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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Second Book of Chronicles

This book begins with the reign of Solomon and the building of the temple, and continues the history of the kings of Judah thenceforward to the captivity and so concludes with the fall of that illustrious monarchy and the destruction of the temple. That monarchy of the house of David, as it was prior in time, so it was superior in worth and dignity to all those four celebrated ones of which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed. The Babylonian monarchy I reckon to begin in Nebuchadnezzar himself—*Thou art that head of gold*, and that lasted but about seventy years; The Persian monarchy, in several families, about 130; the Grecian, in their several branches, about 300; and 300 more went far with the Roman. But as I reckon David a greater hero than any of the founders of those monarchies, and Solomon a more magnificent prince than any of those that were the glories of them, so the succession was kept up in a lineal descent throughout the whole monarchy, which continued considerable between 400 and 500 years, and, after a long eclipse, shone forth again in the kingdom of the Messiah, *of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end*. This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more entertaining and more instructive, than the histories of any of those monarchies. We had the story of the house of David before, in the first and second books of Kings, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which *there* took more room than that of Judah; but here we have it entire. Much is repeated here which we had before, yet many of the passages of the story are enlarged upon, and divers added, which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church-history, and it is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper, when they keep in the way of their duty to God: for all along the good kings prospered and the wicked kings suffered. The peaceable reign of Solomon we have (ch. 1-9), the blemished reign of Rehoboam (ch. 10-12), the short but busy reign of Abijah (ch. 13), the long and happy reign of Asa (ch. 14-16), the pious and prosperous reign of Jehoshaphat (ch. 17-20), the impious and infamous reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah (ch. 21-22), the unsteady reigns of Joash and Amaziah (ch. 24, 25), the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah (ch. 26), the regular reign of Jotham (ch. 27), the profane and wicked reign of Ahaz (ch. 28), the gracious glorious reign of Hezekiah (ch. 29-32), the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon (ch. 33), the reforming reign of Josiah (ch. 34, 35), the ruining reigns of his sons (ch. 36). Put all these together, and the truth of that word of God will appear, *Those that honour me I will honour, but those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*. The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, suggests that the historical books which were written after the captivity (namely, the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) have more mistakes in names and numbers than all the books of the Old Testament besides, through the carelessness of transcribers: but, though that should be allowed, the things are so very minute that we may be confident *the foundation of God stands sure* notwithstanding.

Chapter 1

In the close of the foregoing book we read how God magnified Solomon and Israel obeyed him; God and Israel concurred to honour him. Now here we have an account, I. How he honoured God by sacrifice (v. 1-6) and by prayer (v. 7-12). II. How he honoured Israel by increasing their strength, wealth, and trade (v. 13-17).

Verses 1-12

Here is, I. Solomon's great prosperity, v. 1. Though he had a contested title, yet, God being with him, he was *strengthened in his kingdom*; his heart and hands were strengthened, and his interest in the people. God's presence will be our strength.

II. His great piety and devotion. His father was a prophet, a psalmist, and kept mostly to the ark; but Solomon, having read much in his Bible concerning the tabernacle which Moses built and the altars there, paid more respect to them than, it should seem, David had done. Both did well, and let neither be censured. If the zeal of one be carried out most to one instance of religion, and of another to some other instance, let them not judge nor despise each other.

1. All his great men must thus far be good men that they must join with him in worshipping God. He spoke to the captains and judges, the governors and chief of the fathers, to go with him to Gibeon, v. 2, 3. Authority and interest are well bestowed on those that will thus use them for the glory of God, and the promoting of religion. It is our duty to engage all with whom we have influence in the solemnities of religion, and it is very desirable to have many join with us in those solemnities—the more the better; it is the more like heaven. Solomon began his reign with this public pious visit to God's altar, and it was a very good omen. Magistrates are then likely to do well for themselves and their people when they thus take God along with them at their setting out.

2. He offered abundance of sacrifices to God there (v. 6): 1000 *burnt-offerings*, and perhaps a greater number of peace-offerings, on which he and his company *feasted before the Lord*. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly. His father David had left him flocks and herds in abundance (1 Chr. 27:29, 31), and thus he gave God his dues out of them. The ark was at Jerusalem (v. 4), but the altar was at Gibeon (v. 5), and thither he brought his sacrifices; for *it is the altar that sanctifieth every gift*.

3. He prayed a good prayer to God: this, with the answer to it, we had before, 1 Ki. 3:5, etc. (1.) God bade him ask what he would; not only that he might put him in the right way of obtaining the favours that were intended him (*Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full*), but that he might try him, how he stood affected, and might discover what was in his heart. Men's characters appear in their choices and desires. What wouldst thou *have*? tries a man as much as, What wouldst thou *do*? Thus God tried whether Solomon was one of the *children of this world*, that say, *Who will show us any good*, or of the children of light, that say, *Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us*. As we choose we shall have, and that is likely to be our portion to which we give the preference, whether the wealth and pleasure of this world or spiritual riches or delights. (2.) Like a genuine son of David, he chose spiritual blessings rather than temporal. His petition here is, *Give me wisdom and knowledge*. He owns those to be desirable gifts, and God to be the giver of them, Prov. 2:6. God gave the faculty of understanding, and to

him we must apply for the furniture of it. Two things are here pleaded which we had not in Kings:—[1.] *Thou hast made me reign in my father's stead*, v. 8. "Lord, thou hast put me into this place, and therefore I can in faith ask of thee grace to enable me to do the duty of it." What service we have reason to believe God calls us to we have reason to hope he will qualify us for. But that is not all. "Lord, thou hast put me into this place in the stead of David, the great and good man that filled it up so well; therefore give me wisdom, that Israel may not suffer damage by the change. Must I reign in my father's stead? Lord, give me my father's spirit." Note, The eminency of those that went before us, and the obligation that lies upon us to keep up and carry on the good work they were engaged in, should provoke us to a gracious emulation, and quicken our prayers to God for wisdom and grace, that we may do the work of God in our day as faithfully and well as they did in theirs. [2.] *Let thy promise to David my father be established*, v. 9. He means the promise of concerning his successor. "In performance of that promise, *Lord, give me wisdom.*" We do not find that wisdom was any of the things promised, but it was necessary in order to the accomplishment of what was promised, 2 Sa. 7:13–15. The promise was, *He shall build a house for my name, I will establish his throne, he shall be my son, and my mercy shall not depart from him.* "Now, Lord, unless thou give me wisdom, thy house will not be built, nor my throne established; I shall behave in a manner unbecoming my relation to thee as a Father, shall forfeit thy mercy, and fool it away; therefore, *Lord, give me wisdom.*" Note, *First*, God's promises are our best pleas in prayer. *Remember thy word unto thy servant.* *Secondly*, Children may take the comfort of the promises of that covenant which their parents, in their baptism, laid claim to, and took hold of, for them. *Thirdly*, The best way to obtain the benefit of the promises and privileges of the covenant is to be earnest in prayer with God for wisdom and grace to do the duties of it.

4. He received a gracious answer to this prayer, v. 11, 12. (1.) God gave him the wisdom that he asked for because he asked for it. Wisdom is a gift that God gives as freely and liberally as any gift to those that value it, and wrestle for it; and will resolve to make use of it; and he upbraids not the poor petitioners with their folly, James 1:5. God's grace shall never be wanting to those who sincerely desire to know and do their duty. (2.) God gave him the wealth and honour which he did not ask for because he asked not for them. Those that pursue present things most earnestly are most likely to miss of them; while those that refer themselves to the providence of God, if they have not the most of those things, have the most comfort in them. Those that make this world their end come short of the other and are disappointed in this too; but those that make the other world their end shall not only obtain that, and full satisfaction in it, but shall enjoy as much as is convenient of this world in their way.

Verses 13-17

Here is, 1. Solomon's entrance upon the government (v. 13): He came *from before the tabernacle, and reigned over Israel*. He would not do any acts of government till he had done his acts of devotion, would not take honour to himself till he had given honour to God—first the tabernacle, and then the throne. But, when he had obtained wisdom from God, he did not bury his talent, but as he received the gift ministered the same, did not give up himself to ease and pleasure, but minded business: he reigned over Israel. 2. The magnificence of his court (v. 14): *He gathered chariots and horsemen*. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not; for the king was forbidden to multiply horses, Deu. 17:16. I do not remember that ever we find his good father in a chariot or on horseback; a mule was the highest he mounted. We should endeavor to excel those that went before us

in goodness rather than in grandeur. 3. The wealth and trade of his kingdom. He made silver and gold very cheap and common, v. 15. The increase of gold lowers the value of it; but the increase of grace advances its price; the more men have of that the more they value it. *How much better therefore is it to get wisdom than gold!* He opened also a trade with Egypt, whence he imported horses and linen-yarn, which he exported again to the kings of Syria, with great advantage no doubt, v. 16, 17. This we had before, 1 Ki. 10:28, 29. It is the wisdom of princes to promote industry and encourage trade in their dominions. Perhaps Solomon took the hint of setting up the linen-manufacture, bringing linen-yarn out of Egypt, working it into cloth, and then sending that to other nations, from what his mother taught when she specified this as one of the characteristics of the virtuous woman, *She maketh fine linen, and selleth it, and delivereth girdles of it to the merchant*, Prov. 31:24. *In all labour there is profit.*

Chapter 2

Solomon's trading, which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, and the encouragement he gave both to merchandise and manufacturers, were very commendable. But building was the work he was designed for, and to that business he is here applying himself. Here is, I. Solomon's determination to build the temple and a royal palace, and his appointing labourers to be employed herein (v. 1, 2, 17, 18). II. His request to Hiram king of Tyre to furnish him both with artists and materials (v. 3–10). III. Hiram's obliging answer to, and compliance with, his request (v. 11–16).

Verses 1-10

Solomon's wisdom was given him, not merely for speculation, to entertain himself (though it is indeed a princely entertainment), nor merely for conversation, to entertain his friends, but for action; and therefore to action he immediately applies himself. Observe,

I. His resolution within himself concerning his business (v. 1): *He determined to build, in the first place, a house for the name of the Lord.* It is fit that he who is the first should be served—first a temple and then a palace, a house not so much for himself, or his own convenience and magnitude, as for the kingdom, for the honour of it among its neighbours and for the decent reception of the people whenever they had occasion to apply to their prince; so that in both he aimed at the public good. Those are the wisest men that lay out themselves most for the honour of the name of the Lord and the welfare of communities. We are not born for ourselves, but for God and our country.

II. His embassy to Hiram, king of Tyre, to engage his assistance in the prosecution of his designs. The purport of his errand to him is much the same here as we had it 1 Ki. 5:2, etc., only here it is more largely set forth.

1. The reasons why he makes this application to Hiram are here more fully represented, for information to Hiram as well as for inducement. (1.) He pleads his father's interest in Hiram, and the kindness he had received from him (v. 3): *As thou didst deal with David, so deal with me.* As we must show kindness to, so we may expect kindness from, our fathers' friends, and with them should cultivate a correspondence. (2.) He represents his design in building the temple: he intended it for a place of religious worship (v. 4), that all the offerings which God had appointed for the honour of his name might be offered up there. The house was built that it might be dedicated to God and used in his service. This we should aim at in all our business, that our havings and doings may be all to the glory of God. He mentions various particular services that were there to be performed, for the instruction of Hiram. The mysteries of the true religion, unlike those of the Gentile superstition, coveted not concealment. (3.) He endeavors to inspire Hiram with very great and high thoughts of the God of Israel, by expressing the mighty veneration he had for his holy name: *Great is our God above all gods, above all idols, above all princes.* Idols are nothing, princes are little, and both under the control of the God of Israel; and therefore, [1.] "The house must be great; not in proportion to the greatness of that God to whom it is to be dedicated (for between finite and infinite there can be no proportion), but in some proportion to the great value and esteem we have for this God." [2.] "Yet, be it ever so great, it cannot be a habitation for the great God. Let not Hiram think that the God of Israel, like the gods of the nations, *dwells in temples*

made with hands, Acts 17:24. No, the *heaven of heavens cannot contain him*. It is intended only for the convenience of his priests and worshippers, that they may have a fit place wherein to burn sacrifice before him." [3.] He looked upon himself, though a mighty prince, as unworthy the honour of being employed in this great work: *Who am I that I should build him a house?* It becomes us to go about every work for God with a due sense of our utter insufficiency for it and our incapacity to do any thing adequate to the divine perfections. It is part of the wisdom wherein we ought to walk towards those that are without carefully to guard against all misapprehension which any thing we say or do may occasion concerning God; so Solomon does here in his treaty with Hiram.

2. The requests he makes to him are more particularly set down here. (1.) He desired Hiram would furnish him with a good hand to work (v. 7): *Send me a man*. He had *cunning men* with him in Jerusalem and Judah, whom David provided, 1 Chr. 22:15. Let them not think but that Jews had some among them that were artists. But "*send me a man* to direct them. There are ingenious men in Jerusalem, but not such engravers as are in Tyre; and therefore, since temple-work must be the best in its kind, let me have the best workmen that can be got." (2.) With good materials to work on (v. 8), cedar and other timber in abundance (v. 8, 9); for the house must be *wonderfully great*, that is, very stately and magnificent, no cost must be spared, nor any contrivance wanting in it.

3. Here is Solomon's engagement to maintain the workmen (v. 10), to give them so much wheat and barley, so much wine and oil. He did not feed his workmen with bread and water, but with plenty, and every thing of the best. Those that employ labourers ought to take care they be not only well paid, but well provided for with sufficient of that which is wholesome and fit for them. Let the rich masters do for their poor workmen as they would be done by if the tables were turned.

Verses 11-18

Here we have, I. The return which Hiram made to Solomon's embassy, in which he shows a great respect for Solomon and a readiness to serve him. Meaner people may learn of these great ones to be neighbourly and complaisant. 1. He congratulates Israel on having such a king as Solomon was (v. 11): *Because the Lord loved his people, he has made thee king*. Note, A wise and good government is a great blessing to a people, and may well be accounted a singular token of God's favour. He does not say, *Because he loved thee* (though that was true, 2 Sa. 12:24) *he made thee king*, but because he *loved his people*. Princes must look upon themselves as preferred for the public good, not for their own personal satisfaction, and should rule so as to prove that they were given in love and not in anger. 2. He blesses God for raising up such a successor to David, v. 12. It should seem that Hiram was not only very well affected to the Jewish nation, and well pleased with their prosperity, but that he was proselyted to the Jewish religion, and worshipped Jehovah, *the God of Israel* (who was now known by that name to the neighbouring nations), as *the God that made heaven and earth*, and as the fountain of power as well as being; for he sets up kings. Now that the people of Israel kept close to the law and worship of God, and so preserved their honour, the neighbouring nations were as willing to be instructed by them in the true religion as Israel had been, in the days of their apostasy, to be infected with the idolatries and superstitions of their neighbours. This made them high, that they lent to many nations and did not borrow, lent truth to them, and did not borrow error from them; as when they did the contrary it was their shame. 3. He sent

him a very ingenious curious workman, that would not fail to answer his expectations in every thing, one that had both Jewish and Gentile blood meeting in him; for his mother was an Israelite (Hiram though she was of the tribe of Dan, and therefore says so here, v. 14, but it seems she was of the tribe of Naphtali, 1 Ki. 7:14), but his father was a Tyrian—a good omen of uniting Jew and Gentile in the gospel temple, as it was afterwards when the building of the second temple was greatly furthered by Darius (Ezra 6), who is supposed to have been the son of Esther—an Israelite by the mother's side. 4. He engaged for the timber, as much as he would have occasion for, and undertook to deliver it at Joppa, and withal signified his dependence upon Solomon for the maintenance of the workmen as he had promised, v. 15, 16. This agreement we had, 1 Ki. 5:8, 9.

II. The orders which Solomon gave about the workmen. He would not employ the free-born Israelites in the drudgery work of the temple itself, not so much as to be overseers of it. In this he employed the strangers who were proselyted to the Jewish religion, who had not lands of inheritance in Canaan as the Israelites had, and therefore applied to trades, and got their living by their ingenuity and industry. There were, at this time, vast numbers of them in the land (v. 17), who, if they were of any of the devoted nations, perhaps fell within the case, and therefore fell under the law, of the Gibeonites, to be hewers of wood for the congregation: if not, yet being in many respects well provided for by the law of Moses, and put upon an equal footing with the native Israelites, they were bound in gratitude to do what they could for the service of the temple. Yet, no doubt, they were well paid in money or money's worth: the law was, *Thou shalt not oppress a stranger*. The distribution of them we have here (v. 2, and again v. 18), in all 150,000. Canaan was a fruitful land, that found meat for so many mouths more than the numerous natives; and the temple was a vast building, that found work for so many hands. Mr. Fuller suggests that the expedient peculiar to this structure, of framing all beforehand, must needs increase the work. I think it rather left so much the more room for this vast multitude of hands to be employed in it; for in the forest of Lebanon they might all be at work together, without crowding one another, which they could not have been upon Mount Sion. And, if there had not been such vast numbers employed, so large and curious a fabric, which was begun and ended in seven years, might, for aught I know, have been as long in building as St. Paul's.

Chapter 3

It was a much larger and more particular account of the building of the temple which we had in the book of Kings than is here in this book of Chronicles. In this chapter we have, I. The place and time of building the temple (v. 1, 2). II. The dimensions and rich ornaments of it (v. 3-9). III. The cherubim in the most holy place (v. 10-13). IV. The veil (v. 14). V. The two pillars (v. 15-17). Of all this we have already an account, 1 Ki. 6, 7.

Verses 1-9

Here is, I. The place where the temple was built. Solomon was neither at liberty to choose nor at a loss to fix the place. It was before determined (1 Chr. 22:1), which was an ease to his mind. 1. It must be at Jerusalem; for that was the place where God had chosen to put his name there. The royal city must be the holy city. *There must be the testimony of Israel; for there are set the thrones of judgment*, Ps. 122:4, 5. 2. It must be on Mount Moriah, which, some think, was that very place in the land of Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac, Gen. 22:2. So the Targum says expressly, adding, *But he was delivered by the word of the Lord, and a ram provided in his place*. That was typical of Christ's sacrifice of himself; therefore fitly was the temple, which was likewise a type of him, built there. 3. It must be *where the Lord appeared to David, and answered him by fire*, 1 Chr. 21:18, 26. There atonement was made once; and therefore, in remembrance of that, there atonement was made once; and therefore, in remembrance of that, there atonement must still be made. Where God has met with me it is to be hoped that he will still manifest himself. 4. It must be in the place which David has prepared, not only which he had purchased with his money, but which he had pitched upon divine direction. It was Solomon's wisdom not to enquire out a more convenient place, but to acquiesce in the appointment of God, whatever might be objected against it. 5. It must be in the threshold floor of Ornan, which, if (as a Jebusite) it gives encouragement to the Gentiles, obliges us to look upon temple-work as that which requires the labour of the mind, no less than threshing-work does that of the body.

II. The time when it was begun; not till the fourth year of Solomon's reign, v. 2. Not that the first three years were trifled away, or spent in deliberating whether they should build the temple or no; but they were employed in the necessary preparations for it, wherein three years would be soon gone, considering how many hands were to be got together and set to work. Some conjecture that this was a sabbatical year, or year of release and rest to the land, when the people, being discharged from their husbandry, might more easily lend a hand to the beginning of this work; and then the year in which it was finished would fall out to be another sabbatical year, when they would likewise have leisure to attend the solemnity of the dedication of it.

III. The dimensions of it, in which Solomon was instructed (v. 3), as he was in other things, by his father. *This was the foundation* (so it may be read) *which Solomon laid for the building of the house*. This was the rule he went by, so many cubits the length and breadth, *after the first measure*, that is, according to the measure first fixed, which there was no reason to make any alteration of when the work came to be done; for the dimensions were given by divine wisdom, and *what God does shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, or taken from it*, Eccl. 3:14. His first measure will be the last.

IV. The ornaments of the temple. The timber-work was very fine, and yet, within, it was *overlaid with pure gold* (v. 4), with

fine gold (v. 5). and that embossed with *palm-trees and chains*. It was gold of *Parvaim* (v. 6), the best gold. The *beams and posts*, the *walls and doors*, were *overlaid with gold*, v. 7. The most holy place, which was ten yards square, was all *overlaid with fine gold* (v. 8), even the *upper chambers*, or rather the *upper floor or roof*—top, bottom, and sides, were all overlaid with gold. Every nail, or screw, or pin, with which the golden plates were fastened to the walls that were overlaid with them, weighed fifty shekels, or was worth so much, workmanship and all. A great many precious stones were dedicated to God (1 Chr. 29:2, 8), and these were set here and there, where they would show to the best advantage. The finest houses now pretend to no better garnishing than good paint on the roof and walls; but the ornaments of the temple were most substantially rich. It was set with *precious stones*, because it was a type of the new Jerusalem, which has no temple in it because it is all temple, and the walls, gates, and foundations of which are said to be of *precious stones and pearls*, Rev. 21:18, 19, 21.

Verses 10-17

Here is an account of 1. The two cherubim, which were set up in the holy of holies. There were two already over the ark, which covered the mercy-seat with their wings; these were small ones. Now that the most holy place was enlarged, though these were continued (being appurtenances to the ark, which was not to be made new, as all the other utensils of the tabernacle were), yet those two large ones were added, doubtless by divine appointment, to fill up the holy place, which otherwise would have looked bare, like a room unfurnished. These cherubim are said to be of *image-work* (v. 10), designed, it is likely, to represent the angels who attend the divine Majesty. Each wing extended five cubits, so that the whole was twenty cubits (v. 12, 13), which was just the breadth of the most holy place, v. 8. They stood on their feet, as servants, their faces inward toward the ark (v. 13), that it might appear they were not set there to be adored (for then they would have been made sitting, as on a throne, and their faces towards their worshippers), but rather as themselves attendants on the invisible God. We must not worship angels, but we must worship *with* angels; for we have come into communion with them (Heb. 12:22), and must do the will of God as the angels do it. The thought that we are worshipping him before whom the angels cover their faces will help to inspire us with reverence in all our approaches to God. Compare 1 Co. 11:10 with Isa. 6:2. 2. The veil that parted between the temple and the most holy place, v. 14. This denoted the darkness of that dispensation, and the distance which the worshippers were kept at; but, at the death of Christ, this veil was rent; for through him we are made nigh, and have boldness not only to look, but to enter, into the holiest. On this he was wrought cherubim. Heb. *he caused them to ascend*, that is, they were made in raised work, embossed. Or he made them on the wing in an ascending posture, as the other two that stood on their feet in an attending posture, to remind the worshippers to lift up their hearts, and to soar upwards in their devotions. 3. The two pillars which were set up before the temple. Both together were somewhat above thirty-five cubits in length (v. 15), about eighteen cubits high a-piece. See 1 Ki. 7:15, etc., where we took a view of those pillars, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, *establishment* and *strength* in temple-work and by it.

Chapter 4

We have here a further account of the furniture of God's house. I. Those things that were of brass. The altar for burnt-offerings (v. 1), the sea and lavers to hold water (v. 2-6), the plates with which the doors of the court were overlaid (v. 9), the vessels of the altar, and other things (v. 10-18). II. Those that were of gold. The candlesticks and tables (v. 7, 8), the altar of incense (v. 19), and the appurtenances of each of these (v. 20-22). All these, except the brazen altar (v. 1), were accounted for more largely, 1 Ki. 7:23, etc.

Verses 1-10

David often speaks with much affection both of the *house of the Lord* and of the *courts of our God*. Both without doors and within there was that which typified the grace of the gospel and *shadowed out good things to come*, of which the substance is Christ.

I. There were those things in the open court, in the view of all the people, which were very significant.

1. There was the *brazen altar*, v. 1. The making of this was not mentioned in the Kings. On this all the sacrifices were offered, and it sanctified the gift. This altar was much larger than that which Moses made in the tabernacle; that was five cubits square, this was twenty cubits square. Now that Israel had become both numerous and more rich, and it was to be hoped more devout (for every age should aim to be wiser and better than that which went before it), it was expected that there would be a greater abundance of offerings brought to God's altar than had been. It was therefore made such a capacious scaffold that it might hold them all, and none might excuse themselves from bringing those temptations of their devotion by alleging that there was not room to receive them. God had greatly enlarged their borders; it was therefore fit that they should enlarge his altars. Our returns should bear some proportion to our receivings. It was ten cubits high, so that the people who worshipped in the courts might see the sacrifice burnt, and their eye might affect their heart with sorrow for sin: "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not thus consumed, and that this is accepted as an expiation of my guilt." They might thus be led to consider the great sacrifice which should be offered in the fulness of time to take away sin and abolish death, which the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly do. And with the smoke of the sacrifices their hearts might ascend to heaven in holy desires towards God and his favour. In all our devotions we must keep the eye of faith fixed upon Christ, the great propitiation. How they went up to this altar, and carried the sacrifices up to it, we are not told; some think by a plain ascent like a hill: if by steps, doubtless they were so contrived as that the end of the law (mentioned Ex. 20:26) might be answered.

2. There was the molten sea, a very large brass pan, in which they put water for the priests to wash in, v. 2, 6. It was put just at the entrance into the court of the priests, like the font at the church door. If it were filled to the brim, it would hold 3000 baths (as here, v. 5), but ordinarily there were only 2000 baths in it, 1 Ki. 7:26. The Holy Ghost by this signified, (1.) Our great gospel privilege, that *the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin*, 1 Jn. 1:7. To us there is a *fountain opened* for all believers (who are spiritual priests, Rev. 1:5, 6), nay, for *all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to wash in*, from sin, which is uncleanness. There is a fulness of merit in Jesus Christ for all those that by faith apply to him for the purifying of their consciences, that they

might serve the *living God*, Heb. 9:14. (2.) Our great gospel duty, which is to cleanse ourselves by true repentance from all the pollutions of the flesh and the corruption that is in the world. Our hearts must be sanctified, or we cannot sanctify the name of God. Those that draw nigh to God must *cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts*, Jam. 4:8. *If I was thee not, thou hast no part with me*; and he that *is washed* still needs *to wash his feet*, to renew his repentance, whenever he *goes in to minister*, Jn. 13:10.

3. There were *ten lavers* of brass, in which *they washed such things as they offered for the burnt-offerings*, v. 6. As the priests must be washed, so must the sacrifices. We must not only purify ourselves in preparation for our religious performances, but carefully put away all those vain thoughts and corrupt aims which cleave to our performances themselves and pollute them.

4. The doors of the court were overlaid with brass (v. 9), both for strength and beauty, and that they might not be rotted with the weather, to which they were exposed. *Gates of brass* we read of, Ps. 107:16.

II. There were those things in *the house of the Lord* (into which the priests alone went to minister) that were very significant. All was gold there. The nearer we come to God the purer we must be, the purer we shall be. 1. There were ten *golden candlesticks*, according to the form of that one which was in the tabernacle, v. 7. The written word is a lamp and a light, shining in a dark place. In Moses's time they had but one candlestick, the Pentateuch; but the additions which, in process of time, were to be made of other books of scripture might be signified by this increase of the number of the candlesticks. Light was growing. The candlesticks are the churches, Rev. 1:20. Moses set up but one, the church of the Jews; but, in the gospel temple, not only believers, but churches, are multiplied. 2. There were ten *golden tables* (v. 8), *tables whereon the show-bread was set*, v. 19. Perhaps every one of the tables had twelve loaves of show-bread on it. As the house was enlarged, the house-keeping was. *In my father's house there is bread enough for the whole family*. To those tables belonged 100 golden basins, or dishes; for God's table is well furnished. 3. There was a *golden altar* (v. 19), on which they burnt incense. It is probable that this was enlarged in proportion to the brazen altar. Christ, who once for all made atonement for sin, ever lives, making intercession, in virtue of that atonement.

Verses 11-22

We have here such a summary both of the brass-work and the gold-work of the temple as we had before (1 Ki. 7:13, etc.), in which we have nothing more to observe than, 1. That Hiram the workman was very punctual: *He finished all that he was to make* (v. 11), and left no part of his work undone. *Hiram, his father*, he is called, v. 16. Probably it was a sort of nickname by which he was commonly known, *Father Hiram*; for the king of Tyre called him *Hiram Abi, my father*, in compliance with whom Solomon called him his, he being a great artist and *father of the artificers* in brass and iron. He acquitted himself well both for ingenuity and industry. 2. Solomon was very generous. He made *all the vessels in great abundance* (v. 18), many of a sort, that many hands might be employed, and so the work might go on with expedition, or that some might be laid up for use when others were worn out. Freely he has received, and he will freely give. When he had made vessels enough for the present he could not convert the remainder of the brass to his own use; it is devoted to God, and it shall be used for him.

Chapter 5

The temple being built and furnished for God, we have here, I. Possession given to him, by bringing in the dedicated things (v. 1), but especially the ark, the token of his presence (v. 2–10). II. Possession taken by him, in a cloud (v. 11–14). For if any man open the door of his heart to God he will come in, Rev. 3:20.

Verses 1-10

This agrees with what we had 1 Ki. 8:2, etc., where an account was given of the solemn introduction of the ark into the new-erected temple. 1. There needed no great solemnity for the bringing in of the dedicated things, v. 1. They added to the wealth, and perhaps were so disposed as to add to the beauty of it; but they could not add to the holiness, for it was the *temple that sanctified the gold*, Mt. 23:17. See how just Solomon was both to God and to his father. Whatever David had dedicated to God, however much he might have liked it himself, he would by no means alienate it, but put it among the treasures of the temple. Those children that would inherit their godly parents' blessing must religiously pursue their pious intentions and not defeat them. When Solomon had made all the vessels of the temple in abundance (ch. 4:18), many of the materials were left, which he would not convert to any other use, but laid up in the treasury for a time of need. Dedicated things must not be alienated. It is sacrilege to do it. 2. But it was fit that the ark should be brought in with great solemnity; and so it was. All the other vessels were made new, and larger, in proportion to the house, than they had been in the tabernacle. But the ark, with the mercy-seat and the cherubim, was the same; for the presence and the grace of God are the same in little assemblies that they are in large ones, in the poor condition of the church that they are in its prosperous estate. Wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name there is he as truly present with them as if there were 2000 or 3000. The ark was brought in attended by a very great assembly of the elders of Israel, who came to grace and solemnity; and a very sumptuous appearance no doubt they made, v. 2-4. It was carried by the priests (v. 7), brought into the most holy place, and put under the wings of the great cherubim which Solomon had set up there, v. 7, 8. *There they are unto this day* (v. 9), not the day when this book was written after the captivity, but when that was written out of which this story was transcribed. Or they were there (so it might be read) unto this day, the day of Jerusalem's desolations, that fatal day, Ps. 137:7. The ark was a type of Christ, and, as such, a token of the presence of God. That gracious promise, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*, does in effect bring the ark into our religious assemblies if we by faith and prayer put that promise in suit; and this we should be most solicitous and earnest for. *Lord, if thy presence go not up with us*, wherefore should we go up? The temple itself, if Christ leave it, is a desolate place, Mt. 23:38. 3. With the ark they brought up the tabernacle and all the *holy vessels that were in the tabernacle*, v. 5. Those were not alienated, because they had been dedicated to God, were not altered or melted down for the new work, though there was no need of them; but they were carefully laid up as monuments of antiquity, and probably as many of the vessels as were fit for use were still used. 4. This was done with great joy. They kept a holy feast upon the occasion (v. 3), and *sacrificed sheep and oxen without number*, v. 6. Note, (1.) The establishment of the public worship of God according to his institution, and with the tokens of his presence, is, and ought to be, matter of great joy to any people. (2.) When Christ is

formed in a soul, the law written in the heart, the ark of the covenant settled there, so that it becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost, there is true satisfaction in that soul. (3.) Whatever we have the comfort of we must, by the sacrifice of praise, give God the glory of, and not be straitened therein; *for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. If God favour us with his presence, we must honour him with our services, the best we have.

Verses 11-14

Solomon, and the elders of Israel, had done what they could to grace the solemnity of the introduction of the ark; but God, by testifying his acceptance of what they did, put the greatest honour upon it. The cloud of glory that filled the house beautified it more than all the gold with which it was overlaid or the precious stones with which it was garnished; and yet that was no glory in comparison with the glory of the gospel dispensation, 2 Co. 3:8–10. Observe,

I. How God took possession of the temple: He *filled it with a cloud*, v. 13. 1. Thus he signified his acceptance of this temple to be the same to him that the tabernacle of Moses was, and assured them that he would be the same in it; for it was by a cloud that he made his public entry into that, Ex. 40:34. 2. Thus he considered the weakness and infirmity of those to whom he manifested himself, who could not bear the dazzling lustre of the divine light: it would have overpowered them; he therefore *spread his cloud upon it*, Job 26:9. Christ revealed things unto his disciples as they were able to bear them, and in parables, which wrapped up divine things as in a cloud. 3. Thus he would affect all that worshipped in his courts with holy reverence and fear. Christ's disciples were afraid when they entered into a cloud, Lu. 9:34. 4. Thus he would intimate the darkness of that dispensation, by reason of which they could not stedfastly look to the end of those things which were now abolished, 2 Co. 3:13.

II. When he took possession of it. 1. *When the priests had come out of the holy place*, v. 11. This is the way of giving possession. All must come out, that the rightful owner may come in. Would we have God dwell in our hearts? We must leave room for him; let every thing else give way. We are here told that upon this occasion the whole family of the priests attended, and not any one particular course: *All the priests that were present were sanctified* (v. 11), because there was work enough for them all, when such a multitude of sacrifices were to be offered, and because it was fit that they should all be eye-witnesses of this solemnity and receive the impressions of it. 2. When the singers and musicians praised God, then the house was filled with a cloud. This is very observable; it was not when they *offered sacrifices*, but when they *sang the praises of God*, that God gave them this token of his favour; for the sacrifice of praise *pleaseth the Lord* better than that of *an ox or bullock*, Ps. 69:31. All the singers and musicians were employed, those of all the three families; and, to complete the concert, 120 priests, with their trumpets, joined with them, all standing at the east end of the altar, on that side of the court which lay outmost towards the people, v. 12. And, when this part of the service began, the glory of God appeared. Observe, (1.) It was when they were unanimous, when they were as one, to make one sound. The Holy God descended on the apostles when they met with one accord, Acts 2:1-4. Where unity is the Lord commands the blessing. (2.) It was when they were lively and hearty, and *lifted up their voice to praise the Lord*. Then we serve God acceptably when we are fervent in spirit serving him. (3.) It was when they were, in their praises, celebrating the everlasting mercy and goodness of God. As there is one saying oftener repeated in

scripture than this, *his mercy endureth for ever* (twenty-six times in one psalm, Ps. 136, and often elsewhere), so there is none more signally owned from heaven; for it was not the expression of some rapturous flights that the priests were singing when the glory of God appeared, but this plain song, *He is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*. God's goodness is his glory, and he is pleased when we give him the glory of it.

III. What was the effect of it. The *priests themselves could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud* (v. 14), which, as it was an evidence that the law made men priests that had infirmity, so (as bishop Patrick observes) it was a plain intimation that the Levitical priesthood should cease, and stand no longer to minister, when the Messiah should come, in whom *the fulness of the godhead should dwell bodily*. In him the glory of God dwelt among us, but covered with a cloud. The Word was made flesh; and when he comes to his temple, like a refiner's fire, *who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?* Mal. 3:1, 2.

Chapter 6

The glory of the Lord, in the vehicle of a thick cloud, having filled the house which Solomon built, by which God manifested his presence there, he immediately improves the opportunity, and addresses God, as a God now, in a peculiar manner, nigh at hand. I. He makes a solemn declaration of his intention in building this house, to the satisfaction of the people and the honour of God, both of whom he blessed (v. 1–11). II. He makes a solemn prayer to God that he would please graciously to accept and answer all the prayers that should be made in, or towards, that house (v. 12–42). This whole chapter we had before, with very little variation (1 Ki. 8:12–53), to which it may not be amiss here to look back.

Verses 1-11

It is of great consequence, in all our religious actions, that we design well, and that our eye be single. If Solomon had built this temple in the pride of his heart, as Ahasuerus made his feast, only to *show the riches of his kingdom and the honour of his majesty*, it would not have turned at all to his account. But here he declares upon what inducements he undertook it, and they are such as not only justify, but magnify, the undertaking. 1. He did it for the glory and honour of God; this was his highest and ultimate end in it. It was *for the name of the Lord God of Israel* (v. 10), to be *a house of habitation for him*, v. 2. He has indeed, as to us, *made darkness his pavilion* (v. 1), but let this house be the residence of that darkness; for it is in the upper world that he dwells in light, such as no eye can approach. 2. He did it in compliance with the choice God had been pleased to make of Jerusalem, to be the city in which he would record his name (v. 6): *I have chosen Jerusalem*. A great many stately buildings there were in Jerusalem for the king, his princes, and the royal family. If God chooses that place, it is fit that there be a building for him which may excel all the rest. If men were thus honoured there, let God be thus honoured. 3. He did it in pursuance of his father's good intentions, which he never had an opportunity to put into execution: *"It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for God;"* the project was his, be it known, to his honour (v. 7), and God approved of it, though he permitted him not to put it in execution (v. 8), *Thou didst well that it was in thy heart*. Temple-work is often thus done; one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37, 38), one age begins that which the next brings to perfection. And let not the wisest of men think it any disparagement to them to pursue the good designs which those that went before them have laid, and to build upon their foundation. Every good piece is not an original. 4. He did it in performance of the word which God had spoken. God had said, *Thy son shall build the house for my name*; and now he had done it, v. 9, 10. The service was appointed him, and the honour of it designed him, by the divine promise; so that he did not do it of his own head, but was called of God to do it. It is fit that he who appoints the work should have the appointing of the workmen; and those may go on in their work with great satisfaction who see their call to it clear.

Verses 12-42

Solomon had, in the foregoing verses, signed and sealed, as it were, the deed of dedication, by which the temple was appropriated to the honour and service of God. Now here he prays the consecration-prayer, by which it was made a figure of Christ, the great Mediator, through whom we are to offer all our prayers, and to expect all God's favours, and to whom we are

to have an eye in every thing where we have to do with God. We have opened the particulars of this prayer (1 Ki. 8) and therefore shall now only glean up some few passages in it which may be the proper subjects of our meditation.

I. Here are some doctrinal truths occasionally laid down. As, 1. That the God of Israel is a being of incomparable perfection. We cannot describe him; but this we know, there is *none like him in heaven or in earth*, v. 14. All the creatures have their fellow-creatures, but the Creator has not his peer. He is infinitely above all, and *over all, God blessed for ever*. 2. That he is, and will be, true to every word that he has spoken; and all that serve him in sincerity shall certainly find him both faithful and kind. Those that set God always before them, and *walk before him with all their hearts*, shall find him as good as his word and better; he will both keep covenant with them and show mercy to them, v. 14. 3. That he is a being infinite and immense, whom the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain, and to whose felicity nothing is added by the utmost we can do in his service, v. 18. He is infinitely beyond the bounds of the creation and infinitely above the praises of all intelligent creatures. 4. That he, and *he only, knows the hearts of the children of men*, v. 30. All men's thoughts, aims, and affections, are naked and open before him; and, however the imaginations and intents of our hearts may be concealed from men, angels, and devils, they cannot be hidden from God, who knows not only what is in the heart, but the heart itself and all the beatings of it. 5. That there is no such thing as a sinless perfection to be found in this life (v. 36): *There is no man who sinneth not; nay, who doeth good and sinneth not*; so he writes, agreeable to what he here says, Eccl. 7:20.

II. Here are some suppositions or cases put which are to be taken notice of. 1. He supposed that if doubts and controversies arose between man and man both sides would agree to appeal to God, and lay an oath upon the person whose testimony must decide the matter, v. 22. The religious reverence of an oath, as it was ancient, so, it may be presumed, it will continue as long as there are any remains of conscience and right reason among men. 2. He supposed that, though Israel enjoyed a profound peace and tranquillity, yet troublesome times would come. He did not think the mountain of their prosperity stood so strong but that it might be moved; nay, he expected sin would move it. 3. He supposed that those who had not called upon God at other times, yet, in their affliction, would seek him early and earnestly. "When they are in distress they will confess their sins, and confess thy name, and make supplication to thee." Trouble will drive those to God who have said to him, Depart, v. 24, 26, 28. 4. He supposed that strangers would come from afar to worship the God of Israel and to pay homage to him; and this also might reasonably be expected, considering what worthless things the gods of the nations were, and what proofs the God of Israel had given of his being Lord of the whole earth.

III. Here are petitions very pertinent. 1. That God would own this house, and have an eye to it, as the place of which he had said that he would put his name there, v. 20. He could not, in faith, have asked God to show such peculiar favour to this house above any other if he himself had not said that it should be his rest for ever. The prayer that will speed must be warranted by the word. We may with humble confidence pray to God to be well pleased with us in Jesus Christ, because he had declared himself well pleased in him—*This is my beloved Son*; but he says not now of any house, "This is my beloved place." 2. That God would hear and accept the prayers which should be made in or towards that place, v. 21. He asked not that God should help them whether they prayed for themselves or no, but that God would help them in answer to their prayers. Even Christ's

intercessions do not supersede but encourage our supplications. He prayed that God would hear from his dwelling-place, even from heaven. Heaven in his dwelling-place still, not this temple; and thence help must come. *When thou hearest forgive*. Note, The forgiveness of our sins is that which makes way for all the other answers to our prayers, *Removendo prohibens—The evil which it drives away it keeps away*. 3. That God would give judgment according to equity upon all the appeals that should be made to him, v. 23, 30. This we may, in faith, pray for, for we are sure it shall be done. God sitteth on the throne judging right. 4. That God would return in mercy to his people when they repented, and reformed, and sought unto him, v. 25, 27, 38, 39. This we also may, in faith, pray for, building upon the repeated declarations God has made of his readiness to accept penitents. 5. That God would bid the strangers welcome to this house, and answer their prayers (v. 33); for, if there be in duty, why should there not be in privilege one law for the stranger and for one born in the land? Lev. 24:22. 6. That God would, upon all occasions, own and plead the cause of his people Israel, against all the opposers of it (v. 35): *Maintain their cause*; and again, v. 39. If they be the Israel of God, their cause is the cause of God, and he would espouse it. 7. He concludes this prayer with some expressions which he had learned of his good father, and borrowed from one of his psalms. We had then not in the Kings, but here we have them, v. 41, 42. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; and how can we express ourselves in better language to God than that of his own Spirit? But these words were of use, in a special manner, to direct Solomon, because they had reference to this very work that he was now doing. We have them, Ps. 132:8–10. He prayer (v. 41), (1.) That God would take possession of the temple, and keep possession, that he would make it his resting-place: *Thou and the ark*; what will the ark do without the God of the ark-ordinances without the God of the ordinances? (2.) That he would make the ministers of the temple public blessings: *Clothe them with salvation*, that is, not only save them, but make them instrumental to save others, by offering the sacrifices of righteousness. (3.) That the service of the temple might turn abundantly to the joy and satisfaction of all the Lord's people: *Let thy saints rejoice in goodness*, that is, in the *goodness of thy house*, Ps. 65:4. "Let all that come hither to worship, like the eunuch, go away rejoicing." He pleads two things, v. 42. [1.] His own relation to God: "*Turn not away the face of thy anointed*. Lord, thou hast appointed me to be king, and wilt not thou own me?" [2.] God's covenant with his father: *Remember thy mercies of David thy servant*—the *piety* of David towards God (so some understand it and so the word sometimes signifies), his pious care of the ark, and concern for it (see Ps. 132:1, 2, etc.), or the *promises* of God to David, which were mercies to him, his great support and comforts in all his troubles. We may plead, as Solomon does here, with an eye to Christ:—"We deserve that God should turn away our face, that he should reject us and our prayers; but we come in the name of the Lord Jesus, *thy anointed, thy Messiah* (so the word is), *thy Christ*, so the LLX. Him thou hearest always, and wilt never *turn away his face*. We have no righteousness of our own to plead, but, Lord, *remember the mercies of David thy servant*." Christ is God's servant (Isa. 42:1), and is called *David*, Hos. 3:5. "Lord, remember his mercies, and accept us on the account of them. Remember his tender concern for his Father's honour and man's salvation, and what he did and suffered from that principle. Remember the promises of the everlasting covenant, which free grace has made to us in Christ, and which are called *the sure mercies of David*," Isa. 55:3 and Acts 13:34. This must be all our desire and all our hope, all our prayer and all our plea; for it is all our salvation.

Chapter 7

In this chapter we have God's answer to Solomon's prayer. I. His public answer by fire from heaven, which consumed the sacrifices (v. 1), with which the priests and people were much affected (v. 2, 3). By that token of God's acceptance they were encouraged to continue the solemnities of the feast for fourteen days, and Solomon was encouraged to pursue all his designs for the honour of God (v. 4–11). II. His private answer by word of mouth, in a dream or vision of the night (v. 12–22). Most of these things we had before, 1 Ki. 8 and 9.

Verses 1-11

Here is, I. The gracious answer which God immediately made to Solomon's prayer: *The fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice*, v. 1. In this way God testified his acceptance of Moses (Lev. 9:24), of Gideon (Jdg. 6:21), of David (1 Chr. 21:26), of Elijah (1 Ki. 18:38); and, in general, to accept the burnt-sacrifice is, in the Hebrew phrase, to turn it to ashes, Ps. 20:3. The fire came down here, not upon the killing of the sacrifices, but the praying of the prayer.

1. This fire intimated that God was, (1.) Glorious in himself; for *our God is a consuming fire*, terrible even in his holy places. This fire, breaking forth (as it is probable) out of the thick darkness, made it the more terrible, as on Mount Sinai, Ex. 24:16, 17. *The sinners in Sion* had reason to be *afraid* at that sight, and to say, *Who among us shall dwell near this devouring fire?* Isa. 33:14. And yet, (2.) Gracious to Israel; for this fire, which might justly have consumed them, fastened upon the sacrifice which was offered in their stead, and consumed that, by which God signified to them that he accepted their offerings and that his anger was turned away from them.

2. Let us apply this, (1.) To the suffering of Christ. When it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief, in that he showed his good-will to men, having laid on him the iniquity of us all. His death was our life, and he was made sin and a curse that we might inherit righteousness and a blessing. That sacrifice was consumed that we might escape. *Here am I, let these go their way.* (2.) To the sanctification of the Spirit, who descends like fire, burning up our lusts and corruptions, those beasts that must be sacrificed or we are undone, and kindling in our souls a holy fire of pious and devout affections, always to be kept burning on the altar of the heart. The surest evidence of God's acceptance of our prayers is the descent of the holy fire upon us. *Did not our hearts burn within us?* Lu. 24:32. As a further evidence that God accepted Solomon's prayer, still *the glory of the Lord filled the house*. The heart that is thus filled with a holy awe and reverence of the divine glory, the heart to which God manifests himself in his greatness, and (which is no less his glory) in his goodness, is thereby owned as a living temple.

II. The grateful return made to God for this gracious token of his favour.

1. The people *worshipped and praised God*, v. 3. When they saw the fire of God come down from heaven thus they did not run away affrighted, but kept their ground in the courts of the Lord, and took occasion from it, (1.) With reverence to adore the glory of God: *They bowed their faces to the ground and worshipped*, thus expressing their awful dread of the divine majesty, their cheerful submission to the divine authority, and the sense they had of their unworthiness to come into God's presence and their inability to stand before the power of his wrath. (2.) With thankfulness to acknowledge the goodness of God; even when

the fire of the Lord came down they praised him, saying, *He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever*. This is a song never out of season, and for which our hearts and tongues should be never out of tune. However it be, yet God is good. When he manifests himself as a consuming fire to sinners, his people can rejoice in him as their light. Nay, they had reason to say that in this God was good. "*It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, but the sacrifice in our stead, for which we are bound to be very thankful.*"

2. The king and all the people offered sacrifices in abundance, v. 4, 5. With these they feasted this holy fire, and bade it welcome to the altar. They had offered sacrifices before, but now they increased them. Note, The tokens of God's favour to us should enlarge our hearts in his service, and make us to abound therein more and more. The king's example stirred up the people. Good work is then likely to go on when the leaders of a people lead in it. The sacrifices were so numerous that the altar could not contain them all; but, rather than any of them should be turned back (though we may suppose the blood of them all was sprinkled upon the altar), the flesh of the burnt-offerings and the fat of the peace-offerings were burnt *in the midst of the court* (v. 7), which Solomon either hallowed for that service or hallowed by it. In case of necessity the pavement might be an altar.

3. The priests did their part; they waited on their offices, and the singers and musicians on theirs (v. 6), with the instruments that David made, and the *hymn that David had put into their hand*, as some think it may be read (meaning that 1 Chr. 16:7), or, as we read it, *when David praised by their ministry*. He employed, directed, and encouraged them in this work of praising God; and therefore their performances were accepted as his act, and he is said *to praise by their ministry*.

4. The whole congregation expressed the greatest joy and satisfaction imaginable. They kept the feast of the dedication of the altar seven days, from the second to the ninth; the tenth day was the day of atonement, when they were to afflict their souls for sin, and that was not unseasonable in the midst of their rejoicings; on the fifteenth day began the feast of tabernacles, which continued to the twenty-second, and they did not separate till the twenty-third. We must never grudge the time that we spend in the worship of God and communion with him, nor think it long, or grow weary of it.

5. Solomon went on in his work, and prosperously effected all he designed for the adorning both of God's house and his own, v. 11. Those that begin with the service of God are likely to go on successfully in their own affairs. It was Solomon's praise that what he undertook he went through with, and it was by the grace of God that he prospered in it.

Verses 12-22

That God accepted Solomon's prayer appeared by the fire from heaven. But a prayer may be accepted and yet not answered in the letter of it; and therefore God appeared to him in the night, as he did once before (ch. 1:7), and after a day of sacrifice too, as then, and gave him a peculiar answer to his prayer. We had the substance of it before, 1 Ki. 9:2-9.

I. He promised to own this house for *a house of sacrifice to Israel* and *a house of prayer for all people* (Isa. 56:7): *My name shall be there for ever* (v. 12, 16), that is, "There will I make myself known, and there will I be called upon."

II. He promised to answer the prayers of his people that should at any time be made in that place, v. 13-15. National judgments are here supposed (v. 13), famine, and pestilence, and perhaps war, for by the locusts devouring the land meant enemies as

greedy as locusts, and laying all waste. 2. National repentance, prayer, and reformation, are required, v. 14. God expects that his people who are called by his name, if they have dishonoured his name by their iniquity, should honour it by accepting the punishment of their iniquity. They must be humble themselves under his hand, must pray for the removal of the judgment, must seek the face and favour of God; and yet all this will not do unless they turn from their wicked ways, and return to the God from whom they have revolted. 3. National mercy is then promised, that God will forgive their sin, which brought the judgment upon them, and then heal their land, redress all their grievances. Pardoning mercy makes ways for healing mercy, Ps. 103:3; Mt. 9:2.

III. He promised to perpetuate Solomon's kingdom, upon condition that he persevered in his duty, v. 17, 18. If he hoped for the benefit of God's covenant with David, he must imitate the example of David. But he set before him death as well as life, the curse as well as the blessing. 1. He supposed it possible that though they had this temple built to the honour of God, yet they might be drawn aside to worship other gods, v. 19. He knew their proneness to backslide into that sin. 2. He threatened it as certain that, if they did so, it would certainly be the ruin of both church and state. (1.) It would be the ruin of their state, v. 20. "Though they have taken deep root, and taken root long, in this good land, yet I will pluck them up by the roots, extirpate the whole nation, pluck them up as men pluck up weeds out of their garden, which are thrown to the dunghill." (2.) It would be the ruin of their church. This sanctuary would be no sanctuary to them, to protect them from the judgment of God, as they imagined, saying, *The temple of the Lord are we*, Jer. 7:4. "This house which is high, not only for the magnificence of its structure, but for the designed ends and uses of it, shall be an astonishment, it shall come down wonderfully (Lam. 1:9), to the amazement of all the neighbours."

Chapter 8

In this chapter we are told, I. What cities Solomon built (v. 1-6). II. What workmen Solomon employed (v. 7-10). III. What care he took about a proper settlement for his wife (v. 11). IV. What a good method he put the temple-service into (v. 12-16). V. What trading he had with foreign countries (v. 17, 18).

Verses 1-11

This we had 1 Ki. 9:10-24, and therefore shall only observe here,

I. Though Solomon was a man of great learning and knowledge, yet he spent his days, not in contemplation, but in action, not in his study, but in his country, in building cities and fortifying them, in a time of peace preparing for a time of war, which is as much a man's business as it is in summer to provide food for winter.

II. As he was a man of business himself, and did not consult his own ease, so he employed a great many hands, kept abundance of people to work. It is the interest of a state by all means possible to promote and encourage industry, and to keep its subjects from idleness. A great many strangers there were in Israel, many that remained of the Canaanites; and they were welcome to live there, but not to live and do nothing. The men of Laish, who had no business, were an easy prey to the invaders, Jdg. 18:7.

III. When Solomon had begun with building the house of God, and made good work and quick work of that, he prospered in all his undertakings, so that *he built all that he desired to build*, v. 6. Those who have a genius for building find that one project draws on another, and the latter must amend and improve the former. Now observe, 1. How the divine providence gratified even Solomon's humour, and gave him success, not only in all that he needed to build and that it was for his advantage to build, but in all that he had a mind to build. So indulgent a Father God is sometimes to the innocent desires of his children that serve him. Thus he pleased Jacob with that promise, *Joseph shall put his hand on thy eyes*. 2. Solomon knew how to set bounds to his desires. He was not one of those that enlarge them endlessly, and can never be satisfied, but knew when to draw in; for he finished all he desired, and then he desired no more. He did not sit down and fret that he had not more cities to build, as Alexander did that he had not more worlds to conquer, Hab. 2:5.

IV. That one reason why Solomon built a palace on purpose for the queen, and removed her and her court to it, was because he thought it by no means proper that she should *dwell in the house of David* (v. 11), considering that that had been a place of great piety, and perhaps her house was a place of great vanity. She was proselyted, it is likely, to the Jewish religion; but it is a question whether all her servants were. Perhaps they had among them the idols of Egypt, and a great deal of profaneness and debauchery. Now, though Solomon had not zeal and courage enough to suppress and punish what was amiss there, yet he so far consulted the honour of his father's memory that he would not suffer that place to be thus profaned where the ark of God had been and where holy David had prayed many a good prayer and sung many a sweet psalm. Not that all the places where the ark had been were so holy as never to be put to a common use; for then the houses of Abinadab and Obed-edom must have been so. But the place where it had been so long, and had been so publicly attended on, was so venerable that it was not fit to be the place of so much gaiety, not to say iniquity, as was to be found, I fear, in the court that Pharaoh's daughter kept. Note,

Between things sacred and things common the ancient landmarks ought to be kept up. It was an outer-court of the temple that was the *court of the women*.

Verses 12-18

Here is, I. Solomon's devotion. The building of the temple was in order to the service of the temple. Whatever cost he was at in rearing the structure, if he had neglected the worship that was to be performed there, it would all have been to no purpose. Assisting the devotion of others will not atone for our own neglects. When Solomon had built the temple, 1. He kept up the holy sacrifices there, according to the law of Moses, v. 12, 13. In vain had the altar been built, and in vain had fire come down from heaven, if sacrifices had not been constantly brought as the food of the altar and the fuel of that fire. There were daily sacrifices, *a certain rate every day*, as duly as the day came, weekly sacrifices on the sabbath, double to what was offered on other days, monthly sacrifices *on the new moons*, and yearly sacrifices at the three solemn feasts. Those are spiritual sacrifices that are now required of us, which we are to bring daily and weekly; and it is good to be in a settled method of devotion. 2. He kept up the holy songs there, according to the *law of David*, who is here called the *man of God*, as Moses was, because he was both instructed and authorised of God to make these establishments; and Solomon took care to see them observed *as the duty of every day required*, v. 14. Solomon, though a wise and great man and the builder of the temple, did not attempt to amend, alter, or add to what the man of God had, in God's name, commanded, but closely adhered to that, and used his authority to have that duly observed; and then *none departed from the commandment of the king concerning any matter*, v. 15. He observed God's laws, and then all obeyed his orders. When the service of the temple was put into this good order, then it is said, *The house of the Lord was perfected*, v. 16. The work was the main matter, not the place; the temple was unfinished till all this was done.

II. Solomon's merchandise. He did himself in person visit the sea-port towns of Eloth and Ezion-geber; for those that deal much in the world will find it their interest, as far as they can, to inspect their affairs themselves and to see with their own eyes, v. 17. Canaan was a rich country, and yet must send to Ophir for gold; the Israelites were a wise and understanding people, and yet must be beholden to the king of Tyre for *men that had knowledge of the seas*, v. 18. Yet Canaan was God's peculiar land, and Israel God's peculiar people. This teaches us that grace, and not gold, is the best riches, and acquaintance with God and his law, not with arts and sciences, the best knowledge.

Chapter 9

Solomon here continues to appear great both at home and abroad. We had this account of his grandeur, 1 Ki. 10. Nothing is here added; but his defection towards his latter end, which we have there (ch. 11), is here omitted, and the close of this chapter brings him to the grave with an unstained reputation. Perhaps none of the chapters in the Chronicles agree so much with a chapter in the Kings as this does with 1 Ki. 10 verse for verse, only that the first two verses there are put into one here, and verse 25 here is taken from 1 Ki. 4:26, and the last three verses here from 1 Ki. 11:41–43. Here is, I. The honour which the queen of Sheba did to Solomon, in the visit she made him to hear his wisdom (v. 1–12). II. Many instances given of the riches and splendour of Solomon's court (v. 13–28). III. The conclusion of his reign (v. 29–31).

Verses 1-12

This passage of story had been largely considered in the Kings; yet, because our Saviour has proposed it as an example to us in our enquiries after him (Mt. 12:42), we must not pass it over without observing briefly, 1. *Those who honour God he will honour*, 1 Sa. 2:30. Solomon had greatly honoured God, in building, beautifying, and dedicating the temple; all his wisdom and all his wealth were employed for the making of that a consummate piece: and now God made his wisdom and wealth to redound greatly to his reputation. The way to have both the credit and comfort of all our endowments and all our enjoyments is to consecrate them to God and use them for him. 2. Those who know the worth of true wisdom will grudge no pains nor cost to obtain it. The queen of Sheba put herself to a great deal of trouble and expense to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and yet, learning from him to serve God and do her duty, she thought herself well paid for her pains. Heavenly wisdom is that *pearl of great price* which is a good bargain to purchase by parting with all that we have. 3. As every man has received the gift so he ought to minister the same for the edification of others, as he has opportunity. Solomon was communicative of his wisdom and willing to teach others what he knew himself. Being taught of God, freely he had received, and freely he gave. Let those that are rich in wisdom, as well as wealth, learn *to do good and be ready to distribute. Give to every one that asketh*. 4. Good order in a family, a great family, especially in the things of God, and a regular discharge of the duties of religious worship, are highly expedient, and to be much admired wherever found. The queen of Sheba was exceedingly affected to see the propriety with which Solomon's servants attended him and with which both he and they attended in the house of God. David's ascent to the house of the Lord was also pleasant and interesting, Ps. 42:4. 5. Those are happy who have the opportunity of a constant converse with such as are knowing, wise, and good. The queen of Sheba thought Solomon's servants happy who continually *heard his wisdom*; for, it seems, even to them he was communicative. And it is observable that the posterity of those who had places in his court were willing to have the names of their ancestors forgotten, and thought themselves sufficiently distinguished and dignified when they were called the *children of Solomon's servants* (Ezra 2:55; Neh. 7:57); so eminent were they that it was honour enough to be named from them. 6. We ought to rejoice and give God thanks for the gifts, graces, and usefulness, of others. The queen of Sheba blessed God for the honour he put upon Solomon, and the favour he did to Israel, in advancing him to the throne, v. 8. By giving God the praise of the prosperity of others, we share in the comfort of it; whereas,

by envying the prosperity of others, we lose the comfort even of our own. The happiness of both king and kingdom she traces up to the fountain of all bliss, the divine favour: it was because *thy God delighted in thee* and because he *loved Israel*. Those mercies are doubly sweet in which we can taste the kindness and good will of God as our God. 7. It becomes those that are wise and good to be generous according to their place and power. The queen of Sheba was so to Solomon, Solomon was so to her, v. 9, 12. They both knew how to value wisdom, and therefore were neither of them covetous of their money, but cultivated the acquaintance and confirmed the friendship they had contracted by mutual presents. Our Lord Jesus has promised to give us all our desire: *Ask, and it shall be given you*. Let us study what we shall render to him, and not think any thing too much to do, or suffer, or part with, for him.

Verses 13-31

We have here Solomon in his throne, and Solomon in his grave; for the throne would not secure him from the grave. *Mors sceptri ligonibus aequat—Death wrenches from the hand the sceptre as well as the spade.*

I. Here is Solomon reigning in wealth and power, in ease and fulness, such as, for aught I know, could never since be paralleled by any king whatsoever. I cannot pretend to be critical in comparing the grandeur of Solomon with that of some of the great princes of the earth. But I may observe that the most illustrious of them were famed for their wars, whereas Solomon reigned forty years in profound peace. Some of those that might be thought to vie with Solomon affected retirement, kept people in awe by keeping them at a great distance; nobody must see them, or come near him, upon pain of death: but Solomon went much abroad, and appeared in public business. So that, all things considered, the promise was fulfilled, that God would give him riches, and wealth, and honour, such as no kings *have had, or shall have*, ch. 1:12. 1. Never any prince appeared in public with great splendour than Solomon did, which to those that judge by the sight of the eye, as most people do, would very much recommend him. He had 200 targets and 300 shields, all of beaten gold, carried before him (v. 15, 16), and sat upon a most stately throne, v. 17–19. *There was not the like in any kingdom*. The lustre wherein he appeared was typical of the spiritual glory of the kingdom of the Messiah and but a faint representation of his throne, which is above every throne. Solomon's pomp was all artificial; and therefore our Saviour prefers the natural beauty of the *lilies of the field* before it. Mt. 6:29, *Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these*. 2. Never any prince had greater plenty of gold and silver, though there were no gold or silver mines in his own kingdom. Either he made himself master of the mines in other countries, and, having a populous country, sent hands to dig out those rich metals, or, having a fruitful country, he exported the commodities of it and with them fetched home all this gold that is here spoken of, v. 13, 14–21. 3. Never any prince had such presents brought him by all his neighbours as Solomon had: *All the kings of Arabia, and governors of the country, brought him gold and silver* (v. 14), not as tribute which he extorted from them, but as freewill offerings to procure his favour, or in a way of exchange for some of the productions of his husbandry, corn or cattle. All the kings of the earth brought him presents, that is, all in those parts of the world (v. 24, 28), because they coveted his acquaintance and friendship. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom, as soon as he was born, the wise men of the east brought presents, *gold, frankincense, and myrrh* (Mt. 2:11), and to whom all that are about him must bring presents, Ps. 76:11; Rom. 12:1. 4. Never any prince was so renowned for

wisdom, so courted, so consulted, so admired (v. 23): *The kings of the earth* (for it was too great a favour for common persons to pretend to) *sought to hear his wisdom*—his natural philosophy, or his skill in physic, or his state policy, or his rules of prudence for the conduct of human life, or perhaps the principles of his religion, and the reasons of it. The application which they then made to Solomon to hear his wisdom will aggravate, shame, and condemn, men's general contempt of Christ and his gospel. Though in them are *hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet none of the princes of this world* desire to know them, for they are foolishness to them, 1 Co. 2:8, 14.

II. Here is Solomon dying, stripped of his pomp, and leaving all his wealth and power, not to one concerning whom he knew not *whether he would be a wise man or a fool* (Eccles. 2:19), but who he knew would be a fool. This was not only vanity but vexation of spirit, v. 29–31. It is very observable that no mention is here made of Solomon's departure from God in his latter days, not the least hint given of it, 1. Because the Holy Ghost would teach us not to take delight in repeating the faults and follies of others. If those that have been in reputation for wisdom and honour misbehave, though it may be of use to take notice of their misconduct for warning to ourselves and others, yet we must not be forward to mention it, once the speaking of it is enough; why should that displeasing string be again struck upon? Why can we not do as the sacred historian here does, speak largely of that in others which is praise-worthy, without saying any thing of their blemishes, yea, though they have been gross and obvious? This is but doing as we would be done by. 2. Because, though he fell, yet he was not utterly cast down. His sin is not again recorded, because it was repented of, and pardoned, and became as if it had never been. Scripture-silence sometimes speaks. I am willing to believe that its silence here concerning the sin of Solomon is an intimation that none of the sins he committed were mentioned against him, Eze. 33:16. When God pardons sin he *casts it behind his back and remembers it no more*

Chapter 10

This chapter is copied almost verbatim from 1 Ki. 12:1–19, where it was opened at large. Solomon's defection from God was not repeated, but the defection of the ten tribes from his family is, in this chapter, where we find, I. How foolish Rehoboam was in his treating with them (v. 1, 5–14). II. How wicked the people were in complaining of Solomon (v. 2-4). and forsaking Rehoboam (v 16-19). III. How just and righteous God was in all this (v. 15). His counsel was thereby fulfilled. With him are strength and wisdom; both the deceived and the deceiver (the fool and the knave) are his (Job 12:16), that is, are made use of by him to suit his purposes.

Verses 1-11

We may observe here, 1. The wisest and best cannot give every body content. Solomon enriched and advanced his kingdom, did all (one would think) that could be done to make them happy and easy; and yet either he was indiscreet in burdening them with the imposition of taxes and services, or at least there was some colour of reason to think him so. No man is perfectly wise. It is probable that it was when Solomon had declined from God and his duty that his wisdom failed him, and God left him to himself to act in this impolitic manner. Even Solomon's treasures were exhausted by his love of women; and probably it was to maintain them, and their pride, luxury, and idolatry, that he burdened his subjects. 2. Turbulent and ungrateful spirits will find fault with the government, and complain of grievances, when they have very little reason to do so. Had they not peace in Solomon's time? They were never plundered by invaders, as formerly, never put in fear by the alarms of war, nor obliged to hazard their lives in the high places of the field. Had they not plenty—meat enough, and money enough? What would they more? *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint!—O happy, if they knew their happy state!* And yet they complain that Solomon made their yoke grievous. If any complain thus of the yoke of Christ, that they might have a pretence to break his bands in sunder and cast away his cords from them, we are sure that he never gave them any cause at all for the complaint, whatever Solomon did. *His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.* He never *made us serve with an offering, nor wearied us with incense.* 3. Many ruin themselves and their interests by trampling upon and provoking their inferiors. Rehoboam thought that because he was king he might assume as much authority as his father had done, might have what he would, and do what he would, and carry all before him. But, though he wore his father's crown, he wanted his father's brains, and ought to have considered that, being quite a different man from what his father was, he ought to take other measures. Such a wise man as Solomon may do as we will, but such a fool as Rehoboam must do as he can. The high-mettled horse may be kicked and spurred by him that has the art of managing him; but, if an unskilful horseman do it, it is at his peril. Rehoboam paid dearly for threatening, and talking big, and thinking to carry matters with a high hand. It was Job's wisdom, as well as his virtue, that he *despised not the cause of his man-servant or maid-servant*, when they argued with him (Job 31:13), but heard them patiently, considered their reasons, and gave them a soft answer. And a similar tender consideration of those in subjection, and a forwardness to make them easy, will be the comfort and praise of all in authority, in the church, in the state, and in families. 4. Moderate counsels are generally wisest and best. Gentleness will do what violence will not do. Most people love to be accosted

mildly. Rehoboam's old experienced counsellors directed him to this method (v. 7): "*Be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them*, and thou art sure of them for ever." Good words cost nothing but a little self-denial, and yet they purchase good things. 5. God often fulfils the counsels of his own wisdom by infatuating men, and giving them up to the counsels of their own folly. No more needs to be done to ruin men than to leave them to themselves, and their own pride and passion.

Verses 12-19

We may learn here, 1. That when public affairs are in a ferment violent proceedings do but make bad worse. Rough answers (such as Rehoboam here gave) do but stir up anger and bring oil to the flames. The pilot has need to steer steadily in a storm. Many have been driven to the mischief they did not intend by being too severely dealt with for what they did intend. 2. That, whatever the devices and designs of men are, God is, by all, doing his own work, and fulfilling the word which he has spoken, no iota or tittle of which shall fall to the ground. The cause of the king's obstinacy and thoughtlessness was *of God, that he might perform the word which he spoke by Ahijah*, v. 15. This does not at all excuse Rehoboam's folly, nor lessen the guilt of his haughtiness and passion, that God was pleased to serve his own ends by them. 3. That worldly wealth, honour, and dominion, are very uncertain things. *Solomon reigned over all Israel*, and, one would think, had done enough to secure the monarchy entire to his family for many ages; and yet he is scarcely cold in his grave before ten of the twelve tribes finally revolt from his son. All the good services he had done for Israel were now forgotten: *What portion have we in David?* Thus is the government of Christ cast off by many, notwithstanding all he has done to bind the children of men for ever to himself; they say, *We will not have this man to reign over us*. But this rebellion will certainly be their ruin. 4. That God often visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Solomon forsakes God, and therefore not he, but his son after him, is forsaken by the greatest part of his people. Thus God, by making the penal consequences of sin to last long and visibly to continue after the sinner's death, would give an indication of its malignity, and perhaps some intimation of the perpetuity of its punishment. He that sins against God not only wrongs his soul, but perhaps wrongs his seed more than he thinks of. 5. That, when God is fulfilling his threatenings, he will take care of that, at the same time, promises do not fall to the ground. When Solomon's iniquity is remembered, and for it his son loses ten tribes, David's piety is not forgotten, nor the promise made to him; but for the sake of that his grandson had two tribes preserved to him. The failings of the saints shall not frustrate any promise made to Christ their Head. They shall be chastised, but the covenant not broken, Ps. 89:31–34

Chapter 11

We are here going on with the history of Rehoboam. I. His attempt to recover the ten tribes he has lost, and the letting fall of that attempt in obedience to the divine command (v. 1-4). II. His successful endeavours to preserve the two tribes that remained (v. 5-12). III. The resort of the priests and Levites to him (v. 13-17). IV. An account of his wives and children (v. 18-23).

Verses 1-12

How the ten tribes deserted the house of David we read in the foregoing chapter. They had formerly sat loose to that family (2 Sa. 20:1, 2), and now they quite threw it off, not considering how much it would weaken the common interest and take Israel down from that pitch of glory at which it had arrived in the last reign. But thus the *kingdom* must be corrected as well as the *house* of David. 1. Rehoboam at length, like a bold man, raises an army, with a design to reduce the revolted, v. 1. Judah and Benjamin were not only resolved to continue their allegiance to him, but ready to give him the best assistance they could for the recovery of his right. Judah was his own tribe, that owned him some years before the rest did; Benjamin was the tribe in which Jerusalem, or the greatest part of it, stood, which perhaps was one reason why that tribe clave to him. 2. Yet, like a conscientious man, when God forbade him to prosecute this design, in obedience to him he let it fall, either because he revered the divine authority or because he knew that he should not prosper if he should go contrary to God's command, but instead of retrieving what was lost would be in danger of losing what he had. It is dangerous undertaking any thing, but especially undertaking a war, contrary to the will of God. God calls him (v. 3), *Rehoboam the son of Solomon*, to intimate that this was determined for the sin of Solomon, and it would be to no purpose to oppose a decree that had gone forth. They *obeyed the words of the Lord*; and though it looked mean, and would turn to their reproach among their neighbours, yet, because God would have it so, they laid down their arms. 3. Like a discreet man, he fortified his own country. He saw it was to no purpose to think of reducing those that had revolted. A few good words might have prevented their defection, but now all the forces of his kingdom cannot bring them back. The thing is done, and so it must rest; it is his wisdom to make the best of it. Perhaps the same young counsellors that had advised him to answer them roughly urged him to fight them, notwithstanding the divine inhibition; but he had paid dearly enough for being advised by them, and therefore now, we may suppose, his aged and experienced counsellors were hearkened to, and they advised him to submit to the will of God concerning what was lost, and to make it his business to keep what he had. It was probably by their advice that, (1.) He fortified his frontiers, and many of the principal cities of his kingdom, which, in Solomon's peaceable reign, no care had been taken for the defence of. (2.) He furnished them with good stores of victuals and arms, v. 11, 12. Because God forbade him to fight, he did not therefore sit down sullenly, and say that he would do nothing for the public safety if he might not do that, but prudently provided against an attack. Those that may not be conquerors, yet may be builders.

Verses 13-23

See here,

I. How Rehoboam was strengthened by the accession of the priests and Levites, and all the devout and pious Israelites, to him, even all that were true to their God and their religion.

1. Jeroboam cast them off, that is, he set up such a way of worship as he knew they could not in conscience comply with, which obliged them to withdraw from his altar, and at the same time he would not allow them to go up to Jerusalem to worship at the altar there; so that he totally *cast them off from executing the priest's office*, v. 14. And very willing he was that they should turn themselves out of their places, that room might be made for those mean and scandalous persons whom he *ordained priests for the high places*, v. 15. Compare 1 Ki. 12:31. No marvel if he that cast off God cast off his ministers; they were not for his purpose, would not do whatever he might bid them do, would not *serve his gods, nor worship the golden image which he had set up*.

2. They thereupon *left their suburbs and possessions*, v. 14. Out of the lot of each tribe the Levites had cities allowed them, where they were comfortable provided for and had opportunity of doing much good. But now they were driven out of all their cities except those in Judah and Benjamin. One would think their maintenance well settled, and yet they lost it. It was a comfort to them that the law so often reminded them that the *Lord was their inheritance*, and so they should find him when they were turned out of their house and possessions. But why did they leave their possessions? (1.) Because they saw they could do no good among their neighbours, in whom (now that Jeroboam set up his calves) the old proneness to idolatry revived. (2.) Because they themselves would be in continual temptation to some base compliances, and in danger of being drawn insensibly to that which was evil. If we pray, in sincerity, not to be led into temptation, we shall get and keep as far as we can out of the way of it. (3.) Because, if they retained their integrity, they had reason to expect persecution from Jeroboam and his sons. The priests they made for the devils would not let the Lord's priests be long among them. No secular advantages whatsoever should draw us thither, or detain us there, where we are in danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

3. They *came to Judah and Jerusalem* (v. 14) and *presented themselves to Rehoboam*, v. 13, *margin*. Where should God's priests and Levites be, but where his altar was? Thither they came because it was their business to attend at the times appointed. (1.) It was a mercy to them that they had a place of refuge to flee to, and that when Jeroboam cast them off there were those so near that would entertain them, and bid them welcome, and they were not forced into the lands of the heathen. (2.) It was an evidence that they loved their work better than their maintenance, in that they *left their suburbs and possessions in the country* (where they might have lived at ease upon their own), because they were restrained from serving God there, and cast themselves upon God's providence and the charity of their brethren in coming to a place where they might have the free enjoyment of God's ordinances, according to his institution. Poverty in the way of duty is to be chosen rather than plenty in the way of sin. Better live upon alms, or die in a prison, with a good conscience, than roll in wealth and pleasure with a prostituted one. (3.) It was the wisdom and praise of Rehoboam and his people that they bade them welcome, though they crowded themselves perhaps to make room for them. Conscientious refugees will bring a blessing along with them to the countries that entertain them, as they leave a curse behind them with those that expel them. *Open the gates, that the righteous nation, which*

keepeth truth, may enter in; it will be good policy. See Isa. 26:1, 2.

4. When the priests and Levites came to Jerusalem all the devout pious Israelites of every tribe followed them. Such as *set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel*, that made conscience of their duty to God and were sincere and resolute in it, left the inheritance of their fathers and went and took houses in Jerusalem, that they might have free access to the altar of God and be out of the temptation to worship the calves, v. 16. Note, (1.) That is best for us which is best for our souls; and, in all our choices, advantages for religion must take place of all outward conveniences. (2.) Where God's faithful priests are his faithful people should be. If Jeroboam cast off God's ministers, every true-born Israelite will think himself obliged to own them and stand by them. *Forsake not the Levite, the out-cast Levite, as long as thou livest. When the ark removes do you remove and go after it*, Jos. 3:3.

5. They *strengthened the kingdom of Judah* (v. 17), not only by the addition of so many persons to it, who, it is likely, brought what they could of their effects with them, but by their piety and their prayers they procured a blessing upon the kingdom which was a sanctuary to them. See Zec. 12:5. It is the interest of a nation to protect and encourage religion and religious people, and adds more than any thing to its strength. They made him and his people *strong three years*; for so long they *walked in the way of David and Solomon*, their *good way*. But when they forsook that, and so threw themselves out of God's favour and protection, the best friends they had could no longer help to strengthen them. We retain our strength while we cleave to God and our duty, and no longer.

II. How Rehoboam was weakened by indulging himself in his pleasures. He *desired many wives*, as his father did (v. 23), yet, 1. In *this* he was more wise than his father, that he does not appear to have married strange wives. The wives mentioned here were not only daughters of Israel, but of the family of David; one was a descendant from Eliab, David's brother (v. 18), another from Absalom, probably that Absalom who was David's son (v. 20), another from Jerimoth, David's son. 2. In *this* he was more happy than his father, that he had many sons and daughters; whereas we read not of more than one son that his father had. One can scarcely imagine that he had no more; but, if he had, they were not worth mentioning; whereas several of Rehoboam's sons are here named (v. 19, 20) as men of note, and such active men that he thought it his wisdom to *disperse them throughout the countries of Judah and Benjamin* (v. 23), either, (1.) That they might not be rivals with his son Abijah, whom he designed for his successor, or rather, (2.) Because he could repose a confidence in them for the preserving of the public peace and safety, could trust them with fenced cities, which he took care to have well victualled, that they might stand him in stead in case of an invasion. After-wisdom is better than none at all; nay, they say, "Wit is never good till it is bought;" though he was dearly bought with the loss of a kingdom.

Chapter 12

This chapter gives us a more full account of the reign of Rehoboam than we had before in Kings and it is a very melancholy account. Methinks we are in the book of Judges again; for, I. Rehoboam and his people did evil in the sight of the Lord (v. 1). II. God thereupon sold them into the hands of Shishak, king of Egypt, who greatly oppressed them (v. 2-4) III. God sent a prophet to them, to expound to them the judgment and to call them to repentance (v. 5). IV. They thereupon humbled themselves (v. 6). V. God, upon their repentance, turned from his anger (v. 7, 12) and yet left them under the marks of his displeasure (v. 8–11). Lastly, Here is a general character of Rehoboam and his reign, with the conclusion of it (v. 13–16).

Verses 1-12

Israel was very much disgraced and weakened by being divided into two kingdoms; yet the kingdom of Judah, having both the temple and the royal city, both the house of David and the house of Aaron, might have done very well if they had continued in the way of their duty; but here we have all out of order there.

I. Rehoboam and his people left God: He *forsook the law of the Lord*, and so in effect forsook God, and *all Israel with him*, v.

1. He had his happy triennium, when he walked in the way of David and Solomon (ch. 11:17), but it expired, and he grew remiss in the worship of God; in what instances we are not told, but he fell off, and Judah with him, here called *Israel*, because they walked in the evil ways into which Jeroboam had drawn the kingdom of Israel. Thus he did *when he had established the kingdom and strengthened himself*. As long as he thought his throne tottered he kept to his duty, that he might make God his friend; but, when he found it stood pretty firmly, he thought he had no more occasion for religion; he was safe enough without it. Thus *the prosperity of fools destroys them. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked*. When men prosper, and are in no apprehension of troubles, they are ready to say to God, *Depart from us*.

II. God quickly brought troubles upon them, to awaken them, and recover them to repentance, before their hearts were hardened. It was but in the fourth year of Rehoboam that they began to corrupt themselves, and in the fifth year the king of Egypt came up against them with a vast army, took *the fenced cities of Judah, and came against Jerusalem*, v. 2, 3, 4. This great calamity coming upon them so soon after they began to desert the worship of God, by a hand they had little reason to suspect (having had a great deal of friendly correspondence with Egypt in the last reign), and coming with so much violence that all the *fenced cities of Judah*, which Rehoboam had lately fortified and garrisoned and on which he relied much for the safety of his kingdom, fell immediately into the hands of the enemy, without making any resistance, plainly showed that it was from the Lord, because they had transgressed against him.

III. Lest they should not readily or not rightly understand the meaning of this providence, God by the word explains the rod, v. 5. When the princes of Judah had all met at Jerusalem, probably in a great council of war, to concert measures for their own safety in this critical juncture, he sent a prophet to them, the same that had brought them an injunction from God not to fight against the ten tribes (ch. 11:2), Shemaiah by name; he told them plainly that the reason why Shishak prevailed against them was not because they had been impolitic in the management of their affairs (which perhaps the princes in this congress were at

this time scrutinizing), but because they had forsaken God. God never leaves any till they first leave him.

IV. The rebukes both of the word and of the rod being thus joined, the king and princes humbled themselves before God for their iniquity, penitently acknowledged the sin, and patiently accepted the punishment of it, saying, *The Lord is righteous*, v. 6. "We have none to blame but ourselves; let God be clear when he judgeth." Thus it becomes us, when we are under the rebukes of Providence, to justify God and judge ourselves. Even kings and princes must either bend or break before God, either be humbled or be ruined.

V. Upon the profession they made of repentance God showed them some favour, saved them from ruin, and yet left them under some remaining fears of the judgment, to prevent their revolt again.

1. God, in mercy, prevented the destruction they were now upon the brink of. Such a vast and now victorious army as Shishak had, having made themselves masters of all the fenced cities, what could be expected but that the whole country, and even Jerusalem itself, would in a little time be theirs? But when God saith, *Here shall the proud waves be stayed*, the most threatening force strangely dwindles and becomes impotent. Here again the destroying angel, when he comes to Jerusalem, is forbidden to destroy it: "*My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem; not at this time, not by this hand, not utterly to destroy it*," v. 7, 12. Note, Those that acknowledge God righteous in afflicting them shall find him gracious. Those that humble themselves before him shall find favour with him. So ready is the God of mercy to take the first occasion to show mercy. If we have humbled hearts under humbling providences, the affliction has done its work, and it shall either be removed or the property of it altered.

2. He granted them some deliverance, not complete, but in part; he gave them some advantages against the enemy, so that they recruited a little; he *gave them deliverance for a little while*, so some. They reformed but partially, and for a little while, soon relapsing again; and, as their reformation was, so was their deliverance. Yet it is said (v. 12), *in Judah things went well*, and began to look with a better face. (1.) In respect of piety. *There were good things in Judah* (so it is in the margin), good ministers, good people, good families, who were made better by the calamities of their country. Note, In times of great corruption and degeneracy it is some comfort if there be a remnant among whom good things are found; this is a ground of hope in Israel. (2.) In respect of prosperity. In Judah things went ill when all the fenced cities were taken (v. 4), but when they repented the posture of their affairs altered, and things went well. Note, If things do not go so well as we could wish, yet we have reason to take notice of it with thankfulness if they go better than was to have been expected, better than formerly, and better than we deserved. We should own God's goodness if he do but grant us some deliverance.

3. Yet he left them to smart sorely by the hand of Shishak, both in their liberty and in their wealth.

(1.) In their liberty (v. 8): *They shall be his servants* (that is, they shall lie much at his mercy and be put under contribution by him, and some of them perhaps be taken prisoners and held in captivity by him), *that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries*. They complained, it may be, of the strictness of their religion, and *forsook the law of the Lord* (v. 1) because they thought it a yoke too hard, too heavy, upon them. "Well," saith God, "let them better themselves if they can; let the neighbouring princes rule them awhile, since they are not willing that I should rule them, and let them try how

they like that. They might have *served God with joyfulness and gladness of heart*, and would not; let them *serve their enemies then in hunger and thirst* (Deu. 28:47, 48), till they think of returning to *their first Master, for then it was better with them,*" Hos. 2:7. This, some think, is the meaning of Eze. 20:24, 25. *Because they despised my statutes, I gave them statutes that were not good.* Note, [1.] The more God's service is compared with other services the more reasonable and easy it will appear. [2.] Whatever difficulties or hardships we may imagine there are in the way of obedience, it is better a thousand times to go through them than to expose ourselves to the punishment of disobedience. Are the laws of temperance thought hard? The effects of intemperance will be much harder. The service of virtue is perfect liberty; the service of lust is perfect slavery. (2.) In their wealth. The king of Egypt plundered both the temple and the exchequer, the treasuries of both which Solomon left very full; but he *took them away*; yea, he *took all*, all he could lay his hands on, v. 9. This was what he came for. David and Solomon, who walked in the way of God, filled the treasuries, one by war and the other by merchandise; but Rehoboam, who forsook the law of God, emptied them. The taking away of the golden shields, and the substituting of brazen ones in their place (v. 9–11), we had an account of before, 1 Ki. 14:25–28.

Verses 13-16

The story of Rehoboam's reign is here concluded, much as the story of the other reigns concludes. Two things especially are observable here:-1. That he was at length pretty well *fixed in his kingdom*, v. 13. His fenced cities in Judah did not answer his expectation, so he now *strengthened himself in Jerusalem*, which he made it his business to fortify, and there he reigned seventeen years, in *the city which the Lord had chosen to put his name there*. This intimates his honour and privilege, that he had his royal seat in the holy city, which yet was but an aggravation of his impiety—near the temple, but far from God. Frequent skirmishes there were between his subjects and Jeroboam's, such as amounted to *continual wars*, (v. 15), but he held his own, and reigned, and, as it should seem, did not so grossly *forsake the law of God* as he had done (v. 1) in his fourth year. 2. That he was never rightly fixed in his religion, v. 14. He never quite cast off God; and yet in this he did evil, that he *prepared not, he engaged not, his heart to seek the Lord*. See what the fault is laid upon. (1.) He did not serve the Lord because he did not seek the Lord. He did not pray, as Solomon did, for wisdom and grace. If we prayed better, we should be every way better. Or he did not consult the word of God, did not seek to that as his oracle, nor take directions from it. (2.) He made nothing of his religion because he did not set his heart to it, never minded it with any closeness of application, and never any hearty disposition to it, nor ever came up to a steady resolution in it. What little goodness he had was transient and passed away like the morning cloud. He did evil because he was never determined for that which is good. Those are easily drawn by Satan to any evil who are wavering and inconstant in that which is good and are never persuaded to make religion their business.

Chapter 13

We have here a much fuller account of the reign of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, than we had in the Kings. There we found that his character was no better than his father's—he "walked in the sins of his father, and his heart was not right with God," 1 Ki. 15:2, 3. But here we find him more brave and successful in war than his father was. He reigned but three years, and was chiefly famous for a glorious victory he obtained over the forces of Jeroboam. Here we have, I. The armies brought into the field on both sides (v. 3). The remonstrance which Abijah made before the battle, setting forth the justice of his cause (v. 4–12). III. The distress which Judah was brought into by the policy of Jeroboam (v. 13, 14). IV. The victory they obtained notwithstanding, by the power of God (v. 15–20). V. The conclusion of Abijah's reign (v. 21, 22).

Verses 1-12

Abijah's mother was called *Maachah*, the daughter of Absalom, ch. 11:20; here she is called *Michaiah*, the daughter of Uriel. It is most probable that she was a grand-daughter of Absalom, by his daughter Tamar (2 Sa. 14:27), and that her immediate father was this Uriel. But we are here to attend Abijah into the field of battle with Jeroboam king of Israel.

I. God gave him leave to engage with Jeroboam, and owned him in the conflict, though he would not permit Rehoboam to do it, ch. 11:4. 1. Jeroboam, it is probable, was now the aggressor, and what Abijah did was in his own necessary defence.

Jeroboam, it may be, happening to survive Rehoboam, claimed the crown of Judah by survivorship, at least hoped to get it from this young king, upon his accession to the throne. Against these impudent pretensions it was brave in Abijah to take up arms, and God stood by him. 2. When Rehoboam attempted to recover his ten tribes Jeroboam was upon his good behaviour, and there must be some trial of him; but now that he had discovered what manner of man he was, by setting up the calves and casting off the priests, Abijah is allowed to chastise him, and it does not appear that he intended any more; whereas Rehoboam aimed at no less than the utter reduction of the ten tribes, which was contrary to the counsel of God.

II. Jeroboam's army was double in number to that of Abijah (v. 3), for he had ten tribes to raise an army out of, while Abijah had but two. Of the army on both sides it is said, they were *mighty men*, *chosen men*, and *valiant*; but the army of Judah consisted only of 400,000, while Jeroboam's army amounted to 800,000. The inferior number however proved victorious; for the battle is not always to the strong nor the cause to the majority.

III. Abijah, before he fought them, reasoned with them, to persuade them, though not to return to the house of David (that matter was settled by the divine determination and he acquiesced), yet to desist from fighting against the house of David. He would not have them *withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David* (v. 8), but at least to be content with what they had. Note, It is good to try reason before we use force. If the point may be gained by dint of argument, better so than by dint of sword. We must never fly to violent methods till all the arts of persuasion have been tried in vain. War must be the *ultima ratio regum—the last resort of kings*. Fair reasoning may do a great deal of good and prevent a good deal of mischief. *How forcible are right words!* Abijah had got with his army into the heart of their country; for he made this speech upon a hill in Mount Ephraim, where he might be heard by Jeroboam and the principal officers, with whom it is probable he desired to

have a treaty, to which they consented. It has been usual for great generals to make speeches to their soldiers to animate them, and this speech of Abijah had some tendency to do this, but was directed to Jeroboam and all Israel. Two things Abijah undertakes to make out, for the satisfaction of his own men and the conviction of the enemy:—

1. That he had right on his side, a *jus divinum*—*a divine right*: "You know, or ought to know, that *God gave the kingdom to David and his sons for ever*" (v. 5), not by common providence, his usual way of disposing of kingdoms, but by a covenant of salt, a lasting covenant, a covenant made by sacrifice, which was always salted; so bishop Patrick. All Israel had owned that David was a king of God's making, and that God had entailed the crown upon his family; so that Jeroboam's taking the crown of Israel at first was not justifiable: yet it is not certain that Abijah referred chiefly to that, for he knew that Jeroboam had a grant from God of the ten tribes. His attempt, however, to disturb the peace and possession of the king of Judah was by no means excusable; for when the ten tribes were given to him two were reserved for the house of David. Abijah shows, (1.) That there was a great deal of dishonesty and disingenuousness in Jeroboam's first setting himself up: He *rebelled against his lord* (v. 6) who had preferred him (1 Ki. 11:28), and basely took advantage of Rehoboam's weakness in a critical juncture, when, in gratitude to his old master and in justice to his title, he ought rather to have stood by him, and helped to secure the people in their allegiance to him, than to head a party against him and make a prey of him, which was unworthily done and what he could not expect to prosper in. Those that supported him are here called *vain men* (a character perhaps borrowed from Jdg. 11:3), men that did not act from any steady principle, but were given to change, and men of Belial, that were for shaking off the yoke of government and setting those over them that would do just as they would have them do. (2.) That there was a great deal of impiety in his present attempt; for, in fighting against the house of David, he fought *against the kingdom of the Lord*. Those who oppose right oppose the righteous God who sits in the throne judging right, and cannot promise themselves success in so doing. Right may indeed go by the worst for a time, but it will prevail at last.

2. That he had God on his side. This he insisted much upon, that the religion of Jeroboam and his army was false and idolatrous, but that he and his people, the men of Judah, had the pure worship of the true and living God among them. It appears from the character given of Abijah (1 Ki. 15:3) that he was not himself in this war chiefly from the religion of his kingdom. For, (1.) Whatever he was otherwise, it should seem that he was no idolator, or, if he connived at the high places and images (ch. 14:3, 5), yet he constantly kept up the temple-service. (2.) Whatever corruptions there were in the kingdom of Judah, the state of religion among them was better than in the kingdom of Israel, with which they were now contending. (3.) It is common for those that deny the power of godliness to boast of the form of it. (4.) It was the cause of his kingdom that he was pleading; and, though he was not himself so good as he should have been, yet he hoped that, for the sake of the good men and good things that were in Judah, God would now appear for them. Many that have little religion themselves yet have so much sense and grace as to value it in others. See how he describes, [1.] The apostasy of Israel from God. "*You are a great multitude,*" said he, "far superior to us in number; but we need not fear you, for you have that among yourselves which is enough to ruin you. For," *First*, "You have calves for your gods (v. 8), that are unable to protect and help you and will certainly cause the true and living God to oppose you. Those will be Achans, troublers of your camp." *Secondly*, "You have base men

for your priests, v. 9. You have cast off the tribes of Levi, and the house of Aaron, whom God appointed to minister in holy things; and, in conformity to the custom of the idolatrous nations, make any man a priest that has a mind to the office and will be at the charge of the consecration, though ever so much a scandal to the office." Yet such, though very unfit to be priests, were fittest of all to be *their* priests; for what more agreeable to gods that were no gods than priests that were no priests? Like to like, both pretenders and usurpers. [2.] The adherence of Judah to God: "*But as for us (v. 10) we have not forsaken God.* Jehovah is our God, the God of our fathers, the God of Israel, who is able to protect us, and give us success. He is with us, for we are with him." *First*, "At home in his temple: *We keep his charge*, v. 10, 11. We worship no images, have no priests but what he has ordained, no rites of worship but what he has prescribed. Both the temple service and the temple furniture are of his appointing. His appointment we abide by, and neither add nor diminish. These we have the comfort of, these we now stand up in the defence of: so that upon a religious as well as a civil account we have the better cause. *Secondly*, Here in the camp; he is our captain, and we may therefore be sure that he is with us, because we are with him, v. 12. And, as a token of his presence, we have here with us his priests, sounding his trumpets according to the law, as a testimony against you, and an assurance to us that in the day of battle we shall be *remembered before the Lord our God and saved from our enemies;*" for so this sacred signal is explained, Num. 10:9. Nothing is more effectual to embolden men, and put spirit into them, than to be sure that God is with them and fights for them. He concludes with fair warning to his enemies. "*Fight not against the God of your fathers.* It is folly to fight against the God of almighty power; but it is treachery and base ingratitude to fight against your fathers' God, and you cannot expect to prosper."

Verses 13-22

We do not find that Jeroboam offered to make any answer at all to Abijah's speech. Though it was much to the purpose, he resolved not to heed it, and therefore he heard it as though he heard it not. He came to fight, not to dispute. The longest sword, he thought, would determine the matter, not the better cause. Let us therefore see the issue, whether right and religion carried the day or no.

I. Jeroboam, who trusted to his politics, was beaten. He was so far from fair reasoning that he was not for fair fighting. We may suppose that he felt a sovereign contempt for Abijah's harangue. "One stratagem," thinks he, "is worth twenty such speeches; we will soon give him an answer to all his arguments; he shall soon find himself overpowered with numbers, surrounded on every side with the instruments of death, and then let him boast of his religion and his title to the crown." A parley, it is probable, was agreed on, yet Jeroboam basely takes the advantage of it, and, while he was treating, *laid his ambushment behind Judah*, against all the laws of arms. What honour could be expected in a *servant when he reigned?* Abijah was *for peace*, but, *when he spoke, they were for war*, Ps. 120:7.

II. Abijah and his people, who trusted in their God, came off conquerors, notwithstanding the disproportion of their strength and numbers.

1. They were brought into a great strait, put into a great fright, for *the battle was before and behind*. A good cause, and one which is designed to be victorious, may for a season be involved in embarrassment and distress. It was David's case. *They*

compassed me about like bees, Ps. 118:10–12.

2. In their distress, when danger was on every side, which way should they look but upwards for deliverance? It is an unspeakable comfort that no enemy (not the most powerful or politic), no stratagem or ambushment, can cut off our communication with heaven; our way thitherward is always open. (1.) *They cried unto the Lord*, v. 14. We hope they did this before they engaged in this war, but the distress they were in made them renew their prayers and quickened them to be importunate. God brings his people into straits, that he may teach them to *cry unto him*. Earnest praying is crying. (2.) *They relied on the God of their fathers*, depended upon his power to help them and committed themselves to him, v. 18. The prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer, and this is that by which we overcome the world, *even our faith*, 1 Jn. 5:4. (3.) *The priests sounded the trumpets* to animate them by giving them an assurance of God's presence with them. It was not only a martial but a sacred sound, and put life into their faith. (4.) They shouted in confidence of victory: "The day is our own, for God is with us." To the cry of the prayer they added the shout of faith, and so became more than conquerors.

3. Thus they obtained a complete victory: *As the men of Judah shouted* for joy in God's salvation, *God smote Jeroboam* and his army with such terror and amazement that they could not strike a stroke, but fled with the greatest precipitation imaginable, and the conquerors gave no quarter, so that they put to the sword 500,000 chosen men (v. 17), more, it is said, than ever we read of in any history to have been killed in one battle; but the battle was the Lord's, who would thus chastise the idolatry of Israel and own the house of David. But see the sad effect of division: it was the blood of Israelites that was thus shed like water by Israelites, while the heathen, their neighbours, to whom the name of Israel had formerly been a terror, cried, *Aha! so would we have it*.

4. The consequence of this was that the children of Israel, though they were not brought back to the house of David (which by so great a blow surely they would have been had not the determinate counsel of God been otherwise), yet, for that time, were *brought under*, v. 18. Many cities were taken, and remained in the possession of the kings of Judah; as Bethel particularly, v. 19. What became of the golden calf there, when it came into the hands of the king of Judah, we are not told; perhaps it was removed to some place of greater safety, and at length to Samaria (Hos. 8:5); yet in Jehu's time we find it at Bethel, 2 Ki. 10:29. Perhaps Abijah, when it was in his power to demolish it, suffered it to stand, for *his heart was not perfect* with God; and, not improving what he had got for the honour of God, he soon lost it all again.

Lastly, The death of both of the conquered and of the conqueror, not long after. 1. Jeroboam never looked up after this defeat, though he survived it two or three years. He could not recover *strength again*, v. 20. The Lord struck him either with some bodily disease, of which he languished, or with melancholy and trouble of mind; his heart was broken, and vexation at his loss brought his head, probably by this time a hoary head, with sorrow to the grave. He escaped the sword of Abijah, but God struck him: and there is no escaping his sword. 2. Abijah waxed mighty upon it. What number of wives and children he had before does not appear; but now he multiplied his wives to fourteen in all, by whom he had thirty-eight children, v. 21. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of those arrows. It seems, he had ways peculiar to himself, and sayings of his own, which were recorded with his acts in the history of those times, v. 22. But the number of his months was cut off in the midst, and,

soon after his triumphs, death conquered the conqueror. Perhaps he was too much lifted up with his victories, and therefore God would not let him live long to enjoy the honour of them.

Chapter 14

In this and the two following chapters we have the history of the reign of Asa, a good reign and a long one. In this chapter we have, I. His piety (v. 1-5). II. His policy (v. 6-8). III. His prosperity, and particularly a glorious victory he obtained over a great army of Ethiopians that came out against him (v. 9–15).

Verses 1-8

Here is, I. Asa's general character (v. 2): He did *that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God*. 1. He aimed at pleasing God, studied to approve himself to him. Happy are those that walk by this rule, to do that which is right, not in their own eyes, or in the eye of the world, but in the eyes of God. 2. He saw God's eye always upon him, and that helped much to keep him to what was good and right. 3. God graciously accepted him in what he did, and approved his conduct as good and right.

II. A blessed work of reformation which he set on foot immediately upon his accession to the crown. 1. He removed and abolished idolatry. Since Solomon admitted idolatry, in the latter end of his reign, nothing had been done to suppress it, and so, we presume, it had got ground. Strange gods were worshipped and had their altars, images, and groves; and the temple service, though kept up by the priests (ch. 13:10), was neglected by many of the people. Asa, as soon as he had power in his hands, made it his business to destroy all those idolatrous altars and images (v. 3, 5), they being a great provocation to a jealous God and a great temptation to a careless unthinking people. He hoped by destroying the idols to reform the idolaters, which he aimed at, rather than to ruin them. 2. He revived and established the pure worship of God; and, since the priests did their part in attending God's altars, he obliged the people to do theirs (v. 4): *He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and not the gods of the heathen, and to do the law and the commandments*, that is, to observe all divine institutions, which many had utterly neglected. In doing this, *the land was quiet before him*, v. 5. Though they were much in love with their idols, and very loth to leave them, yet the convictions of their consciences sided with the commands of Asa, and they could not, for shame, refuse to comply with them. Note, Those that have power in their hands, and will use it vigorously for the suppression of profaneness and the reformation of manners, will not meet with so much difficulty and opposition therein as perhaps they feared. Vice is a sneaking thing, and virtue has reason enough on its side to make *all iniquity stop her mouth*, Ps. 107:42.

III. The tranquillity of his kingdom, after constant alarms of war during the last two reigns: *In his days the land was quiet ten years* (v. 1), no war with the kingdom of Israel, who did not recover the blow given them in the last reign for a great while. Abijah's victory, which was owing, under God, to his courage and bravery, laid a foundation for Asa's peace, which was the reward of his piety and reformation. Though Abijah had little religion himself, he was instrumental to prepare the way for one that had much. If Abijah had not done what he did to quiet the land, Asa could not have done what he did to reform it; for *inter arma silent leges—amidst the din of arms the voice of law is unheard*.

IV. The prudent improvement he made of that tranquillity: *The land had rest, for the Lord had given him rest*. Note, *If God give quietness, who then can make trouble?* Job 34:29. Those have rest indeed to whom God gives rest, peace indeed to whom

Christ gives peace, *not as the world giveth*, Jn. 14:27. Now, 1. Asa takes notice of the rest they had as the gift of God (*He hath given us rest on every side*). Note, God must be acknowledged with thankfulness in the rest we are blessed with, of body and mind, family and country), and as the reward of the reformation begun: *Because we have sought the Lord our God, he has given us rest*. Note, As the frowns and rebukes of Providence should be observed for a check to us in an evil way, so the smiles of Providence should be taken notice of for our encouragement in that which is good. See Hag. 2:18, 19; Mal. 3:10. We find by experience that it is good to *seek the Lord*; it gives us rest. While we pursue the world we meet with nothing but vexation. 2. He consults with his people, by their representatives, how to make a good use of the present gleams of peace they enjoyed, and concludes with them, (1.) That they must not be idle, but busy. Times of rest from war should be employed in work, for we must always find ourselves something to do. In the years when he had no war he said, "Let us build; still let us be doing." When the *churches had rest* they were *built up*, Acts 9:31. When the sword is sheathed take up the trowel. (2.) That they must not be secure, but prepare for wars. In times of peace we must be getting ready for trouble, expect it and lay up in store for it. [1.] He fortified his principle cities with *walls, towers, gates, and bars*, v. 7. "This let us do," says he, "*while the land is yet before us*," that is, "while we have opportunity and advantage for it and have nothing to hinder us." He speaks as if he expected that, some way or other, trouble would arise, when it would be too late to fortify, and when they would wish they had done it. *So they built and prospered*. [2.] He had a good army ready to bring into the field (v. 8), not a standing army, but the militia or trained-bands of the country. Judah and Benjamin were mustered severally; and Benjamin (which not long ago was called *little Benjamin*, Ps. 68:27) had almost as many soldiers as Judah, came as near as 28 to 30, so strangely had that tribe increased of late. The blessing of God can make a *little one to become a thousand*. It should seem, these two tribes were differently armed, both offensively and defensively. The men of Judah guarded themselves with targets, the men of Benjamin with shields, the former of which were much larger than the latter, 1 Ki. 10:16, 17. The men of Judah fought with spears when they closed in with the enemy; the men of Benjamin drew bows, to reach the enemy at a distance. Both did good service, and neither could say to the other, I have *no need of thee*. Different gifts and employments are for the common good.

Verses 9-15

Here is, I. Disturbance given to the peace of Asa's kingdom by a formidable army of Ethiopians that invaded them, v. 9, 10. Though still they sought God, yet this fear came upon them, that their faith in God might be tried, and that God might have an opportunity of doing great things for them. It was a vast number that the Ethiopians brought against him: 1,000,000 *men*; and now he found the benefit of having an army ready raised against such a time of need. That provision which we thought needless may soon appear to be of great advantage.

II. The application Asa made to God on occasion of the threatening cloud which now hung over his head, v. 11. He that sought God in the day of his peace and prosperity could with holy boldness cry to God in the day of his trouble, and call him *his God*. His prayer is short, but has much in it. 1. He gives to God the glory of his infinite power and sovereignty: *It is nothing with thee to help* and save by many or few, by those that are mighty or by *those that have no power*. See 1 Sa. 14:6. God works in his own strength, not in the strength of instruments (Ps. 21:13), nay, it is his glory to *help the weakest* and to *perfect strength*

out of the mouth of babes and sucklings. "We do not say, Lord, take our part, for we have a good army for thee to work by; but, take our part, for without thee we have no power." 2. He takes hold of their covenant-relation to God as theirs. *O Lord, our God!* and again, *"Thou art our God,* whom we have chosen and cleave to as ours, and who hast promised to be ours." 3. He pleads their dependence upon God, and the eye they had to him in this expedition. he was well prepared for it, yet trusted not to his preparations; but, "Lord, *we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude,* by warrant from thee, aiming at thy glory, and trusting to thy strength." 4. He interests God in their cause: *"Let not man"* (*mortal man,* so the word is) *"prevail against thee.* If he prevail against us, it will be said that he prevails against thee, because thou art our God, and we rest on thee and go forth in thy name, which thou hast encouraged us to do. The enemy is a mortal man; make it to appear what an unequal match he is for an immortal God. Lord, maintain thy own honour; *hallowed by thy name."*

III. The glorious victory God gave him over his enemies. 1. God defeated the enemy, and put their forces into disorder (v. 12): *The Lord smote the Ethiopians,* smote them with terror, and an unaccountable consternation, so that they fled, and knew neither why nor whither. 2. Asa and his soldiers took the advantage God gave them against the enemy. (1.) They destroyed them. They fell *before the Lord* (for who can stand before him?) and before his host, either an invisible host of angels that were employed to destroy them or the host of Israel, called *God's host* because owned by him. (2.) They took the plunder of their camp, *carried away very much spoil* from the slain and from the baggage. (3.) They *smote the cities* that were in league with them, to which they fled for shelter, and carried off the spoil of them (v. 14); and they were not able to make any resistance, *for the fear of the Lord came upon them,* that is, a fear which God struck them with to such a degree that they had no heart to withstand the conquerors. (4.) They fetched away the cattle out of the enemy's country, in vast numbers, v. 15. Thus the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

Chapter 15

Asa and his army were now returning in triumph from the battle, laden with spoils and adorned with the trophies of victory, the pious prince, we may now suppose, studying what he should render to God for this great favour. He knew that the work of reformation, which he had begun in his kingdom, was not perfected; his enemies abroad were subdued, but there were more dangerous enemies at home that were yet unconquered—idols in Judah and Benjamin: his victory over the former emboldened him vigorously to renew his attack upon the latter. Now here we have, I. The message which God sent to him, by a prophet, to engage him to, and encourage him in, the prosecution of his reformation (v. 1-7). II. The life which this message put into that good cause, and their proceedings in pursuance of it. Idols removed (v. 8). The spoil dedicated to God (v. 9–11). A covenant made with God, and a law for the punishing of idolaters (v. 12–15). A reformation at court (v. 16). Dedicated things brought into the house of God (v. 18). All well, but that the high places were permitted (v. 17). And the effect of this was great peace (v. 19).

Verses 1-7

It was a great happiness to Israel that they had prophets among them; yet, while they were thus blessed, they were strangely addicted to idolatry, whereas, when the spirit of prophecy had ceased under the second temple, and the canon of the Old Temple was completed (which was constantly read in their synagogues), they were pure from idolatry; for the scriptures are of all other the *most sure word of prophecy*, and most effectual, and the church could not be so easily imposed upon by a counterfeit Bible as by a counterfeit prophet. Here was a prophet sent to Asa and his army, when they returned victorious from the war with the Ethiopians, not to compliment them and congratulate them on their success, but to quicken them to their duty; this is the proper business of God's ministers, even with princes and the greatest men. The *Spirit of God came* upon the prophet (v. 1), both to instruct him what he should say and to enable him to say it with clearness and boldness.

I. He told them plainly upon what terms they stood with God. Let them not think that, having obtained this victory, all was their own for ever; no, he must let them know they were upon their good behaviour. Let them do well, and it will be well with them, otherwise not. 1. *The Lord is with you while you are with him*. This is both a word of comfort, that those who keep close to God shall always have his presence with them, and also a word of caution: "He is *with you, while you are with him*, but no longer; you have now a signal token of his favourable presence with you, but the continuance of it depends upon your perseverance in the way of your duty." 2. *"If you seek him, he will be found of you*. Sincerely desire his favour, and aim at it, and you shall obtain it. Pray, and you shall prevail. He never said, nor ever will, *Seek you me in vain*." See Heb. 11:6. But, 3. "If you forsake him and his ordinances, he is not tied to you, but will certainly forsake you, and then you are undone, your present triumphs will be no security to you; woe to you when God departs."

II. He set before them the dangerous consequence of forsaking God and his ordinances, and that there was no way of having grievances redressed, but by repenting, and returning unto God. When Israel forsook their duty they were over-run with a deluge of atheism, impiety, irreligion, and all irregularity (v. 3), and were continually embarrassed with vexatious and

destroying wars, foreign and domestic, v. 5, 6. But when their troubles drove them to God they found it not in vain to seek him, v. 4. But the question is, What time does this refer to? 1. Some think it looks as far back as the days of the Judges. *A long season* ago Israel was *without the true God*, for they worshipped false gods; it was a time of ignorance, for, though they had priests, they had no teaching priests, though they had elders, yet no law to any purpose, v. 3. These were sad times, when they were frequently oppressed by one enemy or other and grievously harassed by Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, and other nations. They were *vexed with all adversity* (v. 6), yet when, in their perplexity, they turned to God by repentance, prayer, and reformation, he raised up deliverers for them. Then was that maxim often verified, that God is with us while we are with him. Whatsoever things of this kind were written aforetime were written for our admonition. 2. Others think it describes the state of the ten tribes (who were now properly called *Israel*) in the days of Asa. "*Now*, since Jeroboam set up the calves, though he pretended to honour the God that brought them out of Egypt, yet his idolatry has brought them to downright infidelity; they are *without the true God*," and no marvel when they were without teaching priests. Jeroboam's priests were not teachers, and thus they came to be without law. It is next to impossible that any thing of religion should be kept up without a preaching ministry. In those times there was no peace, v. 5. Their war with Judah gave them frequent alarms; so did the late insurrection of Baasha and other occasions not mentioned. They provoked God with all iniquity, and then he *vexed them with all adversity*; yet, *when they turned to God*, he was entreated for them. Let Judah take notice of this; let their neighbours' harms be their warnings. Give no countenance to graven images for you see what mischiefs they produce. 3. Others think the whole passage may be read in the future tense, and that it looks forward: Hereafter *Israel will be without the true God and a teaching priest*, and they will be destroyed by one judgment after another till they *return to God and seek him*. See Hos. 3:4.

III. Upon this he grounded his exhortation to prosecute the work of reformation with vigour (v. 7): *Be strong, for your work shall be rewarded*. Note, 1. God's work should be done with diligence and cheerfulness, but will not be done without resolution. 2. This should quicken us to the work of religion, that we shall be sure not to lose by it ultimately. It will not go unrewarded. How should it, when the work is its own reward?

Verses 8-19

We are here told what good effect the foregoing sermon had upon Asa.

I. He grew more bold for God than he had been. His victory would inspire him with some new degrees of resolution, but this message from God with much more. Now he took courage. he saw how necessary a further reformation was, and what assurance he had of God's presence with him in it; and this made him daring, and helped him over the difficulties which had before deterred him and driven him off from the undertaking. Now he ventured to destroy all the abominable idols (and all idolatries are abominable, 1 Pt. 4:3) as far as ever his power went. Away with them all. He also *renewed the altar of the Lord*, which, it seems, had gone out of repair, though it was not above thirty-five years since Solomon's head was laid, who erected it. So soon did these ceremonial institutions begin to wax old, as things which, in the fulness of time, must *vanish away*, Heb. 8:13.

II. He extended his influence further than before, v. 9. He summoned a solemn assembly, and particularly brought the strangers

to it, who had come over to him from the ten tribes. 1. Their coming was a great encouragement to him; for the reason of their coming was because *they saw that the Lord his God was with him*. It is good to be with those that have God with them, to come into relation to, and contract acquaintance and friendship with, those that live in the fear and favour of God. *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zec. 8:23. 2. The cognizance he took of them, and the invitation he gave them to the general assembly, were a great encouragement to them. All strangers are to be helped, but those that cast themselves upon God's good providence, purely to keep a good conscience, are worthy of double honour. Asa gave orders for the gathering of them together (v. 9), yet it is said (v. 10) that they *gathered themselves together*, made it their own act, so forward were they to obey the king's orders. This meeting was held in the third month, probably at the feast of Pentecost, which was in that month.

III. He and his people offered sacrifices to God, as his share of the spoil they had got, v. 11. Their offering here was nothing to Solomon's (ch. 7:5), which was owing to the diminution either of their zeal or of their wealth, or of both. These sacrifices were intended by way of thanksgiving for the favours they had received, and supplication for further favours. Prayers and praises are now our spiritual sacrifices. And, as he took care that the altar should have its gift, so he took care that the temple should have its gold: *He brought into the house of God all the dedicated things*, v. 18. It is honesty to render to God the things that are his. What has been long designed for him, and long laid by for him, as it should seem these dedicated things had been, should at length be laid out for him. Will a man rob God, or make slow payment to him, who is always ready to do us good?

IV. *They entered into covenant with God*, repenting that they had violated their engagements to him and resolving to do better for the future. It is proper for penitents, for converts, to renew their covenants. It should seem, the motion came not from Asa, but from the people themselves. Let every man be a volunteer that covenants with God. *Thy people shall be willing*, Ps. 110:3. Observe,

1. What was the matter of this covenant. Nothing but what they were before obliged to; and, though no vow or promise of theirs could lay any higher obligation upon them than they were already under from the divine precept, yet it would help to increase their sense of the obligation, to arm them against temptations, and would be a testimony to the equity and goodness of the precept. And, by joining all together in this covenant, they strengthened the hands one of another. Two things they engaged themselves to:—(1.) That they would diligently seek God themselves, seek his precepts, seek his favour. What is religion but seeking God, enquiring after him, applying to him, upon all occasions? We shall not enjoy him till we come to heaven; while we are here we must continue seeking. They would seek God as the *God of their fathers*, in the way that their fathers sought him and in dependence upon the promise made to their fathers; and they would do it *with all their heart* and *with all their soul*, for those only seek God acceptably and successfully that are inward with him, intent upon him, and entire for him, in their seeking him. We make nothing of our religion if we do not make heart-work of it. God will have all the heart or none; and, when a jewel of such inestimable value as the divine favour is to be found, it is worth while to seek it *with all our soul*. (2.) That they would, to the utmost of their power, oblige others to seek him, v. 13. They agreed that *whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel* (that is, would either worship other gods or refuse to join with them in the worship of the true God, that was

either an obstinate idolater or an obstinate atheist) he should be put to death. This was no new law of their own making, but an order to put in execution that law of God to this purport, Deu. 17:2, etc. If this law had been duly executed, there would not have been so many abominable idols found in Judah and Benjamin, v. 8. Whether men may now, under the gospel, be compelled by such methods as these to seek the Lord is justly questioned; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and yet mighty.

2. In what manner they made this covenant. (1.) With great cheerfulness, and all possible expressions of joy: *The swore unto the Lord*; not secretly, as if they were either ashamed of what they did or afraid of binding themselves too fast to him, but with a loud voice, to express their own zeal and to animate one another; and they all rejoiced at the oath, v. 14, 15. They did not swear to God with reluctance (as the poor debtor confesses a judgment to his creditor), but with all the pleasure and satisfaction imaginable, as the bridegroom plights his troth to the bride in the marriage covenant. Every honest Israelite was pleased with his own engagements to God, and they were all pleased with one another's. They rejoiced in it as a hopeful expedient to prevent their apostasy from God and a happy indication of God's presence with them. Note, The times of renewing our covenant with God should be times of rejoicing, and national reformation cannot but give general satisfaction to all that are good. It is an honour and happiness to be in bonds to God. (2.) They did it with great sincerity, zeal and resolution: *They swore to God with all their hearts, and sought him with their whole desire*. The Israelites were now in an extraordinarily good frame. O that there had always been such a heart in them! This comes in as the reason why they rejoiced so much in what they did: it was because they were hearty in it. Note, Those only experience the pleasure and comfort of religion that are sincere and upright in it. What is done in hypocrisy is a mere drudgery. But, if God has the heart, we have the joy.

V. We are told what was the effect of this their solemn covenanting with God. 1. God did well for them: *He was found of them, and gave them rest round about* (v. 15), so that there was no war for a long time after (v. 19), no open general war, though there were constant bickerings between Judah and Israel upon the frontiers, 1 Ki. 15:16. National piety procures national blessings. 2. They did, on the whole, well for him. They carried on the reformation so far that Maachah the queen-mother was deposed for idolatry and her idol destroyed, v. 16. This was bravely done of Asa, that he would not connive at idolatry in those that were nearest to him, like Levi, that *said to his father and mother, I have not seen him*, Deu. 33:9. Asa knows he must honour God more than his grandmother, and dares not leave an idol in an apartment of his palace while he is destroying idols in the cities of his kingdom. We may suppose this Maachah was so far convinced of her sin that she was willing to subscribe the association mentioned (v. 12, 13), binding herself to seek the Lord, and therefore was not put to death as those were that refused to sign it, great as well as small, women as well as men: probably it was with an eye to her that *women* were specified. But because she had been an idolater Asa thought fit to divest her of the dignity and authority she had, and probably he banished her the court and confined her to privacy, lest she should influence and infect others. But the reformation was not complete; the high places were not all taken away, though many of them were, ch. 14:3, 5. Those in the cities were removed, but not those in the cities of Judah, but not those in the cities of Israel which were reduced to the house of David; or those that were used in the service of false gods, but not those that were used in the service of the God of Israel. These he connived at,

and yet his heart was perfect. There may be defects in some particular duties where yet the heart, in the man, is upright with God. Sincerity is something less than sinless perfection.

Chapter 16

This chapter concludes the history of the reign of Asa, but does not furnish so pleasing an account of his latter end as we had of his beginning. I. Here is a foolish treaty with Benhadad king of Syria (v. 1-6). II. The reproof which God sent him for it by a prophet (v. 7-9). III. Asa's displeasure against the prophet for his faithfulness (v. 10). IV. The sickness, death, and burial of Asa (v. 11-14).

Verses 1-6

How to reconcile the date of this event with the history of the kings I am quite at a loss. Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of Asa, 1 Ki. 16:8. How then could this be done in his thirty-sixth year, when Baasha's family was quite cut off, and Omri was upon the throne? It is generally said to be meant of the thirty-sixth year of the kingdom of Asa, namely, that of Judah, beginning from the first of Rehoboam, and so it coincides with the sixteenth of Asa's reign; but then ch. 15:19 must be so understood; and how could it be spoken of as a great thing that there was no more war till the fifteenth year of Asa, when that passage immediately before was in his fifteenth year? (ch. 15:10), and after this miscarriage of his, here recorded, he had wars, v. 9. Josephus places it in his twenty-sixth year, and then we must suppose a mistake in the transcriber here and ch. 15:19, the admission of which renders the computation easy. This passage we had before (1 Ki. 15:17, etc.) and Asa was in several ways faulty in it. 1. He did not do well to make a league with Benhadad, a heathen king, and to value himself so much upon it as he seems to have done, v. 3. Had he relied more upon his covenant, and his father's, with God, he would not have boasted so much of his league, and his father's, with the royal family of Syria. 2. If he had had a due regard to the honour of Israel in general, he would have found some other expedient to give Baasha a diversion than by calling in a foreign force, and inviting into the country a common enemy, who, in process of time, might be a plague to Judah too. 3. It was doubtless a sin in Benhadad to break his league with Baasha upon no provocation, but merely through the influence of a bribe; and, if so, certainly it was a sin in Asa to move him to it, especially to hire him to do it. The public faith of kings and kingdoms must not be made so cheap a thing. 4. To take silver and gold out of the house of the Lord for this purpose was a great aggravation of the sin, v. 2. Must the temple be plundered to serve his carnal politics? He had better have brought gifts and offerings with prayers and supplications, to the house of the Lord, that he might have engaged God on his side and made him his friend; then he would not have needed to be at this expense to make Benhadad his friend. 5. It was well if Asa had not to answer for all the mischief that the army of Benhadad did unjustly to the cities of Israel, all the blood they shed and all the spoil they made, v. 4. Perhaps Asa intended not that they should carry the matter so far. But those that draw others to sin know not what they do, nor where it will end. The beginning of sin is as the letting forth of water. However the project succeeded. Benhadad gave Baasha a powerful diversion, obliged him to leave off building Ramah and betake himself to the defence of his own country northward, which gave Asa an opportunity, not only to demolish his fortifications, but to seize the materials and convert them to his own use.

Verses 7-14

Here is, I. A plain and faithful reproof given to Asa by a prophet of the Lord, for making this league with Baasha. The reprover was Hanani the seer, the father of Jehu, another prophet, whom we read of 1 Ki. 16:1; 2 Chr. 19:2. We observed several things amiss in Asa's treaty with Benhadad. But that which the prophet here charges upon him as the greatest fault he was guilty of in that matter is his *relying on the king of Syria and not on the Lord his God*, v. 7. He thought that, though God was on his side, this would not stand him in stead unless he had Benhadad on his side, that God either could not or would not help him, but he must take this indirect course to help himself. Note, God is much displeased when he is distrusted and when an arm of flesh is relied on more than his power and goodness. By putting our confidence in God we give honour to him, and therefore he thinks himself affronted if we give that honour to another. He plainly tells the king that herein he had done foolishly, v. 9. It is a foolish thing to lean on a broken reed, when we have the rock of ages to rely upon. To convince him of his folly he shows him, 1. That he acted against his experience, v. 8. He, of all men, had no reason to distrust God, who had found him such a present powerful helper, by whom he had been made to triumph over a threatening enemy, as his father before him, *because he relied upon the Lord his God*, ch. 13:18; 14:11. "What!" said the prophet, "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host, enough to swallow up a kingdom? And yet, *because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thy hand*; and was not he sufficient to help thee against Baasha?" Note, The many experiences we have had of the goodness of God to us aggravate our distrust of him. Has he not helped us in six troubles? And have we any reason to suspect him in the seventh? But see how deceitful our hearts are! We trust in God when we have nothing else to trust to, when need drives us to him; but, when we have other things to stay on, we are apt to stay too much on them and to lean on our own understanding as long as that has any thing to offer; but a believing confidence will be in God only, when a smiling world courts it most.

2. That he acted against his knowledge of God and his providence, v. 9. Asa could not be ignorant that *the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the earth, strongly to hold with those* (so it may be read) *whose heart is perfect towards him*; that is, (1.) That God governs the world in infinite wisdom, and the creatures, and all their actions, are continually under his eye. The eye of Providence is quick-sighted—it *runs*; it is intent—it *runs to and fro*; it reaches far—*through the whole earth*, no corner of which is from under it, not the most dark or distant; and his eye directs his hand, and the arm of his power; for he shows himself strong. Does Satan walk to and fro in the earth? Providence *runs to and fro*, is never out of the way, never to seek, never at a loss. (2.) That God governs the world for the good of his people, does all in pursuance of the counsels of his love concerning their salvation, all *for Jacob his servant's sake, and Israel his elect*, Isa. 45:4. *Christ is head over all things to his church*, Eph. 1:22. (3.) That those whose hearts are upright with him may be sure of his protection and have all the reason in the world to depend upon it. He is able to protect them in the way of their duty (for wisdom and might are his), and he actually intends their protection. A practical disbelief of this is at the bottom of all our departures from God and double-dealing with him. Asa could not trust God and therefore made court to Benhadad.

3. That he acted against his interest. (1.) He had lost an opportunity of checking the growing greatness of the king of Syria, (v. 7): *His host has escaped out of thy hand*, which otherwise would have joined with Baasha's and fallen with it. (2.) He had incurred God's displeasure and henceforth must expect no peace, but the constant alarms of war, v. 9. Those that cannot find in

their hearts to trust God forfeit his protection and throw themselves out of it.

II. Asa's displeasure at this reproof. Though it came from God by one that was known to be his messenger, though the reproof was just and the reasoning fair, and all intended for his good, yet he was wroth with the seer for telling him of his folly; nay, *he was in a rage with him*, v. 10. Is this Asa? Is this he whose heart was perfect with the Lord all his days? Well, let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. A wise man, and yet in a rage! An Israelite, and yet in a rage with a prophet! A good man, and yet impatient of reproof, and that cannot bear to be told of his faults! Lord, what is man, when God leaves him to himself? Those that idolize their own conduct cannot bear contradiction; and those that indulge a peevish passionate temper may be transported by it into impieties as well as into indecencies, and will, some time or other, fly in the face of God himself. See what gall and wormwood this root of bitterness bore. 1. In his rage he committed the prophet to the jail, *put him in a prison-house*, as a malefactor, *in the stocks* (so some read it,) or into *little-ease*. God's prophets meet with many that cannot bear reproof, but take it much amiss, yet they must do their duty. 2. Having proceeded thus far, *he oppressed some of the people*, probably such as owned the prophet in his sufferings, or were known to be his particular friends. He that abused his power for the persecuting of God's prophet was left to himself further to abuse it for the crushing of his own subjects, whereby he weakened himself and lost his interest. Most persecutors have been tyrants.

III. His sickness. Two years before he died *he was diseased in his feet* (v. 12), afflicted with the gout in a high degree. He had put the prophet in the stocks, and now God put him in the stocks; so his punishment answered his sin. *His disease was exceedingly great*; it came to the height (so some); it flew up to his head (so others), and then it was mortal. This was his affliction; but his sin was that in his disease, instead of seeking to the Lord for relief, *he sought to the physicians*. His making use of physicians was his duty; but trusting to them, and expecting that from them which was to be had from God only, were his sin and folly. The help of creatures must always be used with an eye to the Creator, and in dependence upon him, who makes every creature that to us which it is, and without whom the most skilful and faithful are physicians of no value. Some think that these physicians were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and were a sort of conjurers, to whom he applied as if there were not a God in Israel.

IV. His death and burial. His funeral had something of extraordinary solemnity in it, v. 14. They made a very magnificent *burying for him*. I am loth to think (as some do) that he himself ordered this funeral pomp, and that it was an instance of his vanity, that he would be buried like the Gentiles, and not after the way of the Jews. It is said indeed, *He digged the sepulchre for himself*, as one mindful of his grave; but I am willing to believe that this funeral pomp was rather an expression of the great respect his people retained for him, notwithstanding the failings and infirmities of his latter days. It was agreed to do him honour at his death. Note, The eminent piety and usefulness of good men ought to be remembered to their praise, though they have had their blemishes. Let their faults be buried in their graves, while their services are remembered over their graves. He that said, *There is not a just man that doeth good and sinneth not*, yet said also, *The memory of the just is blessed*; and let it be so.

Chapter 17

Here begin the life and reign of Jehoshaphat, who was one of the first three among the royal worthies, one of the best that ever swayed the sceptre of Judah since David's head was laid. He was the good son of a good father, so that, as this time, grace ran in the blood, even in the blood-royal. Happy the son that had such a father, to lay a good foundation in him and for him. Happy the father that had such a son, to build so wall upon the foundation he had laid! Happy the kingdom that was blessed with two such kings, two such reigns, together! In this chapter we have, I. His accession to and establishment in the throne (v. 1, 2, 5). II. His persona piety (v. 3, 4, 6). III. The course he took to promote religion in his kingdom (v. 7-9). IV. The mighty sway he bore among the neighbours (v. 10, 11). V. The great strength of his kingdom, both in garrisons and standing forces (v. 12-19). Thus was his prosperity the reward of his piety and his piety the brightest grace and ornament of his prosperity.

Verses 1-9

Here we find concerning Jehoshaphat,

I. What a wise man he was. As soon as he came to the crown he *strengthened himself against Israel*, v. 1. Ahab, an active warlike prince, had now been three years upon the throne of Israel, the vigour of his beginning falling in with the decay of Asa's conclusion. It is probable that the kingdom of Israel had, of late, got ground of the kingdom of Judah and began to grow formidable to it; so that the first thing Jehoshaphat had to do was to make his part good on that side, and to check the growing greatness of the king of Israel, which he did so effectually, and without bloodshed, that Ahab soon courted his alliance, so far was he from giving him any disturbance, and proved more dangerous as a friend than he could have been as an enemy.

Jehoshaphat strengthened himself not to act offensively against Israel or invade them, but only to maintain his own, which he did by fortifying the cities that were on his frontiers, and putting garrisons, stronger than had been, in the cities of Ephraim, which he was master of, v. 2. He did not strengthen himself, as his father did, by a league with the king of Syria, but by fair and regular methods, on which he might expect the blessing of God and in which he trusted God.

II. What a good man he was. It is an excellent character that is here given him. 1. He *walked in the ways of his father David*. In the characters of the kings, David's ways are often made the standard, as 1 Ki. 15:3, 11; 2 Ki. 14:3; 16:2; 18:3. But the distinction is nowhere so strongly marked as here between his first ways and his last ways; for the last were not so good as the first. his ways, before he fell so foully in the matter of Uriah (which is mentioned long afterwards as the bar in his escutcheon, 1 Ki. 15:5), were good ways, and, though he happily recovered from that fall, yet perhaps he never, while he lived, fully retrieved the spiritual strength and comfort he lost by it. Jehoshaphat followed David as far as he followed God and no further. Paul himself thus limits our imitation of him (1 Co. 11:1): *Follow me, as I follow Christ*, and not otherwise. Many good people have had their first ways, which were their best ways, their first love, which was their strongest love; and in every copy we propose to write after, as we must single out that only which is good, so that chiefly which is best. The words here will admit another reading; they run thus: *He walked in the ways of David his father (Hareshonim), those first ways, or those ancient ways*. He proposed to himself, for his example, the primitive times of the royal family, those purest times, before the

corruptions of the late reigns came in. See Jer. 6:16. The Septuagint leaves out David, and so refers it to Asa: *He walked in the first ways of his father*, and did not imitate him in what was amiss in him, towards the latter end of his time. It is good to be cautious in following the best men, lest we step aside after them. 2. He *sought not to Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his father*, v. 3, 4. The neighbouring nations had their Baalim, one had one Baal and another had another; but he abhorred them all, had nothing to do with them. he *worshipped the Lord God of his father* and him only, prayed to him only and enquired of him only; both are included in seeking him. 3. That he *walked in God's commandments*, not only worshipped the true God, but worshipped him according to his own institution, *and not after the doings of Israel*, v. 4. Though the king of Israel was his neighbour and ally, yet he did not learn his way. Whatever dealings he had with him in civil matters, he would not have communion with him, nor comply with him in his religion. In this he kept close to the rule. 4. *His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord* (v. 6), or *he lifted up his heart*. He brought his heart to his work, and lifted up his heart in it; that is, he had a sincere regard to God in it. *Unto thee, O Lord! do I lift up my soul*. His heart was enlarged in that which is good, Ps. 119:32. He never thought he could do enough for God. He was lively and affectionate in his religion, *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*, cheerful and pleasant in it; he went on in his work with alacrity, as Jacob, who, after his vision of God at Bethel, *lifted up his feet*, Gen. 29:1, *margin*. He was bold and resolute in the ways of God and went on with courage. His heart was lifted up above the consideration of the difficulties that were in the way of his duty; he easily got over them all, and was not frightened with *winds and clouds from sowing and reaping*, Eccl. 11:4. Let us walk in the same spirit.

III. What a useful man he was, not only a good man, but a good king. He not only was good himself, but did good in his generation, did a great deal of good. 1. He took away the teachers of lies, so images are called (Hab. 2:18), *the high places and the groves*, v. 6. It is meant of those in which idols were worshipped; for those that were dedicated to the true God only were not taken away, ch. 20:33. It was only idolatry that he abolished. Nothing debauched the nation more than those idolatrous groves or images which he took away. 2. He sent forth teachers of truth. When he enquired into the state of religion in his kingdom he found his people generally very ignorant: they *knew not that they did evil*. Even in the last good reign there had been little care taken to instruct them in their duty; and therefore Jehoshaphat resolves to begin his work at the right end, deals with them as reasonable creatures, will not lead them blindfold, no, not into a reformation, but endeavours to have them well taught, knowing that that was the way to have them well cured. In this good work he employed, (1.) His princes. Those about him he sent forth; those in the country he sent *to teach in the cities of Judah*, v. 7. He ordered them, in the administration of justice, not only to correct the people when they did ill, but to teach them how to do better, and to give a reason for what they did, that the people might be informed of the difference between good and evil. The princes or judges upon the bench have a great opportunity of teaching people their duty to God and man, and it is not out of their province, for the laws of God are to be looked upon as laws of the land. (2.) The *Levites and priests went with the princes, and taught in Judah, having the book of the law with them*, v. 8,9. They were teachers by office, Deu. 33:10. Teaching was part of the work for which they had their maintenance. The priests and the Levites had little else to do. But, it seems, they had neglected it, pretending perhaps that they could not get the people to hear them. "Well," says Jehoshaphat, "you shall go along with the princes, and they with their

authority shall oblige the people to come and hear you; and then, if they be not well instructed, it is your fault." What an abundance of good may be done when Moses and Aaron thus go hand in hand in the doing of it, when princes with their power, and priests and Levites with their scripture learning, agree to teach the people the good knowledge of God and their duty! These itinerant judges and itinerant preachers together were instrumental to diffuse a blessed light throughout the cities of Judah. But it is said, *They had the book of the law of the Lord with them.* [1.] For their own direction, that thence they might fetch all the instructions they gave to the people, and not *teach for doctrines the commandments of men.* [2.] For the conviction of the people, that they might see that they had a divine warrant for what they said and delivered to them that only which they received from the Lord. Note, Ministers, when they go to teach the people, should have their Bibles with them.

IV. What a happy man he was. 1. How happy he was in the favour of his God, who signally owned and blessed him: *The Lord was with him (v. 3); the word of the Lord was his helper* (so the Chaldee paraphrase); *the Lord established the kingdom in his hand, v. 5.* Those stand firmly that have the presence of God with them. If the *beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*, that will *establish the work of our hands* and establish us in our integrity. 2. How happy he was in the affections of his people (v. 5): *All Judah brought him presents*, in acknowledgment of his kindness in sending preachers among them. The more there is of true religion among a people the more there will be of conscientious loyalty. A government that answers the end of government will be supported. The effect of the favour both of God and his kingdom was that he had *riches and honour in abundance.* It is undoubtedly true, though few will believe it, that religion and piety are the best friends to outward prosperity. And, observe, it follows immediately, *His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.* Riches and honour in abundance prove to many a clog and a hindrance in the ways of the Lord, an occasion of pride, security, and sensuality; but they had a quite contrary effect upon Jehoshaphat: his abundance was oil to the wheels of his obedience, and the more he had of the wealth of this world the more was his heart *lifted up in the ways of the Lord.*

Verses 10-19

We have here a further account of Jehoshaphat's great prosperity and the flourishing state of his kingdom.

I. He had good interest in the neighbouring princes and nations. Though he was not perhaps so great a soldier as David (which might have made him their terror), nor so great a scholar as Solomon (which might have made him their oracle), yet *the fear of the Lord fell so upon them* (that is, God so influenced and governed their spirits) that they had all a reverence for him, v. 10. And, 1. *None of them made war against him.* God's good providence so ordered it that, while the princes and priests were instructing and reforming the country, none of his neighbours gave him any molestations, to take him off from that good work. Thus when Jacob and his sons were going to worship at Bethel the terror of God was upon the neighbouring cities, that they *did not pursue after them*, Gen. 35:5, and see Ex. 34:24. 2. Many of them brought presents to him (v. 11), to secure his friendship. Perhaps these were a tribute imposed upon them by Asa, who made himself master of the cities of the Philistines, and the tents of the Arabians, ch. 14:14, 15. With the 7700 rams, and the same number of he-goats, which the Arabians brought, there was probably a proportionable number of ewes and lambs, she-goats and kids.

II. He had a very considerable stores laid up in the cities of Judah. He pulled down his barns, and built larger (v. 12), *castles*

and cities of store, for arms and victuals. He was a man of business, and aimed at the public good in all his undertakings, either to preserve the peace or prepare for war.

III. He had the militia in good order. It was never in better since David modelled it. Five *lord-lieutenants* (if I may so call them) are here named, with the numbers of those under their command (the serviceable men, that were fit for war in their respective districts), three in Judah, and two in Benjamin. It is said of one of these great commanders, *Amasiah*, that *he willingly offered himself unto the Lord* (v. 16), not only to the king, to serve him in this post, but to the Lord, to glorify him in it. He was the most eminent among them for religion, he accepted the place, not for the honour, or power, or profit of it, but for conscience' sake towards God, that he might serve his country,. It was usual for great generals then to offer of their spoils to the Lord, 1 Chr. 26:26. But this good man offered himself first to the Lord, and then his dedicated things. The number of the soldiers under these five generals amounts to 1,160,000 men, a vast number for so small a compass of ground as Judah's and Benjamin's lot to furnish out and maintain. Abijah could bring into the field but 400,000 (ch. 13:3), Asa not 600,000 (ch. 14:8), yet Jehoshaphat has at command almost 1,200,000. But it must be considered, 1. That God had promised to make the seed of Abraham like the sand of the sea for number. 2. There had now been a long peace. 3. We may suppose that the city of Jerusalem was very much enlarged. 4. Many had come over to them from the kingdom of Israel (ch. 15:19), which would increase the numbers of the people. 5. Jehoshaphat was under a special blessing of God, which made his affairs to prosper greatly. The armies, we may suppose, were dispersed all the country over, and each man resided for the most part on his own estate; but they appeared often, to be mustered and trained, and were ready at call whenever there was occasion. The commanders waited on the king (v. 19) as officers of his court, privy-counsellors, and ministers of state. But, *lastly*, observe, It was not this formidable army that struck a terror upon the neighbouring nations, that restrained them from attempting any thing against Israel, or obliged them to pay tribute, but the fear of God which fell upon them when Jehoshaphat reformed his country and set up a preaching ministry in it, v. 10. The ordinances of God are more the strength and safety of a kingdom than its military force—its men of God more than its men of war.

Chapter 18

The story of this chapter we had just as it is here related in the story of the reign of Ahab king of Israel, 1 Ki. 22. There it looks more creditable to Ahab than any thing else recorded of him that he was in league with so good a man as Jehoshaphat; here it is a great blemish in the reign of Jehoshaphat that he thus connected himself with so bad a man as Ahab. Here is, I. The alliance he contracted himself with Ahab (v. 1). II. His consent to join with him in his expedition for the recovery of Remoth—Gilead out of the hands of the Syrians (v. 2, 3). III. Their consulting with the prophets, false and true, before they went (v. 4–27). IV. The success of their expedition. Jehoshaphat hardly escaped (v. 28–32) and Ahab received his death's wound (v. 33, 34).

Verses 1-3

Here is, I. Jehoshaphat growing greater. It was said before (ch. 17:5) that he had *riches and honour in abundance*; and here it is said again that his wealth and honour increased upon him by piety and good management.

II. Not growing wiser, else he would not have joined with Ahab, that degenerate Israelite, who had sold himself to work wickedness. What good could he get by a man that was so bad? What good could he do to a man that was so obstinately wicked—an idolater, a persecutor? With him he joined in affinity, that is, married his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah.

1. This was the worst match that ever was made by any of the house of David. I wonder what Jehoshaphat could promise himself by it. (1.) Perhaps pride made the match, as it does many a one, which speeds accordingly. His religion forbade him to marry his son to a daughter of any of the heathen princes that were about him—*Thou shalt not take their daughters to thy sons*; and, having riches and honour in abundance, he thought it a disparagement to marry him to a subject. A king's daughter it must be, and therefore Ahab's, little considering that Jezebel was her mother. (2.) Some think he did it in policy, hoping by this expedient to unite the kingdoms in his son, Ahab perhaps flattering him with hopes that he would make him his heir, when he intended no such thing.

2. This match drew Jehoshaphat, (1.) Into an intimate familiarity with Ahab. He paid him a visit at Samaria, and Ahab, proud of the honour which Jehoshaphat did him, gave him a very splendid entertainment, according to the splendour of those times: *He killed sheep and oxen for him, plain meat, in abundance*, v. 2. In this Jehoshaphat did not walk so closely as he should have done in the ways of his father David, who *hated the congregation of evil-doers and would not sit with the wicked* (Ps. 26:5), nor desired to *eat of their dainties*, Ps. 141:4. (2.) Into a league with Ahab against the Syrians. Ahab persuaded him to join forces with him in an expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, a city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. Did not Ahab know that that, and all the other cities of Israel, did of right belong to Jehoshaphat, as heir of the house of David? With what face then could he ask Jehoshaphat to assist him in recovering it for himself, whose title to the crown was usurped and precarious? Yet Jehoshaphat, an easy man, yields to go with him: *I am as thou art*, v. 3. Some men's kindnesses are dangerous, as well as their society infectious. The feast Ahab made for Jehoshaphat was designed only to wheedle him into the expedition.

The kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Verses 4-27

This is almost word for word the same with what we had, 1 Ki. 22. We will not repeat what was there said, nor have we much to add, but may take occasion to think, 1. Of the great duty of acknowledging God in all our ways *and enquiring at his word*, whatever we undertake. Jehoshaphat was not willing to proceed till he had done this, v. 4. By particular believing prayer, by an unbiased consultation of the scripture and our own consciences, and by an observant regard to the hints of providence, we may make such enquiries and very much to our satisfaction. 2. Of the great danger of bad company even to good men. Those that have more wisdom, grace, and resolution, cannot be sure that they can converse familiarly with wicked people and get no hurt by them. Jehoshaphat here, in complaisance to Ahab, sits in his robes, patiently hearing the false prophets speaking lies in the name of the Lord (v. 9), can scarcely find in his heart to give him a too mild and gentle reproof for hating a prophet of the Lord (v. 7), and dares not rebuke that false prophet who basely abused the faithful seer nor oppose Ahab who committed him to prison. Those who venture among the seats of the scornful cannot come off without a great deal of the guilt attaching to at least the omission of their duty, unless they have such measures of wisdom and courage as few can pretend to. 3. Of the unhappiness of those who are surrounded with flatterers, especially flattering prophets, who cry peace to them and prophesy nothing but smooth things. Thus was Ahab cheated into his ruin, and justly; for he hearkened to such, and preferred those that humoured him before a good prophet that gave him fair warning of his danger. Those do best for themselves that give their friends leave, and particularly their ministers, to deal plainly and faithfully with them, and take their reproofs not only patiently, but kindly. That counsel is not always best for us that is most pleasing to us. 4. Of the power of Satan, by the divine permission, *in the children of disobedience*. One lying spirit can make 400 lying prophets and make use of them to deceive Ahab, v. 21. The devil becomes a murderer by being a liar and destroys men by deceiving them. 5. Of the justice of God in giving those up to strong delusions, to believe a lie, who will not receive the love of the truth, but rebel against it, v. 21. Let the *lying spirit prevail* to entice those to their ruin that will not be persuaded to their duty and happiness. 6. Of the hard case of faithful ministers, whose lot it has often been to be hated, and persecuted, and ill-treated, for being true to their God and just and kind to the souls of men. Micaiah, for discharging a good conscience, was buffeted, imprisoned, and condemned to the bread and water of affliction. But he could with assurance appeal to the issue, as all those may do who are persecuted for their faithfulness, v. 27. The day will declare who is in the right and who in the wrong, when Christ will appear, to the unspeakable consolation of his persecuted people and the everlasting confusion of their persecutors, who will be made *to see in that day* (v. 24) what they will not now believe.

Verses 28-34

We have here, 1. Good Jehoshaphat exposing himself in his robes, thereby endangered, and yet delivered. We have reason to think that Ahab, while he pretended friendship, really aimed at Jehoshaphat's life, to take him off, that he might have the management of his successor, who was his son-in-law, else he would never have advised him to enter into the battle with his robes on, which was but to make himself an easy mark to the enemy: and, if really he intended that, it was as unprincipled a

piece of treachery as ever man was guilty of, and justly was he himself taken in the pit he digged for his friend. The enemy had soon an eye upon the robes, and vigorously attacked the unwary prince who now, when it was too late, wished himself in the habit of the poorest soldier, rather than in his princely raiment. he cried out, either to his friends to relieve him (but Ahab took no care of that), or to his enemies, to rectify their mistake, and let them know that he was not the king of Israel. Or perhaps he cried to God for succour and deliverance (to whom else should he cry?) and he found it was not in vain: *The Lord helped him out of his distress, by moving the captains to depart from him*, v. 31. God has all men's hearts in his hand, and turns them as he pleases, contrary to their own first intentions, to serve his purposes. Many are moved unaccountably both to themselves and others, but an invisible power moves them. 2. Wicked Ahab disguising himself, arming himself thereby as he thought securing himself, and yet slain, v. 33. No art, no arms, can save those whom God has appointed to ruin. What can hurt those whom God will protect? And what can shelter those whom God will destroy? Jehoshaphat is safe in his robes, Ahab killed in his armour; for the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong.

Chapter 19

We have here a further account of the good reign of Jehoshaphat, I. His return in peace to Jerusalem (v. 1). II. The reproof given him for his league with Ahab, and his acting in conjunction with him (v. 2, 3). III. The great care he took thereupon to reform his kingdom (v. 4). IV. The instructions he gave to his judges, both those in the country towns that kept the inferior courts (v. 5-7), and those in Jerusalem that sat in the supreme judicature of the kingdom (v. 8-11).

Verses 1-4

Here is, I. The great favour God showed to Jehoshaphat,

1. In bringing him back in safety from his dangerous expedition with Ahab, which had like to have cost him dearly (v. 1): *He returned to his house in peace*. Notice is taken of this to intimate, (1.) That he fared better than he had expected. He had been in imminent peril, and yet came home in peace. Whenever we return in peace to our houses we ought to acknowledge God's providence in preserving our going out and our coming in. But, if we have been kept through more than ordinary dangers, we are in a special manner bound to be thankful. There was but a step perhaps between us and death, and yet we are alive. (2.) That he fared better than he deserved. He was out of the way of his duty, had been out upon an expedition which he could not well account for to God and his conscience, and yet he returned in peace; for God is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, nor does he withdraw his protection every time we forfeit it. (3.) That he fared better than Ahab king of Israel did, who was brought home slain. Though Jehoshaphat had said to Ahab, *I am as thou art*, God distinguished him; for he knows and owns *the way of the righteous*, but *the way of the ungodly shall perish*. Distinguishing mercies are very obliging. here were two kings in the field together, *one taken and the other left*, one brought home in blood, the other in peace.

2. In sending him a reproof for his affinity with Ahab. It is a great mercy to be made sensible of our faults, and to be told in time wherein we have erred, that we may repent and amend the error before it be too late. The prophet by whom the reproof is sent is Jehu the son of Hanani. The father was an eminent prophet in the last reign, as appeared by Asa's putting him in the stocks for his plain dealing; yet the son was not afraid to reprove another king. Paul would have his son Timothy not only discouraged, but animated by his sufferings, 2 Tim. 3:11, 14. (1.) The prophet told him plainly that he had done very ill in joining with Ahab: *"Shouldst thou, a godly man, help the ungodly, give them a hand of fellowship, and lend them a hand of assistance?"* Or, *"Shouldst thou love those that hate the Lord; wilt thou lay those in thy bosom whom God beholds afar off?"* It is the black character of wicked people that they are *haters of God*, Rom. 1:30. Idolaters are so reputed in the second commandment; and therefore it is not for those that love God to take delight in them or contract an intimacy with them. *Do I not hate those*, says David, *that hate thee?* Ps. 139:21, 11. Those whom the grace of God has dignified ought not to debase themselves. Let God's people be of God's mind. (2.) That God was displeased with him for doing this: *"There is wrath upon thee from before the Lord*, and thou must, by repentance, make thy peace with him, or it will be the worse for thee." He did so, and God's anger was turned away. Yet his trouble, as recorded in the next chapter, was a rebuke to him for meddling with strife that belonged not to him. If he be so fond of war, he shall have enough of it. And the great mischief which his seed after him

fell into by the house of Ahab was the just punishment of his affinity with that house. (3.) Yet he took notice of that which was praiseworthy, as it is proper for us to do when we give a reproof (v. 3): "*There are good things found in thee; and therefore, though God be displeased with thee, he does not, he will not, cast thee off.*" His abolishing idolatry with a heart fixed for God and engaged to seek him was a good thing, which God accepted and would have him go on with, notwithstanding the displeasure he had now incurred.

II. The return of duty which Jehoshaphat made to God for this favour. he took the reproof well, was not wroth with the seer as his father was, but submitted. *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.* See what effect the reproof had upon him. 1. He *dwelt at Jerusalem* (v. 4), minded his own business at home, and would not expose himself by paying any more such visits to Ahab. *Rebuke a wise man, and he will be yet wiser,* and will take warning, Prov. 9:8, 9. 2. To atone (as I may say) for the visit he had paid to Ahab, he made a pious profitable visitation of his own kingdom: He *went out through the people* in his own person from Beersheba in the south to Mount Ephriam in the north, and *brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers,* that is, did all he could towards recovering them. (1.) By what the prophet said he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well pleasing to God, and therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations thus quicken us to our duty, and when the more we are praised for doing well the more vigorous we are in well-doing. (2.) Perhaps he found that his late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab and kingdom of Israel had had a bad influence upon his own kingdom. Many, we may suppose, were emboldened to revolt to idolatry when they saw even their reforming king so intimate with idolaters; and therefore he thought himself doubly obliged to do all he could to restore them. If we truly repent of our sin, we shall do our utmost to repair the damage we have any way done by it to religion or the souls of others. We are particularly concerned to recover those that have fallen into sin, or been hardened in it, by our example.

Verses 5-11

Jehoshaphat, having done what he could to make his people good, is here providing, if possible, to keep them so by the influence of a settled magistracy. He had sent preachers among them, to instruct them (ch. 17:7-9), and that provision did well; but now he saw it further requisite to send judges among them, to see the laws put in execution, and to be a terror to evil-doers. It is probable that there were judges up and down the country before, but either they neglected their business or the people slighted them, so that the end of the institution was not answered; and therefore it was necessary it should be new-modelled, new men employed, and a new charge given them. That is it which is here done.

I. He erected inferior courts of justice in the several cities of the kingdom, v. 5. The judges of these courts were to keep the people in the worship of God, to punish the violations of the law, and to decide controversies between man and man. Here is the charge he gave them (v. 6), in which we have,

1. The means he prescribes to them for the keeping of them closely to their duty; and these are two:—(1.) Great caution and circumspection: *Take heed what you do,* v. 6. And again, "*Take heed and do it,* v. 7. Mind your business; take heed of making any mistakes; be afraid of misunderstanding any point of law, or the matter of fact." Judges, of all men, have need to be cautious, because so much depends upon the correctness of their judgment. (2.) Great piety and religion: "*Let the fear of God*

be upon you, and that will be a restraint upon you to keep you from doing wrong (Neh. 5:15; Gen. 42:18) and an engagement to you to be active in doing the duty of your place." Let destruction from God be a terror to them, as Job speaks (Job 31:23), and then they will be a terror to none but evil-doers.

2. The motives he would have them consider, to engage them to faithfulness. These are three, all taken from God:—(1.) That from him they had their commission; his ministers they were. The powers that be are ordained by him and for him: "*You judge not for man, but for the Lord*; your business is to glorify him, and serve the interests of his kingdom among men." (2.) That his eye was upon them: "He is *with you in the judgment*, to take notice what you do and call you to an account if you do amiss." (3.) That he is the great example of justice to all magistrates: *There is no iniquity with him*, no bribery, nor respect of persons. Magistrates are called gods, and therefore must endeavour to resemble him.

II. He erected a supreme court at Jerusalem, which was advised with, and appealed to, in all the difficult causes that occurred in the inferior courts, and which gave judgment upon demurrers (to speak in the language of our own law), special verdicts, and writs of error. This court sat in Jerusalem; for *there were set the thrones of judgment*: there they would be under the inspection of the king himself. Observe,

1. The causes cognizable in this court; and they were of two kinds, as with us:—(1.) Pleas of the crown, called here *the judgment of the Lord*, because the law of God was the law of the realm. All criminals were charged with the breach of some part of his law and were said to offend against his peace, his crown and dignity. (2.) Common pleas, between party and party, called here *controversies* (v. 8) and *causes of their brethren* (v. 10), differences *between blood and blood* (this refers to Deu. 17:8), between the blood of the person slain and the blood of the man-slayer. Since the revolt of the ten tribes all the cities of refuge, except Hebron, belonged to the kingdom of Israel; and therefore, we may suppose, the courts of the temple, or the horns of the altar, were chiefly used as sanctuaries in that case, and hence the trial of homicides was reserved for the court at Jerusalem. If the inferior judges did not agree about the sense of any law or commandment, any statute or judgment, this court must determine the controversy.

2. The judges of this court were some of *the Levites and priests* that were most learned in the law, eminent for wisdom, and of approved integrity, and some of *the chief of the fathers of Israel, peers of the realm*, as I may call them, or persons of age and experience, that had been men of business, who would be the most competent judges of matters of fact, as the priests and Levites were of the sense of the law.

3. The two chiefs, or presidents, of this court. Amariah, the high priest, was to preside in ecclesiastical causes, to direct the court and be the mouth of it, or perhaps to be last consulted in cases which the judges themselves doubted of. Zebadiah, the prime-minister of that state, was to preside in all civil causes, v. 11. Thus there are diversities of gifts and operations, but all from the same Spirit, and for the good of the body. Some best understand *the matters of the Lord*, others *the king's matters*; neither can say to the other, *I have no need of thee*, for God's Israel has need of both; and, as every one has received the gift, so let him minister the same. Blessed be God both for magistrates and ministers, scribes and statesmen, men of books and men of business.

4. The inferior officers of the court. "Some of *the Levites* (such as had not abilities to qualify them for judges) *shall be officers before you,*" v. 11. They were to bring causes into the court, and to see the sentence of the judges executed. And these hands and feet were as necessary in their places as the eyes and heads (the judges) in theirs.

5. The charge which the king gave them. (1.) They must see to it that they acted from a good principle; they must do all in the *fear of the Lord*, setting him always before them, and then they would act faithfully, conscientiously, and *with a perfect upright heart*, v. 9. (2.) They must make it their great and constant care to prevent sin, *to warn the people that they trespass not against the Lord*, inspire them with a dread of sin, not only as hurtful to themselves and the public peace, but as an offence to God, and that which would bring wrath upon the people if they committed it and upon the magistrates if they did not punish it. "*This do, and you shall not trespass;*" this implies that those who have power in their hands contract the guilt of sin themselves if they do not use their power for the preventing and restraining of sin in others. "You trespass if you do not keep them from trespassing." (3.) They must act with resolution. "Deal courageously, and fear not the face of man; be bold and daring in the discharge of your duty, and, whoever is against you, God will protect you: *The Lord shall be with the good.*" Wherever he finds a good man, a good magistrate, he will be found a good God.

Chapter 20

We have here, I. The great danger and distress that Jehoshaphat and his kingdom were in from a foreign invasion (v. 1, 2). II. The pious course he took for their safety, by fasting, and praying, and seeking God (v. 3–13). III. The assurance which God, by a prophet, immediately gave them of victory (v. 14–17). IV. Their thankful believing reception of those assurances (v. 18–21). V. The defeat which God gave to their enemies thereupon (v. 22–25). VI. A solemn thanksgiving which they kept for their victory, and for a happy consequences of it (v. 26–30). VII. The conclusion of the reign of Jehoshaphat, not without some blemishes (v. 31–37).

Verses 1-13

We left Jehoshaphat, in the foregoing chapter, well employed in reforming his kingdom and providing for the due administration of justice and support of religion in it, and expected nothing but to hear of the peace and prosperity of his reign; but here we have him in distress, which distress, however, was followed by such a glorious deliverance as was an abundant recompence for his piety. If we meet with trouble in the way of duty, we may believe it is that God may have an opportunity of showing us so much the more of his marvellous loving-kindness. We have here,

I. A formidable invasion of Jehoshaphat's kingdom by the Moabites, and Ammonites, and their auxiliaries, v. 1. Jehoshaphat was surprised with the intelligence of it when the enemy had already entered his country, v. 2. What pretence they had to quarrel with Jehoshaphat does not appear; they are said to come *from beyond the sea*, meaning *the Dead Sea*, where Sodom had stood. It should seem, they marched through those of the ten tribes that lay beyond Jordan, and they gave them passage through their borders; so ungrateful were they to Jehoshaphat, who had lately put his hand to help them in recovering Ramoth-Gilead. Several nations joined in this confederacy, but especially *the children of Lot*, whom the rest helped, Ps. 83:6-8. The neighbouring nations had feared Jehoshaphat (ch. 17:10), but perhaps his affinity with Ahab had lessened him in their esteem, and they had some intimation that his God was displeased with him for it, which they fancied would give them an opportunity to make a prey of his kingdom.

II. The preparation Jehoshaphat made against the invaders. No mention is made of his mustering his forces, which yet it is most probable he did, for God must be trusted in the use of means. But his great care was to obtain the favour of God, and secure him on his side, which perhaps he was the more solicitous about because he had been lately told that there was *wrath upon him from before the Lord*, ch. 19:2. But he is of the mind of his father David. If we must be corrected, yet *let us not fall into the hands of man*. 1. He feared. Consciousness of guilt made him fear. Those that have least sin are the most sensible of it. The surprise added to the fright. Holy fear is a spur to prayer and preparation, Heb. 11:7. 2. *He set himself to seek the Lord*, and, in the first place, to make him his friend. Those that would seek the Lord so as to find him, and to find favour with him, must *set* themselves to seek him, must do it with fixedness of thought, with sincerity of intention, and with the utmost vigour and resolution to continue seeking him. 3. He *proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah*, appointed a day of humiliation and prayer, that they might join together in confessing their sins and *asking help of the Lord*. Fasting from bodily refreshments,

upon such extraordinary occasions, is a token of self-judging for the sins we have committed (we own ourselves unworthy of the bread we eat, and that God might justly withhold it from us), and of self-denial for the future; fasting *for* sin implies a resolution to fast *from* it, though it has been to us as a sweet morsel. Magistrates are to call their people to the duty of fasting and prayer upon such occasions, that it may be a national act, and so may obtain national mercies. 4. The people readily assembled out of all the cities of Judah in the court of the temple to join in prayer (v. 4), and they *stood before the Lord*, as beggars at his door, with their wives and children; they and their families were in danger, and therefore they bring their families with them to seek the Lord. "Lord, we are indeed a provoking people, that deserve to be abandoned to ruin; but here are little ones that are innocent, let not them perish in the storm." Nineveh was spared for the sake of the little ones, Jonah 4:11. The place they met in was the *house of the Lord*, before *the new court*, which was perhaps lately added to the former courts (that, as some think, which was called the *court of the women*); thus they came within reach of that gracious promise which God had made, in answer to Solomon's prayer, ch. 7:15. *My ears shall be attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.* 5. Jehoshaphat himself was the mouth of the congregation to God, and did not devolve the work upon his chaplains. Though the kings were forbidden to burn incense, they were allowed to pray and preach; as Solomon and Jehoshaphat here. The prayer Jehoshaphat prayed, upon this occasion, is here recorded, or part of it; and an excellent prayer it is. (1.) He acknowledges the sovereign dominion of the divine Providence, gives to God the glory of it and takes to himself the comfort of it (v. 6): "*Art not thou God in heaven?* No doubt thou art, which none of the gods of the heathen are; make it to appear then. Is not thy dominion, supreme over kingdoms themselves, and universal, over all kingdoms, even those of the heathen that know thee not? Control these heathen then; set bounds to their daring threatening insults. Is there not *in thy hand* the *power and might* which *none is able to withstand?* Lord, exert it on our behalf. Glorify thy own omnipotence." (2.) He lays hold on their covenant-relation to God and interest in him. "Thou that art *God in heaven* art the *God of our fathers* (v. 6) and *our God*, v. 7. Whom should we seek to, whom should we trust to, for relief, but to the God we have chosen and served?" (3.) He shows the title they had to this good land they were now in possession of; an indisputable title it was: "*Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend.* He was thy friend (this is referred to, James 2:23, to show the honour of Abraham, that *he was called the friend of God*); we are *his seed*, and hope to be *beloved for the father's sake*," Rom. 11:28; Deu. 7:8, 9. "We hold this land by grant from thee. Lord, maintain thy own grant, and warrant it against all unjust claims. Suffer us not to be *cast out of thy possession*. We are tenants; thou art our landlord; wilt thou not hold thy own?" v. 11. Those that use what they have for God may comfortably hope that he will secure it to them. (4.) He makes mention of the sanctuary, the temple they had built for God's name (v. 8), not as if that merited any thing at God's hand, for *of his own they gave him*, but it was such a token of God's favourable presence with them that they had promised themselves he would hear and help them when, in their distress, they cried to him before that house, v. 8, 9. "Lord, when it was built it was intended for the encouragement of our faith at such a time as this. Here thy name is; here we are. Lord, help us, for the glory of thy name." (5.) He pleads the ingratitude and injustice of his enemies: "We are such as it will be thy glory to appear *for*; they are such as it will be thy glory to appear *against*; for, [1.] They ill requite our ancient kindnesses. Thou *wouldst not let Israel invade them*, nor give them any disturbance." Deu. 2:5, 9, 19, *Meddle not with the*

Edomites, distress not the Moabites, come not nigh the children of Ammon, no not though they provoke you. "Yet now see how they invade us." We may comfortably appear to God against those that render us evil for good. [2.] "They break in upon our ancient rights. They come to cast us out of our possessions, and seize our land for themselves. O! our God, wilt thou not judge them?" v. 12. Wilt thou not give sentence against them, and execute it upon them?" The justice of God is the refuge of those that are wronged. (6.) He professes his entire dependence upon God for deliverance. Though he had a great army on foot, and well disciplined; yet he said, "We have no might against this great company, none without thee, none that we can expect any thing from without thy special presence and blessing, none to boast of, none to trust to; but our eyes are upon thee. We rely upon thee, and from thee is all our expectation. The disease seems desperate: we know not what to do, are quite at a loss, in a great strait. But this is a sovereign remedy, our eyes are upon thee, an eye of acknowledgment and humble submission, an eye of faith and entire dependence, an eye of desire and hearty prayer, an eye of hope and patient expectation. In thee, O God! do we put our trust; our souls wait on thee."

Verses 14-19

We have here God's gracious answer to Jehoshaphat's prayer; and it was a speedy answer. *While he was yet speaking God heard:* before the congregation was dismissed they had assurance given them that they should be victorious; for it is never in vain to seek God. 1. The spirit of prophecy came upon a Levite that was present, not in any place of eminency, but *in the midst of the congregation*, v. 14. The Spirit, like the wind, *blows where and on whom he listeth*. He was of the sons of Asaph, and therefore one of the singers; on that office God would put an honour. Whether he was a prophet before this or no is uncertain, most probably he was, which would make him the more regarded. There needed no sign, the thing itself was to be performed the very next day, and that would be confirmation enough to his prophecy. 2. He encouraged them to trust in God, though the danger was very threatening (v. 15): *"Be not afraid;* you have admitted fear enough to bring you to God, do not now admit that which will drive you to God, do not now admit that which will drive you from him again. *The battle is not yours;* it is not in your own strength, not for your own cause, that you engage; *the battle is God's:* he does and will, as you have desired, interest himself in the cause." 3. He gives them intelligence of the motions of the enemy, and orders them to march towards them, with particular directions where they should find them. *To-morrow (the day after the fast) go you down against them*, v. 16, 17. It is fit that he who commands the deliverance should command those for whom the deliverance is to be wrought, and give the necessary orders, both for time and place. 4. He assures them that they should be, not the glorious instruments, but the joyful spectators, of the total defeat of the enemy: "You shall not need to strike a stroke; the work shall be done to your hands; only stand still and see it," v. 17. As Moses said to Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13), *"God is with you,* who is able to do his work himself, and will do it. If the battle be his, the victory shall be his too." Let but the Christian soldier go out against his spiritual enemies, and the God of peace will *tread them under his feet* and make *him more than a conqueror*. 5. Jehoshaphat and his people received these assurances with faith, reverence, and thankfulness. (1.) They *bowed their heads*, Jehoshaphat first, and then all the people, *fell before the Lord, and worshipped*, receiving with a holy awe and fear of God this token of his favour, and saying with faith, *Be it unto us according to thy word*. (2.) They lifted up their voices in praise to God, v. 19. An active

faith can give thanks for a promise though it be not yet performed, knowing that God's bonds are as good as ready money. *God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice*, Ps. 60:5.

Verses 20-30

We have here the foregoing prayer answered and the foregoing promise performed, in the total overthrow of the enemies' forces and the triumph (for so it was rather than a victory) of Jehoshaphat's forces over them.

I. Never was army drawn out to the field of battle as Jehoshaphat's was. He had soldiers *ready prepared for war* (ch. 17:18), but here is no notice taken of their military equipment, their swords or spears, their shields or bows. But Jehoshaphat took care, 1. That faith should be their armour. As they went forth, instead of calling them to handle their arms, and stand to them, to keep ranks, observe orders, and fight valiantly, he bade them *believe in the Lord God* and give credit to his word in the mouth of his prophets, and assured them that they should *prosper and be established*, v. 20. That is true courage which faith inspires a man with; nor will any thing contribute more to the establishing of the heart in shaking times than a firm belief of the power, and mercy, and promise of God. The heart is *fixed* that thus *trusteth in the Lord*, and is kept in perfect peace. In our spiritual conflicts, this is the victory, this is the prosperity, even our faith. 2. That praise and thanksgiving should be their vanguard, v. 21. Jehoshaphat called a council of war, and it was resolved to appoint *singers to go out before the army*, to charge in the front, who had nothing else to do but to praise God, to praise his holiness, which is his beauty, to praise him as they did in the temple (that beauty of holiness) with that ancient and good doxology which eternity itself will not wear thread-bare, *Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever*. By this strange advance towards the field of battle, Jehoshaphat intended to express his firm reliance upon the word of God (which enabled him to triumph before the battle), to animate his own soldiers, to confound the enemy, and to engage God on their side; for praise pleases God better than all *burnt offering and sacrifice*.

II. Never was army so unaccountably destroyed as that of the enemy; not by thunder, or hail, or the sword of an angel, not by dint of sword, or strength of arm, or any surprising alarm, like that which Gideon gave the Midianites; but the Lord set ambushments against them, either hosts of angels, or, as bishop Patrick thinks, their own ambushments, whom God struck with such confusion that they fell upon their own friends as if they had been enemies, and *every one helped to destroy another*, so that *none escaped*. This God did *when his people began to sing and to praise* (v. 22), for he delights to furnish those with *matter* for praise that have *hearts* for it. We read of his being *angry at the prayers of his people* (Ps. 80:4), but never at their *praises*. When they did but begin the work of praise God perfected the work of their deliverance. What ground there was for their jealousies one of another does not appear, perhaps there was none; but so it was that the Ammonites and the Moabites fell foul upon the Edomites and cut them off, and then they fell out with one another and cut one another off, v. 23. Thus God often makes wicked people instruments of destruction to one another; and what alliances can be so firm as to keep those together whom God designs to dash in pieces one against another? See the mischievous consequences of divisions which neither of the contending parties can give any good account of the reason of. Those are wretchedly infatuated, to their ruin, that fall foul upon their friends as if they were enemies.

III. Never was spoil so cheerfully divided, for Jehoshaphat's army had nothing to do besides; the rest was done for them. When

they came to the view of this vast army, instead of finding living men to fight with, they found them all dead men, and their carcasses spread as dung upon the face of the earth, v. 24. See how rich God is in mercy to those that call upon him in truth, and how often he out-does him in truth, and how often he out-does the prayers and expectations of his people. Jehoshaphat and his people prayed to be delivered from being spoiled by the enemy; and God not only delivered them, but enriched them with the spoil of the enemy. The plunder of the field was very great and very rich. They found precious jewels with the dead bodies, which yet could not save them from being loathsome carcasses. The spoil *was more than they could carry away* at once, and they were *three days in gathering it*, v. 25. Now it appeared what was God's end in bringing this great army against Judah; it was to humble them and prove them, that he might *do them good in their latter end*. It seemed at first a disturbance to their reformation, but it proved a recompence of it.

IV. Never was victory celebrated with more solemn and enlarged thanksgivings. 1. They kept a day of praise in the camp, before they drew their forces out of the field. Many thanksgivings, no doubt, were offered up to God immediately; but on the fourth day they assembled in a valley, where they blessed God with so much zeal and fervency that that day's work gave a name to the place, the valley of *Berachah*, that is, *of blessing*, v. 26. The remembrance of this work of wonder was hereby perpetuated, for the encouragement of succeeding generations to trust in God. 2. Yet they did not think this enough, but came in solemn procession, all in a body, and Jehoshaphat at the head of them, to Jerusalem, that the country, as they passed along, might join with them in their praises, and that they might give thanks for the mercy where they had by prayer obtained it, *in the house of the Lord*, v. 27, 28. Praising God must not be the work of a day only; but our praises, when we have received mercy, must be often repeated, as our prayers were when we were in the pursuit of it. Every day we must bless God; as long as we live, and while we have any being, we must praise him, spending our time in that work in which we hope to spend our eternity. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments *in the courts of the Lord's house*, Ps. 116:19.

V. Never did victory turn to a better account than this; for, 1. Jehoshaphat's kingdom was hereby made to look very great and considerable abroad, v. 29. When they heard that God fought thus for Israel, they could not but say, *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun*, and *Happy art thou, O Israel!* It begat in the neighbours a reverence of God and a cautious fear of doing any injury to his people. It is dangerous fighting against those who have God with them. 2. It was made very easy and quiet at home, v. 30. (1.) They were quiet among themselves. Those that were displeased at the destroying of the images and groves were now satisfied, and obliged to own that since the God of Israel could deliver after this sort he only is to be worshipped, in that way only which he himself has appointed. (2.) They were quiet from the fear of insults from their neighbours, God having given them rest round about. And, if he give rest, who can give disturbance?

Verses 31-37

We are now drawing towards the close of the history of Jehoshaphat's reign, for a further account of which those who lived when this book was published were referred to an authentic history of it, written by Jehu the prophet (ch. 19:2), which was then extant, v. 34. This was the general character of his reign, that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, kept close to the worship of God himself and did what he could to keep his people close to it. But two things are here to be

lamented:-1. The people still retained a partiality for the high places, v. 33. Those that were erected to the honour of strange gods were taken away (ch. 17:6); but those where the true God was worshipped, being less culpable, were thought allowable, and Jehoshaphat was loth to disoblige the people so far as to take them away, for as yet they had not prepared their hearts to serve the God of their fathers. They complied with Jehoshaphat's reformation because they could not for shame do otherwise, but they were not hearty in it, did not direct their hearts to God in it, did not act in it from any good principle nor with any zeal or resolution: and the best magistrates cannot bring to pass what they would, in reformation, when the people are cool in it. 2. Jehoshaphat himself still retained a partiality for the house of Ahab, because he had married his son to a daughter of that family, though he had been plainly reprov'd for it and had like to have smarted for it. He saw and knew that Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, did very wickedly, and therefore could not expect to prosper; yet he joined himself with him, not in war, as with his father, but in trade, became his partner in an East India fleet bound for Ophir, v. 35, 36. There is an emphasis laid upon the time—*after this*, after God had done such great things for him, without any such scandalous and pernicious confederacies, given him not only victory, but wealth, yet after this to go and join himself with a wicked king was very ungrateful. *After God had given him such a deliverance as this should he again break God's commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations?* What could he expect but that *God should be angry with him?* Ezra 9:13, 14. Yet he sends to him, to show him his error and bring him to repentance, (1.) By a prophet, who foretold the blasting of his project, v. 37. And, (2.) By a storm, which broke the ships in the port before they set sail, by which he was warn'd to break off his alliance with Ahaziah; and it seems he took the warning, for, when Ahaziah afterwards press'd him to join with him, he *would not*, 1 Ki. 22:49. See how pernicious a thing it is to join in friendship and society with evil-doers. It is a hard matter to break off from it. A man may much better keep himself from being taken in the snare than recover himself out of it.

Chapter 21

Never surely did any kingdom change its king so much for the worse as Judah did, when Jehoram, one of the vilest, succeeded Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Thus were they punished for not making a better use of Jehoshaphat's good government, and their disaffectedness (or coldness at least) to his reformation, 20:33. Those that knew not now to value a good king are justly plagued with a bad one. Here is, I. Jehoram's elevation to the throne (v. 1-3). II. The wicked course he took to establish himself in it, by the murder of his brethren (v. 4). III. The idolatries and other wickedness he was guilty of (v. 5, 6, 11). IV. The prophecy of Elijah against him (v. 12-15). V. The judgments of God upon him, in the revolt of his subjects from him (v. 8-10) and the success of his enemies against him (v. 16, 17). VI. His miserable sickness and inglorious exit (v. 18-20). VII. The preservation of the house of David notwithstanding (v. 7).

Verses 1-11

We find here,

I. That Jehoshaphat was a very careful indulgent father to Jehoram. He had many sons, who are here named (v. 2), and it is said (v. 13) that they were better than Jehoram, had a great deal more wisdom and virtue, and lived up to their education, which he went counter to. They were very hopeful, and any of them more fit for the crown than he; and yet, because he was the first-born (v. 3), his father secured the kingdom to him, and portioned his brethren and disposed of them so as that they would be easy and give him no disturbance; as Abraham, when he made Isaac his heir, dismissed his other children with gifts. Herein Jehoshaphat was very kind and fair to his son, which might have obliged him to be respectful to him, and tread in the steps of so good a father. But it is no new thing for the children that have been most indulged by their parents to be least dutiful to them. Whether in doing this he acted wisely and well for his people, and was just to them, I cannot say. His birthright entitled him to a double portion of his father's estate, Deu. 21:17. But if he appeared utterly unfit for government (the end of which is the good of the people), and likely to undo all that his father had done, it would have been better perhaps to have set him aside, and taken the next that was hopeful, and not inclined as he was to idolatry. Power is a sacred thing, with which men may either do much good or much hurt; and therefore *Detur digniori—Let him that deserves it have it. Salus populi suprema lex—The security of the people is the first consideration.*

II. That Jehoram was a most barbarous brother to his father's sons. As soon as he had settled himself in the throne he slew all his brethren with the sword, either by false accusation, under colour of law, or rather by assassination. By some wicked hand or other he got them all murdered, pretending (it is likely) that he could not think himself safe in the government till they were taken out of the way. Those that mean ill themselves are commonly, without cause, jealous of those about them. The wicked fear where no fear is, or pretend to do so, in order to conceal their malice. Jehoram, it is likely, hated his brethren and slew them for the same reason that Cain hated Abel and slew him, because their piety condemned his impiety and won them that esteem with the people which he had lost. With them he slew divers of the princes of Israel, who adhered to them, or were likely to avenge their death. The princes of Judah, those who had taught the good knowledge of the Lord (ch. 17:7), are here

called princes of Israel, as before *fathers of Israel* (ch. 19:8), because they were Israelites indeed, men of integrity. The sword which the good father had put into their hands this wicked son sheathed in their bowels. Woe unto him that thus *foundeth a kingdom in blood* (Hab. 2:12); it will prove a foundation that will sink the superstructure.

III. That Jehoram was a most wicked king, who corrupted and debauched his kingdom, and ruined the reformation that his good father and grandfather had carried on: He *walked in the way of the house of Ahab* (v. 6), made high places, which the people were of themselves too forward to make, and did his utmost to set up idolatry again, v. 11. 1. As for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, where he kept his court, he easily drew them into his spiritual whoredom: He *caused them to commit fornication*, seducing them *to eat things sacrificed to idols*, Rev. 2:20. 2. The country people seem to have been brought to it with more difficulty; but those that would not be corrupted by flatteries were driven by force to partake in his abominable idolatries: He *compelled Judah thereto*. He used that power for the destruction of the church which was given him for the edification of it.

IV. That when he forsook God and his worship his subjects withdrew from their allegiance to him. 1. Some of the provinces abroad that were tributaries to him did so. The Edomites revolted (v. 8), and, though he chastised them (v. 9), yet he could not reduce them, v. 10. 2. One of the cities of his own kingdom did so. Libnah revolted (v. 10) and set up for a free state, as of old it had a king of its own, Jos. 12:15. And the reason is here given, not only why God permitted it, but why they did it; they shook off his government because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers, had become an idolater and a worshipper of false gods, and they could not continue subject to him without some danger of being themselves also drawn away from God and their duty. While he adhered to God they adhered to him; but, when he cast God off, they cast him off. Whether this reason will justify them in their revolt of no, it will justify God's providence which ordered it so.

V. That yet God was tender of his covenant with the house of David, and therefore would not destroy the royal family, though it was so wretchedly corrupted and degenerated, v. 7. These things we had before, 2 Ki. 8:19–22. The tenour of the covenant was that David's seed should be visited for their transgressions, but the covenant should never be broken, Ps. 89:30, etc.

Verses 12-20

Here we have, I. A warning from God sent to Jehoram by a writing from Elijah the prophet. By this it appears that Jehoram came to the throne, and showed himself what he was before Elijah's translation. It is true we find Elisha attending Jehoshaphat, and described as pouring water on the hands of Elijah, after the story of Elijah's translation (2 Ki. 3:11); but that might be, and that description might be given of him, while Elijah was yet on earth: and it is certain that that history is put out of its proper place, for we read of Jehoshaphat's death, and Jehoram's coming to the crown, before we read of Elijah's translation, 1 Ki. 22:50. We will suppose that the time of his departure was at hand, so that he could not go in person to Jehoram; but that, hearing of his great wickedness in murdering his brethren, he left this writing it is probable with Elisha, to be sent him by the first opportunity, that it might either be a means to reclaim him or a witness against him that he was fairly told what would be in the end hereof. The message is sent him in the name of *the Lord God of David his father* (v. 12), upbraiding him with his relation to David as that which, though it was his honour, was an aggravation of his degeneracy. 1. His crimes are plainly charged upon him—his departure from the good ways of God, in which he had been educated, and which he had been directed

and encouraged to walk in by the example of his good father and grandfather, who lived and died in peace and honour (v. 12)—his conformity to the ways of the house of Ahab, that impious scandalous family—his setting up and enforcing idolatry in his kingdom—and his murdering his brethren because they were better than himself, v. 13. These are the heads of the indictment against him. 2. Judgment is given against him for these crimes; he is plainly told that his sin should certainly be the ruin, (1.) Of his kingdom and family (v. 14): "With a heavy stroke, even that of war and captivity, *will the Lord smite thy people and thy children,*" etc. Bad men bring God's judgments upon all about them. His people justly suffer because they had complied with his idolatry, and his wives because they had drawn him to it. (2.) Of his health and life: "Thou shalt have great sickness, very painful and tedious, and at last mortal," v. 15. This he is warned of before, that his blood might be upon his own head, the watchman having delivered his soul; and that when these things so particularly foretold, came to pass, it might appear that they did not come by chance, but as the punishment of his sins, and were so intended. And now if, as he had learned of Ahab to do wickedly, he had but learned even of Ahab to humble himself upon the receipt of this threatening message from Elijah—if, like (1 Ki. 21:27), he had *rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted*—who knows but, like him, he might have obtained at least a reprieve? But it does not appear that he took any notice of it; he threw it by as waste-paper; Elijah seemed to him *as one that mocked*. But those that will not believe shall feel.

II. The threatened judgments brought upon him because he slighted the warning. No marvel that hardened sinners are not frightened from sin and to repentance by the threatenings of misery in another world, which is future and out of sight, when the certain prospect of misery in this world, the sinking of their estates and the ruin of their healths, will not restrain them from vicious courses.

1. See Jehoram here stripped of all his comforts. God *stirred up the spirit of his neighbours* against him, who had loved and feared Jehoshaphat, but hated and despised him, looking upon it as a scandalous thing for a nation to change their gods. Some occasion or other they took to quarrel with him, invaded his country, but, as it should seem, fought neither against small nor great, but the king's house only; they made directly to that, and *carried away all the substance that was found in it*. No mention is made of their carrying any away captive but the *king's wives and his sons*, v. 17. Thus God made it evident that the controversy was with him and his house. Here it is only said, They *carried away* his sons; but we find (ch. 22:1) that they *slew them all*. Blood for blood. He had slain all his brethren, to strengthen himself; and now all his sons are slain but one, and so he is weakened. If he had not been of the house of David, that one would not have escaped. When Jeroboam's house, and Baasha's, and Ahab's, were destroyed, there was none left; but David's house must not be wholly extirpated, though sometimes wretchedly degenerated, because a blessing was in it, no less a blessing than that of the Messiah.

2. See him tormented with *sore diseases and of long continuance*, such as were threatened in the law against those that would not *fear the Lord their God*, Deu. 28:58, 59. His disease was very grievous. It lay in his bowels, producing a continual griping, and with this there was a complication of other sore diseases. The affliction was moreover very tedious. Two years he continued ill, and could get no relief; for the disease was incurable, though he was in the prime of life, not forty years old. Asa, whose heart was perfect with God though in some instances he stepped aside, was diseased only in his feet; but Jehoram,

whose heart was wicked, was struck in his inwards, and he that had no bowels of compassion towards his brethren was so plagued in his bowels that they fell out. Even good men, and those who are very dear to God, may be afflicted with diseases of this kind; but to them they are fatherly chastisements, and by the support of divine consolations the soul may dwell at ease even then when the body lies in pain. These sore diseases seized him just after his house was plundered and his wives and children were carried away. (1.) Perhaps his grief and anguish of mind for that calamity might occasion his sickness, or at least contribute to the heightening of it. (2.) By this sickness he was disabled to do any thing for the recovery of them or the revenge of the injury done him. (3.) It added, no doubt, very much to his grief, in his sickness, that he was deprived of the society of his wives and children and that all the substance of his house was carried away. To be sick and poor, sick and solitary, but especially to be sick and in sin, sick and under the curse of God, sick and destitute of grace to bear the affliction, and of comfort to counter-balance it—is a most deplorable case.

3. See him buried in disgrace. He reigned but eight years, and then *departed without being desired*, v. 20. Nobody valued him while he lived, none lamented him when he died, but all wished that no greater loss might ever come to Jerusalem. To show what little affection or respect they had for him, they would not *bury him in the sepulchres of the kings*, as thinking him unworthy to be numbered among them who had governed so ill. The excluding of his body from the sepulchres of his fathers might be ordered by Providence as an intimation of the everlasting separation of the souls of the wicked after death, from the spirits of just men. This further disgrace they put upon him, that they *made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers*, v. 19. His memory was far from being sweet and precious to them, and therefore they did not honour it with any sweet odours or precious spices, though we may suppose that his dead body, after so long and loathsome a disease, needed something to perfume it. The generality of the people, though prone to idolatry, yet had no true kindness for their idolatrous kings. Wickedness and profaneness make men despicable even in the eyes of those who have but little religion themselves, while natural conscience itself often gives honour to those who are truly pious. Those that *despise God shall be lightly esteemed*, as Jehoram was.

Chapter 22

We read, in the foregoing chapter, of the carrying away of Jehoram's sons and his wives; but here we find one of his sons and one of his wives left, his son Ahaziah and his wife Athaliah, both reserved to be the shame and plague of his family. I. Ahaziah was the shame of it as a partaker, 1. In the sin, and, 2. In the destruction, of the house of Ahab (v. 1-9). II. Athaliah was the plague of it, for she destroyed all the seed-royal, and usurped the throne (v. 10-12).

Verses 1-9

We have here an account of the reign of Ahaziah, a short reign (of one year only), yet long enough, unless it had been better. He was called *Jeho-ahaz* (ch. 21:17); here he is called *Ahaz-iah*, which is the same name and of the same signification, only the words of which it is compounded are transposed. He is here said to be forty-two years old when he began to reign (v. 2), which could not be, for his father, his immediate predecessor, was but forty when he died, and it is said (2 Ki. 8:26) that he was twenty-two years old when *he began to reign*. Some make this forty-two to be the age of his mother Athaliah, for in the original it is, *he was the son of forty-two years*, that is, the son of a mother that was of that age; and justly is her age put for his, in reproach to him, because she managed him, and did what she would—she, in effect, reigned, and he had little more than the title of king. Many good expositors are ready to allow that this, with some few more such difficulties, arise from the mistake of some transcriber, who put forty-two for twenty-two, and the copies by which the error should have been corrected might be lost. Many ancient translations read it here twenty-two. Few books are now printed without some *errata*, yet the authors do not therefore disown them, nor are the errors of the press imputed to the author, but the candid reader amends them by the sense, or by comparing them with some other part of the work, as we may easily do this.

The history of Ahaziah's reign is briefly summed up in two clauses, v. 3, 4. His mother and her relations were his counselors to do wickedly, and it was to his destruction.

I. He did wickedly. Though by a special providence of God he was preserved alive, when all his brethren were slain, and reserved for the crown, notwithstanding he was the youngest of them—though *the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, when they had buried his father ingloriously, made him king, in hopes he would take warning by that not to tread in his steps, but would do better for himself and his kingdom—yet he was not influenced by the favours either of God or man, but *walked in the way of the house of Ahab, did evil in the sight of the Lord* like them (v. 3, 4), that is, he worshipped, Baalim and Ashtaroth, supposing (as the learned bishop Patrick thinks) that by these demons, as mediators, they might have easier access to the supreme *Numen*, the God of Israel, or that *these they might resort to at all times and for all matters*, as being *nearer at hand*, and *not of so high a dignity*, but of a *middle nature* between the immortal God and mortal men—deified heroes; so they worshipped them as the church of Rome does saints and angels. That was sufficiently bad; but I wish there was no reason to suspect worse. I am apprehensive that they looked upon Jehovah, the God of their fathers, to be altogether such a one as these Baalim, and them to be as great and as good as he, nay, upon one account, more eligible inasmuch as these Baalim encouraged in their worshippers all manner of lewdness and sensuality, which the God of Israel strictly forbade.

II. He was counselled by his mother and her relations to do so. *She was his counsellor* (v. 3) and so were *they, after the death of his father*, v. 4. While his father lived *he* took care to keep him to idolatry; but, when he was dead, the house of Ahab feared lest his father's miserable end should deter him from it, and therefore they were very industrious to keep him closely to it, and to make him *seven times* more a *child of hell than themselves*. The counsel of the ungodly is the ruin of many young persons when they are setting out in the world. This young prince might have had better advice if he had pleased from the princes and the judges, the priests and the Levites, that had been famous in his good grandfather's time for teaching in the knowledge of God; but the house of Ahab humoured him, and *he walked after their counsel*, gave himself up to be led by them, and did just as they would have him. Thus do those debase and destroy themselves that forsake the divine guidance.

III. He was counselled by them to his destruction. So it proved. Those that counsel us to do wickedly counsel us to our destruction; while they fawn, and flatter, and pretend friendship, they are really our worst enemies. Those that debauch young men destroy them. It was bad enough that they exposed him to the sword of the Syrians, drawing him in to join with Joram king of Israel in an expedition to Ramoth-Gilead, where Joram was wounded, an expedition that was not for his honour. Those that give us bad counsel in the affairs of religion, if regarded by us, may justly be made of God our counsellors to do foolishly in our own affairs. But that was not all: by engaging him in an intimacy with Joram king of Israel, they involved him in the common ruin of the house of Ahab. He came on a visit to Joram (v. 6) just at the time that Jehu was executing the judgment of God upon that idolatrous family, and so was cut off with them, v. 7-9. Here, 1. See and dread the mischief of bad company—of joining in with sinners. If not the infection, yet let the destruction be feared. *Come out from Babylon*, that falling house, Rev. 18:4. 2. See and acknowledge the justice of God. His providence brought Ahaziah, just at this fatal juncture, to see Joram, that he might fall with him and be taken as in a snare. This we had an account of before, 2 Ki. 9:27, 28. It is here added that he was decently buried (not as Jehoram, whose dead body was cast into Naboth's vineyard, 2 Ki. 9:26), and the reason given is because he was the son (that is, the grandson) of good Jehoshaphat, *who sought the Lord with his heart*. Thus is *he* remembered with honour long after his death, and some respect shown even to his degenerate unworthy seed for his sake. *The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot*.

Verses 10-12

We have here what we had before, 2 Ki. 11:1, etc. 1. A wicked woman endeavouring to destroy the house of David, that she might set up a throne for herself upon the ruins of it. Athaliah barbarously cut off all the seed-royal (v. 10), perhaps intending to transmit the crown of Judah after herself to some of her own relations, that though her family was cut off in Israel by Jehu it might be planted in Judah. 2. A good woman effectually preserving it from being wholly extirpated. One of the late king's sons, a child of a year old, was rescued from among the dead, and saved alive by the care of Jehoiada's wife (v. 11, 12), that a *lamp might be ordained for God's anointed*; for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

Chapter 23

Six years bloody Athaliah had tyrannised; in this chapter we have her deposed and slain, and Joash, the rightful heir, enthroned. We had the story before nearly as it is here related, 2 Ki. 11:4, etc. I. Jehoiada prepared the people for the king, acquainted them with his design, armed them, and appointed them their posts (v. 1–10). II. He produced the king to the people, crowned him, and anointed him (v. 11). III. He slew the usurper (v. 12–15). IV. He reformed the kingdom, re-established religion, and restored the civil government (v. 16–21).

Verses 1-11

We may well imagine the bad posture of affairs in Jerusalem during Athaliah's six years' usurpation, and may wonder that God permitted it and his people bore it so long; but after such a dark and tedious night the returning day in this revolution was the brighter and the more welcome. The continuance of David's seed and throne was what God had sworn by his holiness (Ps. 89:35), and an interruption was no defeasance; the stream of government here runs again in the right channel. The instrument and chief manager of the restoration is Jehoiada, who appears to have been, 1. A man of great prudence, who reserved the young prince for so many years till he was fit to appear in public, and till the nation had grown weary of the usurper, who prepared his work beforehand, and then effected it with admirable secrecy and expedition. When God has work to do he will qualify and animate men for it. 2. A man of great interest. The captains joined with him, v. 1. The Levites and the chief of the fathers of Israel came at his call to Jerusalem (v. 2) and were there ready to receive his orders. See what a command wisdom and virtue will give men. *The Levites and all Judah did as Jehoiada commanded* (v. 8), and, which is strange, all that were entrusted with the secret kept their own counsel till it was executed. Thus *the words of the wise are heard in quiet*, Eccl. 9:17. 3. A man of great faith. It was not only common equity (much less his wife's relation to the royal family) that put him upon this undertaking, but a regard to the word of God, and the divine entail of the crown (v. 3): *The king's son shall reign, must reign, as the Lord hath said*. His eye to the promise, and dependence upon that, added a great deal of glory to this undertaking. 4. A man of great religion. This matter was to be done in the temple, which might occasion some breach of rule, and the necessity of the case might be thought to excuse it; but he gave special order that none of the people should come into the house of the Lord, but the priests and Levites only, who were holy, upon pain of death, v. 6, 7. Never let sacred things be profaned, no, not for the support of civil rights. 5. A man of great resolution. When he had undertaken this business he went through with it, *brought out the king, crowned him, and gave him the testimony*, v. 11. He ventured his head, but it was in a good cause, and therefore he went on boldly. It is here said that his sons joined with him in anointing the young king. One of them, it is likely, was that Zechariah whom Joash afterwards put to death for reproving him (ch. 24:20), which was so much the more ungrateful because he bore a willing part in anointing him.

Verses 12-21

Here we have, I. The people pleased, v. 12, 13. When the king stood at his pillar, whose right it was to stand there, *all the people of the land rejoiced to see a rod sprung out of the stem of Jesse*, Isa. 11:1. When it seemed a withered root in a dry

ground, to see what they despaired of ever seeing—a king of the house of David, what a pleasing surprise was it to them! They ran in transports of joy to see this sight, praised the king, and praised God, for they had with them such as *taught to sing praise*.

II. Athaliah slain. She ran upon the point of the sword of justice; for, imagining her interest much better than it was, she ventured *into the house of the Lord* at that time, and cried, *Treason, treason!* But nobody seconded her, or sided with her. The pride of her heart deceived her. She thought all her own, whereas none were cordially so. Jehoiada, as protector in the king's minority, ordered her to be slain (v. 14), which was done immediately (v. 15), only care was taken that she should not be *slain in the house of the Lord*, that sacred place must not be so far disgraced, nor that wicked woman so far honoured.

III. The original contract agreed to, v. 16. In the *Kings* it is said that Jehoiada made a covenant between the *Lord*, the people, and the king, 2 Ki. 11:17. Here it is said to be between *himself*, the people, and the king; for he, as God's priest, was his representative in this transaction, or a sort of mediator, as Moses was. The indenture was tripartite, but the true intent and meaning of the whole was that *they should be the Lord's people*. God covenanted by Jehoiada to take them for his people; the king and people covenanted with him to be his; and then the king covenanted with the people to govern them *as the people of God*, and the people with the king to be subject to him *as the Lord's people*, in his fear and for his sake. Let us look upon ourselves and one another as *the Lord's people*, and this will have a powerful influence upon us in the discharge of all our duty both to God and man.

IV. Baal destroyed, v. 17. They would not have done half their work if they had only destroyed the usurper of the *king's* right, and not the usurper of *God's* right—if they had asserted the honour of the throne, and not that of the altar. The greatest grievance of Athaliah's reign was the bringing in of the worship of Baal, and supporting of that; therefore that must be abolished in the first place. Down with Baal's house, his altars, his images; down with them all, and let the blood of his priests be mingled with his sacrifices; for God had commanded that seducers to idolatry should be put to death, Deu. 13:5, 6.

V. The temple service revived, v. 18, 19. This had been neglected in the last reigns, the priest and people wanting either power or zeal to keep it up when they had princes that were disaffected to it. But Jehoiada restored *the offices of the house of the Lord*, which in the late times had been disturbed and invaded, to the proper course and proper hands. 1. He appointed the priests to their courses, for the due offering of sacrifices, according to the law of Moses. 2. The singers to theirs, according to the appointment of David. The sacrifices (it should seem) were *offered with rejoicing and singing*, and with good reason. We *joy in God* when we *receive the atonement*, Rom. 5:11. 3. The porters were put in their respective posts as David ordered (v. 19), and their office was to take care that none who were upon any account ceremonially unclean should be admitted into the courts of the temple.

VI. The civil government re-established, v. 20. They brought the king in state to his own palace, and set him *upon the throne of the kingdom*, to give law, and give judgment, either in his own person or by Jehoiada his tutor. Thus was this happy revolution perfected. The generality of the people rejoiced in it, and the rest were quiet and made no opposition, v. 21. When the Son of David is enthroned in the soul all is quiet and springs of joy are opened.

Chapter 24

We have here the history of the reign of Joash, the progress of which, and especially its termination, were not of a piece with its beginning, nor shone with so much lustre. How wonderfully he was preserved for the throne, and placed in it, we read before; now here we are told how he began in the spirit, but ended in the flesh. I. In the beginning of his time, while Jehoiada lived, he did well; particularly, he took care to put the temple in good repair (v. 1–14). II. In the latter end of his time, after Jehoiada's death, he apostatized from God, and his apostasy was his ruin. 1. He set up the worship of Baal again (v. 15–18), though warned to the contrary (v. 19). 2. He put Zechariah the prophet to death because he reprov'd him for what he had done (v. 20–22). 3. The judgments of God came upon him for it. The Syrians invaded him (v. 23, 24). He was struck with sore diseases; his own servants conspired against him and slew him; and, as a mark of infamy upon him, he was not buried in the burying-place of the kings (v. 25–27).

Verses 1-14

This account of Joash's good beginnings we had as it stands here 2 Ki. 12:1, etc., though the latter part of this chapter, concerning his apostasy, we had little of there. What is good in men we should take all occasions to speak of and often repeat it; what is evil we should make mention of but sparingly, and no more than is needful. We shall here only observe, 1. That it is a happy thing for young people, when they are setting out in the world, to be under the direction of those that are wise and good and faithful to them, as Joash was under the influence of Jehoiada, during whose time he *did that which was right*. Let those that are young reckon it a blessing to them, and not a burden and check upon them, to have those with them that will caution them against that which is evil and advise and quicken them to that which is good; and let them reckon it not a mark of weakness and subjection, but of wisdom and discretion, to hearken to such. He that will not be counselled cannot be helped. It is especially prudent for young people to take advice in their marriages, as Joash did, who left it to his guardian to choose him his wives, because Jezebel and Athaliah had been such plagues, v. 3. This is a turn of life which often proves either the making or marring of young people, and therefore should be attended to with great care. 2. Men may go far in the external performances of religion, and keep long to them, merely by the power of their education and the influence of their friends, who yet have no hearty affection for divine things nor any inward relish of them. Foreign inducements may push men on to that which is good who are not actuated by a living principle of grace in their hearts. 3. In the outward expressions of devotion it is possible that those who have only the form of godliness may out-strip those who have the power of it. Joash is more solicitous and more zealous about the repair of the temple than Jehoiada himself, whom he reprov's for his remissness in that matter, v. 6. It is easier to build temples than to be temples to God. 4. The repairing of churches is a good work, which all in their places should promote, for the decency and conveniency of religious assemblies. The learned tell us that in the Christian church, anciently, part of the tithes were applied that way. 5. Many a good work would be done that now lies undone if there were but a few active men to stir in it and to put it forward. When Joash found the money did not come in as he expected in one way he tried another way, and that answered the intention. Many have honesty enough to follow that have not zeal enough to lead in

that which is good. The throwing of money into a chest, through a hole in the lid of it, was a way that had not been used before, and perhaps the very novelty of the thing made it a successful expedient for the raising of money; a great deal was thrown in and with a great deal of cheerfulness: they all rejoiced, v. 10. An invention to please people's humour may sometimes bring them to their duty. Wisdom herein is profitable to direct. 6. Faithfulness is the greatest praise and will be the greatest comfort of those that are entrusted with public treasure or employed in public business. The king and Jehoiada faithfully paid the money to the workmen, who faithfully did the work, v. 12, 13.

Verses 15-27

We have here a sad account of the degeneracy and apostasy of Joash. God had done great things for him; he had done something for God; but now he proved ungrateful to his God and false to the engagements he had laid himself under to him. *How has the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* Here we find,

I. The occasions of his apostasy. When he did that which was right it was *not with a perfect heart*. He never was sincere, never acted from principle, but in compliance to Jehoiada, who had helped him to the crown, and because he had been protected in the temple and rose upon the ruins of idolatry; and therefore, when the wind turned, he turned with it. 1. His good counsellor left him, and was by death removed from him. It was a mercy to him and his kingdom that Jehoiada lived so long-130 years (v. 15), by which it appears that he was born in Solomon's time, and had lived six entire reigns before this. It was an encouragement to him to go on in that good way which Jehoiada had trained him up in to see what honour was done to Jehoiada at his death: *They buried him among the kings*, with this honourable encomium (perhaps it was part of the inscription on his grave-stone), that *he had done good in Israel*. Judah is called *Israel*, because, the other tribes having revolted from God, they only were Israelites indeed. Note, It is the greatest honour to do good in our generations, and those who *do that which is good shall have praise of the same*. He had done good towards God; not that any man's goodness can extend unto him, but he had done good towards his house, in reviving the temple service, ch. 23:8. Note, Those do the greatest good to their country that lay out themselves in their places to promote religion. Well, Jehoiada finished his course with honour; but the little religion that Joash had was all buried in his grave, and, after his death, both king and kingdom miserably degenerated. See how much one head may sustain, and what a great judgment to any prince or people the death of godly, zealous, useful men is. See how necessary it is that, as our Saviour speaks, *we have salt in ourselves*, that we act in religion from an inward principle, which will carry us on through all changes. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, a friend, will not involve the loss of our religion. 2. Bad counsellors got about him, insinuated themselves into his affections, wheedled him, flattered him, *made obeisance* to him, and, instead of condoling, congratulated him upon the death of his old tutor, as his release from the discipline he had been so long under, unworthy a man, a king. They tell him he must be priest-ridden no longer, he is now discharged from *grave lessons and restraints*, he may do as he pleases: and (would you think it?) the princes of Judah were the men that were so industrious to debauch him, v. 17. His father and grandfather were corrupted by the house of Ahab, from whom no better could be expected. But that the princes of Judah should be seducers to their king was very sad. But those that incline to the *counsels of the ungodly* will never want ungodly counsellors. They *made obeisance to the king*, flattered him into

an opinion of his absolute power, promised to stand by him in making his royal will and pleasure pass for a law, any divine precept or institution to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding. And he hearkened to them: their discourse pleased him, and was more agreeable than Jehoiada's dictates used to be. Princes and inferior people have been many a time thus flattered into their ruin by those who have promised them liberty and dignity, but who have really brought them into the greatest servitude and disgrace.

II. The apostasy itself: *They left the house of God, and served groves and idols*, v. 18. The princes, it is likely, had a request to the king, which they tell him they durst not offer while Jehoiada lived; but now they hope it will give no offence: it is that they may set up the groves and idols again which were thrown down in the beginning of his reign, for they hate to be always confined to the dull old-fashioned service of the temple. And he not only gave them leave to do it themselves, but he joined with them. The king and princes, who, a little while ago, were repairing the temple, now forsook the temple; those who had pulled down groves and idols now themselves served them. So inconstant a thing is man and so little confidence is to be put in him!

III. The aggravations of this apostasy and the additions of guilt to it. God *sent prophets to them* (v. 19) to reprove them for their wickedness, and to tell them what would be in the end thereof, and so *to bring them again unto the Lord*. It is the work of ministers to bring people, not to themselves, but to God—to bring those again to him who have gone a whoring from him. In the most degenerate times God *left not himself without witness*; though they had dealt very disingenuously with God, yet he sent prophets to them to convince and instruct them, and to assure them that they should find favour with him if yet they would return; for he would rather sinners should *turn and live* than *go on and die*, and those that perish shall be left inexcusable. The prophets did their part: *they testified against them*; but, few or none *received their testimony*.

1. They slighted all the prophets; they would not give ear, were so strangely wedded to their idols that no reproofs, warnings, threatenings, nor any of the various methods which the prophets took to convince them would reclaim them. Few would hear them, fewer would heed them, but fewest of all would believe them or be governed by them.

2. They slew one of the most eminent, *Zechariah the son of Jehoiada*, and perhaps others. Concerning him observe,

(1.) The message which he delivered to them in the name of God, v. 20. The people were assembled in the court of the temple (for they had not quite left it), probably on occasion of some solemn feast, when this Zechariah, being filled with the spirit of prophecy, and known (it is likely) to be a prophet, stood up in some of the desks that were in the court of the priests, and very plainly, but without any provoking language, told the people of their sin and what would be the consequences of it. He did not impeach any particular persons, nor predict any particular judgments, as sometimes the prophets did, but as inoffensively as possible reminded them of what was written in the law. Let them but look into their Bibles, and there they would find, [1.] The precept they broke: *"You transgress the commandments of the Lord, you know you do so, in serving groves and idols: and why will you so offend God and wrong yourselves?"* [2.] The penalty they incurred: *"You know, if the word of God be true, you cannot prosper in this evil way; never expect to do ill and fare well. Nay, you find already that because you have forsaken the Lord he hath forsaken you, as he told you he would,"* Deu. 29:25; 31:16,17. This is the work of ministers, by the word of God,

as a lamp and a light, to expose the sin of men and expound the providences of God.

(2.) The barbarous treatment they gave him for his kindness and faithfulness in delivering this message to them, v. 21. By the conspiracy of the princes, or some of their party, and *by the commandment of the king*, who thought himself affronted by this fair warning, they stoned him to death immediately, not under colour of law, accusing him as a blasphemer, a traitor, or a false prophet, but in a popular tumult, *in the court of the house of the Lord*—as horrid a piece of wickedness as perhaps any we read of in all the history of the kings. The *person* was sacred—a priest, the *place* sacred—the court of the temple (the inner court, *between the porch and the altar*), the *message* yet more sacred, and we have reason to think that they knew it came from the spirit of prophecy. The reproof was just, the warning fair, both backed with scripture, and the delivery very gentle and tender; and yet so impudently and daringly do they defy God himself that nothing less than the blood of the prophet can satisfy their indignation at the prophecy. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and tremble, O earth!* that ever such villany should be committed by men, by Israelites, in contempt and violation of every thing that is just, honourable, and sacred—that a king, a king in covenant with God, should command the murder of one whom it was his office to protect and countenance! The Jews say there were seven transgressions in this; for they killed a priest, a prophet, a judge, they shed innocent blood, and polluted the court of the temple, the sabbath, and the day of expiation: for on that day, their tradition says, this happened.

(3.) The aggravation of this sin, that this Zechariah, who suffered martyrdom for his faithfulness to God and his country, was the son of Jehoiada, who had done so much good in Israel, and particularly had been as a father to Joash, v. 22. The affront done by it to God, and the contempt put on religion, are not so particularly taken notice of as the ingratitude there was in it to the memory of Jehoiada. He remembered not the kindness of the father, but slew the son for doing his duty, and what the father would have done if he had been there. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse.

(4.) The dying martyr's prophetic imprecation of vengeance upon his murderers: *The Lord look upon it, and require it!* This came not from a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of prophecy: *He will require it.* This would be the continual cry of the blood they shed, as Abel's blood cried against Cain: "Let the God to whom vengeance belongs demand blood for blood. He will do it, for he is righteous." This precious blood was quickly reckoned for in the judgments that came upon this apostate prince; it came into the account afterwards in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans—their misusing the prophets was that which brought upon them ruin without remedy (ch. 36:16); nay, our Saviour makes the persecutors of him and his gospel answerable for the blood of this Zechariah; so loud, so long, does the blood of the martyrs cry. See Mt. 23:35. Such as this is the cry of the souls under the altar (Rev. 6:10), *How long ere thou avenge our blood?* For it shall not always go unrevenged.

IV. The judgments of God which came upon Joash for this aggravated wickedness of his. 1. A small army of Syrians made themselves masters of Jerusalem, destroyed the princes, plundered the city, and sent the spoil of it to Damascus, v. 23, 24. God's people, while they kept in with God, had often been conquerors when the enemy had the advantage of the greater number; but now, on the contrary, an inconsiderable handful of Syrians routed a *very great host of Israelites, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers*, and then they were not only put upon the level with their enemies, but opposed them with the utmost disadvantage; for their God not only departed from them, but *turned to be their enemy and fought against*

them. The Syrians were employed as instruments in God's hand to *execute judgments against Joash*, though they little thought so, Isa. 10:6, 7, and see Deu. 32:30. 2. God smote him with great diseases, of body, or mind, or both, either like his grandfather (ch. 21:18), or, like Saul, an evil spirit from God troubling him. While he was plagued with the Syrians he thought that, if he could but get clear of them, he should do well enough. But, before they departed from him, God smote him with diseases. If vengeance pursue men, the end of one trouble will but be the beginning of another. 3. His own servants conspired against him. Perhaps he began to hope his disease would be cured—he was but a middle-aged man and might recover it; but *he that cometh up out of the pit shall fall into the snare.* When he thought he should escape death by sickness he met it by the sword. They slew him in his bed *for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada*, by which it should seem that he did not only slay Zechariah, but others of the sons of Jehoiada for his sake. Perhaps those that slew him *intended* to take vengeance for that blood; but, whether they did or not, this was what God intended in permitting them to slay him. Those that drink the blood of the saints shall have their own blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. The regicides are here named (v. 26), and it is observable that the mothers of them both were foreigners, one an Ammonitess and the other a Moabitess. The idolatrous kings, it is likely, countenanced those marriages which the law prohibited for the prevention of idolatry; and see how they resulted in their own destruction. 4. His people would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings because he had stained his honour by his mal-administration. *Let him not be written with the righteous*, Ps. 69:28. These judgments are called the *burdens laid upon him* (v. 27), for the wrath of God is a heavy burden, too heavy for any man to bear. Or it may be meant of the threatenings denounced against him by the prophets, for those are called *burdens*. Usually God sets some special marks of his displeasure upon apostates in this life, for warning to all to *remember Lot's wife*.

Chapter 25

Amaziah's reign, recorded in this chapter, was not one of the worse and yet far from good. Most of the passages in this chapter we had before more briefly related, 2 Ki. 14. Here we find Amaziah, I. A just revenger of his father's death (v. 1-4). II. An obedient observer of the command of God (v. 5-10). III. A cruel conqueror of the Edomites (v. 11-13). IV. a foolish worshipper of the gods of Edom and impatient of reproof for it (v. 14-16). V. Rashly challenging the king of Israel, and smarting for his rashness (v. 17-24). And, lastly, ending his days ingloriously (v. 25-28).

Verses 1-13

Here is, I. The general character of Amaziah: *He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, worshipped the true God, kept the temple service a going, and countenanced religion in his kingdom; but he did not do it *with a perfect heart* (v. 2), that is, he was not a man of serious piety or devotion himself, nor had he any zeal for the exercises of religion. He was no enemy to it, but a cool and indifferent friend. Such is the character of too many in this Laodicean age: they do that which is good, but not with the heart, not with a perfect heart.

II. A necessary piece of justice which he did upon the traitors that murdered his father: he put them to death, v. 3. Though we should suppose they intended to avenge on their king the death of the prophet (as was intimated, ch. 24:25), yet this would by no means justify their wickedness; for *they* were not the avengers, but presumptuously took God's work out of his hands: and therefore Amaziah did what became him in calling them to an account for it, but forbade the putting of the children to death for the parents' sin, v. 4.

III. An expedition of his against the Edomites, who, some time ago, had revolted from under the dominion of Judah, to which he attempted to reduce them. Observe,

1. The great preparation he made for this expedition. (1.) He mustered his own forces, and marshalled them (v. 5), and found Judah and Benjamin in all but 300,000 men that were fit for war, whereas, in Jehoshaphat's time, fifty or sixty years before, they were four times as many. Sin weakens a people, diminishes them, dispirits them, and lessens their number and figure. (2.) He hired auxiliary troops out of the kingdom of Israel, v. 6. Finding his own kingdom defective in men, he thought to make up the deficiency with his money, and therefore took into his pay 100,000 Israelites. If he had advised with any of his prophets before he did this, or had but considered how little any of his ancestors got by their alliances with Israel, he would not have had this to undo again. But rashness makes work for repentance.

2. The command which God sent him by a prophet to dismiss out of his service the forces of Israel, v. 7, 8. He would not have him call in any assistance at all: it looked like distrust of God. If he made sure of God's presence, the army he had of his own was sufficient. But particularly he must not take in *their* assistance: *For the Lord is not with the children of Ephraim, because they are not with him*, but worship the calves. This was a good reason why he should not make use of them, because he could not depend upon them to do him any service. What good could be expected from those that had not God with them, nor his blessings upon their undertakings? It is comfortable to employ those who, we have reason to hope, have an interest in heaven,

and dangerous to associate with those from whom the Lord has departed. The prophet assured him that if he persisted in his resolution to take these idolatrous apostate Israelites with him, in hopes thereby to make himself strong for the battle, it was at his peril; they would prove a dead weight to his army, would sink and betray it: "*God shall make thee fall before the enemy, and these Israelites will be the ruin of thy cause; for God has power to help thee without them, and to cast thee down though thou hast them with thee.*"

3. The objection which Amaziah made against this command, and the satisfactory answer which the prophet gave to that objection, v. 9. The king had remitted 100 talents to the men of Israel for advance-money. "Now," says he, "if I send them back, I shall lose that: *But what shall we do for the 100 talents?*" This is an objection men often make against their duty: they are afraid of losing by it. "Regard not that," says the prophet: "*The Lord is able to give thee much more than this;* and, thou mayest depend upon it, he will not see thee lose by him. What are 100 talents between thee and him? He has ways enough to make up the loss to thee; it is below thee to speak of it." Note, A firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to bear us out in our duty, and to make up all the loss and damage we sustain in his service abundantly to our advantage, will make his yoke very easy and his burden very light. What is it to trust in God, but to be willing to venture the loss of any thing for him, in confidence of the goodness of the security he gives us that we shall not lose by him, but that whatever we part with for his sake shall be made up to us in kind or kindness. When we grudge to part with any thing for God and our religion, this should satisfy us, that God is able to give us much more than this. He is just, and he is good, and he is solvent. The king lost 100 talents by his obedience; and we find just that sum given to his grandson Jotham as a present (ch. 27:5); then the principal was repaid, and, for interest, 10,000 measures of wheat and as many of barley.

4. His obedience to the command of God, which is upon record to his honour. He would rather lose his money, disoblige his allies, and dismiss a fourth part of his army just as they were going to take the field, than offend God: *He separated the army of Ephraim, to go home again*, v. 10. And they went home in great anger, taking it as a great affront thus to be made fools of, and to be cashiered as men not fit to be employed, and being perhaps disappointed of the advantages they promised themselves in spoil and plunder by joining with Judah against Edom. Men are apt to resent that which touches them in their profit or reputation, though it frees them from trouble.

5. His triumphs over the Edomites, v. 11, 12. He left dead upon the spot, in the field of battle, 10,000 men; 10,000 more he took prisoners, and barbarously killed them all by throwing them down some steep and craggy precipice. What provocation he had to exercise this cruelty towards them we are not told; but it was certainly very severe.

6. The mischief which the disbanded soldiers of Israel did to the cities of Judah, either in their return or soon after, v. 13. They were so enraged at being sent home that, if they might not go to share with Judah in the spoil of Edom, they would make a prey of Judah. Several cities that lay upon the borders they plundered, killing 3000 men that made resistance. But why should God suffer this to be done? Was it not in obedience to him that they were sent home, and yet shall the country thus suffer by it? Surely God's way is in the sea! Did not the prophet say that God was not with the children of Ephraim, and yet they are suffered to prevail against Judah? Doubtless God intended hereby to chastise those cities of Judah for their idolatries, which

were found most in those parts that lay next to Israel. The men of Israel had corrupted them, and now they were made a plague to them. Satan both tempts and torments.

Verses 14-16

Here is, I. The revolt of Amaziah from the God of Israel to the gods of the Edomites. Egregious folly! Ahaz worshipped the gods of those that had conquered him, for which he had some little colour, ch. 28:23. But to worship the gods of those whom he had conquered, who could not protect their own worshippers, was the greatest absurdity that could be. What did he see in the gods of the children of Seir that could tempt him to set them up for *his gods* and *bow himself down before them?* v. 14. If he had cast the idols down from the rock and broken them to pieces, instead of the prisoners, he would have manifested more of the piety as well as more of the pity of an Israelite; but perhaps for that barbarous inhumanity he was given up to this ridiculous idolatry.

II. The reproof which God sent to him, by a prophet, for this sin. *The anger of the Lord was kindled against him*, and justly; yet, before he sent to destroy him, he sent to convince and reclaim him, and so to prevent his destruction. The prophet reasoned with him very fairly and very mildly: *Why hast thou sought the favour of those gods which could not deliver their own people?* v. 15. If men would but duly consider the inability of all those things to help them to which they have recourse when they forsake God, they would not be such enemies to themselves.

III. The check he gave to the reprover, v. 16. He could say nothing in excuse of his own folly; the reproof was too just to be answered. But he fell into a passion with the reprover. 1. He taunted him as saucy and impertinent, and meddling with that which did not belong to him: *Art thou made of the king's counsel?* Could not a man speak reasonably to him, but he must be upbraided as usurping the place of a privy-counsellor? But, as a prophet, he really was made of the king's counsel by the King of kings, in duty to whom the king was bound not only to hear, but to ask and take his counsel. 2. He silenced him, bade him forbear and say not a word more to him. He *said to the seer, See not*, Isa. 30:10. Men would gladly have their prophets thus under their girdles, as we say, to speak just when and what they would have them speak, and not otherwise. 3. He threatened him: *"Why shouldst thou be smitten?* It is at thy peril if thou sayest a word more of this matter." He seems to remind him of Zechariah's fate in the last reign, who was put to death for making bold with the king; and bids him take warning by him. Thus he justifies the killing of that prophet by menacing this, and so, in effect, makes himself guilty of the blood of both. He had hearkened to the prophet who ordered him to send back the army of Israel, and was ruled by him, though he contradicted his politics and lost him 100 talents, v. 10. But this prophet, who dissuaded him from worshipping the gods of the Edomites, he ran upon with an unaccountable rage, which must be attributed to the witchcraft of idolatry. He was easily persuaded to part with his talents of silver, but by no means with his gods of silver.

IV. The doom which the prophet passed upon him for this. He had more to say to him by way of instruction and advice; but, finding him obstinate in his iniquity, he forbore. He is *joined to idols; let him alone*, Hos. 4:17. Miserable is the condition of that man with whom the blessed Spirit, by ministers and conscience, *forbears to strive*, Gen. 6:3. And both the reprovers in the gate and that in the bosom, if long brow-beaten and baffled, will at length forbear. So I *gave them up to their own hearts' lusts*.

The secure sinner perhaps values himself upon it as a noble and happy achievement to have silenced his reprovers and monitors, and to get clear of them; but what comes of it? *"I know that God has determined to destroy thee; it is a plain indication that thou art marked for ruin that thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel."* Those that are deaf to reproof are ripening apace for destruction, Prov. 29:1.

Verses 17-28

We have here this degenerate prince mortified by his neighbour and murdered by his own subjects.

I. Never was proud prince more thoroughly mortified than Amaziah was by Joash king of Israel.

1. This part of the story (which was as fully related 2 Ki. 14:8, etc., as it is here)—embracing the foolish challenge which Amaziah sent to Joash (v. 17), his haughty scornful answer to it (v. 18), with the friendly advice he gave him to sit still and know when he was well off, (v. 19),—his wilfully persisting in his challenge (v. 20, 21), the defeat that was given him (v. 22), and the calamity he brought upon himself and his city thereby (v. 23, 24),—verifies two of Solomon's proverbs:—(1.) That *a man's pride will bring him low*, Prov. 29:23. It goes before his destruction; not only procures it meritoriously, but is often the immediate occasion of it. *He that exalteth himself shall be abased.* (2.) That he that *goes forth hastily to strive* will probably not know what to do in the end thereof, *when his neighbour has put him to shame*, Prov. 25:8. He that is fond of contention may have enough of it sooner than he thinks of.

2. But there are two passages in this story which we had not before in the *Kings*. (1.) That *Amaziah took advice* before he challenged the king of Israel, v. 17. But of whom? Not of the prophet—he was *not made of the king's counsel*; but of his statesmen that would flatter him and bid him go up and prosper. It is good to take advice, but then it must be of those that are fit to advise us. Those that will not take advice from the word of God, which would guide them aright, will justly be left to the bad advice of those that will counsel them to their destruction. Let those be made fools that will not be made wise. (2.) Amaziah's imprudence is here made the punishment of his impiety (v. 20): *It was of the Lord*; he left him to himself to act thus foolishly, that he and his people might be *delivered into the hands of their enemies, because they had forsaken God and sought after the gods of Edom*. Those that will not persuaded to do well for their souls will justly be given up to their own counsels to do ill for themselves even in their outward affairs.

II. Never was poor prince more violently pursued by his own subjects. *From the time* that he departed from the Lord (so it may be read, v. 27) the hearts of his subjects departed from him, and they began to form a design against him in Jerusalem. It is probable they were exasperated against him more for his rashly engaging in a war against Israel than for his worshipping the gods of Edom. But at length the ferment grew so high, and he perceived the plot to be laid so deeply, that he thought fit to quit his royal city and flee to Lachish, either as a private place where he might be hid or as a strong place where he might be guarded; but they sent after him thither, and slew him there. By this the putting of him to death seems to have been done deliberately, and to have been the act, not of a disgusted servant or two, but of a considerable body that durst avow it. How unrighteous soever they were herein, God was righteous

Chapter 26

This chapter gives us an account of the reign of Uzziah (Azariah he was called in the Kings) more fully than we had it before, though it was long, and in some respects illustrious, yet it was very briefly related, 2 Ki. 14:21; 15:1, etc. Here is, I. His good character in general (v. 1-5) II. His great prosperity in his wars, his buildings, and all the affairs of his kingdom (v. 6-15). III. His presumption in invading the priests' office, for which he was struck with a leprosy, and confined by it (v. 16-21) even to his death (v. 22, 23).

Verses 1-15

We have here an account of two things concerning Uzziah:—

I. His piety. In this he was not very eminent or zealous; yet *he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*. He kept up the pure worship of the true God *as his father did*, and was better than his father, inasmuch as we have no reason to think he ever worshipped idols as his father did, no, not in his latter days, when *his heart was lifted up*. It is said (v. 5), *He sought God in the days of Zechariah*, who, some think, was the son of the Zechariah whom his grandfather Joash slew. This Zechariah was one that *had understanding in the visions of God*, either the visions which he himself was favoured with or the visions of the preceding prophets. He was well versed in prophecy, and conversed much with the upper world, was an intelligent, devout, good man; and, it seems, had great influence with Uzziah. Happy are the great men who have such about them and are willing to be advised by them; but unhappy those who seek God only while they have such with them and have not a principle in themselves to bear them out to the end.

II. His prosperity.

1. In general, *as long as he sought the Lord*, and minded religion, *God made him to prosper*. Note, (1.) Those only prosper whom *God makes to prosper*; for prosperity is his gift. (2.) Religion and piety are very friendly to outward prosperity. Many have found and owned this, that as long as they sought the Lord and kept close to their duty they prospered; but since they forsook God every thing has gone cross.

2. Here are several particular instances of his prosperity:—(1.) His success in his wars: *God helped him* (v. 7), and then he triumphed over the Philistines (those old enemies of God's people), demolished the fortifications of their cities, and put garrisons of his own among them, v. 6. He obliged the Ammonites to pay him tribute, v. 8. He made all quiet about him, and kept them in awe. (2.) The greatness of his fame and reputation. His name was celebrated throughout all the neighbouring countries (v. 8) and it was a good name, a name for good things with God and good people. This is true fame, and makes a man truly honourable. (3.) His buildings. While he acted offensively abroad, he did not neglect the defence of his kingdom at home, but *built towers in Jerusalem* and fortified them, v. 9. Much of the wall of Jerusalem was in his father's time broken down, particularly at *the corner gate*. But his best fortification of Jerusalem was his close adherence to the worship of God: if his father had not forsaken this the wall of Jerusalem would not have been broken down. While he fortified the city, he did not forget the country, but *built towers in the desert* too (v. 10), to protect the country people from the inroads of the plunderers,

bands of whom sometimes alarmed them and plundered them, as ch. 21:16. (4.) His husbandry. He dealt much in cattle and corn, employed many hands, and got much wealth by his dealing; for he took a pleasure in it: he *loved husbandry* (v. 10), and probably did himself inspect his affairs in the country, which was no disparagement to him, but an advantage, as it encouraged industry among his subjects. It is an honour to the husbandman's calling that one of the most illustrious princes of the house of David followed it and loved it. He was not one of those that delight in war, nor did he addict himself to sport and pleasure, but delighted in the innocent and quiet employments of the husbandman. (5.) His standing armies. He had, as it should seem, two military establishments. [1.] A *host of fighting men* that were to make excursions abroad. These *went out to war by bands*, v. 11. They fetched in spoil from the neighbouring countries by way of reprisal for the depredations they had so often made upon Judah, [2.] Another army for *guards and garrisons*, that were ready to defend the country in case it should be invaded, v. 12, 13. So great were their number and valour that they *made war with mighty power*; no enemy durst face them, or, at least, could stand before them. Men unarmed can do little in war. Uzziah therefore furnished himself with a great armoury, whence his soldiers were supplied with arms offensive and defensive (v. 14), spears, bows, and slings, shields, helmets, and habergeons: swords are not mentioned, because it is probable that every man had a sword of his own, which he wore constantly. Engines were invented, in his time, for annoying besiegers with darts and stones shot from the towers and bulwarks, v. 15. What a pity it is that the wars and fightings which come from men's lusts have made it necessary for cunning men to employ their skill in inventing instruments of death.

Verses 16-23

Here is the only blot we find on the name of king Uzziah, and it is such a one as lies not on any other of the kings. Whoredom, murder, oppression, persecution, and especially idolatry, gave characters to the bad kings and some of them blemishes to the good ones, David himself not excepted, witness the matter of Uriah. But we find not Uzziah charged with any of these; and yet he *transgressed against the Lord his God*, and fell under the marks of his displeasure in consequence, not, as other kings, in vexatious wars or rebellions, but an incurable disease.

I. His sin was invading the priest's office. The good way is one; by-paths are many. The transgression of his predecessors was forsaking the temple of the Lord, flying off from it (ch. 24:18), and burning incense upon idolatrous altars, ch. 25:14. *His* was intruding *into the temple of the Lord* further than was allowed him, and attempting him to *burn incense upon the altar* of God, for which, it is likely, he pretended an extraordinary zeal and affection. See how hard it is to avoid one extreme and not run into another.

1. That which was at the bottom of his sin was pride of heart, a lust that ruins more than any other whatsoever (v. 16): *When he was strong* (and he was marvellously helped by the good providence of God *till he was so*, v. 15), when he had grown very great and considerable in wealth, interest, and power, instead of lifting up the name of God in gratitude to him who had done so much for him, his *heart was lifted up to his destruction*. Thus the prosperity of fools, by puffing them up with pride, destroys them. Now that he had done so much business, and won so much honour, he began to think no business, no honour, too great or too good for him, no, not that of the priesthood Men's pretending to forbidden knowledge, and exercising

themselves in things too high for them, are owing to the pride of their heart, and the fleshly mind they are *vainly puffed up with*.

2. His sin was *going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense*, probably on some solemn feast day, or when he himself had some special occasion for supplicating the divine favour. What could move him to this piece of presumption, or put it into his head, I cannot conjecture. None of all his predecessors, not the best, not the worst, attempted it. The law, he knew, was express against him, and there was no usage or precedent for him. He could not pretend any necessity, as there was for David's eating the show-bread. (1.) Perhaps he fancied the priests did not do their office so dexterously, decently, and devoutly, as they ought, and he could do it better. Or, (2.) He observed that the idolatrous kings did themselves burn incense at the altars of their gods; his father did so, and Jeroboam (1 Ki. 13:1), an ambition of which honour was perhaps one thing that tempted them from the house of God, where it was not permitted them; and he, being resolved to cleave to God's altar, would try to break through this restraint and come as near it as the idolatrous kings did to their altars. But it is called a *transgression against the Lord his God*. He was not content with the honours God had put upon him, but would usurp those that were forbidden him, like our first parents.

3. He was opposed in this attempt by the chief priest and other priests that attended and assisted him, v. 17, 18. They were ready to burn incense for the king, according to the duty of their place; but, when he offered to do it himself, they plainly let him know that he meddled with that which did not belong to him, and that it was at his peril. They did not resist him by laying violent hands on him, though they were valiant men, but by reasoning with him and showing him, (1.) That it was not lawful for him to burn incense: *"It appertaineth not to thee, O Uzziah! but to the priests, whose birthright it is, as sons of Aaron, and who are consecrated to the service."* Aaron and his sons were appointed by the law to burn incense, Ex. 30:7. See Deu. 33:10; 1 Chr. 23:13. David had blessed the people and Solomon and Jehoshaphat had prayed with them and preached to them. Uzziah might have done this, and it would have been to his praise; but as for burning incense, that service was to be performed by the priests only. The kingly and priestly offices were separated by the law of Moses, not to be united again but in the person of the Messiah. If Uzziah did intend to honour God, and gain acceptance with him, in what he did, he was quite out in his aim; for, being a service purely of divine institution, he could not expect it should be accepted unless it were done in the way and by the hands that God had appointed. (2.) That it was not safe. It shall not be *for thy honour from the Lord God*. More is implied: "It will be thy disgrace, and it is at thy peril." The law runs expressly against all strangers that came nigh (Num. 3:10, 18:7), that is, all that were not priests. Korah and his accomplices, though Levites, paid dearly for offering to burn incense, which was the work of the priests only, Num. 16:35. The incense of our prayers must be by faith put into the hands of our Lord Jesus, the great high priest of our profession, else we cannot expect it should be accepted by God, Rev. 8:3.

4. He fell into a passion with the priests that reprov'd him, and would push forward to do what he intended notwithstanding (v. 19): *Uzziah was wroth*, and would not part with the censer out of his hand. He took it ill to be checked, and would not bear interference. *Nitimur in vetitum—We are prone to do what is forbidden*.

II. His punishment was an incurable leprosy, which rose up in his forehead while he was contending with the priests. If he had

submitted to the priests' admonition, acknowledged his error, and gone back, all would have been well; but *when he was wroth with the priests*, and fell foul upon them, then God was wroth with him and smote him with a plague of leprosy. Josephus says that he threatened the priests with death if they opposed him, and that then the earth shook, the roof of the temple opened, and through the cleft a beam of the sun darted directly upon the king's face, wherein immediately the leprosy appeared. And some conjecture that that was the earthquake in the days of Uzziah which we read of Amos 1:1 and Zec. 14:5. Now this sudden stroke, 1. Ended the controversy between him and the priests; for, when the leprosy appeared, they were emboldened to thrust him out of the temple; nay, he himself *hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him* with a disease which was in a particular manner a token of his displeasure, and which he knew secluded him from common converse with men, much more from the altar of God. He would not be convinced by what the priests said, but God took an effectual course to convince him. If presumptuous men will not be made to see their error by the judgments of God's mouth, they shall be made to see it by the judgments of his hand. It evinced some religious fear of God in the heart of this king, even in the midst of his transgression, that, as soon as he found God was angry with him, he not only let fall his attempt, but retired with the utmost precipitation. Though he strove with the priests, he would not strive with his Maker. 2. It remained a lasting punishment of his transgression; for he continued a *leper to the day of his death*, shut up in confinement, and shut out from society, and forced to leave it to his son to manage all his business, v. 21. Thus God gave an instance of his resisting the proud and of his jealousy for the purity and honour of his own institutions; thus he gave fair warning even to great and good men to know and keep their distance, and not to intrude into those things which they have not seen; and thus he gave Uzziah a loud and constant call to repentance, and a long space to repent, which we have reason to hope he improved. He had been a man of much business in the world; but being taken off from that, and confined to a *separate house*, he had leisure to think of another world and prepare for it. By this judgment upon the king God intended to possess the people with a great veneration for the temple, the priesthood, and other sacred things, which they had been apt to think meanly of. While the king was a leper, he was as good as dead, dead while he lived, and buried alive; and so the law was, in effect, answered, that the stranger who cometh nigh shall be put to death. The disgrace survived him; for, when he was dead, they would not bury him in the *sepulchres of the kings* because he was a leper, which stained all his other glory. 3. It was a punishment that answered the sin as face does face in a glass. (1.) Pride was at the bottom of his transgression, and thus God humbled him and put dishonour upon him. (2.) He invaded the office of the priests in contempt of them, and God struck him with a disease which in a particular manner made him subject to the inspection and sentence of the priests; for to them pertained the *judgment of the leprosy*, Deu. 24:8. (3.) He thrust himself into the temple of God, whither the priests only had admission, and for that was thrust out of the very courts of the temple, into which the meanest of his subjects that was ceremonially clean had free access. (4.) He confronted the priests that faced him and opposed his presumption, and for that the leprosy *rose in his forehead*, which, in Miriam's case, is compared to her father's *spitting in her face*, Num. 12:14. (5.) He invaded the dignity of the priesthood, which he had no right to, and for that he was deprived even of his royal dignity, which he had a right to. Those that covet forbidden honours forfeit allowed ones. Adam, by catching at the tree of knowledge of which he might not eat, debarred himself from the tree of life, of which he might have eaten. Let all

that read it say, *The Lord is righteous*

Chapter 27

Here is a very short account of the reign of Jotham, a pious prosperous prince, of whom one would wish to have known more: but we may better dispense with the brevity of his story because that which lengthened the history of the last three kings was their degeneracy in their latter end, of which we have had a faithful account; but there was no occasion for such a melancholy conclusion of the history of this reign, which is only an account, I. Of the date and continuance of this reign (v. 1, 8). II. The general good character of it (v. 2, 6). III. The prosperity of it (v. 3-5). IV. The period of it (v. 7, 9).

Verses 1-9

There is not much more related here concerning Jotham than we had before, 2 Ki. 15:32, etc.

I. He reigned well. He *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; the course of his reign was good, and pleasing to God, whose favour he made his end, and his word his rule, and (which shows that he acted from a good principle) he *prepared his ways before the Lord his God* (v. 6), that is, he walked circumspectly and with much caution, contrived how to shun that which was evil and compass that which was good. He looked before him, and cast his affairs into such a posture and method as made the regular management of them the more easy. Or he established or fixed his ways before the Lord, that is, he walked steadily and constantly in the way of his duty, was uniform and resolute in it: not like some of those that went before him, who, though they had some good in them, lost their credit by their inconstancy and inconsistency with themselves. They had run well, but something hindered them. It was not so with Jotham. Two things are observed here in his character:-1. What was amiss in his father he amended in himself (v. 2): He did *according to all that his father did* well and wisely; howbeit he would not imitate him in which he did amiss; for he *entered not into the temple of the Lord* to burn incense as his father did, but took warning by his fate not to dare so presumptuous a thing. Note, We must not imitate the best men, and those we have the greatest veneration for, any further than they did well; but, on the contrary, their falls, and the injurious consequences of them, must be warnings to us to walk the more circumspectly, that we stumble not at the same stone that they stumbled at. 2. What was amiss in his people he could not prevail to amend: *The people did yet corruptly*. Perhaps it reflects some blame upon him, that he was wanting in his part towards the reformation of the land. Men may be very good themselves, and yet not have courage and zeal to do what they might do towards the reforming of others. however it certainly reflects a great deal of blame upon the people, that they did not do what they might have done to improve the advantages of so good a reign: they had good instructions given them and a good example set before them, but they would not be reformed; so that even in the reign of their good kings, as well as in that of the bad ones, they were *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*; for they still did corruptly, and the founder melted in vain.

II. He prospered, and became truly reputable. 1. He built. He began with *the gate of the house of the Lord*, which he repaired, beautified, and raised. He then *fortified the wall of Ophel, and built cities in the mountains of Judah* (v. 3, 4), took all possible care for the fortifying of his country and the replenishing of it. 2. He conquered. He prevailed against the Ammonites, who had invaded Judah in Jehoshaphat's time, ch. 20:1. He triumphed over them, and exacted great contributions from them, v. 5. He

became mighty (v. 6) in wealth and power, and influence upon the neighbouring nations, who courted his friendship and feared his displeasure; and this he got by *preparing his ways before the Lord his God*. The more stedfast we are in religion the more mighty we are both for the resistance of that which is evil and for the performance of that which is good.

III. He finished his course too soon, but finished it with honour. He had the unhappiness to die in the midst of his days; but, to balance that, the happiness not to out-live his reputation, as the last three of his predecessors did. He died when he was but forty-one years of age (v. 8); but *his wars and his ways*, his wars abroad and his ways at home, were so glorious that they were recorded in the book of the kings of Israel, as well as of the kings of Judah, v. 7. The last words of the chapter are the most melancholy, as they inform us that *Ahaz his son*, whose character, in all respects, was the reverse of his, *reigned in his stead*. When the wealth and power with which wise men have done good devolve upon fools, that will do hurt with them, it is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation

Chapter 28

This chapter is the history of the reign of Ahaz the son of Jotham; a bad reign it was, and which helped to augment the fierce anger of the Lord. We have here, I. His great wickedness (v. 1-4). II. The trouble he brought himself into by it (v. 5-8). III. The reproof which God sent by a prophet to the army of Israel for trampling upon their brethren of Judah, and the obedient ear they gave to that reproof (v. 9-15). IV. The many calamities that followed to Ahaz and his people (v. 16-21). V. The continuance of his idolatry notwithstanding (v. 22-25), and so his story ends (v. 26, 27).

Verses 1-5

Never surely had a man greater opportunity of doing well than Ahaz had, finding things in a good posture, the kingdom rich and strong and religion established; and yet here we have him in these few verses, 1. Wretchedly corrupted and debauched. He had had a good education given him and a good example set him: but parents cannot give grace to their children. All the instructions he had were lost upon him: *He did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord* (v. 1), nay, he did a great deal that was wrong, a wrong to God, to his own soul, and to his people; he walked in the way of the revolted Israelites and the devoted Canaanites, made molten images and worshipped them, contrary to the second commandment; nay, he made them for Baalim, contrary to the first commandment. he forsook the temple of the Lord and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills, as if they would place him nearer heaven, and under every green tree, as if they would signify the protection and influence of heaven by their shade and dropping. To complete his wickedness, as one perfectly divested of all natural affection as well as religion and perfectly devoted to the service and interest of the great enemy of mankind, he *burnt his children in the fire to Moloch* (v. 3), not thinking it enough to dedicate them to that infernal fiend by causing them to pass through the fire. See what an absolute sway the prince of the power of the air bears among the children of disobedience. 2. Wretchedly spoiled and made a prey of. When he forsook God, and at a vast expense put himself under the protection of false gods, God, who of right was his God, delivered him into the hands of his enemies, v. 5. (1.) The Syrians insulted him and triumphed over him, beat him in the field and carried away a great many of his people into captivity. (2.) The king of Israel, though an idolater too, was made a scourge to him, and *smote him with a great slaughter*. The people suffered by these judgments: their blood was shed, their country wasted, their families ruined; for when they had a good king, though *they did corruptly* (ch. 27:2), yet then his goodness sheltered them; but now that they had a bad one all the defence had departed from them and an inundation of judgments broke in upon them. Those that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign were taught to value it by the miseries of this reign.

Verses 6-15

We have here,

I. Treacherous Judah under the rebukes of God's providence, and they are very severe. Never was such bloody work made among them since they were a kingdom, and by Israelites too. Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and the king of Israel was the instrument God made use of for his punishment. It is just with God to make those our plagues whom we make

our patterns or make ourselves partners with in sin. A war broke out between Judah and Israel, in which Judah was worsted. For, 1. There was a great slaughter of men in the field of battle. Vast numbers (120,000 men, and valiant men too at other times) were slain (v. 6) and some of the first rank, the king's son for one. He had sacrificed some of his sons to Moloch; justly therefore is this sacrificed to the divine vengeance. Here is another that was *next the king*, his friend, the prime-minister of state, or perhaps next him in the battle, so that the king himself had a narrow escape, v. 7. The kingdom of Israel was not strong at this time, and yet strong enough to bring this great destruction upon Judah. But certainly so many men, great men, stout men, could not have been cut off in one day if they had not been strangely dispirited both by the consciousness of their own guilt and by the righteous hand of God upon them. Even valiant men were numbered *as sheep for the slaughter*, and became an easy prey to the enemy *because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers*, and he had therefore forsaken them. 2. There was a great captivity of *women and children*, v. 8. When the army in the field was routed, the cities, and towns, and country villages, were all easily stripped, the inhabitants taken for slaves, and their wealth for a prey.

II. Even victorious Israel under the rebuke of God's word for the bad principle they had gone upon in making war with Judah and the bad use they had made of their success, and the good effect of this rebuke. Here is,

1. The message which God sent them by a prophet, who went out to meet them, not to applaud their valour or congratulate them on their victory, though they returned laden with spoils and triumphs, but in God's name to tell them of their faults and warn them of the judgments of God.

(1.) He told them how they came by this victory of which they were so proud. It was not because God favoured them, or that they had merited it at his hand, but *because he was wroth with Judah*, and made them the rod of his indignation. *Not for your righteousness*, be it known to you, but *for their wickedness* (Deu. 9:5) *they are broken off*; therefore *be not you high-minded, but fear lest God also spare not you*, Rom. 11:20, 21.

(2.) He charged them with the abuse of the power God had given them over their brethren. Those understand not what victory is who think it gives them authority to do what they will, and that the longest sword is the clearest claim to lives and estates (*Jusque datum sceleri—might is right*); no, as it is impolitic not to use a victory, so it is impious to abuse it. The conquerors are here reproved, [1.] For the cruelty of the slaughter they had made in the field. They had indeed *shed the blood of war in war*; we suppose that to be lawful, but it turned into sin to them, because they did it from a bad principle of enmity to their brethren and after a bad manner, with a barbarous fury, *a rage reaching up to heaven*, that is, that cried to God for vengeance against such bloody men, that delighted in military execution. Those that serve God's justice, if they do it with rage and a spirit of revenge, make themselves obnoxious to it, and forfeit the honour of acting for him; *for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. [2.] For the imperious treatment they gave their prisoners. *"You now purpose to keep them under, to use them or sell them as slaves, though they are your brethren and free-born Israelites."* God takes notice of what men purpose, as well as of what they say and do.

(3.) He reminded them of their own sins, by which they also were obnoxious to the wrath of God: *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?* v. 10. He appeals to their own consciences, and to the notorious evidence of the

thing. "Though you are now made the instruments of correcting Judah for sin, yet do not think that you are therefore innocent yourselves; no, you also are guilty before God." This is intended as a check, [1.] To their triumph in their success. "You are sinners, and it ill becomes sinners to be proud; you have carried the day now, but be not secure, the wheel may ere long return upon yourselves, for, if judgment begin thus with those that have *the house of God* among them, what shall be the end of such as worship the calves?" [2.] To their severity towards their brethren. "You have now got them under, but you ought to show mercy to them, for you yourselves are undone if you do not find mercy with God. It ill becomes sinners to be cruel. You have transgressions enough to answer for already, and need not add this to the rest."

(4.) He commanded them to release the prisoners, and to send them home again carefully (v. 11); "for you having sinned, *the fierce wrath of God is upon you*, and there is no other way of escaping it than by showing mercy."

2. The resolution of the princes thereupon not to detain the prisoners. They *stood up against those that came from the war*, though flushed with victory, and told them plainly that they should not bring their captives into Samaria, v. 12, 13. They had sin enough already to answer for, and would have nothing done to add to their trespass. In this they discovered an obedient regard to the word of God by his prophet and a tender compassion towards their brethren, which was wrought in them by the tender mercy of God; for he regarded the affliction of this poor people, and hears their cry, and *made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captive*, Ps. 106:44, 46.

3. The compliance of the soldiers with the resolutions of the princes in this matter, and the dismissal of the captives thereupon. (1.) The armed men, though being armed they might be force have maintained their title to what they got by the sword, acquiesced, and left their captives and the spoil to the disposal of *the princes* (v. 14), and herein they showed more truly heroic bravery than they did in taking them. It is a great honour for any man to yield to the authority of reason and religion against his interest. (2.) The princes very generously sent home the poor captives well accommodated, v. 15. Those that hope to find mercy with God must learn hence with what tenderness to carry themselves towards those that lie at their mercy. It is strange that these princes, who in this instance discovered such a deference to the word of God, and such an influence upon the people, had not so much grace as, in obedience to the calls of God by so many prophets, to root idolatry out of their kingdom, which, soon after this, was the ruin of it.

Verses 16-27

Here is, I. The great distress which the kingdom of Ahaz was reduced to for his sin. In general, 1. *The Lord brought Judah low*, v. 19. They had lately been very high in wealth and power; but God found means to bring them down, and make them as despicable as they had been formidable. Those that will not humble themselves under the word of God will justly be humbled by his judgments. Iniquity *brings men low*, Ps. 106:43. 2. Ahaz made Judah naked. As his sin debased them, so it exposed them. It made them naked to their shame; for it exposed them to contempt, as a man unclothed. It made them naked to their danger; for it exposed them to assaults, as a man unarmed, Ex. 32:25. Sin strips men. In particular, the Edomites, to be revenged for Amaziah's cruel treatment of them (ch. 25:12), smote Judah, and carried off many captives, v. 17. The Philistines also insulted them, took and kept possession of several cities and villages that lay near them (v. 18), and so they were revenged

for the incursions which Uzziah had made upon them, ch. 26:6. And, to show that it was purely the sin of Ahaz that brought the Philistines upon his country, in the very year that he died the prophet Isaiah foretold the destruction of the Philistines by his son, Isa. 14:28, 29.

II. The addition which Ahaz made both to the national distress and the national guilt.

1. He added to the distress, by making court to strange kings, in hopes they would relieve him. When the Edomites and Philistines were vexatious to him, *he sent to the kings of Assyria to help him* (v. 16); for he found his own kingdom weakened and made naked, and he could not put any confidence in God, and therefore was at a vast expense to get an interest in the king of Assyria. He pillaged the house of God, and the king's house, and squeezed the princes for money to hire these foreign forces into his service, v. 21. Though he had conformed to the idolatry of the heathen nations, his neighbours, they did not value him for that, nor love him the better, nor did his compliance, by which he lost God, gain them, nor could he make any interest in them, but with his money. It is often found that wicked men themselves have no real affection for those that revolt to them, nor do they care to do them a kindness. A degenerate branch is looked upon, on all sides, as *an abominable branch*, Isa. 14:19. But what did Ahaz get by the king of Assyria? Why, he *came to him*, but he *distressed him*, and *strengthened him not* (v. 20), *helped him not*, v. 21. The forces of the Assyrian quartered upon his country, and so impoverished and weakened it; they grew insolent and imperious, and created him a great deal of vexation, like a broken reed, which not only fails, but pierces the hand.

2. He added to the guilt, by making court to strange gods, in hopes they would relieve him. In his distress, instead of repenting of his idolatry, which he had reason enough to see the folly of, *he trespassed yet more* (v. 22), was more mad than ever upon his idols. A brand of infamy is here set upon him for it: *This is that king Ahaz*, that wretched man, who was the scandal of the house of David and the curse and plague of his generation. Note, Those are wicked and vile indeed that are made worse by their afflictions, instead of being made better by them, who *in their distress trespass yet more*, have their corruptions exasperated by that which should mollify them, and their hearts more *fully set in them to do evil*. Let us see what his trespass was. (1.) He abused the house of God; for he *cut in pieces the vessels* of it, that the priests might not perform the service of the temple, or not as it should be performed, for want of vessels; and, at length, he *shut up the doors*, that the people might not attend it, v. 24. This was worse than the worst of the kings before him had done. (2.) He confronted the altar of God, for he *made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem*; so that, as the prophet speaks, they were like *heaps in the furrows of the fields*, Hos. 12:11. And in the cities of Judah, either by his power or by his purse, perhaps by both, he erected high places for the people to burn incense to what idols they pleased, as if on purpose to *provoke the God of his fathers*, v. 25. (3.) He cast off God himself; for he *sacrificed to the gods of Damascus* (v. 23), not because he loved them, for he thought they smote him; but because he feared them, thinking that they helped his enemies, and that, if he could bring them into his interest, they would help him. Foolish man! It was his own God that smote him and strengthened the Syrians against him, not the gods of Damascus; had he sacrificed to him, and to him only, he would have helped him. But no marvel that men's affections and devotions are misplaced when they mistake the author of their trouble and their help. And what comes of it? The gods of Syria befriend Ahaz no more than the kings of Assyria did; they were *the ruin of him and of all Israel*. This sin provoked God to

bring judgments upon them, to cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but thirty-six years old; and it debauched the people so that the reformation of the next reign could not prevail to cure them of their inclination to idolatry, but they retained that root of bitterness till the captivity in Babylon plucked it up.

The chapter concludes with the conclusion of the reign of Ahaz, v. 26, 27. For aught that appears, he died impenitent, and therefore died inglorious; for he was not buried *in the sepulchres of the kings*. Justly was he thought unworthy to be laid among them who was so unlike them—to be buried with kings who had used his kingly power for the destruction of the church and not for its protection or edification.

Chapter 29

We are here entering upon a pleasant scene, the good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, in which we shall find more of God and religion than perhaps in any of the good reigns we have yet met with; for he was a very zealous, devout, good man, none like him. In this chapter we have an account of the work of reformation which he set about with vigour immediately after his accession to the crown. Here is, I. His exhortation to the priests and Levites, when he put them in possession of the house of God again (v. 1–11). II. The care and pains which the Levites took to cleanse the temple, and put things in order there (v. 12–19). III. A solemn revival of God's ordinances that had been neglected, in which atonement was made for the sins of the last reign, and the wheels were set a-going again, to the great satisfaction of king and people (v. 20–36).

Verses 1-11

Here is, I. Hezekiah's age when he came to the crown. He was *twenty-five years old*. Joash, who came to the crown after two bad reigns, was but seven years old; Josiah, who came after two bad reigns, was but eight, which occasioned the delay of the reformation; but Hezekiah had come to years, and so applied himself immediately to it. We may well think with what a sorrowful heart he beheld his father's idolatry and profaneness, how it troubled him to see the doors of the temple shut, though, while his father lived, he durst not open them. His soul no doubt wept in secret for it, and he vowed that when he should receive the congregation he would redress these grievances, which made him do it with more readiness and resolution.

II. His general character. He *did that which was right like David*, v. 2. Of several of his predecessors it had been said that they did that which was right, *but not like David*, not with David's integrity and zeal. But here was one that had as hearty an affection for the ark and law of God as ever David had.

III. His speedy application to the great work of restoring religion. The first thing he did was to *open the doors of the house of the Lord*, v. 3. We are willing to hope his father had not quite suppressed the temple service; for then the holy fire on the altar must have gone out, and we do not read of the re-kindling of it; but he had hindered the people from attending it, and the priests, except such of them as were of his own party, 2 Ki. 16:15. But Hezekiah immediately threw the church doors open, and *brought in the priests and Levites*. He found Judah low and naked, yet did not make it his first business to revive the civil interests of his kingdom, but to restore religion to its good posture again. Those that begin with God begin at the right end of their work, and it will prosper accordingly.

IV. His speech to the priests and Levites. It was well known, no doubt, that he had a real kindness for religion and was disaffected to the corruptions of the last reign; yet we do not find the priests and Levites making application to him for the restoration of the temple service but he calls upon them, which, I doubt, bespeaks their coldness as much as his zeal; and perhaps, if they had done their part with vigour, things would not have been brought into so very bad a posture as Hezekiah found them in. Hezekiah's exhortation to the Levites is very pathetic.

1. He laid before them the desolations of religion and the deplorable state to which it was brought among them (v. 6, 7): *Our fathers have trespassed*. He said not *"My father,"* because it became him, as a son, to be as tender as might be of his father's

name, and because his father would not have done all this if their fathers had not neglected their duty. Urijah the priest had joined with Ahaz in setting up an idolatrous altar. He complained, (1.) That the house of God had been deserted: *They have forsaken God, and turned their backs upon his habitation*. Note, Those that turn their backs upon God's ordinances may truly be said to forsake God himself. (2.) That the instituted worship of God there had been let fall. The lamps were not lighted, and incense was not burnt. There are still such neglects as these, and they are no less culpable, when the word is not duly read and opened (for that was signified by the *lighting of the lamps*) and when prayers and praises are not duly offered up, for that was signified by *the burning of incense*.

2. He showed the sad consequences of the neglect and decay of religion among them, v. 8. 9. This was the cause of all the calamities they had lain under. God had in anger delivered them to trouble, to the sword, and to captivity. When we are under the rebukes of God's providence it is good for us to enquire whether we have not neglected God's ordinances and whether the controversy he has with us may not be traced to this neglect.

3. He declared his own full purpose and resolution to revive religion and make it his business to promote it (v. 10): *"It is in my heart* (that is, I am fully resolved) *to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel* (that is, to worship him only, and in that way which he has appointed); for I am sure that, otherwise, his fierce anger will not turn away from us." This covenant he would not only make himself, but bring his people into the bond of.

4. He engaged and excited the Levites and priests to do their duty on this occasion. This he begins with (v. 5); this he ends with, v. 11. He called them *Levites* to remind them of their obligation to God, called them his *sons* to remind them of the relation to himself, that he expected that, *as a son with the father, they should serve with him* in the reformation of the land. (1.) he told them what was their duty, to sanctify *themselves* first (by repenting of their neglects, reforming their own hearts and lives, and renewing their covenants with God to do their duty better for the time to come), and then to *sanctify the house of God*, as his servants, to make it clean from every thing that was disagreeable, either through the disuse or the profanation of it, and to set it up for the purposes for which it was made. (2.) He stirred them up to do it (v. 11): *"Be not now negligent, or remiss, in your duty. Let not this good work be retarded through your carelessness." Be not deceived*, so the *margin*. Note, Those that by their negligence in the service of God think to mock God, and put a cheat upon him, do but deceive themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls. *Be not secure* (so some), as if there were no urgent call to do it or no danger in not doing it. Note, Men's negligence in religion is owing to their carnal security. The consideration he quickens them with is derived from their office. God had herein put honour upon them: He has *chosen you to stand before him*. God therefore expected work from them. They were not chosen to be idle, to enjoy the dignity and leave the duty to be done by others, but to serve him and to minister to him. They must therefore be ashamed of their late remissness, and, now that the doors of the temple were opened again, must set about their work with double diligence.

Verses 12-19

We have here busy work, good work, and needful work, the cleansing of the house of the Lord.

I. The persons employed in this work were the priests and Levites, who should have kept the temple clean, but, not having

done that, were concerned to make it clean. Several of the Levites are here named, two of each of the three principal houses, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari (v. 12), and two of each of the three families of singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, v. 13, 14. We cannot think these are named merely because they were chief in place (for then surely the high priest, or some of the heads of the courses of the priests, would have been mentioned), but because they were more zealous and active than the rest. When God has work to do he will raise up leading men to preside in it. And it is not always that the first in place and rank are most fit for service or most forward to it. These Levites not only bestirred themselves, but *gathered their brethren*, and quickened them to do *according to the commandment of the king by the word of the Lord*. Observe, They did according to the king's command, but with an eye to God's word. The king commanded them what was already their duty by the word of God, and, in doing it, they regarded God's word as a rule to them and the king's commandment as a spur to them.

II. The work was *cleansing the house of God*, 1. From the common dirt it had contracted while it was shut up-dust, and cobwebs, and the rust of the vessels. 2. From the idols and idolatrous altars that were set up in it, which, though kept ever so neat, were a greater pollution to it than if it had been made the common sewer of the city. The priests were none of them mentioned as leading men in this work, yet none but they durst go *into the inner part of the house, no, not to cleanse it*, which they did, and perhaps the high priest into the holy of holies, to cleanse that. And, though the Levites had the honour to be the leaders in the work, they did not disdain to be servitors to the priests according to their office; for what filth the priests brought into the court the Levites carried to the brook Kidron. Let not men's usefulness, be it ever so eminent, make them forget their place.

III. The expedition with which they did this work was very remarkable. They began on the first day of the first month, a happy beginning of the new-year, and one that promised a good year. Thus should every year begin with the reformation of what is amiss, and the purging away, by true repentance, of all the defilements contracted the foregoing year. In eight days they cleared and cleansed the temple, and in eight days more the *courts* of the temple, v. 17. Let those that do good work learn to rid work and get it done. Let what is amiss be amended quickly.

IV. The report they made of it to Hezekiah was very agreeable, v. 18, 19. They gave him an account of what they had done, because it was he that set them on work, boasted not of their own care and pains, nor did they come to him to be paid, but to let him know that all things that had been profaned were now sanctified according to law, and were ready to be used again whenever he pleased. They knew the good king had set his heart upon God's altar, and longed to be attending that, and therefore they insisted most upon the readiness they had put that into—that the vessels for the altar were scoured and brightened. Those vessels which Ahaz, in his *transgression*, had cast away as vessels in which there was no pleasure, they gathered together, sanctified them, and laid them in their place *before the altar*. Though the vessels of the sanctuary may be profaned for a while, God will find a time and a way to sanctify them. Neither his ordinances nor his people shall be suffered to fail for ever.

Verses 20-36

The temple being cleansed, we have here an account of the good use that was immediately made of it. A solemn assembly was

called to meet the king at the temple, the very next day (v. 20); and very glad, no doubt, all the good people in Jerusalem were, when it was said, *Let us go up to the house of the Lord*, Ps. 122:1. As soon as Hezekiah heard that the temple was ready for him he lost no time, but made it appear that he was ready for it. He rose early to go up to the house of the Lord, earlier on that day than on other days, to show that his heart was upon his work there. Now this day's work was to look two ways:—

I. Atonement must be made for the sins of the last reign. They thought it not enough to lament and forsake those sins, but they brought a sin-offering. Even our repentance and reformation will not obtain pardon but in and through Christ, who was made *sin* (that is, a sin-offering) for us. No peace but through his blood, no, not for penitents. Observe, 1. The sin-offering was *for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah* (v. 21), that is, to make atonement for the sins of princes, priests, and people, for they had all corrupted their way. The law of Moses appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the whole congregation (Lev. 4:13, 14; Num. 15:24, 25), that the national judgments which their national sins deserved might be turned away. For this purpose we must now have an eye to Christ the great propitiation, as well as for the remission and salvation of particular persons. 2. The law appointed only one goat for a sin-offering, as on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:15) and on such extraordinary occasions as this, Num. 15:24. But they here offered seven (v. 21), because the sins of the congregation had been very great and long continued in. Seven is a number of perfection. Our great sin-offering is but one, yet that one *perfects* for ever *those that are sanctified*. 3. The king and the *congregation* (that is, the representatives of the congregation) *laid their hands on the heads of the goats* that were for the *sin-offering* (v. 23), thereby owning themselves guilty before God and expressing their desire that the guilt of the sinner might be transferred to the sacrifice. By faith we lay our hands on the Lord Jesus, and so *receive the atonement*, Rom. 5:11. 4. Burnt-offerings were offered with the sin-offerings, *seven bullocks, seven rams, and seven lambs*. The intention of the burnt-offerings was to give glory to the God of Israel, whom they owned as the only true God, which it was proper to do at the same time that they were by the sin-offering making atonement for their offences. The blood of those, as well as of the sin-offering, was *sprinkled upon the altar* (v. 22), to make reconciliation *for all Israel* (v. 24), and not for Judah only. Christ is a propitiation, not for the sins of Israel only, but *of the whole world*, 1 Jn. 2:1, 2. 5. While the offerings were burning upon the altar the *Levites sang the song of the Lord* (v. 27), the Psalms composed by David and Asaph (v. 30), accompanied by the musical instruments which God by his prophets had commanded the use of (v. 25), and which had been long neglected. Even sorrow for sin must not put us out of tune for praising God. By faith we must rejoice in Christ Jesus as our righteousness; and our prayers and praises must ascend with his offering, to be accepted only in virtue of it. 6. The king and all the congregation testified their consent to and concurrence in all that was done, by *bowing their heads and worshipping*, expressing an awful veneration of the divine Majesty, by postures of adoration. This is taken notice of, v. 28–30. It is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped, if we do not ourselves worship him, and that not with bodily exercise only, which profits little, but with the heart.

II. The solemnities of this day did likewise look forward. The temple service was to be set up again, that it might be continually kept up; and this Hezekiah calls them to, v. 31. "Now that you have *consecrated yourselves to the Lord*—have both made an atonement and made a covenant by sacrifice, are solemnly reconciled and engaged to him—now *come near, and*

bring sacrifices." Note, Our covenant with God must be pursued and improved in communion with him. Having consecrated ourselves, in the first place, to the Lord, we must bring the sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, to his house. Now, in this work, it was found.

1. That the people were free. Being called to it by the king, they brought in their offerings, though not in such abundance as in the glorious days of Solomon (for Judah was now diminished, impoverished, and brought low), but according to what they had, and as much as one could expect considering their poverty and the great decay of piety among them. (1.) Some were so generous as to bring burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God, and of which the offerer had no part. Of this sort there were seventy bullocks, 100 rams, and 200 lambs, v. 32. (2.) Others brought peace-offerings and thank-offerings, the fat of which was burnt upon the altar, and the flesh divided between the priests and the offerers, v. 35. Of this sort there were 600 oxen and 3000 sheep, v. 33. Perhaps the remembrance of their sin in sacrificing on the high places made them more willing to bring their sacrifices now to God's altar.

2. That *the priests were few*, too few for the service, v. 34. Many of them, it is likely, were suspended and laid aside as polluted and uncanonical, for having sacrificed to idols in the last reign, and the rest had not the zeal that one might have expected upon such an occasion. They thought that the king needed not to be so forward, that there was no necessity for such haste in opening the doors of the temple, and therefore they took no care to sanctify themselves, and being unsanctified, and so unqualified, they made that their excuse for being absent from the service; as if their offence would be their defence. It is recorded here, to the perpetual shame of the priests, that, though they were so well provided for out of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, yet they did not mind their business. Here was work to do, and there wanted proper hands to do it.

3. That the Levites were forward. They had been *more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests* (v. 34), were better affected to the work and better prepared and qualified for it. This was their praise, and, in recompence for it, they had the honour to be employed in that which was the priests' work: they *helped them to flay the offerings*. This was not according to the law (Lev. 1:5, 6), but the irregularity was dispensed with in cases of necessity, and thus encouragement was given to the faithful zealous Levites and a just disgrace put upon the careless priests. What the Levites wanted in the ceremonial advantages of their birth and consecration was abundantly made up in their eminent qualifications of skill and will to do the work.

4. That all were pleased. The king and all the people rejoiced in this blessed turn of affairs and the new face of religion which the kingdom had put on, v. 36. Two things in this matter pleased them:—(1.) That it was soon brought about: *The thing was done suddenly*, in a little time, with a great deal of ease, and without any opposition. Those that go about the work of God in faith and with resolution will find that there is not that difficulty in it which they sometimes imagine, but it will be a pleasing surprise to them to see how soon it is done. (2.) That the hand of God was plainly in it: *God had prepared the people* by the secret influences of his grace, so that many of those who had in the last reign doted on the idolatrous altars were now as much in love with God's altar. This change, which God wrought on their minds, did very much expedite and facilitate the work. Let magistrates and ministers do their part towards the reforming of a land, and ascribe to him the glory of what is done, especially when it is done suddenly and is a pleasing surprise. *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous.*

Chapter 30

In this chapter we have an account of the solemn passover which Hezekiah kept in the first year of his reign. I. The consultation about it, and the resolution he and his people came to for the observance of it (v. 2-5). II. The invitation he sent to Judah and Israel to come and keep it (v. 1, 6-12). III. The joyful celebration of it (v. 13-27). By this the reformation, set on foot in the foregoing chapter, was greatly advanced and established, and that nail in God's holy place clenched.

Verses 1-12

Here is, I. A passover resolved upon. That annual feast was instituted as a memorial of the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It happened that the reviving of the temple service fell within the appointed days of that feast, the seventeenth day of the first month: this brought that forgotten solemnity to mind. "What shall we do," says Hezekiah, "about the passover? It is a very comfortable ordinance, and has been long neglected. How shall we revive it? The time has elapsed for this year; we cannot go about it immediately; the congregation is thin, the people have not notice, the priests are not prepared, v. 3. Must we defer it till another year?" Many, it is likely, were for deferring it; but Hezekiah considered that by that time twelve-month the good affections of the people would cool, and it would be too long to want the benefit of the ordinance; and therefore, finding a proviso in the law of Moses that particular persons who were unclean in the first month might keep the passover the fourteenth day of the second month and be accepted (Num. 9:11), he doubted not but that it might be extended to the congregation. Whereupon they resolved to keep the passover *in the second month*. Let the circumstance give way to the substance, and let not the thing itself be lost upon a nicety about the time. It is good striking while the iron is hot, and taking people when they are in a good mind. Delays are dangerous.

II. A proclamation issued out to give notice of this passover and to summon the people to it.

1. An invitation was sent to the ten revolted tribes to stir them up to come and attend this solemnity. Letters were written to Ephraim and Manasseh to invite them to Jerusalem to keep this passover (v. 1), not with any political design, to bring them back to the house of David, but with a pious design to bring them back to the Lord God of Israel. "Let them take whom they will for their king," says Hezekiah, "so they will but take him for their God." The matters in difference between Judah and Israel, either upon a civil or sacred account, shall not hinder but that if the people of Israel will sincerely return to the Lord their God Hezekiah will bid them as welcome to the passover as any of his own subjects. Expresses are sent post throughout all the tribes of Israel with memorials earnestly pressing the people to take this opportunity of returning to the God from whom they had revolted. Now here we have,

(1.) The contents of the circular letters that were despatched upon the occasion, in which Hezekiah discovers a great concern both for the honour of God and for the welfare of the neighbouring kingdom, the prosperity of which he seems passionately desirous of, though he not only received no toll, tribute, or custom, from it, but it had often, and not long since, been vexatious to his kingdom. This is rendering good for evil. Observe,

[1.] What it is which he presses them to (v. 8): "*Yield yourselves unto the Lord*. Before you can come into communion with

him you must come into covenant with him." *Give the hand to the Lord* (so the word is), that is, "Consent to take him for your God." A bargain is confirmed by giving the hand. "Strike this bargain. Join yourselves to him in an everlasting covenant. *Subscribe with the hand* to be his, Isa. 44:5. Give him your hand, in token of giving him your heart. Lay your hand to his plough. Devote yourselves to his service, to work for him. *Yield to him*," that is, "Come up to his terms, come under his government, stand it not out any longer against him." "*Yield to him*, to be absolutely and universally at his command, at his disposal, to be, and do, and have, and suffer, whatever he pleases. In order to this, be not *stiff-necked as your fathers were*; let not your corrupt and wicked wills rise up in resistance of and rebellion against the will of God. Say not that you will do what you please, but resolve to do what he pleases." There is in the carnal mind a stiffness, an obstinacy, an unaptness to comply with God. We have it from our fathers; it is bred in the bone with us. This must be conquered; and the will that had in it a spirit of contradiction must be melted into the will of God; and to his yoke the neck that was an iron sinew must be bowed and fitted. In pursuance of this resignation to God, he presses them *to enter into his sanctuary*, that is, to attend upon him in that place which he had chosen, to put his name there, and serve him in the ordinances which he had appointed. "The doors of the sanctuary are now opened, and you have liberty to enter; the temple service is now revived, and you are welcome to join in it." The king says, *Come*; the princes and priests say, *Come; whosoever will, let him come*. This he calls (v. 6) *turning to the Lord God*; for they had forsaken him, and worshipped other gods. *Repent now, and be converted*. Thus those who through grace have turned to God themselves should do all they can to bring others back to him.

[2.] What arguments he uses to persuade them to do this. *First*, "You are children of Israel, and therefore stand related, stand obliged, to the God of Israel, from whom you have revolted." *Secondly*, "The God you are called to return to is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with your first fathers, who served him and yielded themselves to him; and it was their honour and happiness that they did so." *Thirdly*, "Your late fathers that forsook him and trespassed against him have been given up to desolation; their apostasy and idolatry have been their ruin, as you see (v. 7); let their harms be your warnings." *Fourthly*, "You yourselves are but a *remnant narrowly escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria* (v. 6), and therefore are concerned to put yourselves under the protection of the God of your fathers, that you be not quite swallowed up." *Fifthly*, "This is the only way of *turning away the fierceness of God's anger from you* (v. 8), which will certainly consume you if you continue stiff-necked." *Lastly*, "If you return to God in a way of duty, he will return to you in a way of mercy." This he begins with (v. 6) and concludes with, v. 9. In general, "You will find him *gracious and merciful*, and one that *will not turn away his face from you*, if you seek him, notwithstanding the provocations you have given him." Particularly, "You may hope that he will turn again the captivity of your brethren that are carried away, and bring them back to their own land." Could any thing be expressed more pathetically, more movingly? Could there be a better cause, or could it be better pleaded?

(2.) The entertainment which Hezekiah's messengers and message met with. It does not appear that Hoshea, who was now king of Israel, took any umbrage from, or gave any opposition to, the dispersing of these proclamations through his kingdom, nor that he forbade his subjects to accept the invitation. He seems to have left them entirely to their liberty. They might go to Jerusalem to worship if they pleased; for, though he did evil, yet *not like the kings of Israel that were before him*, 2 Ki. 17:2.

He saw ruin coming upon his kingdom, and, if any of his subjects would try this expedient to prevent it, they had his full permission. But, for the people, [1.] The generality of them slighted the call and turned a deaf ear to it. The messengers went from city to city, some to one and some to another, and used pressing entreaties with the people to come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover; but they were so far from complying with the message that they abused those that brought it, *laughed them to scorn, and mocked them* (v. 10), not only refused, but refused with disdain. Tell them of the God of Abraham! they knew him not, they had other gods to serve, Baal and Ashtaroth. Tell them of the sanctuary! their high places were as good. Tell them of God's mercy and wrath! they neither dreaded the one nor desired the other. No marvel that the king's messengers were thus despitefully used by this apostate race when God's messengers were so, his servants the prophets, who produced credentials from him. The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was now at hand. It was but two or three years after this that the king of Assyria laid siege to Samaria, which ended in the captivity of those tribes. Just before this they had not only a king of their own that permitted them to return to God's sanctuary, but a king of Judah that earnestly invited them to do it. Had they generally accepted this invitation, it might have prevented their ruin; but their contempt of it hastened and aggravated it, and left them inexcusable. [2.] Yet there were some few that accepted the invitation. The message, though to some it was a *savour of death unto death*, was to others a *savour of life unto life*, v. 11. In the worst of times God has had a remnant; so he had here, many of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun (here is no mention of any out of Ephraim, though some of that tribe are mentioned, v. 18), *humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem*, that is, were sorry for their sins and submitted to God. Pride keeps men from yielding themselves to the Lord; when that is brought down, the work is done.

2. A command was given to the men of Judah to attend this solemnity; and they universally obeyed it, v. 12. They did it with one heart, were all of a mind in it, and *the hand of God gave them that one heart*; for it is in the day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing. It is God that works both *to will* and *to do*. When people, at any time, manifest an unexpected forwardness to do that which is good, we must acknowledge that hand of God in it.

Verses 13-20

The time appointed for the passover having arrived, a very great congregation came together upon the occasion, v. 13. Now here we have,

I. The preparation they made for the passover, and good preparation it was: *They took away all the idolatrous altars* that were found, not only in the temple, but *in Jerusalem*, v. 14. Before they kept the feast, they cast out this old leaven. The best preparation we can make for the gospel passover is to cast away our iniquities, our spiritual idolatries.

II. The celebration of the passover. In this the people were so forward and zealous that the priests and Levites blushed to see themselves out-done by the commonalty, to see them more ready to bring sacrifices than they were to offer them. This put them upon sanctifying themselves (v. 15), that the work might not stand still for want of hands to carry it on. The notice we take of the zeal of others should make us ashamed of our own coldness, and quicken us not only to do our duty, but to do it well, and to sanctify ourselves to it. They did according to the duty of their place (v. 16), sprinkling *the blood upon the altar*, which was a type of Christ our passover sacrificed for us.

III. The irregularities they were guilty of in this solemnity. The substance was well managed, and with a great deal of devotion; but, besides that it was a month out of time, 1. The *Levites killed the passover*, which should have been done by the priests only, v. 17. They also assisted more than the law ordinarily allowed in offering the other sacrifices, particularly those that were for the purifying of the unclean, many of which there was now occasion for. Some think that it was the offerers' work, not the priests', that the Levites had here the charge of. Ordinarily every man killed his lamb, but now for those that were under any ceremonial pollution the Levites killed it. 2. Many were permitted to eat the passover who were not purified according to the strictness of the law, v. 18. This was the second month, and there was not warrant to put them off further to the third month, as, if it had been the first month, the law would have permitted them to eat it the second. And they were loth to forbid them communicating at all, lest they should discourage new converts, and send those away complaining whom they desired to send away rejoicing. Grotius observes from this that ritual institutions must give way, not only to a public necessity, but to a public benefit and advantage.

IV. Hezekiah's prayer to God for the forgiveness of this irregularity. It was his zeal that had called them together in such haste, and he would not that any should fare the worse for being straitened of time in their preparation. He therefore thought himself concerned to be an intercessor for those that *ate the passover otherwise than it was written*, that there might not be wrath upon them from the Lord. His prayer was,

1. A short prayer, but to the purpose: *The good Lord pardon every one* in the congregation that has fixed, engaged, or prepared, his heart to those services, though the ceremonial preparation be wanting. Note, (1.) The great thing required in our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances is that we *prepare our hearts to seek him*, that we be sincere and upright in all we do, that the inward man be engaged and employed in it, and that we make heart-work of it; it is all nothing without this. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part*. Hezekiah does not pray that this might be dispensed with, nor that the want of other things might be pardoned where there was not this. For *this* is the *one thing needful*, that we *seek God*, his favour, his honour, and that we set our hearts to do it. (2.) Where this sincerity and fixedness of heart are there may still be many defects and infirmities, both the frame of the spirit and the performance of the service may be short of *the purification of the sanctuary*. Corruptions may not be so fully conquered, thoughts not so closely fixed, affections not so lively, faith not so operative, as they should be. Here is a defect in sanctuary purification. There is nothing perfect under the sun, nor *a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not*. (3.) These defects need pardoning healing grace; for omissions in duty are sins as well as omissions of duty. If God should deal with us in strict justice according to the best of our performances, we should be undone. (4.) The way to obtain pardon for our deficiencies in duty, and all the iniquities of our holy things, is to seek it of God by prayer; it is not so a pardon of course but that it must be obtained by petition through the blood of Christ. (5.) In this prayer we must take encouragement from the goodness of God: *The good Lord pardon*; for, when he proclaimed his goodness, he insisted most upon this branch of it, *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*. (6.) It is the duty of those that have the charge of others, not only to look to themselves, but to those also that are under their charge, to see wherein they are wanting, and to pray for them, as Hezekiah here. See Job 1:5.

2. A successful prayer: *The Lord hearkened to Hezekiah*, was well pleased with his pious concern for the congregation, and, in answer to his prayer, *healed the people* (v. 20), not only did not lay their sin to their charge, but graciously accepted their services notwithstanding; for healing denotes not only forgiveness (Isa. 6:10; Ps. 103:3), but comfort and peace, Isa. 57:18; Mal. 4:2.

Verses 21-27

After the passover followed the feast of unleavened bread, which continued seven days. How that was observed we are here told, and every thing in this account looks pleasant and lively. 1. Abundance of sacrifices were offered to God in peace-offerings, by which they both acknowledged and implored the favour of God, and on part of which the offerers feasted with their friends during these seven days (v. 22), in token of their communion with God and the comfort they took in his favour and their reconciliation to him. To keep up this part of the service, that God's altar might be abundantly regaled with the fat and blood and his priests and people with the flesh of the peace-offerings, Hezekiah gave out of his own stock 1000 bullocks and 7000 sheep, and the princes, excited by his pious example, gave the same number of bullocks and a greater number of sheep, and all for peace-offerings, v. 24. By this God was honoured, the joy of the festival was kept up, and the strangers were encouraged to come again to Jerusalem. It was generously done of the king and the princes thus plentifully to entertain the whole congregation; but what is a great estate good for but that it puts men into a capacity of doing so much the more good? Christ feasted those that followed him. I believe neither Hezekiah nor his princes were the poorer at the year's end for this their pious liberality. 2. Many good prayers were put up to God with the peace-offerings, v. 22. They *made confession to the Lord God of their fathers*, in which the intent and meaning of the peace-offerings were directed and explained. When the priests sprinkled the blood and burnt the fat they made confession, so did the people when they feasted on their part. They made a religious confession of their relation to God and dependence upon him, a penitent confession of their sins and infirmities, a thankful confession of God's mercies to them, and a supplicatory confession of their wants and desires; and, in all these, they had an eye to God as *the God of their fathers*, a God in covenant with them. 3. There was a great deal of good preaching. The Levites (whose office it was, Deu. 33:10) *taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord*, read and opened the scriptures, and instructed the congregation concerning God and their duty to him; and great need there was of this, after so long a famine of the word as there had been in the last reign. Hezekiah did not himself preach, but he *spoke comfortably to the Levites* that did, attended their preaching, commended their diligence, and assured them of his protection and countenance. Hereby he encouraged them to study hard and take pains, and put a reputation upon them, that the people might respect and regard them the more. Princes and magistrates, by owning and encouraging faithful and laborious preachers, greatly serve the interest of God's kingdom among men. 4. They sang psalms every day (v. 21): *The Levites and priests praised the Lord day by day*, both with songs and musical instruments, thus expressing their own and exciting one another's joy in God and thankfulness to him. Praising God should be much of our work in our religious assemblies. 5. Having kept the seven days of the feast in this religious manner, they had so much comfort in the service that they *kept other seven days*, v. 23. They did not institute any new modes of worship, but repeated and continued the old. The case was extraordinary: they had been long without the

ordinance; guilt had been contracted by the neglect of it; they had now got a very great congregation together, and were in a devout serious frame; they knew not when they might have such another opportunity, and therefore could not now find in their hearts to separate till they had doubled the time. Many of them were a great way from home, and had business in the country to look after, for, this being the second month, they were in the midst of their harvest; yet they were in no haste to return: the zeal of God's house made them forget their secular affairs. How unlike those who snuffed at God's service, and said, *What a weariness is it!* Or those who asked, *When will the sabbath be gone?* The servants of God should abound in his work. 6. All this they did *with gladness* (v. 23); they all rejoiced, and particularly *the strangers*, v. 25. *So there was great joy in Jerusalem*, v. 26. Never was the like since the dedication of the temple in Solomon's time. Note, Holy duties should be performed with holy gladness; we should be forward to them, and take pleasure in them, relish the sweetness of communion with God, and look upon it as matter of unspeakable joy and comfort that we are thus favoured and have such earnestness of everlasting joy. 7. The congregation was at length dismissed with a solemn blessing, v. 27. (1.) The priests pronounced it; for it was part of their office to *bless the people* (Num. 6:22, 23), in which they were both the people's mouth to God by way of prayer and God's mouth to the people by way of promise; for their blessing included both. In it they testified both their desire of the people's welfare and their dependence upon God and that word of his grace to which they commended them. What a comfort is it to a congregation to be sent home thus crowned! (2.) God said *Amen* to it. The voice of the priests, when they *blessed the people*, was *heard in heaven* and came up to the *habitation of God's holiness*. When they pronounced the blessing God commanded it, and perhaps gave some sensible token of the ratification of it. The prayer that comes up to heaven in a cloud of incense will come down again to this earth in showers of blessings.

Chapter 31

We have here a further account of that blessed reformation of which Hezekiah was a glorious instrument, and of the happy advances he made in it. I. All the remnants of idolatry were destroyed and abolished (v. 1). II. The priests and Levites were set to work again, every man in his place (v. 2). III. Care was taken for their maintenance. 1. The royal bounty to the clergy, and for the support of the temple service, was duly paid (v. 3). 2. Orders were given for the raising of the people's quota (v. 4). 3. The people, thereupon, brought in their dues abundantly (v. 5–10). 4. Commissioners were appointed for the due distribution of what was brought in (v. 11–19). Lastly, Here is the general praise of Hezekiah's sincerity in all his undertakings (v. 20, 21).

Verses 1-10

We have here an account of what was done after the passover. What was wanting in the solemnities of preparation for it before was made up in that which is better, a due improvement of it after. When the religious exercises of a Lord's day or a communion are finished we must not think that then the work is done. No, then the hardest part of our work begins, which is to exemplify the impressions of the ordinance upon our minds in all the instances of a holy conversation. So it was here; when all this was finished there was more to be done.

I. They applied themselves with vigour to destroy all the monuments of idolatry, v. 1. The king had done what he could of this kind (2 Ki. 18:4), but the people could discover those profane relics which escaped the eye of the king's officers, and therefore they went out to see what they could do, v. 1. This was done immediately after the passover. Note, The comfort of communion with God should kindle in us a holy zeal and indignation against sin, against every thing that is offensive to God. If our hearts have been made to burn within us at an ordinance, that spirit of burning will consume the dross of corruption. *What have I now to do any more with idols?* Their zeal here in destroying the *images and groves, the high places and altars*, appeared, 1. In that they did this, not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but in those of Ephraim and Manasseh. Some think that those cities are meant which had come under the protection and the jurisdiction of the kings of Judah. Others think that, Hoshea king of Israel not forbidding it, their zeal carried them out to the destruction of idolatry even in many parts of his kingdom. At least those that came out of Ephraim and Manasseh to keep the passover (as many did, ch. 30:18) destroyed all their own images and groves, and did the like for as many more as they had influence upon or could make interest in for leave to do it. We should not only reform ourselves, but do all we can to reform others too. 2. They destroyed all: they *utterly destroyed all*; they spared none through favour or affection either to the images or to their worshippers; though ever so ancient, ever so costly, ever so beautiful, and ever so well patronised, yet they must all be destroyed. Note, Those that sincerely set themselves against sin will set themselves against all sin. 3. They would not return to their houses, though they had been long absent, till this was done. They could not be easy, nor think themselves safe, in their cities, as long as the images and groves, those betrayers and destroyers of their country, were left standing. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah pointed to this when, a little before, he spoke of a day in which men should cast away the very idols that they themselves had made. So surprising was this blessed change, Isa. 2:20; 31:6, 7.

II. Hezekiah revived and restored the courses of the priests and Levites, which David had appointed and which had of late been put out of course, v. 2. The temple service was put into its proper method again, to run in the old channel. Every man was made to know his work, his place, his time, and what was expected from him. Note, Good order contributes much to the carrying on of a good work. The priests were appointed in their courses for *burnt-offerings and peace-offerings*; the Levites in their courses were some to minister to the priests, others to *give thanks and praise*. See 1 Chr. 23:4, 5. And all this in the *gates or courts of the tents of the Lord*. The temple is here called a tent because the temple privileges are movable things and this temple was shortly to be removed.

III. He appropriated a branch of the revenue of his crown to the maintenance and support of the altar. Though the people were to be at the charge of the daily offerings, and those on the sabbaths, new moons, and feasts, yet, rather than they should be burdened with the expense, he allowed out of his own estate, or out of his exchequer, for all those offerings, v. 3. It was a generous act of piety, wherein he consulted both God's honour and his people's ease, as a faithful servant to him and a tender father to them. Let princes and great men reckon that well bestowed, and set out to the best interest, which they give for the support and encouragement of religion in their country.

IV. He issued out an order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, v. 4 (that those who were nearest the temple, and both saved and got by being so, might give a good example to others), but which was afterwards extended to, or at least admitted by, the *cities of Judah*, that they should carefully pay in their dues, according to the law, to the priests and Levites. This had been long neglected, which made the work to be neglected (for a scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry); but Hezekiah, having himself been liberal, might with a good grace require his subjects to be just to the temple service. And observe the end he aims at in recovering and restoring to the priests and Levites their portion, that they *might be encouraged in the law of the Lord*, in the study of it, and in doing their duty according to it. Observe here, 1. It is fit that ministers should be not only maintained, but encouraged, that they should not only be kept to do their work, but that they should also have wherewith to live comfortably, that they may do it with cheerfulness. 2. Yet they are to be maintained, not in idleness, pride, and luxury, but in *the law of the Lord*, in their observance of it themselves and in teaching others the good knowledge of it.

V. The people thereupon brought in their tithes very readily. They wanted nothing but to be called upon; and therefore, *as soon as the commandment came abroad*, the first-fruits and all the holy things were duly brought in, v. 5, 6. What the priests had occasion for, for themselves and their families, they made use of, and the overplus was *laid in heaps*, v. 6. All harvest-time they were increasing these heaps, as the fruits of the earth were gathered in; for God was to have his dues out of them all. Though a prescription may be pleaded for a *modus decimandi—tenth proportion*, yet it cannot be pleaded *pro non decimado—for the omission of the tenth*. When harvest ended they finished their heaps, v. 7. Now here we have, 1. The account given to Hezekiah concerning those heaps. He *questioned the priests and Levites* concerning them, why they did not use what was paid in, but hoarded it up thus, (v. 9), to which it was answered that they had made use of all they had occasion for, for the maintenance of themselves and their families and for their winter store, and that this was that which was left over and above, v. 10. They did not hoard these heaps for covetousness, but to show what plentiful provision God by his law had

made for them, if they could but have it collected and brought in, and that those who conscientiously give God his dues out of their estates bring a blessing upon all they have: *Since they began to bring in the offerings the Lord has blessed his people*. See for this Hag. 2:19. "Try me," says God, "if you will not otherwise trust me, whether, upon your bringing the tithes into the store-house, you have not a blessing poured out upon you," Mal. 3:10, 11; Eze. 44:30. 2. The acknowledgment which the king and princes made of it, v. 8. They gave thanks to God for his good providence, which gave them something to bring, and his good grace, which gave them hearts to bring it. And they also *blessed the people*, that is, commended them for their doing well now, without reproaching them for their former neglects. It is observable that after they had tasted the sweetness of God's ordinance, in the late comfortable passover, they were thus free in maintaining the temple service. Those that experience the benefit of a settled ministry will not grudge the expense of it.

Verses 11-21

Here we have,

I. Two particular instances of the care of Hezekiah concerning church matters, having put them into good order, to keep them so. The tithes and other holy things being brought in, he provided, 1. That they should be carefully laid up, and not left exposed in loose heaps, liable to be wasted and embezzled. He ordered chambers to be made ready in some of the courts of the temple for store-chambers (v. 11), and into them the offerings were brought and there kept under lock and key, v. 12, 13. Treasures or store-keepers were appointed, who had the oversight of them, to see that *moth and rust* did not *corrupt* them nor *thieves break through to steal*. This wisdom of laying up the surplus in days of plenty we may learn from the ant, who *provideth meat in summer*. The laying up in store what was brought in was an encouragement to people to pay in their contributions. That will be given cheerfully by the public which appears to be well husbanded. 2. That they should be faithfully laid out, according to the uses they were intended for. Church treasures are not to be hoarded any longer than till there is occasion for them, lest even the rust should be a witness against those who hoard them. Officers were appointed, men (no doubt) of approved wisdom and faithfulness, to *distribute the oblations of the Lord and the most holy things* among the priests (v. 14), and to see that they all had a competent maintenance for themselves and their families. The law provided sufficient for them all, and therefore, if some had too little, it must be because others had too much; to prevent such inequality these officers were to go by some certain rule of proportion in the disposal of the incomes of the temple. It is said of the priests here (v. 18) *that in their set office they sanctified themselves; in faith* they sanctified themselves (so the word is), that is, as bishop Patrick explains it, they attended their ministry at the house of God, not doubting but they should be provided with all things necessary. Now, because they served God in that confidence, care was taken that they should not be made ashamed of their hope. Note, Those that sanctify themselves to God and his service in faith, believing that he will see them want for nothing that is good for them, *shall* certainly *be fed*. Out of the offerings of the Lord distribution was made, (1.) To the priests in the cities (v. 15), who staid at home while their brethren went to Jerusalem, and did good there in *teaching the good knowledge of the Lord*. The preaching priests were maintained as well as the sacrificing priests, and those that abode by the stuff as well as those that warred the warfare. (2.) To those that *entered into the house of the Lord*, all the *males from three years old and upwards*; for the male

children even at that tender age, it seems, were allowed to come into the temple with their parents, and shared with them in this distribution, v. 16. (3.) Even the Levites from twenty years old and upwards had their share, v. 17. (4.) The wives and children of the priests and Levites had a comfortable maintenance out of those offerings, v. 18. In maintaining ministers, regard must be had to their families, that not they only, but theirs, may have food convenient. In some countries where ministers have their salary paid them by the state an addition is made to it upon the birth of a child. (5.) The priests in the country, that lived *in the fields of the suburbs*, were not overlooked in this ministration, v. 19. Those also had their share who were *inhabitants of the villages*, though they might be supposed to live at a less expense.

II. A general character of Hezekiah's services for the support of religion, v. 20, 21. 1. His pious zeal reached to all the parts of his kingdom: *Thus he did throughout all Judah*; every part of the country, and not those only that lay next him, shared in the good fruits of his government. 2. He sincerely designed to please God, and approved himself to him in all he did: He *wrought that which was good before the Lord his God*; all his care was to do that which should be accepted of God, which was *right* (that is, agreeable to natural equity), *and truth* (that is, agreeable to divine revelation and his covenant with God), *before the Lord*; to do according to that law which is holy, just, and good. 3. What he began he went through with, prosecuted it with vigour, and *did it with all his heart*. 4. All his good intentions were brought to a good issue; whatever he did in the service of the house of God, and in the government of his kingdom, he prospered in it. Note, What is undertaken with a sincere regard to the glory of God will succeed to our own honour and comfort at last.

Chapter 32

This chapter continues and concludes the history of the reign of Hezekiah. I. The descent which Sennacherib made upon him, and the care he took to fortify himself, his city, and the minds of his people, against that enemy (v. 1-8). II. The insolent blasphemous letters and messages which Sennacherib sent him (v. 9-19). III. The real answer God gave to Sennacherib's blasphemies, and to Hezekiah's prayers, in the total rout of the Assyrian army, to the shame of Sennacherib and the honour of Hezekiah (v. 20-23). IV. Hezekiah's sickness and his recovery from that, his sin and his recovery from that, with the honours that attended him living and dead (v. 24-33).

Verses 1-8

Here is, I. The formidable design of Sennacherib against Hezekiah's kingdom, and the vigorous attempt he made upon it. This Sennacherib was now, as Nebuchadnezzar was afterwards, the terror and scourge and great oppressor of that part of the world. He aimed to raise a boundless monarchy for himself upon the ruins of all his neighbours. His predecessor Shalmaneser had lately made himself master of the kingdom of Israel, and carried the ten tribes captives. Sennacherib thought, in like manner, to win Judah for himself. Pride and ambition put men upon grasping at universal dominion. It is observable that, just about this time, Rome, a city which afterwards came to reign more than any other had done *over the kings of the earth*, was built by Romulus. Sennacherib invaded Judah immediately after the reformation of it and the re-establishment of religion in it: *After these things he entered into Judah*, v. 1. 1. It was well ordered by the divine Providence that he did not give them this disturbance before the reformation was finished and established, as it might then have put a stop to it. 2. Perhaps he intended to chastise Hezekiah for destroying that idolatry to which he himself was devoted. He looked upon Hezekiah as profane in what he had done, and as having thrown himself out of the divine protection. He accordingly considered him as one who might easily be made a prey of. 3. God ordered it at this time that he might have an opportunity of showing himself strong on the behalf of this returning reforming people. He brought this trouble upon them that he might have the honour, and might put on them the honour, of their deliverance. *After these things, and the establishment thereof*, one would have expected to hear of nothing but perfect peace, and that none durst meddle with a people thus qualified for the divine favour; yet the next news we hear is that a threatening destroying army enters the country, and is ready to lay all waste. We may be in the way of our duty and yet meet with trouble and danger. God orders it so for the trial of our confidence in him and the manifestation of his care concerning us. The little opposition which Sennacherib met with in entering Judah induced him to imagine that all was his own. He thought to *win all the fenced cities* (v. 1), and purposed to *fight against Jerusalem*, v. 2. See 2 Ki. 18:7, 13.

II. The preparation which Hezekiah prudently made against this storm that threatened him: *He took counsel with his princes* what he should do, what measures he should take, v. 3. With their advice he provided, 1. That the country should give him a cold reception, for he took care that he should find no water in it (and then his army must perish for thirst), or at least that there should be a scarcity of water, by which his army would be weakened and unfitted for service. A powerful army, if it want water but a few days, will be but a heap of dry dust. All hands were set immediately to work to *stop up the fountains*, and the

brook that ran through the midst of the land, turning that (it is probable) into the city by pipes under-ground. Such as this is the policy commonly practised now-a-days of destroying the forage before an invading army. 2. That the city should give him a warm reception. In order to this he repaired the wall, raised towers, and made darts (or, as it is in the margin, *swords* or *weapons*) and shields in abundance (v. 5), and appointed captains, v. 6. Note, Those that trust God with their safety must yet use proper means for their safety, otherwise they tempt him, and do not trust him. *God will provide*, but so must we also.

III. The encouragement which he gave to his people to depend upon God in this distress. He gathered them together in a broad open street, and *spoke comfortably to them*, v. 6. He was himself undaunted, being confident the invasion would issue well. He was not like his father, who had much guilt to terrify him and no faith to encourage him, so that, in a time of public danger, *his heart was moved, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*, and then no marvel that *the heart of his people was so too*, Isa. 7:2. With what he said he put life into his people, his captains especially, and *spoke to their heart*, as the word is. 1. He endeavoured to keep down their fears: "*Be strong and courageous*; do not think of surrendering the city or capitulating, but resolve to hold it out to the last man; do not think of losing the city, nor of falling into the enemy's hand; there is no danger. Let the soldiers be bold and brave, make good their posts, stand to their arms, and fight manfully, and let the citizens encourage them to do so: *Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria.*" The prophet had thus encouraged them from God (Isa. 10:24): *Be not afraid of the Assyrians*; and here the king from him. Now it was that *the sinners in Zion were afraid* (Isa. 33:14), but the righteous *dwelt on high* (Isa. 33:15, 16) and *meditated on terror* so as to conquer it. See Isa. 33:18, which refers to what is recorded here. 2. He endeavoured to keep up their faith, in order to the silencing and suppressing of their fears. "Sennacherib has a *multitude with him*, and yet there are *more with us than with him*; for we have God with us, and how many do you reckon him for? With our enemy is an arm of flesh, which he trusts to; but *with us is the Lord*, whose power is irresistible, our God, whose promise is inviolable, a God in covenant with us, *to help us, and to fight our battles*, not only to help us to fight them, but to fight them for us if he please:" and so he did here. Note, A believing confidence in God will raise us above the prevailing fear of man. He that *feareth the fury of the oppressor forgetteth the Lord his Maker*, Isa. 51:12, 13. It is probable that Hezekiah said more to this purport, and that the people rested themselves upon what he said, not merely upon his word, but on the things he said concerning the presence of God with them and his power to relieve them, the belief of which made them easy. Let the good subjects and soldiers of Jesus Christ rest thus upon his word, and boldly say, *Since God is for us, who can be against us?*

Verses 9-23

This story of the rage and blasphemy of Sennacherib, Hezekiah's prayer, and the deliverance of Jerusalem by the destruction of the Assyrian army, we had more at large in the book of Kings, 2 Ki. 18 and 19. It is contracted here, yet large enough to show these three things:—

I. The impiety and malice of the church's enemies. Sennacherib has his hands full in besieging Lachish (v. 9), but hears that Hezekiah is fortifying Jerusalem and encouraging his people to stand it out; and therefore, before he come in person to besiege it, he sends messengers to make speeches, and he himself writes letters to frighten Hezekiah and his people into a surrender of

the city. See, 1. His great malice against the king of Judah, in endeavouring to withdraw his subjects from their allegiance to him. He did not treat with Hezekiah as a man of honour would have done, nor propose fair terms to him, but used mean and base artifices, unbecoming a crowned head, to terrify the common people and persuade them to desert him. he represented Hezekiah as one who designed to deceive his subjects into their ruin and betray them *to famine and thirst* (v. 11), as one who had done them great wrong and exposed them already to the divine displeasure by taking away the high places and altars (v. 12), and who, against the common interest of his people, held out against a force that would certainly be their ruin, v. 15. 2. His great impiety against the God of Israel, *the God of Jerusalem* he is called (v. 19), because that was the place he had chosen to put his name there, and because that was the place which was now threatened by the enemy and which the divine Providence had under its special protection. This proud blasphemer compared the great Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth, with the dunghill gods of the nations, the work of men's hands, and thought him no more able to deliver his worshippers than they were to deliver theirs (v. 19), as if an infinite and eternal Spirit had no more wisdom and power than a stone or the stock of a tree. He boasted of his triumphs over the gods of the nations, that they could none of them protect their people (v. 13–15), and thence inferred not only, *How shall your God deliver you?* (v. 14), but, as if he were inferior to them all, *How much less shall your God deliver you?* as if he were less able to help than any of them. Thus did they rail, rail in writing (which, being more deliberate, is so much the worse), *on the Lord God of Israel*, as if he were a cipher and an empty name, like all the rest, v. 17. Sennacherib, in the instructions he gave, said more than enough; but, as if his blasphemies had been too little, his servants, who learned insolence from their master, spoke yet more than he bade them *against the Lord God and his servant Hezekiah*, v. 16. And God resents what is said against his servants, and will reckon for it, as well as what is said against himself. All this was intended to frighten the people from their hope in God, which David's enemies sought to take him off from (Ps. 11:1; 42:10), saying, *There is no help for him in God*, Ps. 3:2; 71:11. Thus they hoped to take the city by weakening the hands of those that should defend it. Satan, in his temptations, aims to destroy our faith in God's all-sufficiency, knowing that he shall gain his point if he can do that; as we keep our ground if our *faith fail not*, Lu. 22:32.

II. The duty as well as the interest of the church's friends, and that is in the day of distress to pray and cry to Heaven. So Hezekiah did, and the prophet Isaiah, v. 20. It was a happy time when the king and the prophet joined thus in prayer. Is any troubled? Is any terrified? Let him pray. So we engage God for us; so we encourage ourselves in him. Praying to God is here called *crying to Heaven*, because we are, in prayer, to eye him as our Father in heaven, whence he beholds the children of men, and where he has prepared his throne.

III. The power and goodness of the church's God. He is able both to control his enemies, be they ever so high, and to relieve his friends, be they ever so low.

1. As the blasphemies of his enemies engage him against them (Deu. 32:27), so the prayers of his people engage him for them. They did so here. (1.) The army of the Assyrians was cut off by the sword of an angel, which triumphed particularly in the slaughter of the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains, who defied the sword of any man. God delights to abase the proud and secure. The Targum says, The Word of the Lord (the eternal Word) sent Gabriel to do this execution, and that it

was done with lightning, and in the passover night: that was the night in which the angel destroyed the first-born of Egypt. But that was not all. (2.) The king of the Assyrians, having received this disgrace, was cut off by the sword of his own sons. Those that *came forth of his own bowels slew him*, v. 21. Thus was he mortified first, and then murdered—shamed first, and then slain. Evil pursues sinners; and, when they escape one mischief, they run upon another unseen.

2. By this work of wonder, (1.) God was glorified, as the protector of his people. Thus he saved Jerusalem, not only from the hand of Sennacherib, but from the hand *of all others*, v. 22; for such a deliverance as this was an earnest of much mercy in store; and he *guided them*, that is, he guarded them, on every side. God defends his people by directing them, shows them what they should do, and so saves them from what is designed or done against them. For this *many brought gifts unto the Lord*, when they saw the great power of God in the defence of his people. Strangers were thereby induced to supplicate his favour and enemies to deprecate his wrath, and both brought gifts to his temple, in token of their care and desire. (2.) Hezekiah was magnified as the favourite and particular care of Heaven. *Many brought presents to him* (v. 22, 23), in token of the honour they had for him, and to make an interest in him. By the favour of God enemies are lost and friends gained.

Verses 24-33

Here we conclude the story of Hezekiah with an account of three things concerning him:—

I. His sickness and his recovery from it, v. 24. The account of his sickness is but briefly mentioned here; we had a large narrative of it, 2 Ki. 20. His disease seemed likely to be mortal. In the extremity of it he prayed. God answered him, and gave him a sign that he should recover, the going back of the sun ten degrees.

II. His sin and his repentance for it, which were also more largely related, 2 Ki. 20:12, etc. Yet several things are here observed concerning his sin which we had not there. 1. The occasion of it was the king of Babylon's sending an honourable embassy to him to congratulate him on his recovery. But here it is added that they came to enquire of *the wonder that was done in the land* (v. 31), either the destruction of the Assyrian army or the going back of the sun. The Assyrians were their enemies; they came to enquire concerning their fall, that they might triumph in it. The sun was their god; they came to enquire concerning the favour he had shown to Hezekiah, that they might honour him whom their god honoured, v. 31. These miracles were wrought to alarm and awaken a stupid careless world, and turn them from dumb and lame idols to the living God; and men were startled by them, but not converted till a greater wonder was done in that land, in the appearing of Jesus Christ, Mt. 2:1, 2. 2. God left him to himself in it, to try him, v. 31. God, by the power of his almighty grace, could have prevented the sin; but he permitted it for wise and holy ends, that, by this trial and his weakness in it, he might know, that is, it might be known (a usual Hebraism), what was in his heart, that he was not so perfect in grace as he thought he was, but had his follies and infirmities as other men. God left him to himself to be proud of his wealth, to keep him from being proud of his holiness. It is good for us to know ourselves, and our own weakness and sinfulness, that we may not be conceited or self-confident, but may always think meanly of ourselves and live in a dependence upon divine grace. We know not the corruption of our own hearts, nor what we shall do if God leave us to ourselves. *Lord, lead us not into temptation*. 3. His sin was the *his heart was lifted up*, v. 25. He was proud of the honour God had put upon him in so many instances, the honour his neighbours did him in bringing him presents,

and now that the king of Babylon should send an embassy to him to caress and court him: this exalted him above measure. When Hezekiah had destroyed other idolatries he began to idolize himself. O what need have great men, and good men, and useful men, to study their own infirmities and follies, and their obligations to free grace, that they may never think highly of themselves, and to beg earnestly of God that he will hide pride from them and always keep them humble! 4. The aggravation of his sin was the he made so bad a return to God for his favours to him, making even those favours the food and fuel of his pride (v. 25): *He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him*. Note, It is justly expected that those who have received mercy from God should study to make some suitable returns for the mercies they have received; and, if they do not, their ingratitude will certainly be charged upon them. Though we cannot render an equivalent, or the payment of a debt, we must render the acknowledgment of a favour. *What shall I render* that may be so accepted? Ps. 116:12. 5. The divine displeasure he was under for this sin; though it was but a heart-sin, and the overt-act seemed not only innocent but civil (the showing of his treasures to a friend), yet wrath came upon him and his kingdom for it, v. 25. Note, Pride is a sin that God hates as much as any, and particularly in his own people. Those that exalt themselves must expect to be abased, and put under humbling providences. Wrath came on David for his pride in numbering the people. 6. His repentance for this sin: *He humbled himself for the pride of his heart*. Note, (1.) Though God may, for wise and holy ends, suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it; they *shall not be utterly cast down*. (2.) Heart-sins are to be repented of, though they go no further. (3.) Self-humiliation is a necessary branch of repentance. (4.) Pride of heart, by which we have lifted up ourselves, is a sin for which we ought in a special manner to humble ourselves. (5.) People ought to mourn for the sins of their rulers. The inhabitants of Jerusalem humbled themselves with Hezekiah, because they either knew that they also had been guilty of the same sin, or at least feared that they might share in the punishment. When David, in his pride, numbered the people, they all smarted for his sin. 7. The reprieve granted thereupon. The wrath came not in his days. While he lived the country had peace and truth prevailed; so much does repentance avail to put by, or at least to put off, the tokens of God's anger.

III. Here is the honour done to Hezekiah, 1. By the providence of God while he lived. He had *exceeding much riches and honour* (v. 27), replenished his stores, victualled his camp, fortified his city, and did all he wished to do; for God *had given him very much substance*, v. 29. Among his great performances, his turning the water-course of Gihon is mentioned (v. 30), which was done upon occasion of Sennacherib's invasion, v. 3, 4. The water had come into that which is called the *old pool* (Isa. 22:11) and the *upper pool* (Isa. 7:3); but he gathered the waters into a new place, for the greater convenience of the city, called the *lower pool*, Isa. 22:9. And, in general, he *prospered in all his works*, for they were good works. 2. By the respect paid to his memory when he was dead. (1.) The prophet Isaiah wrote his life and reign (v. 32), his acts and his goodness or piety, or which it is part of the honour to be recorded and remembered, for examples to others. (2.) The people *did him honour at his death* (v. 33), buried him in the chief of the sepulchres, made as great a burning for him as for Asa, or, which is a much greater honour, made great lamentation for him, as for Josiah. See how the honour of serious godliness is manifested in the consciences of men. Though it is to be feared that the generality of the people did not heartily comply with the reforming kings, yet they could not but praise their endeavours for reformation, and the memory of those kings was blessed among them.

It is a debt we owe to those who have been eminently useful in their day to do them honour at their death, when they are out of the reach of flattery and we have seen the end of their conversation. The due payment of this debt will be an encouragement to others to do likewise.

Chapter 33

In this chapter we have the history of the reign, I. Of Manasseh, who reigned long. 1. His wretched apostasy from God, and revolt to idolatry and all wickedness (v. 1–10). 2. His happy return to God in his affliction; his repentance (v. 11–13), his reformation (v. 15–17), and prosperity (v. 14), with the conclusion of his reign (v. 18–20). II. Of Amon, who reigned very wickedly (v. 21–23), and soon ended his days unhappily (v. 24, 25).

Verses 1-10

We have here an account of the great wickedness of Manasseh. It is the same almost word for word with that which we had 2 Ki. 21:1-9, and took a melancholy view of. It is no such pleasing subject that we should delight to dwell upon it again. This foolish young prince, in contradiction to the good example and good education his father gave him, abandoned himself to all impiety, transcribed the abominations of the heathen (v. 2), ruined the established religion, unravelled his father's glorious reformation (v. 3), profaned the house of God with his idolatry (v. 4, 5), dedicated his children to Moloch, and made the devil's lying oracles his guides and his counsellors, v. 6. In contempt of the choice God had made of Sion to be his rest for ever and Israel to be his covenant-people (v. 8), and the fair terms he stood upon with God, he embraced other gods, profaned God's chosen temple, and debauched his chosen people. He *made them to err, and do worse than the heathen* (v. 9); for, if the unclean spirit returns, he brings with him *seven other spirits more wicked than himself*. That which aggravated the sin of Manasseh was that God *spoke to him and his people* by the prophets, *but they would not hearken*, v. 10. We may here admire the grace of God in speaking to them, and their obstinacy in turning a deaf ear to him, that either their badness did not quite turn away his goodness, but still he waited to be gracious, or that his goodness did not turn them from their badness, but still they hated to be reformed. Now from this let us learn, 1. That it is no new thing, but a very sad thing, for the children of godly parents to turn aside from that good way of God in which they have been trained. Parents may give many good things to their children, but they cannot give them grace. 2. Corruptions in worship are such diseases of the church as it is very apt to relapse into again even when they seem to be cured. 3. The god of this world has strangely blinded men's minds, and has a wonderful power over those that are led captive by him; else he could not draw them from God, their best friend, to depend upon their sworn enemy.

Verses 11-20

We have seen Manasseh by his wickedness undoing the good that his father had done; here we have him by repentance undoing the evil that he himself had done. It is strange that this was not so much as mentioned in the book of *Kings*, nor does any thing appear there to the contrary but that he persisted and perished in his son. But perhaps the reason was because the design of that history was to show the wickedness of the nation which brought destruction upon them; and this repentance of Manasseh and the benefit of it, being personal only and not national, is overlooked there; yet here it is fully related, and a memorable instance it is of the riches of God's pardoning mercy and the power of his renewing grace. Here is,
I. The occasion of Manasseh's repentance, and that was his affliction. In his distress he did not (like king Ahaz) *trespass yet*

more against God, but humbled himself and returned to God. Sanctified afflictions often prove happy means of conversion. What his distress was we are told, v. 11. God brought a foreign enemy upon him; the king of Babylon, that courted his father who faithfully served God, invaded him now that he had treacherously departed from God. He is here called *king of Assyria*, because he had made himself master of Assyria, which he would the more easily do for the defeat of Sennacherib's army, and its destruction before Jerusalem. He aimed at the treasures which the ambassadors had seen, and all those precious things; but God sent him to chastise a sinful people, and subdue a straying prince. The captain took *Manasseh among the thorns*, in some bush or other, perhaps in his garden, where he had hid himself. Or it is spoken figuratively: he was perplexed in his counsels and embarrassed in his affairs. He was, as we say, in the briers, and knew not which way to extricate himself, and so became an easy prey to the Assyrian captains, who no doubt plundered his house and took away what they pleased, as Isaiah had foretold, 2 Ki. 20:17, 18. What was Hezekiah's pride was their prey. They bound Manasseh, who had been held before with the cords of his own iniquity, and carried him prisoner to Babylon. About what time of his reign this was we are not told; the Jews say it was in his twenty-second year.

II. The expressions of his repentance (v. 12, 13): *When he was in affliction* he had time to bethink himself and reason enough too. He saw what he had brought himself to by his sin. He found the gods he had served unable to help him. He knew that repentance was the only way of restoring his affairs; and therefore to him he returned from whom he had revolted. 1. He was convinced the Jehovah is the only living and true God: *Then he knew* (that is, he believed and considered) that the *Lord he was God*. He might have known it at a less expense if he would have given due attention and credit to the word written and preached: but it was better to pay thus dearly for the knowledge of God than to perish in ignorance and unbelief. Had he been a prince in the palace of Babylon, it is probable he would have been confirmed in his idolatry; but, being a captive in the prisons of Babylon, he was convinced of it and reclaimed from it. 2. He applied to him as *his God* now, renouncing all others, and resolving to cleave to him only, the God of his fathers, and a God on covenant with him. 3. He humbled himself greatly before him, was truly sorry for his sins, ashamed of them, and afraid of the wrath of God. It becomes sinners to humble themselves before the face of that God whom they have offended. It becomes sufferers to humble themselves under the hand of that God who corrects them, and to accept the punishment of their iniquity. Our hearts should be humbled under humbling providences; then we accommodate ourselves to them, and answer God's end in them. 4. He prayed to him for the pardon of sin and the return of his favour. Prayer is the relief of penitents, the relief of the afflicted. That is a good prayer, and very pertinent in this case, which we find among the apocryphal books, entitled, *The prayer of Manasses, king of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon*. Whether it was his or no is uncertain; if it was, in it he *gives glory to God* as the *God of their fathers and their righteous seed*, as the Creator of the world, a God whose *anger is insupportable*, and yet *his merciful promise unmeasurable*. He pleads that God has *promised repentance and forgiveness to those that have sinned*, and has *appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved*, not *unto the just*, as to *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, but *to me* (says he) *that am a sinner; for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea*: so he confesses his sin largely, and aggravates it. He prays, *Forgive me, O Lord! forgive me, and destroy me not*; he pleads, *Thou art the God of those that repent*, etc., and

concludes, *Therefore I will praise thee for ever*, etc.

III. God's gracious acceptance of his repentance: *God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication*. Though affliction drive us to God, he will not therefore reject us if in sincerity we seek him, for afflictions are sent on purpose to bring us to him. As a token of God's favour to him, he made a way for his escape. Afflictions are continued no longer than till they have done their work. When Manasseh is brought back to his God and to his duty he shall soon be *brought back to his kingdom*. See how ready God is to accept and welcome returning sinners, and how *swift to show mercy*. Let not great sinners despair, when Manasseh himself, upon his repentance, found favour with God; in him God *showed forth a pattern of long-suffering*, as 1 Tim. 1:16; Isa. 1:18.

IV. The *fruits meet for repentance* which he brought forth after his return to his own land, v. 15, 16. 1. He turned from his sins. He *took away the strange gods*, the images of them, and that idol (whatever it was) which he had set up with so much solemnity *in the house of the Lord*, as if it had been master of that house. He cast out all the idolatrous altars that were *in the mount of the house* and in Jerusalem, as detestable things. Now (we hope) he loathed them as much as ever he had loved them, and said to them, *Get you hence*, Isa. 30:22. "*What have I to do any more with idols? I have had enough of them.*" 2. He returned to his duty; for he *repaired the altar of the Lord*, which had either been abused and broken down by some of the idolatrous priests, or, at least, neglected and gone out of repair. He sacrificed thereon peace-offerings to implore God's favour, and thank-offerings to praise him for his deliverance. Nay, he now used his power to reform his people, as before he had abused it to corrupt them: *He commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel*. Note, Those that truly repent of their sins will not only return to God themselves, but will do all they can to recover those that have by their example been seduced and drawn away from God; else they do not thoroughly (as they ought) undo what they have done amiss, nor make the plaster as wide as the wound. We find that he prevailed to bring them off from their *false gods*, but not from their *high places*, v. 17. They still sacrificed in them, *yet to the Lord their God only*; Manasseh could not carry the reformation so far as he had carried the corruption. It is an easy thing to debauch men's manners, but not so easy to reform them again.

V. His prosperity, in some measure, after his repentance. He might plainly see it was sin that ruined him; for, when he returned to God in a way of duty, God returned to him in a way of mercy: and then he *built a wall about the city of David* (v. 14), for by sin he had unwallled it and exposed it to the enemy. He also put captains of war in the fenced cities for the security of his country. Josephus says that all the rest of his time he was so changed for the better that he was looked upon as a very happy man.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of his history. The heads of those things for a full narrative of which we are referred to the other writings that were then extant are more than of any of the kings, v. 18, 19. A particular account, it seems, was kept, 1. *Of all his sin, and his trespass*, the *high places* he built, *the groves and images he set up, before he was humbled*. Probably this was taken from his own confession which he made of his sin when God gave him repentance, and which he left upon record, in a book entitled, *The words of the seers*. To those seers that *spoke to him* (v. 18) to reprove him for his sin he sent his confession when he repented, to be inserted in their memoirs, as a token of his gratitude to them for their kindness in reproving him. Thus

it becomes penitents to take shame to themselves, to give thanks to their reprovers, and warning to others. 2. Of *the words of the seers that spoke to him in the name of the Lord* (v. 10, 18), the reproofs they gave him for his sin and their exhortations to repentance. Note, Sinners ought to consider, that, how little notice soever they take of them, an account is kept of the words of the seers that speak to them from God to admonish them of their sins, warn them of their danger, and call them to their duty, which will be produced against them in the great day. 3. Of his *prayer to God* (this is twice mentioned as a remarkable thing) *and how God was entreated of him*. This was *written for the generations to come, that the people that should be created might praise the Lord* for his readiness to receive returning prodigals. Notice is taken of the place of his burial, not in *the sepulchres of the kings*, but *in his own house*; he was buried privately, and nothing of that honour was done him at his death that was done to his father. Penitents may recover their comfort sooner than their credit.

Verses 21-25

We have little recorded concerning Amon, but enough unless it were better. Here is,

I. His great wickedness. He did as *Manasseh had done* in the days of his apostasy, v. 22. Those who think this an evidence that Manasseh did not truly repent forget how many good kings had wicked sons. Only it should seem that Manasseh was in *this* defective, that, when he *cast out the images*, he did not utterly deface and destroy them, according to the law which required Israel to *burn the images with fire*, Deu. 7:2. How necessary that law was this instance shows; for the *carved images* being only thrown by, and not burnt, Amon knew where to find them, soon set them up, and sacrificed to them. It is added, to represent him exceedingly sinful and to justify God in cutting him off so soon, 1. That he out-did his father in sinning: *He trespassed more and more*, v. 23. His father did ill, but he did worse. Those that were joined to idols grew more and more mad upon them. 2. That he came short of his father in repenting: *He humbled not himself before the Lord, as his father had humbled himself*. He fell like him, but did not get up again like him. It is not so much sin as impenitence in sin that ruins men, not so much that they offend as that they do not humble themselves for their offences, not the disease, but the neglect of the remedy.

II. His speedy destruction. He reigned but two years and then his servants *conspired against him and slew him*, v. 24. Perhaps when Amon sinned as his father did in the beginning of his days he promised himself that he should repent as his father did in the latter end of his days. But his case shows what a madness it is to presume upon that. If he hoped to repent when he was old, he was wretchedly disappointed; for he was cut off when he was young. He rebelled against God, and his own servants rebelled against him. Herein God was righteous, but they were wicked, and justly did the *people of the land* put them to death as traitors. The lives of kings are particularly under the protection of Providence and the laws both of God and man.

Chapter 34

Before we see Judah and Jerusalem ruined we shall yet see some glorious years, while good Josiah sits at the helm. By his pious endeavours for reformation God tried them yet once more; if they had known in this their day, the day of their visitation, the things that belonged to their peace and improved them, their ruin might have been prevented. But after this reign they were hidden from their eyes, and the next reigns brought an utter desolation upon them. In this chapter we have, I. A general account of Josiah's character (v. 1, 2). II. His zeal to root out idolatry (v. 3-7). III. His care to repair the temple (v. 8-13). IV. The finding of the book of the law and the good use made of it (v. 14-28). V. The public reading of the law to the people and their renewing their covenant with God thereupon (v. 29-33). Much of this we had 2 Ki. 22.

Verses 1-7

Concerning Josiah we are here told, 1. That he came to the crown when he was very young, only eight years old (yet his infancy did not debar him from his right), and he reigned *thirty-one years* (v. 1), a considerable time. I fear, however, that in the beginning of his reign things went much as they had done in his father's time, because, being a child, he must have left the management of them to others; so that it was not till his twelfth year, which goes far in the number of his years, that the reformation began, v. 3. He could not, as Hezekiah did, fall about it immediately. 2. That he reigned very well (v. 2), approved himself to God, trod in the steps of David, and did not decline either *to the right hand of to the left*: for there are errors on both hands. 3. That while he was young, about sixteen years old, he *began to seek after God*, v. 3. We have reason to think he had not so good an education as Manasseh had (it is well if those about him did not endeavour to corrupt and debauch him); yet he thus sought God when he was young. It is the duty and interest of young people, and will particularly be the honour of young gentlemen, as soon as they come to years of understanding, to *begin to seek God*; for those that seek him early shall find him. 4. That in the twelfth year of his reign, when it is probable he took the administration of the government entirely into his own hands, he *began to purge his kingdom from the remains of idolatry*; he destroyed the high places, groves, images, altars, all the utensils of idolatry, v. 3, 4. He not only cast them out as Manasseh did, but broke them to pieces, and made dust of them. This destruction of idolatry is here said to be in his twelfth year, but it was said (2 Ki. 23:23) to be in his eighteenth year. Something was probably done towards it in his twelfth year; then he began to purge out idolatry, but that good work met with opposition, so that it was not thoroughly done till they had found the book of the law six years afterwards. But here the whole work is laid together briefly which was much more largely and particularly related in the *Kings*. His zeal carried him out to do this, not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in the cities of Israel too, as far as he had any influence upon them.

Verses 8-13

Here, 1. Orders are given by the king for the repair of the temple, v. 8. When he had purged the house of the corruptions of it he began to fit it up for the services that were to be performed in it. Thus we must do by the spiritual temple of the heart, get it cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and then renewed, so as to be transformed into the image of God. Josiah, in this order, calls God *the Lord his God*. Those that truly love God will *love the habitation of his house*. 2. Care is taken about it, effectual care.

The Levites went about the country and gathered money towards it, which was returned to the three trustees mentioned, v. 8. They brought it to Hilkiah the high priest (v. 9), and he and they put it into the hands of workmen, both overseers and labourers, who undertook to do it by the great, as we say, or *in the gross*, v. 10, 11. It is observed that the workmen were industrious and honest: They *did the work faithfully* (v. 12); and workmen are not completely faithful if they are not both careful and diligent, for a confidence is reposed in them that they will be so. It is also intimated that the overseers were ingenious; for it is said that all those were employed to inspect this work who were skilful in *instruments of music*; not that their skill in music could be of any use in architecture, but it was an evidence that they were men of sense and ingenuity, and particularly that their genius lay towards the mathematics, which qualified them very much for this trust. Witty men are then wise men when they employ their wit in doing good, in helping their friends, and, as they have opportunity, in serving the public. Observe, in this work, how God dispenses his gifts variously; here were some that were *bearers of burdens*, cut out for bodily labour and fit to work. Here were others (made *meliori luto—of finer materials*) that had skill in music, and they were *overseers of those that laboured*, and scribes and officers. The former were the hands: these were the heads. They had need of one another, and the work needed both. Let not the overseers of the work despise the bearers of burdens, nor let those that work in the service grudge at those whose office it is to direct; but let each esteem and serve the other in love, and let God have the glory and the church the benefit of the different gifts and dispositions of both.

Verses 14-28

This whole paragraph we had, just as it is here related, 2 Ki. 22:8–20, and have nothing to add here to what was there observed. But, 1. We may hence take occasion to bless God that we have plenty of Bibles, and that they are, or may be, in all hands,—that the book of the law and gospel is not lost, is not scarce,—that, in this sense, the *word of the Lord* is not *precious*. Bibles are jewels, but, thanks be to God, they are not rarities. The fountain of the waters of life is not a spring shut up or a fountain sealed, but the streams of it, in all places, *make glad the city of our God. Usus communis aquarum—These waters flow for general use*. What a great deal shall we have to answer for if the great things of God's law, being thus made common, should be accounted by us as strange things! 2. We may hence learn, whenever we read or hear the word of God, to affect our hearts with it, and to get them possessed with a holy fear of that wrath of God which is there revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, as Josiah's tender heart was. When he heard the words of the law he *rent his clothes* (v. 19), and God was well pleased with his doing so, v. 27. Were the things contained in the scripture new to us, as they were here to Josiah, surely they would make deeper impressions upon us than commonly they do; but they are not the less weighty, and therefore should not be the less considered by us, for their being well known. Rend the heart therefore, not the garments. 3. We are here directed when we are under convictions of sin, and apprehensions of divine wrath, to enquire of the Lord; so Josiah did, v. 21. It concerns us to ask (as they did, Acts 2:37), *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* and more particularly (as the jailor), *What must I do to be saved?* Acts 16:30. *If you will thus enquire, enquire* (Isa. 21:12); and, blessed be God, we have the lively oracles to which to apply with these enquiries. 4. We are here warned of the ruin that sin brings upon nations and kingdoms. Those that forsake God bring evil upon themselves (v. 24, 25), and kindle a fire *which shall not be quenched*. Such

will the fire of God's wrath be when the decree has gone forth against those that obstinately and impenitently persist in their wicked ways. 5. We are here encouraged to humble ourselves before God and seek unto him, as Josiah did. If we cannot prevail thereby to turn away God's wrath from our land, yet we shall deliver our own souls, v. 27, 28. And good people are here taught to be so far from fearing death as to welcome it rather when it *takes them away from the evil to come*. See how the property of it is altered by making it the matter of a promise: *Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace*, housed in that ark, as Noah, when a deluge is coming.

Verses 29-33

We have here an account of the further advances which Josiah made towards the reformation of his kingdom upon the hearing of the law read and the receipt of the message God sent him by the prophetess. Happy the people that had such a king; for here we find that, 1. They were well taught. He did not go about to force them to do their duty, till he had first instructed them in it. He called all the people together, great and small, young and old, rich and poor, high and low. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear* the words of *the book of the covenant*; for they are all concerned in those words. To put an honour upon the service, and to engage attention the more, though there were priests and Levites present, the king himself read the book to the people (v. 30), and he read it, no doubt, in such a manner as to show that he was himself affected with it, which would be a means of affecting the hearers. 2. They were well fixed. The articles of agreement between God and Israel being read, that they might intelligently covenant with God, both king and people with great solemnity did as it were subscribe the articles. The king in his place covenanted to keep God's commandments with all his heart and soul, according to what was *written in the book* (v. 31), and urged the people to declare their consent likewise to this covenant, and solemnly to promise that they would faithfully perform, fulfil, and keep, all and every thing that was on their part to be done, according to this covenant: this they did; they could not for shame do otherwise. He caused *all that were present to stand to it* (v. 32), and made them all *to serve, even to serve the Lord their God* (v. 33), to do it and to *make a business* of it. he did all he could to bring them to it—to *serve, even to serve*; the repetition denotes that this was the only thing his heart was set on; he aimed at nothing else in what he did but to engage them to God and their duty. 3. They were well tended, were honest with good looking to. *All his days they departed not from following the Lord*; he kept them, with much ado, from running into idolatry again. *All his days* were days of restraint upon them; but this intimated that there was in them a *bent to backslide*, a strong inclination to idolatry. Many of them wanted nothing but to have him out of the way, and then they would have their high places and their images up again. And therefore we find that *in the days of Josiah* (Jer. 3:6) God charged it upon treacherous Judah that she *had not returned to him with all her heart, but feignedly* (v. 10), nay, had *played the harlot* (v. 8) and thereby had even *justified backsliding Israel*, v. 11. In the twenty-third year of this reign, four or five years after this, they had *gone on to provoke God to anger with the works of their hands* (Jer. 25:3-7); and, which is very observable, it is from the beginning of Josiah's reformation, his twelfth or thirteenth year, that *the iniquity of the house of Judah*, which brought ruin upon them, and which the prophet was to bear lying on his right side, was dated (Eze. 4:6), for thence to the destruction of Jerusalem was just forty years. Josiah was sincere in what he did, but the generality of the people were averse to it and hankered after their idols still; so that the reformation, though well

designed and well prosecuted by the prince, had little or no effect upon the people. It was with reluctancy that they parted with their idols; still they were in heart joined to them, and wished for them again. This God saw, and therefore from that time, when one would have thought the foundations had been laid for a perpetual security and peace, from that very time did the decree go forth for their destruction. Nothing hastens the ruin of a people nor ripens them for it more than the baffling of hopeful attempts for reformation and a hypocritical return to God. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.*

Chapter 35

We are here to attend Josiah, I. To the temple, where we see his religious care for the due observance of the ordinance of the passover, according to the law (v. 1–19). II. To the field of battle, where we see his rashness in engaging with the king of Egypt, and how dearly it cost him (v. 20–23). III. To the grave, where we see him bitterly lamented (v. 24–27). And so we must take our leave of Josiah.

Verses 1-19

The destruction which Josiah made of idols and idolatry was more largely related in the *Kings*, but just mentioned here in the foregoing chapter (v. 33); but his solemnizing the passover, which was touched upon there (2 Ki. 23:21), is very particularly related here. Many were the feasts of the Lord, appointed by the ceremonial law, but the passover was the chief. It *began them all* in the night wherein Israel came out of Egypt; it *concluded them all* in the night wherein Christ was betrayed; and in the celebration of it Hezekiah and Josiah, those two great reformers, revived religion in their day. The ordinance of the Lord's supper resembles the passover more than it does any of the Jewish festivals; and the due observance of that ordinance, according to the rule, is an instance and means both of the growing purity and beauty of churches and of the growing piety and devotion of particular Christians. Religion cannot flourish where that passover is either wholly neglected or not duly observed; return to that, revive that, make a solemn business of that affecting binding ordinance, and then, it is to be hoped, there will be a reformation in other instances also.

In the account we had of Hezekiah's passover the great zeal of the people was observable, and the transport of devout affection that they were in; but little of the same spirit appears here. It was more in compliance with the king that they all kept the passover (v. 17, 18) than from any great inclination they had to it themselves. Some pride they took in this form of godliness, but little pleasure in the power of it. But, whatever defect there was among the people in the spirit of the duty, both the magistrates and the ministers did their part and took care that the external part of the service should be performed with due solemnity.

I. The king exhorted and directed, quickened and encouraged, the priests and Levites to do their office in this solemnity. Perhaps he saw them remiss and indifferent, unwilling to go out of their road or mend their pace. If ministers are so, it is not amiss for any, but most proper for magistrates, to stir them up to their business. Say to Archippus, *Take heed to thy ministry*, Col. 4:17. Let us see how this good king managed his clergy upon this occasion. 1. He reduced them to the office they were appointed to by the law of Moses (v. 6) and the order they were put into by David and Solomon, v. 4. *He set them in their charge*, v. 2. He did not cut them out new work, nor put them into any new method, but called them back to their institution. Their courses were settled in writing; let them have recourse to that writing, and marshal themselves according to the *divisions of their families*, v. 5. Our rule is settled in the written word; let magistrates take care that ministers walk according to that rule and they do their duty. 2. He ordered the ark to be put in its place. It should seem, it had of late been displaced, either by the wicked kings, to make room for their idols in the most holy place, or by Hezekiah, to make room for the workmen that repaired

the temple. However it was, Josiah bids the *Levites put the ark in the house* (v. 3), and not carry it about from place to place, as perhaps of late they had done, justifying themselves therein by the practice before the temple was built. Now that the priests were discharged from this burden of the ark they must be careful in other services about it. 3. He charged them to *serve God and his people Israel*, v. 3. Ministers must look upon themselves as servants both to Christ and to his church for his sake, 2 Co. 4:5. They must take care, and take pains, and lay out themselves to the utmost, (1.) For the glory and honour of God, and to advance the interests of his kingdom among men. Paul, *a servant of God*, Tit. 1:1. (2.) For the welfare and benefit of his people, not as having dominion over their faith, but as helpers of their holiness and joy; and there will be no difficulty, in the strength of God, in honestly serving these two masters. 4. He charged them to *sanctify themselves, and prepare their brethren*, v. 6. Ministers' work must begin at home, and they must sanctify themselves in the first place, purify themselves from sin, sequester themselves from the world, and devote themselves to God. But it must not end there; they must do what they can to *prepare their brethren* by admonishing, instructing, exhorting, quickening, and comforting, them. *The preparation of the heart is indeed from the Lord*; but ministers must be instruments in his hand. 5. He *encouraged them to the service*, v. 2. He spoke comfortably to them, as Hezekiah did, ch. 30:22. He promised them his countenance. Note, Those whom we charge we should encourage. Most people love to be commended, and will be wrought upon by encouragements more than by threats.

II. The king and the princes, influenced by his example, gave liberally for the bearing of the charges of this passover. The ceremonial services were expensive, which perhaps was one reason why they had been neglected. People had not zeal enough to be at the charge of them; nor were they now very fond of them, for that reason, and therefore, 1. Josiah, at his own proper cost, furnished the congregation with paschal lambs, and other sacrifices, to be offered during the seven days of the feast. He allowed out of his own estate 30,000 *lambs for passover offerings*, which the offerers were to feast upon, and 3000 bullocks (v. 7) to be offered during the following seven days. Note, Those who are serious in religion should, when they persuade others to do that which is good, make it as cheap and easy to them as may be. And where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly. It is to be feared that the congregation generally had not come provided; so that, if Josiah had not furnished them, the work of God must have stood still. 2. The chief of the priests, who were men of great estates, contributed towards the priests' charges, as Josiah did towards the people's. *The princes* (v. 8), that is, the chief of the priests, the princes of the holy tribe, *rulers of the house of God*, bore the priests' charges. And some of the rich and great men of the Levites furnished them also with cattle, both great and small, for offerings, v. 9. For, as to those that sincerely desire to be found in the way of their duty, Providence sometimes raises up friends to bear them out in it, beyond what they could have expected.

III. The priests and Levites performed their office very readily, v. 10. They killed the paschal lambs in the court of the temple, the priests sprinkled the blood upon the altar, the Levites flayed them, and then gave the flesh to the people according to their families (v. 11, 12), not fewer than ten, nor more than twenty, to a lamb. They took it to their several apartments, roasted it, and ate it *according to the ordinance*, v. 13. As for the other sacrifices that were eucharistical, the flesh of them was boiled according to the law of the peace-offerings and was *divided speedily among the people*, that they might feast upon it as a token of their joy in the atonement made and their reconciliation to God thereby. And, *lastly*, The priests and Levites took care to

honour God by *eating of the passover* themselves, v. 14. Let not ministers think that the care they take for the souls of others will excuse their neglect of their own, or that being employed so much in public worship will supersede the religious exercises of their closets and families. The Levites here made ready for themselves and for the priests, because the priests were wholly taken up all day in the service of the altar; therefore, that they might not have their lamb to dress when they should eat it, the Levites got it ready for them against supper time. Let ministers learn hence to help one another, and to forward one another's work, as brethren, and fellow-servants of the same Master.

IV. The singers and porters attended in their places, and did their office, v. 15. The singers with their sacred songs and music expressed and excited the joy of the congregation, and made the service very pleasant to them; and the porters at the gates took care that there should be no breaking in of any thing to defile or disquiet the assembly, nor going out of any from it, that none should steal away till the service was done. While they were thus employed their brethren the Levites prepared paschal lambs for them.

V. The whole solemnity was performed with great exactness, according to the law (v. 16, 17), and, upon that account, there was none like it since Samuel's time (v. 18), for in Hezekiah's passover there were several irregularities. And bishop Patrick observes that in this also it exceeded the other passovers which the preceding kings had kept, that though Josiah was by no means so rich as David, and Solomon, and Jehoshaphat, yet he furnished the whole congregation with beasts for sacrifice, both paschal and eucharistical, at his own proper cost and charge, which was more than any king ever did before him.

Verses 20-27

It was thirteen years from Josiah's famous passover to his death. During this time, things went well in his kingdom, that he prospered, and religion flourished; yet we are not entertained with the pleasing account of those years, but they are passed over in silence, because the people, for all this, were not turned from the love of their sins nor God from the fierceness of his anger. The next news therefore we hear of Josiah is that he is cut off in the midst of his days and usefulness, before he is full forty years old. We had this sad story, 2 Ki. 23:29, 30. Here it is somewhat more largely related. That appears here, more than did there, which reflects such blame on Josiah and such praise on the people as one would not have expected.

I. Josiah was a very good prince, yet he was much to be blamed for his rashness and presumption in going out to war against the king of Egypt without cause or call. It was bad enough, as it appeared in the *Kings*, that he meddled with strife which belonged not to him. But here it looks worse; for, it seems, the king of Egypt sent ambassadors to him, to warn him against this enterprise, v. 21.

1. The king of Egypt argued with Josiah, (1.) From principles of justice. He professed that he had no desire to do him any hurt, and therefore it was unfair, against common equity and the law of nations, for Josiah to take up arms against him. If even a *righteous man* engage in an *unrighteous cause*, let him not expect to prosper. *God is no respecter of persons*. See Prov. 3:30; 25:8. (2.) From principles of religion: "*God is with me; nay, He commanded me to make haste*, and therefore, if thou retard my motions, thou meddlest with God." It cannot be that the king of Egypt only pretended this (as Sennacherib did in a like case, 2 Ki. 18:25), hoping thereby to make Josiah desist, because he knew he had a veneration for the word of God; for it is said here

(v. 22) that the words of Necho were from the mouth of God. We must therefore suppose that either by a dream, or by a strong impulse upon his spirit which he had reason to think was from God, or by Jeremiah or some other prophet, he had ordered him to make war upon the king of Assyria. (3.) From principles of policy: "*That he destroy thee not; it is at thy peril if thou engage against one that has not only a better army and a better cause, but God on his side.*"

2. It was not in wrath to Josiah, whose heart was upright with the Lord his God, but in wrath to a hypocritical nation, who were unworthy of so good a king, that he was so far infatuated as not to hearken to these fair reasonings and desist from his enterprise. He *would not turn his face from him*, but went in person and fought the Egyptian army in the *valley of Megiddo*, v. 22. If perhaps he could not believe that the king of Egypt had a command from God to do what he did, yet, upon his pleading such a command, he ought to have consulted the oracles of God before he went out against him. His not doing that was his great fault, and of fatal consequence. In this matter he walked not in the ways of David his father; for, had it been his case, he would have enquired of the Lord, *Shall I go up? Wilt thou deliver them into my hands?* How can we think to prosper in our ways if we do not acknowledge God in them?

II. The people were a very wicked people, yet they were much to be commended for lamenting the death of Josiah as they did. That Jeremiah lamented him I do not wonder; he was the weeping prophet, and plainly foresaw the utter ruin of his country following upon the death of this good king. But it is strange to find that all Judah and Jerusalem, that stupid senseless people, *mourned for him* (v. 24), contrived how to have their mourning excited by singing men and singing women, how to have it spread through the kingdom (they made an ordinance in Israel that the mournful ditties penned on this sad occasion should be learned and sung by all sorts of people), and also how to have the remembrance of it perpetuated: these elegies were inserted in the collections of state poems; they are written in the Lamentations. Hereby it appeared, 1. That they had some respect to their good prince, and that, though they did not cordially comply with him in all his good designs, they could not but greatly honour him. Pious useful men will be manifested in the consciences even of those that will not be influenced by their example; and many that will not submit to the rules of serious godliness themselves yet cannot but give it their good word and esteem it in others. Perhaps those lamented Josiah when he was dead that were not thankful to God for him while he lived. The Israelites murmured at Moses and Aaron while they were with them and spoke sometimes of stoning them, and yet, when they died, they mourned for them many days. We are often taught to value mercies by the loss of them which, when we enjoyed them, we did not prize as we ought. 2. That they had some sense of their own danger now that he was gone. Jeremiah told them, it is likely, of the evil they might now expect to come upon them, from which he was taken away; and so far they credited what he said that they lamented the death of him that was their defence. Note, Many will more easily be persuaded to lament the miseries that are coming upon them than to take the proper way by universal reformation to prevent them, will shed tears for their troubles, but will not be prevailed upon to part with their sins. But godly sorrow worketh repentance and that repentance will be to salvation.

Chapter 36

We have here, I. A short but sad account of the utter ruin of Judah and Jerusalem within a few years after Josiah's death. 1. The history of it in the unhappy reigns of Jehoahaz for three months (v. 1-4), Jehoiakim (v. 5-8) for eleven years, Jehoiachin three months (v. 9, 10), and Zedekiah eleven years (v. 11). Additions were made to the national guilt, and advances towards the national destruction, in each of those reigns. The destruction was, at length, completed in the slaughter of multitudes (v. 17), the plundering and burning of the temple and all the palaces, the desolation of the city (v. 18, 19), and the captivity of the people that remained (v. 20). 2. Some remarks upon it—that herein sin was punished, Zedekiah's wickedness (v. 12, 13), the idolatry the people were guilty of (v. 14), and their abuse of God's prophets (v. 15, 16). The word of God was herein fulfilled (v. 21). II. The dawning of the day of their deliverance in Cyrus's proclamation (v. 22, 23).

Verses 1-10

The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is here coming on by degrees. God so ordered it to show that he has no pleasure in the ruin of sinners, but had rather they would turn and live, and therefore gives them both time and inducement to repent and waits to be gracious. The history of these reigns was more largely recorded in the last three chapters of the second of *Kings*. 1. Jehoahaz was set up by the people (v. 1), but in one quarter of a year was deposed by Pharaoh-necho, and carried a prisoner to Egypt, and the land fined for setting him up, v. 2-4. Of this young prince we hear no more. Had he trodden in the steps of his father's piety he might have reigned long and prospered; but we are told in the *Kings* that *he did evil in the sight of the Lord*, and therefore his triumphing was short and his joy but for a moment. 2. Jehoiakim was set up by the king of Egypt, an old enemy to their land, gave what king he pleased to the kingdom and what name he pleased to the king! v. 4. He made Eliakim king, and called him *Jehoiakim*, in token of his authority over him. *Jehoiakim did that which was evil* (v. 5), nay, we read of the *abominations which he did* (v. 8); he was very wild and wicked. Idolatries generally go under the name of abominations. We hear no more of the king of Egypt, but the king of Babylon came up against him (v. 6), seized him, and bound him with a design to carry him to Babylon; but, it seems, he either changed his mind, and suffered him to reign as his vassal, or death released the prisoner before he was carried away. However the best and most valuable vessels of the temple were now carried away and made use of in Nebuchadnezzar's temple in Babylon (v. 7); for, we may suppose, no temple in the world was so richly furnished as that of Jerusalem. The sin of Judah was that they had brought the idols of the heathen into God's temple; and now their punishment was that the vessels of the temple were carried away to the service of the gods of the nations. If men will profane God's institutions by their sins, it is just with God to suffer them to be profaned by their enemies. These were the vessels which the false prophets flattered the people with hopes of the return of, Jer. 27:16. But Jeremiah told them that the rest should go after them (Jer. 27:21, 22), and they did so. But, as the carrying away of these vessels to Babylon began the calamity of Jerusalem, so Belshazzar's daring profanation of them there filled the measure of the iniquity of Babylon; for, when he drank wine in them to the honour of his gods, the handwriting on the wall presented him with his doom, Dan. 5:3, etc. In the reference to the book of the *Kings* concerning this Jehoiakim mention is made of *that which was found in him* (v. 8), which

seems to be meant of the treachery that was found in him towards the king of Babylon; but some of the Jewish writers understand it of certain private marks or signatures found in his dead body, in honour of his idol, such cuttings as God had forbidden, Lev. 19:28. 3. Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, attempted to reign in his stead, and reigned long enough to show his evil inclination; but, after three months and ten days, the king of Babylon sent and fetched him away captive, with more of the goodly vessels of the temple. He is here said to be eight years old, but in *Kings* he is said to be eighteen when he began to reign, so that this seems to be a mistake of the transcriber, unless we suppose that his father took him at eight years old to join with him in the government, as some think.

Verses 11-21

We have here an account of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Abraham, God's friend, was called out of that country, from Ur of the Chaldees, when God took him into covenant and communion with himself; and now his degenerate seed were carried into that country again, to signify that they had forfeited all that kindness wherewith they had been regarded for the father's sake, and the benefit of that covenant into which he was called; all was now undone again. Here we have,

I. The sins that brought this desolation.

1. Zedekiah, the king in whose days it came, brought it upon himself by his own folly; for he conducted himself very ill both towards God and towards the king of Babylon. (1.) If he had but made God his friend, that would have prevented the ruin. Jeremiah brought him messages from God, which, if he had given due regard to them, might have secured a lengthening of his tranquillity; but it is here charged upon him that he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah*, v. 12. It was expected that this mighty prince, high as he was, should humble himself before a poor prophet, when *he spoke from the mouth of the Lord*, should submit to his admonitions and be amended by them, to his counsels and be ruled by them, should lay himself under the commanding power of the word of God in his mouth; and, because he would not thus make himself a servant to God, he was made a slave to his enemies. God will find some way or other to humble those that will not humble themselves. Jeremiah, as a prophet, was set *over the nations and kingdoms* (Jer. 1:10), and, as mean a figure as he made, whoever would not humble themselves before him found that it was at their peril. (2.) If he had but been true to his covenant with the king of Babylon, that would have prevented his ruin; but he *rebelled against him*, though he had sworn to be his faithful tributary, and perfidiously violated his engagements to him, v. 13. It was this that provoked the king of Babylon to deal so severely with him as he did. All nations looked upon an oath as a sacred thing, and on those that durst break through the obligations of it as the worst of men, abandoned of God and to be abhorred by all mankind. If therefore Zedekiah falsify his oath, *when, lo, he has given his hand, he shall not escape*, Eze. 17:18. Though Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen, an enemy, yet if, having sworn to him, he be false to him, he shall know *there is a God to whom vengeance belongs*. The thing that ruined Zedekiah was not only that he *turned not to the Lord God of Israel*, but that he *stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning to him*, that is, he as obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke nor his heart under the impressions of his word, and so, in effect, he *would not be healed, he would not live*.

2. The great sin that brought this destruction was idolatry. The priests and people went after *the abominations of the heathen*, forsook the pure worship of God for the lewd and filthy rites of the Pagan superstition, and so *polluted the house of the Lord*, v. 14. The priests, the chief of the priests, who should have opposed idolatry, were ring-leaders in it. That place is not far from ruin in which religion is already ruined.

3. The great aggravation of their sin, and that which filled the measure of it, was the abuse they gave to God's prophets, who were sent to call them to repentance, v. 15, 16. Here we have, (1.) God's tender compassion towards them in sending prophets to them. Because he was the *God of their fathers*, in covenant with them, and whom they worshipped (though this degenerate race forsook him), therefore he *sent to them by his messengers*, to convince them of their sin and warn them of the ruin they would bring upon themselves by it, *rising up betimes and sending*, which denotes not only that he did it with the greatest care and concern imaginable, as men rise betimes to set their servants to work when their heart is upon their business, but that, upon their first deviation from God to idols, if they took but one step that way, God immediately sent to them by his messengers to reprove them for it. He gave them early timely notice both of their duty and danger. Let this quicken us to seek God early, that he rises betimes to send to us. The prophets that were sent rose betimes to speak to them, were diligent and faithful in their office, lost no time, slipped no opportunity of dealing with them; and therefore God is said to rise betimes. The more pains ministers take in their work the more will the people have to answer for if it be all in vain. The reason given why God by his prophets did thus strive with them is because *he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-lace*, and would by these means have prevented their ruin. Note, The methods God takes to reclaim sinners by his word, by ministers, by conscience, by providences, are all instances of his compassion towards them and his unwillingness *that any should perish*. (2.) Their base and disingenuous carriage towards God (v. 16): *They mocked the messengers of God* (which was a high affront to him that sent them), *despised his word* in their mouths, and not only so, but *misused the prophets*, treating them as their enemies. The ill usage they gave Jeremiah who lived at this time, and which we read much of in the book of his prophecy, is an instance of this. This was an evidence of an implacable enmity to God, and an invincible resolution to go on in their sins. This brought wrath upon them without remedy, for it was sinning against the remedy. Nothing is more provoking to God than abuses given to his faithful ministers; for what is done against them he takes as done against himself. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Persecution was the sin that brought upon Jerusalem its final destruction by the Romans. See Mt. 23:34–37. Those that mock at God's faithful ministers, and do all they can to render them despicable or odious, that vex and misuse them, to discourage them and to keep others from hearkening to them, should be reminded that a wrong done to an ambassador is construed as done to the prince that sends him, and that the day is coming when they will find it would have been better for them if they had been thrown *into the sea* with a mill-stone about their necks; for hell is deeper and more dreadful.

II. The desolation itself, and some few of the particular so fit, which we had more largely 2 Ki. 25:1. Multitudes were put to the sword, even *in the house of their sanctuary* (v. 17), whither they fled for refuge, hoping that the holiness of the place would be their protection. But how could they expect to find it so when they themselves had polluted it with their abominations? v. 14. Those that cast off the dominion of their religion forfeit all the benefit and comfort of it. The Chaldeans not only paid no

reverence to the sanctuary, but showed no natural pity either to the tender sex or to venerable age. They forsook God, who had compassion on them (v. 15), and would have none of him; justly therefore are they given up into the hands of cruel men, for they *had no compassion on young man or maiden*. 2. All the remaining vessels of the temple, great and small, and all the treasures, sacred and secular, the treasures of God's house and of the king and his princes, were seized, and brought to Babylon, v. 18. 3. The temple was burnt, the walls of Jerusalem were demolished, the houses (called here the *palaces*, as Ps. 48:3, so stately, rich, and sumptuous were they) laid in ashes, and all the furniture, called here *the goodly vessels thereof*, destroyed, v. 19. Let us see where what woeful havock sin makes, and, as we value the comfort and continuance of our estates, keep that worm from the root of them. 4. The remainder of the people that escaped the sword were carried captives to Babylon (v. 20), impoverished, enslaved, insulted, and exposed to all the miseries, not only of a strange and barbarous land, but of an enemy's land, where those that hated them bore rule over them. They were servants to those monarchs, and no doubt were ruled with rigour so long as that monarchy lasted. Now they sat down by the rivers of Babylon, with the streams of which they mingled their tears, Ps. 137:1. And though there, it should seem, they were cured of idolatry, yet, as appears by the prophet Ezekiel, they were not cured of mocking the prophets. 5. The land lay desolate while they were captives in Babylon, v. 21. That fruitful land, the glory of all lands, was now turned into a desert, not tilled, nor husbanded. The pastures were not clothed as they used to be with flocks, nor the valleys with corn, but all lay neglected. Now this may be considered, (1.) As the just punishment of their former abuse of it. They had served Baal with its fruits; *cursed therefore is the ground for their sakes*. Now the land *enjoyed her sabbaths*; (v. 21), as God had threatened by Moses, Lev. 26:34, and the reason there given (v. 35) is, "Because *it did not rest on your sabbaths*; you profaned the sabbath-day, did not observe the sabbatical year." They many a time ploughed and sowed their land in the seventh year, when it should have rested, and now it lay unploughed and unsown for ten times seven years. Note, God will be no loser in his glory at last by the disobedience of men: if the tribute be not paid, he will distraint and recover it, as he speaks, Hos. 2:9. If they would not let the land rest, God would make it rest whether they would or no. Some think they had neglected the observance of seventy sabbatical years in all, and just so many, by way of reprisal, the land now enjoyed; or, if those that had been neglected were fewer, it was fit that the law should be satisfied with interest. We find that one of the quarrels God had with them at this time was for not observing another law which related to the seventh year, and that was the release of servants; see Jer. 34:13, etc. (2.) Yet we may consider it as giving some encouragement to their hopes that they should, in due time, return to it again. Had others come and taken possession of it, they might have despaired of ever recovering it; but, while it lay desolate, it did, as it were, lie waiting for them again, and refuse to acknowledge any other owners.

Verses 22-23

These last two verses of this book have a double aspect. 1. They look back to the prophecy of Jeremiah, and show how that was accomplished, v. 22. God had, by him, promised the restoring of the captives and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, at the end of seventy years; and that time to favour Sion, that set time, came at last. After a long and dark night the day-spring from on high visited them. God will be found true to every word he has spoken. 2. They look forward to the history of Ezra, which begins

with the repetition of these last two verses. They are there the introduction to a pleasant story; here they are the conclusion of a very melancholy one; and so we learn from them that, though God's church be cast down, it is not cast off, though his people be corrected, they are not abandoned, though thrown into the furnace, yet not lost there, nor left there any longer than till the dross be separated. Though God contend long, he will not contend always. The Israel of God shall be fetched out of Babylon in due time, and even the dry bones made to live. It may be long first; but the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak and not lie; therefore, though it tarry, wait for it.