so far, either by force or surrender, made himself master of Jerusalem itself that he took away the treasures both of the temple and of the exchequer, of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, which David and Solomon had amassed, v. 25, 26. These, it is likely, tempted him to make his descent; and, to save the rest, Rehoboam perhaps tamely surrendered them, as Ahab, ch. 20:4. He also took away the golden shields that were made but in his father's time, v. 26. These the king of Egypt carried off as trophies of his victory; and, instead of them, Rehoboam made brazen shields, which the life-guard carried before him when he went to church in state, v. 27, 28. This was an emblem of the diminution of his glory. Sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass. We commend Rehoboam for going to *the house of the Lord*, perhaps the oftener for the rebuke he had been under, and do not condemn him for going in pomp. Great men should honour God with their honour, and then they are themselves most honoured by it.

## Chapter 15

In this chapter we have an abstract of the history, I. Of two of the kings of Judah, Abijam, the days of whose reign were few and evil (v. 1-8), and Asa, who reigned well and long (v. 9–24). II. Of two of the kings of Israel, Nadab the son of Jeroboam, and Baasha the destroyer of Jeroboam's house (v. 25–34).

### Verses 1-8

We have here a short account of the short reign of Abijam the son of Rehoboam king of Judah. He makes a better figure, 2 Chr. 13, where we have an account of his war with Jeroboam, the speech which he made before the armies engaged, and the wonderful victory he obtained by the help of God. There he is called *Abijah—My father is the Lord*, because no wickedness is there laid to his charge. But here, where we are told of his faults, *Jah*, the name of God, is, in disgrace to him, taken away from his name, and he is called *Abijam*. See Jer. 22:24.

I. Few particulars are related concerning him. 1. Here began his reign in the beginning of Jeroboam's eighteenth year; for Rehoboam reigned but seventeen, ch. 14:21. Jeroboam indeed survived Rehoboam, but Rehoboam's Abijah lived to succeed him and to be a terror to Jeroboam, while Jeroboam's Abijah (whom we read of ch. 14:1) died before him. 2. He reigned scarcely three years, for he died before the end of Jeroboam's twentieth year, v. 9. Being made proud and secure by his great victory over Jeroboam (2 Chr. 13:21), God cut him off, to make way for his son Asa, who would be a better man. 3. *His mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom*, that is, Absalom, David's son, as I am the rather inclined to think because two other of Rehoboam's wives were his near relations (2 Chr. 11:18), one the daughter of Jerimoth, David's son, and another the daughter of Eliab, David's brother. He took warning by his father not to marry strangers; yet thought it below him to marry his subjects, except they were of the royal family. 4. He carried on his father's wars with Jeroboam. As there was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, not set battles (these were forbidden, ch. 12:24), but frequent encounters, especially upon the borders, one making incursions and reprisals on the other, so there was between Abijam and Jeroboam (v. 7), till Jeroboam, with a great army, invaded him, and then Abijam, not being forbidden to act in his own defence, routed him, and weakened him, so that he compelled him to be quiet during the rest of his reign, 2 Chr. 13:20.

II. But, in general, we are told, 1. That he was not like David, had no hearty affection for the ordinances of God, though, to serve his purpose against Jeroboam, he pleaded his possession of the temple and priesthood, as that upon which he valued himself, 2 Chr. 13:10–12. Many boast of their profession of godliness who are strangers to the power of it, and plead the truth of their religion who yet are not true to it. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God*. He seemed to have zeal, but he wanted sincerity; he began pretty well, but he fell off, and *walked in all the sins of his father*, followed his bad example, though he had seen the bad consequences of it. He that was all his days in war ought to have been so wise as to make and keep his peace with God, and not to make him his enemy, especially having found him so good a friend in his war with Jeroboam, 2 Chr. 13:18. *Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*, Isa. 26:10. 2. That yet it was for David's sake that he was advanced, and continued upon the throne; it was *for his sake* (v. 4, 5) that God thus *set up his son after him*;

not for his own sake, nor for the sake of his father, in whose steps he trod, *but for the sake of David*, whose example he would not follow. Note, It aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors and owe their blessings to it, and yet will not imitate it. They stand upon that ground, and yet despise it, and trample upon it, and unreasonably ridicule and oppose that which they enjoy the benefit of. The kingdom of Judah was supported, (1.) That David might have a lamp, pursuant to the divine ordination of *a lamp for his anointed*, Ps. 132:17. (2.) That Jerusalem might be established, not only that the honours put upon it in David's and Solomon's time might be preserved to it, but that it might be reserved to the honours designed for it in after-times. The character here given of David is very great—*that he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*; but the exception is very remarkable—*save only in the matter of Uriah*, including both his murder and the debauching of his wife. That was a bad matter; it was a remaining blot upon his name, a bar in his escutcheon, and the reproach of it was not wiped away, though the guilt was. David was guilty of other faults, but they were nothing in comparison of that; yet even that being repented of, though it be mentioned for warning to others, did not prevail to throw him out of the covenant, nor to cut off the entail of the promise upon his seed.

#### **Verses 9-24**

We have here a short account of the reign of Asa; we shall find a more copious history of it 2 Chr. 14, 15, and 16. Here is,

I. The length of it: *He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem*, v. 10. In the account we have of the kings of Judah we find the number of the good kings and the bad ones nearly equal; but then we may observe, to our comfort, that the reign of the good kings was generally long, but that of the bad kings short, the consideration of which will make the state of God's church not altogether so bad within that period as it appears at first sight. Length of days is in Wisdom's right hand. *Honour thy father*, much more thy heavenly Father, *that thy days may be long*.

II. The general good character of it (v. 11): *Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, and that is right indeed which is so in God's eyes; those are approved whom he commends. He did *as did David his father*, kept close to God, and to his instituted worship, was hearty and zealous for that, which gave him this honourable character, that he was like David, though he was not a prophet, or psalmist, as David was. If we come up to the graces of those that have gone before us it will be our praise with God, though we come short of their gifts. Asa was like David, though he was neither such a conqueror nor such an author; for *his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days* (v. 14), that is, he was both cordial and constant in his religion. What he did for God he was sincere in, steady and uniform, and did it from a good principle, with a single eye to the glory of God.

III. The particular instances of Asa's piety. His times were times of reformation. For,

1. He removed that which was evil. There reformation begins; and a great deal of work of that kind his hand found to do. For, though it was but twenty years after the death of Solomon that he began to reign, yet very gross corruption had spread far and taken deep root. Immorality he first struck at: *He took away the sodomites out of the land*, suppressed the brothels; for how can either prince or people prosper while those cages of unclean and filthy birds, more dangerous than pest-houses, are suffered to remain? Then he proceeded against idolatry: *He removed all the idols*, even those *that his father had made*, v. 12. His father

having made them, he was the more concerned to remove them, that he might cut off the entail of the curse, and prevent the visiting of that iniquity upon him and his. Nay (which redounds much to his honour, and shows his heart was perfect with God), when he found idolatry in the court, he rooted it out thence, v. 13. When it appeared that Maachah his mother, or rather his grandmother (but called his *mother* because she had the educating of him in his childhood), had an idol in a grove, though she was his mother, his grandmother,—though, it is likely, she had a particular fondness for it,—though, being old, she could not live long to patronise it,—though she kept it for her own use only, yet he would by no means connive at her idolatry. Reformation must begin at home. Bad practices will never be suppressed in the country while they are supported in the court. Asa, in every thing else, will honour and respect his mother; he loves her well, but he loves God better, and (like the Levite, Deu. 33:9) readily forgets the relation when it comes in competition with his duty. If she be an idolater, (1.) Her idol shall be destroyed, publicly exposed to contempt, defaced, and burnt to ashes *by the brook Kidron*, on which, it is probable, he strewed the ashes, in imitation of Moses (Ex. 32:20) and in token of his detestation of idolatry and his indignation at it wherever he found it. Let no remains of a court-idol appear. (2.) She shall be deposed, He removed her from being queen, or from the queen, that is, from conversing with his wife; he banished her from the court, and confined her to an obscure and private life. Those that have power are happy when thus they have hearts to use it well.

2. He re-established that which was good (v. 15): He *brought into the house of God the dedicated things* which he himself had vowed out of the spoils of the Ethiopians he had conquered, and which his father had vowed, but lived not to bring in pursuant to his vow. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well, not only cast away the idols of our iniquity, but dedicate ourselves and our all to God's honour and glory. When those who, in their infancy, were by baptism devoted to God, make it their own act and deed to join themselves to him and vigorously employ themselves in his service, this is bringing in the dedicated things which they and their fathers have dedicated: it is necessary justice—rendering to God the things that are his. VI. The policy of his reign. He built cities himself, to encourage the increase of his people (v. 23) and to invite others to him by the conveniences of habitation; and he was very zealous to hinder Baasha from building Ramah, because he designed it for the cutting off of communication between his people and Jerusalem and to hinder those who in obedience to God would come to worship there. An enemy must by no means be suffered to fortify a frontier town.

V. The faults of his reign. In both the things for which he was praised he was found defective. The fairest characters are not without some *but* or other in them. 1. Did he take away the idols? That was well; *but the high places were not removed* (v. 14); therein his reformation fell short. He removed all images which were rivals with the true God or false representations of him; but the altars which were set up in high places, and to which those sacrifices were brought which should have been offered on the altar in the temple, those he suffered to stand, thinking there was no great harm in them, they having been used by good men before the temple was built, and being loth to disoblige the people, who had a kindness to them and were wedded to them both by custom and convenience; whereas in Judah and Benjamin, the only tribes under Asa's government which lay so near Jerusalem and the altars there, there was less pretence for them than in those tribes which lay more remote. They were against the law, which obliged them to worship *at one place*, Deu. 12:11. They lessened men's esteem of the temple and the altars

there, and were an open gap for idolatry to enter in at, while the people were so much addicted to it. It was not well that Asa, when his hand was in, did not remove these. *Nevertheless his heart was perfect with the Lord.* This affords us a comfortable note, That those may be found honest and upright with God, and be accepted of him, who yet, in some instances, come short of doing the good they might and should do. The perfection which is made the indispensable condition of the new covenant is not to be understood of sinlessness (then we were all undone), but sincerity. 2. Did he bring in the dedicated things? That was well; but he afterwards alienated the dedicated things, when he took the gold and silver out of the house of God and sent them as a bribe to Benhadad, to hire him to break his league with Baasha, and, by making an inroad upon his country, to give him a diversion from the building of Ramah, v. 18, 19. Here he sinned, (1.) In tempting Benhadad to break his league, and so to violate the public faith. If he did wrong in doing it, as certainly he did, Asa did wrong in persuading him to do it. (2.) In that he could not trust God, who had done so much for him, to free him out of this strait, without using such indirect means to help himself. (3.) In taking the gold out of the treasury of the temple, which was not to be made use of but on extraordinary occasions. The project succeeded. Benhadad made a descent upon the land of Israel, which obliged Baasha to retire with his whole force from Ramah (v. 20, 21), which gave Asa a fair opportunity to demolish his works there, and the timber and stones served him for the building of some cities of his own, v. 22. But, though the design prospered, we find it was displeasing to God; and though Asa valued himself upon the policy of it, and promised himself that it would effectually secure his peace, he was told by the prophet that he had done foolishly, and that *thenceforth he should have wars*; see 2 Chr. 16:7-9.

VI. The troubles of his reign. For the most part he prospered; but, 1. Baasha king of Israel was a very troublesome neighbour to him. He reigned twenty-four years, and all his days had war, more or less, with Asa, v. 16. This was the effect of the division of the kingdoms, that they were continually vexing one another, and so weakened one another, which made them both an easier prey to the common enemy. 2. In his old age he was himself afflicted with the gout: He was *diseased in his feet*, which made him less fit for business and peevish towards those about him.

VII. The conclusion of his reign. The acts of it were more largely recorded in the common history (to which reference is here had, v. 23) than in this sacred one. He reigned long, but finished at last with honour, and left his throne to a successor no way inferior to him.

### **Verses 25-34**

We are now to take a view of the miserable state of Israel, while the kingdom of Judah was happy under Asa's good government. It was threatened that they should be as *a reed shaken in the water* (ch. 14:15), and so they were, when, during the single reign of Asa, the government of their kingdom was in six or seven different hands, as we find in this and the following chapter. Jeroboam was upon the throne in the beginning of his reign and Ahab at the end of it, and between them were Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri, undermining and destroying one another. This they got by deserting the house both of God and of David. Here we have, 1. The ruin and extirpation of the family of Jeroboam, according to the word of the Lord by Ahijah. His son Nadab succeeded him. If the death of his brother Abijah had had a due influence upon him to make him religious, and the honour done him at his death had engaged him to follow his good example, his reign might have been long

and glorious; but he *walked in the way of his father* (v. 26), kept up the worship of his calves, and forbade his subjects to go up to Jerusalem to worship, *sinned and made Israel to sin*, and therefore God brought ruin upon him quickly, in the second year of his reign. He was besieging Gibbethon, a city which the Philistines had taken from the Danites, and was endeavouring to re-take it; and there, in the midst of his army, did Baasha, with others, conspire against him and kill him, (v. 27), and so little interest had he in the affections of his people that his army did not only not avenge his death, but chose his murderer for his successor. Whether Baasha did it upon a personal pique against Nadab, or to be avenged on the house of Jeroboam for some affront received from them, or whether under pretence of freeing his country from the tyranny of a bad prince, or whether merely from a principle of ambition, to make way for himself to the throne, does not appear; but he *slew him and reigned in his stead*, v. 28. And the first thing he did when he came to the crown was to *cut off all the house of Jeroboam*, that he might the better secure himself and his own usurped government. He thought it not enough to imprison or banish them, but he destroyed them, left not only no males (as was foretold, ch. 14:10), but none that breathed. Herein he was barbarous, but God was righteous. Jeroboam's sin was punished (v. 30); for those that provoke God do it *to their own confusion*; see Jer. 7:19. Ahijah's prophecy was accomplished (v. 29); for no word of God shall fall to the ground. Divine threatenings are not bugbears. 2. The elevation of Baasha. He shall be tried awhile, as Jeroboam was. Twenty-four years he reigned (v. 33), but showed that it was not from any dislike to Jeroboam's sin that he destroyed his family, but from malice and ambition; for, when he had rooted out the sinner, he himself clave to the sin, and *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (v. 34), though he had seen the end of that way; so strangely was his heart hardened with the deceitfulness of sin.

## Chapter 16

This chapter relates wholly to the kingdom of Israel, and the revolutions of that kingdom—many in a little time. The utter ruin of Jeroboam's family, after it had been twenty-four years a royal family, we read of in the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we have, I. The ruin of Baasha's family, after it had been but twenty-six years a royal family, foretold by a prophet (v. 1-7), and executed by Zimri, one of his captains (v. 8-14). II. The seven days' reign of Zimri, and his sudden fall (v. 15-20). III. The struggle between Omri and Tibni, and Omri's prevalency, and his reign (v. 21-28). IV. The beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we shall afterwards read much (v. 29-33). V. The rebuilding of Jericho (v. 34). All this while, in Judah, things went well.

### Verses 1-14

Here is, I. The ruin of the family of Baasha foretold. He was a man likely enough to have raised and established his family—active, politic, and daring; but he was an idolater, and this brought destruction upon his family.

1. God sent him warning of it before. (1.) That, if he were thereby wrought upon to repent and reform, the ruin might be prevented; for God threatens, that he may not strike, as one that desires not the death of sinners. (2.) That, if not, it might appear that the destruction when it did come, whoever might be instruments of it, was the act of God's justice and the punishment of sin.

2. The warning was sent by *Jehu the son of Hanani*. The father was a seer, or prophet, at the same time (2 Chr. 16:7), and was sent to Asa king of Judah; but the son, who was young and more active, was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel. *Juniores ad labores—Toil and adventure are for the young*. This Jehu was a prophet and the son of a prophet. Prophecy, thus happily entailed, was worthy of so much the more honour. This Jehu continued long in his usefulness, for we find him reproving Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 19:2) above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, 2 Chr. 20:34. The message which this prophet brought to Baasha is much the same with that which Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife.

(1.) He reminds Baasha of the great things God had done for him (v. 2): *I exalted thee out of the dust to the throne of glory*, a great instance of the divine sovereignty and power, 1 Sa. 2:8. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was a hand of Providence in it, to bring about God's counsel, concerning Jeroboam's house; and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed does by no means amount to the patronising of his ambition and treachery. It is God that puts power into bad men's hands, which he makes to serve his good purposes, notwithstanding the bad use they make of it. *I made thee prince over my people*. God calls Israel his people still, though wretchedly corrupted, because they retained the covenant of circumcision, and there were many good people among them; it was not till long after that they were called *Loammi, not a people*, Hos. 1:9.

(2.) He charges him with high crimes and misdemeanours, [1.] That he had caused *Israel to sin*, had seduced God's subjects from their allegiance and brought them to pay to dunghill-deities the homage due to him only, and herein he had *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (v. 2), and been *like his house*, v. 7. [2.] That he had himself *provoked God to anger with the work of his*

*hands*, that is, by worshipping images, the *work of men's hands*; though perhaps others made them, yet he served them and thereby avowed the making of them, and they are therefore called the *work of his hands*. [3.] That he had *destroyed the house of Jeroboam* (v. 7), *because he killed him*, namely, Jeroboam's son and all his: if he had done that with an eye to God, to his will and glory, and from a holy indignation against the sins of Jeroboam and his house, he would have been accepted and applauded as a minister of God's justice; but, as he did it, he was only the tool of God's justice, but a servant to his own lusts, and is justly punished for the malice and ambition which actuated and governed him in all he did. Note, Those who are in any way employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God (magistrates or ministers) are concerned to do it from a good principle and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them and they make themselves obnoxious by it.

(3.) He foretels the same destruction to come upon his family which he himself had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam, v. 3, 4. Note, Those who resemble others in their sins may expect to resemble them in their plagues, especially those who seem zealous against such sins in others as they allow themselves in; the house of Jehu was reckoned with for the blood of the house of Ahab, Hos. 1:4.

II. A reprieve granted for some time, so long that Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour in his own royal city (v. 6), so far is he from being a prey either to the dogs or to the fowls, which yet was threatened to his house, v. 4. He lives not either to see or feel the punishment threatened, yet he was himself the greatest delinquent. Certainly there must be a future state, in which impenitent sinners will suffer in their own persons, and not escape, as often they do in this world. Baasha died under no visible stroke of divine vengeance for aught that appears, but *God laid up his iniquity for his children*, as Job speaks, ch. 21:19. Thus he often visits sin. Observe, Baasha is punished by the destruction of his children after his death, and his children are punished by the abuse of their bodies after their death; that is the only thing which the threatening specifies (v. 4), that the dogs and the fowls of the air should eat them, as if herein were designed a tacit intimation that there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the sorest punishments and are most to be dreaded; these judgments on the body and posterity signified judgments on the soul when separated from the body, by him who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*.

III. Execution done at last. Baasha's son Elah, like Jeroboam's son Nadab, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, one of his own soldiers, as Nadab was by Baasha; so like was his house made to that of Jeroboam, as was threatened, v. 3. Because his idolatry was like his, and one of the sins for which God contended with him being the destruction of Jeroboam's family, the more the destruction of his own resembled that, the nearer did the punishment resemble the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

1. As then, so now, the king himself was first slain, but Elah fell more ingloriously than Nadab. Nadab was slain in the field of action and honour, he and his army then besieging Gibbethon (ch. 15:27); but the siege being then raised upon that disaster, and the city remaining still in the Philistines' hands, the army of Israel was now renewing the attempt (v. 15) and Elah should have been with them to command in chief, but he loved his own ease and safety better than his honour or duty, or the public good, and therefore staid behind to take his pleasure; and, when he was *drinking himself drunk in his servant's house*, Zimri

killed him, v. 9, 10. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those who designedly drink themselves drunk, that they know not but death may surprise them in that condition. (1.) Death comes easily upon men when they are drunk. Besides the chronic diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men in that condition are more easily overcome by an enemy, as Amnon by Absalom, and are liable to more bad accidents, being unable to help themselves, (2.) Death comes terribly upon men in that condition. Finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion, that day *comes upon them unawares* (Lu. 21:34), like a thief.

2. As then, so now, the whole family was cut off, and rooted out. The traitor was the successor, to whom the unthinking people tamely submitted, as if it were all one to them what kind they had, so that they had one. The first thing Zimri did was to *slay all the house of Baasha*; thus he held by cruelty what he got by treason. His cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's did against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah *none of his kinsfolks or friends* (v. 11), *none of his avengers* (so the word is), none that were likely to avenge his death; yet divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably that it was used as a proverb long after, *Had Zimri peace who slew his master?* 2 Ki. 9:31. In this, (1.) The word of God was fulfilled, v. 12. (2.) The sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they *provoked God by their vanities*, v. 13. Their idols are called their *vanities*, for they cannot profit nor help. Miserable are those whose deities are vanities.

### **Verses 15-28**

Solomon observes (Prov. 28:2) that *for the transgression of a land many were the princes thereof* (so it was here in Israel), *but by a man of understanding the state thereof shall be prolonged*—so it was with Judah at the same time under Asa. When men forsake God they are out of the way of rest and establishment. Zimri, and Tibni, and Omri, are here striving for the crown. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin. These confusions end in the settlement of Omri; we must therefore take him along with us through this part of the story.

I. How he was chosen, as the Roman emperors often were, by the army in the field, now encamped before Gibbethon. Notice was soon brought thither that Zimri had slain their king (v. 16) and set up himself in Tirzah, the royal city, whereupon they chose Omri king in the camp, that they might without delay avenge the death of Elah upon Zimri. Though he was idle and intemperate, yet he was their king, and they would not tamely submit to his murderer, nor let the treason go unpunished. They did not attempt to avenge the death of Nadab upon Baasha, perhaps because the house of Baasha had ruled with more gentleness than the house of Jeroboam; but Zimri shall feel the resentments of the provoked army. The siege of Gibbethon is quitted (Philistines are sure to gain when Israelites quarrel) and Zimri is prosecuted.

II. How he conquered Zimri, who is said to have reigned seven days (v. 15), so long before Omri was proclaimed king and himself proclaimed traitor; but we may suppose it was a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to show his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God by supporting his idolatry, v. 19. Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it (v. 17), forced Zimri into the palace, which being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it, v. 18. Unwilling that his rival should ever enjoy that sumptuous palace, he burnt it; and fearing that if he fell into the hands of the army, either alive or dead, he

should be ignominiously treated, he burnt himself in it. See what desperate practices men's wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin; see the disposition of incendiaries, who set palaces and kingdoms on fire, though they are themselves in danger of perishing in the flame.

III. How he struggled with Tibni, and at length got clear of him: *Half of the people followed this Tibni* (v. 21), probably those who were in Zimri's interest, with whom others joined, who would not have a king chosen in the camp (lest he should rule by the sword and a standing army), but in a convention of the states. The contest between these two lasted some years, and, it is likely, cost a great deal of blood on both sides, for it was in the twenty-seventh year of Asa that Omri was first elected (v. 15) and thence the twelve years of his reign are to be dated; but it was not till the thirty-first year of Asa that he began to reign without a rival; then Tibni died, it is likely in battle, *and Omri reigned*, v. 22. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his *History of the World* (2.19.6), enquires here why it was that in all these confusions and revolutions of the kingdom of Israel they never thought of returning to the house of David, and uniting themselves again to Judah, *for then it was better with them than now*; and he thinks the reason was because the kings of Judah assumed a more absolute, arbitrary, and despotic power than the kings of Israel. It was the heaviness of the yoke that they complained of when they first revolted from the house of David, and the dread of that made them ever after averse to it, and attached to kings of their own, who ruled more by law and the rules of a limited monarchy.

IV. How he reigned when he was at length settled on the throne. 1. He made himself famous by building Samaria, which, ever after, was the royal city of the kings of Israel (the palace at Tirzah being burnt), and in process of time grew so considerable that it gave name to the middle part of Canaan (which lay between Galilee on the north and Judea on the south) and to the inhabitants of that country, who were called *Samaritans*. He bought the ground for *two talents of silver*, somewhat more than 700*l.* of our money, for a talent was 353*l.* 11*s.* 10 1/2*d.* Perhaps Shemer, who sold him the ground, let him have it considerably the cheaper upon condition that the city should be called after his name, for otherwise it would have borne the name of the purchaser; it was called *Samaria*, or *Shemeren* (as it is in the Hebrew), from Shemer, the former owner, v. 24. The kings of Israel changed their royal seats, Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria; but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God. Those that cleave to the Lord fix, but those that leave him ever wander. 2. He made himself infamous by his wickedness; for *he did worse than all that were before him*, v. 25. Though he was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and Providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha. He went further than they had done in *establishing iniquity by a law*, and forcing his subjects to comply with him in it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made *Israel a desolation*, Mic. 6:16. Jeroboam caused Israel to sin by temptation, example, and allurements; but Omri did it by compulsion.

V. How he ended his reign, v. 27, 28. He was in some repute for the might which he showed. Many a bad man has been a stout man. He died in his bed, as did Jeroboam and Baasha themselves; but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then pay off the scores, of his iniquity.

### Verses 29-34

We have here the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded than of any of the kings of Israel. We have here only a general idea given us of him, as the worst of all the kings, that we may expect what the particulars will be. He reigned twenty-two years, long enough to do a great deal of mischief.

I. He exceeded all his predecessors in wickedness, *did evil above all that were before him* (v. 30), and, as if it were done with a particular enmity both to God and Israel, to affront him and ruin them, it is said, *He did more purposely to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger*, and, consequently, to send judgments on his land, *than all the kings of Israel that were before him*, v. 33. It was bad with the people when every successive king was worse than his predecessor. What would they come to at last? He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families; yet, instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened and enraged against God by it. He thought it *a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam*, v. 31. It was nothing to break the second commandment by image-worship, he would set aside the first also by introducing other gods; his little finger should fall heavier upon God's ordinances than Jeroboam's loins. Making light of less sins makes way for greater, and those that endeavour to extenuate other people's sins will but aggravate their own.

II. He married a wicked woman, who he knew would bring in the worship of Baal, and seemed to marry her with that design. *As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel* (v. 31), a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, addicted to witchcrafts and whoredoms (2 Ki. 9:22), and every way vicious. The false prophetess spoken of Rev. 2:20 is there called *Jezebel*, for a wicked woman could not be called by a worse name than hers; what mischiefs she did, and what mischief at last befel her (2 Ki. 9:33), we shall find in the following story; this one strange wife debauched Israel more than all the strange wives of Solomon.

III. He set up the worship of Baal, forsook the God of Israel and served the god of the Sidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah, the sun (so some think), a deified hero of the Phoenicians (so others): he was weary of the golden calves, and thought they had been worshipped long enough; such vanities were they that those who had been fondest of them at length grew sick of them, and, like adulterers, much have variety. In honour of this mock deity, whom they called *Baal—lord*, and for the convenience of his worship, 1. Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city, because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the royal city of the other kingdom. He would have Baal's temple near him, that he might the better frequent it, protect it, and put honour upon it. 2. He reared an altar in that temple, on which to offer sacrifice to Baal, by which they acknowledged their dependence upon him and sought his favour. O the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expense to make one their friend whom they might have chosen whether they would make a god of or no! 3. He made a grove about his temple, either a natural one, by planting shady trees there, or, if those would be too long in growing, an artificial one in imitation of it; for it is not said he *planted*, but he *made* a grove, something that answered the intention, which was to conceal and so countenance the abominable impurities that were committed in the filthy worship of Baal. *Lucus, à lucendo, quia non lucet—He that doeth evil hateth the light.*

IV. One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had long since pronounced on him that should attempt it, v. 34. It comes in as an instance of the height of impiety to which men had

arrived, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe, 1. How ill he did. Like Achan he meddled with the accursed thing, turned that to his own use which was devoted to God's honour. He began to build, in defiance of the curse well known in Israel, jesting with it perhaps as a bugbear, or fancying its force worn out by length of time, for it was above 500 years since it was pronounced, Jos. 6:26. He went on to build, in defiance of the execution of the curse in part; for, though his eldest son died when he began, yet he would proceed in contempt of God and his wrath revealed from heaven against his ungodliness. 2. How ill he sped. He built for his children, but God wrote him childless; his eldest son died when he began, the youngest when he finished, and all the rest (it is supposed) between. Note, Those whom God curses are cursed indeed; none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!

## Chapter 17

So sad was the character both of the princes and people of Israel, as described in the foregoing chapter, that one might have expected God would cast off a people that had so cast him off; but, as an evidence to the contrary, never was Israel so blessed with a good prophet as when it was so plagued with a bad king. Never was king so bold to sin as Ahab; never was prophet so bold to reprove and threaten as Elijah, whose story begins in this chapter and is full of wonders. Scarcely any part of the Old-Testament history shines brighter than this history of the spirit and power of Elias; he only, of all the prophets, had the honour of Enoch, the first prophet, to be translated, that he should not see death, and the honour of Moses, the great prophet, to attend our Saviour in his transfiguration. Other prophets prophesied and wrote, he prophesied and acted, but wrote nothing; but his actions cast more lustre on his name than their writings did on theirs. In this chapter we have, I. His prediction of a famine in Israel, through the want of rain (v. 1). II. The provision made for him in that famine, 1. By the ravens at the brook Cherith (v. 2-7). 2. When that failed, by the widow at Zarephath, who received him in the name of a prophet and had a prophet's reward; for (1.) He multiplied her meal and her oil (v. 8-16). (2.) He raised her dead son to life (v. 17-24). Thus his story begins with judgments and miracles, designed to awaken that stupid generation that had to deeply corrupted themselves.

### Verses 1-7

The history of Elijah begins somewhat abruptly. Usually, when a prophet enters, we have some account of his parentage, are told whose son he was and of what tribe; but Elijah drops (so to speak) out of the clouds, as if, like Melchisedek, he were without father, without mother, and without descent, which made some of the Jews fancy that he was an angel sent from heaven; but the apostle has assured us that *he was a man subject to like passions as we are* (James 5:17), which perhaps intimates, not only that he was liable to the common infirmities of human nature, but that, by his natural temper, he was a man of strong passions, more hot and eager than most men, and therefore the more fit to deal with the daring sinners of the age he lived in: so wonderfully does God suit men to the work he designs them for. Rough spirits are called to rough services. The reformation needed such a man as Luther to break the ice. Observe, 1. The prophet's name: *Elijahu—"My God Jehovah is he"* (so it signifies), "is he who sends me and will own me and bear me out, is he to whom I would bring Israel back and who alone can effect that great work." 2. His country: He was *of the inhabitants of Gilead*, on the other side Jordan, either of the tribe of Gad or the half of Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them; but whether a native of either of those tribes is uncertain. The obscurity of his parentage was no prejudice to his eminency afterwards. We need not enquire whence men are, but what they are: if it be a good thing, no matter though it come out of Nazareth. Israel was sorely wounded when God sent them this balm from Gilead and this physician thence. He is called a *Tishbite* from Thisbe, a town in that country. Two things we have an account of here in the beginning of his story:—

I. How he foretold a famine, a long and grievous famine, with which Israel should be punished for their sins. That fruitful land, for want of rain, should be turned into barrenness, for the iniquity of those that dwelt therein. He went and told Ahab this; did not whisper it to the people, to make them disaffected to the government, but proclaimed it to the king, in whose power it was

to reform the land, and so to prevent the judgment. It is probable that he reproved Ahab for his idolatry and other wickedness, and told him that unless he repented and reformed this judgment would be brought upon his land. There should be *neither dew nor rain for some years*, none but *according to my word*, that is, "Expect none till you hear from me again." The apostle teaches us to understand this, not only of the word of prophecy, but the word of prayer, which turned the key of the clouds, James 5:17, 18. He prayed earnestly (in a holy indignation at Israel's apostasy, and a holy zeal for the glory of God, whose judgments were defied) *that it might not rain*; and, according to his prayers, the heavens became as brass, till he *prayed again that it might rain*. In allusion to this story it is said of God's witnesses (Rev. 11:6), *These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy*. Elijah lets Ahab know, 1. That *the Lord Jehovah* is the *God of Israel*, whom he had forsaken. 2. That he is a *living God*, and not like the gods he worshipped, which were dead dumb idols. 3. That he himself was God's servant in office, and a messenger sent from him: "It is he *before whom I stand*, to minister to him," or "whom I now represent, in whose stead I stand, and in whose name I speak, in defiance of the prophets of Baal and the groves." 4. That, notwithstanding the present peace and prosperity of the kingdom of Israel, God was displeased with them for their idolatry and would chastise them for it by the want of rain (which, when he withheld it, it was not in the power of the gods they served to bestow; for *are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain?* Jer. 14:22), which would effectually prove their impotency, and the folly of those who left the living God, to make their court to such as could do neither good nor evil; and this he confirms with a solemn oath—*As the Lord God of Israel liveth*, that Ahab might stand the more in awe of the threatening, the divine life being engaged for the accomplishment of it. 5. He lets Ahab know what interest he had in heaven: It shall be *according to my word*. With what dignity does he speak when he speaks in God's name, as one who well understood that commission of a prophet (Jer. 1:10), *I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms*. See the power of prayer and the truth of God's word; for he performeth the counsel of his messengers.

II. How he was himself taken care of in that famine. 1. How he was hidden. God bade him *go and hide himself by the brook Cherith*, v. 3. This was intended, not so much for his preservation, for it does not appear that Ahab immediately sought his life, but as a judgment to the people, to whom, if he had publicly appeared, he might have been a blessing both by his instructions and his intercession, and so have shortened the days of their calamity; but God had determined it should last three years and a half, and therefore, so long, appointed Elijah to abscond, that he might not be solicited to revoke the sentence, the execution of which he had said should be *according to his word*. When God *speaks concerning a nation, to pluck up and destroy*, he finds some way or other to remove those that would stand in the gap to turn away his wrath. It bodes ill to a people when good men and good ministers are ordered to hide themselves. When God intended to *send rain upon the earth* then he bade Elijah go and *show himself to Ahab*, ch. 18:1. For the present, in obedience to the divine command, he went and dwelt all alone in some obscure unfrequented place, where he was not discovered, probably among the reeds of the brook. If Providence calls us to solitude and retirement, it becomes us to acquiesce; when we cannot be useful we must be patient, and when we cannot work for God we must sit still quietly for him. 2. How he was fed. Though he could not work there, having nothing to do but to meditate and pray (which would help to prepare him for his usefulness afterwards), yet he shall eat, for he is in the way of his

duty, and verily he shall be fed, in the day of famine he shall be satisfied. When the woman, the church, is driven into the wilderness, care it taken that she be fed and nourished there, time, times, and half a time, that is, three years and a half, which was just the time of Elijah's concealment. See Rev. 12:6, 14. Elijah must drink of the brook, and the ravens were appointed to bring him meat (v. 4) and did so, v. 6. Here, (1.) The provision was plentiful, and good, and constant, bread and flesh twice a day, daily bread and food convenient. We may suppose that he fared not so sumptuously as the prophets of the groves, who *did eat at Jezebel's table* (ch. 18:19), and yet better than the rest of the Lord's prophets, whom Obadiah fed with bread and water, ch. 18:4. It ill becomes God's servants, especially his servants the prophets, to be nice and curious about their food and to affect dainties and varieties; if nature be sustained, no matter though the palate be not pleased; instead of envying those who have daintier fare, we should think how many there are, better than we, who live comfortably upon coarser fare and would be glad of our leavings. Elijah had but one meal brought him at a time, every morning and every evening, to teach him not to take thought for the morrow. Let those who have but from hand to mouth learn to live upon Providence, and trust it for *the bread of the day in the day*; thank God for bread this day, and let to-morrow bring bread with it. (2.) The caterers were very unlikely; the *ravens* brought it to him. Obadiah, and others in Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal, would gladly have entertained Elijah; but he was a man by himself, and must be red in an extraordinary way. He was a figure of John the baptist, whose meat was locusts and wild honey. God could have sent angels to minister to him, as he did afterwards (ch. 19:5) and as he did to our Saviour (Mt. 4:11), but he chose to send by winged messengers of another nature, to show that when he pleases he can serve his own purposes by the meanest creatures as effectually as by the mightiest. If it be asked whence the ravens had this provision, how and where it was cooked, and whether they came honestly by it, we must answer, as Jacob did (Gen. 27:20), *The Lord our God brought it to them*, whose the earth is and the fulness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein. But why ravens? [1.] They are birds of prey, ravenous devouring creatures, more likely to have taken his meat from him, or to have picked out his eyes (Prov. 30:17); but thus Samson's riddle is again unriddled, *Out of the eater comes forth meat*. [2.] They are unclean creatures. *Every raven after his kind* was, by the law, forbidden to be eaten (Lev. 11:15), yet Elijah did not think the meat they brought ever the worse for that, but ate and gave thanks, asking no question for conscience' sake. Noah's dove was to him a more faithful messenger than his raven; yet here the ravens are faithful and constant to Elijah. [3.] Ravens feed on insects and carrion themselves, yet they brought the prophet man's meat and wholesome food. It is a pity that those who bring the bread of life to others should themselves take up with *that which is not bread*. [4.] Ravens could bring but a little, and broken meat, yet Elijah was content with such things as he had, and thankful that he was fed, though not feasted. [5.] Ravens neglect their own young ones, and do not feed them; yet when God pleases they shall feed his prophet. Young lions and young ravens may lack, and suffer hunger, but not those that fear the Lord, Ps. 34:10. [6.] Ravens are themselves fed by special providence (Job 38:41; Ps. 147:9), and now they fed the prophet. Have we experienced God's special goodness to us and ours? Let us reckon ourselves obliged thereby to be kind to those that are his, for his sake. Let us learn hence, *First*, To acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over all the creatures; he can make what use he pleases of them, either for judgment or mercy. *Secondly*, To encourage ourselves in God in the greatest straits, and never to distrust him. He that could furnish a table

in the wilderness, and make ravens purveyors, cooks, and servitors to his prophet, is able to supply all our need according to his riches in glory.

Thus does Elijah, for a great while, *eat his morsels alone*, and his provision of water, which he has in an ordinary way from the brook, fails him before that which he has by miracle. The powers of nature are limited, but not the powers of the God of nature. Elijah's brook dried up (v. 7) *because there was no rain*. If the heavens fail, earth fails of course; such are all our creature-comforts; we lose them when we most need them, like the brooks in summer, Job 6:15. But there is *a river which makes glad the city of God* and which never runs dry (Ps. 46:4), *a well of water that springs up to eternal life*. Lord, give us that living water!

### **Verses 8-16**

We have here an account of the further protection Elijah was taken under, and the further provision made for him in his retirement. *At destruction and famine he shall laugh* that has God for his friend to guard and maintain him. The brook Cherith is dried up, but God's care of his people, and kindness to them, never slacken, never fail, but are still the same, are still continued and drawn out to those that know him, Ps. 36:10. When the brook was dried up Jordan was not; why did not God send him thither? Surely because he would show that he has a variety of ways to provide for his people and is not tied to any one. God will now provide for him where he shall have some company and opportunity of usefulness, and not be, as he had been, buried alive. Observe,

I. The place he is sent to, to *Zarephath*, or *Sarepta*, a city of Sidon, out of the borders of the land of Israel, v. 9. Our Saviour takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favour of God designed for the poor Gentiles, in the fulness of time, Lu. 4:25, 26. *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias*, and some, it is likely, that would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes (says Dr. Lightfoot) *the first prophet of the Gentiles*. Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations and become worse than they; justly therefore is *the casting off of them the riches of the world*. Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen; therefore, lo, he turns to the Gentiles, as the apostles were afterwards ordered to do, Acts 18:6. But why to a city of Sidon? Perhaps because the worship of Baal, which was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately thence with Jezebel, who was a Sidonian (ch. 16:31); therefore thither he shall go, that thence may be fetched the destroyer of that idolatry, "Even out of Sidon have I called my prophet, my reformer." Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country. Christ never went among the Gentiles except once *into the coast of Sidon*, Mt. 15:21.

II. The person that is appointed to entertain him, not one of the rich merchants or great men, of Sidon, not such a one as Obadiah, that was governor of Ahab's house and fed the prophets; but a poor widow woman, destitute and desolate, is commanded (that is, is made both able and willing) to sustain him. It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of the *weak and foolish things of the world* and put honour upon them. He is, in a special manner, the widows' God, and feeds them, and therefore they must study what they shall render to him.

III. The provision made for him there. Providence brought the widow woman to meet him very opportunely at the gate of the city (v. 10), and, by what is here related of what passed between Elijah and her, we find,

1. Her case and character; and it appears, (1.) That she was very poor and necessitous. She had nothing to live upon but a handful of meal and a little oil, needy at the best, and now, by the general scarcity, reduced to the last extremity. When she has eaten the little she has, for aught she yet sees, she must die for want, she and her son, v. 12. She had no fuel but the sticks she gathered in the streets, and, having no servant, she must gather them herself (v. 10), being thus more in a condition to receive alms than give entertainment. To her Elijah was sent, that he might still live upon Providence as much as he did when the ravens fed him. It was in compassion to the low estate of his handmaiden that God sent the prophet to her, not to beg of her, but to board with her, and he would pay well for his table. (2.) That she was very humble and industrious. He found her gathering sticks, and preparing to bake her own bread, v. 10, 12. Her mind was brought to her condition, and she complained not of the hardship she was brought to, nor quarrelled with the divine Providence for withholding rain, but accommodated herself to it as well as she could. Such as are of this temper in a day of trouble are best prepared for honour and relief from God. (3.) That she was very charitable and generous. When this stranger desired her to go and fetch him some water to drink, she readily went, at the first word, v. 10, 11. She objected not to the present scarcity of it, nor asked him what he would give her for a draught of water (for now it was worth money), nor hinted that he was a stranger, an Israelite, with whom perhaps the Sidonians cared not for having any dealings, any more than the Samaritans, Jn. 4:9. She did not excuse herself on account of her weakness through famine, or the urgency of her own affairs, did not tell him she had something else to do than to go on his errands, but left off gathering the sticks for herself to fetch water for him, which perhaps she did the more willingly, being moved with the gravity of his aspect. We should be ready to do any office of kindness even to strangers; if we have not wherewith to give to the distressed, we must be the more ready to work for them. A cup of cold water, though it cost us no more than the labour of fetching, shall in no wise lose its reward. (4.) That she had a great confidence in the word of God. It was a great trial for her faith and obedience when, having told the prophet how low her stock of meal and oil was and that she had but just enough for herself and her son, he bade her *make a cake for him*, and make *his* first, and then *prepare for herself and her son*. If we consider, it will appear as great a trial as could be in so small a matter. "Let the children first be served" (might she have said); "charity begins at home. I cannot be expected to give, having but little, and not knowing, when that is gone, where to obtain more." She had much more reason than Nabal to ask, "Shall I take my meat and my oil and *give it to one that I know not whence he is?*" Elijah, it is true, made mention of *the God of Israel* (v. 14), but what was that to a Sidonian? Or if she had a veneration for the name *Jehovah*, and valued the God of Israel as the true God, yet what assurance had she that this stranger was his prophet or had any warrant to speak in his name? It was easy for a hungry vagrant to impose upon her. But she gets over all these objections, and obeys the precept in dependence upon the promise: She *went and did according to the saying of Elijah*, v. 15. *O woman! great was thy faith*; one has not found the like, *no, not in Israel*: all things considered, it exceeded that of the widow who, when she had but two mites, cast them into the treasury. She took the prophet's word, that she should not lose by it, but it should be repaid with interest. Those that can venture upon the promise of God will make no

difficulty of exposing and emptying themselves in his service, by giving him his dues out of a little and giving him his part first. Those that deal with God must deal upon trust; seek first his kingdom, and then other things shall be added. By the law, the first-fruits were God's, the tithe was taken out first, and the heave-offering of their dough was first offered, Num. 15:20, 21. But surely the increase of this widow's faith, to such a degree as to enable her thus to deny herself and to depend upon the divine promise, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace as the increase of her oil was in the kingdom of providence. Happy are those who can thus, against hope, believe and obey in hope.

2. The care God took of her guest: *The barrel of meal wasted not, nor did the cruse of oil fail*, but still as they took from them more was added to them by the divine power, v. 16. Never did corn or olive so increase in the growing (says bishop Hall) as these did in the using; but the *multiplying of the seed sown* (2 Co. 9:10) in the common course of providence is an instance of the power and goodness of God not to be overlooked because common. The meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending; for *there is that scattereth and yet increaseth*. When God blesses a little, it will go a great way, even beyond expectation; as, on the contrary, though there be abundance, if he blow upon it, it comes to little, Hag. 1:9; 2:16. (1.) This was a maintenance for the prophet. Still miracles shall be his daily bread. Hitherto he had been fed with bread and flesh, now he was fed with bread and oil, which they used as we do butter. Manna was both, for the *taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil*, Num. 11:8. This Elijah was thankful for, though he had been used to flesh twice a day and now had none at all. Those that cannot live without flesh, once a day at least, because they have been used to it, could not have boarded contentedly with Elijah, no, not to live upon a miracle. (2.) It was a maintenance for *the poor widow and her son*, and a recompence to her for entertaining the prophet. There is nothing lost by being kind to God's people and ministers; she that received a prophet had a prophet's reward; she gave him house-room, and he repaid her with food for her household. Christ has promised to those who open their doors to him that he will come in to them, and *sup with them*, and *they with him*, Rev. 3:20. Like Elijah here, he brings to those who bid him welcome, not only his own entertainment, but theirs too. See how the reward answered the service. She generously made one cake for the prophet, and was repaid with many for herself and her son. When Abraham offers his only son to God he is told he shall be the father of multitudes. What is laid out in piety or charity is let out to the best interest, upon the best securities. One poor meal's meat this poor widow gave the prophet, and, in recompence of it, *she and her son did eat many days* (v. 15), above two years, in a time of general scarcity; and to have their food from God's special favour, and to eat it in such good company as Elijah's, made it more than doubly sweet. It is promised to those that trust in God that they *shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied*, Ps. 37:19.

#### **Verses 17-24**

We have here a further recompence made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet; as if it were a small thing to be kept alive, her son, when dead, is restored to life, and so restored to her. Observe,

I. The sickness and death of the child. For aught that appears he was her only son, the comfort of her widowed estate. He was fed miraculously, and yet that did not secure him from sickness and death. *Your fathers did eat manna, and are dead, but there is bread of which a man may eat and not die*, which was given for the life of the world, Jn. 6:49, 50. The affliction was to this

widow as a thorn in the flesh, lest she should be lifted up above measure with the favours that were done her and the honours that were put upon her. 1. She was nurse to a great prophet, was employed to sustain him, and had strong reason to think the Lord would do her good; yet now she loses her child. Note, We must not think it strange if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. 2. She was herself nursed by miracle, and kept a good house without charge or care, by a distinguishing blessing from heaven; and in the midst of all this satisfaction she was thus afflicted. Note, When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will towards us, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of Providence. Our mountain never stands so strong but it may be moved, and therefore, in this world, we must always rejoice with trembling.

II. Her pathetic complaint to the prophet of this affliction. It should seem, the child died suddenly, else she would have applied to Elijah, while he was sick, for the cure of him; but being dead, dead in her bosom, she expostulates with the prophet upon it, rather to give vent to her sorrow than in any hope of relief, v. 18. 1. She expresses herself passionately: *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* How calmly had she spoken of her own and her child's death when she expected to die for want (v. 12)—*that we may eat, and die!* Yet now that her child dies, and not so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed at it. We may speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it *toucheth us we are troubled*, Job 4:5. Then she spoke deliberately, now in haste; the death of her child was now a surprise to her, and it is hard to keep our spirits composed when troubles come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of our peace and prosperity. She calls him *a man of God*, and yet quarrels with him as if he had occasioned the death of her child, and is ready to which she had never seen him, forgetting past mercies and miracles: "What have I done against thee?" (so some understand it), "Wherein have I offended thee, or been wanting in my duty? *Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.*" 2. Yet she expresses herself penitently: "*Hast thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance*, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to *my* remembrance, as the effect of the affliction?" Perhaps she knew of Elijah's intercession against Israel, and, being conscious to herself of sin, perhaps her former worshipping of Baal the god of the Sidonians, she apprehends he had made intercession against her. Note, (1.) When God removes our comforts from use he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job 13:26. Our sins are the death of our children. (2.) When God thus remembers our sins against us he designs thereby to make us remember them against ourselves and repent of them.

III. The prophet's address to God upon this occasion. He gave no answer to her expostulation, but brought it to God, and laid the case before him, not knowing what to say to it himself. He took the dead child from the mother's bosom to his own bed, v. 19. Probably he had taken a particular kindness to the child, and found the affliction his own more than by sympathy. He retired to his chamber, and, 1. He humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, v. 20. He sees death striking by commission from God: *Thou hast brought this evil* for is there any evil of this kind in the city, in the family, and the Lord has not done it? He pleads the greatness of the affliction to the poor mother: "It is *evil upon the widow*; thou art the widow's God, and dost not usually bring evil upon widows; it is affliction added to the afflicted." He pleads his own concern: "It is the widow *with whom I sojourn*; wilt thou, that art my God, bring evil upon one of the best of my benefactors? I shall be reflected upon,

and others will be afraid of entertaining me, if I bring death into the house where I come." 2. He earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again, v. 21. We do not read before this of any that were raised to life; yet Elijah, by a divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, which yet will not warrant us to do the like. David expected not, by fasting and prayer, to bring his child back to life (2 Sa. 12:23), but Elijah had a power to work miracles, which David had not. He *stretched himself upon the child*, to affect himself with the case and to show how much he was affected with it and how desirous he was of the restoration of the child—he would if he could put life into him by his own breath and warmth; also to give a sign of what God would do by his power, and what he does by his grace, in raising dead souls to a spiritual life; the Holy Ghost comes upon them, overshadows them, and puts life into them. He is very particular in his prayer: *I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again*, which plainly supposes the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, and consequently its immortality, which Grotius thinks God designed by this miracle to give intimation and evidence of, for the encouragement of his suffering people.

IV. The resurrection of the child, and the great satisfaction it gave to the mother: the child revived, v. 22. See the power of prayer and the power of him that hears prayer, who *kills and makes alive*. Elijah brought him to his mother, who, we may suppose, could scarcely believe her own eyes, and therefore Elijah assures her it is her own: "It is *thy son that liveth*; see it is thy own, and not another," v. 23. The good woman hereupon cries out, *Now I know that thou art a man of God*; though she knew it before, by the increase of her meal, yet the death of her child she took so unkindly that she began to question it (a good man surely would not serve her so); but now she was abundantly satisfied that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God, and will never doubt of it again, but give up herself to the direction of his word and the worship of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child (like that of Lazarus, Jn. 11:4) was for the glory of God and the honour of his prophet.

## Chapter 18

We left the prophet Elijah wrapt up in obscurity. It does not appear that either the increase of the provision or the raising of the child had caused him to be taken notice of at Zarephath, for then Ahab would have discovered him; he would rather do good than be known to do it. But in this chapter his appearance was as public as before his retirement was close; the days appointed for his concealment (which was part of the judgment upon Israel) being finished, he is not commanded to show himself to Ahab, and to expect rain upon the earth (v. 1). Pursuant to this order we have here, I. His interview with Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants, by whom he sends notice to Ahab of his coming (v. 2–16). II. His interview with Ahab himself (v. 17–20). III. His interview with all Israel upon Mount Carmel, in order to a public trial of titles between the Lord and Baal; a most distinguished solemnity it was, in which, 1. Baal and his prophets were confounded. 2. God and Elijah were honoured (v. 21–39). IV. The execution he did upon the prophets of Baal (v. 40). V. The return of the mercy of rain, at the word of Elijah (v. 41–46). It is a chapter in which are many things very observable.

### Verses 1-16

In these verses we find,

I. The sad state of Israel at this time, upon two accounts:—

1. *Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord* (v. 4), *slew them*, v. 13. Being an idolater, she was a persecutor, and made Ahab one. Even in those bad times, when the calves were worshipped and the temple at Jerusalem deserted, yet there were some good people that feared God and served him, and some good prophets that instructed them in the knowledge of him and assisted them in their devotions. The priests and the Levites had all gone to Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chr. 11:13, 14), but, instead of them, God raised up these prophets, who read and expounded the law in private meetings, or in the families that retained their integrity, for we read not of any synagogues at this time; they had not the spirit of prophecy as Elijah, nor did they offer sacrifice, or burn incense, but taught people to live well, and keep close to the God of Israel. These Jezebel aimed to extirpate, and put many of them to death, which was as much a public calamity as a public iniquity, and threatened the utter ruin of religion's poor remains in Israel. Those few that escaped the sword were forced to abscond, and hide themselves in caves, where they were buried alive and cut off, though not from life, yet from usefulness, which is the end and comfort of life; and, when the prophets were persecuted and driven into corners, no doubt their friends, those few good people that were in the land, were treated in like manner. Yet, bad as things were,

(1.) There was one very good man, who was a great man at court, *Obadiah*, who answered his name—*a servant of the Lord*, one who feared God and was faithful to him, and yet was steward of the household to Ahab. Observe his character: He *feared the Lord greatly* (v. 3), was not only a good man, but zealously and eminently good; his great place put a lustre upon his goodness, and gave him great opportunities of doing good; and he *feared the Lord from his youth* (v. 12), he began betimes to be religious and had continued long. Note, Early piety, it is to be hoped, will be eminent piety; those that are good betimes are likely to be very good; he that feared God from his youth came to fear him greatly. He that will thrive must rise betimes. But it

is strange to find such an eminently good man governor of Ahab's house, an office of great honour, power, and trust. [1.] It was strange that so wicked a man as Ahab would prefer him to it and continue him in it; certainly it was because he was a man of celebrated honesty, industry, and ingenuity, and one in whom he could repose a confidence, whose eyes he could trust as much as his own, as appears here, v. 5. Joseph and Daniel were preferred because there were none so fit as they for the places they were preferred to. Note, Those who profess religion should study to recommend themselves to the esteem even of those that are without by their integrity, fidelity, and application to business. [2.] It was strange that so good a man as Obadiah would accept of preferment in a court so addicted to idolatry and all manner of wickedness. We may be sure it was not made necessary to qualify him for preferment that he should be of the king's religion, that he should conform to the *statutes of Omri, or the law of the house of Ahab*. Obadiah would not have accepted the place if he could not have had it without bowing the knee to Baal, nor was Ahab so impolitic as to exclude those from offices that were fit to serve him, merely because they would not join with him in his devotions. That man that is true to his God will be faithful to his prince. Obadiah therefore could with a good conscience enjoy the place, and therefore would not decline it, nor give it up, though he foresaw he could not do the good he desired to do in it. Those that fear God need not go out of the world, bad as it is. [3.] It was strange that either he did not reform Ahab or Ahab corrupt him; but it seems they were both fixed; he that was filthy would be filthy still, and he that was holy would be holy still. Those fear God greatly that keep up the fear of him in bad times and places; thus Obadiah did. God has his remnant among all sorts, high and low; there were saints in Nero's household, and in Ahab's.

(2.) This great good man used his power for the protection of God's prophets. He hid 100 of them in two caves, when the persecution was hot, and *fed them with bread and water*, v. 4. He did not think it enough to fear God himself, but, having wealth and power wherewith to do it, he thought himself obliged to assist and countenance others that feared God; nor did he think his being kind to them would excuse him from being good himself, but he did both, he both feared God greatly himself and patronised those that feared him likewise. See how wonderfully God raises up friends for his ministers and people, for their shelter in difficult times, even where one would least expect them. Bread and water were now scarce commodities, yet Obadiah will find a competence of both for God's prophets, to keep them alive for service hereafter, though now they were laid aside.

2. When Jezebel cut off God's prophets God cut off the necessary provisions by the extremity of the drought. Perhaps Jezebel persecuted God's prophets under pretence that they were the cause of the judgment, because Elijah had foretold it. *Christianos ad leones—Away with Christians to the lions*. But God made them know the contrary, for the famine continued till Baal's prophets were sacrificed, and so great a scarcity of water there was that the king himself and Obadiah went in person throughout the land to seek for grass for the cattle, v. 5, 6. Providence ordered it so, that Ahab might, with his own eyes, see how bad the consequences of this judgment were, that so he might be the better inclined to hearken to Elijah, who would direct him into the only way to put an end to it. Ahab's care was not to *lose all the beasts*, many being already lost; but he took no care about his soul, not to lose that; he took a deal of pains to seek grass, but none to seek the favour of God, fencing against the effect, but not enquiring how to remove the cause. The land of Judah lay close to the land of Israel, yet we find no

complaint there of the want of rain; for *Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the saints* and prophets (Hos. 11:12), by which distinction Israel might plainly have seen the ground of God's controversy, when God *caused it to rain upon one city and not upon another* (Amos 4:7, 8); but they blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and would not see.

II. The steps taken towards redressing the grievance, by Elijah's appearing again upon the stage, to act as a *Tishbite*, a *converter* or *reformer* of Israel, for so (some think) that title of his signifies. Turn them again to the Lord God of hosts, from whom they have revolted, and all will be well quickly; this must be Elijah's doing. See Lu. 1:16, 17.

1. Ahab had made diligent search for him (v. 10), had offered rewards to any one that would discover him, sent spies *into every tribe and lordship* of his own dominions, as some understand it, or, as others, into all the neighbouring nations and kingdoms that were in alliance with him; and, when they denied that they knew any thing of him, he would not believe them unless they swore it, and, as should seem, promised likewise upon oath that, if ever they found him among them, they would discover him and deliver him up. It should seem, he made this diligent search for him, not so much that he might punish him for what he had done in denouncing the judgment as that he might oblige him to undo it again, by recalling the sentence, because he had said it should be *according to his word*, having such an opinion of him as men foolishly conceive of witches (that, if they can but compel them to bless that which they have bewitched, it will be well again), or such as the king of Moab had of Balaam. I incline to this because we find, when they came together, Elijah, knowing what Ahab wanted him for, appointed him to meet him on Mount Carmel, and Ahab complied with the appointment, though Elijah took such a way to revoke the sentence and bless the land as perhaps he little thought of.

2. God, at length, ordered Elijah to present himself to Ahab, because the time had now come when he would *send rain upon the earth* (v. 1), or rather *upon the land*. Above two years he had lain hid with the widow at Zarephath, after he had been concealed one year by the brook Cherith; so that the third year of his sojourning there, here spoken of (v. 1), was the fourth of the famine, which lasted in all three years and six months, as we find, Lu. 4:25; James 5:17. Such was Elijah's zeal, no doubt, against the idolatry of Baal, and such his compassion to his people, that he thought it long to be thus confined to a corner; yet he appeared not till God bade him: "*Go and show thyself to Ahab, for now thy hour has come, even the time to favour Israel.*" Note, It bodes well to any people when God calls his ministers out of their corners, and bids them show themselves—a sign that he will *give rain on the earth*; at least we may the better be content with the bread of affliction while *our eyes see our teachers*, Isa. 30:20, 21.

3. Elijah first surrendered, or rather discovered, himself to Obadiah. He knew, by the Spirit, where to meet him, and we are here told what passed between them.

(1.) Obadiah saluted him with great respect, fell on his face, and humbly asked, *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* v. 7. As he had shown the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he showed the reverence of a son to this father of the prophets; and by this made it appear that he did indeed *fear God greatly*, that he did honour to one that was his extraordinary ambassador and had a great interest in heaven.

(2.) Elijah, in answer to him, [1.] Transfers the title of honour he gave him to Ahab: "Call him thy lord, not me;" that is a fitter

title for a prince than for a prophet, *who seeks not honour from men*. Prophets should be called *seers*, and *shepherds*, and *watchmen*, and *ministers*, rather than *lords*, as those that mind duty more than dominion. [2.] He bids Obadiah go and tell the king that he is there to speak with him: *Tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah* is forth-coming, v. 8. He would have the king know before, that it might not be a surprise to him and that he might be sure it was the prophet's own act to present himself to him. (3.) Obadiah begs to be excused from carrying this message to Ahab, for it might prove as much as his life was worth. [1.] He tells Elijah what great search Ahab had made for him and how much his heart was upon it to find him out, v. 10. [2.] He takes it for granted that Elijah would again withdraw (v. 12): *The Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee* (as it is likely he had done sometimes, when Ahab thought he had been sure of him) *whither I know not*. See 2 Ki. 2:16. He thought Elijah was not in good earnest when he bade him tell Ahab where he was, but intended only to expose the impotency of his malice; for he knew Ahab was not worthy to receive any kindness from the prophet and it was not fit that the prophet should receive any mischief from him. [3.] He is sure Ahab would be so enraged at the disappointment that he would put him to death for making a fool of him, or for not laying hands on Elijah himself, when he had him in his reach, v. 12. Tyrants and persecutors, in their passion, are often unreasonably outrageous, even towards their friends and confidants. [4.] He pleads that he did not deserve to be thus exposed, and put in peril of his life: *What have I said amiss?* v. 9. Nay (v. 13), *Was it not told my lord how I hid the prophets?* He mentions this, not in pride or ostentation, but to convince Elijah that though he was Ahab's servant he was not in his interest, and therefore deserved not to be bantered as one of the tools of his persecution. He that had protected so many prophets, he hoped, should not have his own life hazarded by so great a prophet. (4.) Elijah satisfied him that he might with safety deliver this message to Ahab, by assuring him, with an oath, that he would, this very day, present himself to Ahab, v. 15. Let but Obadiah know that he spoke seriously and really intended it, and he will make no scruple to carry the message to Ahab. Elijah swears by *the Lord of hosts*, who has all power in his hands, and is therefore able to protect his servants against all the powers of hell and earth. (5.) Notice is hereby soon brought to Ahab that Elijah had sent him a challenge to meet him immediately at such a place, and Ahab accepts the challenge: *He went to meet Elijah*, v. 16. We may suppose it was a great surprise to Ahab to hear that Elijah, whom he had so long sought and not found, was now found without seeking. He went in quest of grass, and found him from whose word, at God's mouth, he must expect rain. Yet his guilty conscience gave him little reason to hope for it, but, rather, to fear some other more dreadful judgment. Had he, by his spies, surprised Elijah, he would have triumphed over him; but, now that he was thus surprised by him, we may suppose he even trembled to look him in the face, hated him, and yet feared him, as Herod did John.

### **Verses 17-20**

We have here the meeting between Ahab and Elijah, as bad a king as ever the world was plagued with and as good a prophet as ever the church was blessed with. 1. Ahab, like himself, basely accused Elijah. He durst not strike him, remembering that Jeroboam's hand withered when it was stretched out against a prophet, but gave him bad language, which was no less an affront to him that sent him. It was a very coarse compliment with which he accosted him at the first word: *Art thou he that*

*troubleth Israel?* v. 17. How unlike was this to that with which his servant Obadiah saluted him (v. 7): *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* Obadiah feared God greatly; Ahab had sold himself to work wickedness; and both discovered their character by the manner of their address to the prophet. One may guess how people stand affected to God by observing how they stand affected to his people and ministers. Elijah now came to bring blessings to Israel, tidings of the return of the rain; yet he was thus affronted. Had it been true that he was the *troubler of Israel*, Ahab, as king, would have been bound to animadvert upon him. There are those who trouble Israel by their wickedness, whom the conservators of the public peace are concerned to enquire after. But it was utterly false concerning Elijah; so far was he from being an enemy to Israel's welfare that he as the stay of it, *the chariots and horsemen of Israel*. Note, It has been the lot of the best and most useful men to be called and counted *the troublers of the land*, and to be run down as public grievances. Even Christ and his apostles were thus misrepresented, Acts 17:6. 2. Elijah, like himself, boldly returned the charge upon the king, and proved it upon him, that he was *the troubler of Israel*, v. 18. Elijah is not the Achan: "*I have not troubled Israel*, have neither done them any wrong nor designed them any hurt." Those that procure God's judgments do the mischief, not he that merely foretels them and gives warning of them, that the nation may repent and prevent them. *I would have healed Israel, but they would not be healed*. Ahab is the Achan, the troubler, who follows Baalim, those accursed things. Nothing creates more trouble to a land than the impiety and profaneness of princes and their families. 3. As one having authority immediately from the King of kings, he ordered a convention of the states to be forthwith summoned to meet at Mount Carmel, where there had been an altar built to God, v. 30. Probably on that mountain they had an eminent high place, where formerly the pure worship of God had been kept up as well as it could be any where but at Jerusalem. Thither all Israel must come, to give Elijah the meeting; and the prophets of Baal who were dispersed all the country over, with those of the groves who were Jezebel's domestic chaplains, must there make their personal appearance. 4. Ahab issued out writs accordingly, for the convening of this great assembly (v. 20), either because he feared Elijah and durst not oppose him (Saul stood in awe of Samuel more than of God), or because he hoped Elijah would bless the land, and speak the word that they might have rain, and upon those terms they would be all at his beck. Those that slighted and hated his counsels would gladly be beholden to him for his prayers. Now God *made those who said they were Jews and were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan, to come, and, in effect, to worship at his feet, and to know that God had loved him*, Rev. 3:9.

#### **Verses 21-40**

Ahab and the people expected that Elijah would, in this solemn assembly, *bless the land*, and pray for rain; but he had other work to do first. The people must be brought to repent and reform, and then they may look for the removal of the judgment, but not till then. This is the right method. God will first *prepare our heart*, and then *cause his ear to hear*, will first *turn us to him*, and then *turn to us*, Ps. 10:17; 80:3. Deserters must not look for God's favour till they return to their allegiance. Elijah might have looked for rain seventy times seven times, and not have seen it, if he had not thus begun his work at the right end. Three years and a half's famine would not bring them back to God. Elijah would endeavour to convince their judgments, and no doubt it was by special warrant and direction from heaven that he put the controversy between God and Baal upon a public trial. It was great condescension in God that he would suffer so plain a case to be disputed, and would permit Baal to be a

competitor with him; but thus God would have every mouth to be stopped and all flesh to become silent before him. God's cause is so incontestably just that it needs not fear to have the evidences of its equity searched into and weighed.

I. Elijah reproved the people for mixing the worship of God and the worship of Baal together. Not only some Israelites worshipped God and others Baal, but the same Israelites sometimes worshipped one and sometimes the other. This he calls (v. 21) *halting between two opinions, or thoughts*. They worshipped God to please the prophets, but worshipped Baal to please Jezebel and curry favour at court. They thought to trim the matter, and play on both sides, as the Samaritans, 2 Ki. 17:33. Now Elijah shows them the absurdity of this. He does not insist upon their relation to Jehovah—"Is he not yours, and the God of your fathers, while Baal is the god of the Sidonians? And *will a nation change their god?*" Jer. 2:11. No, he waives the prescription, and enters upon the merits of the cause:—"There can be but one God, but one infinite and but one supreme: there needs but one God, one omnipotent, one all-sufficient. What occasion for addition to that which is perfect? Now if, upon trial, it appears that Baal is that one infinite omnipotent Being, that one supreme Lord and all-sufficient benefactor, you ought to renounce Jehovah and cleave to Baal only: but, if Jehovah be that one God, Baal is a cheat, and you must have no more to do with him." Note, 1. It is a very bad thing to *halt between God and Baal*. "In reconcilable differences (says bishop Hall) nothing more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but, in cases of such necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, *he that is not with God is against him.*" Compare Mk. 9:38, 39, with Mt. 21:30. The service of God and the service of sin, the dominion of Christ and the dominion of our lusts, these are the two thoughts which it is dangerous halting between. Those halt between them that are unresolved under their convictions, unstable and unsteady in their purposes, promise fair, but do not perform, begin well, but do not hold on, that are inconsistent with themselves, or indifferent and lukewarm in that which is good. *Their heart is divided* (Hos. 10:2), whereas God will have all or none. 2. We are fairly put to our choice *whom we will serve*, Jos. 24:15. If we can find one that has more right to us, or will be a better master to us, than God, we may take him at our peril. God demands no more from us than he can make out a title to. To this fair proposal of the case, which Elijah here makes, the people knew not what to say: *They answered him not a word*. They could say nothing to justify themselves, and they would say nothing to condemn themselves, but, as people confounded, let him say what he would.

II. He proposed to bring the matter to a fair trial; and it was so much the fairer because Baal had all the external advantages on his side. The king and court were all for Baal; so was the body of the people. The managers of Baal's cause were 450 men, fat and well fed (v. 22), besides 400 more, their supporters or seconds, v. 19. The manager of God's cause was but one man, lately a poor exile, hardly kept from starving; so that God's cause has nothing to support it but its own right. However, it is put to this experiment, "Let each side prepare a sacrifice, and pray to its God, and *the God that answereth by fire, let him be God*; if neither shall thus answer, let the people turn Atheists; if both, let them continue to *halt between two.*" Elijah, doubtless, had a special commission from God to put it to this test, otherwise he would have tempted God and affronted religion; but the case was extraordinary, and the judgment upon it would be of use, not only then, but in all ages. It is an instance of the courage of Elijah that he durst stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers; and the issue encourages all God's witnesses and advocates never to fear the face of man. Elijah does not say, "The God that answers by *water*" (though that was

the thing the country needed), but "that *answers by fire, let him be God;*" because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy. The God therefore that has power to pardon sin, and to signify it by consuming the sin-offering, must needs be the God that can relieve us against the calamity. He that can give fire can give rain; see Mt. 9:2, 6.

III. The people join issue with him: *It is well spoken*, v. 24. They allow the proposal to be fair and unexceptionable "God has often answered by fire; if Baal cannot do so, let him be cast out for a usurper." They were very desirous to see the experiment tried, and seemed resolved to abide by the issue, whatever it should be. Those that were firm for God doubted not but it would end to his honour; those that were indifferent were willing to be determined; and Ahab and the prophets of Baal durst not oppose for fear of the people, and hoped that either *they* could obtain fire from heaven (though they never had yet), and the rather because, as some think, they worshipped the sun in Baal, or that *Elijah* could not, because not at the temple, where God was wont thus to manifest his glory. If, in this trial, they could but bring it to a drawn battle, their other advantages would give them the victory. Let it go on therefore to a trial.

IV. The prophets of Baal try first, but in vain, with their god. They covet the precedency, not only for the honour of it, but that, if they can but in the least seem to gain their point, Elijah may not be admitted to make the trial. Elijah allows it to them (v. 25), gives them the lead for their greater confusion; only, knowing that the working of Satan is with lying wonders, he takes care to prevent a fraud: Be sure to *put no fire under*. Now in their experiment observe,

I. How importunate and noisy the prophets of Baal were in their applications to him. They got their sacrifices ready; and we may well imagine what a noise 450 men made, when they cried as one man, and with all their might, *O Baal! hear us, O Baal! answer us;* as it is in the margin: and this for some hours together, longer than Diana's worshippers made their cry, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, Acts 19:34. How senseless, how brutish, were they in their addresses to Baal! (1.) Like fools, *they leaped upon the altar*, as if they would themselves become sacrifices with their bullock; or thus they expressed their great earnestness of mind. *They leaped up and down*, or danced about the altar (so some): they hoped, by their dancing, to please their deity, as Herodias did Herod, and so to obtain their request. (2.) Like madmen they *cut themselves in pieces with knives and lancets* (v. 28) for vexation that they were not answered, or in a sort of prophetic fury, hoping to obtain the favour of their god by offering to him their own blood, when they could not obtain it with the blood of their bullock. God never required his worshippers thus to honour him; but the service of the devil, though in some instances it pleases and pampers the body, yet in other things it is really cruel to it, as in envy and drunkenness. It seems, this was the manner of the worshippers of Baal. God expressly forbade his worshippers to cut themselves, Deu. 14:1. He insists upon it that we mortify our lusts and corruptions; but corporeal penances and severities, such as the Papists use, which have no tendency to that, are no pleasure to him. *Who has required these things at your hands?*

2. How sharp Elijah was upon them, v. 27. He stood by them, and patiently heard them for so many hours praying to an idol, yet with secret indignation and disdain; and at noon, when the sun was at the hottest, and they too expecting fire (then if ever), he upbraided them with their folly; and notwithstanding the gravity of his office, and the seriousness of the work he had before

him, bantered them: "*Cry aloud, for he is a god, a goodly god that cannot be made to hear without all this clamour. Surely you think he is talking or meditating (as the word is) or he is pursuing some deep thoughts, (in a brown study, as we say), thinking of somewhat else and not minding his own matter, when not your credit only, but all his honour lies at stake, and his interest in Israel. His new conquest will be lost if he do not look about him quickly.*" Note, The worship of idols is a most ridiculous thing, and it is but justice to represent it so and expose it to scorn. This will, by no means, justify those who ridicule the worshippers of God in Christ because the worship is not performed just in their way. Baal's prophets were so far from being convinced and put to shame by the just reproach Elijah cast upon them that it made them the more violent and led them to act more ridiculously. *A deceived heart had turned them aside, they could not deliver their souls by saying, Is there not a lie in our right hand?*

3. How deaf Baal was to them. Elijah did not interrupt them, but let them go on till they were tired, and quite despaired of success, which was not *till the time of the evening sacrifice*, v. 29. During all that time some of them prayed, while others of them prophesied, sang hymns, perhaps to the praise of Baal, or rather encouraged those that were praying to proceed, telling them that Baal would answer them at last; but there was *no answer, nor any that regarded*. Idols could do neither good nor evil. The prince of the power of the air, if God has permitted him, could have caused *fire to come down from heaven* on this occasion, and gladly would have done it for the support of his Baal. We find that the beast which deceived the world does it. *He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men and so deceiveth them*, Rev. 13:13, 14. But God would not suffer the devil to do it now, because the trial of his title was put on that issue by consent of parties.

V. Elijah soon obtains from his God an answer by fire. The Baalites are forced to give up their cause, and now it is Elijah's turn to produce his. Let us see if he speed better.

1. He fitted up an altar. He would not make use of theirs, which had been polluted with their prayers to Baal, but, finding the ruins of an altar there, which had formerly been used in the service of the Lord, he chose to repair that (v. 30), to intimate to them that he was not about to introduce any new religion, but to revive the faith and worship of their fathers' God, and reduce them to their first love, their first works. He could not bring them to the altar at Jerusalem unless he could unite the two kingdoms again (which, for correction to both, God designed should not now be done), therefore, by his prophetic authority, he builds an altar on Mount Carmel, and so owns that which had formerly been built there. When we cannot carry a reformation so far as we would we must do what we can, and rather comply with some corruptions than not do our utmost towards the extirpation of Baal. He repaired this altar with *twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes*, v. 31. Though ten of the tribes had revolted to Baal, he would look upon them as belonging to God still, by virtue of the ancient covenant with their fathers: and, though those ten were unhappily divided from the other two in civil interest, yet in the worship of the God of Israel they had communion with each other, and they twelve were one. Mention is made of God's calling their father Jacob by the name of *Israel, a prince with God* (v. 31), to shame his degenerate seed, who worshipped a god which they saw could not hear nor answer them, and to encourage the prophet who was now to wrestle with God as Jacob did; he also shall be a prince with God. Ps. 24:6, *Thy face, O Jacob!* Hos. 12:4. *There he spoke with us.*

2. Having built his altar *in the name of the Lord* (v. 32), by direction from him and with an eye to him, and not for his own honour, he prepared his sacrifice, v. 33. *Behold the bullock and the wood; but where is the fire?* Gen. 22:7, 8. *God will provide himself fire.* If we, in sincerity, offer our hearts to God, he will, by his grace, kindle a holy fire in them. Elijah was no priest, nor were his attendants Levites. Carmel had neither tabernacle nor temple; it was a great way distant from the ark of the testimony and the place God had chosen; this was not the altar that sanctified the gift; yet never was any sacrifice more acceptable to God than this. The particular Levitical institutions were so often dispensed with (as in the time of the Judges, Samuel's time, and now) that one would be tempted to think they were more designed for types to be fulfilled in the evangelical anti-types than for laws to be fulfilled in the strict observance of them. Their perishing thus is the using, as the apostle speaks of them (Col. 2:22), was to intimate the utter abolition of them after a little while, Heb. 8:13.

3. He ordered abundance of water to be poured upon his altar, which he had prepared a trench for the reception of (v. 32), and, some think, made the altar hollow. Twelve barrels of water (probably sea-water, for the sea was near, and so much fresh water in this time of drought was too precious for him to be so prodigal of it), thrice four, he poured upon his sacrifice, to prevent the suspicion of any fire under (for, if there had been any, this would have put it out), and to make the expected miracle the more illustrious.

4. He then solemnly addressed himself to God by prayer before his altar, humbly beseeching him to *turn to ashes his burnt-offering* (as the phrase is, Ps. 20:3), and to testify his acceptance of it. His prayer was not long, for he used no vain repetitions, nor thought he should be *heard for his much speaking*; but it was very grave and composed, and showed his mind to be calm and sedate, and far from the heats and disorders that Baal's prophets were in, v. 36, 37. Though he was not at the *place* appointed, he chose the appointed *time of the offering of the evening sacrifice*, thereby to testify his communion with the altar at Jerusalem. Though he expected an answer by fire, yet he came near to the altar with boldness, and feared not that fire. He addressed himself to God as *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*, acting faith on God's ancient covenant, and reminding people too (for prayer may prevail) of their relation both to God and to the patriarchs. Two things he pleads here:—(1.) The glory of God: "Lord, hear me, and answer me, *that it may be known* (for it is now by the most denied or forgotten) *that thou art God in Israel*, to whom alone the homage and devotion of Israel are due, and *that I am thy servant*, and do all that I have done, am doing, and shall do, as thy agent, *at thy word*, and not to gratify any humour or passion of my own. Thou employest me; Lord, make it appear that thou dost so;" see Num. 16:28, 29. Elijah sought not his own glory but in subserviency to God's, and for his own necessary vindication. (2.) The edification of the people: "*That they may know that thou art the Lord*, and may experience thy grace, *turning their heart*, by this miracle, as a means, *back again to thee*, in order to thy return in a way of mercy to them."

5. God immediately answered him by fire, v. 38. Elijah's God was neither talking nor pursuing, needed not to be either awakened or quickened; while he was yet speaking, *the fire of the Lord fell*, and not only, as at other times (Lev. 9:24; 1 Chr. 21:26; 2 Chr. 7:1) *consumed the sacrifice and the wood*, in token of God's acceptance of the offering, but *licked up all the water in the trench*, exhaling that, and drawing it up as a vapour, in order to the intended rain, which was to be the fruit of this

sacrifice and prayer, more than the product of natural causes. Compare Ps. 135:7. *He causeth vapours to ascend, and maketh lightnings for the rain;* for this rain he did both. As for those who fall as victims to the fire of God's wrath, no water can shelter them from it, any more than briars or thorns, Isa. 27:4, 5. But this was not all; to complete the miracle, the fire consumed the *stones of the altar, and the very dust*, to show that it was no ordinary fire, and perhaps to intimate that, though God accepted this occasional sacrifice from this altar, yet for the future they ought to demolish all the altars on their high places, and, for their constant sacrifices, make use of that at Jerusalem only. Moses's altar and Solomon's were consecrated by the fire from heaven; but this was destroyed, because no more to be used. We may well imagine what a terror the fire struck on guilty Ahab and all the worshippers of Baal, and how they fled from it as far and as fast as they could, saying, *Lest it consume us also*, alluding to Num. 16:34.

VI. What was the result of this fair trial. The prophets of Baal had failed in their proof, and could give no evidence at all to make out their pretensions on behalf of their god, but were perfectly non-suited. Elijah had, by the most convincing and undeniable evidence, proved his claims on behalf of the God of Israel. And now, 1. The people, as the jury, gave in their verdict upon the trial, and they are all agreed in it; the case is so plain that they need not go from the bar to consider of their verdict or consult about it: *They fell on their faces*, and all, as one man, said, "*Jehovah, he is the God*, and not Baal; we are convinced and satisfied of it: *Jehovah, he is the God*" (v. 39), whence, one would think, they should have inferred, "If he be the God, he shall be our God, and we will serve him only," as Jos. 24:24. Some, we hope, had their hearts thus turned back, but the generality of them were convinced only, not converted, yielded to the truth of God, that he is the God, but consented not to his covenant, that he should be theirs. Blessed are those that have not seen what *they* saw and yet have believed and been wrought upon by it more than those that saw it. Let it for ever be looked upon as a point adjudged against all pretenders (for it was carried, upon a full hearing, against one of the most daring and threatening competitors that ever the God of Israel was affronted by) that *Jehovah, he is God*, God alone. 2. The prophets of Baal, as criminals, are seized, condemned, and executed, according to law, v. 40. If Jehovah be the true God, Baal is a false God, to whom these Israelites had revolted, and seduced others to the worship of him; and therefore, by the express law of God, they were to be put to death, Deu. 13:1–11. There needed no proof of the fact; all Israel were witnesses of it: and therefore Elijah (acting still by an extraordinary commission, which is not to be drawn into a precedent) orders them all to be slain immediately as the troublers of the land, and Ahab himself is so terrified, for the present, with the fire from heaven, that he dares not oppose it. These were the 450 prophets of Baal; the 400 prophets of the groves (who, some think, were Sidonians), though summoned (v. 19), yet, as it should seem, did not attend, and so escaped this execution, which fair escape perhaps Ahab and Jezebel thought themselves happy in; but it proved they were reserved to be the instruments of Ahab's destruction, some time after, by encouraging him to go up to Ramoth-Gilead, ch. 22:6.

#### **Verses 41-46**

Israel being thus far reformed that they had acknowledged the Lord to be God, and had consented to the execution of Baal's prophets, that they might not seduce them any more, though this was far short of a thorough reformation, yet it was so far

accepted that God thereupon opened the bottles of heaven, and poured out blessings upon his land, that very evening (as it should seem) on which they did this good work, which should have confirmed them in their reformation; see Hag. 2:18, 19. I. Elijah sent Ahab to *eat and drink*, for joy that God *had now accepted his works*, and that rain was coming; see Eccl. 9:7. Ahab had continued fasting all day, either religiously, it being a day of prayer, or for want of leisure, it being a day of great expectation; but now let him *eat and drink* for, though others perceive no sign of it, Elijah, by faith, hears *the sound of abundance of rain*, v. 41. God reveals his secrets to his servants the prophets; and yet, without a revelation, we may foresee that when man's judgments run down like a river God's mercy will. Rain is *the river of God*, Ps. 65:9.

II. He himself retired to pray (for though God had promised rain, he must ask it, Zec. 10:1), and to give thanks for God's answer by fire, now hoping for an answer by water. What he said we are not told; but, 1. He withdrew to a strange place, to the *top of Carmel*, which was very high and very private. Hence we read of those that *hide themselves in the top of Carmel*, Amos 9:3. There he would be alone. Those who are called to appear and act in public for God must yet find time to be private with him and keep up their converse with him in solitude. There he set himself, as it were, *upon his watch-tower*, like the prophet, Hab. 2:1. 2. He put himself into a strange posture. He cast himself down on his knees upon the earth, in token of humility, reverence, and importunity, and *put his face between his knees* (that is, bowed his head so low that it touched his knees), thus abasing himself in the sense of his own meanness now that God had thus honoured him.

III. He ordered his servant to bring him notice as soon as he discerned a cloud arising out of the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, which he had a large prospect of from the top of Carmel. The sailors at this day call it *Cape Carmel*. Six times his servant goes to the point of the hill and sees nothing, brings no good news to his master; yet Elijah continues praying, will not be diverted so far as to go and see with his own eyes, but still sends his servant to see if he can discover any hopeful cloud, while he keeps his mind close and intent in prayer, and abides by it, as one that has taken up his father Jacob's resolution, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me*. Note, Though the answer of our fervent and believing supplications may not come quickly, yet we must continue instant in prayer, and not faint nor desist; for *at the end it shall speak and not lie*.

IV. A little cloud at length appeared, no bigger than a man's hand, which presently overspread the heavens and watered the earth, v. 44, 45. Great blessings often arise from small beginnings, and showers of plenty from a cloud of a span long. Let us therefore never *despise the day of small things*, but hope and wait for great things from it. This was not as a morning cloud, which passes away (though Israel's goodness was so), but one that produced a plentiful rain (Ps. 68:9), and an earnest of more.

V. Elijah hereupon hastened Ahab home, and attended him himself. Ahab rode in his chariot, at ease and in state, v. 45. Elijah ran on foot before him. If Ahab had paid the respect to Elijah that he deserved he would have taken him into his chariot, as the eunuch did Philip, that he might honour him before the elders of Israel, and confer with him further about the reformation of the kingdom. But his corruptions got the better of his convictions, and he was glad to get clear of him, as Felix of Paul, when he dismissed him, and adjourned his conference with him to a more convenient season. But, since Ahab invites him not to ride with him, he will *run before him* (v. 46) as one of his footmen, that he may not seem to be lifted up with the great honour God had put upon him or to abate in his civil respect to his prince, though he reproved him faithfully. God's ministers should make

it appear that, how great soever they look when they deliver God's message, yet they are far from affecting worldly grandeur:  
let them leave that to the kings of the earth.

## Chapter 19

We left Elijah at the entrance of Jezreel, still appearing publicly, and all the people's eyes upon him. In this chapter we have him again absconding, and driven into obscurity, at a time when he could ill be spared; but we are to look upon it as a punishment to Israel for the insincerity and inconstancy of their reformation. When people will not learn it is just with God to remove their teachers into corners. Now observe, I. How he was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel his sworn enemy (v. 1-3). II. How he was met, in his banishment, by the favour of God, his covenant-friend. 1. How God fed him (v. 4-8). 2. How he conversed with him, and manifested himself to him (v. 9, 11-13), heard his complaint (v. 10-14), directed him what to do (v. 15-17), and encouraged him (v. 18). III. How his hands were strengthened, at his return out of banishment, by the joining of Elisha with him (v. 19-21).

### Verses 1-8

One would have expected, after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God and such a clear decision of the controversy depending between him and Baal, to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people—after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them, the one as it signified the acceptance of their offering, the other as it *refreshed their inheritance, which was weary*—that now they would all, as one man, return to the worship of the God of Israel and take Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he would thenceforward be prime-minister of state, and his directions would be as laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise; he is neglected whom God honoured; no respect is paid to him, nor care taken of him, nor any use made of him, but, on the contrary, the land of Israel, to which he had been, and might have been, so great a blessing, is now made too hot for him. 1. Ahab incensed Jezebel against him. That queen-consort, it seems, was in effect queen-regent, as she was afterwards when she was queen-dowager, an imperious woman that managed king and kingdom and did what she would. Ahab's conscience would not let him persecute Elijah (some remains he had in him of the blood and spirit of an Israelite, which tied his hands), but he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done (v. 1), not to convince, but to exasperate her. It is not said he told her what *God* had done, but what *Elijah* had done, as if he, by some spell or charm, had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it. Especially he represented to her, as that which would make her outrageous against him, that he had slain the prophets; the prophets of Baal he calls *the prophets*, as if none but they were worthy of the name. His heart was set upon them, and he aggravated the slaying of them as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal upon Jezebel for killing God's prophets, ch. 18:4. Those who, when they cannot for shame or fear do mischief themselves, yet stir up others to do it, will have it laid to their charge as if they had themselves done it. 2. Jezebel sent him a threatening message (v. 2), that she had vowed and sworn to be the death of him within twenty-four hours. Something prevents her from doing it just now, but she resolves it shall not be long undone. Note, Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God by that which should convince and conquer them and bring them into subjection to him. She swears by her gods, and, raging like one distracted, curseth herself if she slay not him, without any proviso of a divine permission. Cruelty and confidence often meet in

persecutors. *I will pursue, I will overtake*, Ex. 15:9. But how came she to send him word of her design, and so to give him an opportunity of making his escape? Did she think him so daring that he would not flee, or herself so formidable that she could prevent him? Or was there a special providence in it, that she should be thus infatuated by her own fury? I am apt to think that though she desired nothing more than his blood, yet, at this time, she durst not meddle with him *for fear of the people, all counting him a prophet*, a great prophet, and therefore sent this message to him merely to frighten him and get him out of the way. for the present, that he might not carry on what he had begun. The backing of her threats with an oath and imprecation does not at all prove that she really intended to slay him, but only that she intended to make him believe so. The gods she swore by could do her no harm. 3. Elijah, hereupon, in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba, v. 3. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab and all the prophets of Baal? Nay, which kept him by his sacrifice when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman. *Lord, what is man!* Great faith is not always alike strong. He could not but know that he might be very serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all the reason in the world to depend upon God's protection while he was doing God's work; yet he fled. In his former danger God had bidden him hide himself (ch. 17:3), therefore he supposed he might do so now. 4. From Beer-sheba he went forward into the wilderness, that vast howling wilderness in which the Israelites wandered. Beer-sheba was so far distant from Jezreel, and within the dominion of so good a king as Jehoshaphat, that he could not but be safe there; yet, as if his fears haunted him even when he was out of the reach of danger, he could not rest there, but went a day's journey into the desert. Yet perhaps he retired thither not so much for his safety as that he might be wholly retired from the world, in order to a more free and intimate communion with God. *He left his servant at Beer-sheba* that he might be private in the wilderness, as Abraham left his servants at the bottom of the hill when he went up into the mount to worship God, and as Christ in the garden was *withdrawn from his disciples*, or perhaps it was because he would not expose his servant, who was young and tender, to the hardships of the wilderness, which would have been putting new wine into old bottles. We ought thus to consider the frame of those who are under our charge, for God considers ours. 5. Being wearied with his journey, he grew cross (like children when they are sleepy) and *wished he might die*, v. 4. He *requested for his life* (so it is in the margin), *that he might die*; for death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet that was not the reason why he wished to die; it was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to *depart and be with Christ*, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. Those that are, in this manner, forward to die are not in the fittest frame for dying. Jezebel has sworn his death, and therefore he, in a fret, prays for it, runs from death to death, yet with this difference, he wishes to die by the hand of the Lord, whose tender mercies are great, and not to fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He would rather die in the wilderness than as Baal's prophet died, according to Jezebel's threatening (v. 2), lest the worshippers of Baal should triumph and blaspheme the God of Israel, whom they will think themselves too hard for, if they can run down his advocate. He pleads, "It is enough. I have done enough, and suffered enough. I am weary of living." Those that have secured a happiness in the other world will soon have enough of this world. He pleads, "*I am not better than my fathers*, not better able to bear those

fatigues, and therefore why should I be longer burdened with them than they were?" But is this *that my lord Elijah?* Can that great and gallant spirit shrink thus? God thus left him to himself, to show that when he was bold and strong it was *in the Lord and the power of his might*, but of himself he was *no better than his fathers* or brethren. 6. God, by an angel, fed him in that wilderness, into the wants and perils of which he had wilfully thrown himself, and in which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he would have perished. How much better does God deal with his froward children than they deserve! Elijah, in a pet, wished to die; God needed him not, yet he designed further to employ and honour him, and therefore sent an angel to *keep him alive*. Our case would be bad sometimes if God should take us at our word and grant us our foolish passionate requests. Having prayed that he might die, he *laid down and slept* (v. 5), wishing it may be to die in his sleep, and not to awake again; but he is awakened out of his sleep, and finds himself not only well provided for with bread and water (v. 6), but, which was more, attended by an angle, who guarded him when he slept, and twice called him to his food when it was ready for him, v. 5, 7. He needed not to complain of the unkindness of men when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Thus provided for, he had reason to think he had fared better than the *prophets of the groves*, that *did eat at Jezebel's table*. Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not lost them; there they may *look at him that lives and sees them*, as *Hagar*, Gen. 16:13. 7. He was carried, in the strength of this meat, to Horeb, *the mount of God*, v. 8. Thither the Spirit of the Lord led him, probably beyond his own intention, that he might have communion with God in the same place where Moses had, the law that was given by Moses being revived by him. The angel bade him eat the second time, because of the greatness *of the journey* that was *before him*, v. 7. Note God knows what he designs us for, though we do not, what service, what trials, and will take care for us when we, for want of foresight, cannot for ourselves, that we be furnished for them with *grace sufficient*. He that appoints what the voyage shall be will victual the ship accordingly. See how many different ways God took to keep Elijah alive; he fed him by ravens, with multiplied meals—then by an angel—and now, to show that *man lives not by bread alone*, he kept him alive forty days without meat, not resting and sleeping, which might make him the less to crave sustenance, but continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings; yet he neither needs food nor desires it. The place, no doubt, reminds him of the manna, and encourages him to hope that God will sustain him here, and in due time bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like him, fretful and distrustful.

### **Verses 9-18**

Here is, I. Elijah housed in a cave at Mount Horeb, which is called *the mount of God*, because on it God had formerly manifested his glory. And perhaps this was the same cave, or cleft of a rock, in which Moses was hidden when the Lord *passed by before him and proclaimed his name*, Ex. 33:22. What Elijah proposed to himself in coming to lodge here, I cannot conceive, unless it was to indulge his melancholy, or to satisfy his curiosity and assist his faith and devotion with the sight of that famous place where the law was given and where so many great things were done, and hoping to meet with God himself there, where Moses met with him, or in token of his abandoning his people Israel, who hated to be reformed (in the latter case, it agrees with Jeremiah's wish, Jer. 9:2, *O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my*

*people, and go from them, for they are all adulterers*) and so it was a bad omen of God's forsaking them; or it was because the thought he could not be safe any where else, and to this instance of the hardships this good man was reduced to the apostle refers, Heb. 11:38. *They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

II. The visit God paid to him there and the enquiry he made concerning him: *The word of the Lord came to him.* We cannot go any where to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. *Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?* Ps. 139:7, etc. God will take care of his out-casts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses. John saw the visions of the Almighty when he was in banishment in the isle of Patmos, Rev. 1:9. The question God puts to the prophet is, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* v. 9, and again v. 13. This is a reproof, 1. For his fleeing hither. "What brings thee so far from home? Dost thou flee from Jezebel? Couldst thou not depend upon almighty power for thy protection?" Lay the emphasis upon the pronoun *thou*. "What *thou!* So great a man, so great a prophet, so famed for resolution—dost thou flee thy country, forsake thy colours thus?" This cowardice would have been more excusable in another, and not so bad an example. *Should such a man as I flee?* Neh. 6:11. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be thus shaken.* 2. For his fixing here. "What doest thou here, in this cave? Is this a place for a prophet of the Lord to lodge in? Is this a time for such men to retreat, when the public has such need of them?" In the retirement to which God sent Elijah (ch. 17) he was a blessing to a poor widow at Sarepta, but here he had no opportunity of doing good. Note, It concerns us often to enquire whether we be in our place and in the way of our duty. "Am I where I should be, whither God calls me, where my business lies, and where I may be useful?"

III. The account he gives of himself, in answer to the question put to him (v. 10), and repeated, in answer to the same question, v. 14.

1. He excuses his retreat, and desires it may not be imputed to his want of zeal for reformation, but to his despair of success. For God knew, and his own conscience witnessed for him, that as long as there was any hope of doing good he had been *very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts*; but now that he had *laboured in vain*, and all his endeavours were to no purpose, he thought it was time to give up the cause, and mourn for what he could not mend. *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei—"Away to thy cell, and cry, Have compassion on me."*

2. He complains of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety to which they had arrived: *"The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, and that is the reason I have forsaken them; who can stay among them, to see every thing that is sacred ruined and run down?"* This the apostle calls his *making intercession against Israel*, Rom. 11:2, 3. He had often been, of choice, their advocate, but now he is necessitated to be their accuser, before God. Thus Jn. 5:45, *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, whom you trust.* Those are truly miserable that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them. (1.) He charges them with having forsaken God's covenant; though they retained circumcision, that sign and seal of it, yet they had quitted his worship and service, which was the intention of it. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and let fall their communion with him, do really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him. (2.) With having *thrown down his altars*, not only deserted them and suffered them to go to decay, but, in their zeal for the worship of Baal, wilfully

demolished them. This alludes to the private altars which the prophets of the Lord had, and which good people attended, who could not go up to Jerusalem and would not worship the calves nor Baal. These separate altars, though breaking in upon the unity of the church, yet, being erected and attended by those that sincerely aimed at the glory of God and served him faithfully, the seeming schism was excused. God owned them for his altars, as well as that at Jerusalem, and the putting of them down is charged upon Israel as a crying sin. But this was not all. (3.) *They have slain thy prophets with the sword*, who, it is probable, ministered at those altars. Jezebel, a foreigner, slew them (ch. 18:4), but the crime is charged upon the body of the people because the generality of them were *consenting to their death*, and pleased with it.

3. He gives the reasons why he retired into this desert and took up his residence in this cave. (1.) It was because he could not appear to any purpose: *"I only am left, and have none to second or support me in any good design. They all said, The Lord he is God, but none of them would stand by me nor offer to shelter me. That point then gained was presently lost again, and Jezebel can do more to debauch them than I can to reform them. What can one do against thousands?"* Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. No one is willing to venture alone, forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them. (2.) It was because he could not appear with any safety: *"They seek my life to take it away; and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude than lose my life in a fruitless endeavour to reform those that hate to be reformed."*

IV. God's manifestation of himself to him. Did he come hither to meet with God? He shall find that God will not fail to give him the meeting. Moses was put into the cave when God's glory passed before him; but Elijah was called out of it: *Stand upon the mount before the Lord*, v. 11. He *saw no manner of similitude*, any more than Israel did when God *talked to them in Horeb*. But, 1. He heard a strong wind, and saw the terrible effects of it, for it rent the mountains and tore the rocks. Thus was the trumpet sounded before the Judge of heaven and earth, by his angels, whom he makes *spirits*, or *winds* (Ps. 104:4), sounded so loud that the earth not only rang, but rent again. 2. He felt the shock of an earthquake. 3. He saw an eruption of fire, v. 12. These were to usher in the designed manifestation of the divine glory, angels being employed in them, whom he *maketh a flame of fire*, and who, as his ministers, march before him, to *prepare in this desert a highway for our God*. But, 4. At last he perceived a *still small voice*, in which *the Lord was*, that is, by which he spoke to him, and not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Those struck an awe upon him, awakened his attention, and inspired humility and reverence; but God chose to make known his mind to him in whispers soft, not in those dreadful sounds. When he perceived this, (1.) *He wrapped hi face in his mantle*, as one afraid to look upon the glory of God, and apprehensive that it would dazzle his eyes and overcome him. The angels *cover their faces* before God in token of reverence, Isa. 6:2. Elijah hid his face in token of shame for having been such a coward as to flee from his duty when he had such a God of power to stand by him in it. The wind, and earthquake, and fire, did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord than by his terrors. (2.) He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. This method of God's manifesting himself here at Mount Horeb seems to refer to the discoveries God formerly made of himself at this place to Moses. [1.] Then there was a tempest, an earthquake, and fire (Heb. 12:18); but, when God would show Moses his glory, he *proclaimed his goodness*; and so here: *He was, the Word was*, in the *still small voice*. [2.] Then the law was thus given to

Israel, with the appearances of terror first and then with a voice of words; and Elijah being now called to revive that law, especially the first two commandments of it, is here taught how to manage it; he must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but he must endeavour, with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not forsake them when he should be addressing them. Faith comes by hearing the word of God; miracles do but make way for it. [3.] Then God spoke to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias, he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid; see Heb. 12:18, etc.

V. The orders God gives him to execute. He repeats the question he had put to him before, "*What doest thou here?* This is not a place for thee now." Elijah gives the same answer (v. 14), complaining of Israel's apostasy from God and the ruin of religion among them. To this God gives him a reply. When he wished *he might die* (v. 4) God answered him not according to his folly, but was so far from letting him die that he not only kept him alive then but provided that he should never die, but be translated. But when he complained of his discouragement (and whither should God's prophets go with their complaints of that kind but to their Master?) God gave him an answer. He sends him back with directions to appoint Hazael king of Syria (v. 15), Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the eminency of the prophetic office (v. 16), which is intended as a prediction that by these God would chastise the degenerate Israelites, plead his own cause among them, and *avenge the quarrel of his covenant*, v. 17. Elijah complained that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished. The judgment of famine was too gentle, and had not reclaimed them; it was removed before they were reformed: "*I have been jealous,*" says he, "for God's name, but he himself has not appeared jealous for it." "Well," says God, "be content; it is all in good time; *judgments are prepared for those scorers*, though they are not yet inflicted; the persons are pitched upon, and shall now be nominated, for they are now in being, who shall do the business." 1. "When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall make bloody work among the people (2 Ki. 8:12) and so correct them for their idolatry." 2. "When Jehu comes to be king of Israel he shall make bloody work with the royal family, and shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry." 3. "Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and, when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and be a remaining witness against the apostasy of Israel, and even he shall slay the children of Bethel, that idolatrous city." Note, The wicked are reserved to judgment. *Evil pursues sinners*, and there is no escaping it; to attempt an escape is but to run from one sword's point upon another. See Jer. 48:44, *He that flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare*. Elisha, with the *sword of the Spirit*, shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war and Jehu's sword of justice. *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*, Isa. 11:4; 2 Th. 2:8; Hos. 6:5. It is a great comfort to good men and good ministers to think that God will never want instruments to do his work in his time, but, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

VI. The comfortable information God gives him of the number of Israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone (v. 18): *I have left 7000 in Israel* (besides Judea) *who have not bowed the knee to Baal*. Note, 1. In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostasy God has always had, and will have, a remnant faithful to him, some that keep their integrity

and do not go down the stream. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah (Rom. 11:4) and applies it to his own day, when the Jews generally rejected the gospel. *Yet*, says he, *at this time also there is a remnant*, v. 5. 2. It is God's work to preserve that remnant, and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace they could not have distinguished themselves: *I have left me*; it is therefore said to be a remnant *according to the election of grace*. 3. It is but a little remnant, in comparison with the degenerate race; what are 7000 to the thousands of Israel? Yet, when those of every age come together, they will be found many more, 12,000 *sealed out of each tribe*, Rev. 7:4. 4. God's faithful ones are often his hidden ones (Ps. 83:3), and the visible church is scarcely visible, the wheat lost in the chaff and the gold in the dross, till the sifting, refining, separating day comes. 5. *The Lord knows those that are his*, though we do not; he sees in secret. 6. There are more good people in the world than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think the corruption is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven, as we shall miss a great many whom we thought to meet there, so we shall meet a great many whom we little thought to find there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity and more extensive.

#### **Verses 19-21**

Elisha was named last in the orders God gave to Elijah, but he was first called, for by him the other two were to be called. He must come in Elijah's room; yet Elijah is forward to raise him, and is far from being jealous of his successor, but rejoices to think that he shall leave the work of God in such good hands. Concerning the call of Elisha observe, 1. That it was an unexpected surprising call. Elijah found him by divine direction, or perhaps he was before acquainted with him and knew where to find him. He found him, not in the schools of the prophets, but *in the field*, not reading, nor praying, nor sacrificing, but *ploughing*, v. 19. Though a great man (as appears by his feast, v. 21), master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he did not think it any disparagement to him to follow his business himself, and not only to inspect his servants, but himself to lay his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not at all put us out of the way of our heavenly calling, any more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough to feed Israel and to sow the *seed of the word*, as the apostles were taken from fishing to catch men. Elisha enquired not after Elijah, but was anticipated with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us, first. 2. That it was a powerful call. Elijah did but *cast his mantle upon him*. (v. 19), in token of friendship, that he would take him under his care and tuition as he did under his mantle, and to be one with him in the same clothes, or in token of his being clothed with the spirit of Elijah (now he put some of his honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, Num. 27:20); but, when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, 2 Ki. 2:13. And immediately he *left the oxen* to go as they would, and *ran after Elijah*, and assured him that he would follow him presently, v. 20. An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing (Ps. 110:3), nor would any come to Christ unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to *ask* leave, but only to *take* leave, of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his (Lu. 9:61) that desired he might *bid those farewell that were at home*, but only a reservation of the respect and

duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bade him to back and do it, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back, and not return, for any thing he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that those who are good are good of choice and not by constraint, not pressed men, but volunteers. 3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell-feast he made for his family (v. 21), though he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel and her party. It was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to wear his coat; yet Elisha cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great fast when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ. 4. That it was an effectual call. Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but *ministered to him* as his servitor, *poured water on his hands*, 2 Ki. 3:11. It is of great advantage to young ministers to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom, and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach must have time to learn; and those that hope hereafter to rise and rule must be willing at first to stoop and serve.

## Chapter 20

This chapter is the history of a war between Ben-hadad king of Syria and Ahab king of Israel, in which Ahab was, once and again, victorious. We read nothing of Elijah or Elisha in all this story; Jezebel's rage, it is probable, had abated, and the persecution of the prophets began to cool, which gleam of peace Elijah improved. He appeared not at court, but, being told how many thousands of good people there were in Israel more than he thought of, employed himself, as we may suppose, in founding religious houses, schools, or colleges of prophets, in several parts of the country, to be nurseries of religion, that they might help to reform the nation when the throne and court would not be reformed. While he was thus busied, God favoured the nation with the successes we here read of, which were the more remarkable because obtained against Ben-hadad king of Syria, whose successor, Hazael, was ordained to be a scourge to Israel. They must shortly suffer by the Syrians, and yet now triumphed over them, that, if possible, they might be led to repentance by the goodness of God. Here is, I. Ben-hadad's descent upon Israel, and his insolent demand (v. 1–11). II. The defeat Ahab gave him, encouraged and directed by a prophet (v. 12–21). III. The Syrians rallying again, and the second defeat Ahab gave them (v. 22–30). IV. The covenant of peace Ahab made with Ben-hadad, when he had him at his mercy (v. 31–34), for which he is reprov'd and threatened by a prophet (v. 35–43).

### Verses 1-11

Here is, I. The threatening descent which Ben-hadad made upon Ahab's kingdom, and the siege he laid to Samaria, his royal city, v. 1. What the ground of the quarrel was we are not told; covetousness and ambition were the principle, which would never want some pretence or other. David in his time had quite subdued the Syrians and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostasy from God makes them formidable again. Asa had tempted the Syrians to invade Israel once (ch. 15:18–20), and now they did it of their own accord. It is dangerous bringing a foreign force into the country: posterity may pay dearly for it. Ben-hadad had with him thirty-two kings, who were either tributaries to him, and bound in duty to attend him, or confederates with him, and bound in interest to assist him. How little did the title of king look when all these poor petty governors pretended to it!

II. The treaty between these two kings. Surely Israel's defence had departed from them, or else the Syrians could not have marched so readily, and with so little opposition, to Samaria, the head and heart of the country, a city lately built, and therefore, we may suppose, not well fortified, but likely to fall quickly into the hands of the invaders; both sides are aware of this, and therefore,

1. Ben-hadad's proud spirit sends Ahab a very insolent demand, v. 2, 3. A parley is sounded, and a trumpeter (we may suppose) is sent into the city, to let Ahab know that he will raise the siege upon condition that Ahab become his vassal (Nay, his *villain*), and not only pay him a tribute out of what he has, but make over his title to Ben-hadad, and hold all at his will, even his wives and children, the godliest of them. The manner of expression is designed to gall them; "All shall be mine, without exception."

2. Ahab's poor spirit sends Ben-hadad a very disgraceful submission. It is general indeed (he cannot mention particulars in his

surrender with so much pleasure as Ben-hadad did in his demand), but it is effectual: *I am thine, and all that I have*, v. 4. See the effect of sin. (1.) If he had not by sin provoked God to depart from him, Ben-hadad could not have made such a demand. Sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of divine protection. If God may not rule us, our enemies shall. A rebel to God is a slave to all besides. Ahab had prepared his silver and gold for Baal, Hos. 2:8. Justly therefore is it taken from him; such an alienating amounts to a forfeiture. (2.) If he had not by sin wronged his own conscience, and set that against him, he could not have made such a mean surrender. Guilt dispirits men, and makes them cowards. He knew Baal could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore was content to buy his life upon any terms. Skin for skin, and all that is dear to him, he will give for it; he will rather live a beggar than not die a prince.

3. Ben-hadad's proud spirit rises upon his submission, and becomes yet more insolent and imperious, v. 5, 6. Ahab had laid his all at his feet, at his mercy, expecting that one king would use another generously, that this acknowledgment of Ben-hadad's sovereignty would content him, the honour was sufficient for the present, and he might hereafter make use of it if he saw cause (*Satis est prostrasse leoni—It suffices the lion to have laid his victim prostrate*); but this will not serve. (1.) Ben-hadad is as covetous as he is proud, and cannot go away unless he have the possession as well as the dominion. He thinks it not enough to call it his, unless he have it in his hands. He will not so much as lend Ahab the use of his own goods above a day longer. (2.) He is as spiteful as he is haughty. Had he come himself to select what he had a mind for, it would have shown some respect to a crowned head; but he will send his servants to insult the prince, and hector over him, to rifle the palace, and strip it of all its ornaments; nay, to give Ahab the more vexation, they shall be ordered, not only to take what they please, but, if they can learn which are the persons or things that Ahab is in a particular manner fond of, to take those: *Whatsoever is pleasant in thy eyes they shall take away*. We are often crossed in that which we most dote upon; and that proves least safe which is most dear. (3.) He is as unreasonable as he is unjust, and will construe the surrender Ahab made for himself as made for all his subjects too, and will have them also to lie at his mercy: "They shall search, not only thy house, but *the houses of thy servants* too, and plunder them at discretion." Blessed be God for peace and property, and that what we have we can call our own.

4. Ahab's poor spirit begins to rise too, upon this growing insolence; and, if it becomes not bold, yet it becomes desperate, and he will rather hazard his life than give up all thus. (1.) How he takes advice of his privy-council, who encourage him to stand it out. He speaks but poorly (v. 7), appeals to them whether Ben-hadad be not an unreasonable enemy, and do not seek mischief. What else could he expect from one who, without any provocation given him, had invaded his country and besieged his capital city? He owns to them how he had truckled to him before, and will have them advise him what he should do in this strait; and they speak bravely (*Hearken not to him, nor consent*, v. 8), promising no doubt to stand by him in the refusal. (2.) Yet he expresses himself very modestly in his denial, v. 9. He owns Ben-hadad's dominion over him: "*Tell my lord the king* I have no design to affront him, nor to recede from the surrender I have already made; what I offered at first I will stand to, *but this thing I may not do*; I must not give what is none of my own." It was a mortification to Ben-hadad that even such an abject spirit as Ahab's durst deny him; yet it should seem, by his manner of expressing himself, that he durst not have done it if his people had not animated him.

5. Ben-hadad proudly swears the ruin of Samaria. The threatening waves of his wrath, meeting with this check, rage and foam, and make a noise. In his fury, he imprecates the impotent revenge of his gods, *if the dust of Samaria serve for handfuls for his army* (v. 10), so numerous, so resolute, an army will be brought into the field against Samaria, and so confident is he of their success; it will be done as easily as the taking up of a handful of dust; all shall be carried away, even the ground on which the city stands. Thus confident is his pride, thus cruel is his malice; this prepares him to be ruined, though such a prince and such a people are unworthy of the satisfaction of seeing him ruined.

6. Ahab sends him a decent rebuke to his assurance, dares not defy his menaces, only reminds him of the uncertain turns of war (v. 11): "Let not him that begins a war, and is girding on his sword, his armour, his harness, boast of victory, or think himself sure of it, *as if he had put it off*, and had come home a conqueror." This was one of the wisest words that ever Ahab spoke, and is a good item or memento to us all; it is folly to boast beforehand of any day, since we know not what it may bring forth (Prov. 27:1), but especially to boast of a day of battle, which may prove as much against us as we promise ourselves it will be for us. It is impolitic to despise an enemy, and to be too sure of victory is the way to be beaten. Apply it to our spiritual conflicts. Peter fell by his confidence. While we are here we are but girding on the harness, and therefore must never boast as though we had put it off. *Happy is the man that feareth always*, and is never off his watch.

### **Verses 12-21**

The treaty between the besiegers and the besieged being broken off abruptly, we have here an account of the battle that ensued immediately.

I. The Syrians, the besiegers, had their directions from a drunken king, who gave orders over his cups, as he was *drinking* (v. 12), *drinking himself drunk* (v. 16) *with the kings in the pavilions*, and this at noon. Drunkenness is a sin which armies and their officers have of old been addicted to. Say not thou then that the former days were, in this respect, better than these, though these are bad enough. Had he not been very secure he would not have sat to drink; and, had he not been intoxicated, he would not have been so very secure. Security and sensuality went together in the old world, and Sodom, Lu. 17:26, etc. Ben-hadad's drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall, as Belshazzar's was, Dan. 5. How could he prosper that preferred his pleasure before his business, and kept his kings to drink with him when they should have been at their respective posts to fight for him? In his drink, 1. He orders the town to be invested, the engines fixed, and every thing got ready for the making of a general attack (v. 12), but stirs not from his drunken club to see it done. *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is such a child.*

2. When the besieged made a sally (and, by that time, he was far gone) he gave orders to take them alive (v. 18), not to kill them, which might have been done more easily and safely, but to seize them, which gave them an opportunity of killing the aggressors; so imprudent was he in the orders he gave, as well as unjust, in ordering them to be taken prisoners though they came for peace and to renew the treaty. Thus, as is usual, he drinks, and forgets the law, both the policies and the justice of war.

II. The Israelites, the besieged, had their directions from an inspired prophet, one of the prophets of the Lord, whom Ahab had hated and persecuted: *And behold a prophet, even one, drew near to the king of Israel*; so it may be read, v. 13.

1. Behold, and wonder, that God should send a prophet with a kind and gracious message to so wicked a prince as Ahab was; but he did it, (1.) For his people Israel's sake, who, though wickedly degenerated, were the seed of Abraham his friend and Jacob his chosen, the children of the covenant, and not yet cast off. (2.) That he might magnify his mercy, in doing good to one so evil and unthankful, might either bring him to repentance or leave him the more inexcusable. (3.) That he might mortify the pride of Ben-hadad and check his insolence. Ahab's idolatry shall be punished hereafter, but Ben-hadad's haughtiness shall be chastised now; for God resists the proud, and is pleased to say that *he fears the wrath of the enemy*, Deu. 32:26, 27. There was but one prophet perhaps to be had in Samaria, and he drew near with this message, intimating that he had been forced to keep at a distance. Ahab, in his prosperity, would not have borne the sight of him, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves can give him any assistance. He enquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him unasked, for he waits to be gracious.

2. Two things the prophet does:—(1.) He animates Ahab with an assurance of victory, which was more than all the elders of Israel could give him (v. 8), though they promised to stand by him. This prophet, who is not named (for he *spoke in God's name*), tells him from God that this very day the siege shall be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed, v. 13. When the prophet said, *Thus saith the Lord*, we may suppose Ahab began to tremble, expecting a message of wrath; but he is revived when it proves a gracious one. He is informed what use he ought to make of this blessed turn of affairs: "*Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah*, the sovereign Lord of all." God's foretelling a thing that was so very unlikely proved that it was his own doing. (2.) He instructs him what to do for the gaining of this victory. [1.] He must not stay till the enemy attacked him, but must sally out upon them and surprise them in their trenches. [2.] The persons employed must be the *young men of the princes of the provinces*, the pages, the footmen, who were few in number, only 232, utterly unacquainted with war, and the unlikeliest men that could be thought of for such a bold attempt; yet these must do it, these weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong, that, while Ben-hadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's may be prevented and precluded, and the *excellency of the power may appear to be of God*. [3.] Ahab must himself so far testify his confidence in the word of God as to command in person, though, in the eye of reason, he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it. But it is fit that those who have the benefit of God's promises should enter upon them. Yet, [4.] He is allowed to make use of what other forces he has at hand, to follow the blow, when these young men have broken the ice. All he had in Samaria, or within call, were but 7000 men, v. 15. It is observable that it is the same number with theirs that he not *bowed the knee to Baal* (ch. 19:18), though, it is likely, not the same men.

III. The issue was accordingly. The proud Syrians were beaten, and the poor despised Israelites were more than conquerors. The young men gave an alarm to the Syrians just at noon, at high dinner-time, supported by what little force they had, v. 16. Ben-hadad despised them at first (v. 18), but when they had, with unparalleled bravery and dexterity, *slain every one his man*, and so put the army into disorder, that proud man durst not face them, but mounted immediately, drunk as he was, and made the best of his way, v. 20. See how God *takes away the spirit of princes*, and makes himself *terrible to the kings of the earth*. Now where are the silver and gold he demanded of Ahab? Where are the handfuls of Samaria's dust? Those that are most

secure are commonly least courageous. Ahab failed not to improve this advantage, but *slew the Syrians with a great slaughter*, v. 21. Note, God oftentimes makes one wicked man a scourge to another.

### Verses 22-30

We have here an account of another successful campaign which Ahab, by divine aid, made against the Syrians, in which he gave them a greater defeat than in the former. Strange! Ahab idolatrous and yet victorious, a persecutor and yet a conqueror! God has wise and holy ends in suffering wicked men to prosper, and glorifies his own name thereby.

I. Ahab is admonished by a prophet to prepare for another war, v. 22. It should seem, he was now secure, and looked but a little way before him. Those that are careless of their souls are often as careless of their outwards affairs; but the prophet (to whom God made known the following counsels of the Syrians) told him they would renew their attempt at the return of the year, hoping to retrieve the honour they had lost and be avenged for the blow they had received. He therefore bade him strengthen himself, put himself into a posture of defence, and be ready to give them a warm reception. God had decreed the end, but Ahab must use the means, else he tempts God: "Help thyself, strengthen thyself, and God will help and strengthen thee." The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their malice, and, though they may take some breathing-time for themselves, yet they are still *breathing out threatenings and slaughter* against the church. It concerns us always to expect assaults from our spiritual enemies, and therefore to mark and see what we do.

II. Ben-hadad is advised by those about him concerning the operations of the next campaign. 1. They advised him to *change his ground*, v. 23. They took it for granted that it was not Israel, but Israel's gods, that beat them (so great a regard was then universally had to invisible powers); but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah—that he was *many*, whereas he is one and his name one,—that he was *their* God only, a local deity, peculiar to that nation, whereas he is the Creator and ruler of all the world,—and that he was a God *of the hills* only, because David their great prophet had said, *I will lift up my eyes to the hills whence cometh my help* (Ps. 121:1), and that *his foundation was in the holy mountain* (Ps. 87:1; 78:54), and much was said of his *holy hill* (Ps. 15:1; 24:3); supposing him altogether such a one as their imaginary deities, they fancied he was confined to his hills, and could not or would not come down from them, and therefore an army in the valley would be below his cognizance and from under his protection. Thus vain were the *Gentiles in their imaginations* concerning God, so wretchedly were *their foolish hearts darkened*, and, *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. 2. They advised him to change his officers (v. 24, 25), not to employ the kings, who were commanders by birth, but captains rather, who were commanders by merit, who were inured to war, would not affect to make a show like the kings, but would go through with business. Let every man be employed in that which he is brought up to and used to, and preferred to that which he is fit for. Syria, it seems, was rich and populous, when it could furnish recruits sufficient, after so great a defeat, *horse for horse, chariot for chariot*.

III. Both armies take the field. Ben-hadad, with his Syrians, encamps near Aphek, in the tribe of Asher. It is probable that Asher was a city in his own possession, one of those which his father had won (v. 34), and the country about it was flat and level, and fit for his purpose, v. 26. Ahab, with his forces, posted himself at some distance over against them, v. 27. The disproportion of numbers was very remarkable. *The children of Israel*, who were cantoned in two battalions, looked like *two*

*little flocks of kids*, their numbers small, their equipage mean, and the figure they made contemptible; *but the Syrians filled the country* with their numbers, their noise, their chariots, their carriages, and their baggage.

IV. Ahab is encouraged to fight the Syrians, notwithstanding their advantages and confidence. A man of God is sent to him, to tell him that this numerous army shall *all be delivered into his hand* (v. 28), but not for his sake; be it known to him, he is utterly unworthy for whom God will do this. God would not do it because Ahab had praised God or prayed to him (we do not read that he did either), but because the Syrians had blasphemed God, and had said, He is *the God of the hills and not of the valleys*; therefore God will do it in his own vindication, and to preserve the honour of his own name. If the Syrians had said, "Ahab and his people have forgotten their God, and so put themselves out of his protection, and therefore we may venture to attack them," God would probably have delivered Israel into their hands; but when they go upon a presumption so very injurious to the divine omnipotence, and the honour of him who is Lord of all hosts, not only in hills and valleys, but in heaven and earth, which they are willingly ignorant of, they shall be undeceived, at the expense of that vast army which is so much their pride and confidence.

V. After the armies had faced one another seven days (the Syrians, it is likely, boasting, and the Israelites trembling), they engaged, and the Syrians were totally routed, 100,000 men slain by the sword of Israel in the field of battle (v. 29), and 27,000 men, that thought themselves safe *under the walls of Aphek*, a fortified city (from the walls of which the shooters might annoy the enemy if they pursued them, 2 Sa. 11:24), found their bane where they hoped for protection: the wall fell upon them, probably overthrown by an earthquake, and, the cities of Canaan being walled up to heaven, it reached a great way, and they were all killed, or hurt, or overwhelmed with dismay. Ben-hadad, who thought his city Aphek would hold out against the conquerors, finding it thus unwall'd, and the remnant of his forces dispirited and dispersed, had nothing but secrecy to rely upon for safety, and therefore hid himself in *a chamber within a chamber*, lest the pursuers should seize him. See how the greatest confidence often ends in the greatest cowardice. "Now is the God of Israel the *God of the valleys* or no?" He shall know now that he is forced *into an inner chamber to hide himself*, see ch. 22:25.

### **Verses 31-43**

Here is an account of what followed upon the victory which Israel obtained over the Syrians.

I. Ben-hadad's tame and mean submission. Even in his inner chamber he feared, and would, if he could, flee further, though none pursued. His servants, seeing him and themselves reduced to the last extremity, advised that they should surrender at discretion, and make themselves prisoners and petitioners to Ahab for their lives, v. 31. The servants will put their lives in their hands, and venture first, and their master will act according as they speed. Their inducement to take this course is the great reputation the kings of Israel had for clemency above any of their neighbours: "We have heard that they are merciful kings, not oppressive to their subjects that are under their power" (as governments then went, that of Israel was one of the most easy and gentle), "and therefore not cruel to their enemies when they lie at their mercy." Perhaps they had this notion of the kings of Israel because they had heard that the God of Israel proclaimed his name *gracious and merciful*, and they concluded their kings would make their God their pattern. It was an honour to the kings of Israel to be thus represented, as indeed every Israelite is

then dressed as becomes him when he *puts on bowels of mercies*. "They are merciful kings, therefore we may hope to find mercy upon our submission." This encouragement poor sinners have to repent and humble themselves before God. "Have we not heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rend our hearts and return to him." Joel 2:13. That is evangelical repentance which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ; *there is forgiveness with him*. Two things Ben-hadad's servants undertake to represent to Ahab:-1. Their master a penitent; for they *girded sackcloth on their loins*, as mourners, and *put ropes on their heads*, as condemned criminals going to execution, pretending to be sorry that they had invaded his country and disturbed his repose, and owning that they deserved to be hanged for it. Here they are ready to do penance for it, and throw themselves at the feet of him whom they had injured. Many pretend to repent of their wrong-doing, when it does not succeed, who, if they had prospered in it, would have justified it and gloried in it. 2. Their master a beggar, a beggar for his life: *Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, "I pray thee, let me live, v. 32. Though I live a perpetual exile from my own country, and captive in this, yet, upon any terms, let me live."* What a great change is here, (1.) In his condition! How has he fallen from the height of power and prosperity to the depths of disgrace and distress, and all the miseries of poverty and slavery! See the uncertainty of human affairs; such turns are they subject to that the spoke which was uppermost may soon come to be undermost. (2.) In his temper—in the beginning of the chapter hectoring, swearing, and threatening, and none more high in his demands, but here crouching and whining and none more low in his requests! How meanly does he beg his life at the hand of him upon whom he had there been trampling! The most haughty in prosperity are commonly most abject in adversity: an even spirit will be the same in both conditions. See how God glorified himself when he *looks upon proud men and abases them, and hides them in the dust together*, Job 40:11–13.

II. Ahab's foolish acceptance of his submission, and the league he suddenly made with him upon it. He was proud to be thus courted by him whom he had feared, and enquired for him with great tenderness: *Is he yet alive? He is my brother*, brother-king, though not brother-Israelite: and Ahab valued himself more upon his royalty than on his religion, and others accordingly. *"Is he thy brother, Ahab? Did he use thee like a brother when he sent thee that barbarous message? v. 5, 6. Would he have called thee brother if he had been the conqueror? Would he now have called himself thy servant if he had not been reduced to the utmost strait? Canst thou suffer thyself to be thus imposed upon by a forced and counterfeit submission?"* This word *brother* they caught at (v. 33), and were thereby encouraged to go and fetch him to the king. He that calls him *brother* will let him live. Let poor penitents hear God, in his word, calling them *children* (Jer. 31:20), catch at it, echo to it, and call him *Father*. Ben-hadad, upon his submission, shall not only be honourably conveyed (he *took him up into the chariot*), but treated with as an ally (v. 34): he *made a covenant with him*, not consulting God's prophets, or the elders of the land, or himself, concerning what was fit to be insisted on, but, as if Ben-hadad had been conqueror, he shall make his own terms. He might now have demanded some of Ben-hadad's cities, when all of them lay at the mercy of his victorious army; but was content with the restitution of his own. He might now have demanded the stores, and treasures, and magazines of Damascus, to augment the wealth and strength of his own kingdom, but was content with a poor liberty, at his own expense, to build streets there, a point of honour and no advantage, or no more than what the kings of Syria had had in Samaria, though they had never had so much

power as he had now to support the demand of it. With this covenant he sent him away, without so much as reproving him for his blasphemous reflections upon the God of Israel, for whose honour Ahab had no concern. Note, There are those on whom success is ill bestowed; they know not how to serve God, or their generation, or even their own true interests, with their prosperity. *Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.*

III. The reproof given to Ahab for his clemency to Ben-hadad and his covenant with him. It was given him by a prophet, in the name of the Lord, the Jews say by Micaiah, and not unlikely, for Ahab complains of him (ch. 22:8) that he used to *prophesy evil concerning him*. This prophet designed to reprove Ahab by a parable, that he might oblige him to condemn himself, as Nathan and the woman of Tekoa did David. To make his parable the more plausible, he finds it necessary to put himself into the posture of a wounded soldier. 1. With some difficulty he gets himself wounded, for he would not wound himself with his own hands. He commanded one of his brother prophets, his *neighbour*, or *companion* (for so the word signifies), to smite him, and this in God's name (v. 35), but finds him not so willing to give the blow as he is to receive it; he refused to smite him: others, he thought, were forward enough to smite prophets, they need not smite one another. We cannot but think it was from a good principle he declined it. "If it must be done, let another do it, not I; I cannot find it in my heart to strike my friend." Good men can much more easily receive a wrongful blow than give one; yet because he disobeyed an express command of God (which was so much the worse if he was himself a prophet), like that other disobedient prophet (ch. 13:24), he was presently *slain by a lion*, v. 36. This was intended, not only to show, in general, how provoking disobedience is (Col. 3:6), but to intimate to Ahab (who no doubt was told the story) that if a good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said, *Smite*, of much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy, who spared his enemy and God's, when God said, *Smite*. *Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, more pure or more compassionate than his Maker?* We must be merciful as he is merciful, and not otherwise. The next he met with made no difficulty of smiting him (*Volenti non fit injuria—He that asks for an injury is not wronged by it*) and did it so that he *wounded him*, v. 37. He fetched blood with the blow, probably in his face. 2. Wounded as he was, and disguised with ashes that he might not be known to be a prophet, he made his application to the king in a story wherein he charged himself with such a crime as the king was now guilty of in sparing Ben-hadad, and waited for the king's judgment upon it. The case in short is this—A prisoner taken in the battle was committed to his custody by a man (we may suppose one that had authority over him as his superior officer) with this charge, *If he be missing, thy life shall be for his life*, v. 39. The prisoner has made his escape through his carelessness. Can the chancery in the king's breast relieve him against his captain, who demands his life in lieu of the prisoner's? "By no means," says the king, "thou shouldst either not have undertaken the trust or been more careful and faithful to it; there is no remedy (*Currat lex—Let the law take its course*), thou hast forfeited thy bond, and execution must go out upon it: *So shall thy doom be, thou thyself hast decided it.*" Now the prophet has what he would have, puts off his disguise, and is known by Ahab himself to be a prophet (v. 41) and plainly tells him, *"Thou art the man*. Is it *my* doom? No, it is *thine*; *thou thyself hast decided it*. Out of thy own mouth art thou judged. God, thy superior and commander-in-chief, delivered into thy hands one plainly marked for destruction both by his own pride and God's providence, and thou hast not carelessly lost him, but wittingly and willingly

dismissed him, and so hast been false to thy trust, and lost the end of thy victory; expect therefore no other than that *thy life shall go for his life*, which thou hast spared" (and so it did, ch. 22:35), "and thy *people for his people*, whom likewise thou hast spared," and so they did afterwards, 2 Ki. 10:32, 33. When their other sins brought them low, this came into the account. There is a time when *keeping back the sword from blood is doing the work of the Lord deceitfully*, Jer. 48:10. Foolish pity spoils the city. 3. We are told how Ahab resented this reproof. He *went to his house heavy and displeased* (v. 43), not truly penitent, or seeking to undo what he had done amiss, but enraged at the prophet, exasperated against God (as if he had been too severe in the sentence passed upon him), and yet vexed at himself, every way out of humour, notwithstanding his victory. He who by his providence had mortified the pride of one king, by his word cast a damp upon the triumphs of another. *Be wise therefore, O you kings! and be instructed to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling*, Ps. 2:10, 11.

## Chapter 21

Ahab is still the unhappy subject of the sacred history; from the great affairs of his camp and kingdom this chapter leads us into his garden, and gives us an account of some ill things (and ill indeed they proved to him) relating to his domestic affairs. I. Ahab is sick for Naboth's vineyard (v. 1-4). II. Naboth dies by Jezebel's plot, that the vineyard may escheat to Ahab (v. 5-14). III. Ahab goes to take possession (v. 15-16). IV. Elijah meets him, and denounces the judgments of God against him for his injustice (v. 17-24). V. Upon his humiliation a reprieve is granted (v. 25-29).

### Verses 1-4

Here is, 1. Ahab coveting his neighbour's vineyard, which unhappily lay near his palace and conveniently for a kitchen-garden. Perhaps Naboth had been pleased that he had a vineyard which lay so advantageously for a prospect of the royal gardens, or the vending of its productions to the royal family; but the situation of it proved fatal to him. If he had had no vineyard, or it had lain obscure in some remote place, he would have preserved his life. But many a man's possessions have been his snare, and his neighbourhood to greatness has been of pernicious consequence. Ahab sets his eye and heart on this vineyard, v. 2. It will be a pretty addition to his demesne, a convenient out-let to his palace; and nothing will serve him but it must be his own. He is welcome to the fruits of it, welcome to walk in it; Naboth perhaps would have made him a lease of it for his life, to please him; but nothing will please him unless he have an absolute property in it, he and his heirs for ever. Yet he is not such a tyrant as to take it by force, but fairly proposes either to give Naboth the full value of it in money or a better vineyard in exchange. He had tamely quitted the great advantages God had given him of enlarging his dominion for the honour of his kingdom, by his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden, only for the convenience of his house, as if to be penny wise would atone for being pound foolish. To desire a convenience to his estate was not evil (there would be no buying if there were no desire of what is bought; the virtuous woman *considers a field and buys it*); but to desire any thing inordinately, though we would compass it by lawful means, is a fruit of selfishness, as if we must engross all the conveniences, and none must live, or live comfortably, by us, contrary to the law of contentment, and the letter of the tenth commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house*. 2. The repulse he met with in this desire. Naboth would by no means part with it (v. 3): *The Lord forbid it me*; and the Lord did forbid it, else he would not have been so rude and uncivil to his prince as not to gratify him in so small a matter. Canaan was in a peculiar manner God's land; the Israelites were his tenants; and this was one of the conditions of their leases, that they should not alienate (no, not to one another) any part of that which fell to their lot, unless in case of extreme necessity, and then only till the year of jubilee, Lev. 25:28. Now Naboth foresaw that, if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs, no, not in the jubilee. He would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men, and therefore in this matter desires to be excused. Ahab knew the law, or should have known it, and therefore did ill to ask that which his subject could not grant without sin. Some conceive that Naboth looked upon his earthly inheritance as an earnest of his lot in the heavenly Canaan, and therefore would not part with the former, lest it should amount to a forfeiture of the latter. He seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather hazard the king's displeasure than offend God, and probably

was one of the 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal, for which, it may be, Ahab owed him a grudge. 3. Ahab's great discontent and uneasiness hereupon. He was as before (ch. 20:43) *heavy and displeased* (v. 4), grew melancholy upon it, threw himself upon his bed, would not eat nor admit company to come to him. He could by no means digest the affront. His proud spirit aggravated the indignity Naboth did him in denying him, as a thing not to be suffered. He cursed the squeamishness of Naboth's conscience, which he pretended to consult the peace of, and secretly meditated revenge. Nor could he bear the disappointment; it cut him to the heart to be crossed in his desires, and he was perfectly sick for vexation. Note, (1.) Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and all the enjoyments sour; it is the heaviness of the heart and the rottenness of the bones. (2.) It is a sin that is its own parent. It arises not from the condition, but from the mind. As we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace. He had all the delights of Canaan, that pleasant land, at command the wealth of a kingdom, the pleasures of a court, and the honours and powers of a throne; and *yet all this avails him nothing* without Naboth's vineyard. Inordinate desires expose men to continual vexations, and those that are disposed to fret, be they ever so happy, will always find something or other to fret at.

#### **Verses 5-16**

Nothing but mischief is to be expected when Jezebel enters into the story—*that cursed woman*, 2 Ki. 9:34.

I. Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, and blows the coals of his corruptions. It became her to take notice of his grief and to enquire into the cause of it, v. 5. Those have forgotten both the duty and affection of the conjugal relation that interest not themselves in each other's troubles. He told her what troubled him (v. 6), yet invidiously concealed Naboth's reason for his refusal, representing it as peevish, when it was conscientious—*I will not give it thee*, whereas he said, *I may not*. What! says Jezebel (v. 7), *Dost thou govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread*. She does well to persuade him to shake off his melancholy, and not to sink under his burden, to be easy and cheerful; whatever was his grief, grieving would not redress it, but pleasantness would alleviate it. Her plea is, *Dost thou now govern Israel?* This is capable of a good sense: "Does it become so great a prince as thou art to cast thyself down for so small a matter? Thou shamest thyself, and profanest thy crown; it is below thee to take notice of so inconsiderable a thing. Art thou fit to govern Israel, who hast no better a government of thy own passions? Or hast thou so rich a kingdom at command and canst not thou be without this one vineyard?" We should learn to quiet ourselves, under our crosses, with the thoughts of the mercies we enjoy, especially our hopes of the kingdom. But she meant it in a bad sense: "*Dost thou govern Israel*, and shall any subject thou hast deny thee any thing thou hast a mind to? Art thou a king? It is below thee to buy and pay, much more to beg and pray; use thy prerogative, and take by force what thou canst not compass by fair means; instead of resenting the affront thus, revenge it. If thou knowest not how to support the dignity of a king, let me alone to do it; give me but leave to make use of thy name, and I will soon *give thee the vineyard of Naboth*; right or wrong, it shall be thy own shortly, and cost thee nothing." Unhappy princes those are, and hurried apace towards their ruin, who have those about them that stir them up to acts of tyranny and teach them how to abuse their power.

II. In order to gratify him, she projects and compasses the death of Naboth. No less than his blood will serve to atone for the

affront he has given to Ahab, which she thirsts after the more greedily because of his adherence to the law of the God of Israel.

1. Had she aimed only at his land, her false witnesses might have sworn him out of that by a forged deed (she could not have set up so weak a title but the elders of Jezreel would have adjudged it good); but *the adulteress will hunt for the precious life*, Prov. 6:26. Revenge is sweet. Naboth must die, and die as a malefactor, to gratify it.

(1.) Never were more wicked orders given by any prince than those which Jezebel sent to the magistrates of Jezreel, v. 8–10. She borrows the privy-seal, but the king shall not know what she will do with it. It is probable this was not the first time he had lent it to her, but that with it she had signed warrants for the slaying of the prophets. She makes use of the king's name, knowing the thing would please him when it was done, yet fearing he might scruple at the manner of doing it; in short, she commands them, upon their allegiance, to put Naboth to death, without giving them any reason for so doing. Had she sent witnesses to inform against him, the judges (who must go *secundum allegata et probata*—*according to allegations and proofs*) might have been imposed upon, and their sentence might have been rather their unhappiness than their crime; but to oblige them to find the witnesses, sons of Belial, to suborn them themselves, and then to give judgment upon a testimony which they knew to be false, was such an impudent defiance to every thing that is just and sacred as we hope cannot be paralleled in any story. She must have looked upon the elders of Jezreel as men perfectly lost to every thing that is honest and honourable when she expected these orders should be obeyed. But she will put them in a way how to do it, having as much of the serpent's subtlety as she had of his poison. [1.] It must be done under colour of religion: "*Proclaim a fast*; signify to your city that you are apprehensive of some dreadful judgment coming upon you, which you must endeavour to avert, not only by prayer, but by finding out and by putting away the accursed thing; pretend to be afraid that there is some great offender among you undiscovered, for whose sake God is angry with your city; charge the people, if they know of any such, on that solemn occasion to inform against him, as they regard the welfare of the city; and at last let Naboth be fastened upon as the suspected person, probably because he does not join with his neighbours in their worship. This may serve for a pretence to *set him on high among the people*, to call him to the bar. Let proclamation be made that, if any one can inform the court against the prisoner, and prove him to be the Achan, they shall be heard; and then let the witnesses appear to give evidence against him." Note, There is no wickedness so vile, so horrid, but religion has sometimes been made a cloak and cover for it. We must not think at all the worse of fasting and praying for their having been sometimes thus abused, but much the worse of those wicked designs that have at any time been carried on under the shelter of them. [2.] It must be done *under colour of justice* too, and with the formalities of a legal process. Had she sent to them to hire some of their danbitti, some desperate suffirans, to assassinate him, to stab him as he went along the streets in the night, the deed would have been bad enough; but to destroy him by a course of law, to use that power for the murdering of the innocent which ought to be their protection, was such a *violent perversion of justice and judgment* as was truly monstrous, yet such as we are directed *not to marvel at*, Eccl. 5:8. The crime they must lay to his charge was *blaspheming God and the king*— a complicated blasphemy. Surely she could not think to put a blasphemous sense upon the answer he had given to Ahab, as if denying him his vineyard were blaspheming the king, and giving the divine law for the reason were blaspheming God. No, she pretends not any ground at all for the charge: though there

was no colour of truth in it, the witnesses must swear it, and Naboth must not be permitted to speak for himself, or cross-examine the witnesses, but immediately, under pretence of a universal detestation of the crime, they must *carry him out and stone him*. His blaspheming God would be the forfeiture of his life, but not of his estate, and therefore he is also charged with treason, in *blaspheming the king*, for which his estate was to be confiscated, that so Ahab might have his vineyard.

(2.) Never were wicked orders more wickedly obeyed than these were by the magistrates of Jezreel. They did not so much as dispute the command nor make any objections against it, though so palpably unjust, but punctually observed all the particulars of it, either because they feared Jezebel's cruelty or because they hated Naboth's piety, or both: They did *as it was written in the letters* (v. 11, 12), neither made any difficulty of it, nor met with any difficulty in it, but cleverly carried on the villany. They stoned Naboth to death (v. 13), and, as it should seem, his sons with him, or after him; for, when God came to make inquisition for blood, we find this article in the account (2 Ki. 9:26), *I have seen the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons*. Perhaps they were secretly murdered, that they might not claim their father's estate nor complain of the wrong done him.

2. Let us take occasion from this sad story, (1.) To stand amazed at the wickedness of the wicked, and the power of Satan in the children of disobedience. What a holy indignation may we be filled with to see *wickedness in the place of judgment!* Eccl. 3:16. (2.) To lament the hard case of oppressed innocency, and to mingle our tears with *the tears of the oppressed that have no comforter*, while *on the side of the oppressors there is power*, Eccl. 4:1. (3.) To commit the keeping of our lives and comforts to God, for innocency itself will not always be our security. (4.) To rejoice in the belief of a judgment to come, in which such wrong judgments as these will be called over. Now we see that *there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked* (Eccl. 8:14), but all will be set to rights in the great day.

III. Naboth being taken off, Ahab takes possession of his vineyard. 1. The elders of Jezreel sent notice to Jezebel very unconcernedly, sent it to her as a piece of agreeable news, *Naboth is stoned and is dead*, v. 14. Here let us observe that, as obsequious as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel's orders which she sent from Samaria for the murder of Naboth, so obsequious were the elders of Samaria afterwards to Jehu's orders which he sent from Jezreel for the murder of Ahab's seventy sons, only that was not done by course of law, 2 Ki. 10:6, 7. Those tyrants that by their wicked orders debauch the consciences of their inferior magistrates may perhaps find at last the wheel return upon them, and that those who will not stick to do one cruel thing for them will be as ready to do another cruel thing against them. 2. Jezebel, jocund enough that her plot succeeded so well, brings notice to Ahab that *Naboth is not alive, but dead*; therefore, says she, *Arise, take possession of his vineyard*, v. 15. He might have taken possession by one of his officers, but so pleased is he with this accession to his estate that he will make a journey to Jezreel himself to enter upon it; and it should seem he went in state too, as if he had obtained some mighty victory, for Jehu remembers long after that he and Bidkar attended him at this time, 2 Ki. 9:25. If Naboth's sons were all put to death, Ahab thought himself entitled to the estate, *ob defectum sanguinis—in default of heirs* (as our law expresses it); if not, yet, Naboth dying as a criminal, he claimed it *ob delictum criminis—as forfeited by his crime*. Or, if neither would make him a good title, the absolute power of Jezebel would give it to him, and who would dare to oppose her will? Might often prevails against right, and wonderful is the divine patience that suffers it to do so. God is certainly *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*,

and yet for a time *keeps silence when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he*, Hab. 1:13.

### Verses 17-29

In these verses we may observe,

I. The very bad character that is given of Ahab (v. 25, 26), which comes in here to justify God in the heavy sentence passed upon him, and to show that though it was passed upon occasion of his sin in the matter of Naboth (which David's sin in the matter of Uriah did too much resemble), yet God would not have punished him so severely if he had not been guilty of many other sins, especially idolatry; whereas David, except in that one matter, *did that which was right*. But, as to Ahab, there was *none like him*, so ingenious and industrious in sin, and that made a trade of it. He *sold himself to work wickedness*, that is, he made himself a perfect slave to his lusts, and was as much at their beck and command as ever any servant was at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin, and, upon condition he might have the pleasures of it, he would take the wages of it, which is death, Rom. 6:23. Blessed Paul complained that he was *sold under sin* (Rom. 7:14), as a poor captive against his will; but Ahab was voluntary: he *sold himself to sin*; of choice, and as his own act and deed, he submitted to the dominion of sin. It was no excuse of his crimes that *Jezebel his wife stirred him up* to do wickedly, and made him, in many respects, worse than otherwise he would have been. To what a pitch of impiety did he arrive who had such tinder of corruption in his heart and such a temper in his bosom to strike fire into it! In many things he did ill, but he did *most abominably in following idols*, like the Canaanites; his immoralities were very provoking to God, but his idolatries were especially so. Israel's case was sad when a prince of such a character as this reigned over them.

II. The message with which Elijah was sent to him, when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, v. 17–19.

1. Hitherto God kept silence, did not intercept Jezebel's letters, nor stay the process of the elders of Jezreel; but now Ahab is reproved and his *sin set in order before his eyes*. (1.) The person sent is Elijah. A prophet of lower rank was sent with messages of kindness to him, ch. 20:13. But the father of the prophets is sent to try him, and condemn him, for his murder. (2.) The place is Naboth's vineyard and the time just when he is taking possession of it; then, and there, must his doom be read him. By taking possession, he avowed all that was done, and made himself guilty *ex post facto—as an accessory after the fact*. There he was taken in the commission of the errors, and therefore the conviction would come upon him with so much the more force. "What hast thou to do in this vineyard? What good canst thou expect from it when it is *purchased with blood* (Hab. 2:12) and thou hast *caused the owner thereof to lose his life*?" Job 31:39. Now that he is pleasing himself with his ill-gotten wealth, and giving direction for the turning of this vineyard into a flower-garden, his *meat in his bowels is turned. He shall not feel quietness. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him*, Job 20:14, 20, 23.

2. Let us see what passed between him and the prophet.

(1.) Ahab vented his wrath against Elijah, fell into a passion at the sight of him, and, instead of humbling himself before the prophet, as he ought to have done (2 Chr. 36:12), was ready to fly in his face. *Hast thou found me, O my enemy?* v. 20. This shows, [1.] That he hated him. The last time we found them together they parted very good friends, ch. 18:46. Then Ahab had countenanced the reformation, and therefore then all was well between him and the prophet; but now he had relapsed, and was

worse than ever. His conscience told him he had made God his enemy, and therefore he could not expect Elijah should be his friend. Note, That man's condition is very miserable that has made the word of God his enemy, and his condition is very desperate that reckons the ministers of that word his enemies because they *tell him the truth*, Gal. 4:16. Ahab, having sold himself to sin, was resolved to stand to his bargain, and could not endure him that would have helped him to recover himself, [2.] That he feared him: *Hast thou found me?* intimating that he shunned him all he could, and it was now a terror to him to see him. The sight of him was like that of the handwriting upon the wall to Belshazzar; it made his *countenance change, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another*. Never was poor debtor or criminal so confounded at the sight of the officer that came to arrest him. Men may thank themselves if they make God and his word a terror to them. (2.) Elijah denounced God's wrath against Ahab: *I have found thee* (says he, v. 20), *because thou hast sold thyself to work evil*. Note, Those that give up themselves to sin will certainly be found out, sooner or later, to their unspeakable horror and amazement. Ahab is now set to the bar, as Naboth was, and trembles more than he did. [1.] Elijah finds the indictment against him, and convicts him upon the notorious evidence of the fact (v. 19): *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?* He was thus charged with the murder of Naboth, and it would not serve him to say the law killed him (perverted justice is the highest injustice), nor that, if he was unjustly prosecuted, it was not his doing—he knew nothing of it; for it was to please him that it was done, and he had shown himself pleased with it, and so had made himself guilty of all that was done in the unjust prosecution of Naboth. He killed, for he took possession. If he takes the garden, he takes the guilt with it. *Terra transit cum onere—The land with the incumbrance*. [2.] He passes judgment upon him. He told him from God that his family should be ruined and rooted out (v. 21) and all his posterity cut off,—that his house should be made like the houses of his wicked predecessors, Jeroboam and Baasha (v. 22), particularly that those who died in the city should be meat for dogs and those who died in the field meat for birds (v. 24), which had been foretold of Jeroboam's house (ch. 14:11), and of Baasha's (ch. 16:4),—that Jezebel, particularly, should be devoured by dogs (v. 23), which was fulfilled (2 Ki. 9:36),—and, as for Ahab himself, that the dogs should *lick his blood* in the very same place where they licked Naboth's (v. 19—"*Thy blood, even thine*, though it be royal blood, though it swell thy veins with pride and boil in thy heart with anger, shall ere long be an entertainment for the dogs"), which was fulfilled, ch. 22:38. This intimates that he should die a violent death, should come to his grave with blood, and that disgrace should attend him, the foresight of which must needs be a great mortification to such a proud man. Punishments after death are here most insisted on, which, though such as affected the body only, were perhaps designed as figures of the soul's misery after death.

III. Ahab's humiliation under the sentence passed upon him, and the favourable message sent him thereupon. 1. Ahab was a kind of penitent. The message Elijah delivered to him in God's name put him into a fright for the present, so that he *rent his clothes and put on sackcloth*, v. 27. He was still a proud hardened sinner, and yet thus reduced. Note, God can make the stoutest heart to tremble and the proudest to humble itself. His word is quick and powerful, and is, when he pleases to make it so, like a *fire and a hammer*, Jer. 23:29. It made Felix tremble. Ahab put on the garb and guise of a penitent, and yet his heart was unhumbled and unchanged. After this, we find, he hated a faithful prophet, ch. 22:8. Note, It is no new thing to find the

show and profession of repentance where yet the truth and substance of it are wanting. Ahab's repentance was only what might be seen of men: *Seest thou* (says God to Elijah) *how Ahab humbles himself*; it was external only, the garments rent, but not the heart. A hypocrite may go very far in the outward performance of holy duties and yet come short. 2. He obtained hereby a reprieve, which I may call a kind of pardon. Though it was but an outside repentance (lamenting the judgment only, and not the sin), though he did not leave his idols, nor restore the vineyard to Naboth's heirs, yet, because he did hereby give some glory to God, God took notice of it, and bade Elijah take notice of it: *Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself?* v. 29. In consideration of this the threatened ruin of his house, which had not been fixed to any time, should be *adjourned to his son's days*. The sentence should not be revoked, but the execution suspended. Now, (1.) This discovers the great goodness of God, and his readiness to show mercy, which here *rejoices against judgment*. Favour was shown to this wicked man that God might magnify his goodness (says bishop Sanderson) even to the hazard of his other divine perfections; as if (says he) God would be thought unholy, or untrue, or unjust (though he be none of these), or any thing, rather than unmerciful. (2.) This teaches us to take notice of that which is good even in those who are not so good as they should be: let it be commended as far as it goes. (3.) This gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long; God is rewarding their external services with external mercies. (4.) This encourages all those that truly repent and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel. If a pretending partial penitent shall go to his house reprieved, doubtless a sincere penitent shall *go to his house justified*.

## Chapter 22

This chapter finishes the history of Ahab's reign. It was promised in the close of the foregoing chapter that the ruin of his house should not come in his days, but his days were soon at an end. His war with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead is that which we have an account of in this chapter. I. His preparations for that war. He consulted, 1. His privy-council (v. 1-3). 2. Jehoshaphat (v. 4). 3. His prophets. (1.) His own, who encouraged him to go on this expedition (v. 5, 6), Zedekiah particularly (v. 11, 12). (2.) A prophet of the Lord, Micah, who was desired to come by Jehoshaphat (v. 7, 8), sent for (v. 9, 10-13, 14), upbraided Ahab with his confidence in the false prophets (v. 15), but foretold his fall in this expedition (v. 16-18), and gave him an account how he came to be thus imposed upon by his prophets (v. 19-23). He is abused by Zedekiah (v. 24, 25), and imprisoned by Ahab (v. 26-28). II. The battle itself, in which, 1. Jehoshaphat is exposed. But, 2. Ahab is slain (v. 29-40). In the close of the chapter we have a short account, (1.) Of the good reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah (v. 41-50). (2.) Of the wicked reign of Ahaziah king of Israel (v. 51-53).

### Verses 1-14

Though Ahab continued under guilt and wrath, and the dominion of the lusts to which he had sold himself, yet, as a reward for his professions of repentance and humiliation, though the time drew near when he should descend into battle and perish, yet we have him blessed with a three years' peace (v. 1) and an honourable visit made him by Jehoshaphat king of Judah, v. 2. The Jews have a fabulous conceit, that when Ahab humbled himself for his sin, and lay in sackcloth, he sent for Jehoshaphat to come to him, to chastise him; and that he staid with him for some time, and gave him so many stripes every day. This is a groundless tradition. He came now, it is probable, to consult him about the affairs of their kingdoms. It is strange that so great a man as Jehoshaphat would pay so much respect to a kingdom revolted from the house of David, and that so good a man should show so much kindness to a king revolted from the worship of God. But, though he was a godly man, his temper was too easy, which betrayed him into snares and inconveniences. The Syrians durst not give Ahab any disturbance. But, I. Ahab here meditates a war against the Syrians, and advises concerning it with those about him, v. 3. The king of Syria gave him the provocation; when he lay at his mercy, he promised to restore him his cities (ch. 20:34), and Ahab foolishly took his word, when he ought not to have dismissed him till the cities were put into his possession. But now he knows by experience, what he ought before to have considered, that as the kisses, so the promises, *of an enemy are deceitful*, and there is no confidence to be put in leagues extorted by distress. Benhadad is one of those princes that think themselves bound by their word no further and no longer than it is for their interest. Whether any other cities were restored we do not find, but Ramoth-Gilead was not, a considerable city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan, a Levites' city, and one of the cities of refuge. Ahab blames himself, and his people, that they did not bestir themselves to recover it out of the hands of the Syrians, and to chastise Ben-hadad's violation of his league; and resolves to let that ungrateful perfidious prince know that as he had given him peace he could give him trouble. Ahab has a good cause, yet succeeds not. Equity is not to be judged of by prosperity. II. He engages Jehoshaphat, and draws him in, to join with him in this expedition, for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, v. 4.

And here I do not wonder that Ahab should desire the assistance of so pious and prosperous a neighbour. Even bad men have often coveted the friendship of the good. It is desirable to have an interest in those that have an interest in heaven, and to have those with us that have God with them. But it is strange that Jehoshaphat will go so entirely into Ahab's interests as to say, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people*. I hope not; Jehoshaphat and his people are not so wicked and corrupt as Ahab and his people. Too great a complaisance to evildoers has brought many good people, through unwariness, into a dangerous fellowship with *the unfruitful works of darkness*. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dearly for his compliment when, in battle, he was taken for Ahab. Yet some observe that in joining with Israel against Syria he atoned for his father's fault in joining with Syria against Israel, ch. 15:19, 20.

III. At the special instance and request of Jehoshaphat, he asks counsel of the prophets concerning this expedition. Ahab thought it enough to consult with his statesmen, but Jehoshaphat moves that they should *enquire of the word of the Lord*, v. 5. Note, 1. Whithersoever a good man goes he desires to take God along with him, and will acknowledge him in all his ways, ask leave of him, and look up to him for success. 2. Whithersoever a good man goes he ought to take his religion along with him, and not be ashamed to own it, no, not when he is with those who have no kindness for it. Jehoshaphat has not left behind him, at Jerusalem, his affection, his veneration, for *the word of the Lord*, but both avows it and endeavours to introduce it into Ahab's court. If Ahab drew him into his wars, he will draw Ahab into his devotions.

IV. Ahab's 400 prophets, the standing regiment he had of them (*prophets of the groves* they called them), agreed to encourage him in this expedition and to assure him of success, v. 6. He put the question to them with a seeming fairness: *Shall I go or shall I forbear?* But they knew which way his inclination was and designed only to humour the two kings. To please Jehoshaphat, they made use of the name *Jehovah*: He shall *deliver it into the hand of the king*; they stole the word from the true prophets (Jer. 23:30) and spoke their language. To please Ahab they said, *Go up*. They had indeed probabilities on their side: Ahab had, not long since, beaten the Syrians twice; he had now a good cause, and was much strengthened by his alliance with Jehoshaphat. But they pretended to speak by prophecy, not by rational conjecture, by divine, not human, foresight: "Thou shalt certainly recover Ramoth-Gilead." Zedekiah, a leading man among these prophets, in imitation of the true prophets, illustrated his false prophecy with a sign, v. 11. He made himself a pair of iron horns, representing the two kings, and their honour and power (both of which were signified by horns, exaltation and force), and with these the Syrians must be pushed. All the prophets agreed, as one man, that Ahab should return from this expedition a conqueror, v. 12. Unity is not always the mark of a true church and a true ministry. Here were 400 men that prophesied with one mind and one mouth, and yet all in an error.

V. Jehoshaphat cannot relish this sort of preaching; it is not like what he was used to. The false prophets cannot so mimic the true but that he who had spiritual senses exercised could discern the fallacy, and therefore he enquired for a *prophet of the Lord besides*, v. 7. He is too much of a courtier to say any thing by way of reflection on the king's chaplains, but he waits to see a *prophet of the Lord*, intimating that he could not look upon these to be so. They *seemed to be somewhat* (whatever they were, it made no matter to him), but, in conference, they *added nothing to him*, they gave him no satisfaction, Gal. 2:6. One

faithful prophet of the Lord was worth them all.

VI. Ahab has another, but one he hates, Micaiah by name, and, to please Jehoshaphat, he is willing to have him sent for, v. 8–10. Ahab owned that they might *enquire of the Lord by him*, that he was a true prophet, and one that knew God's mind. And yet, 1. He hated him, and was not ashamed to own to the king of Judah that he did so, and to give this for a reason. He *doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil*. And whose fault was that? If Ahab had done well, he would have heard nothing but good from heaven; if he do ill, he may thank himself for all the uneasiness which the reproofs and threats of God's word gave him. Note, Those are wretchedly hardened in sin, and are ripening apace for ruin, who hate God's ministers because they deal plainly with them and faithfully warn them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and reckon those their enemies that *tell them the truth*. 2. He had (it should seem) imprisoned him; for, when he committed him (v. 26), he bade the officer carry him back, namely, to the place whence he came. We may suppose that this was he that reproved him for his clemency to Ben-hadad (ch. 20:38, etc.) and for so doing was cast into prison, where he had lain these three years. This was the reason why Ahab knew where to find him so readily, v. 9. But his imprisonment had not excluded him for divine visits: the spirit of prophecy continued with him there. He was bound, but *the word of the Lord was not*. Nor did it in the least abate his courage, nor make him less confident or faithful in delivering his message. Jehoshaphat gave too gentle a reproof to Ahab for expressing his indignation against a faithful prophet: *Let not the king say so*, v. 8. He should have said, "Thou art unjust to the prophet, unkind to thyself, and puttest an affront upon his Lord and thine, in saying so." Such sinners as Ahab must be rebuked sharply. However he so far yielded to the reproof that, for fear of provoking Jehoshaphat to break off from his alliance with him, he orders Micaiah to be sent for with all speed, v. 9. The two kings sat each in their robes and chairs of state, in the gate of Samaria, ready to receive this poor prophet, and to hear what he had to say; for many will give God's word the hearing that will not lend it an obedient ear. They were attended with a crowd of flattering prophets, that could not think of prophesying any thing but what was very sweet and very smooth to two such glorious princes now in confederacy. Those that love to be flattered shall not want flatterers.

VII. Micaiah is pressed by the officer that fetches him to follow the cry, v. 13. That officer was unworthy the name of an Israelite who pretended to prescribe to a prophet; but he thought him altogether such a one as the rest, who studied to please men and not God. He told Micaiah how unanimous the other prophets were in foretelling the king's good success, how agreeable it was to the king, intimating that it was his interest to say as they said—he might thereby gain, not only enlargement, but preferment. Those that dote upon worldly things themselves think every body else should do so too, and true or false, right or wrong, speak and act for their secular interest only. He intimated likewise that it would be to no purpose to contradict such a numerous and unanimous vote; he would be ridiculed, as affecting a foolish singularity, if he should. But Micaiah, who knows better things, protests, and backs his protestation with an oath, that he will deliver his message from God with all faithfulness, whether it be pleasing or displeasing to his prince (v. 14): *"What the Lord saith to me, that will I speak, without addition, diminution, or alteration."* This was nobly resolved, and as became one who had his eye to a greater King than either of these, arrayed with brighter robes, and sitting on a higher throne.

## Verses 15-28

Here Micaiah does well, but, as is common, suffers ill for so doing.

I. We are told how faithfully he delivered his message, as one that was more solicitous to please God than to humour either the great or the many. In three ways he delivers his message, and all displeasing to Ahab:—

1. He spoke as the rest of the prophets had spoken, but ironically: *Go, and prosper*, v. 15. Ahab put the same question to him that he had put to his own prophets (*Shall we go, or shall we forbear?*) seeming desirous to know God's mind, when, like Balaam, he was strongly bent to do his own, which Micaiah plainly took notice of when he bade him go, but with such an air and pronunciation as plainly showed he spoke it by way of derision; as if he had said, "I know you are determined to go, and I hear your own prophets are unanimous in assuring you of success; go then and take what follows. They say, *The Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king*; but I do not tell thee that *thus saith the Lord*; no, he saith otherwise." Note, Those deserve to be bantered that love to be flattered; and it is just with God to give up those to their own counsels that give up themselves to their own lusts. Eccl. 11:9. In answer to this Ahab adjured him to tell him the truth, and not to jest with him (v. 16), as if he sincerely desired to know both what God would have him to do and what he would do with him, yet intending to represent the prophet as a perverse ill-humoured man, that would not tell him the truth till he was thus put to his oath, or adjured to do it.

2. Being thus pressed, he plainly foretold that the king would be cut off in this expedition, and his army scattered, v. 17. He saw them in a vision, or in a dream, dispersed upon the mountains, as sheep that had no one to guide them. *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, Zec. 13:7. This intimates, (1.) That Israel should be deprived of their king, who was their shepherd. God took notice of it, *These have no master*. (2.) That they would be obliged to retire *re infecta*—without accomplishing their object. He does not foresee any great slaughter in the army, but that they should make a dishonorable retreat. *Let them return every man to his house in peace*, put into disorder indeed for the present, but no great losers by the death of their king; he shall fall in war, but they shall go home in peace. Thus Micaiah, in his prophecy, testified what he had seen and heard (let them take it how they pleased), while the others prophesied merely *out of their own hearts*; see Jer. 23:28. "The prophet that has a dream let him tell that, and so quote his authority; *and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully*, and not his own; for *what is the chaff to the wheat?*" Now Ahab finds himself aggrieved, turns to Jehoshaphat, and appeals to him whether Micaiah had not manifestly a spite against him, v. 18. Those that bear malice to others are generally willing to believe that others bear malice to them, though they have no cause for it, and therefore to put the worst constructions upon all they say. What evil did Micaiah prophesy to Ahab in telling him that, if he proceeded in this expedition, it would be fatal to him, while he might choose whether he would proceed in it or no? The greatest kindness we can do to one that is going a dangerous way is to tell him of his danger.

3. He informed the king how it was that all his prophets encouraged him to proceed, that God permitted Satan by them to deceive him into his ruin, and he by vision knew of it; it was represented to him, and he represented it to Ahab, that the God of heaven had determined he should fall at Ramoth-Gilead (v. 19, 20), that the favour he had wickedly shown to Ben-hadad might be punished by him and his Syrians, and that he being in some doubt whether he should go to Ramoth-Gilead or no, and

resolving to be advised by his prophets, they should persuade him to it and prevail (v. 21, 22); and hence it was that they encouraged him with so much assurance (v. 23); it was a lie from the father of lies, but by divine permission. This matter is here represented after the manner of men. We are not to imagine that God is ever put upon new counsels, or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes, nor that he needs to consult with angels, or any creature, about the methods he should take, nor that he is the author of sin or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie; but, besides what was intended by this with reference to Ahab himself, it is to teach us, (1.) That God is a great king above all kings, and has a throne above all the thrones of earthly princes. "You have your thrones," said Micaiah to these two kings, "and you think you may do what you will, and we must all say as you would have us; but *I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne*, and every man's judgment proceeding from him, and therefore I must say as he says; he is not a man, as you are." (2.) That he is continually attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, those heavenly hosts, who stand by him, ready to go where he sends them and to do what he bids them, messengers of mercy *on his right hand*, of wrath *on his left hand*. (3.) That he not only takes cognizance of, but presides over, all the affairs of this lower world, and overrules them *according to the counsel of his own will*. The rise and fall of princes, the issues of war, and all the great affairs of state, which are the subject of the consultations of wise and great men, are no more above God's direction than the meanest concerns of the poorest cottages are below his notice. (4.) That God has many ways of bringing about his own counsels, particularly concerning the fall of sinners when they are ripe for ruin; he can do it either in this manner or in that manner. (5.) That there are malicious and lying spirits which go about continually seeking to devour, and, in order to that, seeking to deceive, and especially to put lies into the mouths of prophets, by them to entice many to their destruction. (6.) It is not without the divine permission that the devil deceives men, and even thereby God serves his own purposes. *With him are strength and wisdom, the deceived and the deceivers are his*, Job 12:16. When he pleases, for the punishment of those who receive not the truth in the love of it, he not only *lets Satan loose to deceive them* (Rev. 20:7, 8), but *gives men up to strong delusions to believe him*, 2 Th. 2:11, 12. (7.) Those are manifestly marked for ruin that are thus given up. God has certainly *spoken evil concerning those* whom he had given up to be imposed upon by lying prophets. Thus Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning, not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but of the danger of believing those that encouraged him to proceed. Thus we are warned to *beware of false prophets*, and to try the spirits; the lying spirit never deceives so fatally as *in the mouth of prophets*.

II. We are told how he was abused for delivering his message thus faithfully, thus plainly, in a way so very proper both to convince and to affect. 1. Zedekiah, a wicked prophet, impudently insulted him in the face of the court, *smote him on the cheek*, to reproach him, to silence him and stop his mouth, and to express his indignation at him (thus was our blessed Saviour abused, Mt. 26:67, that Judge of Israel, Mic. 5:1); and as if he not only had the spirit of the Lord, but the monopoly of this Spirit, that he might not go without his leave, he asks, *Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak to thee?* v. 24. The false prophets were always the worst enemies the true prophets had, and not only stirred up the government against them, but were themselves abusive to them, as Zedekiah here. To strike within the verge of the court, especially in the king's presence, is looked upon by our law as a high misdemeanour; yet this wicked prophet gives this abuse to a prophet of the Lord,

and is not reprimanded nor bound to his good behaviour for it. Ahab was pleased with it, and Jehoshaphat had not courage to appear for the injured prophet, pretending it was out of his jurisdiction; but Micaiah, though he returns not his blow (God's prophets are not strikers nor persecutors, dare not avenge themselves, render blow for blow, or be in any way accessory to the breach of the peace), yet, since he boasted so much of the Spirit, as those commonly do that know least of his operations, he leaves him to be convinced of his error by the event: *Thou shalt know when thou hidest thyself in an inner chamber*, v. 25. It is likely Zedekiah went with Ahab to the battle, and took his horns of iron with him to encourage the soldiers, to see with pleasure the accomplishment of his prophecy, and return in triumph with the king; but, the army being routed, he fled among the rest from the sword of the enemy, sheltered himself as Ben-hadad had done in *a chamber within a chamber* (ch. 20:30), lest he should perish, as he knew he deserved to do, with those whom he had deluded, as Balaam did (Num. 31:8), and lest the blind prophet should *fall into the ditch* with the blinded prince whom he had misled. Note, Those that will not have their mistakes rectified in time by the word of God will be undeceived, when it is too late, by the judgments of God. 2. Ahab, that wicked king, committed him to prison (v. 27), not only ordered him to be taken into custody, or remitted to the prison whence he came, but to be fed with bread and water, coarse bread and puddle-water, till he should return, not doubting but that he should return a conqueror, and then he would put him to death for a false prophet (v. 27)—hard usage for one that would have prevented his ruin! But by this it appeared that God had *determined to destroy him*, as 2 Chr. 25:16. How confident is Ahab of success. He doubts not but he shall return in peace, forgetting what he himself had reminded Ben-hadad of, *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast*; but there was little likelihood of his coming home in peace when he left one of God's prophets behind him in prison. Micaiah put it upon the issue, and called all the people to be witnesses that he did so: *"If thou return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me*, v. 28. Let me incur the reproach and punishment of a false prophet, if the king come home alive." He ran no hazard by this appeal, for he knew whom he had believed; he that is terrible to the kings of the earth, and treads upon princes as mortar, will rather let thousands of them fall to the ground than one jot or tittle of his own word; he will not fail to *confirm the word of his servants*, Isa. 44:26.

#### **Verses 29-40**

The matter in contest between God's prophet and Ahab's prophets is here soon determined, and it is made to appear which was in the right. Here,

I. The two kings march with their forces to Ramoth-Gilead, v. 29. That the king of Israel, who hated God's prophet, should so far disbelieve his admonition as to persist in his resolution, notwithstanding, is not strange; but that Jehoshaphat, that pious prince, who had desired to enquire by a *prophet of the Lord*, as disrelishing and discrediting Ahab's prophets, should yet proceed, after so fair a warning, is matter of astonishment. But by the easiness of his temper he was carried away with the delusion (as Barnabas was with the dissimulation, Gal. 2:113) of his friends. He gave too much heed to Ahab's prophets, because they pretended to speak from God too, and in his country he had never been imposed upon by such cheats. He was ready to give his opinion with the majority, and to conclude that it was 400 to one but they should succeed. Micaiah had not forbidden them to go; nay, at first, he said, *Go, and prosper*. If it came to the worst, it was only Ahab's fall that was foretold,

and therefore Jehoshaphat hoped he might safely venture.

II. Ahab adopts a contrivance by which he hopes to secure himself and expose his friend (v. 30): "*I will disguise myself*, and go in the habit of a common soldier, but let *Jehoshaphat put on his robes*, to appear in the dress of a general." He pretended thereby to do honour to Jehoshaphat, and to compliment him with the sole command of the army in this action. He shall direct and give orders, and Ahab will serve as a soldier under him. But he intended, 1. To make a liar of a good prophet. Thus he hoped to elude the danger, and so to defeat the threatening, as if, by disguising himself, he could escape the divine cognizance and the judgments that pursued him. 2. To make a fool of a good king, whom he did not cordially love, because he was one that adhered to God and so condemned his apostasy. He knew that if any perished it must be the shepherd (so Micaiah had foretold); and perhaps he had intimation of the charge the enemy had to fight chiefly *against the king of Israel*, and therefore basely intended to betray Jehoshaphat to the danger, that he might secure himself. Ahab was marked for ruin; one would not have been in his coat for a great sum; yet he will over-persuade this godly king to muster for him. See what those get that join in affinity with vicious men, whose consciences are debauched, and who are lost to every thing that is honourable. How can it be expected that he should be true to his friend that has been false to his God?

III. Jehoshaphat, having more piety than policy, put himself into the post of honour, though it was the post of danger, and was thereby brought into the peril of his life, but God graciously delivered him. The king of Syria charged his captains to level their force, not against the king of Judah, for with him he had no quarrel, but against the king of Israel only (v. 31), to aim at his person, as if against him he had a particular enmity. Now Ahab was justly repaid for sparing Ben-hadad, who, as the seed of the serpent commonly do, stung the bosom in which he was fostered and saved from perishing. Some think that he designed only to have him taken prisoner, that he might now give him as honourable a treatment as he had formerly received from him. Whatever was the reason, this charge the officers received, and endeavoured to oblige their prince in this matter; for, seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal habit, they took him for the king of Israel, and surrounded him. Now, 1. By his danger God let him know that he was displeased with him for joining in confederacy with Ahab. Jehoshaphat had said, in compliment to Ahab (v. 4), *I am as thou art*; and now he was indeed taken for him. Those that associate with evil doers are in danger of sharing in their plagues. 2. By his deliverance God let him know that, though he was displeased with him, yet he had not deserted him. Some of the captains that knew him perceived their mistake, and so retired from the pursuit of him; but it is said (2 Chr. 18:31) that *God moved them* (for he has all hearts in his hand) *to depart from him*. To him he cried out, not in cowardice, but devotion, and from him his relief came: Ahab was in no care to succour him. God is a friend that will not fail us when other friends do.

IV. Ahab receives his mortal wound in the battle, notwithstanding his endeavours to secure himself in the habit of a private sentinel. Let no man think to hide himself from God's judgment, no, not in masquerade. *Thy hand shall find out all thy enemies*, whatever disguise they are in, v. 34. The Syrian that shot him little thought of doing such a piece of service to God and his king; for he *drew a bow at a venture*, not aiming particularly at any man, yet God so directed the arrow that, 1. He hit the right person, the man that was marked for destruction, whom, if they had taken alive, as was designed, perhaps Ben-hadad would have spared. Those cannot escape with life whom God hath doomed to death. 2. He hit him in the right place, *between*

*the joints of the harness*, the only place about him where this arrow of death could find entrance. No armour is of proof against the darts of divine vengeance. Case the criminal in steel, and it is all one, *he that made him can make his sword to approach him*. That which to us seems altogether casual is done by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.

V. The army is dispersed by the enemy and sent home by the king. Either Jehoshaphat or Ahab ordered the retreat of the sheep, when the shepherd was smitten: *Every man to his city*, for it is to no purpose to attempt any thing more, v. 36. Ahab himself lived long enough to see that part of Micaiah's prophecy accomplished that all Israel should be scattered *upon the mountains of Gilead* (v. 17), and perhaps with his dying lips did himself give orders for it; for though he would be carried out of the army, to have his wounds dressed (v. 34), yet he would be *held up in his chariot*, to see if his army were victorious. But, when he saw the battle increase against them, his spirits sunk, and he died, but his death was so lingering that he had time to feel himself die; and we may well imagine with what horror he now reflected upon the wickedness he had committed, the warnings he had slighted, Baal's altars, Naboth's vineyard, Micaiah's imprisonment. Now he sees himself flattered into his own ruin, and Zedekiah's horns of iron pushing, not the Syrians, but himself, into destruction. Thus is he *brought to the king of terrors* without *hope in his death*.

VI. The royal corpse is brought to Samaria and buried there (v. 37), and hither are brought the bloody chariot and bloody armour in which he died, v. 38. One particular circumstance is taken notice of, because there was in it the accomplishment of a prophecy, that when they brought the chariot to the pool of Samaria, to be washed, the dogs (and swine, says the Septuagint) gathered about it, and, as is usual, *licked the blood*, or, as some think, the water in which it was washed, with which the blood was mingled: the dogs made no difference between royal blood and other blood. Now Naboth's blood was avenged (ch. 21:19), and that word of David, as well as Elijah's word, was fulfilled (Ps. 68:23), *That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thy enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same*. The dogs licking the guilty blood was perhaps designed to represent the terrors that prey upon the guilty soul after death.

*Lastly*, The story of Ahab is here concluded in the usual form, v. 39, 40. Among his works mention is made of an ivory house which he built, so called because many parts of it were inlaid with ivory; perhaps it was intended to vie with the stately palace of the kings of Judah, which Solomon built.

### **Verses 41-53**

Here is, I. A short account of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, of which we shall have a much fuller narrative in the book of Chronicles, and of the greatness and goodness of that prince, neither of which was lessened or sullied by any thing but his intimacy with the house of Ahab, which, upon several accounts, was a diminution to him. His confederacy with Ahab in war we have already found dangerous to him, and his confederacy with Ahaziah his son in trade sped no better. He offered to go partner with him in a fleet of merchant-ships, that should fetch gold from Ophir, as Solomon's navy did, v. 49. See 2 Chr. 20:35, 36. But, while they were preparing to set sail, they were exceedingly damaged and disabled by a storm (*broken at Ezion-geber*), which a prophet gave Jehoshaphat to understand was a rebuke to him for his league with wicked Ahaziah (2 Chr. 20:37); and therefore, as we are told here (v. 49), when Ahaziah desired a second time to be a partner with him, or, if that could

not be obtained, that he might but send his servants with some effects of board Jehoshaphat's ships, he refused: *Jehoshaphat would not*. The rod of God, expounded by the word of God, had effectually broken him off from his confederacy with that ungodly unhappy prince. Better buy wisdom dear than be without it; but experience is therefore said to be the mistress of fools because those are fools that will not learn till they are taught by experience, and particularly till they are taught the danger of associating with wicked people. Now Jehoshaphat's reign appears here to have been none of the longest, but one of the best. 1. It was none of the longest, for he reigned but twenty-five years (v. 42), but then it was in the prime of his time, between thirty-five and sixty, and these twenty-five, added to his father's happy forty-one, give us a grateful idea of the flourishing condition of the kingdom of Judah, and of religion in it, for a great while, even when things were very bad, upon all accounts, in the kingdom of Israel. If Jehoshaphat reigned not so long as his father, to balance this he had not those blemishes on the latter end of his reign that his father had (2 Chr. 16:9, 10, 12), and it is better for a man that has been in reputation for wisdom and honour to die in the midst of it than to outlive it. 2. Yet it was one of the best, both in respect of piety and prosperity. (1.) He did well: He *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord* (v. 43), observed the commands of his God, and trod in the steps of his good father; and he persevered therein: He *turned not aside from it*. Yet every man's character has some *but* or other, so had his; the *high places were not taken away*, no not out of Judah and Benjamin, though those tribes lay so near Jerusalem that they might easily bring their offerings and incense to the altar there, and could not pretend, as some other of the tribes, the inconveniency of lying remote. But old corruptions are with difficulty rooted out, especially when they have formerly had the patronage of those that were good, as the high places had of Samuel, Solomon, and some others. (2.) His affairs did well. He prevented the mischiefs which had attended their wars with the kingdom of Israel, establishing a lasting peace (v. 44), which would have been a greater blessing if he had contented himself with a peace, and not carried it on to an affinity with Israel; he put a deputy, or viceroy, in Edom, so that the kingdom was tributary to him (v. 47), and therein the prophecy concerning Esau and Jacob was fulfilled, that *the elder should serve the younger*. And, in general, mention is made of his might and his wars, v. 45. He pleased God, and God blessed him with strength and success. His death is spoken of (v. 50), to shut up his story, yet, in the history of the kings of Israel, we find mention of him afterwards, 2 Ki. 3:7.

II. The beginning of the story of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, v. 51–53. His reign was very short, not two years. Some sinners God makes quick work with. It is a very bad character that is here given him. He not only kept up Jeroboam's idolatry, but the worship of Baal likewise; though he had heard of the ruin of Jeroboam's family, and had seen his own father drawn into destruction by the prophets of Baal, who had often been proved false prophets, yet he received no instruction, took no warning, but followed the example of his wicked father and the counsel of his more wicked mother Jezebel, who was still living. Miserable are the children that not only derive a stock of corruption from their parents, but are thus taught by them to trade with it; and unhappy, most unhappy parents, are those that help to damn their children's souls.