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

This second book of the Kings (which the Septuagint, numbering from Samuel, called the *fourth*) is a continuation of the former book; and, some think, might better have been made to begin with the fifty-first verse of the foregoing chapter, where the reign of Ahaziah begins. The former book had an illustrious beginning, in the glories of the kingdom of Israel, when it was entire; this has a melancholy conclusion, in the desolations of the kingdoms of Israel first, and then of Judah, after they had been long broken into two: for a kingdom divided against itself cometh to destruction. But, as Elijah's mighty works were very much the glory of the former book, towards the latter end of it, so were Elisha's the glory of this, towards the beginning of it. These prophets out-shone their princes; and therefore, as far as they go, the history shall be accounted for in them. Here is, I. Elijah fetching fire from heaven and ascending in fire to heaven, ch. 1 and 2. II. Elisha working many miracles, both for prince and people, Israelites and foreigners, ch. 3-7. III. Hazael and Jehu anointed, the former for the correction of Israel, the latter for the destruction of the house of Ahab and the worship of Baal, ch. 8-10. IV. The reign of several of the kings, both of Judah and Israel, ch. 11-16. V. The captivity of the ten tribes, ch. 17. VI. The good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, ch. 18-20. VII. Manassah's wicked reign, and Josiah's good one, ch. 21-23. VIII. The destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, ch. 24 and 25. This history, in the several passages of it, confirms that observation of Solomon, *That righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.*

Chapter 1

We here find Ahaziah, the genuine son and successor of Ahab, on the throne of Israel. His reign continued not two years; he died by a fall in his own house, of which, after the mention of the revolt of Moab (v. 1), we have here an account. I. The message which, on that occasion, he sent to the god of Ekron (v. 2). II. The message he received from the God of Israel (v. 3-8). III. The destruction of the messengers he sent to seize the prophet, once and again (v. 9-12). IV. His compassion to, and compliance with, the third messenger, upon his submission, and the delivery of the message to the king himself (v. 13-16). IV. The death of Ahaziah (v. 17, 18). In the story we may observe how great the prophet looks and how little the prince.

Verses 1-8

We have here Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, under God's rebukes both by his providence and by his prophet, by his rod and by his word.

I. He is crossed in his affairs. How can those expect to prosper that *do evil in the sight of the Lord*, and *provoke him to anger*? When he rebelled against God, and revolted from his allegiance to him, Moab rebelled against Israel, and revolted from the subjection that had long paid to the kings of Israel, v. 1. The Edomites that bordered on Judah, and were tributaries to the kings of Judah, still continued so, as we find in the chapter before (v. 47), till, in the wicked reign of Joram, they broke that yoke (ch. 8:22) as the Moabites did now. If men break their covenants with us, and neglect their duty, we must reflect upon our breach of covenant with God, and the neglect of our duty to him. Sin weakens and impoverishes us. We shall hear of the Moabites, ch. 3:5.

II. He is seized with sickness in body, not from any inward cause, but by a severe accident. *He fell down through a lattice*, and was much bruised with the fall; perhaps it threw him into a fever, v. 2. Whatever we go, there is but a step between us and death. A man's house is his castle, but not to secure him against the judgments of God. The cracked lattice is a fatal to the son, when God pleases to make it so, as the bow drawn at a venture was to the father. Ahaziah would not attempt to reduce the Moabites, lest he should perish in the field of battle: but he is not safe, though he tarry at home. Royal palaces do not always yield firm footing. The snare is laid for the sinner in the ground where he thinks least of it, Job 18:9, 10. The whole creation, which groans under the man's sin, will at length sink and break under the weight, like this lattice. He is never safe that has God for his enemy.

III. In his distress he sends messengers to enquire of the god Ekron whether he should recover or no, v. 2. And here, 1. His enquiry was very foolish: *Shall I recover?* Even nature itself would rather have asked, "What means may I use that I may recover?" But as one solicitous only to know his fortune, not to know his duty, his question is only this, *Shall I recover?* to which a little time would give an answer. We should be more thoughtful what will become of us after death than how, or when, or where, we shall die, and more desirous to be told how we may conduct ourselves well in our sickness, and get good to our souls by it, than whether we shall recover from it. 2. His sending to Baal-zebub was very wicked; to make a dead and dumb idol, perhaps newly erected (for idolaters were fond of new gods), his oracle, was not less a reproach to his reason than to his

religion. Baal-zebul, which signifies *the lord of a fly*, was one of their Baals that perhaps gave his answers either by the power of the demons or the craft of the priests, with a humming noise, like that of a great fly, or that had (as they fancied) rid their country of the swarms of flies wherewith it was infested, or of some pestilential disease brought among them by flies. Perhaps this dunghill-deity was as famous then as the oracle of Delphos was, long afterwards, in Greece. In the New Testament *the prince of the devils* is called *Beel-zebul* (Mt. 12:24), for the gods of the Gentiles were devils, and this perhaps grew to be one of the most famous.

IV. Elijah, by direction from God, meets the messengers, and turns them back with an answer that shall save them the labour of going to Ekron. Had Ahaziah sent for Elijah, humbled himself, and begged his prayers, he might have had an answer of peace; but if he send to the god of Ekron, instead of the God of Israel, this, like Saul's consulting the witch, shall fill the measure of his iniquity, and bring upon him a sentence of death. Those that will not enquire of the word of God for their comfort shall be made to hear it, whether they will or not, to their amazement.

1. He faithfully reproves his sin (v. 3): *Is it not because there is not* (that is, because you think there is not) a God in Israel (*because there is no God, none in Israel*, so it may be read), *that you go to enquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron*, a despicable town of the Philistines (Zec. 9:7), long since vanquished by Israel? Here, (1.) The sin was bad enough, giving that honour to the devil which is due to God alone, which was done as much by their enquiries as by their sacrifices. Note, It is a very wicked thing, upon any occasion or pretence whatsoever, to consult with the devil. This wickedness reigned in the heathen world (Isa. 47:12, 13) and remains too much even in the Christian world, and the devil's kingdom is supported by it. (2.) The construction which Elijah, in God's name, puts upon it, makes it much worse: "It is because you think not only that the God of Israel is not able to tell you, but that there is no God at all in Israel, else you would not send so far for a divine answer." Note, A practical and constructive atheism is the cause and malignity of our departures from God. Surely we think there is *no God in Israel* when we live at large, make flesh our arm, and seek a portion in the things of this world.

2. He plainly reads his doom: Go, tell him *he shall surely die*, v. 4. "Since he is so anxious to know his fate, this is it; let him make the best of it." The certain fearful looking for of judgment and indignation which this message must needs cause cannot but cut him to the heart.

V. The message being delivered to him by his servants, he enquires of them by whom it was sent to him, and concludes, by their description of him, that it must be Elijah, v. 7, 8. For, 1. His dress was the same that he had seen him in, in his father's court. He was clad in a hairy garment, and had a leathern girdle about him, was plain and homely in his garb. John Baptist, the Elias of the New Testament, herein resembled him, for his clothes were made of hair cloth, and he was girt with a leathern girdle, Mt. 3:4. He that was clothed with the Spirit despised all rich and gay clothing. 2. His message was such as he used to deliver to his father, to whom he never prophesied good, but evil. Elijah is one of those witnesses that still torment the inhabitants of the earth, Rev. 11:10. He that was a thorn in Ahab's eyes will be so in the eyes of his son while he treads in the steps of his father's wickedness; and he is ready to cry out, as his father did, *Hast thou found me, O my enemy?* Let sinners consider that the word which *took hold of their fathers* is still as quick and powerful as ever. See Zec. 1:6; Heb. 4:12.

Verses 9-18

Here, I. The king issues out a warrant for the apprehending of Elijah. If the God of Ekron had told him he should die, it is probable he would have taken it quietly; but now that a prophet of the Lord tells him so, reproving him for his sin and reminding him of the God of Israel, he cannot bear it. So far is he from making any good improvement of the warning given him that he is enraged against the prophet; neither his sickness, nor the thoughts of death, made any good impressions upon him, nor possessed him with any fear of God. No external alarms will startle and soften secure sinners, but rather exasperate them. Did the king think Elijah a prophet, a true prophet? Why then durst he persecute him? Did he think him a common person? What occasion was there to send such a force, in order to seize him? Thus a band of men must take our Lord Jesus.

II. The captain that was sent with his fifty soldiers found Elijah on the top of a hill (some think Carmel), and commanded him, in the king's name, to surrender himself, v. 9. Elijah was now so far from absconding, as formerly, into the close recesses of a cave, that he makes a bold appearance on the top of a hill; experience of God's protection makes him more bold. The captain calls him *a man of God*, not that he believed him to be so, or revered him as such a one, but because he was commonly called so. Had he really looked upon him as a prophet, he would not have attempted to make him his prisoner; and, had he thought him entrusted with the word of God, he would not have pretended to command him with the word of a king.

III. Elijah calls for fire from heaven, to consume this haughty daring sinner, not to secure himself (he could have done that some other way), nor to avenge himself (for it was not his own cause that he appeared and acted in), but to prove his mission, and to *reveal the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. This captain had, in scorn, called him *a man of God*: "If I be so," says Elijah, "thou shalt pay dearly for making a jest of it." He valued himself upon his commission (the king has said, *Come down*), but Elijah will let him know that the God of Israel is superior to the king of Israel and has a greater power to enforce his commands. It was not long since Elijah had fetched fire from heaven, to consume the sacrifice (1 Ki. 17:38), in token of God's acceptance of that sacrifice as an atonement for the sins of the people; but, they having slighted that, now the fire falls, not on the sacrifice, but on the sinners themselves, v. 10. See here, 1. What an interest the prophets had in heaven; what the Spirit of God in them demanded the power of God effected. Elijah did but speak, and it was done. He that formerly had fetched water from heaven now fetches fire. O the power of prayer! *Concerning the work of my hands, command you me*, Isa. 14:11. 2. What an interest heaven had in the prophets! God was always ready to plead their cause, and avenge the injuries done to them; kings shall still be *rebuked for their sakes*, and charged to do *his prophets no harm*; one Elijah is more to God than 10,000 captains and their fifties. Doubtless Elijah did this by a divine impulse, and yet our Saviour would not allow the disciples to draw it into a precedent, Lu. 9:54. They were now not far from the place where Elias did this act of justice upon provoking Israelites, and would needs, in like manner, call for fire upon those provoking Samaritans. "No," says Christ, "by no means, *you know not what manner of spirit you are of*," that is, (1.) "You do not consider *what manner of spirit*, as disciples, you are called to, and how different from that of the Old-Testament dispensation; it was agreeable enough to that dispensation of terror, and of the letter, for Elias to call for fire, but the dispensation of the Spirit and of grace will by no means allow it." (2.) "You are not aware what manner of spirit you are, upon this occasion, actuated by, and

how different from that of Elias: he did it in holy zeal, you in passion; he was concerned for God's glory, you for your own reputation only." God judges men's practices by their principles, and his judgment is according to truth.

IV. This is repeated a second time; would one think it? 1. Ahaziah sends, a second time, to apprehend Elijah (v. 11), as if he were resolved not to be baffled by omnipotence itself. Obstinate sinners must be convinced and conquered, at last, by the fire of hell, for fire from heaven, it seems, will not subdue them. 2. Another captain is ready with his fifty, who, in his blind rage against the prophet, and his blind obedience to the king, dares engage in that service which had been fatal to the last undertakers. This is as impudent and imperious as the last, and more in haste; not only, "*Come down quietly*, and do not struggle," but without taking any notice of what had been done, he says, "*Come down quickly*, and do not trifle, the king's business requires haste; come down, or I will fetch thee down." 3. Elijah relents not, but calls for another flash of lightning, which instantly lays this captain and his fifty dead upon the spot. Those that will sin like others must expect to suffer like them; God is inflexibly just.

V. The third captain humbled himself and cast himself upon the mercy of God and Elijah. It does not appear that Ahaziah ordered him to do so (his stubborn heart is as hard as ever; so regardless is he of the terrors of the Lord, so little affected with the manifestations of his wrath, and withal so prodigal of the lives of his subjects, that he sends a third with the same provoking message to Elijah), but he took warning by the fate of his predecessors, who, perhaps, lay dead before his eyes; and, instead of summoning the prophet down, fell down before him, and begged for his life and the lives of his soldiers, acknowledging their own evil deserts and the prophet's power (v. 13, 14): *Let my life be precious in thy sight*. Note, There is nothing to be got by contending with God: if we would prevail with him, it must be by supplication; if we would not fall before God, we must bow before him; and those are wise for themselves who learn submission from the fatal consequences of the obstinacy of others.

VI. Elijah does more than grant the request of this third captain. God is not so severe with those that stand it out against him but he is as ready to show mercy to those that repent and submit to him; never any found it in vain to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. This captain, not only has his life spared, but is permitted to carry his point: Elijah, being so commanded by the angel, *goes down with him to the king*, v. 15. Thus he shows that he before refused to come, not because he feared the king or court, but because he would not be imperiously compelled, which would lessen the honour of his master; he *magnifies his office*. He comes boldly to the king, and tells him to his face (let him take it as he may) what he had before sent to him (v. 16), that he shall surely and shortly die; he mitigates not the sentence, either for fear of the king's displeasure or in pity to his misery. The God of Israel has condemned him, let him send to see whether the god of Ekron can deliver him. So thunder-struck is Ahaziah with this message, when it comes from the prophet's own mouth, that neither he nor any of those about him durst offer him any violence, nor so much as give him an affront; but out of that den of lions he comes unhurt, like Daniel. Who can harm those whom God will shelter?

Lastly, The prediction is accomplished in a few days. Ahaziah died (v. 17), and, dying childless, left his kingdom to his brother Jehoram. His father reigned wickedly twenty-two years, he not two. Sometimes the *wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in*

power; but those who therefore promise themselves prosperity in impiety may perhaps find themselves deceived; for (as bishop Hall observes here), "Some sinners live long, to aggravate their judgment, others die soon, to hasten it;" but it is certain that evil pursues sinners, and, sooner or later, it will overtake them; nor will any thing fill the measure sooner than that complicated iniquity of Ahaziah—honouring the devil's oracles and hating God's oracles.

Chapter 2

In this chapter we have, I. That extraordinary event, the translation of Elijah. In the close of the foregoing chapter we had a wicked king leaving the world in disgrace, here we have a holy prophet leaving it in honour; the departure of the former was his greatest misery, of the latter his greatest bliss: men are as their end is. Here is, 1. Elijah taking leave of his friends, the sons of the prophets, and especially Elisha, who kept close to him, and walked with him through Jordan (v. 1–10). 2. Elijah taken into heaven by the ministry of angels (v. 11), and Elisha's lamentation of the loss this earth has of him (v. 12). II. The manifestation of Elisha, as a prophet in his room. 1. By the dividing of Jordan (v. 13, 14). 2. By the respect which the sons of the prophets paid him (v. 15–18). 3. By the healing of the unwholesome waters of Jericho (v. 19–22). 4. By the destruction of the children of Bethel that mocked him (v. 23–25). This revolution in prophecy makes a greater figure than the revolution of a kingdom.

Verses 1-8

Elijah's times, and the events concerning him, are as little dated as those of any great man in scripture; we are not told of his age, nor in what year of Ahab's reign he first appeared, nor in what year of Joram's he disappeared, and therefore cannot conjecture how long he flourished; it is supposed about twenty years in all. Here we are told,

I. That God had determined to take him up into heaven by a whirlwind, v. 1. He would do it, and it is probable let him know of his purpose some time before, that he would shortly take him from the world, not by death, but translate him body and soul to heaven, as Enoch was, only causing him to undergo such a change as would be necessary to the qualifying of him to be an inhabitant in that world of spirits, and such as those shall undergo who will be found alive at Christ's coming. It is not for us to say why God would put such a peculiar honour upon Elijah above any other of the prophets; he was a man *subject to like passions as we are*, knew sin, and yet never tasted death. Wherefore is he thus dignified, thus distinguished, as a man whom the Kings of kings did delight to honour? We may suppose that herein, 1. God looked back upon his past services, which were eminent and extraordinary, and intended a recompence for those and an encouragement to the sons of the prophets to tread in the steps of his zeal and faithfulness, and, whatever it cost them, to witness against the corruptions of the age they lived in. 2. He looked down upon the present dark and degenerate state of the church, and would thus give a very sensible proof of another life after this, and draw the hearts of the faithful few upward towards himself, and that other life. 3. He looked forward to the evangelical dispensation, and, in the translation of Elijah, gave a type and figure of the ascension of Christ and the *opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers*. Elijah had, by faith and prayer, conversed much with heaven, and now he is taken thither, to assure us that if we have our conversation in heaven, while we are here on earth, we shall be there shortly, the soul shall (and that is the man) be happy there, there for ever.

II. That Elisha had determined, as long as he continued on earth to cleave to him, and not to leave him. Elijah seemed desirous to shake him off, would have had him stay behind at Gilgal, at Bethel, at Jericho, v. 2, 4, 6. Some think out of humility; he knew what glory God designed for him, but would not seem to glory in it, nor desired it should be seen of men (God's

favourites covet not to have it proclaimed before them that they are so, as the favourites of earthly princes do), or rather it was to try him, and make his constant adherence to him the more commendable, like Naomi's persuading Ruth to go back. In vain does Elijah entreat him to tarry here and tarry there; he resolves to tarry nowhere behind his master, till he goes to heaven, and leaves him behind on this earth. "Whatever comes of it, *I will not leave thee;*" and why so? Not only because he loved him, but, 1. Because he desired to be edified by his holy heavenly converse as long as he staid on earth; it had always been profitable, but, we may suppose, was now more so than ever. We should do all the spiritual good we can one to another, and get all we can one by another, while we are together, because we are to be *together but a little while*. 2. Because he desired to be satisfied concerning his departure, and to see him when he was taken up, that his faith might be confirmed and his acquaintance with the invisible world increased. He had long followed Elijah, and he would not leave him now when he hoped for the parting blessing. Let not those that follow Christ come short by tiring at last.

III. That Elijah, before his departure, visited the schools of the prophets and took leave of them. It seems that there were such schools in many of the cities of Israel, probably even in Samaria itself. Here we find *sons of the prophets*, and considerable numbers of them, even at Bethel, where one of the calves was set up, and at Jericho, which was lately built in defiance of a divine curse. At Jerusalem, and in the kingdom of Judah, they had priests and Levites, and the temple-service, the want of which, in the kingdom of Israel, God graciously made up by those colleges, where men were trained up and employed in the exercises of religion and devotion, and whither good people resorted to solemnize the appointed feasts with praying and hearing, when they had not conveniences for sacrifice or incense, and thus religion was kept up in a time of general apostasy. Much of God was among these prophets, and *more were the children of the desolate* than the *children of the married wife*. None of all the high priests were comparable to those two great men Elijah and Elisha, who, for aught we know, never attended in the temple at Jerusalem. These seminaries of religion and virtue, which Elijah, it is probable, had been instrumental to found, he now visits, before his departure, to instruct, encourage, and bless them. Note, Those that are going to heaven themselves ought to be concerned for those they leave behind them on earth, and to leave with them their experiences, testimonies, counsels, and prayers, 2 Pt. 1:15. When Christ said, with triumph, *Now I am no more in the world*, he added, with tenderness, *But these are. Father, keep them*.

IV. That the sons of the prophets had intelligence (either from Elijah himself, or by the spirit of prophecy in some of their own society), or suspected by the solemnity of Elijah's farewell, that he was now shortly to be removed; and, 1. They told Elisha of it, both at Bethel (v. 3) and at Jericho (v. 5): *Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?* This they said, not as upbraiding him with his loss, or expecting that when his master was gone he would be upon the level with them, but to show how full they were of the thoughts of this matter and big with expectation of the event, and to admonish Elisha to prepare for the loss. Know we not that our nearest relations, and dearest friends, must shortly be taken from us? *The Lord will take them*; we lose them not till he calls for them whose they are, and who *taketh away and none can hinder him*. He takes away superiors from our head, inferiors from our feet, equals from our arms; let us therefore carefully do the duty of every relation, that we may reflect upon it with comfort when it comes to be dissolved. Elisha knew it too well, and *sorrow had*

filled his heart upon this account (as the disciples in a like case, Jn. 16:6), and therefore he did not need to be told of it, did not care for hearing of it, and would not be interrupted in his contemplations on this great concern, or in the least diverted from his attendance upon his master. *I know it; hold you your peace.* He speaks not this peevishly, or in contempt of the sons of the prophets, but as one that was himself and would have them composed and sedate, and with an awful silence expecting the event: *I know it; be silent, Zec. 2:13.* 2. They went themselves to be witnesses of it at a distance, though they might not closely attend (v. 7): *Fifty of them stood to view afar off,* intending to satisfy their curiosity, but God so ordered it that they might be eye-witnesses of the honour heaven did to that prophet, who was *despised and rejected of men.* God's works are well worthy our notice; when a *door is opened in heaven* the call is, *Come up hither, come and see.*

V. That the miraculous dividing of the river Jordan was the preface to Elijah's translation into the heavenly Canaan, as it had been to the entrance of Israel into the earthly Canaan, v. 8. He must go on to the other side Jordan to be translated, because it was his native country, and that he might be near the place where Moses died, and that thus honour might be put on that part of the country which was most despised. he and Elisha might have gone over Jordan by a ferry, as other passengers did, but God would magnify Elijah in his exit, as he did Joshua in his entrance, by the dividing of this river, Jos. 3:7. As Moses with his rod divided the sea, so Elijah with his mantle divided Jordan, both being the *insignia—the badges* of their office. These waters of old yielded to the ark, now to the prophet's mantle, which, to those that wanted the ark was an equivalent token of God's presence. When God will take up his faithful ones to heaven death is the Jordan which, immediately before their translation, they must pass through, and they find a way through it, as safe and comfortable way; the death of Christ has divided those waters, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass over. *O death! where is thy sting, thy hurt, thy terror?*

Verses 9-12

Here, I. Elijah makes his will, and leaves Elisha his heir, now anointing him to be prophet in his room, more than when he *cast his mantle upon him,* 1 Ki. 19:19.

1. Elijah, being greatly pleased with the constancy of Elisha's affection and attendance, bade him ask what he should do for him, what blessing he should leave him at parting; he does not say (as bishop Hall observes), *"Ask of me when I am gone, in heaven I shall be better able to befriend thee,"* but, *"Ask before I go."* Our friends on earth may be spoken to, and can give us an answer, but we know not that we can have access to any friend in heaven but Christ, and God in him. *Abraham is ignorant of us.*

2. Elisha, having this fair opportunity to enrich himself with the best riches, prays for a *double portion of his spirit.* He asks not for wealth, nor honour, nor exemption from trouble, but to be qualified for the service of God and his generation, he asks, (1.) For the Spirit, not that the gifts and graces of the Spirit were in Elijah's power to give, therefore he says not, *"Give me the Spirit"* (he knew very well it was God's gift), but *"Let it be upon me, intercede with God for this for me."* Christ bade his disciples ask what they would, not one, but all, and promised to send the Spirit, with much more authority and assurance than Elijah could. (2.) For *his spirit,* because he was to be a prophet in his room, to carry on his work, to father the sons of the prophets and face their enemies, because he had the same perverse generation to deal with that he had, so that, if he have not

his spirit, he has not *strength according to the day*. (3.) For a *double portion of his spirit*; he does not mean double to what Elijah had, but double to what the rest of the prophets had, from whom so much would not be expected as from Elisha, who had been brought up under Elijah. It is a holy ambition to *covet earnestly the best gifts*, and those which will render us most serviceable to God and our brethren. Note, We all ought, both ministers and people, to set before us the example of our predecessors, to labour after their spirit, and to be earnest with God for that grace which carried them through their work and enabled them to finish well.

3. Elijah promised him that which he asked, but under two provisos, v. 10. (1.) Provided he put a due value upon it and esteem it highly: this he teaches him to do by calling it *a hard thing*, not too hard for God to do, but too great for him to expect. Those are best prepared for spiritual blessings that are most sensible of their worth and their own unworthiness to receive them. (2.) Provided he kept close to his master, even to the last, and was observant of him: *If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so*, otherwise not. A diligent attendance upon his master's instructions, and a careful observance of his example, particularly now in his last scene, were the condition and would be a proper means of obtaining much of his spirit. Taking strict notice of the manner of his ascension would likewise be of great use to him. The comforts of departing saints, and their experiences, will mightily help both to gild our comforts and to steel our resolutions. Or, perhaps, this was intended only as a sign: "If God favour thee so far as to give thee a sight of me when I ascend, take that for a token that he will do this for thee, and depend upon it." Christ's disciples saw him ascend, and were thereupon assured that they should, in a little time, be filled with his Spirit, Acts 1:8. Elisha, we may suppose, hereupon prayed earnestly, *Lord, show me this token for good*.

II. Elijah is carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot, v. 11. Like Enoch, he was translated, *that he should not see death*; and was (as Mr. Cowley expresses it) *the second man that leaped the ditch where all the rest of mankind fell, and went not downward to the sky*. Many curious questions might be asked about this matter, which could not be answered. Let it suffice that we are here told,

1. What his Lord, when he came, found him doing. He was talking with Elisha, instructing and encouraging him, directing him in his work, and quickening him to it, for the good of those whom he left behind. He was not meditating nor praying, as one wholly taken up with the world he was going to, but engaged in edifying discourse, as one concerned about the kingdom of God among men. We mistake if we think our preparation for heaven is carried on only by contemplation and the acts of devotion. Usefulness to others will pass as well in our account as any thing. Thinking of divine things is good, but talking of them (if it come from the heart) is better, because for edification, 1 Co. 14:4. Christ ascended as he was blessing his disciples.

2. What convoy his Lord sent for him—a *chariot of fire and horses of fire*, which appeared either descending upon them from the clouds or (as bishop Patrick thinks) running towards them upon the ground: in this form the angels appeared. The souls of all the faithful are carried by an invisible guard of angels into the bosom of Abraham; but, Elijah being to carry his body with him, this heavenly guard was visible, not in a human shape, as usual, though they might so have borne him up in their arms, or carried him as on eagles' wings, but that would have been to carry him like a child, like a lamp (Isa. 40:11, 31); they appear in the form of a chariot and horses, that he may ride in state, may ride in triumph, like a prince, like a conqueror, yea, *more than a*

conqueror. The angels are called in scripture *cherubim* and *seraphim*, and their appearance here, though it may seem below their dignity, answers to both those names; for (1.) *Seraphim* signifies *fiery*, and God is said to make them *a flame of fire*, Ps. 104:4. (2.) *Cherubim* (as many think) signifies *chariots*, and they are called *the chariots of God* (Ps. 68:17), and he is said to *ride upon a cherub* (Ps. 18:10), to which perhaps there is an allusion in Ezekiel's vision of four living creatures, and wheels, like horses and chariots; in Zechariah's vision, they are so represented, Zec. 1:8; 6:1. Compare Rev. 6:2, etc. See the readiness of the angels to do the will of God, even in the meanest services, for the good of those that shall be heirs of salvation. Elijah must remove to the world of angels, and therefore, to show how desirous they were of his company, some of them would come to fetch him. The chariot and horses appeared like fire, not for burning, but brightness, not to torture or consume him, but to render his ascension conspicuous and illustrious in the eyes of those that stood afar off to view it. Elijah had burned with holy zeal for God and his honour, and now with a heavenly fire he was refined and translated.

3. How he was separated from Elisha. This chariot parted them both asunder. Note, The dearest friends must part. Elisha had protested he would not leave him, yet now is left behind by him.

4. Whither he was carried. He *went up by a whirlwind into heaven*. The fire tends upward; the whirlwind helped to carry him through the atmosphere, out of the reach of the magnetic virtue of this earth, and then how swiftly he ascended through the pure ether to the world of holy and blessed spirits we cannot conceive.

"But where he stopped will ne'er be known,
'Till Phenix—nature, aged grown,
To a better being shall aspire,
Mounting herself, like him, to eternity in fire."

—Cowley

Elijah had once, in a passion, wished he might die; yet God was so gracious to him as not only not to take him at his word then, but to honour him with this singular privilege, that he should never see death; and by this instance, and that of Enoch, (1.) God showed how men should have left the world if they had not sinned, not by death, but by a translation. (2.) He gave a glimpse of that life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel, of the glory reserved for the bodies of the saints, and the *opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers*, as then to Elijah. It was also a figure of Christ's ascension.

III. Elisha pathetically laments the loss of that great prophet, but attends him with an ecomium, v. 12. 1. He saw it; thus he received the sign by which he was assured of the grant of his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He looked stedfastly towards heaven, whence he was to expect that gift, as the disciples did, Acts 1:10. he saw it awhile, but the vision was presently out of his sight; and *he saw him no more*. 2. He rent his own clothes, in token of the sense he had of his own and the public loss. Though Elijah had gone triumphantly to heaven, yet this world could ill spare him, and therefore his removal ought to be much regretted by the survivors. Surely their hearts are hard whose eyes are dry when God, by taking away faithful useful men, calls for weeping and mourning. Though Elijah's departure made way for Elisha's eminency, especially since he was now sure of a double portion of his spirit, yet he lamented the loss of him, for he loved him, and could have served him for

ever. 3. He gave him a very honourable character, as the reason why he thus lamented the loss of him. (1.) He himself had lost the guide of his youth: *My father, my father*. He saw his own condition like that of a fatherless child thrown upon the world, and lamented it accordingly. Christ, when he left his disciples, did not leave them orphans (Jn. 14:15), but Elijah must. (2.) The public had lost its best guard; he was *the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*. He would have brought them all to heaven, as in this chariot, if it had not been their own fault; they used not chariots and horses in their wars, but Elijah was to them, by his counsels, reproofs, and prayers, better than the strongest force of chariot and horse, and kept off the judgments of God. His departure was like the routing of an army, an irreparable loss. "Better have lost all our men of war than this man of God."

Verses 13-18

We have here an account of what followed immediately after the translation of Elijah.

I. The tokens of God's presence with Elisha, and the marks of his elevation into Elijah's room, to be, as he had been, a father to the sons of the prophets, and the chariots and horsemen of Israel.

1. He was possessed of Elijah's mantle, the badge of his office, which, we may suppose, he put on and wore for his master's sake, v. 13. When Elijah went to heaven, though he did not let fall his body as others do, he let fall his mantle instead of it; for he was unclothed, that he might be clothed upon with immortality: he was going to a world where he needed not the mantle to adorn him, nor to shelter him from the weather, nor to wrap his face in, as 1 Ki. 19:13. He left his mantle as a legacy to Elisha, and, though in itself it was of small value, yet as it was a token of the descent of the Spirit upon him, it was more than if he had bequeathed to him thousands of gold and silver. Elisha took it up, not as a sacred relic to be worshipped, but as a significant garment to be worn, and a recompence to him for his own garments which he had rent. he loved this cloak ever since it was first cast over him, 1 Ki. 19:19. He that then so cheerfully obeyed the summons of it, and became Elisha's servant, is now dignified with it, and becomes his successor. There are remains of great and good men, which, like this mantle, ought to be gathered up and preserved by the survivors, their sayings, their writings, their examples, that, as their works follow them in the reward of them, they may stay behind in the benefit of them.

2. He was possessed of Elijah's power to divide Jordan, v. 14. Having parted with his father, he returns to his sons in the schools of the prophets. Jordan was between him and them; it had been divided to make way for Elijah to his glory; he will try whether it will divide to make way for him to his business, and by that he will know that God is with him, and that he has the double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah's last miracle shall be Elisha's first; thus he begins where Elijah left off and there is no vacancy. In dividing the waters, (1.) He made use of Elijah's mantle, as Elijah himself had done (v. 8), to signify that he designed to keep to his master's methods and would not introduce any thing new, as those affect to do that think themselves wiser than their predecessors. (2.) He applied to Elijah's God: *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* He does not ask, "Where is Elijah?" as poring upon the loss of him, as if he could not be easy now that he was gone,—or as doubting of his happy state, as if, like the sons of the prophets here, he knew not what had become of him,—or as curiously enquiring concerning him, and the particular of that state he was removed to (no, that is a hidden life, it does not yet appear what we shall be),—nor as expecting

help from him; no, Elijah is happy, but is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; but he asks, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* Now that Elijah was taken to heaven God had abundantly proved himself the God of Elijah; if he had not prepared for him that city, and done better for him there than ever he did for him in this world, he *would have been ashamed to be called his God*, Heb. 11:16; Mt. 27:31, 32. Now that Elijah was taken to heaven Elisha enquired, [1.] After God. When our creature-comforts are removed, we have a God to go to, that lives for ever. [2.] After *The God of Elijah*, the God that Elijah served, and honoured, and pleaded for, and adhered to when all Israel had deserted him. This honour is done to those who cleave to God in times of general apostasy, that God will be, in a peculiar manner, their God. "The God that owned, and protected, and provided for Elijah, and many ways honoured him, especially now at last, where is he? Lord, am not I promised Elijah's spirit? Make good that promise." The words which next follow in the original, *Aph-his—even he*, which we join to the following clause, *when he also had smitten the waters*, some make an answer to this question, *Where is Elijah's God? Etiam ille adhuc superest—He is in being still*, and nigh at hand. We have lost Elijah, but we have not lost Elijah's God. He *has not forsaken the earth*; it is even he that is still with me." Note, *First*, It is the duty and interest of the saints on earth to enquire after God, and apply to him as the Lord God of the saints that have gone before to heaven, *the God of our fathers*. *Secondly*, It is very comfortable to those who enquire of him; it is *even he* that *is in his holy temple* (Ps. 11:4) and *nigh to all who call upon him*, Ps. 145:18. *Thirdly*, Those that walk in the spirit and steps of their godly faithful predecessors shall certainly experience the same grace that they experienced; Elijah's God will be Elisha's too. The Lord God of the holy prophets is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and what will it avail us to have the mantles of those that are gone, their places, their books, if we have not their spirit, their God?

3. He was possessed of Elijah's interest in the sons of the prophets, v. 15. Some of the fellows of the college at Jericho, who had placed themselves conveniently near Jordan, to see what passed, were surprised to see Jordan divided before Elisha in his return, and took that as a convincing evidence that *the spirit of Elijah did rest upon him*, and that therefore they ought to pay the same respect and deference to him that they had paid to Elijah. Accordingly they went to meet him, to congratulate him on his safe passage through fire and water, and the honour God had put upon him; and they *bowed themselves to the ground before him*. They were trained up in the schools; Elisha was taken from the plough; yet when they perceived that God was with him, and that this was *the man whom he delighted to honour*, they readily submitted to him as their head and father, as the people to Joshua when Moses was dead, Jos. 1:17. Those that appear to have God's Spirit and presence with them ought to have our esteem and best affections, notwithstanding the meanness of their extraction and education. This ready submission of the sons of the prophets, no doubt, was a great encouragement to Elisha, and helped to clear his call.

II. The needless search which the sons of the prophets made for Elijah. 1. They suggested that possibly he was dropped, either alive or dead, upon some mountain, or in some valley; and it would be a satisfaction to them if they sent some strong men, whom they had at command, in quest of him, v. 16. Some of them perhaps started this as a demurrer to the choice of Elisha: "Let us first be sure that Elijah has quite gone. Can we think Elijah thus neglected by heaven, that chosen vessel thus cast away as a vessel in which was no pleasure?" 2. Elisha consented not to their motion till they overcame him with importunity, v. 17.

They urged him till he was ashamed to oppose it any further lest he should be thought wanting in his respect to his old master or loth to resign the mantle again. Wise men may yield to that, for the sake of peace and the good opinion of others, which yet their judgment is against as needless and fruitless. 3. The issue made them as much ashamed of their proposal as they, by their importunity, had made Elisha ashamed of his opposing it. Their messengers, after they had tired themselves with fruitless search, returned with a *non est inventus—he is not to be found*, and gave Elisha an opportunity of upbraiding his friends with their folly: *Did I not say unto you, Go not?* v. 18. This would make them the more willing to acquiesce in his judgment another time. Traversing hills and valleys will never bring us to Elijah, but the imitation of his holy faith and zeal will, in due time.

Verses 19-25

Elisha had, in this respect, a double portion of Elijah's spirit, that he wrought more miracles than Elijah. Some reckon them in number just double. Two are recorded in these verses—a miracle of mercy to Jericho and a miracle of judgment to Bethel, Ps. 101:1.

I. Here is a blessing upon the waters of Jericho, which was effectual to heal them. Jericho was built in disobedience to a command, in defiance to a threatening, and at the expense of the lives of all the builder's children; yet, when it was built, it was not ordered to be demolished again, nor were God's prophets or people forbidden to dwell in it, but even within those walls that were built by iniquity we find a nursery of piety. Fools, they say, build houses for wise men to dwell in. Here the wealth of the sinner provided a habitation for the just. We find Christ at Jericho, Lu. 19:1. Hither Elisha came, to confirm the souls of the disciples with a more particular account of Elijah's translation than their spies, who saw at a distance, could give them. Here he staid while the fifty men were searching for him. And, 1. The men of Jericho represented to him their grievance, v. 19. God's faithful prophets love to be employed; it is wisdom to make use of them during the little while that their light is with us. They had not applied to Elijah concerning the matter, perhaps because he was not so easy of access as Elisha was; but now, we may hope, by the influence of the divinity-school in their city, they were reformed. The situation was pleasant and afforded a good prospect; but they had neither wholesome water to drink nor fruitful soil to yield them food, and what pleasure could they take in their prospect? Water is a common mercy, which we should estimate by the greatness of the calamity which the want or unwholesomeness of it would be. Some think that it was not all the ground about Jericho that was barren and had bad water, but some one part only, and *that* where the sons of the prophets had their lodgings, who are here called *the men of the city*. 2. He soon redressed their grievance. Prophets should endeavour to make every place they come to, some way or other, the better for them, endeavouring to sweeten bitter spirits, and to make barren souls fruitful, by the due application of the word of God. Elisha will heal their waters; but, (1.) They must furnish him with salt in a new cruse, v. 20. If salt had been proper to season the water, yet what could so small a quantity do towards it and what the better for being in a new cruse? But thus those that would be helped must be employed and have their faith and obedience tried. God's works of grace are wrought, not by any operations of ours, but in observance of his institutions. (2.) He cast the salt *into the spring of the waters*, and so healed the streams and the ground they watered. Thus the way to reform men's lives is to renew their hearts; let those be seasoned with the salt of grace; for *out of them are the issues of life. Make the tree good and the fruit will be good*. Purify the heart and that

will cleanse the hands. (3.) He did not pretend to do this by his own power, but in God's name: *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters*. He is but the instrument, the channel through which God is pleased to convey this healing virtue. By doing them this kindness with a *Thus saith the Lord*, they would be made the more willing hereafter, to receive from him a reproof, admonition, or command, with the same preface. If, in God's name, he can help them, in God's name let him teach and rule them. *Thus saith the Lord*, out of Elisha's mouth, must, ever after, be of mighty force with them. (4.) The cure was lasting, and not for the present only: *The waters were healed unto this day*, v. 22. What God does *shall be for ever*, Eccl. 3:14. When he, by his Spirit, *heals a soul*, there shall be *no more death nor barrenness*; the property is altered: what was useless and offensive becomes grateful and serviceable.

II. Here is a curse upon the children of Bethel, which was effectual to destroy them; for it was not a curse causeless. At Bethel there was another school of prophets. Thither Elisha went next, in this his primary visitation, and the scholars there no doubt welcomed him with all possible respect, but the townsmen were abusive to him. One of Jeroboam's calves was at Bethel; this they were proud of, and fond of, and hated those that reproved them. The law did not empower them to suppress this pious academy, but we may suppose it was their usual practice to jeer the prophets as they went along the streets, to call them by some nickname or other, that they might expose them to contempt, prejudice their youth against them, and, if possible, drive them out of their town. Had the abuse done to Elisha been the first offence of that kind, it is probable that it would not have been so severely punished. But *mocking the messengers of the Lord*, and *misusing the prophets*, was one of the *crying sins of Israel*, as we find, 2 Chr. 36:16. Now here we have, 1. An instance of that sin. The little *children of Bethel*, the boys and girls that were playing in the streets (notice, it is likely, having come to the town of his approach), went out to meet him, not with their hosannas, as they ought to have done, but with their scoffs; they gathered about him and mocked him, as if he had been a fool, or one fit to make sport with. Among other things that they used to jeer the prophets with, they had this particular taunt for him, *Go up, thou bald head, go up, thou bald head*. It is a wicked thing to reproach persons for their natural infirmities or deformities; it is adding affliction to the afflicted; and, if they are as God made them, the reproach reflects upon him. But this was such a thing as scarcely deserved to be called a blemish, and would never have been turned to his reproach if they had had any thing else to reproach him with. It was his character as a prophet that they designed to abuse. The honour God had crowned him with should have been sufficient to cover his bald head and protect him from their scoffs. They bade him *go up*, perhaps reflecting on the assumption of Elijah: "Thy master," they say, "has gone up; why dost not thou go up after him? Where is the fiery chariot? When shall we be rid of thee too?" These children said as they were taught; they had learned of their idolatrous parents to call foul names and give bad language, especially to prophets. These young cocks, as we say, crowed after the old ones. Perhaps their parents did at this time send them out and set them on, that, if possible, they might keep the prophet out of their town. 2. A specimen of that ruin which came down upon Israel at last, for misusing God's prophets, and of which this was intended to give them fair warning. Elisha heard their taunts, a good while, with patience; but at length the fire of holy zeal for God was kindled in his breast by the continued provocation, and he *turned and looked upon them*, to try if a grave and severe look would put them out of countenance and oblige them to retire, to see if he could discern in their faces any

marks of ingenuousness; but they *were not ashamed, neither could they blush*; and therefore he *cursed them in the name of the Lord*, both imprecated and denounced the following judgment, not in personal revenge for the indignity done to himself, but as the mouth of divine justice to punish the dishonour done to God. His summons was immediately obeyed. two she-bears (bears perhaps robbed of their whelps) came out of an adjacent wood, and presently killed forty-two children, v. 24. Now in this, (1.) The prophet must be justified, for he did it by divine impulse. Had the curse come from any bad principle God would not have said *Amen* to it. We may think it would have been better to have called for two rods for the correction of these children than two bears for the destruction of them. But Elisha knew, by the Spirit, the bad character of these children. He knew what a generation of vipers those were, and what mischievous enemies they would be to God's prophets if they should live to be men, who began so early to be abusive to them. He intended hereby to punish the parents and to make them afraid of God's judgments. (2.) God must be glorified as a righteous God, that hates sin, and will reckon for it, even in little children. Let the wicked wretched brood make our flesh tremble for fear of God. Let little children be afraid of speaking wicked words, for God notices what they say,. Let them not mock any for their defects in mind or body, but pity them rather; especially let them know that it is at their peril if they jeer God's people or ministers, and scoff at any for well-doing. Let parents, that would have comfort in their children, train them up well, and do their utmost betimes to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts; for, as bishop Hall says, "In vain do we look for good from those children whose education we have neglected; and in vain do we grieve for those miscarriages which our care might have prevented." Elisha comes to Bethel and fears not the revenges of the bereaved parents; God, who bade him do what he did, he knew would bear him out. Thence he goes to Mount Carmel (v. 25), where it is probable there was a religious house fit for retirement and contemplation. Thence he returned to Samaria, where, being a public place, this father of the prophets might be most serviceable. Bishop Hall observes here, "That he can never be a profitable seer who is either always or never alone."

Chapter 3

We are now called to attend the public affairs of Israel, in which we shall find Elisha concerned. Here is, I. The general character of Jehoram, king of Israel (v. 1-3). II. A war with Moab, in which Jehoram and his allies were engaged (v. 4-8). III. The straits which the confederate army were reduced to in their expedition against Moab, and their consulting Elisha in that distress, with the answer of peace he gave them (v. 9–19). IV. The glorious issue of this campaign (v. 20–25) and the barbarous method the king of Moab took to oblige the confederate army to retire (v. 26, 27). The house of Ahab is doomed to destruction; and, though in this chapter we have both its character and its condition better than before, yet the threatened ruin is not far off.

Verses 1-5

Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and brother of Ahaziah, is here upon the throne of Israel; and, though he was but a bad man, yet two commendable things are here recorded of him:—

I. That he removed his father's idols. He did evil in many things, but not like his father Ahab or his mother Jezebel, v. 2. Bad he was, but not so bad, so *overmuch wicked*, as Solomon speaks, Eccl. 7:17. Perhaps Jehoshaphat, though by his alliance with the house of Ahab he made his own family worse, did something towards making Ahab's better. Jehoram saw his father and brother cut off for worshipping Baal, and wisely took warning by God's judgments on them, and *put away the image of Baal*, resolving to worship the God of Israel only, and consult none but his prophets. So far was well, yet it did not prevent the destruction of Ahab's family, nay, that destruction came *in his days*, and fell immediately *upon him* (ch. 9:24), though he was one of the best of the family, for then the measure of its iniquity was full. Jehoram's reformation was next to none; for, 1. He only put away the image of Baal *which his father had made*, and this probably in compliment to Jehoshaphat, who otherwise would not have come into confederacy with him, any more than with his brother, 1 Ki. 22:49. But he did not destroy the worship of Baal among the people, for Jehu found it prevalent, ch. 10:19. It was well to reform his family, but it was not enough; he ought to have used his power for the reforming of his kingdom. 2. When he put away the image of Baal, he adhered to the worship of the calves, that politic sin of Jeroboam, v. 3. *He departed not therefrom*, because that was the state engine by which the division between the two tribes was supported. Those do not truly, nor acceptably, repent or reform, who only part with the sins that they lose by, but continue their affection to the sins that they get by. 3. He only *put away* the image of Baal, he did not break it in pieces, as he ought to have done. He laid it aside for the present, yet not knowing but he might have occasion for it another time; and Jezebel, for reasons of state, was content to worship her Baal in private.

II. That he did what he could to recover his brother's losses. As he had something more of the religion of an Israelite than his father, so he had something more of the spirit of a king than his brother. Moab rebelled against Israel, immediately upon the death of Ahab, ch. 1:1. And we do not find that Ahaziah made any attempt to chastise or reduce them, but tamely let go his interest in them, rather than entertain the cares, undergo the fatigues, and run the hazards, of a war with them. His folly and pusillanimity herein, and his indifference to the public good, were the more aggravated because the tribute which the king of

Moab paid was a very considerable branch of the revenue of the crown of Israel: 100,000 *lambs, and 100,000 wethers*, v. 4. The riches of kings then lay more in cattle than coin, and they thought it not below them to *know the state of their flocks and herds* themselves, because, as Solomon observes, *the crown doth not endure to every generation*, Prov. 27:23, 24. Taxes were then paid not so much in money as in the commodities of the country, which was an ease to the subject, whether it was an advantage to the prince or no. The revolt of Moab was a great loss to Israel, yet Ahaziah sat still in sloth and ease. But an upper chamber in his house proved as fatal to him as the high places of the field could have been (ch. 1:2), and the breaking of his lattice let into his throne a man of the more active genius, that would not lose the dominion of Moab without making at least one push for its preservation.

Verses 6-19

Jehoram has no sooner got the sceptre into his hand than he takes the sword into his hand, to reduce Moab. Crowns bring great cares and perils to the heads that wear them; no sooner in honour than in war. Now here we have,

I. The concerting of this expedition between Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoram levied an army (v. 6), and such an opinion he had of the godly king of Judah that, 1. He courted him to be his confederate: *Wilt thou go with me against Moab?* And he gained him. Jehoshaphat said, *I will go up. I am as thou art*, v. 7. Judah and Israel, though unhappily divided from each other, yet can unite against Moab a common enemy. Jehoshaphat upbraids them not with their revolt from the house of David, nor makes it an article of their alliance that they shall return to their allegiance, though he had good reason to insist upon it, but treats with Israel as a sister-kingdom. Those are no friends to their own peace and strength who can never find in their hearts to forgive and forget an old injury, and unite with those that have formerly broken in upon their rights.

Quod initio non vulvit, tractu temporis invalescit—*That which was originally destitute of authority in the progress of time acquires it.* 2. He consulted him as his confidant, v. 8. He took advice of Jehoshaphat, who had more wisdom and experience than himself, which way they should make their descent upon the country of Moab; and he advised that they should not march against them the nearest way, over Jordan, but go round *through the wilderness of Edom*, that they might take the king of Edom (who was tributary to him) and his forces along with them. If two be better than one, much more will not a *three-fold cord be easily broken*. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dearly for joining with Ahab, yet he joined with his son, and this expedition also had like to have been fatal to him. There is nothing got by being yoked with unbelievers.

II. The great straits that the army of the confederates was reduced to in this expedition. Before they saw the face of an enemy they were all in danger of perishing for want of water, v. 9. This ought to have been considered before they ventured a march through the wilderness, the same wilderness (or very near it) where their ancestors wanted water, Num. 20:2. God suffers his people, by their own improvidence, to bring themselves into distress, that the wisdom, power, and goodness of his providence may be glorified in their relief. What is more cheap and common than water? It is *drink to every beast of the field*, Ps. 104:11. Yet the want of it will soon humble and ruin kings and armies. The king of Israel sadly lamented the present distress, and the imminent danger it put them in of falling into the hands of their enemies the Moabites, to whom, when weakened by thirst, they would be an easy prey, v. 10. it was he that had *called these kings together*; yet he charges it upon Providence, and

reflects upon that as unkind: The Lord has *called them together*. Thus *the foolishness of man perverteth his way*, and then *his heart fretteth against the Lord*, Prov. 19:3.

III. Jehoshaphat's good motion to ask counsel of God in this exigency, v. 11. The place they were now in could not but remind them of the *wonders of which their fathers told them*, the waters fetched out of the rock for Israel's seasonable supply. The thought of this, we may suppose, encouraged Jehoshaphat to ask, *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord*, like unto Moses? He was the more concerned because it was by his advice that they fetched this compass through the wilderness, v. 8. It was well that Jehoshaphat enquired of the Lord now, but it would have been much better if he had done it sooner, before he engaged in this war, or steered this course; so the distress might have been prevented. Good men are sometimes remiss and forgetful, and neglect their duty till necessity and affliction drive them to it.

IV. Elisha recommended as a proper person for them to consult with v. 11. And here we may wonder, 1. That Elisha should follow the camp, especially in such a tedious march as this, as a volunteer, unasked, unobserved, and in no post of honour at all; not in the office of *priest of the war* (Deu. 20:2) or president of the council of war, but in such obscurity that none of the kings knew they had such a jewel in the treasures of their camp, nor so good a friend in their retinue. We may suppose it was by special direction from heaven that Elisha attended the war, as *the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof*. Thus does God anticipate his people with the blessings of his goodness and provide his oracles for those that provide them not for themselves. It would often be bad with us if God did not take more care of us, both for soul and body, than we take for ourselves. 2. That a servant of the king of Israel knew of his being there when the king himself did not. Probably it was such a servant as Obadiah was to his father Ahab, one that *feared the Lord*; to such a one Elisha made himself known, not to the kings. The account he gives of him is that it was he that *poured water on the hands of Elijah*, that is, he was his servant, and particularly attended him when he washed his hands. He that will be great, let him learn to minister: he that will rise high, let him begin low.

V. The application which the kings made to Elisha. They went down to him to his quarters, v. 12. Jehoshaphat had such an esteem for a prophet with whom the word of the Lord was that he would condescend to visit him in his own person and not send for him up to him. The other two were moved by the straits they were in to make their court to the prophet. He that humbled himself was thus exalted, and looked great, when three kings came to knock at his door, and beg his assistance; see Rev. 3:9.

VI. The entertainment which Elisha gave them. 1. He was very plain with the wicked king of Israel (v. 13): *"What have I to do with thee? How canst thou expect an answer of peace from me? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother, whom thou hast countenanced and maintained in thy prosperity, and let them help thee now in thy distress."* Elisha was not imposed upon, as Jehoshaphat was, by his partial and hypocritical reformation; he knew that, though he had put away the image of Baal, Baal's prophets were still dear to him, and perhaps some of the were now in his camp. "Go," said he, *"go to them. Get you to the gods whom you have served*, Jdg. 10:14. The world and the flesh have ruled you, let them help you; why should God be *enquired of by you?"* Eze. 14:3. Elisha tells him to his face, in a holy indignation at his wickedness, that he can scarcely find in

his heart to *look towards him* or to *see him*, v. 14. Jehoram is to be respected as a prince, but as a wicked man he is a vile person, and is to be condemned, Ps. 15:4. Elisha, as a subject, will honour him, but as a prophet he will cause him to know his iniquity. For those that had such an extraordinary commission it was fit (though not for a common person) to say to a king, *Thou art wicked*, Job 34:18. Jehoram has so much self-command as to take this plain dealing patiently; he cares not now for hearing of the prophets of Baal, but is a humble suitor to the God of Israel and his prophet, representing the present case as very deplorable and humbly recommending it to the prophet's compassionate consideration. In effect, he owns himself unworthy, but let not the other kings be ruined for his sake. 2. Elisha showed a great respect to the godly king of Judah, *regarded his presence*, and, for his sake, would *enquire of the Lord* for them all. It is good being with those that have God's favour and his prophet's love. Wicked people often fare the better for the friendship and society of those that are godly. 3. He composed himself to receive instructions from God. His mind was somewhat ruffled and disturbed at the sight of Jehoram; though he was not put into a sinful heat or passion, nor had spoken unadvisedly, yet his zeal for the present indisposed him for prayer and the operations of the Spirit, which required a mind very calm and sedate. He therefore called for a musician (v. 15), a devout musician, one accustomed to play upon his harp and sign psalms to it. To hear God's praises sweetly sung, as David had appointed, would cheer his spirits, and settle his mind, and help to put him into a right frame both to speak to him and to hear from him. We find a company of prophets prophesying with *a psaltery and a tabret before them*, 1 Sa. 10:5. Those that desire communion with God must keep their spirits quiet and serene. Elisha being refreshed, and having the tumult of his spirits laid by this divine music, *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, and his visit did him more honour than that of three kings. 4. God, by him, gave them assurance that the issue of the present distress would be comfortable and glorious. (1.) They should speedily be supplied with water, v. 16, 17. To try their faith and obedience, he bids them *make the valley full of ditches* to receive the water. Those that expect God's blessings must prepare room for them, *dig the pools* for the rain to fill, as they did in the valley of Baca, and so made even that a well, Ps. 84:6. To raise the wonder, he tells them they shall have water enough, and yet there shall be *neither wind nor rain*. Elijah, by prayer, obtained water out of the clouds, but Elisha fetches it nobody knows whence. The spring of these waters shall be as secret as the head of the Nile. God is not tied to second causes. Ordinarily it is by a plentiful rain that God *confirms his inheritance* (Ps. 68:9), but here it is done without rain, at least without rain in that place. Some of the *fountains of the great deep*, it is likely, *were broken up* on this occasion; and, to increase the miracle, *that valley* only (as it should seem) *was filled with water*, and no other place had any share of it. (2.) That supply should be an earnest of victory (v. 18): *"This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord; you shall not only be saved from perishing, but shall return in triumph."* As God gives freely to the unworthy, so he gives richly, like himself, more than we are *able to ask or think*. His grants out-do our requests and expectations. Those that sincerely seek for the dew of God's grace shall have it, and by it be made *more than conquerors*. It is promised that they shall be masters of the rebellious country, and they are permitted to lay it waste and ruin it, v. 19. The law forbade them to fell fruit-trees to be employed in their sieges (Deu. 20:19), but not when it was intended, in justice, for the starving of a country that had forfeited its fruits, by denying *tribute to those to whom tribute was due*.

Verses 20-27

I. We have here the divine gift of both those things which God had promised by Elisha—water and victory, and the former not only a pledge of the latter, but a means of it. God, who created, and commands, all the waters, both above and beneath the firmament, sent them an abundance of water on a sudden, which did them double service.

1. It relieved their armies, which were ready to perish, v. 20. And, which was very observable, this relief came just at the time of the *offering of the morning sacrifice* upon the altar at Jerusalem, a certain time, and universally known. That time Elisha chose for his *hour of prayer* (it is likely *looking towards the temple*, for so there were to do in their prayers when they were *going out to battle* and encamped at a distance, 1 Ki. 8:44), in token of his communion with the temple-service, and his expectation of success by virtue of the great sacrifice. We now cannot pitch upon any hour more acceptable than another, because our high priest is always appearing for us, to present and plead his sacrifice. That time God chose for the hour of mercy to put an honour upon the daily sacrifice, which had been despised. God answered Daniel's prayer just at the *time of the evening sacrifice* (Dan. 9:21); for he will acknowledge his own institutions.

2. It deceived their enemies, who were ready to triumph, into the destruction. Notice was given to the Moabites of the advances of the confederate army, to oppose which *all that were able to put on armour* were posted upon the frontiers, where they were ready to give the Israelites a warm reception (v. 21), promising themselves that it would be easy dealing with an army fatigued by so long a march through the wilderness of Edom. But see here,

(1.) How easily they were drawn into their own delusions. Observe the steps of their self-deceit. [1.] They saw the water in the valley where the army of Israel encamped, and conceited it was blood (v. 22), because they knew the valley to be dry, and (there having been no rain) could not imagine it should be water. The sun shone upon it, and probably *the sky was red and lowering*, a presage of *foul weather that day* (Mt. 16:3), and so it proved to them. But, this making the water look red, their own fancies, which made them willing to believe what made for them, suggested, *This is blood*, God permitting them thus to impose upon themselves. [2.] If their camp was thus full of blood, they conclude, "Certainly the kings have fallen out (as confederates of different interests are apt to do) and they have *slain one another* (v. 23), for who else should slay them?" And, [3.] "If the armies have slain one another, we have nothing to do but to divide the prey. *Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.*" These were the gradual suggestions of some sanguine spirits among them, that thought themselves wiser and happier in their conjectures than their neighbours; and the rest, being desirous it should be so, were forward to believe it was so. *Quod volumus facile credimus—What we wish we readily believe*. Thus those that are to be destroyed are first deceived (Rev. 20:8), and none are so effectually deceived as those that deceive themselves.

(2.) How fatally they thereby ran upon their own destruction. They rushed carelessly into the camp of Israel, to plunder it, but were undeceived when it was too late. The Israelites, animated by the assurances Elisha had given them of victory, fell upon them with the utmost fury, routed them, and pursued them into their own country (v. 24), which they laid waste (v. 25), destroyed the cities, marred the ground, stopped up the wells, felled the timber, and left only the royal city standing, in the walls of which they made great breaches with their battering engines. This they got by rebelling against Israel. Who ever

hardened his heart against God and prospered?

II. In the close of the chapter we are told what the king of Moab did when he found himself reduced to the last extremity by the besiegers, and that his capital city was likely to fall into their hands. 1. He attempted that which was bold and brave. he got together 700 choice men, and with them sallied out upon the intrenchments of the king of Edom, who, being but a mercenary in this expedition, would not, he hoped, make any great resistance if vigorously attacked, and so he might make his escape that way. But it would not do; even the king of Edom proved too hard for him, and obliged him to retire, v. 26. 2. This failing, he did that which was brutish and barbarous; he took his own son, his eldest son, that was to succeed him, than whom nothing could be more dear to himself and his people, and *offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall*, v. 27. He designed by this, (1.) To obtain the favour of Chemosh his god, which, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer any thing was to them the more acceptable those idolaters thought it must needs be if offered in sacrifice to their gods, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honour. (2.) To terrify the besiegers, and oblige them to retire. Therefore he did it *upon the wall*, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dearly he would sell his city and life. He intended hereby to render them odious, and to exasperate and enrage his own subjects against them. This effect it had: *There was great indignation against Israel* for driving him to this extremity, whereupon they raised the siege and returned. Tender and generous spirits will not do that, though just, which will drive any man distracted, or make him desperate.

Chapter 4

Great service Elisha had done, in the foregoing chapter, for the three kings: to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter would tell us what honours and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this, that he should immediately be preferred at court, and made prime-minister of state, that Jehoshaphat should take him home with him, and advance him in his kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man, Eccl. 9:15. Or, if he had preferment offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets before that of being great in the courts of princes. God magnified him, and that sufficed him—magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no fewer than five miracles. I. He multiplied the poor widow's oil (v. 1-7). II. He obtained for the good Shunammite the blessing of a son in her old age (v. 8-17). III. He raised that child to life when it was dead (v. 18-27). IV. He healed the deadly pottage (v. 38-41). V. He fed 100 men with twenty small loaves (v. 42-44).

Verses 1-7

Elisha's miracles were for use, not for show; this recorded here was an act of real charity. Such also were the miracles of Christ, not only great wonders, but great favours to those for whom they were wrought. God magnifies his goodness with his power.

I. Elisha readily receives a poor widow's complaint. She was a prophet's widow; to whom therefore should she apply, but to him that was a father to the sons of the prophets, and concerned himself in the welfare of their families? It seems, the prophets had wives as well as the priests, though prophecy went not by entail, as the priesthood did. Marriage is honourable in all, and not inconsistent with the most sacred professions. Now, by the complaint of this poor woman (v. 1), we are given to understand, 1. That her husband, being *one of the sons of the prophets*, was well known to Elisha. Ministers of eminent gifts and stations should make themselves familiar with those that are every way their inferiors, and know their character and state. 2. That he had the reputation of a godly man. Elisha knew him to be one that feared the Lord, else he would have been unworthy of the honour and unfit for the work of a prophet. He was one that kept his integrity in a time of general apostasy, one of the 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal. 3. That he was dead, though a good man, a good minister. The prophets—do they live for ever? Those that were clothed with the Spirit of prophecy were not thereby armed against the stroke of death. 4. That he died poor, and in debt more than he was worth. He did not contract his debts by prodigality, and luxury, and riotous living, for he was one that feared the Lord, and therefore durst not allow himself in such courses: nay, religion obliges men not to live above what they have, nor to spend more than what God gives them, no, not in expenses otherwise lawful; for thereby, of necessity, they must disable themselves, at last, to give every one his own, and so prove guilty of a continued act of injustice all along. Yet it may be the lot of those that fear God to be in debt, and insolvent, through afflictive providences, losses by sea, or bad debts, or their own imprudence, for the *children of light* are not always *wise for this world*. Perhaps this prophet was impoverished by persecution: when Jezebel ruled, prophets had much ado to live, and especially if they had families. 5. That the creditors were very severe with her. Two sons she had to be the support of her widowed state, and their labour is reckoned

assets in her hand; that must go therefore, and they must be bondmen for seven years (Ex. 21:2) to work out this debt. Those that leave their families under a load of debt disproportionate to their estates know not what trouble they entail. In this distress the poor widow goes to Elisha, in dependence upon the promise that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken. The generation of the upright may expect help from God's providence and countenance from his prophets.

II. He effectually relieves this poor widow's distress, and puts her in a way both to pay her debt and to maintain herself and her family. He did not say, *Be warmed, be filled*, but gave her real help. He did not give her some small matter for her present provision, but set her up in the world to sell oil, and put a stock into her hand to begin with. This was done by miracle, but it is an indication to us what is the best method of charity, and the greatest kindness one can do to poor people, which is, if possible, to help them into a way of improving what little they have by their own industry and ingenuity.

1. He directed her what to do, considered her case: *What shall I do for thee?* The sons of the prophets were poor, and it would signify little to make a collection for her among them: but the God of the holy prophets is able to supply all her need; and, if she has a little committed to her management, her need must be supplied by his blessing and increasing that little. Elisha therefore enquired what she had to make money of, and found she had nothing to sell but one pot of oil, v. 2. If she had had any plate or furniture, he would have bidden her part with it, to enable her to be just to her creditors. We cannot reckon any thing really, nor comfortably, our own, but what is so when all our debts are paid. If she had not had this pot of oil, the divine power could have supplied her; but, having this, it will work upon this, and so teach us to make the best of what we have. The prophet, knowing her to have credit among her neighbours, bids her borrow of them *empty vessels* (v. 3), for, it seems, she had sold her own, towards the satisfying of her creditors. He directs her to shut the door upon herself and her sons, while she filled all those vessels out of that one. She must shut the door, to prevent interruptions from the creditors, and others while it was in the doing, that they might not seem proudly to boast of this miraculous supply, and that they might have opportunity for prayer and praise to God upon this extraordinary occasion. Observe, (1.) The oil was to be multiplied in the pouring, as the other widow's meal in the spending. The way to increase what we have is to use it; to him that so hath shall be given. It is not hoarding the talents, but trading with them, that doubles them. (2.) It must be poured out by herself, not by Elisha nor by any of the sons of the prophets, to intimate that it is in connexion with our own careful and diligent endeavours that we may expect the blessing of God to enrich us both for this world and the other. What we have will increase best in our own hand.

2. She did it accordingly. She did not tell the prophet he designed to make a fool of her; but firmly believing the divine power and goodness, and in pure obedience to the prophet, she borrowed vessels large and many of her neighbours, and poured out her oil into them. One of her sons was employed to bring her empty vessels, and the other carefully to set aside those that were full, while they were all amazed to find their pot, like a fountain of living water, always flowing, and yet always full. They saw not the spring that supplied it, but believed it to be in him *in whom all our springs are*. Job's metaphor was now verified in the letter (Job 29:6), *The rock poured me out rivers of oil*. Perhaps this was in the tribe of Asher, part of whose blessing it was that he should *dip his foot in oil*, Deu. 33:24.

3. The oil continued flowing as long as she had any empty vessels to receive it; when every vessel was full the oil stayed (v. 6),

for it was not fit that this precious liquor should run over, and be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Note, We are never straitened in God, in his power and bounty, and the riches of his grace; all our straitness is in ourselves. It is our faith that fails, not his promise. He gives above what we ask: were there more vessels, there is enough in God to fill them—enough for all, enough for each. Was not this pot of oil exhausted as long as there were any vessels to be filled from it? And shall we fear lest the golden oil which flows from the very root and fatness of the good olive should fail, as long as there are any lamps to be supplied from it? Zec. 4:12.

4. The prophet directed her what to do with the oil she had, v. 7. She must not keep it for her own use, to *make her face to shine*. Those whom Providence has made poor must be content with poor accommodations for themselves (this is *knowing how to want*), and must not think, when they get a little of that which is better than ordinary, to feed their own luxury: no, (1.) She must sell the oil to those that were rich, and could afford to bestow it on themselves. We may suppose, being produced by miracle, it was the best of its kind, like the wine (Jn. 2:10), so that she might have both a good price and a good market for it. Probably the merchants bought it to export, for oil was one of the commodities that Israel traded in, Eze. 27:17. (2.) She must pay her debt with the money she received for her oil. Though her creditors were too rigorous with her, yet they must not therefore lose their debt. Her first care, now that she has wherewithal to do so, must be to discharge that, even before she makes any provision for her children. It is one of the fundamental laws of our religion that we render to all their due, pay every just debt, give every one his own, though we leave ever so little for ourselves; and this, not of constraint but willingly and without grudging; not only for wrath, to avoid being sued, but also for conscience' sake. Those that possess an honest mind cannot with pleasure eat their daily bread, unless it be their own bread. (3.) The rest must not be laid up, but she and her children must live upon it, not upon the oil, but upon the money received from it, with which they must put themselves into a capacity of getting an honest livelihood. No doubt she did as the man of God directed; and hence, [1.] Let those that are poor and in distress be encouraged to trust God for supply in the way of duty. *Verily thou shalt be fed*, though not feasted. It is true we cannot now expect miracles, yet we may expect mercies, if we wait on God and seek to him. Let widows particularly, and prophets' widows in a special manner, depend upon him to preserve them and their fatherless children alive, for to them he will be a husband, a father. [2.] Let those whom God has blessed with plenty use it for the glory of God and under the direction of his word: let them do justly with it, as this widow did, and serve God cheerfully in the use of it, and as Elisha, be ready to do good to those that need them, be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.

Verses 8-17

The giving of a son to such as were old, and had been long childless, was an ancient instance of the divine power and favour, in the case of Abraham, and Isaac, and Manoah, and Elkanah; we find it here among the wonders wrought by Elisha. This was wrought in recompence for the kind entertainment which a good woman gave him, as the promise of a son was given to Abraham when he entertained angels. Observe here,

I. The kindness of the Shunammite woman to Elisha. Things are bad enough in Israel, yet not so bad but that God's prophet finds friends, wherever he goes. Shunem was a city in the tribe of Issachar, that lay in the road between Samaria and Carmel, a

road that Elisha often travelled, as we find ch. 2:25. *There lived a great woman*, who kept a good house, and was very hospitable, her husband having a good estate, and his heart safely trusting in her, and in her discreet management, Prov. 31:11. So famous a man as Elisha could not pass and repass unobserved. Probably he had been accustomed to take some private obscure lodgings in the town; but this pious matron, having notice once of his being there, pressed him with great importunity, and, with much difficulty, constrained him to dine with her, v. 8. He was modest and loth to be troublesome, humble and affected not to associate with those of the first rank; so that it was not without some difficulty that he was first drawn into an acquaintance there; but afterwards, whenever he went that way in his circuit, he constantly called there. So well pleased was she with her guest, and so desirous of his company, that she would not only bid him welcome to her table, but provide a lodging-room for him in her house, that he might make the longer stay, not doubting but her house would be blessed for his sake, and all under her roof edified by his pious instructions and example—a good design, yet she would not do it without acquainting her husband, would neither lay out his money nor invite strangers to his house without his consent asked and obtained, v. 9, 10. She suggests to him, 1. That the stranger she would invite was a *holy man of God*, who therefore would do good to their family, and God would recompense the kindness done to him; perhaps she had heard how well paid the widow of Sarepta was for entertaining Elijah. 2. That the kindness she intended him would be no great charge to them; she would build him only a little chamber. Perhaps she had no spare room in the house, or none private and retired enough for him, who spent much of his time in contemplation, and cared not for being disturbed with the noise of the family. The furniture shall be very plain; no costly hangings, no stands, no couches, no looking-glasses, but a bed, and a table, a stool, and a candlestick, all that was needful for his convenience, not only for his repose, but for his study, his reading and writing. Elisha seemed highly pleased with these accommodations, for he turned in and lay there (v. 11), and, as it should seem, his man in the same chamber, for he was far from taking state.

II. Elisha's gratitude for this kindness. Being exceedingly pleased with the quietness of his apartment, and the friendliness of his entertainment, he began to consider with himself what recompence he should make her. Those that receive courtesies should study to return them; it ill becomes men of God to be ungrateful, or to sponge upon those that are generous. 1. He offered to use his interest for her in the king's court (v. 13): *Thou hast been careful for us with all this care* (thus did he magnify the kindness he received, as those that are humble are accustomed to do, though in the purse of one so rich, and in the breast of one so free, it was as nothing); now *what shall be done for thee?* As the liberal devise liberal things, so the grateful devise grateful things. *"Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host, for an office for thy husband, civil or military? Hast thou any complaint to make, any petition to present, any suit at law depending, that needs the countenance of the high powers? Wherein can I serve thee?"* It seems Elisha had got such an interest by his late services that, though he chose not to prefer himself by it, yet he was capable of preferring his friends. A good man can take as much pleasure in serving others as in raising himself. But she needs not any good offices of this kind to be done for her: *I dwell* (says she) *among my own people*, that is, "We are well off as we are, and do not aim at preferment." It is a happiness to *dwell among our own people*, that love and respect us, and to whom we are in a capacity of doing good; and a greater happiness to be content to do

so, to be easy, and to know when we are well off. Why should those that live comfortably among their own people covet to live delicately in kings' palaces? It would be well with many if they did but know when they were well off. Some years after this we find this Shunammite had occasion to be spoken for to the king, though now she needed it not, ch. 8:3, 4. Those that dwell among their own people must not think their mountain stands so strong as that it cannot be moved; they may be driven, as this good woman was, to sojourn among strangers. Our continuing city is above. 2. He did use his interest for her in the court of heaven, which was far better. Elisha consulted with his servant what kindness he should do for her, to such a freedom did this great prophet admit even his servant. Gehazi reminded him that she was childless, had a great estate, but no son to leave it to, and was past hopes of having any, her husband being old. If Elisha could obtain this favour from God for her, it would be the removal of that which at present was her only grievance. Those are the most welcome kindnesses which are most suited to our necessities. He sent for her immediately. She very humbly and respectfully *stood in the door* (v. 15), according to her accustomed modesty, and then he assured her that within a year she should bring forth a son, v. 16. She had received this prophet *in the name of a prophet*, and now she had not a courtier's reward, in being spoken for to the king, but a prophet's reward, a signal mercy given by prophets and in answer to prayer: the promise was a surprise to her, and she begged that she might not be flattered by it: "*Nay, my lord, thou art a man of God, and therefore I hope speakest seriously, and doth not jest with me, nor lie unto thy handmaid.*" The event, within the time limited, confirmed the truth of the promise: *She bore a son* at the season that Elisha spoke of, v. 17. God built up her house, in reward to her kindness in building the prophet a chamber. We may well imagine what joy this brought to the family. *Sing, O barren! thou that didst not bear.*

Verses 18-37

We may well suppose that, after the birth of this son, the prophet was doubly welcome to the good Shunammite. He had thought himself indebted to her, but henceforth, as long as she lives, she will think herself in his debt, and that she can never do too much for him. We may also suppose that the child was very dear to the prophet, as the son of his prayers, and very dear to the parents, as the son of their old age. But here is,

I. The sudden death of the child, though so much a darling, he was so far past the perils of infancy that he was able to go to the field to his father, who no doubt was pleased with his engaging talk, and his joy of his son was greater than the joy of his harvest; but either the cold or the heat of the open field overcame the child, who was bred tenderly, and he complained to his father that his head ached, v. 19. Whither should we go with our complaints, but to our heavenly Father? Thither the Spirit of adoption brings believers with all their grievances, all their desires, teaching them to cry, with groanings that cannot be uttered, "*My head, my head; my heart, my heart.*" The father sent him to his mother's arms, his mother's lap, little suspecting any danger in his indisposition, but hoping he would drop asleep in his mother's bosom and awake well; but the sickness proved fatal; he slept the sleep of death (v. 20), was well in the morning and dead by noon: all the mother's care and tenderness could not keep him alive. A child of promise, a child of prayer, and given in love, yet taken away. Little children lie open to the arrests of sickness and death. But how admirably does the prudent pious mother guard her lips under this surprising affliction! Not one peevish murmuring word comes from her. She has a strong belief that the child will be raised to life again: like a

genuine daughter of Abraham's faith, as well as loins, she accounts that God is able to raise him from the dead, for thence at first she *received him in a figure*, Heb. 11:19. She had heard of the raising of the widow's son of Sarepta, and that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha; and such confidence had she of God's goodness that she was very ready to believe that he who so soon took away what he had given would restore what he had now taken away. By this faith *women received their dead raised to life*, Heb. 11:35. In this faith she makes no preparation for the burial of her dead child, but for its resurrection; for she *lays him on the prophet's bed* (v. 21), expecting that he will stand her friend. *O woman! great is thy faith.* he that wrought it would not frustrate it.

II. The sorrowful mother's application to the prophet on this sad occasion; for it happened very opportunely that he was now at the college upon Mount Carmel, not far off.

1. She begged leave of her husband to go to the prophet, yet not acquainting him with her errand, lest he should not have faith enough to let her go, v. 22. He objected, *It is neither new moon nor sabbath* (v. 23), which intimates that on those feasts of the Lord she used to go to the assembly in which he presided, with other good people, to hear the word, and to join with him in prayers and praises. She did not think it enough to have his help sometimes in her own family, but, though a great woman, attended on public worship, for which this was none of the times appointed; *therefore*, said the husband, "why wilt thou go to day? What is the matter?" "No harm," said she, *"It shall be well*, so you will say yourself hereafter." See how this husband and wife vied with each other in showing mutual regard; she was so dutiful to him that she would not go till she had acquainted him with her journey, and he so kind to her that he would not oppose it, though she did not think fit to acquaint him with her business. 2. She made all the haste she could to the prophet (v. 24), and he, seeing her at a distance, sent his servant to enquire whether any thing was amiss, v. 25, 26. The questions were particular: *Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?* Note, It well becomes the men of God, with tenderness and concern, to enquire about the welfare of their friends and their families. The answer was general *It is well*. Gehazi was not the man that she came to complain to, and therefore she put him off with this; she said little, and little said is soon amended (Ps. 39:1, 2), but what she did say was very patient: "It is well with me, with my husband, with the child"—all well, and yet the child dead in the house. Note, When God calls away our dearest relations by death it becomes us quietly to say, "It is well both with us and them;" it is well, for all is well that God does; all is well with those that are gone if they have gone to heaven, and all well with us that stay behind if by the affliction we are furthered in our way thither. 3. When she came to the prophet she humbly reasoned with him concerning her present affliction. She threw herself at his feet, as one troubled and in grief, which she never showed till she came to him who, she believed, could help her, v. 27. When her passion would do her service she knew how to discover it, as well as how to conceal it when it would do her disservice. Gehazi knew his master would not be pleased to see her lie at his feet, and therefore would have raised her up; but Elisha waited to hear from her, since he might not know immediately from God, what was the cause of her trouble. God discovered things to his prophets as he saw fit, not always as they desired; God did not show this to the prophet, because he might know it from the good woman herself. What she said was very pathetic. She appealed to the prophet, (1.) Concerning her indifference to this mercy which was now taken from her: *"Did I desire a son of my lord? No,*

thou knowest I did not; it was thy own proposal, not mine; I did not fret for the want of a son, as Hannah, nor beg, as Rachel, *Give me children or else I die.*" Note, When any creature-comfort is taken from us, it is well if we can say, through grace, that we did not set our hearts inordinately upon it; for, if we did, we have reason to fear it was given in anger and taken away in wrath. (2.) Concerning her entire dependence upon the prophet's word: *Did I not say, Do not deceive me?* Yes, she did say so (v. 16), and this reflection upon it may be considered either, [1.] As quarrelling with the prophet for deceiving her. She was ready to think herself mocked with the mercy when it was so soon removed, and that it would have been better she had never had this child than to be deprived of him when she began to have comfort in him. Note, The loss of a mercy should not make us undervalue the gift of it. Or, [2.] As pleading with the prophet for the raising of the child to life again: "*I said, Do not deceive me, and I know thou wilt not.*" Note, However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will, deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed.

III. The raising of the child to life again. We may suppose that the woman gave Elisha a more express account of the child's death, and he gave her a more express promise of his resurrection, than is here related, where we are briefly told,

1. That Elisha sent Gehazi to go in all haste to the dead child, gave him his staff, and bade him lay that on the face of the child, v. 29. I know not what to make of this. Elisha knew that Elijah raised the dead child with a very close application, stretching himself upon the child, and praying again and again, and could he think to raise this child by so slight a ceremony as this, especially when nothing hindered him from coming himself? Shall such a power as this be delegated, and to no better man than Gehazi? Bishop Hall suggests that it was done out of human conceit, and not by divine instinct, and therefore it failed of the effect; God will not have such great favours made too cheap, nor shall they be too easily come by, lest they be undervalued.

2. The woman resolved not to go back without the prophet himself (v. 30): *I will not leave thee.* She had no great expectation from the staff, she would have the hand, and she was in the right of it. Perhaps God intended hereby to teach us not to put that confidence in creatures, that are servants, which the power of the Creator, their Master and ours, will alone bear the weight of. Gehazi returns *re infecta*—without success, without the tidings of any sign of life in the child (v. 31): *The child is not awaked,* intimating, to the comfort of the mother, that its death was but a sleep, and that he expected that it would shortly be awaked. In the raising of dead souls to spiritual life ministers can do no more by their own power than Gehazi here could; they lay the word, like the prophet's staff, before their faces, but there is neither voice nor hearing, till Christ, by his Spirit, comes himself. The letter alone kills; it is the Spirit that gives life. It is not prophesying upon dry bones that will put life into them, breath must come from heaven and breathe upon those slain.

3. The prophet, by earnest prayer, obtained from God the restoring of this dead child to life again. He found the child dead upon his own bed (v. 32), *and shut the door upon them twain,* v. 33. Even the dead child is spoken of as a person, one of the twain, for it was still in being and not lost. He shut out all company, that he might not seem to glory in the power God had given him, or to use it for ostentation and to be seen of men. Observe,

(1.) How closely the prophet applied himself to this great operation, perhaps being sensible that he had tempted God too much in thinking to effect it by the staff in Gehazi's hand, for which he thought himself rebuked by the disappointment. He now

found it a harder task than he then thought, and therefore addressed himself to it with great solemnity. [1.] He *prayed unto the Lord* (v. 33), probably as Elijah had done, *Let this child's soul come into him again*. Christ raised the dead to life as one having authority—*Damsel, arise—young man, I say unto thee, Arise—Lazarus, come forth* (for he was powerful and faithful as a Son, the Lord of life), but Elijah and Elisha did it by petition, as servants. [2.] He *lay upon the child* (v. 34), as if he would communicate to him some of his vital heat or spirits. Thus he expressed the earnestness of his desire, and gave a sign of that divine power which he depended upon for the accomplishment of this great work. He first *put his mouth to the child's mouth*, as if, in God's name, he would breathe into him the breath of life; then *his eyes to the child's eyes*, to open them again to the light of life; then *his hands to the child's hands*, to put strength into them. He then *returned, and walked in the house*, as one full of care and concern, and wholly intent upon what he was about. Then he went up stairs again, and the second time, *stretched himself upon the child*, v. 35. Those that would be instrumental in conveying spiritual life to dead souls must thus affect themselves with their case, and accommodate themselves to it, and labour fervently in prayer for them.

(2.) How gradually the operation was performed. At the first application, *the flesh of the child waxed warm* (v. 34), which gave the prophet encouragement to continue instant in prayer. After a while, *the child sneezed seven times*, which was an indication, not only of life, but liveliness. Some have reported it as an ancient tradition that when God breathed into Adam the breath of life the first evidence of his being alive was sneezing, which gave rise to the usage of paying respect to those that sneeze. Some observe here that sneezing clears the head, and there lay the child's distemper.

(3.) How joyfully the child was restored alive to his mother (v. 36, 37), and all parties concerned *were not a little comforted*, Acts 20:12. See the power of God, who kills and makes alive again. See the power of prayer; as it has the key of the clouds, so it has the key of death. See the power of faith; that fixed law of nature (that death is a way whence there is no returning) shall rather be dispensed with than this believing Shunammite shall be disappointed.

Verses 38-44

We have here Elisha in his place, in his element, among the sons of the prophets, teaching them, and, as a father, providing for them; and happy it was for them that they had one over them who naturally cared for their state, under whom they were well fed and well taught. There was a dearth in the land, for the wickedness of those that dwelt therein, the same that we read of, ch. 8:1. It continued seven years, just as long again as that in Elijah's time. A famine of bread there was, but not of hearing the word of God, for Elisha had the sons of the prophets sitting before him, to hear his wisdom, who were taught, that they might teach others. Two instances we have here of the care he took about their meat. Christ twice fed those to whom he preached. Elisha was in the more care about it now because of the dearth, that the sons of the prophets might not be ashamed in this evil time, but, even in *the days of famine, might be satisfied*, Ps. 37:19.

I. He made hurtful food to become safe and wholesome. 1. On the lecture-day, the sons of the prophets being all to attend, he ordered his servant to provide food for their bodies, while he was breaking to them the bread of life for their souls. Whether there was any flesh-meat for them does not appear; he orders only that pottage should be seethed for them of herbs, v. 38. The sons of the prophets should be examples of temperance and mortification, not desirous of dainties, but content with plain food.

If they have neither savoury meats nor sweet meats, nay, if a mess of pottage be all the dinner, let them remember that this great prophet entertained himself and his guests no better. 2. One of the servitors, who was sent to gather herbs (which, it should seem, must serve instead of flesh for the pottage), by mistake brought in that which was noxious, or at least very nauseous, and shred it into the pottage: *wild gourds* they are called, v. 39. Some think it was *coloquintida*, a herb strongly cathartic, and, if not qualified, dangerous. The sons of the prophets, it seems, were better skilled in divinity than in natural philosophy, and read their Bibles more than their herbals. If any of the fruits of the earth be hurtful, we must look upon it as an effect of the curse (*thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee*), for the original blessing made all good. 3. The guests complained to Elisha of the unwholesomeness of their food. Nature has given man the sense of tasting, not only that wholesome food may be pleasant, but that that which is unwholesome may be discovered before it comes to the stomach; the mouth tries meat by tasting it, Job 12:11. This pottage was soon found by the taste of it to be dangerous, so that they cried out, *There is death in the pot*, v. 40. The table often becomes a snare, and that which should be for our welfare proves a trap, which is a good reason why we should not feed ourselves without fear; when we are receiving the supports and comforts of life we must keep up an expectation of death and a fear of sin. 4. Elisha immediately cured the bad taste and prevented the bad consequences of this unwholesome pottage; as before he had healed the bitter waters with salt, so now the bitter broth with meal, v. 41. It is probable that there was meal in it before, but that was put in by a common hand, only to thicken the pottage; this was the same thing, but cast in by Elisha's hand, and with intent to heal the pottage, by which it appears that the change was not owing to the meal (that was the sign only, not the means), but to the divine power. Now all was well, not only no death, but no harm in the pot. We must acknowledge God's goodness in making our food wholesome and nourishing. *I am the Lord that healeth thee*.

II. He made a little food to go a great way. 1. Elisha had a present brought him of twenty barley-loaves and some ears of corn (v. 42), a present which, in those ages, would not be despicable at any time, but now in a special manner valuable, when there was a dearth in the land. It is said to be of *the first-fruits*, which was God's due out of their increase; and when the priests and Levites were all at Jerusalem, out of their reach, the religious people among them, with good reason, looked upon the prophets as God's receivers, and brought their first-fruits to them, which helped to maintain their schools. 2. Having freely received, he freely gave, ordering it all to be set before the sons of the prophets, reserving none for himself, none for the hereafter. *"Let the morrow take thought for the things of itself, give it all to the people that they may eat."* It well becomes the men of God to be generous and open-handed, and the fathers of the prophets to be liberal to the sons of the prophets. 3. Though the loaves were little, it is likely no more than what one man would ordinarily eat at a meal, yet with twenty of them he satisfied 100 men, v. 43, 44. his servant thought that to set so little meat before so many men was but to tantalize them, and shame his master for making so great an invitation to such short commons; but he in God's name, pronounced it a full meal for them, and so it proved; they did eat, and left thereof, not because their stomachs failed them, but because the bread increased in the eating. God has promised his church (Ps. 132:15) *that he will abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread*; for whom he feeds he fills, and what he blesses comes to much, as what he blows upon comes to little, Hag. 1:9. Christ's feeding

his hearers was a miracle far beyond this; but both teach us that those who wait upon God in the way of duty may hope to be both protected and supplied by a particular care of divine Providence.

Chapter 5

Two more of Elisha's miracles are recorded in this chapter. I. The cleansing of Naaman, a Syrian, a stranger, from his leprosy, and there, 1. The badness of his case (v. 1). 2. The providence that brought him to Elisha, the intelligence given him by a captive maid (v. 2-4). A letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, to introduce him (v. 5-7). And the invitation Elisha sent him (v. 8). 3. The method prescribed for his cure, his submission, with much ado, to that method, and his cure thereby (v. 9-14). 4. The grateful acknowledgments he made to Elisha hereupon (v. 15-19). II. The smiting of Gehazi, his own servant, with that leprosy. 1. Gehazi's sins, which were belying his master to Naaman (v. 20-24), and lying to his master when he examined him (v. 25). 2. His punishment for these sins. Naaman's leprosy was entailed on his family (v. 26, 27). And, if Naaman's cure was typical of the calling of the Gentiles, as our Saviour seems to make it (Lu. 4:27), Gehazi's stroke may be looked upon as typical of the blinding and rejecting of the Jews, who envied God's grace to the Gentiles, as Gehazi envied Elisha's favour to Naaman.

Verses 1-8

Our saviour's miracles were intended for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet one, like a crumb, fell from the table to a woman of Canaan; so this one miracle Elisha wrought for Naaman, a Syrian; for God does good to all, and will have all men to be saved. Here is,

I. The great affliction Naaman was under, in the midst of all his honours, v. 1. He was a great man, in a great place; not only rich and raised, but particularly happy for two things:-1. That he had been very serviceable to his country. God made him so: *By him the Lord had often given deliverance to Syria*, success in their wars even with Israel. The preservation and prosperity even of those that do not know God and serve him must be ascribed to him, for *he is the Saviour of all men, but especially of those that believe*. Let Israel know that when the Syrians prevailed it was from the Lord. 2. That he was very acceptable to his prince, was his favourite, and prime-minister of state; so great was he, so high, so honourable, and a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper, was under that loathsome disease, which made him a burden to himself. Note, (1.) No man's greatness, or honour, or interest, or valour, or victory, can set him out of the reach of the sorest calamities of human life; there is many a sickly crazy body under rich and gay clothing. (2.) Every man has some *but* or other in his character, something that blemishes and diminishes him, some alloy to his grandeur, some damp to his joy; he may be very happy, very good, yet, in something or other, not so good as he should be nor so happy as he would be. Naaman was as great as the world could make him, and yet (as bishop Hall expresses it) the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him.

II. The notice that was given him of Elisha's power, by a little maid that waited on his lady, v. 2, 3. This maid was, by birth, an Israelite, providentially carried captive into Syria, and there preferred into Naaman's family, where she published Elisha's fame to the honour of Israel and Israel's God. The unhappy dispersing of the people of God has sometimes proved the happy occasion of the diffusion of the knowledge of God, Acts 8:4. This little maid, 1. As became a true-born Israelite, consulted the honour of her country, and could give an account, though but a girl, of the famous prophet they had among them. Children

should betimes acquaint themselves with the wondrous works of God, that, wherever they go, they may have them to talk of. See Ps. 8:2. 2. As became a good servant, she desired the health and welfare of her master, though she was a captive, a servant by force; much more should servants of choice seek their masters' good. The Jews in Babylon were to seek the peace of the land of their captivity. Jer. 29:7. *Elisha had not cleansed any leper in Israel* (Lu. 4:27), yet this little maid, from the other miracles he had wrought, inferred that he *could* cure her master, and from his common beneficence inferred that he *would* do it, though he was a Syrian. Servants may be blessings to the families where they are, by telling what they know of the glory of God and the honour of his prophets.

III. The application which the king of Syria hereupon made to the king of Israel on Naaman's behalf. Naaman took notice of the intelligence, though given by a simple maid, and did not despise it for the sake of her meanness, when it tended to his bodily health. he did not say, "The girl talks like a fool; how can any prophet of Israel do that for me which all the physicians of Syria have attempted in vain?" Though he neither loved nor honoured the Jewish nation, yet, if one of that nation can but cure him of his leprosy, he will thankfully acknowledge the obligation. O that those who are spiritually diseased would hearken thus readily to the tidings brought them of the great Physician! See what Naaman did upon this little hint. 1. He would not send for the prophet to come to him, but such honour would he pay to one that had so much of a divine power with him as to be able to cure diseases that he would go to him himself, though he himself was sickly, unfit for society, the journey long, and the country an enemy's; princes, he thinks, must stoop to prophets when they need them. 2. He would not go *incognito—in disguise*, though his errand proclaimed his loathsome disease, but went in state, and with a great retinue, to do the more honour to the prophet. 3. He would not go empty-handed, but took with him gold, silver, and raiment, to present to his physician. Those that have wealth, and want health show which they reckon the more valuable blessing; what will they not give for ease, and strength, and soundness of body? 4. He would not go without a letter to the king of Israel from the king his master, who did himself earnestly desire his recovery. He knows not where in Samaria to find this wonder-working prophet, but takes it for granted the king knows where to find him; and, to engage the prophet to do his utmost for Naaman, he will go to him supported with the interest of two kings. If the king of Syria must entreat his help, he hopes the king of Israel, being his liege-lord, may command it. The gifts of the subject must all be (he thinks) for the service and honour of the prince, and therefore he desires the king that he would *recover the leper* (v. 6), taking it for granted that there was a greater intimacy between the king and the prophet than really there was.

IV. The alarm this gave to the king of Israel, v. 7. He apprehended there was in this letter, 1. A great affront upon God, and therefore he rent his clothes, according to the custom of the Jews when they heard or read that which they thought blasphemous; and what less could it be than to attribute to him a divine power? "*Am I a God, to kill whom I will, and make alive whom I will?*" No, I pretend not to such an authority." Nebuchadnezzar did, as we find, Dan. 5:19. "*Am I a God, to kill with a word, and make alive with a word?*" No, I pretend not to such a power;" thus this great man, this bad man, is made to own that he is but a man. Why did he not, with this consideration, correct himself for his idolatry, and reason thus:—Shall I worship those as gods that can neither kill nor make alive, can *do neither good nor evil?* 2. A bad design upon himself. He

appeals to those about him for this: "*See how he seeketh a quarrel against me; he requires me to recover the leper, and if I do not, though I cannot, he will make that a pretence to wage war with me,*" which he suspects the rather because Naaman is his general. had he rightly understood the meaning of the letter, that when the king wrote to him to recover the leper he meant that he would take care he might be recovered, he would not have been in this fright. Note, We often create a great deal of uneasiness to ourselves by misinterpreting the words and actions of others that are well intended: it is charity to ourselves to think no evil. If he had bethought himself of Elisha, and his power, he would easily have understood the letter, and have known what he had to do; but he is put into this confusion by making himself a stranger to the prophet: the captive maid had him more in her thoughts than the king had.

V. The proffer which Elisha made of his services. He was willing to do any thing to make his prince easy, though he was neglected and his former good services were forgotten by him. Hearing on which occasion the king had rent his clothes, he sent to him to let him know that if his patient would come to him he should not lose his labour (v. 8): *He shall know that there is a prophet in Israel* (and it were sad with Israel if there were not), that there is a prophet in Israel who can do that which the king of Israel dares not attempt, which the prophets of Syria cannot pretend to. It was not for his own honour, but for the honour of God, that he coveted to make them all know *that there was a prophet in Israel*, though obscure and overlooked.

Verses 9-14

We have here the cure of Naaman's leprosy.

I. The short and plain direction which the prophet gave him, with assurance of success. Naaman designed to do honour to Elisha when he came in his chariot, and with all his retinue, to Elisha's door, v. 9. Those that showed little respect to prophets at other times were very complaisant to them when they needed them. He attended at Elisha's door as a beggar for an alms. Those that would be cleansed from the spiritual leprosy must wait at *Wisdom's gate, and watch at the posts of her doors*. Naaman expected to have his compliment returned, but Elisha gave him his answer without any formality, would not go to the door to him, lest he should seem too much pleased with the honour done him, but sent a messenger to him, saying, *Go wash in Jordan seven times*, and promising him that if he did so his disease should be cured. The promise was express: *Thou shalt be clean*. The method prescribed was plain: *Go wash in Jordan*. This was not intended as any means of the cure; for, though cold bathing is recommended by many as a very wholesome thing, yet some think that in the case of a leprosy it was rather hurtful. But it was intended as a sign of the cure, and a trial of his obedience. Those that will be helped of God must do as they are bidden. But why did Elisha send a messenger to him with these directions? 1. Because he had retired, at this time, for devotion, was intent upon his prayers for the cure, and would not be diverted; or, 2. Because he knew Naaman to be a proud man, and he would let him know that before the great God all men stand upon the same level.

II. Naaman's disgust at the method prescribed, because it was not what he expected. Two things disgusted him:—

1. That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his person, in sending him orders by a servant, and not coming to him himself, v. 11. Being big with the expectation of a cure, he had been fancying how this cure would be wrought, and the scheme he had laid was this: "*He will surely come out to me*, that is the least he can do to me, a peer of Syria, to me that have come to him in

all this state, to me that have so often been victorious over Israel. *He will stand, and call on the name of his God, and name me in his prayer, and then he will wave his hand over the place, and so effect the cure.*" And, because the thing was not done just thus, he fell into a passion, forgetting, (1.) That he was a leper, and the law of Moses, which Elisha would religiously observe, shut lepers out from society—a leper, and therefore he ought not to insist upon the punctilios of honor. Note, Many have hearts unhumbled under humbling providences; see Num. 12:14. (2.) That he was a petitioner, suing for a favour which he could not demand; and beggars must not be choosers, patients must not prescribe to their physicians. See in Naaman the folly of pride. A cure will not content him unless he be cured with ceremony, with a great deal of pomp and parade; he scorns to be healed, unless he be humoured.

2. That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his country. He took it hard that he must be sent to wash in Jordan, a river of Israel, when he thought *Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel.* How magnificently does he speak of these two rivers that watered Damascus, which soon after fell into one, called by geographers *Chrysoroas—the golden stream!* How scornfully does he speak of all the waters of Israel, though God had called the land of Israel *the glory of all lands*, and particularly for its *brooks of water!* Deu. 8:7. So common it is for God and man to differ in their judgments. How slightly does he speak of the prophet's directions! *May I not wash in them and be clean?* He might wash in them and be clean from dirt, but not wash in them and be clean from leprosy. He was angry that the prophet bade him wash and be clean; he thought that the prophet must do all and was not pleased that he was bidden to do any thing,—or he thought this too cheap, too plain, too common a thing for so great a man to be cured by,—or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or, if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider, (1.) That Jordan belonged to Israel's God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord's land, the holy land, and, in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel or the beauty of the stream. (2.) That Jordan had more than once before this obeyed the commands of omnipotence. It had of old yielded a passage to Israel, and of late to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers which had only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but, above all, (3.) Jordan was the river appointed, and, if he expected a cure from the divine power, he ought to acquiesce in the divine will, without asking why or wherefore. Note, It is common for those that are wise in their own conceit to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of divine wisdom and to prefer their own fancies before them; those that are for *establishing their own righteousness* will not *submit to the righteousness of God*, Rom. 10:3. Naaman talked himself into such a heat (as passionate men usually do) that he turned away from the prophet's door in a rage, ready to swear he would never have any thing more to say to Elisha; and who then would be the loser? Note, *Those that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.* Jonah 2:8. Proud men are the worst enemies to themselves and forego their own redemption.

III. The modest advice which his servants gave him, to observe the prophet's prescriptions, with a tacit reproof of his resentments, v. 13. Though at other times they kept their distance, and now saw him in a passion, yet, knowing him to be a man that would hear reason at any time, and from any body (a good character of great men, and a very rare one), they drew

near, and made bold to argue the matter a little with him. They had conceived a great opinion of the prophet (having, perhaps, heard more of him from the common people, whom they had conversed with, than Naaman had heard from the king and courtiers, whom he had conversed with), and therefore begged of him to consider: "*If the prophet had bidden thee to do some great thing, had ordered thee into a tedious course of physic, or to submit to some painful operation, blistering, or cupping, or salivating, Wouldst thou not have done it?*" No doubt thou wouldst. And wilt thou not submit to so easy a method as this, *Wash and be clean?*" Observe, 1. His own servants gave him this reproof and counsel, which was no more disparagement to him than that he had intelligence of one that could cure him from his wife's maid, v. 3. Note, It is a great mercy to have those about us that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us of our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their servants, Job 31:13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly, though given by the greatest and most venerable names, so we should have our ear open to good advice, though brought us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks, if the thing be well said. 2. The reproof was very modest and respectful. They call him *Father*; for servants must honour and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection. In giving reproof or counsel we must make it appear that it comes from love and true honour, and that we intend, not reproach, but reformation. 3. It was very rational and considerate. If the rude and unthinking servants had stirred up their master's angry resentment, and offered to avenge his quarrel upon the prophet, who (he thought) affronted him, how mischievous would the consequences have been! Fire from heaven, probably, upon them all! But they, to our great surprise, took the prophet's part. Elisha, though it is likely he perceived that what he had said had put Naaman out of humour, did not care to pacify him: it was at his peril if he persisted in his wrath. But his servants were made use of by Providence to reduce him to temper. They reasoned with him, (1.) From his earnest desire of a cure: *Wouldst thou not do any thing?* Note, When diseased sinners come to this, that they are content to do any thing, to submit to any thing, to part with any thing, for a cure, then, and not till then, there begin to be some hopes of them. Then they will take Christ on his own terms when they are made willing to have Christ upon any terms. (2.) From the easiness of the method prescribed: "It is but, *Wash and be clean*. It is but trying; the experiment is cheap and easy, it can do no hurt, but may do good." Note, the methods prescribed for the healing of the leprosy of sin are so plain that we are utterly inexcusable if we do not observe them. It is but, "Believe, and be saved"—"Repent, and be pardoned"—"Wash, and be clean." IV. The cure effected, in the use of the means prescribed, v. 14. Naaman, upon second thoughts, yielded to make the experiment, yet, it should seem, with no great faith and resolution; for, whereas the prophet bade him wash in Jordan seven times, he did but dip himself so many times, as lightly as he could. However God was pleased so far to honour himself and his word as to make that effectual. *His flesh came again, like the flesh of a child*. to his great surprise and joy. This men get by yielding to the will of God, by attending to his institutions. His being cleansed by washing put an honour on the law for cleansing lepers. God will magnify his word above all his name.

Verses 15-19

Of the ten lepers that our Saviour cleansed, the only one that *returned to give thanks* was a *Samaritan*, Lu. 17:16. This Syrian did so, and here expresses himself.

I. Convinced of the power of the God of Israel, not only that he is God, but that he is God alone, and that indeed *there is no God in all the earth but in Israel* (v. 15)—a noble confession, but such as intimates the misery of the Gentile world; for the nations that had many gods really had no God, but were without God in the world. He had formerly thought the gods of Syria gods indeed, but now experience had rectified his mistake, and he knew Israel's God was God alone, the sovereign Lord of all. Had he seen other lepers cleansed, perhaps the sight would not have convinced him, but the mercy of the cure affected him more than the miracle of it. Those are best able to speak of the power of divine grace who have themselves experienced it.

II. Grateful to Elisha the prophet: "Therefore, for his sake whose servant thou art, I have a present for thee, silver, and gold, and raiment, whatever thou wilt please to accept." He valued the cure, not by the easiness of it to the prophet, but the acceptableness of it to himself, and would gladly pay for it accordingly. But Elisha generously refused the fee, though urged to accept it; and, to prevent further importunity, backed his refusal with an oath: *As the Lord liveth, I will receive none* (v. 16), not because he did not need it, for he was poor enough, and knew what to do with it, and how to bestow it among the sons of the prophets, nor because he thought it unlawful, for he received presents from others; but he would not be beholden to this Syrian, nor should *he* say, *I have made Elisha rich*, Gen. 14:23. It would be much for the honour of God to show this new convert that the servants of the God of Israel were taught to look upon the wealth of this world with a holy contempt, which would confirm him in his belief that *there was no God but in Israel*. See 1 Co. 9:18; 2 Co. 11:9.

III. Proselyted to the worship of the God of Israel. He will not only offer a sacrifice to the Lord, in thanks for his present cure, but he resolves he will never offer sacrifice to any other gods, v. 17. It was a happy cure of his leprosy which cured him of his idolatry, a more dangerous disease. But here are two instances of his weakness and infirmity in his conversion:-1. In one instance he over-did it, that he would not only worship the God of Israel, but he would have clods of earth out of the prophet's garden, or at least of the prophet's ordering, to *make an altar of*, v. 17. He that awhile ago had spoken very slightly of the waters of Israel (v. 12) now is in another extreme, and over-values the earth of Israel, supposing (since God has appointed *altars of earth*, Ex. 20:24) that an altar of that earth would be most acceptable to him, not considering that all *the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof*. Or perhaps the transport of his affection and veneration for the prophet, not only upon the account of his power, but of his virtue and generosity, made him, as we say, love the very ground he went upon and desire to have some of it home with him. The modern compliment equivalent to this would be, "Pray, sir, let me have your picture." 2. In another instance he under-did it, that he reserved to himself a liberty to bow in the house of Rimmon, in complaisance to the king his master, and according to the duty of his place at court (v. 18), *in this thing* he must be excused. He owns he ought not to do it, but that he cannot otherwise not do it, but that he cannot otherwise keep his place,—protests that his bowing is not, nor ever shall be, as it had been, in honour to the idol, but only in honour to the king,—and therefore he hopes God will forgive him. Perhaps, all things considered, this might admit of some apology, though it was not justifiable. But, as to us, I am sure, (1.) If, in covenanting with God, we make a reservation for any known sin, which we will continue to indulge ourselves in, that reservation is a defeasance of his covenant. We must cast away all our transgressions and not except any house of Rimmon. (2.) Though we are encouraged to pray for the remission of the sins we have committed, yet, if we ask for a dispensation to go

on in any sin for the future, we mock God, and deceive ourselves. (3.) Those that know not how to quit a place at court when they cannot keep it without sinning against God, and wronging their consciences, do not rightly value the divine favour. (4.) Those that truly hate evil will make conscience of abstaining from all appearances of evil. Though Naaman's dissembling his religion cannot be approved, yet because his promise to offer no sacrifice to any god but the God of Israel only was a great point gained with a Syrian, and because, by asking pardon in this matter, he showed such a degree of conviction and ingenuousness as gave hopes of improvement, the prophet took fair leave of him, and bade him *Go in peace*, v. 19. Young converts must be tenderly dealt with.

Verses 20-27

Naaman, a Syrian, a courtier, a soldier, had many servants, and we read how wise and good they were, v. 13. Elisha, a holy prophet, a man of God, has but one servant, and he proves a base, lying, naughty fellow. Those that heard of Elisha at a distance honoured him, and got good by what they heard; but he that stood continually before him, to hear his wisdom, had no good impressions made upon him either by his doctrine or miracles. One would have expected that Elisha's servant should be a saint (even Ahab's servant, Obadiah, was), but even Christ himself had a Judas among his followers. The means of grace cannot give grace. The best men, the best ministers have often had those about them that have been their grief and shame. The nearer the church the further from God. *Many come from the east and west to sit down with Abraham when the children of the kingdom shall be cast out.* Here is,

I. Gehazi's sin. It was a complicated sin. 1. The love of money, that root of all evil, was at the bottom of it. His master contemned Naaman's treasures, but he coveted them, v. 20. His heart (says bishop Hall) was packed up in Naaman's chests, and he must run after him to fetch it. Multitudes, by coveting worldly wealth, have *erred from the faith* and *pierced themselves with many sorrows*. 2. He blamed his master for refusing Naaman's present, condemned him as foolish in not taking gold when he might have it, envied and grudged his kindness and generosity to this stranger, though it was for the good of his soul. In short, he thought himself wiser than his master. 3. When Naaman, like a person of accomplished manners, alighted from his chariot to meet him (v. 21), he told him a deliberate lie, that his master sent him to him, and so he received that courtesy to himself that Naaman intended to his master. 4. He abused his master, and basely misrepresented him to Naaman as one that had soon repented of his generosity, that was fickle, and did not know his own mind, that would say and unsay, swear and unswear, that would not do an honourable thing but he must presently undo it again. his story of the two sons of the prophets was as silly as it was false; if he would have begged a token for two young scholars, surely less than a talent of silver might serve them. 5. There was danger of his alienating Naaman from that holy religion which he had espoused, and lessening his good opinion of it. he would be ready to say, as Paul's enemies suggested concerning him (2 Co. 12:16, 17), that, though Elisha himself did not burden him, yet being crafty he caught him with guile, sending those that made a gain of him. We hope that he understood afterwards that Elisha's hand was not in it, and that Gehazi was forced to restore what he had unjustly got, else it might have driven him to his idols again. 6. His seeking to conceal what he had unjustly got added much to his sin. (1.) He hid it, as Achan did his gain, by sacrilege, in the tower, a secret place, a strong place, till he should have an opportunity of laying it

out, v. 24. Now he thought himself sure of it, and applauded his own management of a fraud by which he had imposed, not only upon the prudence of Naaman, but upon Elisha's spirit of discerning, as Ananias and Sapphira upon the apostles. (2.) He denied it: He *went in, and stood before his master*, ready to receive his orders. None looked more observant of his master, though really none more injurious to him; he thought, as Ephraim, *I have become rich, but they shall find no iniquity in me*, Hos. 12:8. His master asked him where he had been, "Nowhere, sir" (said he), "out of the house." Note, One lie commonly begets another: the way of that sin is down-hill; therefore dare to be true.

II. The punishment of this sin. Elisha immediately called him to an account for it; and observe,

1. How he was convicted. he thought to impose upon the prophet, but was soon given to understand that the Spirit of prophecy could not be deceived, and that it was in vain to lie to the Holy Ghost. Elisha could tell him, (1.) What he had done, though he had denied it. "Thou sayest thou wentest nowhere, but *went not my heart with thee?*" v. 26. Had Gehazi yet to learn that prophets had spiritual eyes? or could he think to hide any thing from a seer, from him with whom the secret of the Lord was? Note, It is folly to presume upon sin in hopes of secrecy. When thou goest aside into any by-path does not thy own conscience go with thee? Does not the eye of God go with thee? *He that covers his sin shall not prosper, particularly a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. 12:19. Truth will transpire, and often comes to light strangely, to the confusion of those that make lies their refuge. (2.) What he designed, though he kept that in his own breast. He could tell him the very thoughts and intents of his heart, that he was projecting, now that he had got these two talents, to purchase ground and cattle, to leave Elisha's service, and to set up for himself. Note, All the foolish hopes and contrivances of carnal worldlings are open before God. And he tells him also the evil of it: "*Is it a time to receive money? Is this an opportunity of enriching thyself? Couldst thou find no better way of getting money than by belying thy master and laying a stumbling-block before a young convert?*" Note, Those that are for getting wealth at any time, and by any ways and means whatsoever, right or wrong, lay themselves open to a great deal of temptation. Those that will be rich (*per fas, per nefas; rem, rem, quocunque modo rem—by fair means, by foul means; careless of principle, intent only on money*) *drown themselves in destruction and perdition*, 1 Tim. 6:9. War, and fire, and plague, and shipwreck, are not, as many make them, things to get money by. It is not a time to increase our wealth when we cannot do it but in such ways as are dishonourable to God and religion or injurious to our brethren or the public.

2. How he was punished for it: *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to thee*, v. 27. If he will have his money, he shall take his disease with it, *Transit cum onere—It passes with this incumbrance*. He was contriving to entail lands upon his posterity; but, instead of them, he entails a loathsome disease on the heirs of his body, from generation to generation. The sentence was immediately executed on himself; no sooner said than done: He *went out from his presence a leper as white as snow*. Thus he is stigmatized and made infamous, and carries the mark of his shame wherever he goes: thus he loads himself and family with a curse, which shall not only for the present proclaim his villany, but for ever perpetuate the remembrance of it. Note, *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of those that seek death*, Prov. 21:6. Those who get wealth by fraud and injustice cannot expect either the comfort or the continuance of it. What was Gehazi profited, though he gained his two talents, when thereby he lost his health, his honour, his peace, his service, and, if repentance prevented not, his soul for

ever? See Job 20:12, etc.

Chapter 6

In this chapter we have, I. A further account of the wondrous works of Elisha. 1. His making iron to swim (v. 1-7). 2. His disclosing to the king of Israel the secret counsels of the king of Syria (v. 8-12). 3. His saving himself out of the hands of those who were sent to apprehend him (v. 13-23). II. The besieging of Samaria by the Syrians and the great distress the city was reduced to (v. 24-33). The relief of it is another of the wonders wrought by Elisha's word, which we shall have the story of in the next chapter. Elisha is still a great blessing both to church and state, both to the sons of the prophets and to his prince.

Verses 1-7

Several things may be observed here,

I. Concerning the sons of the prophets, and their condition and character. The college here spoken of seems to be that at Gilgal, for there Elisha was (ch. 4:38), and it was near Jordan; and, probably, wherever Elisha resided as many as could of the sons of the prophets flocked to him for the advantage of his instructions, counsels, and prayers. Every one would covet to dwell with him and be near him. Those that would be teachers should lay out themselves to get the best advantages for learning. Now observe,

1. Their number increased so that they wanted room: *The place is too strait for us* (v. 1)—a good hearing, for it is a sign many are added to them. Elisha's miracles doubtless drew in many. Perhaps they increased the more now that Gehazi was cashiered, and, it is likely, an honest man put in his room, to take care of their provisions; for it should seem (by that instance, ch. 4:43) that Naaman's case was not the only one in which he grudged his master's generosity.

2. They were humble men and did not affect that which was gay or great. When they wanted room they did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones, and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for great things in the other world, to be content with mean things in this.

3. They were poor men, and men that had no interest in great ones. It was a sign that Joram was king, and Jezebel ruled too, or the sons of the prophets, when they wanted room, would have needed only to apply to the government, not to consult among themselves about the enlargement of their buildings. God's prophets have seldom been the world's favourites. Nay, so poor were they that they had not wherewithal to hire workmen (but must leave their studies, and work for themselves), no, nor to buy tools, but must borrow of their neighbours. Poverty then is no bar to prophecy.

4. They were industrious men, and willing to take pains. They desired not to live, like idle drones (idle *monks*, I might have said), upon the labours of others, but only desired leave of their president to work for themselves. As the sons of the prophets must not be so taken up with contemplation as to render themselves unfit for action, so much less must they so indulge themselves in their ease as to be averse to labour. He that must eat or die must work or starve, 2 Th. 3:8, 10. Let no man think an honest employment either a burden or disparagement.

5. They were men that had a great value and veneration for Elisha; though they were themselves prophets, they paid much

deference to him. (1.) They would not go about to build at all without his leave, v. 2. It is good for us all to be suspicious of our own judgment, even when we think we have most reason for it, and to be desirous of the advice of those who are wiser and more experienced; and it is especially commendable in the sons of the prophets to take their fathers along with them, and to act in all things of moment under their direction, *permissu superiorum—by permission of their superiors*. (2.) They would not willingly go to fell timber without his company: "*Go with thy servants* (v. 3), not only to advise us in any exigence, but to keep good order among us, that, being under they eye, we may behave as becomes us." Good disciples desire to be always under good discipline.

6. They were honest men, and men that were in care to give all men their own. When one of them, accidentally fetching too fierce a stroke (as those that work seldom are apt to be violent), threw off his axe-head into the water, he did not say, "It was a mischance, and who can help it? It was the fault of the helve, and the owner deserved to stand to the loss." No, he cries out with deep concern, *Alas, master! For it was borrowed*, v. 5. Had the axe been his own, it would only have troubled him that he could not be further serviceable to his brethren; but now, besides that, it troubles him that he cannot be just to the owner, to whom he ought to be not only just but grateful. Note, We ought to be as careful of that which is borrowed as of that which is our own, that it receives no damage, because we must love our neighbour as ourselves and do as we would be done by. It is likely this prophet was poor, and had not wherewithal to pay for the axe, which made the loss of it so much the greater trouble. To those that have an honest mind the sorest grievance of poverty is not so much their own want or disgrace as their being by it rendered unable to pay their just debts.

II. Concerning the father of the prophets, Elisha. 1. That he was a man of great condescension and compassion; he went with the sons of the prophets to the woods, when they desired his company, v. 3. Let no man, especially no minister, think himself to great to stoop to do good, but be tender to all. 2. That he was a man of great power; he could make iron to swim, contrary to its nature (v. 6), for the God of nature is not tied up to its laws. He did not throw the helve after the hatchet, but cut down a new stick, and cast it into the river. We need not double the miracle by supposing that the stick sunk to fetch up the iron, it was enough that it was a signal of the divine summons to the iron to rise. God's grace can thus raise the stony iron heart which has sunk into the mud of this world, and raise up affections naturally earthly, to things above.

Verses 8-12

Here we have Elisha, with his spirit of prophecy, serving the king, as before helping the sons of the prophets; for that, as other gifts, is given to every man to profit withal; and, whatever abilities any man has of doing good, he is by them made a debtor both to the wise and unwise. Observe here,

I. How the king of Israel was informed by Elisha of all the designs and motions of his enemy, the king of Syria, more effectually than he could have been by the most vigilant and faithful spies. If the king of Syria, in a secret council of war, determined in which place to make an inroad upon the coasts of Israel, where he thought it would be the greatest surprise and they would be least able to make resistance, before his forces could receive his orders the king of Israel had notice of them from Elisha, and so had opportunity of preventing the mischief; and many a time, v. 8–10. See here, 1. That the enemies of

God's Israel are politic in their devices, and restless in their attempts, against him. *They shall not know, nor see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them*, Neh. 4:11. 2. All those devices are known to God, even those that are deepest laid. He knows not only what men do, but what they design, and has many ways of countermining them. 3. It is a great advantage to us to be warned of our danger, that we may stand upon our guard against it. The work of God's prophets is to give us warning; if, being warned, we do not save ourselves, it is our own fault, and our blood will be upon our own head. The king of Israel would regard the warnings Elisha gave him of his danger by the Syrians, but not the warnings he gave him of his danger by his sins. Such warnings are little heeded by the most; they will save themselves from death, but not from hell.

II. How the king of Syria resented this. He suspected treachery among his senators, and that his counsels were betrayed, v. 11. But one of his servants, that had heard, by Naaman and others, of Elisha's wondrous works, concludes it must needs be he that gave this intelligence to the king of Israel, v. 12. What could not he discover who could tell Gehazi his thoughts? Here a confession of the boundless knowledge, as before of the boundless power, of Israel's God, is extorted from Syrians. Nothing done, said, thought, by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance.

Verses 13-23

Here is, 1. The great force which the king of Syria sent to seize Elisha. He found out where he was, at Dothan (v. 13), which was not far from Samaria; thither he sent a great host, who were to come upon him by night, and to bring him dead or alive, v. 14. Perhaps he had heard that when only one captain and his fifty men were sent to take Elijah they were baffled in the attempt, and therefore he sent an *army* against Elisha, as if the fire from heaven that consumed fifty men could not as easily consume 50,000. Naaman could tell him that Elisha dwelt not in any strong-hold, nor was attended with any guards, nor had any such great interest in the people that he needed to fear a tumult among them; what occasion then was there for this great force? But thus he hoped to make sure of him, especially coming upon him by surprise. Foolish man! Did he believe that Elisha had informed the king of Israel of his secret counsels or not? If not, what quarrel had he with him? If he did, could he be so weak as to imagine that Elisha would not discover the designs laid against himself, and that, having interest enough in heaven to discover them, he would not have interest enough to defeat them? Those that fight against God, his people, and prophet, know not what they do.

II. The grievous fright which the prophet's servant was in, when he perceived the city surrounded by the Syrians, and the effectual course which the prophet took to pacify him and free him from his fears. It seems, Elisha accustomed his servant to rise early, that is the way to bring something to pass, and to do the work of a day in its day. Being up, we may suppose he heard the noise of soldiers, and thereupon looked out, and was aware of an army compassing the city (v. 15), with great assurance no doubt of success, and that they should have this troublesome prophet in their hands presently. Now observe, 1. What a consternation he was in. He ran straight to Elisha, to bring him an account of it: "*Alas, master!*" (said he) "*what shall we do?*" We are undone, it is to no purpose to think either of fighting or flying, but we must unavoidably fall into their hands." Had he but studied David's Psalms, which were then extant, he might have learnt *not to be afraid of* 10,000 of people (Ps. 3:6), no, not of *a host encamped against him*, Ps. 27:3. Had he considered that he was embarked with his master, by whom God had

done great things, and whom he would not now leave to *fall into the hands of the uncircumcised*, and who, having saved others, would no doubt save himself, he would not have been thus at a loss. If he had only said, *What shall I do?* it would have been like that of the disciples: *Lord, save us, we perish*; but he needed not to include his master as being in distress, nor to say, *What shall we do?* 2. How his master quieted him, (1.) By word. What he said to him (v. 16) is spoken to all the faithful servants of God, when *without are fightings and within are fears*: "*Fear not* with that fear which has torment and amazement, *for those that are with us*, to protect us, *are more than those that are against us*, to destroy us—angels unspeakably more numerous—God infinitely more powerful." When we are magnifying the causes of our fear we ought to possess ourselves with clear, and great, and high thoughts of God and the invisible world. *If God be for us*, we know what follows, Rom. 8:31. (2.) By vision, v. 17. [1.] It seems Elisha was much concerned for the satisfaction of his servant. Good men desire, not only to be easy themselves, but to have those about them easy. Elisha had lately parted with his old man, and this, having newly come into his service, had not the advantage of experience; his master was therefore desirous to give him other convincing evidence of that omnipotence which employed him and was therefore employed for him. Note, Those whose faith is strong ought tenderly to consider and compassionate those who are weak and of a timorous spirit, and to do what they can to strengthen their hands. [2.] He saw himself safe, and wished no more than that his servant might see what he saw, a guard of angels round about him; such as were his master's convoy to the gates of heaven were his protectors against the gates of hell—*chariots of fire, and horses of fire*. Fire is both dreadful and devouring; that power which was engaged for Elisha's protection could both terrify and consume the assailants. As angels are God's messengers, so they are his soldiers, his hosts (Gen. 32:2), his legions, or regiments, (Mt. 26:53), for the good of his people. [3.] For the satisfaction of his servant there needed no more than the opening of his eyes; *that* therefore he prayed for, and obtained for him: *Lord, open his eyes that he may see*. The eyes of his body were open, and with them he saw the danger. "Lord, open the eyes of his faith, that with them he may see the protection we are under." Note, *First*, The greatest kindness we can do for those that are fearful and faint-hearted is to pray for them, and so to recommend them to the mighty grace of God. *Secondly*, The opening of our eyes will be the silencing of our fears. In the dark we are most apt to be frightened. The clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven the less we shall fear the calamities of this earth.

III. The shameful defeat which Elisha gave to the host of Syrians who came to seize him. They thought to make a prey of him, but he made fools of them, perfectly played with them, so far was he from fearing them or any damage by them. 1. He prayed to God to smite them with blindness, and they were all struck blind immediately, not stone-blind, nor so as to be themselves aware that they were blind, for they could see the light, but their sight was so altered that they could not know the persons and places they were before acquainted with, v. 18. They were so confounded that those among them whom they depended upon for information did not know this place to be Dothan nor this person to be Elisha, but *groped at noon day as in the night* (Isa. 59:10; Job 12:24, 25); their memory failed them, and their distinguishing faculty. See the power of God over the minds and understanding of men, both ways; he enlightened the eyes of Elisha's friend, and darkened the eyes of his foes, that they might see indeed, but not perceive, Isa. 6:9 *For this twofold judgment Christ came into this world, that those who see not might see,*

and that those who see might be made blind (Jn. 9:39), a saviour of life to some, of death to others.

2. When they were thus bewildered and confounded he led them to Samaria (v. 19), promising that he would show them the man whom they sought, and he did so. He did not lie to them when he told them, *This is not the way, nor is this the city* where Elisha is; for he had now come out of the city; and if they would see him, they must go to another city to which he would direct them. Those that fight against God and his prophets deceive themselves, and are justly given up to delusions. 3. When he had brought them to Samaria he prayed to God so to open their eyes and restore them their memories that they might see where they were (v. 20), *and behold*, to their great terror, *they were in the midst of Samaria*, where, it is probable, there was a standing force sufficient to cut them all off, or make them prisoners of war. Satan, the god of this world, blinds men's eyes, and so deludes them into their own ruin; but, when God enlightens their eyes, they then see themselves in the midst of their enemies, captives to Satan and in danger of hell, though before they thought their condition good. The enemies of God and his church, when they fancy themselves ready to triumph, will find themselves conquered and triumphed over. 4. When he had them at his mercy he made it appear that he was influenced by a divine goodness as well as a divine power. (1.) He took care to protect them from the danger into which he had brought them, and was content to show them what he could have done; he needed not the sword of an angel to avenge his cause, the sword of the king of Israel is at his service if he please (v. 21): *My father* (so, respectfully does the king now speak to him, though, soon after, he swore his death), *shall I smite them?* And, again, as if he longed for the assault, *Shall I smite them?* Perhaps, he remembered how God was displeased at his father for *letting go out of his hands* those whom he had put it in his power to destroy, and he would not offend in like manner; yet such a reverence has he for the prophet that he will not strike a stroke without his commission. But the prophet would by no means suffer him to meddle with them; they were brought hither to be convinced and shamed, not to be killed, v. 22. Had they been *his* prisoners, taken captive by his sword and bow, when they asked quarter it would have been barbarous to deny, and, when he had given it to them, it would have been perfidious to do them any hurt, and against the laws of arms to kill men in cool blood. But they were not his prisoners; they were God's prisoners and the prophet's, and therefore he must do them no harm. Those that humble themselves under God's hand take the best course to secure themselves. (2.) He took care to provide for them; he ordered the king to treat them handsomely and then dismiss them fairly, which he did, v. 23. [1.] It was the king's praise that he was so obsequious to the prophet, contrary to his inclination, and, as it seemed, to his interest, 1 Sa. 24:19. Nay, so willing was he to oblige Elisha that, whereas he was ordered openly to set *bread and water* before them (which are good fare for captives), he *prepared great provision* for them, for the credit of his court and country and of Elisha. [2.] It was the prophet's praise that he was so generous to his enemies, who, though they came to take him, could not but go away admiring him, as both the mightiest and kindest man they ever met with. The great duty of loving enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, was both commanded in the Old Testament (Prov. 25:21, 22, *If thy enemy hunger, feed him*, Ex. 23:4, 5) and practised, as here by Elisha. His predecessor had given a specimen of divine justice when he called for flames of fire on the heads of his persecutors to consume them, but he have a specimen of divine mercy in heaping coals of fire on the heads of his persecutors to melt them. Let not us then be *overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*.

IV. The good effect this had, for the present, upon the Syrians. They *came no more into the land of Israel* (v. 23), namely, upon this errand, to take Elisha; they saw it was to no purpose to attempt that, nor would any of their bands be persuaded to make an assault on so great and good a man. The most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend.

Verses 24-33

This last paragraph of this chapter should, of right, have been the first of the next chapter, for it begins a new story, which is there continued and concluded. Here is,

I. The siege which the king of Syria laid to Samaria and the great distress which the city was reduced to thereby. The Syrians had soon forgotten the kindnesses they had lately received in Samaria, and very ungratefully, for aught that appears without any provocation, sought the destruction of it, v. 24. There are base spirits that can never feel obliged. The country, we may suppose, was plundered and laid waste when this capital city was brought to the last extremity, v. 25. The dearth which had of late been in the land was probably the occasion of the emptiness of their stores, or the siege was so sudden that they had not time to lay in provisions; so that, while the sword devoured without, the famine within was more grievous (Lam. 4:9): for, it should seem, the Syrians designed not to storm the city, but to starve it. So great was the scarcity that an ass's head, that has but little flesh on it and that unsavoury, unwholesome, and ceremonially unclean, was sold for five pounds, and a small quantity of fitches, or lentiles, or some such coarse corn, then called *dove's dung*, no more of it than the quantity of six eggs, for five pieces of silver, about twelve or fifteen shillings. Learn to value plenty, and to be thankful for it; see how contemptible money is, when, in time of famine, it is so freely parted with for anything that is eatable.

II. The sad complaint which a poor woman had to make to the king, in the extremity of the famine. He was *passing by upon the wall* to give orders for the mounting of the guard, the posting of the archers, the repair of the breaches, and the like, when a woman of the city cried to him, *Help, my lord, O king!* v. 26. Whither should the subject, in distress, go for help but to the prince, who is, by office, the protector of right and the avenger of wrong? He returns but a melancholy answer (v. 27): *If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I?* Some think it was a *quarrelling* word, and the language of his fretfulness: "Why dost thou expect anything from me, when God himself deals thus hardly with us?" Because he could not help her as he would, out of the floor or the wine-press, he would not help her at all. We must take heed of being made cross by afflictive providences. It rather seems to be a *quieting* word: "Let us be content, and make the best of our affliction, looking up to God, for, till he help us, I cannot help thee." 1. He laments the emptiness of the floor and the wine-press. These were not as they had been; even the king's failed. We read (v. 23) of great provisions which he had a command, sufficient for the entertainment of an army, yet now he has not wherewithal to relieve one poor woman. Scarcity sometimes follows upon great plenty; we cannot be sure that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, Isa. 56:12; Ps. 30:6. 2. He acknowledges himself thereby disabled to help, unless God would help them. Note, Creatures are helpless things without God, for every creature is that, all that, and only that, which he makes it to be. However, though he cannot help her, he is willing to hear her (v. 28): *"What ails thee?"* Is there anything singular in thy case, or dost thou fare worse than thy neighbours?" Truly yes; she and one of her neighbours had made a barbarous agreement, that, all provisions failing, they should boil and eat her son first and then her neighbour's; hers was eaten (who can think of it

without horror?) and now her neighbour hid hers, v. 28, 29. See an instance of the dominion which the flesh has got above the spirit, when the most natural affections of the mind may be thus overpowered by the natural appetites of the body. See the word of God fulfilled; among the threatenings of God's judgments upon Israel for their sins this was one (Deu. 28:53–57), that they should eat the flesh of their own children, which one would think incredible, yet it came to pass.

III. The king's indignation against Elisha upon this occasion. He lamented the calamity, *rent his clothes, and had sackcloth upon his flesh* (v. 30), as one heartily concerned for the misery of his people, and that it was not in his power to help them; but he did not lament his own iniquity, nor the iniquity of his people, which was the procuring cause of the calamity; he was not sensible that his *ways and his doings had procured this to himself; this is his wickedness, for it is bitter. The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.* Instead of vowing to pull down the calves at Dan and Beth-el, or letting the law have its course against the prophets of Baal and of the groves, he swears *the death of Elisha*, v. 31. Why, what is the matter? What had Elisha done? his head is the most innocent and valuable in all Israel, and yet that must be devoted, and made an anathema. Thus in the days of the persecuting emperors, when the empire groaned under any extraordinary calamity, the fault was laid on the Christians, and they were doomed to destruction. *Christianos ad leones—Away with the Christians to the lions.* Perhaps Jehoram was in this heat against Elisha because he had foretold this judgment, or had persuaded him to hold out, and not surrender, or rather because he did not, by his prayers, raise the siege, and relieve the city, which he thought he could do but would not; whereas till they repented and reformed, and were ready for deliverance, they had no reason to expect that the prophet should pray for it.

IV. The foresight Elisha had of the king's design against him, v. 32. He sat in his house well composed, and the elders with him, well employed no doubt, while the king was like a wild bull in a net, or like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; he told the elders there was an officer coming from the king to cut off his head, and bade them stop him at the door, and not let him in, for the king his master was just following him, to revoke the order, as we may suppose. The same spirit of prophecy that enabled Elisha to tell him what was done at a distance authorized him to call the king *the son of a murderer*, which, unless we could produce such an extraordinary commission, it is not for us to initiate; far be it from us to despise dominion and to speak evil of dignities. He appealed to the elders whether he had deserved so ill at the king's hands: "See whether in this he be not the son of a murderer?" For *what evil had Elisha done? He had not desired the woeful day*, Jer. 17:16.

V. The king's passionate speech, when he came to prevent the execution of his edict for the beheading of Elisha. He seems to have been in a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions, knew not what to say, but, seeing things brought to the last extremity, he even abandoned himself to despair (v. 33): *This evil is of the Lord.* Therein his notions were right and well applied; it is a general truth that all penal evil is of the Lord, as the first cause, and sovereign judge (Amos 3:6), and this we ought to apply to particular cases: if all evil, then this evil, whatever it is we are now groaning under, whoever are the instruments, God is the principal agent of it. But his inference from this truth was foolish and wicked: *What should I wait for the Lord any longer?* When Eli, and David, and Job, said, *It is of the Lord*, they grew patient upon it, but this bad man grew outrageous upon it: "I will neither fear worse nor expect better, for worse cannot come and better never will come: we are all

undone, and there is no remedy." It is an unreasonable thing to be weary of waiting for God, for he is a God of judgment, and blessed are all those that wait for him.

Chapter 7

Relief is here brought to Samaria and her king, when the case is, in a manner, desperate, and the king despairing. I. It is foretold by Elisha, and an unbelieving lord shut out from the benefit of it (v. 1, 2). II. It is brought about, 1. By an unaccountable fright into which God put the Syrians (v. 6), which caused them to retire precipitately (v. 7). 2. By the seasonable discovery which four lepers made of this (v. 3-5), and the account which they gave of it to the court (v. 8-11). 3. By the cautious trial which the king made of the truth of it (v. 12-15). III. The event answered the prediction both in the sudden plenty (v. 16), and the death of the unbelieving lord (v. 17-20); for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

Verses 1-2

Here, I. Elisha foretels that, notwithstanding the great straits to which the city of Samaria is reduced, yet within twenty-four hours they shall have plenty, v. 1. The king of Israel despaired of it and grew weary of waiting; then Elisha foretold it, when things were at the worst. Man's extremity is God's opportunity of magnifying his own power; his time to appear for his people is when *their strength is gone*, Deu. 32:36. When they had given over expecting help it came. *When the son of man comes shall he find faith on the earth?* Lu. 18:8. The king said, *What shall I wait for the Lord any longer?* And perhaps some of the elders were ready to say the same: "Well," said Elisha, "you hear what these say; *now hear you the word of the Lord*, hear what he says, hear it and heed it and believe it: to-morrow corn shall be sold at the usual rate in the gate of Samaria;" that is, the siege shall be raised, for the gate of the city shall be opened, and the market shall be held there as formerly. The return of peace is thus expressed (Jdg. 5:11), *Then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates*, to buy and sell there. 2. The consequence of that shall be great plenty. This would, in time, follow of course, but that corn should be thus cheap in so short a time was quite beyond what could be thought of. Though the king of Israel had just now threatened Elisha's life, God promises to save his life and the life of his people; for *where sin abounded grace doth much more abound*.

II. A peer of Israel that happened to be present openly declared his disbelief of this prediction, v. 2. He was a courtier whom the king had an affection for, as the man of his right hand, on whom he leaned, that is, on whose prudence he much relied, and in whom he reposed much confidence. He thought it impossible, unless God should rain corn out of the clouds, as once he did manna; no less than the repetition of Moses's miracle will serve him, though that of Elijah might have served to answer this intention, the increasing of the meal in the barrel.

III. The just doom passed upon him for his infidelity, that he should see this great plenty for this conviction, and yet not eat of it to his comfort. Note, Unbelief is a sin by which men greatly dishonour and displease God, and deprive themselves of the favours he designed for them. The murmuring Israelites saw Canaan, but could not enter in because of unbelief. Such (says bishop Patrick) will be the portion of those that believe not the promise of eternal life; they shall see it at a distance—Abraham afar off, but shall never taste of it; for they forfeit the benefit of the promise if they cannot find in their heart to take God's word.

Verses 3-11

We are here told,

I. How the siege of Samaria was raised in the evening, at the edge of night (v. 6, 7), not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, striking terror upon the spirits of the besiegers. Here was not a sword drawn against them, not a drop of blood shed, it was not by thunder or hailstones that they were discomfited, nor were they slain, as Sennacherib's army before Jerusalem, by a destroying angel; but, 1. *The Lord made them to hear a noise of chariots and horses*. The Syrians that besieged Dothan had their *sight* imposed upon, ch. 6:18. These had their *hearing* imposed upon. For God knows how to work upon every sense, pursuant to his own counsels as *he makes the hearing ear and the seeing eye*, so he makes *the deaf and the blind*, Ex. 4:11. Whether the noise was really made in the air by the ministry of angels, or whether it was only a sound in their ears, is not certain; which soever it was, it was from God, who both *brings the wind out of his treasures*, and *forms the spirit of man within him*. The sight of horses and chariots had encouraged the prophet's servant, ch. 6:17. The noise of horses and chariots terrified the hosts of Syria. For notices from the invisible world are either very comfortable or very dreadful, according as men are at peace with God or at war with him. 2. Hearing this noise, they concluded the king of Israel had certainly procured assistance from some foreign power: *He has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians*. There was, for aught we know but one king of Egypt, and what kings there were of the Hittites nobody can imagine; but, as they were imposed upon by that dreadful sound in their ears, so they imposed upon themselves by the interpretation they made of it. Had they supposed the king of Judah to have come with his forces, there would have been more of probability in their apprehensions than to dream of the *kings of the Hittites and the Egyptians*. If the fancies of any of them raised this spectre, yet their reasons might soon have laid it: how could the king of Israel, who was closely besieged, hold intelligence with those distant princes? What had he to hire them with? It was impossible but some notice would come, before, of the motions of so great a host; but *there were they in great fear where no fear was*. 3. Hereupon they all fled with incredible precipitation, as for their lives, left their camp as it was: even their horses, that might have hastened their flight, they could not stay to take with them, v. 7. None of them had so much sense as to send out scouts to discover the supposed enemy, much less courage enough to face the enemy, though fatigued with a long march. *The wicked flee when none pursues*. God can, when he pleases, dispirit the boldest and most brave, and make the stoutest heart to tremble. Those that will not fear God he can make to fear at the shaking of a leaf.

II. How the Syrians' flight was discovered by four leprous men. Samaria was delivered, and did not know it. The watchmen on the walls were not aware of the retreat of the enemy, so silently did they steal away. But Providence employed four lepers to be the intelligencers, who had their lodging without the gate, being excluded from the city, as ceremonially unclean: the Jews say they were Gehazi and his three sons; perhaps Gehazi might be one of them, which might cause him to be taken notice of afterwards by the king, ch. 8:4. See here, 1. How these lepers reasoned themselves into a resolution to make a visit in the night to the camp of the Syrians, v. 3, 4. They were ready to perish for hunger; none passed through the gate to relieve them. Should they go into the city, there was nothing to be had there, they must die in the streets; should they sit still, they must pine to death in their cottage. They therefore determine to go over to the enemy, and throw themselves upon their mercy: if they killed them,

better die by the sword than by famine, one death than a thousand; but perhaps they would save them alive, as objects of compassion. Common prudence will put us upon that method which may better our condition, but cannot make it worse. The prodigal son resolves to return to his father, whose displeasure he had reason to fear, rather than perish with hunger in the far country. These lepers conclude, "If they kill us, we shall but die;" and happy they who, in another sense, can thus speak of dying. "We shall but die, that is the worst of it, not die and be damned, not be hurt of the second death." According to this resolution, they went, in the beginning of the night, to the camp of the Syrians, and, to their great surprise, found it wholly deserted, not a man to be seen or heard in it, v. 5. Providence ordered it, that these lepers came as soon as ever the Syrians had fled, for they fled in the twilight, the evening twilight (v. 7), and in the twilight the lepers came (v. 5), and so no time was lost. 2. How they reasoned themselves into a resolution to bring tidings of this to the city. They feasted in the first tent they came to (v. 8) and then began to think of enriching themselves with the plunder; but they corrected themselves (v. 9): "*We do not well* to conceal these good tidings from the community we are members of, under colour of being avenged upon them for excluding us from their society; it was the law that did it, not they, and therefore let us bring them the news. Though it awake them from sleep, it will be *life from the dead* to them." Their own consciences told them that some mischief would befall them if they acted separately, and sought themselves only. Selfish narrow-spirited people cannot expect to prosper; the most comfortable advantage is that which our brethren share with us in. According to this resolution, they returned to the gate, and acquainted the sentinel with what they had discovered (v. 10), who straightway brought the intelligence to court (v. 11), and it was not the less acceptable for being first brought by lepers.

Verses 12-20

Here we have,

I. The king's jealousy of a stratagem in the Syrian's retreat, v. 12. He feared that they had withdrawn into an ambush, to draw out the besieged, that they might fall on them with more advantage. he knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favour by his unbelief and impatience. He knew no reason the Syrians had to fly, for it does not appear that he or any of his attendants heard the noise of the chariots which the Syrians were frightened at. Let not those who, like him, are *unstable in all their ways, think to receive any thing from God*; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst and makes men suspicious.

II. The course they took for their satisfaction, and to prevent their falling into a snare. They sent out spies to see what had become of the Syrians, and found they had all fled indeed, commanders as well a common soldiers. They could track them by the garments which they threw off, and left by the way, for their greater expedition, v. 15. He that gave this advice seems to have been very sensible of the deplorable condition the people were in (v. 13); for speaking of the horses, many of which were dead and the rest ready to perish for hunger, he says, and repeats it, "*They are as all the multitude of Israel*. Israel used to glory in their multitude, but now they are diminished and brought low." He advised to send five horsemen, but, it should seem, there were only two horses fit to be sent, and those chariot-horses, v. 14. Now the Lord repented himself concerning his servants, when he saw that their strength was gone, Deu. 32:36.

III. The plenty that was in Samaria, from the plunder of the camp of the Syrians, v. 16. Had the Syrians been governed by the modern policies of war, when they could not take their baggage and their tents with them they would rather have burnt them (as it is common to do with the forage of a country) than let them fall into their enemies' hands; but God determined that the besieging of Samaria, which was intended for its ruin, should turn to its advantage, and that Israel should now be enriched with the spoil of the Syrians as of old with that of the Egyptians. here see, 1. The *wealth of the sinner laid up for the just* (Job 27:16, 17) and the spoilers spoiled, Isa. 33:1. 2. The wants of Israel supplied in a way that they little thought of, which should encourage us to depend upon the power and goodness of God in our greatest straits. 3. The word of Elisha fulfilled to a tittle: *A measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel*; those that spoiled the camp had not only enough to supply themselves with, but an overplus to sell at an easy rate for the benefit of others, and so even *those that tarried at home did divide the spoil*, Ps. 68:12; Isa. 33:23. God's promise may be safely relied on, for no word of his shall fall to the ground.

IV. The death of the unbelieving courtier, that questioned the truth of Elisha's word. Divine threatenings will as surely be accomplished as divine promises. *He that believeth not shall be damned* stands as firm as *He that believeth shall be saved*. This lord, 1. Was preferred by the king to the *charge of the gate* (v. 17), to keep the peace, and to see that there was no tumult or disorder in dividing and disposing of the spoil. So much trust did the king repose in him, in his prudence and gravity, and so much did he delight to honour him. He that will be great, let him serve the public. 2. Was trodden to death by the people in the gate, either by accident, the crowd being exceedingly great, and he in the thickest of it, or perhaps designedly, because he abused his power, and was imperious in restraining the people from satisfying their hunger. However it was, God's justice was glorified, and the word of Elisha was fulfilled. He saw the plenty, for the silencing and shaming of his unbelief, corn cheap without *opening windows in heaven*, and therein saw his own folly in prescribing to God; but he did not eat of the plenty he saw. *When he was about to fill his belly God cast the fury of his wrath upon him* (Job 20:23) and it came between the cup and the lip. Justly are those thus tantalized with the world's promises that think themselves tantalized with the promises of God. If believing shall not be seeing, seeing shall not be enjoying. This matter is repeated, and the event very particularly compared with the prediction (v. 18–20), that we might take special notice of it, and might learn, (1.) How deeply God resents out distrust of him, of his power, providence, and promise. When Israel said, *Can God furnish a table? the Lord heard it and was wroth*. Infinite wisdom will not be limited by our folly. God never promises the end without knowing where to provide the means. (2.) How uncertain life and the enjoyments of it are. Honour and power cannot secure men from sudden and inglorious deaths. He whom the king leaned upon the people trod upon; he who fancied himself the stay and support of the government was trampled under foot as the mire in the streets. Thus hath the pride of men's glory been often stained. (3.) How certain God's threatenings are, and how sure to alight on the guilty and obnoxious heads. Let all men fear before the great God, who *treads upon princes as mortar* and is *terrible to the kings of the earth*.

Chapter 8

The passages of story recorded in this chapter oblige us to look back. I. We read before of a Shunammite woman that was a kind benefactor to Elisha; now here we are told how she fared the better for it, afterwards, in the advice Elisha gave her, and the favour the king showed her for his sake (v. 1-6). II. We read before of the designation of Hazael to be king of Syria (1 Ki. 19:15), and here we have an account of his elevation to that throne and the way he forced for himself to it, by killing his master (v. 7-15). III. We read before of Jehoram's reigning over Judah in the room of his father Jehoshaphat (1 Ki. 22:50), now here we have a short and sad history of his short and wicked reign (v. 16-24), and the beginning of the history of the reign of his son Ahaziah (v. 25-29).

Verses 1-6

Here we have,

I. The wickedness of Israel punished with a long famine, one of God's sore judgments often threatened in the law. *Canaan*, that fruitful land, *was turned into barrenness*, for the *iniquity of those that dwelt therein*. The famine in Samaria was soon relieved by the raising of that siege, but neither that judgment nor that mercy had a due influence upon them, and therefore *the Lord called for another famine*; for when he judgeth he will overcome. If less judgments do not prevail to bring men to repentance, he will send greater and longer; they are at his beck, and will come when he calls for them. He does, by his ministers, call for reformation and obedience, and, if those calls be not regarded, we may expect he will call for some plague or other, for he will be heard. This famine continued seven years, as long again as that in Elijah's time; for if men will walk contrary to him, he will heat the furnace yet hotter.

II. The kindness of the good Shunammite to the prophet rewarded by the care that was taken of her in that famine; she was not indeed fed by miracle, as the widow of Sarepta was, but, 1. She had notice given her of this famine before it came, that she might provide accordingly, and was directed to remove to some other country; any where but in Israel she would find plenty. It was a great advantage to Egypt in Joseph's time that they had notice of the famine before it came, so it was to this Shunammite; others would be forced to remove at last, after they had long borne the grievances of the famine, and had wasted their substance, and could not settle elsewhere upon such good terms as she might that went early, before the crowd, and took her stock with her unbroken. It is our happiness to foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee it, to hide ourselves. 2. Providence gave her a comfortable settlement in *the land of the Philistines*, who, though subdued by David, yet were not wholly rooted out. It seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel, and other countries that joined close to them had plenty at the same time, which plainly showed the immediate hand of God in it (as in the plagues of Egypt, when they distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians) and that the sins of Israel, against whom this judgment was directly levelled, were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbours, because of their profession of relation to God. *You only have I known, therefore will I punish you*, Amos 3:2. Other countries had rain when they had none, were free from locusts and caterpillars when they were eaten up with them; for some think this was the famine

spoken of, Joel 1:3, 4. It is strange that when there was plenty in the neighbouring countries there were not those that made it their business to import corn into the land of Israel, which might have prevented the inhabitants from removing; but, as they were befooled with their idolatries, so they were infatuated even in the matters of their civil interest.

III. Her petition to the king at her return, favoured by the seasonableness of her application to him. 1. When the famine was over she *returned out of the land of the Philistines*; that was no proper place for an Israelite to dwell any longer than there was a necessity for so doing, for there she could not keep her new moons and her sabbaths as she used to do in her own country, among the schools of the prophets, ch. 4:23. 2. At her return she found herself kept out of the possession of her own estate, it being either confiscated to the exchequer, seized by the lord, or usurped in her absence by some of the neighbours; or perhaps the person she had entrusted with the management of it proved false, and would neither resign it to her nor come to an account with her for the profits: so hard is it to find a person that one can put a confidence in *in a time of trouble*, Prov. 25:19; Mic. 7:5. 3. She made her application to the king himself for redress; for, it seems (be it observed to his praise), he was easy of access, and did himself take cognizance of the complaint of his injured subjects. Time was when she dwelt so securely among her own people that she had no occasion to be *spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host* (ch. 4:13); but now her own familiar friends, in whom she trusted, proved so unjust and unkind that she was glad to appeal to the king against them. Such uncertainty there is in the creature that that may fail us which we most depend upon and that befriend us which we think we shall never need. 4. She found the king talking with Gehazi about Elisha's miracles, v. 4. It was his shame that he needed now to be informed concerning them, when he might have acquainted himself with them as they were done from Elisha himself, if he had not been wiling to shut his eyes against the convincing evidence of his mission; yet it was his praise that he was now better disposed, and would rather talk with a leper that was capable of giving a good account of them than continue ignorant of them. The law did not forbid all conversation with lepers, but only dwelling with them. There being then no priests in Israel, perhaps the king, or some one appointed by him, had the inspection of lepers, and passed the judgment upon them, which might bring him acquainted with Behazi. 5. This happy coincidence befriended both Behazi's narrative and her petition. Providence is to be acknowledged in ordering the circumstances of events, for sometimes those that are minute in themselves prove of great consequence, as this did, for, (1.) It made the king ready to believe Gehazi's narrative when it was thus confirmed by the persons most nearly concerned: "*This is the woman, and this her son; let them speak for themselves,*" v. 5. Thus did God even force him to believe what he might have had some colour to question if he had only had Gehazi's word for it, because he was branded for a liar, witness his leprosy. (2.) It made him ready to grant her request; for who would not be ready to favour one whom heaven had thus favoured, and to support a life which was given once and again by miracle? In consideration of this the king gave orders that her land should be restored to her and all the profits that were made of it in her absence. If it was to himself that the land and profits had escheated, it was generous and kind to make so full a restitution; he would not (as Pharaoh did in Joseph's time) enrich the crown by the calamities of his subjects. If it was by some other person that her property was invaded, it was an act of justice in the king, and part of the duty of his place, to give her redress, Ps. 82:3, 4; Prov. 31:9. It is not enough for those in authority that they do no wrong themselves, but they must support the right of those

that are wronged.

Verses 7-15

Here, I. We may enquire what brought Elisha to Damascus, the chief city of Syria. Was he sent to any but the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*? It seems he was. Perhaps he went to pay a visit to Naaman his convert, and to confirm him in his choice of the true religion, which was the more needful now because, it should seem, he was not out of his place (for Hazael is supposed to be captain of that host); either he resigned it or was turned out of it, because he would not bow, or not bow heartily, in the house of Rimmon. Some think he went to Damascus upon account of the famine, or rather he went thither in obedience to the orders God gave Elijah, 1 Ki. 19:15, "*Go to Damascus to anoint Hazael, thou, or thy successor.*"

II. We may observe that Ben-hadad, a great king, rich and mighty, lay sick. No honour, wealth, or power, will secure men from the common diseases and disasters of human life; palaces and thrones lie as open to the arrests of sickness and death as the meanest cottage.

III. We may wonder that the king of Syria, in his sickness, should make Elisha his oracle.

1. Notice was soon brought him that *the man of God* (for by that title he was well known in Syria since he cured Naaman) had come to Damascus, v. 7. "Never in better time," says Ben-hadad. "*Go, and enquire of the Lord by him.*" In his health he *bowed in the house of Rimmon*, but now that he is sick he distrusts his idol, and sends to enquire of the God of Israel. Affliction brings those to God who in their prosperity had made light of him; sometimes sickness opens men's eyes and rectifies their mistakes. This is the more observable, (1.) Because it was not long since a king of Israel had, in his sickness, sent to enquire of the god of Ekron (ch. 1:2), as if there had been no God in Israel. Note, God sometimes fetches to himself that honour from strangers which is denied him and alienated from him by his own professing people. (2.) Because it was not long since this Ben-hadad had sent a great force to treat Elisha as an enemy (ch. 6:14), yet now he courts him as a prophet. Note, Among other instances of the change of men's minds by sickness and affliction, this is one, that it often gives them other thoughts of God's ministers, and teaches them to value the counsels and prayers of those whom they had hated and despised.

2. To put an honour upon the prophet, (1.) He sends *to* him, and does not send *for* him, as if, with the centurion, he thought himself not worthy that the man of God should come under his roof. (2.) He sends to him by Hazael, his prime-minister of state, and not by a common messenger. It is no disparagement to the greatest of men to attend the prophets of the Lord. Hazael must go and meet him at a place where he had appointed a meeting with his friends. (3.) He sends him a noble present, *of every good thing of Damascus*, as much as loaded forty camels (v. 9), testifying hereby his affection to the prophet, bidding him welcome to Damascus, and providing for his sustenance while he sojourned there. It is probable that Elisha accepted it (why should he not?), though he refused Naaman's. (4.) He orders Hazael to call him *his son Ben-hadad*, conforming to the language of Israel, who called the prophets *fathers*. (5.) He puts an honour upon him as one acquainted with the secrets of heaven, when he enquires of him, *Shall I recover?* It is natural to us to desire to know things to come in time, while things to come in eternity are little thought of or enquired after.

IV. What passed between Hazael and Elisha is especially remarkable.

1. Elisha answered his enquiry concerning the king, that he might recover, the disease was not mortal, but that he should die another way (v. 10), not a natural but a violent death. There are many ways out of the world, and sometimes, while men think to avoid one, they fall by another.
2. He looked Hazael in the face with an unusual concern, till he made Hazael blush and himself weep, v. 11. The man of God could outface the man of war. It was not in Hazael's countenance that Elisha read what he would do, but God did, at this time, reveal it to him, and it fetched tears from his eyes. The more foresight men have the more grief they are liable to.
3. When Hazael asked him why he wept he told him what a great deal of mischief he foresaw he would do to the Israel of God (v. 12), what desolations he would make of their strong-holds, and barbarous destruction of their men, women, and children. The sins of Israel provoked God to give them up into the hands of their cruel enemies, yet Elisha wept to think that ever Israelites should be thus abused; for, though he foretold, he did not desire the woeful day. See what havock war makes, what havock sin makes, and how the nature of man is changed by the fall, and stripped even of humanity itself.
4. Hazael was greatly surprised at this prediction (v. 13): *What, says he, Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* This great thing he looks upon to be, (1.) An act of great power, not to be done but by a crowned head. "It must be some mighty potentate that can think to prevail thus against Israel, and therefore not I." Many are raised to that dominion which they never thought of and it often proves *to their own hurt*, Eccl. 8:9. (2.) An act of great barbarity, which could not be done but by one lost to all honour and virtue: "Therefore," says he, "it is what I shall never find in my heart to be guilty of: *Is thy servant a dog, to rend, and tear, and devour?* Unless I were a dog, I could not do it." See here, [1.] What a bad opinion he had of the sin; he looked upon it to be great wickedness, fitter for a brute, for a beast of prey, to do than a man. Note, It is possible for a wicked man, under the convictions and restraints of natural conscience, to express great abhorrence of a sin, and yet afterwards to be well reconciled to it. [2.] What a good opinion he had of himself, how much better than he deserved; he thought it impossible he should do such barbarous things as the prophet foresaw. Note, We are apt to think ourselves sufficiently armed against those sins which yet we are afterwards overcome by, as Peter, Mt. 26:35.
5. In answer to this Elisha only told him *he should be king over Syria*; then he would have power to do it, and then he would find in his heart to do it. *Honours change men's tempers and manners*, and seldom for the better: "Thou knowest not what thou wilt do when thou comest to be king, but I tell thee this thou wilt do." Those that are little and low in the world cannot imagine how strong the temptations of power and prosperity are, and, if ever they arrive at them, they will find how deceitful their hearts were and how much worse than they suspected.
- V. What mischief Hazael did to his master hereupon. If he took any occasion to do it from what Elisha had said the fault was in him, not in the word. 1. He basely cheated his master, and belied the prophet (v. 14): *He told me thou shouldst certainly recover*. This was abominably false; he told him he should die (v. 10), but he unfairly and unfaithfully concealed that, either because he was loth to put the king out of humour with bad news or because hereby he might the more effectually carry on that bloody design which he conceived when he was told he should be his successor. The devil ruins men by telling them they shall certainly recover and do well, so rocking them asleep in security, than which nothing is more fatal. This was an injury to the

king, who lost the benefit of this warning to prepare for death, and an injury to Elisha, who would be counted a false prophet. 2. He barbarously murdered his master, and so made good the prophet's word, v. 15. He dipped a thick cloth in cold water, and spread it upon his face, under pretence of cooling and refreshing him, but so that it stopped his breath, and stifled him presently, he being weak (and not able to help himself) or perhaps asleep: such a bubble is the life of the greatest of men, and so much exposed are princes to violence. Hazael, who was Ben-hadad's confidant, was his murderer, and some think, was not suspected, nor did the truth ever come out but by the pen of this inspired historian. We found this haughty monarch (1 Ki. 20) *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, but he goes down slain to the pit with his iniquity upon his bones, Eze. 32:27.

Verses 16-24

We have here a brief account of the life and reign of Jehoram (or Joram), one of the worst of the kings of Judah, but the son and successor of Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Note, 1. Parents cannot give grace to their children. Many that have themselves been godly have had the grief and shame of seeing those that came forth out of their bowels wicked and vile. Let not the families that are thus afflicted think it strange. 2. If the children of good parents prove wicked, commonly they are worse than others. The unclean spirit brings in seven others more wicked than himself, Lu. 11:26. 3. A nation is sometimes justly punished with the miseries of a bad reign for not improving the blessings and advantages of a good one.

Concerning this Jehoram observe,

I. The general idea here given of his wickedness (v. 18): *He did as the house of Ahab*, and worse he could not do. His character is taken from the bad example he followed, for men are according to the company they converse with and the copies they write after. No mistake is more fatal to young people than a mistake in the choice of those whom they would recommend themselves to and take their measures from, and whose good opinion they value themselves by. Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and this choice was his ruin. We have a particular account of his wickedness (2 Chr. 21), murder, idolatry, persecution, everything that was bad.

II. The occasions of his wickedness. His father was a very good man, and no doubt took care to have him taught the good knowledge of the Lord, but, 1. It is certain he did ill to marry him to the daughter of Ahab; no good could come of an alliance with an idolatrous family, but all mischief with such a daughter of such a mother as Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel. The degeneracy of the old world took rise from the unequal yoking of professors with profane. Those that are ill-matched are already half-ruined. 2. I doubt he did not do well to make him king in his own life-time. It is said here (v. 16) that he *began to reign, Jehoshaphat being then king*; hereby he gratified his pride (than which nothing is more pernicious to young people), indulged him in his ambition, in hopes to reform him by humouring him, and so brought a curse upon his family, as Eli did, *whose sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not*. Jehoshaphat had made this wicked son of his viceroy once when he went with Ahab to Ramoth-Gilead, from which Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year (1 Ki. 22:51) is made Jehoram's second (2 Ki. 1:17), but afterwards, in his twenty-second year, he made him partner in his government, and thence Joram's eight years are to be dated, three years before his father's death. It has been hurtful to many young men to come too soon to their estates. Samuel got nothing by *making his sons judges*.

III. The rebukes of Providence which he was under for his wickedness. 1. The Edomites revolted, who had been under the government of the kings of Judah ever since David's time, about 150 years, v. 20. He attempted to reduce them, and gave them a defeat (v. 21), but he could not improve the advantage he had got, so as to recover his dominion over them: *Yet Edom revolted* (v. 22), and the Edomites were, after this, bitter enemies to the Jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah and Ps. 137:7. Now Isaac's prophecy was fulfilled, that this Esau the elder should serve Jacob the younger; yet, in process of time, he should *break that yoke from off his neck*, Gen. 27:40. 2. Libnah revolted. This was a city in Judah, in the heart of his country, a priests' city; the inhabitants of this city shook off his government *because he had forsaken God*, and would have compelled them to do so too, 2 Chr. 21:10, 11. In order that they might preserve their religion they set up for a free state. Perhaps other cities did the same. 3. His reign was short. God cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but forty years old, and had reigned but eight years. *Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days*.

IV. The gracious care of Providence for the keeping up of the kingdom of Judah, and the house of David, notwithstanding the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign (v. 19): *Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah*. He could easily have done it; he might justly have done it; it would have been no loss to him to have done it; yet he would not do it, for David's sake, not for the sake of any merit of his which could challenge this favour to his family as a debt, but for the sake of a promise made to him that he should always have a lamp (that is, a succession of kings from one generation to another, by which his name should be kept bright and illustrious, as a lamp is kept burning by a constant fresh supply of oil), that his family should never be extinct till it terminated in the Messiah, that Son of David on whom was to be *hung all the glory of his Father's house* and in whose everlasting kingdom that promise to David is fulfilled (Ps. 132:17), *I have ordained a lamp for my anointed*.

V. The conclusion of this impious and inglorious reign, v. 23, 24. Nothing peculiar is here said of him; but we are told (2 Chr. 21:19, 20) that he *died of sore diseases* and *died without being desired*.

Verses 25-29

As among common persons there are some that we call *little men*, who make no figure, are little regarded, as less valued, so among kings there are some whom, in comparison with others, we may call *little kings*. This Ahaziah was one of these; he looks mean in the history, and in God's account vile, because wicked. It is too plain an evidence of the affinity between Jehoshaphat and Ahab that they had the same names in their families at the same time, in which, we may suppose, they designed to compliment one another. Ahab had two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, who reigned successively; Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson names Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson names Jehoram and Ahaziah, who, in like manner, reigned successively. Names indeed do not make natures, but it was a bad omen to Jehoshaphat's family to borrow names from Ahab's; or, if he lent the names to that wretched family, he could not communicate with them the devotion of their significations, *Ahaziah—Taking hold of the Lord*, and *Jehoram—The Lord exalted*. Ahaziah king of Israel had reigned but two years, Ahaziah king of Judah reigned but one. We are here told that his relation to Ahab's family was the occasion, 1. Of his wickedness (v. 27): *He walked in the way of the house of Ahab*, that idolatrous bloody house; for his mother was Ahab's daughter (v. 26), so that he sucked in wickedness with his milk. *Partus sequitur ventrem—The child may be expected to resemble the mother*.

When men choose wives for themselves they must remember they are choosing mothers for their children, and are concerned to choose accordingly. 2. Of his fall. Joram, his mother's brother, courted him to join with him for the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab; so it was to Joram his son, for in that expedition he was wounded (v. 28), and returned to Jezreel to be cured, leaving his army there in possession of the place. Ahaziah likewise returned, but went to Jezreel to see how Jehoram did, v. 29. Providence so ordered it, that he who had been debauched by the house of Ahab might be cut off with them, when the measure of their iniquity was full, as we shall find in the next chapter. Those who partake with sinners in their sins must expect to partake with them in their plagues.

Chapter 9

Hazael and Jehu were the men that were designed to be the instruments of God's justice in punishing and destroying the house of Ahab. Elijah was told to appoint them to this service; but, upon Ahab's humiliation, a reprieve was granted, and so it was left to Elisha to appoint them. Hazael's elevation to the throne of Syria we read of in the foregoing chapter; and we must now attend Jehu to the throne of Israel; for him that escapeth the sword of Hazael, as Joram and Ahaziah did, Jehu must slay, of which this chapter gives us an account. I. A commission is sent to Jehu by the hand of one of the prophets, to take upon him the government, and destroy the house of Ahab (v. 1–10). II. Here is his speedy execution of this commission. 1. He communicates it to his captains (v. 11–15). 2. He marches directly to Jezreel (v. 16–20), and there dispatches (1.) Joram king of Israel (v. 21–26). (2.) Ahaziah king of Judah (v. 27–29). (3.) Jezebel (v. 30–37).

Verses 1-10

We have here the anointing of Jehu to be king, who was, at this time, a commander (probably commander-in-chief) of the forces employed at Ramoth-Gilead, v. 14. There he was fighting for the king his master, but received orders from a higher king to fight against him. It does not appear that Jehu aimed at the government, or that he ever thought of it, but the commission given him was a perfect surprise to him. Some think that he had been anointed before by Elijah, whom God ordered to do it, but privately, and with an intimation that he must not act till further orders, as Samuel anointed David long before he was to come to the throne: but that it not at all probable, for then we must suppose Elijah had anointed Hazael too. No, when God bade him do these things he bade him anoint Elisha to *be prophet in his room*, to do them when he was gone, as God should direct him. Here is,

I. The commission sent.

1. Elisha did not go himself to anoint Jehu, because he was old and unfit for such a journey and so well known that he could not do it privately, could not go and come without observation; therefore he sends *one of the sons of the prophets* to do it, v. 1. They not only reverence him as their father (ch. 2:15), but observed and obeyed him as their father. This service of anointing Jehu, (1.) Had danger in it (1 Sa. 16:2), and therefore it was not fit that Elisha should expose himself, but one of the sons of the prophets, whose life was of less value, and who could do it with less danger. (2.) It required labour and was therefore fitter for a young man in his full strength. Let youth work and age direct. (3.) Yet it was an honourable piece of service, to anoint a king, and he that did it might hope to be preferred for it afterwards, and therefore, for the encouragement of the young prophets, Elisha employed one of them: he would not engross all the honours to himself, nor grudge the young prophets a share in them. 2. When he sent him, (1.) He put the oil into his hand with which he must anoint Jehu: *Take this box of oil* Solomon was anointed with *oil out of the tabernacle*, 1 Ki. 1:39. That could not now be had, but oil from a prophet's hand was equivalent to oil out of God's house. Probably it was not the constant practice to anoint kings, but upon the disturbance of the succession, as in the case of Solomon, or the interruption of it, as in the case of Joash (ch. 11:12), or the translation of the government to a new family, as here and in the case of David; yet it might be used generally, though the scripture does not mention it. (2.) He

put *the words into his mouth* which he must say (v. 3)—*I have anointed thee king*, and, no doubt, told him all the rest that he said, v. 7–10. Those whom God sends on his errands shall not go without full instructions. (3.) He also ordered him, [1.] To do it privately, to single out Jehu from the rest of the captains and anoint him *in an inner chamber* (v. 2), that Jehu's confidence in his commission might be tried, when he had no witness to attest it. His being suddenly animated for the service would be proof sufficient of his being anointed to it. There needed no other proof. The thing signified was the best evidence of the sign. [2.] To do it expeditiously. When he went about it he must *gird up his loins*; when he had done it he must *flee and not tarry* for a fee, or a treat, or to see what Jehu would do. It becomes the sons of the prophets to be quick and lively at their work, to go about it and go through it as men that hate sauntering and trifling. They should be as angels that fly swiftly.

II. The commission delivered. The young prophet did his business with despatch, was at Ramoth-Gilead presently, v. 4. There he found the general officers sitting together, either at dinner or in a council of war, v. 5. With the assurance that became a messenger from God, notwithstanding the meanness of his appearance, he called Jehu out from the rest, not waiting his leisure, or begging his pardon for disturbing him, but as one having authority: *I have an errand to thee, O captain*. Perhaps Jehu had some intimation of his business; and therefore, that he might not seem too forward to catch at the honour, he asked, *To which of all us?* that it might not be said afterwards he got it by speaking first, but they might all be satisfied he was indeed the person designed. When the prophet had him alone he anointed him, v. 6. The anointing of the Spirit is a hidden thing, that new name which none knows but those that have it. Herewith,

1. He invests him with the royal dignity: *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, whose messenger I am, in his name *I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord*. He gives him an incontestable title, but reminds him that he was made king, (1.) *By the God of Israel*; from him he must see his power derived (for by him kings reign), for he must use it, and to him he must be accountable. Magistrates are the ministers of God, and must therefore act in dependence upon him and with an entire devotedness to him and to his glory. (2.) *Over the Israel of God*. Though the people of Israel were wretchedly corrupted, and had forfeited all the honour of relationship to God, yet they are here called the *people of the Lord*, for he had a right to them and had not yet given them a bill of divorce. Jehu must look upon the people he was made king of as the *people of the Lord*, not as his vassals, but God's freemen, his sons, his first-born, not to be abused or tyrannized over, *God's people*, and therefore to be ruled for him, and according to his laws.

2. He instructs him in his present service, which was to destroy all the house of Ahab (v. 7), not that he might clear his own way to the throne, and secure to himself the possession of it, but that he might execute the judgments of God upon that guilty and obnoxious family. He calls Ahab his *master*, that the relation might be no objection. "He was thy master, and to lift up thy hand against his son and successor would be not only base ingratitude, but treason, rebellion, and all that is bad, if thou hadst not an immediate command from God to do it. But thou art under higher obligations to thy Master in heaven than to thy master Ahab. He has determined that *the whole house of Ahab shall perish*, and *by thy hand*; fear not: has not he commanded thee? Fear not sin; his command will justify thee and bear thee out: fear not danger; his command will secure and prosper thee." That he might intelligently, and in a right manner, do this great execution on the house of Ahab, he tells him, (1.) What was their

crime, what the ground of the controversy, and wherefore God had quarrel with them, that he might have an eye to that which God had an eye to, and that was *the blood of God's servants, the prophets* and others, faithful worshippers, which they had shed, and which must now be required at the hand of Jezebel. That they were idolaters was bad enough, and merited all that was brought upon them; yet that is not mentioned here, but the controversy God has with them is for their being persecutors, not so much their *throwing down God's altars* as their *slaying his prophets with the sword*. Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any prince or people as this does nor brings a surer or a sorer ruin. This was the sin that brought on Jerusalem its first destruction (2 Chr. 36:16) and its final one, Mt. 23:37, 38. Jezebel's whoredoms and witchcrafts were not so provoking as her persecuting the prophets, killing some and driving the rest into corners and caves, 1 Ki. 18:4. (2.) What was their doom. They were sentenced to utter destruction; not to be corrected, but to be cut off and rooted out. This Jehu must know, that his eye might not spare for pity, favour, or affection. All that belonged to Ahab must be slain, v. 8. A pattern is given him of the destruction intended, in the destruction of the families of Jeroboam and Baasha (v. 9), and he is particularly directed to throw Jezebel to the dogs, v. 10. The whole stock of royal blood was little enough, and too little, to atone for the blood of the prophets, the saints and martyrs, which, in God's account, is of great price.

The prophet, having done this errand, made the best of his way home again, and left Jehu alone to consider what he had to do and beg direction from God.

Verses 11-15

Jehu, after some pause, returned to his place at the board, taking no notice of what had passed, but, as it should seem, designing, for the present, to keep it to himself, if they had not urged him to disclose it. Let us therefore see what passed between him and the captains.

I. With what contempt the captains speak of the young prophet (v. 11): "*Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee? What business had he with thee? And why wouldst thou humour him so far as to retire for conversation with him? Are prophets company for captains?*" They are called him *a mad fellow*, because he was one of those that would not *run with them to an excess of riot* (1 Pt. 4:4), but lived a life of self-denial, mortification, and contempt of the world, and spent their time in devotion; for these things they thought the prophets were fools and the *spiritual men were mad*, Hos. 9:7. Note, Those that have no religion commonly speak with disdain of those that are religious, and look upon them as mad. They said of our Saviour, *He is beside himself*, of John Baptist, *He has a devil* (is a poor melancholy man), of St. Paul, *Much learning has made him mad*. The highest wisdom is thus represented as folly, and those that best understand themselves are looked upon as beside themselves. Perhaps Jehu intended it for a rebuke to his friends when he said, "*You know the man* to be a prophet, why then do you call him a mad fellow? You know the way of his communication to be not from madness, but inspiration." Or, "Being a prophet, you may guess what his business is, to tell me of my faults, and to teach me my duty; I need not inform you concerning it." Thus he thought to put them off, but they urged him to tell them. "It is false," say they, "we cannot conjecture what was his errand, and therefore tell us." Being thus pressed to it, he told them that the prophet had *anointed him king*, and it is probable showed them the oil upon his head, v. 12. He knew not but some of them either out of loyalty to Joram or envy of

him, might oppose him, and go near to crush his interest in its infancy; but he relied on the divine appointment, and was not afraid to own it, knowing whom he had trusted: he that raised him would stand by him.

II. With what respect they compliment the new king upon the first notice of his advancement, v. 13. How meanly soever they thought of the prophet that anointed him, and of his office, they expressed a great veneration for the royal dignity of him that was anointed, and were very forward to proclaim him and sound of trumpet. In token of their subjection and allegiance to him, their affection to his person and government, and their desire to see him high and easy in it, they put their garments under him, that he might stand or sit upon them *on the top of the stairs*, in sight of the soldiers, who, upon the first intimation, came together to grace the solemnity. God put it into their hearts thus readily to own him, for he turns the hearts of people as well as kings, like the rivers of water, into what channel he pleases. Perhaps they were disquieted at Joram's government or had a particular affection for Jehu; or, however this might be, things it seems were ripe for the revolution, and they all came into Jehu's interest and *conspired against Joram*, v. 14.

III. With what caution Jehu proceeded. He had advantages against Joram, and he knew how to improve them. He had the army with him. Joram had left it, and had gone home badly wounded. Jehu's good conduct appears in two things:-1. That he complimented the captains, and would do nothing without their advice and consent ("If it be your minds, we will do so and so, else not"), thereby intimating the deference he paid to their judgment and the confidence he had in their fidelity, both which tended to please and fix them. It is the wisdom of those that would rise fast, and stand firm, to take their friends along with them. 2. That he contrived to surprise Joram; and, in order thereto, to come upon him with speed, and to prevent his having notice of what was now done: "*Let none go forth to tell it in Jezreel*, that, as a snare, the ruin may come on him and his house." The suddenness of an attack sometimes turns to as good an account as the force of it.

Verses 16-29

From Ramoth-Gilead to Jezreel was more than one day's march; about the mid-way between them the river Jordan must be crossed. We may suppose Jehu to have marched with all possible expedition, and to have taken the utmost precaution to prevent the tidings from getting to Jezreel before him; and, at length, we have him within sight first, and then within reach, of the devoted king.

I. Joram's watchman discovers him first at a distance, him and his retinue, and gives notice to the king of the approach of a company, whether of friends or foes he cannot tell. But the king (impatient to know what is the matter, and perhaps jealous that the Syrians, who had wounded him, had traced him by the blood to his own palace, and were coming to seize him) sent first one messenger, and then another, to bring him intelligence, v. 17-19. He had scarcely recovered from the fright he was put into in the battle, and his guilty conscience put him into a continual terror. Each messenger asked the same question: "*Is it peace?* are you for us or for our adversaries? Do you bring good tidings or bad?" Each had the same answer: "*What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me*", v. 18. 19. As if he had said, "It is not to thee, but to him that sent thee, that I will give answer; for thy part, if thou consult thy own safety, *turn thee behind me*, and enlist thyself among my followers." The watchman gave notice that the messengers were taken prisoners, and at length observed that the leader of this troop drove like Jehu, who it

seems was noted for driving furiously, thereby discovering himself to be a man of a hot eager spirit, intent upon his business, and pushing forward with all his might. A man of such a violent temper was fittest for the service to which Jehu was designated. The wisdom of God is seen in the choice of proper instruments to be employed in his work. But it is not much for any man's reputation to be known by his fury. He that has rule over his own spirit is better than the mighty. The Chaldee paraphrase gives this a contrary sense: *The leading is like that of Jehu, for he leads quietly*. And, it should seem, he did not come up very fast, for then there would not have been time for all this that passed. And some think he chose to march slowly, that he might give Joram time to come out to him, and so dispatch him before he entered the city.

II. Joram himself goes out to meet him, and takes Ahaziah king of Judah along with him, neither of them equipped for war, as not expecting an enemy, but in haste to have their curiosity satisfied. How strangely has Providence sometimes ordered it, that men have been in haste to meet their ruin when their day has come to fall.

1. The place where Joram met Jehu was ominous: *In the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite*, v. 21. The very sight of that ground was enough to make Joram tremble and Jehu triumph; for Joram had the guilt of Naboth's blood fighting against him and Jehu had the force of Elijah's curse fighting for him. The circumstances of events are sometimes so ordered by divine Providence as to make the punishment answer to the sin as face answers to face in a glass.

2. Joram's demand was still the same: *"Is it peace, Jehu? Is all well? Dost thou come home thus flying from the Syrians or more than a conqueror over them?"* It seems, he looked for peace, and could not entertain any other thought. Note, It is very common for great sinners, even when they are upon the brink of ruin, to flatter themselves with an opinion that all is well with them, and to cry peace to themselves.

3. Jehu's reply was very startling. He answered him with a question: *What peace canst thou expect, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel (who, though queen dowager, was in effect queen regent) and her witchcrafts are so many?* See how plainly Jehu deals with him. Formerly he durst not do so, but now he had another spirit. Note, Sinners will not always be flattered; one time or other, they will have their own given them, Ps. 36:2. Observe, (1.) He charges upon him his mother's wickedness, because he had at first learned it and then with his kingly power protected it. She stands impeached for whoredom, corporal and spiritual (serving idols and serving them with the very acts of lewdness), for witchcraft likewise, enchantments and divinations, used in honour of her idols; and these multiplied, the whoredoms and the witchcrafts many; for those that abandon themselves to wicked courses know not where they will stop. One sin begets another. (2.) Upon that account he throws him off from all pretensions to peace: "What peace can come to that house in which there is so much wickedness unrepented of?" Note, The way of sin can never be the way of peace, Isa. 57:21. What peace can sinners have with God, what peace with their own consciences, what good, what comfort, can they expect in life, in death, or after death, who go on still in their trespasses? No peace so long as sin is persisted in; but, as soon as it is repented of and forsaken, there is peace.

4. The execution was done immediately. When Joram heard of his mother's crimes his heart failed him; he presently concluded the long-threatened day of reckoning had now come, and cried out, *"There is treachery, O Ahaziah! Jehu is our enemy, and it is time for us to shift for our safety."* Both fled, and, (1.) Joram king of Israel was slain presently, v. 24. Jehu dispatched him

with his own hands. The bow was not drawn at a venture, as that which sent the fatal arrow through the joints of his father's harness, but Jehu directed the arrow between his shoulders as he fled (it was one of God's arrows which he *has ordained against the persecutor*, Ps. 7:13), and it reached to his heart, so that he died upon the spot. He was now the top branch of Ahab's house, and therefore was first cut off. He died a criminal, under the sentence of the law, which Jehu, the executioner, pursues in the disposal of the dead body. Naboth's vineyard was hard by, which put him in mind of that circumstance of the doom Elijah passed upon Ahab, "*I will requite thee in this plat, said the Lord* (v. 25, 26), *for the blood of Naboth himself, and for the blood of his sons,*" who were either put to death with him as partners in his crime, or secretly murdered afterwards, lest they should bring an appeal, or find some way to avenge their father's death, or break their hearts for the loss of him, or (his whole estate being confiscated, as well as his vineyard) lose their livelihoods, which was in effect to lose their lives. For this the house of Ahab must be reckoned with; and that very piece of ground which he, with so much pride and pleasure, had made himself master of at the expense of the guilt of innocent blood, now became the theatre on which his son's dead body lay exposed a spectacle to the world. Thus *the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. Higgaiion. Selah.* (2.) Ahaziah king of Judah was pursued, and slain in a little time, and not far off, v. 27, 28. [1.] Though he was now in Joram's company, he would not have been slain but that he was joined with the house of Ahab both in affinity and in iniquity. He was one of them (so he had made himself by his sins) and therefore he must fare as they fared. Jehu justly construed his commission as extending to them. Yet, [2.] Perhaps he would not at this time have fallen with them if he had not been found in company with them. It is a dangerous thing to associate with evil-doers; we may be entangled both in guilt and misery by it.

Verses 30-37

The greatest delinquent in the house of Ahab was Jezebel: it was she that introduced Baal, slew the Lord's prophets, contrived the murder of Naboth, stirred up her husband first, and then her sons, to do wickedly; a *cursed woman* she is here called (v. 34), a curse to the country, and whom all that wished well to their country had a curse for. Three reigns her reign had lasted, but now, at length, her day had come to fall. We read of a false prophetess in the church of Thyatira that is compared to Jezebel, and called by her name (Rev. 2:20), her wickedness the same, seducing God's servants to idolatry, a long *space given her to repent* (v. 21) as to Jezebel, and a fearful ruin brought upon her at last (v. 22, 23), as here upon Jezebel. So that Jezebel's destruction may be looked upon as typical of the destruction of idolaters and persecutors, especially that great whore, that mother of harlots, that hath made herself *drunk with the blood of saints* and the nations *drunk with the wine of her fornications*, when God shall put it into the heart of the kings of the earth to hate her, Rev. 17:5, 6. 16. Now here we have, I. Jezebel daring the judgment. She heard that Jehu had slain her son, and slain him for her whoredoms and witchcrafts, and thrown his dead body into the portion of Naboth, according to the word of the Lord, and that he was now coming to Jezreel, where she could not but expect herself to fall next a sacrifice to his revenging sword. Now see how she meets her fate; she posted herself in a window at the entering of the gate, to affront Jehu and set him at defiance. 1. Instead of hiding herself, as one afraid of divine vengeance, she exposed herself to it and scorned to flee, mocked at fear and was not affrighted. See how a heart hardened against God will brave it out to the last, *run upon him, even upon his neck*, Job 15:26. But never did any thus

harden their hearts against him and prosper. 2. Instead of humbling herself, and putting herself into close mourning for her son, she *painted her face, and tired her head*, that she might appear like herself, that is (as she thought), great and majestic, hoping thereby to daunt Jehu, to put him out of countenance, and to stop his career. *The Lord God called to baldness and girding with sackcloth*, but behold painting and dressing, walking contrary to God, Isa. 22:12, 13. There is not a surer presage of ruin than an unhumbled heart under humbling providences. Let painted faces look in Jezebel's glass, and see how they like themselves. 3. Instead of trembling before Jehu, the instrument of God's vengeance, she thought to make him tremble with that threatening question, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* Observe, (1.) She took no notice of the hand of God gone out against her family, but flew in the face of him that was only the sword in his hand. We are very apt, when we are in trouble, to break out into a passion against the instruments of our trouble, when we ought to be submissive to God and angry at ourselves only. (2.) She pleased herself with the thought that what Jehu was now doing would certainly end in his own ruin, and that he would not have peace in it. He had cut her off from all pretensions to peace (v. 22), and now she thought to cut him off likewise. Note, It is no new thing for those that are doing God's work to be looked upon as out of the way of peace. Active reformers, faithful reprovers, are threatened with trouble; but let them be in nothing terrified, Phil. 1:28. (3.) She quoted a precedent, to deter him from the prosecution of this enterprise: "*Had Zimri peace?* No, he had not; he came to the throne by blood and treachery, and within seven days was constrained to burn the palace over his head and himself in it: and canst thou expect to fare any better?" Had the case been parallel, it would have been proper enough to give him this memorandum; for the judgments of God upon those that have gone before us in any sinful way should be warnings to us to take heed of treading in their steps. But the instance of Zimri was misapplied to Jehu. Zimri had no warrant for what he did, but was incited to it merely by his own ambition and cruelty; whereas Jehu was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets, and did this by order from heaven, which would bear him out. In comparing persons and things we must carefully distinguish between the precious and the vile, and take heed lest from the fate of sinful men we read the doom of useful men.

II. Jehu demanding aid against her. He looked up to the window, not daunted at the menaces of her impudent but impotent rage, and cried, *Who is on my side? Who?* v. 32. He was called out to do God's work, in reforming the land and punishing those that had debauched it; and here he calls out for assistance in the doing of it, looked as if there were any to help, any to uphold, Isa. 63:5. He lifts up a standard, and makes proclamation, as Moses (Ex. 32:26), *Who is on the Lord's side?* And the Psalmist (Ps. 94:16), *Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?* Note, When reformation-work is set on foot, it is time to ask, "Who sides with it?"

III. Her own attendants delivering her up to his just revenge. Two or three chamberlains looked out to Jehu with such a countenance as encouraged him to believe they were on his side, and to them he called not to seize or secure her till further orders, but immediately to throw her down, which was one way of stoning malefactors, casting them headlong from some steep place. Thus was vengeance taken on her for the stoning of Naboth. They threw her down, v. 33. If God's command would justify Jehu, his command would justify them. Perhaps they had a secret dislike of Jezebel's wickedness, and hated her, though they served her; or, it may be, she was barbarous and injurious to those about her, and they were pleased with this opportunity

of being avenged on her; or, observing Jehu's success, they hoped thus to ingratiate themselves with him, and keep their places in his court. However it was, thus she was most shamefully put to death, dashed against the wall and the pavement, and then trodden on by the horses, which were all besmeared with her blood and brains. See the end of pride and cruelty, and say, *The Lord is righteous*.

IV. The very dogs completing her shame and ruin, according to the prophecy. When Jehu had taken some refreshment in the palace, he bethought himself of showing so much respect to Jezebel's sex and quality as to bury her. As bad as she was, she was a daughter, a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's mother: *Go and bury her*, v. 34. But, though he had forgotten what the prophet said (v. 10, *Dogs shall eat Jezebel*), God had not forgotten it. While he was eating and drinking, the dogs had devoured her dead body, the dogs that *went about the city* (Ps. 59:6) and fed upon the carrion, so that there was nothing left but her bare skull (the painted face gone) and her feet and hands. The hungry dogs had no respect to the dignity of her extraction; a king's daughter was no more to them than a common person. When we pamper our bodies, and use them deliciously, let us think how vile they are, and that shortly they will be either a feast for worms under ground or beasts above ground. When notice was brought of this to Jehu, he remembered the threatening (1 Ki. 21:23), *The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel*. Nothing should remain of her but the monuments of her infamy. She had been used to appear on public days in great state, and the cry was, "This is Jezebel. What a majestic port and figure! How great she looks!" But now it shall be said no more. We have often seen the wicked buried (Eccl. 8:10), yet sometimes, as here, they have no burial, Eccl. 6:3. Jezebel's name nowhere remained, but as stigmatized in sacred writ: they could not so much as say, "This is Jezebel's dust, This is Jezebel's grave," or "This is Jezebel's seed." Thus the name of the wicked shall rot—rot above ground.

Chapter 10

We have in this chapter, I. A further account of Jehu's execution of his commission. He cut off, I. All Ahab's sons (v. 1–10). 2. All Ahab's kindred (v. 11–14, 17). 3. Ahab's idolatry: his zeal against this he took Jonadab to be witness to (v. 15, 16), summoned all the worshippers of Baal to attend (v. 18–23) and slew them all (v. 24, 25), and then abolished that idolatry (v. 26–28). II. A short account of the administration of his government. 1. The old idolatry of Israel, the worship of the calves, was retained (v. 29–31). 2. This brought God's judgments upon them by Hazael, with which his reign concludes (v. 32–36).

Verses 1-14

We left Jehu in quiet possession of Jezreel, triumphing over Joram and Jezebel; and we must now attend his further motions. He knew the whole house of Ahab must be cut off, and therefore proceeded in this bloody work, and did not do it deceitfully, or by halves, Jer. 48:10.

I. He got the heads of all the sons of Ahab cut off by their own guardians at Samaria. Seventy sons (or grandsons) Ahab had, Gideon's number, Jdg. 8:30. In such a number that bore his name his family was likely to be perpetuated, and yet it is extirpated all at once. Such a quiver full of arrows could not protect his house from divine vengeance. Numerous families, if vicious, must not expect to be long prosperous. These sons of Ahab were now at Samaria, a strong city, perhaps brought thither upon occasion of the war with Syria, as a place of safety, or upon notice of Jehu's insurrection; with them were the rulers of Jezreel, that is, the great officers of the court, who went to Samaria to secure themselves or to consult what was to be done. Those of them that were yet under tuition had their tutors with them, who were entrusted with their education in learning, agreeable to their birth and quality, but, it is to be feared, brought them up in the idolatries of their father's house and made them all worshippers of Baal. Jehu did not think fit to bring his forces to Samaria to destroy them, but, that the hand of God might appear the more remarkably in it, made their guardians their murderers. 1. He sent a challenge to their friends to stand by them, v. 2, 3. "You that are hearty well-wishers to the house of Ahab, and entirely in its interests, now is your time to appear for it. Samaria is a strong city; you are in possession of it; you have forces at command; you may choose out the likeliest person of all the royal family to head you; you know you are not tied to the eldest, unless he be *the best and meetest of your master's sons*. If you have any spirit in you, show it, and set one of them on his father's throne, and stand by him with your lives and fortunes." Not that he desired they should do this, or expected they would, but thus he upbraided them with their cowardice and utter inability to contest with the divine counsels. "Do if you dare, and see what will come of it." Those that have forsaken their religion have often, with it, lost both their sense and their courage, and deserve to be upbraided with it. 2. Hereby he gained from them a submission. They prudently reasoned with themselves: "*Behold, two kings stood not before him, but fell as sacrifices to his rage; how then shall we stand?*" v. 4. Therefore they sent him a surrender of themselves: "*We are thy servants, thy subjects, and will do all that thou shalt bid us, right or wrong, and will set up nobody in competition with thee.*" They saw it was to no purpose to contend with him, and therefore it was their interest to submit to him. With much more reason may we thus argue ourselves into a subjection to the great God. Many kings and great men have fallen before his wrath,

for their wickedness; and how then shall we stand? *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* No, we must either bend or break. 3. This was improved so far as to make them the executioners of those whom they had the tuition of (v. 6): *If you be mine, bring me the heads of your master's sons by to-morrow at this time.* Though he knew it must be done, and was loth to do it himself, one would think he could not expect they should do it. Could they betray such a trust? Could they be cruel to their master's sons? It seems, so low did they stoop in their adoration to the rising sun that they did it; they cut off the heads of those seventy princes, and sent them in baskets a present to Jehu, v. 7. Learn hence not to trust in a friend nor to put confidence in a guide not governed by conscience. One can scarcely expect that he who has been false to his God should ever be faithful to his prince. But observe God's righteousness in their unrighteousness. These elders of Jezreel had been wickedly obsequious to Jezebel's order for the murder of Naboth, 1 Ki. 21:11. She gloried, it is likely, in the power she had over them; and now the same base spirit makes them as pliable to Jehu and as ready to obey his orders for the murder of Ahab's sons. Let none aim at arbitrary power, lest they be found rolling a stone which, some time or other, will return upon them. Princes that make their people slaves take the readiest way to make them rebels; and by forcing men's consciences, as Jezebel did, they lose their hold of them. When the separated heads were presented to Jehu, he slyly upbraided those that were the executioners of this vengeance. The heads were laid in two heaps at the gate, the proper place of judgment. There he acquitted the people before God and the world (v. 9, *You are righteous*), and, by what the rulers of Samaria had now done, comparatively acquitted himself: "I slew but one; they have slain all these: I did it by conspiracy and with design; they have done this merely in compliance and with an implicit obedience. Let not the people of Samaria, nor any of the friends of the house of Ahab, ever reproach me for what I have done, when their own elders, and the very guardians of the orphans, have done this." It is common for those who have done something base to attempt the mitigation of their own reproach by drawing others in to do something worse. But, (2.) He resolves all into the righteous judgment of God (v. 10): *The Lord hath done that which he spoke by Elijah.* God is not the author of any man's sin, but even by that which men do from bad principles God serves his own purposes and glorifies his own name; and he is righteous in that wherein men are unrighteous. When the Assyrian is made the *rod of God's anger*, and the instrument of his justice, *he meaneth not so, neither does his heart think so*, Isa. 10:7.

II. He proceeded to destroy all that remained of the house of Ahab, not only those that descended from him, but those that were in any relation to him, all the officers of his household, ministers of state, and those in command under him, called here his *great men* (v. 11), all his kinsfolks and acquaintance, who had been partners with him in his wickedness, and his priests, or domestic chaplains, whom he employed in his idolatrous services and who strengthened his hand that he should not turn from his evil way. Having done this in Jezreel, he did the same in Samaria (v. 17), *slew all that remained to Ahab in Samaria.* This was bloody work, and is not now, in any case, to be drawn into a precedent. Let the guilty suffer, but not the guiltless for their sakes. Perhaps such terrible destructions as these were intended as types of the final destruction of all the ungodly. God has a sword, bathed in heaven, which will come down upon the people of his curse, and *be filled with blood.* Isa. 34:5, 6. Then *his eye will not spare, neither will he pity.*

III. Providence bringing the brethren of Ahaziah in his way, as he was going on with this execution, he slew them likewise, v. 12–14. The brethren of Ahaziah were slain by the Arabians (2 Chr. 22:1), but these were the sons of his brethren, as it is there explained (v. 8), and they are said to be princes of Judah, and to minister to Ahaziah. Several things concurred to make them obnoxious to the vengeance Jehu was now executing. 1. They were branches of Ahab's house, being descended from Athaliah, and therefore fell within his commission. 2. They were tainted with the wickedness of the house of Ahab. 3. They were now going to make their court to the princes of the house of Ahab, to *salute the children of the king and the queen*, Joram and Jezebel, which showed that they were linked to them in affection as well as in affinity. These princes, forty-two in number, being appointed as sheep for the sacrifice, were slain with solemnity, *at the pit of the shearing-house. The Lord is known by these judgments which he executeth.*

Verses 15-28

Jehu, pushing on his work, is here,

I. Courting the friendship of a good man, *Jehonadab the son of Rechab*, v. 15, 16. This Jehonadab, though mortified to the world and meddling little with the business of it (as appears by his charge to his posterity, which they religiously observed 300 years after, not to drink wine nor dwell in cities, Jer. 35:6, etc.), yet, upon this occasion, went to meet Jehu, that he might encourage him in the work to which God had called him. The countenance of good men is a thing which great men, if they be wise, will value, and value themselves by. David prayed, *Let those that fear thee turn to me*, Ps. 119:79. This Jehonadab, though no prophet, priest, or Levite, no prince or ruler, was, we may suppose, very eminent for prudence and piety, and generally respected for that life of self-denial and devotion which he lived: Jehu, though a soldier, knew him and honoured him. He did not indeed think of sending for him, but when he met him (though it is likely he drove now as furiously as ever) he stopped to speak to him; and we are here told what passed between them. 1. Jehu saluted him; he *blessed him* (so the word is), paid him the respect and showed him the good-will that were due to so great an example of serious godliness. 2. Jehonadab assured him that he was sincerely in his interest and a hearty well-wisher to his cause. Jehu professed that *his heart was right with him*, that he had a true affection for his person and a veneration for the crown of his Nazariteship, and desired to know whether he had the same affection for him and satisfaction in that crown of royal dignity which God had put upon his head: *Is thy heart right?* a question we should often put to ourselves. "I make a plausible profession, have gained a reputation among men, but *is my heart right?* Am I sincere and inward with God?" Jehonadab gave him his word (*It is*), and gave him his hand as a pledge of his heart, *yielded to him* (so giving the hand is rendered, 2 Chr. 30:8), concurred and covenanted with him, and owned him in the work both of revenge and of reformation he was now about. 3. Jehu took him up into his chariot and took him along with him to Samaria. He put some honour upon him, by taking him into the chariot with him (Jehonadab was not accustomed to ride in a chariot, much less with a king); but he received more honour from him, and from the countenance he gave to his present work. All sober people would think the better of Jehu when they saw Jehonadab in the chariot with him. This was not the only time in which the piety of some has been made to serve the policy of others, and designing men have strengthened themselves by drawing good men into their interests. Jehonadab is a stranger to the arts of fleshly wisdom, and

has his *conversation in simplicity and godly sincerity*; and therefore, if Jehu be a servant of God and an enemy to Baal, he will be his faithful friend. "Come then" (says Jehu), "come with me, *and see my zeal for the Lord*; and then thou wilt see reason to espouse my cause." This is commonly taken as not well said by Jehu, and as giving cause to suspect that his heart was not right with God in what he did, and that the zeal he pretended for the Lord was really zeal for himself and his own advancement. For, (1.) He boasted of it, and spoke as if God and man were mightily indebted to him for it. (2.) He desired it might be seen and taken notice of, like the Pharisees, who did all to be seen of men. An upright heart approves itself to God and covets no more than his acceptance. If we aim at the applause of men, and make their praise our highest end, we are upon a false bottom. Whether Jehu looked any further we cannot judge; however Jehonadab went with him, and, it is likely, animated and assisted him in the further execution of his commission (v. 17), destroying all Ahab's friends in Samaria. A man may hate cruelty and yet love justice, may be far from thirsting after blood and yet may *wash his feet in the blood of the wicked*, Ps. 58:10.

II. Contriving the destruction of all the worshippers of Baal. The service of Baal was the crying sin of the house of Ahab: that root of this idolatry was plucked up, but multitudes yet remained that were infected with it, and would be in danger of infecting others. The law of God was express, that they were to be put to death; but they were so numerous, and so dispersed throughout all parts of the kingdom, and perhaps so alarmed with Jehu's beginnings, that it would be a hard matter to find them all out and an endless task to prosecute and execute them one by one. Jehu's project therefore is to cut them all off together. 1. By a wile, by a fraud, he brought them together to the temple of Baal. He pretended he would worship Baal more than ever Ahab had done, v. 18. Perhaps he spoke this ironically, or to try the body of the people whether they would oppose such a resolution as this, and would resent his threatening to increase his predecessor's exactions, and say, "If it be so, we have no part in Jehu, nor inheritance in the son of Nimshi." But it rather seems to have been spoken purposely to deceive the worshippers of Baal, and then it cannot be justified. The truth of God needs not any man's lie. He issued a proclamation, requiring the attendance of all the worshippers of Baal to join with him in a sacrifice to Baal (v. 19, 20), not only the prophets and priests, but all, throughout the kingdom, who worshipped Baal, who were not nearly so many as they had been in Elijah's time. Jehu's friends, we may suppose, were aware of what he designed, and were not offended at it; but the bigoted besotted Baalites began to think themselves very happy, and that now they should see golden days again. *Joram had put away the image of Baal*, ch. 3:2. If Jehu will restore it, they have what they would have, and come up to Samaria with joy from all parts to celebrate the solemnity; and they are pleased to see the house of Baal crowded (v. 21), to see his priests in their vestments (v. 22), and themselves perhaps with some badges or other to notify their relation to Baal, for there were vestments for all his worshippers. 2. He took care that none of the servants of the Lord should be among them, v. 23. This they took as a provision to preserve the worship of Baal from being profaned by strangers; but it was a wonder that they did not, by this, see themselves brought into a snare and discern a design upon them. No marvel if those that suffer themselves to be deceived by Baal (as all idolaters were by their idols), are deceived by Jehu to their destruction. 3. He gave order for the cutting of them all off, and Jehonadab joined with him therein, v. 23. When a strict search was made lest any of the servants of God should, either for company or curiosity, have got among them—lest any wheat should be mixed with those tares, and when eighty men were set to stand guard at all the

avenues to Baal's temple, that none might escape (v. 24), then the guards were sent in to put them all to the sword and to *minge their blood with their sacrifices*, in a way of just revenge, as they themselves had sometimes done, when, in their blind devotion, they *cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out*, 1 Ki. 18:28. This was accordingly done, and the doing of it, though seemingly barbarous, was, considering the nature of their crime, really righteous. *The Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God.* 4. The idolaters being thus destroyed, the idolatry itself was utterly abolished. The buildings about the house of Baal (which were so many and so stately that they are here called a *city*), where Baal's priests and their families lived, were destroyed; all the little images, statues, pictures, or shrines, which beautified Baal's temple, with the great image of Baal himself, were brought out and burnt (v. 26, 27), and the temple of Baal was broken down, and made a dunghill, the common sink, or sewer, of the city, that the remembrance of it might be blotted out or made infamous. Thus was the worship of Baal quite destroyed, at least for the present, out of Israel, though it had once prevailed so far that there were but 7000 of all the thousands of Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal, and those concealed. Thus will God destroy all the gods of the heathen, and, sooner or later, triumph over them all.

Verses 29-36

Here is all the account of the reign of Jehu, though it continued twenty-eight years. The progress of it answered not to the glory of its beginning. We have here,

I. God's approbation of what Jehu had done. Many, it is probable, censured him as treacherous and barbarous—called him a rebel, a usurper, a murderer, and prognosticated ill concerning him, that a family thus raised would soon be ruined; but God said, *Well done* (v. 30), and then it signified little who said otherwise. 1. God pronounced that to be right which he had done. It is justly questionable whether he did it from a good principle and whether he did not take some false steps in the doing of it; and yet (says God), *Thou hast done well in executing that which is right in my eyes*. The extirpating of idolaters and idolatry was a thing right in God's eyes, for it is an iniquity he visits as surely and severely as any: it was *according to all that was in his heart*, all he desired, all he designed. Jehu went through with his work. 2. God promised him a reward, that his children of the fourth generation from him should *sit upon the throne of Israel*. This was more than what took place in any of the dignities or royal families of that kingdom; of the house of Ahab there were indeed four kings, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram, but the last two were brothers, so that it reached but to the third generation, and that whole family continued but about forty-five years in all, whereas Jehu's continued in four, besides himself, and in all about 120 years. Note, No services done for God shall go unrewarded.

II. Jehu's carelessness in what he was further to do. By this it appeared that his heart was not right with God, that he was partial in his reformation. 1. He did not put away all the evil. He departed from the sins of Ahab, but not from the sins of Jeroboam—discarded Baal, but adhered to the calves. The worship of Baal was indeed the greater evil, and more heinous in the sight of God, but the worship of the calves was a great evil, and true conversion is not only from gross sin, but from all sin—not only from false gods, but from false worships. The worship of Baal weakened and diminished Israel, and made them beholden to the Sidonians, and therefore he could easily part with that; but the worship of the calves was a politic idolatry, was begun and

kept up for reasons of state, to prevent the return of the ten tribes to the house of David, and therefore Jehu clave to that. True conversion is not only from wasteful sins, but from gainful sins—not only from those sins that are destructive to the secular interest, but from those that support and befriend it, in forsaking which is the great trial whether we can deny ourselves and trust God. 2. He put away evil, but he did not mind that which was good (v. 31): *He took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel*. He abolished the worship of Baal, but did not keep up the worship of God, nor walk in his law. He had shown great care and zeal for the rooting out of a false religion; but in the true religion, (1.) He showed no care, took no heed, lived at large, was not at all solicitous to please God and to do his duty, took no heed to the scriptures, to the prophets, to his own conscience, but walked at all adventures. Those that are heedless, it is to be feared, are graceless; for, where there is a good principle in the heart, it will make men cautious and circumspect, desirous to please God and jealous of doing any thing to offend him. (2.) He showed no zeal; what he did in religion he did not do with his heart, with all his heart, but did it as if he did it not, without any liveliness or concern. It seems, he was a man that had little religion himself, and yet God made use of him as an instrument of reformation in Israel. It is a pity but that those that do good to others should always be good themselves. III. The judgment that came upon Israel in his reign. We have reason to fear that when Jehu took no heed himself to walk in God's law the people were generally as careless as he, both in their devotions and in their conversations. There was a general decay of piety and increase of profaneness; and therefore it is not strange that the next news we hear is, *In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short*, v. 32. Their neighbours encroached upon them on every side; they were short in their duty to God, and therefore God cut them short in their extent, wealth, and power. Hazael king of Syria was, above any other, vexatious and mischievous to them, *smote them in all the coasts of Israel*, particularly the countries on the other side Jordan, which lay next him, and most exposed; on these he made continual inroads, and laid them waste. Now the Reubenites and Gadites smarted for the choice which their ancestors made of an inheritance on that side Jordan, which Moses reprov'd them for, Num. 32. Now Hazael did what Elisha foresaw and foretold he would do. Yet, for doing it, God had a quarrel with him and with his kingdom, as we may find, Amos 1:3, 4. Because those of Damascus have *threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron*, therefore (says God) *I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad*. Lastly, The conclusion of Jehu's reign, v. 34–36. Notice is taken, in general, of his might; but, because he took no heed to serve God, the memorials of his mighty enterprises and achievements are justly buried in oblivion.

Chapter 11

The revolution in the kingdom of Israel was soon perfected in Jehu's settlement; we must now enquire into the affairs of the kingdom of Judah, which lost its head (such as it was) at the same time, and by the same hand, as Israel lost its head; but things continued longer there in distraction than in Israel, yet, after some years, they were brought into a good posture, as we find in this chapter. I. Athaliah usurps the government and destroys all the seed-royal (v. 1). II. Joash, a child of a year old, is wonderfully preserved (v. 2, 3). III. At six years' end he is produced, and, by the agency of Jehoiada, made king (v. 4–12). IV. Athaliah is slain (v. 13–16). V. Both the civil and religious interests of the kingdom are well settled in the hands of Joash (v. 17–21). And thus, after some interruption, things returned with advantage into the old channel.

Verses 1-3

God had assured David of the continuance of his family, which is called his *ordaining a lamp for his anointed*; and this cannot but appear a great thing, now that we have read of the utter extirpation of so many royal families, one after another. Now here we have David's promised lamp almost extinguished and yet wonderfully preserved.

I. It was almost extinguished by the barbarous malice of Athaliah, the queen-mother, who, when she heard that her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, *arose and destroyed all the seed-royal* (v. 1), all that she knew to be akin to the crown. Her husband Jehoram had slain all his brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chr. 21:4. The Arabians had slain all Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah, 2 Chr. 22:1. Jehu had slain all their sons (2 Chr. 22:8) and Ahaziah himself. Surely never was royal blood so profusely shed. Happy the men of inferior birth, who live below envy and emulation! But, as if all this were but a small matter, Athaliah destroyed all that were left of the seed-royal. It was strange that one of the tender sex could be so barbarous, that one who had been herself a king's daughter, a king's wife, and a king's mother, could be so barbarous to a royal family, and a family into which she was herself ingrafted; but she did it, 1. From a spirit of ambition. She thirsted after rule, and thought she could not get to it any other way. That none might reign with her, she slew even the infants and sucklings that might have reigned after her. For fear of a competitor, not any must be reserved for a successor. 2. From a spirit of revenge and rage against God. The house of Ahab being utterly destroyed, and her son Ahaziah among the rest, because he was akin to it, she resolved, as it were, by way of reprisal, to destroy the house of David, and cut off his line, in defiance of God's promise to perpetuate it—a foolish attempt and fruitless, for who can disannul what God hath purposed? Grandmothers have been thought more fond of their grandchildren than they were of their own; yet Ahaziah's own mother is the wilful murderer of Ahaziah's own sons, and in their infancy too, when she was obliged, above any other, to nurse them and take care of them. Well might she be called *Athaliah, that wicked woman* (2 Chr. 24:7), Jezebel's own daughter; yet herein God was righteous, and visited the iniquity of Joram and Ahaziah, those degenerate branches of David's house, upon their children.

II. It was wonderfully preserved by the pious care of one of Joram's daughters (who was wife to Jehoiada the priest), who stole away one of the king's sons, Joash by name, and hid him, v. 2, 3. This was a brand plucked out of the fire; what number were slain we are not told, but, it seems, this being a child in the nurse's arms was not missed, or not enquired after, or at least no

found. The person that delivered him was his own aunt, the daughter of wicked Joram; for God will raise up protectors for those whom he will have protected. The place of his safety was the house of the Lord, one of the chambers belonging to the temple, a place Athaliah seldom troubled. His aunt, by bringing him hither, put him under God's special protection, and so hid him by faith, as Moses was hidden. Now were David's words made good to one of his seed (Ps. 27:5), *In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me*. With good reason did this Joash, when he grew up, set himself to repair the house of the Lord, for it had been a sanctuary to him. Now was the promise made to David bound up in one life, and yet it did not fail. Thus to the son of David will God, according to his promise, secure a spiritual seed, which, though sometimes reduced to a small number, brought very low, and seemingly lost, will be perpetuated to the end of time, hidden sometimes and unseen, but hidden in God's pavilion and unhurt. It was a special providence that Joram, though a king, a wicked king, married his daughter to Jehoiada a priest, a godly priest. Some perhaps thought it a disparagement to the royal family to marry a daughter to a clergyman, but it proved a happy marriage, and the saving of the royal family from ruin; for Jehoiada's interest in the temple gave *her* an opportunity to preserve the child, and her interest in the royal family gave *him* an opportunity to set him on the throne. See the wisdom and care of Providence, and how it prepares for what it designs; and see what blessings those lay up in store for their families that marry their children to those that are wise and good.

Verses 4-12

Six years Athaliah tyrannised. We have not a particular account of her reign; no doubt it was of a piece with the beginning. While Jehu was extirpating the worship of Baal in Israel, she was establishing it in Judah, as appears, 2 Chr. 24:7. The court and kingdom of Judah had been debauched by their alliance with the house of Ahab, and now one of that house is a curse and a plague to both: sinful friendships speed no better. All this while, Joash lay hid, entitled to a crown and intended for it, and yet buried alive in obscurity. Though the sons and heirs of heaven are now hidden, *the world knows them not* (1 Jn. 3:1), yet the time is fixed when they shall appear in glory, as Joash in his seventh year; by that time he was ready to be shown, not a babe, but, having served his first apprenticeship to life and arrived at his first climacterical year, he had taken a good step towards manhood; by that time the people had grown weary of Athaliah's tyranny and ripe for a revolution. How that revolution was effected we are here told.

I. The manager of this great affair was Jehoiada the priest, probably the high priest, or at least the *sagan* (as the Jews called him) or suffragan to the high priest. By his birth and office he was a man in authority, whom the people were bound by the law to observe and obey, especially when there was no rightful king upon the throne, Deu. 17:12. By marriage he was allied to the royal family, and, if all the seed-royal were destroyed, his wife, as daughter to Joram, had a better title to the crown than Athaliah had. By his eminent gifts and graces he was fitted to serve his country, and better service he could not do it than to free it from Athaliah's usurpation; and we have reason to think he did not make this attempt till he had first asked counsel of God and known his mind, either by prophets or Urim, perhaps by both.

II. The management was very discreet and as became so wise and good a man as Jehoiada was.

1. He concerted the matter with the *rulers of hundreds and the captains*, the men in office, ecclesiastical, civil, and military; he

got them to him to the temple, consulted with them, laid before them the grievances they at present laboured under, gave them an oath of secrecy, and, finding them free and forward to join with him, *showed them the king's son* (v. 4), and so well satisfied were they with his fidelity that they saw no reason to suspect an imposition. We may well think what a pleasing surprise it was to the good people among them, who feared that the house and lineage of David were quite cut off, to find such a spark as this in the embers.

2. He posted the priests and Levites, who were more immediately under his direction, in the several avenues to the temple, to keep the guard, putting them under the command of the *rulers of hundreds*, v. 9. David had divided the priests into courses, which waited by turns. Every sabbath-day morning a new company came into waiting, but the company of the foregoing week did not go out of waiting till the sabbath evening, so that on the sabbath day, when double service was to be done, there was a double number to do it, both those that were to come in and those that were to go out. These Jehoiada employed to attend on this great occasion; he armed them out of the magazines of the temple with David's spears and shields, either his own or those he had taken from his enemies, which he devoted to God's honour, v. 10. If they were old and unfashionable, yet those that used them might, by their being David's, be reminded of God's covenant with him, which they were now acting in the defence of. Two things they were ordered to do:—(1.) To protect the young king from being insulted; they must *keep the watch of the king's house* (v. 5), *compass the king, and be with him* (v. 8), to guard him from Athaliah's partizans, for still there were those that thirsted after royal blood. (2.) To preserve the holy temple from being profaned by the concourse of people that would come together on this occasion (v. 6): *Keep the watch of the house, that it be neither broken through nor broken down*, and so strangers should crowd in, or such as were unclean. He was not so zealous for the projected revolution as to forget his religion. In times of the greatest hurry care must be taken, *Ne detrimentum capiat ecclesia—That the holy things of God be not trenched upon*. It is observable that Jehoiada appointed to each his place as well as his work (v. 6, 7), for good order contributes very much to the expediting and accomplishing of any great enterprise. Let every man know, and keep, and make good, his post, and then the work will be done quickly.

3. When the guards were fixed, then the king was brought forth, v. 12. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion!* for even in thy holy mountain thy king appears, a child indeed, but not such a one as brings a woe upon the land, for he is the son of nobles, the son of David (Eccl. 10:17)—a child indeed, but he had a good guardian, and, which was better, a good God, to go to. Jehoiada, without delay, proceeded to the coronation of this young king; for, though he was not yet capable of despatching business, he would be growing up towards it by degrees. This was done with great solemnity, v. 12. (1.) In token of his being invested with kingly power, he *put the crown upon him*, though it was yet too large and heavy for his head. The regalia, it is probable, were kept in the temple, and so the crown was ready at hand. (2.) In token of his obligation to govern by law, and to make the word of God his rule, he gave him the testimony, put into his hand a Bible, in which he must *read all the days of his life*, Deu. 17:18, 19. (3.) In token of his receiving the Spirit, to qualify him for this great work to which he before was called, he anointed him. Though notice is taken of the anointing of the kings only in case of interruption, as here, and in Solomon's case, yet I know not but the ceremony might be used for all their kings, at least those of the house of David, because their

royalty was typical of Christ's, who was to be anointed above his fellows, above all the sons of David. (4.) In token of the people's acceptance of him and subjection to his government, they clapped their hands for joy, and expressed their hearty good wishes to him: *Let the king live*; and thus they made him king, made him their king, consented to, and concurred with, the divine appointment. They had reason to rejoice in the period now put to Athaliah's tyranny, and the prospect they had of the restoration and establishment of religion by a king under the tuition of so good a man as Jehoiada. They had reason to bid him welcome to the crown whose right it was, and to pray, *Let him live*, concerning him who came to them as life from the dead and in whom the house of David was to live. With such acclamations of joy and satisfaction must the kingdom of Christ be welcomed into our hearts when his throne is set up there and Satan the usurper is deposed. *Hosanna, blessed is he that comes*: clap hands, and say, "Let King Jesus live, for ever live and reign, in my soul, and in all the world;" it is promised (Ps. 72:15), *He shall live, and prayer shall be made for him, and his kingdom, continually.*

Verses 13-16

We may suppose it was designed when they had finished the solemnity of the king's inauguration, to pay a visit to Athaliah, and call her to an account for her murders, usurpation, and tyranny; but, like her mother Jezebel, she saved them the labour, went out to meet them, and hastened her own destruction. 1. Hearing the noise, she came in a fright to see what was the matter, v. 13. Jehoiada and his friends began in silence, but now that they found their strength, they proclaimed what they were doing. It seems, Athaliah was little regarded, else she would have had intelligence brought her of this daring attempt before with her own ears she heard the noise; had the design been discovered before it was perfected, it might have been quashed, but now it was too late. When she heard the noise it was strange that she was so ill advised as to come herself, and, for aught that appears, to come alone. Surely she was not so neglected as to have none to go for her, or none to go with her, but she was wretchedly infatuated by the transport both of fear and indignation she was in. Whom God will destroy he befools. 2. Seeing what was done she cried out for help. She saw the king's place by the pillar possessed by one to whom the princes and people did homage (v. 14) and had reason to conclude her power at an end, which she knew was usurped; this made her rend her clothes, like one distracted, and cry, "Treason! treason! Come and help against the traitors." Josephus adds that she cried to have him killed that possessed the king's place. What was now doing was the highest justice, yet it was branded as the highest crime; she herself was the greatest traitor, and yet was first and loudest in crying Treason! treason! Those that are themselves most guilty are commonly most forward to reproach others. 3. Jehoiada gave orders to put her to death as an idolater, a usurper, and an enemy to the public peace. Care was taken, (1.) That she should not be killed in the temple, or any of the courts of it, in reverence to that holy place, which must not be stained with the blood of any human sacrifice, though ever so justly offered. (2.) That whoever appeared for her should die with her: "Him that follows her, to protect or rescue her, any of her attendants that resolve to adhere to her and will not come into the interests of their rightful sovereign, *kill with the sword*, but not unless they follow her now," v. 15. According to these orders, she endeavouring to make her escape the back way to the palace, through the stalls, they pursued her, and there killed her, v. 16. *So let thy enemies perish, O Lord!* thus give the bloody harlot blood to drink, for she is worthy.

Verses 17-21

Jehoiada had now got over the harlot part of his work, when, by the death of Athaliah, the young prince had his way to the throne cleared of all opposition. He had now to improve his advantages for the perfecting of the revolution and the settling of the government. Two things we have an account of here:—

I. The good foundations he laid, by an original contract, v. 17. Now that prince and people were together in God's house, as it should seem before they stirred, Jehoiada took care that they should jointly covenant with God, and mutually covenant with each other, that they might rightly understand their duty both to God and to one another, and be firmly bound to it. 1. He endeavoured to settle and secure the interests of religion among them, by a covenant between them and God. King and people would then cleave most firmly to each other when both had joined themselves to the Lord. God had already, on his part, promised to be their God (Jehoiada could show them that in the book of the testimony); now the king and people on their part must covenant and agree that *they will be the Lord's people*: in this covenant, the king stands upon the same level with his subjects and is as much bound as any of them to serve the Lord. By this engagement they renounced Baal, whom many of them had worshipped, and resigned themselves to God's government. It is well with a people when all the changes that pass over them help to revive, strengthen, and advance the interests of religion among them. And those are likely to prosper who set out in the world under fresh and sensible obligations to God and their duty. By our bonds to God the bonds of every relation are strengthened. They *first gave themselves to the Lord*, and then *to us*, 2 Co. 8:5. 2. He then settled both the coronation-oath and the oath of allegiance, the *pacta conventa—covenant*, between the king and the people, by which the king was obliged to govern according to law and to protect his subjects, and they were obliged, while he did so, to obey him and to bear faith and true allegiance to him. Covenants are of use both to remind us of and to bind us to those duties which are already binding on us. It is good, in all relations, for the parties to understand one another fully, particularly in that between prince and subject, that the one may understand the limits of his power and prerogative, the other those of his liberty and property; and never may the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set before them be removed.

II. The good beginnings he raised on those foundations. 1. Pursuant to their covenant with God they immediately abolished idolatry, which the preceding kings, in compliance with the house of Ahab, had introduced (v. 18): *All the people of the land*, the mob, got together, to show their zeal against idolatry; and every one, now that they were so well headed, would lend a hand to pull down Baal's temple, his altars, and his images. All his worshippers, it should seem, deserted him; only his priest Mattan stuck to his altar. Though all men forsook Baal, he would not, and there he was slain, the best sacrifice that ever was offered upon that altar. Having destroyed Baal's temple, they appointed *officers over the house of God*, to see that the service of God was regularly performed by the proper persons, in due time, and according to the institutional manner. 2. Pursuant to their covenant with one another they expressed a mutual readiness to and satisfaction in each other. (1.) The king was brought in state to the royal palace, and sat there on the throne of judgment, *the thrones of the house of David* (v. 19), ready to receive petitions and appeals, which he would refer it to Jehoiada to give answers to and to give judgment upon. (2.) The people rejoiced, and Jerusalem was in quiet (v. 20), and Josephus says they kept a feast of joy many days, making good Solomon's

observation (Prov. 11:10), *When it goes well with the righteous the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there is shouting.*

Chapter 12

This chapter gives us the history of the reign of Joash, which does not answer to that glorious beginning of it which we had an account of in the foregoing chapter; he was not so illustrious at forty years old as he was at seven, yet his reign is to be reckoned one of the better sort, and appears much worse in Chronicles (2 Chr. 24) than it does here, for there we find the blood of one of God's prophets laid at his door; here we are only told, I. That he did well while Jehoiada lived (v. 1-3). II. That he was careful and active to repair the temple (v. 4-16). III. That after a mean compact with Hazael (v. 17, 18) he died ingloriously (v. 19-21).

Verses 1-3

The general account here given of Joash is, 1. That he reigned forty years. As he began his reign when he was very young, he might, in the course of nature, have continued much longer, for he was cut off when he was but forty-seven years old, v. 1. 2. That he did that which was right as long as Jehoiada lived to instruct him, v. 2. Many young men have come too soon to an estate—have had wealth, and power, and liberty, before they knew how to use them—and it has been of bad consequence to them; but against this danger Joash was well guarded by having such a good director as Jehoiada was, so wise, and experienced, and faithful to him, and by having so much wisdom as to hearken to him and be directed by him, even when he was grown up. Note, It is a great mercy to young people, and especially to young princes, and all young men of consequence, to be under good direction, and to have those about them that will instruct them to do *that which is right in the sight of the Lord*; and they then do wisely and well for themselves when they are willing to be counselled and ruled by such. *A child left to himself brings his mother to shame*, but a child left to such a tuition may bring himself to honour and comfort. 3. That the *high places were not taken away*, v. 3. Up and down the country they had altars both for sacrifice and incense, to the honour of the God of Israel only, but in competition with, and at least in tacit contempt of, his altar at Jerusalem. These private altars, perhaps, had been more used in the late bad reigns than formerly, because it was not safe to go up to Jerusalem, nor was the temple-service performed as it should have been; and, it may be, Jehoiada connived at them, because some well-meaning people were glad of them when they could not have better, and he hoped that the reforming of the temple, and putting things into a good posture there, would by degrees draw people from their high places and they would dwindle of themselves; or perhaps neither the king nor the priest had zeal enough to carry on their reformation so far, nor courage and strength enough to encounter such an inveterate usage.

Verses 4-16

We have here an account of the repairing of the temple in the reign of Joash.

I. It seems, the temple had gone out of repair. Though Solomon built it very strong, of the best materials and in the best manner, yet in time it went to decay, and there were *breaches found in it* (v. 5), in the roofs, or walls, or floors, the ceiling, or wainscoting, or windows, or the partitions of the courts. Even temples themselves are the worse for the wearing; but the heavenly temple will never wax old. Yet it was not only the teeth of time that made these breaches, the sons of Athaliah had

broken up the house of God (2 Chr. 24:7), and, out of enmity to the service of the temple, had damaged the buildings of it, and the priests had not taken care to repair the breaches in time, so that they went worse and worse. Unworthy were those husbandmen to have this valuable vineyard let out to them upon such easy terms who could not afford to keep the winepress in due and tenantable repair, Mt. 21:33. Justly did their great Lord sue them for this permissive waste, and by his judgments recover *locum vastatum*—for *dilapidations* (as the law speaks), when this neglected temple was laid even with the ground.

II. The king himself was (as it should seem) the first and forwardest man that took care for the repair of it. We do not find that the priests complained of it or that Jehoiada himself was active in it, but the king was zealous in the matter, 1. Because he was king, and God expects and requires from those who have power that they use it for the maintenance and support of religion, the redress of grievances, and reparation of decays, for the exciting and engaging of ministers to do their part and people theirs. 2. Because the temple had been both his nursery and his sanctuary when he was a child, in a grateful remembrance of which he now appeared zealous for the honour of it. Those who have experienced the comfort and benefit of religious assemblies will make the reproach of them their burden (Zep. 3:18), the support of them their care, and the prosperity of them their chief joy.

III. The priests were ordered to collect money for these repairs, and to take care that the work was done. The king had the affairs of his kingdom to mind, and could not himself inspect this affair, but he employed the priests to manage it, the fittest persons, and most likely, one would think, to be hearty in it. 1. He gave them orders for the levying of the money of the dedicated things. They must not stay till it was paid in, but they must call for it where they knew it was due, in their respective districts, as redemption-money (by virtue of the law, Lev. 27:2, 3), or as a free-will offering, v. 4. This they were to gather every man of his acquaintance, and it was supposed that there was no man but had acquaintance with some or other of the priests. Note, We should take the opportunity that God gives us of exciting those we have a particular acquaintance with to that which is good. 2. He gave them orders for laying out the money they had levied in *repairing the breaches of the house*, v. 5.

IV. This method did not answer the intention, v. 6. Little money was raised. Either the priests were careless, and did not call on the people to pay in their dues, or the people had so little confidence in the priests' management that they were backward to pay money into their hands; if they were distrusted without cause, it was the people's shame; if with, it was more theirs. But what money was raised was not applied to the proper use: *The breaches of the house were not repaired*; the priests thought it might serve as well as it had done, and therefore put off repairing from time to time. Church work is usually slow work, but it is a pity that churchmen, of all men, should be slow at it. Perhaps what little money they raised they thought it necessary to use for the maintenance of the priests, which must needs fall much short when ten tribes had wholly revolted and the other two were wretchedly corrupted.

V. Another method was therefore taken. The king had his heart much set upon having *the breaches of the house repaired*, v. 7. His apostasy, at last, gives us cause to question whether he had as good an affection for the service of the temple as he had for the structure. Many have been zealous for building and beautifying churches, and for other forms of godliness, who yet have been strangers to the power of it. However, we commend his zeal, and blame him not for reproving even his tutor Jehoiada himself when he saw him remiss; and so convincing was his reproof that the priests owned themselves unworthy to be any

longer employed, and consented to the taking of some other measures, and the giving up of the money they had received into other hands, v. 8. It was honestly done, when they found they had not spirit to do it themselves, not to hinder other people from doing it. Another course was taken,

1. For raising money, v. 9, 10. The money was not paid into private hands, but put into a public chest, and then people brought it in readily and in great abundance, not only their dues, but their free-will offerings for so good a work. The high priest and the secretary of state counted the money out of the chest, and laid it by *in specie* for the use to which it was appropriated. When public distributions are made faithfully public contributions will be made cheerfully. The money that was given, (1.) Was dropped into the chest through a hole in the lid, past recall, to intimate that what has been once resigned to God must never be resumed. *Every man, as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give.* (2.) The chest was put on the right hand as they went in, which, some think, is alluded to in that rule of charity which our Saviour gives, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* But, while they were getting all they could for the repair of the temple, they did not break in upon that which was the stated maintenance of the priests, v. 16. The trespass-money and the sin-money (which were given to them by that law, Lev. 5:15, 16) were reserved to them. Let not the servants of the temple be starved under colour of repairing the breaches of it.

2. For laying out the money that was raised.

(1.) They did not put it into the hands of the priests, who were not versed in affairs of this nature, having other work to mind, but *into the hands of those that did the work*, or at least *had the oversight of it*, v. 11. Those were fittest to be entrusted with this business whose employment lay that way. *Tractant fabrilia fabri—Every artist has his trade assigned;* but let not those who are called to war the holy warfare entangle themselves in the affairs of this life. Those that were thus entrusted did the business, [1.] Carefully, purchasing materials and paying workmen, v. 12. Business is done with expedition when those are employed in it that understand it and know which way to go about it. [2.] Faithfully; such a reputation they got for honesty that there was no occasion to examine their bills or audit their accounts. Let all that are entrusted with public money, or public work, learn hence to deal faithfully, as those that know God will reckon with them, whether men do or no. Those that think it is no sin to cheat the government, cheat the country, or cheat the church, will be of another mind when God shall set their sins in order before them.

(2.) They did not lay it out in ornaments for the temple, in vessels of gold or silver, but in necessary repairs first (v. 13), whence we may learn, in all our expenses to give that the preference which is most needful, and, in dealing for the public, to deal as we would for ourselves. After the repairs were finished we find the overplus turned into plate for the service of the temple, 2 Chr. 24:14.

Verses 17-21

When Joash had revolted from God and become both an idolater and a persecutor the hand of the Lord went out against him, and his *last state was worse than his first.*

I. His wealth and honour became an easy prey to his neighbours. Hazael, when he had chastised Israel (ch. 10:32), threatened Judah and Jerusalem likewise, took Gath, a strong city (v. 17), and thence intended to march with his forces against Jerusalem,

the royal city, the holy city, but whose defence, on account of its sinfulness, had departed. Joash had neither spirit nor strength to make head against him, but gave him all the hallowed things, and all the gold that was found both in his exchequer and in the treasures of the temple (v. 18), to bribe him to march another way. If it were lawful to do this for the public safety, better part with the gold of the temple than expose the temple itself; yet, 1. If he had not forsaken God, and forfeited his protection, his affairs would not have been brought to this extremity, but he might have forced Hazael to retire. 2. He diminished himself, and made himself very mean, lost the honour of a prince and a soldier, and of an Israelite too, in alienating the dedicated things. 3. He impoverished himself and his kingdom. And, 4. He tempted Hazael to come again, when he could carry home so rich a booty without striking a stroke. And it had this effect, for the next year the host of Syria came up against Jerusalem, destroyed the prince, and plundered the city, 2 Chr. 24:23, 24.

II. His life became an easy prey to his own servants. They conspired against him and slew him (v. 20, 21), not aiming at his kingdom, for they opposed not his son's succeeding him, but to be avenged on him for some crime he had committed; and we are told in Chronicles that his murdering the prophet, Jehoiada's son, was the provocation. In this, how unrighteous soever they were (vengeance was not theirs, nor did it belong to them to repay), God was righteous; and this was not the only time that he let even kings know that it was at their peril if they touched his anointed and did his prophets any harm, and that, when he comes to make inquisition for blood, the blood of prophets will run the account very high. Thus fell Joash, who began in the spirit and ended in the flesh. God usually sets marks of his displeasure upon apostates, even in this life; for they, of all sinners, do most *reproach the Lord*.

Chapter 13

This chapter brings us again to the history of the kings of Israel, and particularly of the family of Jehu. We have here an account of the reign, I. Of his son Jehoahaz, which continued seventeen years. 1. His bad character in general (v. 1, 2), the trouble he was brought into (v. 3), and the low ebb of his affairs (v. 7). 2. His humiliation before God, and God's compassion towards him (v. 4, 5, and 23). 3. His continuance in his idolatry notwithstanding (v. 6). 4. His death (v. 8, 9). II. Of his grandson Joash, which continued sixteen years. Here is a general account of his reign in the usual form (v. 10–13), but a particular account of the death of Elisha in his time. 1. The kind visit the king made him (v. 14), the encouragement he gave the king in his wars with Syria (v. 15–19). 2. His death and burial (v. 20), and a miracle wrought by his bones (v. 21). And, lastly, the advantages Joash gained against the Syrians, according to his predictions (v. 24, 25).

Verses 1-9

This general account of the reign of Jehoahaz, and of the state of Israel during his seventeen years, though short, is long enough to let us see two things which are very affecting and instructive:—

I. The glory of Israel raked up in the ashes, buried and lost, and turned into shame. How unlike does Israel appear here to what it had been and might have been! How is its crown profaned and its honour laid in the dust! 1. It was the honour of Israel that they worshipped the only living and true God, who is a Spirit, an eternal mind, and had rules by which to worship him of his own appointment; but by *changing the glory of their incorruptible God into the similitude of an ox, the truth of God into a lie*, they lost this honour, and levelled themselves with the nations that worshipped the work of their own hands. We find here that the king *followed the sins of Jeroboam* (v. 2), and the people departed *not from them, but walked therein*, v. 6. There could not be a greater reproach than these two idolized calves were to a people that were instructed in the service of God and entrusted with the lively oracles. In all the history of the ten tribes we never find the least shock given to that idolatry, but, in every reign, still the calf was their god, and they separated themselves to that shame. 2. It was the honour of Israel that they were taken under the special protection of heaven; God himself was their defence, the shield of their help and the sword of their excellency. Happy wast thou, O Israel! upon this account. But here, as often before, we find them stripped of this glory, and exposed to the insults of all their neighbours. They by their sins provoked God to anger, and then he *delivered them into the hands of Hazeal and Benhadad*, v. 3. *Hazeal oppressed Israel* v. 22. Surely never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbours as Israel was. This the people brought upon themselves by sin; when they had provoked God to pluck up their hedge, the goodness of their land did but tempt their neighbours to prey upon them. So low was Israel brought in this reign, by the many depravations which the Syrians made upon them, that the militia of the kingdom and all the force they could bring into the field were but *fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and 10,000 footmen*, a despicable muster, v. 7. Have the thousands of Israel come to this? *How has the gold become dim!* The debauching of a nation will certainly be the debasing of it.

II. Some sparks of Israel's ancient honour appearing in these ashes. It is not quite forgotten, notwithstanding all these quarrels,

that this people is the Israel of God and he is the God of Israel. For, 1. It was the ancient honour of Israel that they were a praying people: and here we find somewhat of that honour revived; for Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, *besought the Lord* (v. 4), applied for help, not to the calves (what help could they give him?) but to the Lord. It becomes kings to be beggars at God's door, and the greatest of men to be humble petitioners at the footstool of his throne. Need will drive them to it. 2. It was the ancient honour of Israel that they had *God nigh unto them in all that which they called upon him for* (Deu. 4:7), and so he was here. Though he might justly have rejected the prayer as an abomination to him, yet *the Lord hearkened unto Jehoahaz*, and to his prayer for himself and for his people (v. 4), and *he gave Israel a saviour* (v. 5), not Jehoahaz himself, for all his days Hazael oppressed Israel (v. 22), but his son, to whom, in answer to his father's prayers, God gave success against the Syrians, so that he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father, v. 25. This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz, not for his sake, or the sake of that unworthy people, but in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham (v. 23), which, in such exigencies as these, he had long since promised to have respect to, Lev. 26:42. See swift God is to show mercy, how ready to hear prayers, how willing to find out a reason to be gracious, else he would not look so far back as that ancient covenant which Israel had so often broken and forfeited all the benefit of. Let this invite and engage us for ever to him, and encourage even those that have forsaken him to return and repent; for *there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared*.

Verses 10-19

We have here Jehoash, or Joash, the son of Jehoahaz and grandson of Jehu, upon the throne of Israel. Probably the house of Jehu intended some respect to the house of David when they gave this heir-apparent to the crown the same name with him that was then king of Judah.

I. The general account here given of him and his reign is much the same with what we have already met with, and has little in it remarkable, v. 10–13. He was none of the worst, and yet, because he kept up that ancient and politic idolatry of the house of Jeroboam, it is said, *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*. That one evil was enough to leave an indelible mark of infamy upon his name; for, how little evil soever men saw in it, it was, *in the sight of the Lord*, a very wicked thing; and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth. It is observable how lightly the inspired penman passes over his acts, and his might wherewith he warred, leaving it to the common historians to record them, while he takes notice only of the respect he showed to Elisha. One good action shall make a better figure in God's book than twenty great ones; and, in his account, it gains a man a much better reputation to honour a prophet than to conquer a king and his army.

II. The particular account of what passed between him and Elisha has several things in it remarkable.

1. Elisha fell sick, v. 14. Observe, (1.) He lived long; for it was now about sixty years since he was first called to be a prophet. It was a great mercy to Israel, and especially to the sons of the prophets, that he was continued so long a burning and shining light. Elijah finished his testimony in a fourth part of that time. God's prophets have their day set them, some longer, others shorter, as Infinite Wisdom sees fit. (2.) All the latter part of his time, from the anointing of Jehu, which was forty-five years before Joash began his reign, we find no mention made of him, or of any thing he did, till we find him here upon his death-bed. He might be useful to the last, and yet not so famous as he had sometimes been. The time of his flourishing was less than the

time of his living. Let not old people complain of obscurity, but rather be well pleased with retirement. (3.) The spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and yet he was not sent for to heaven in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but went the common road out of the world, and was *visited with the visitation of all men*. If God honour some above others, who yet are not inferior to them in gifts or graces, who shall find fault? *May he not do what he will with his own?*

2. King Joash visited him in his sickness, and *wept over him*, v. 14. This was an evidence of some good in him, that he had a value and affection for a faithful prophet; so far was he from hating and persecuting him as a troubler of Israel that he loved and honoured him as one of the greatest blessings of his kingdom, and lamented the loss of him. There have been those who would not be obedient to the word of God, and yet have the faithful ministers of it so manifested in their consciences that they could not but have an honour for them. Observe here, (1.) When the king heard of Elisha's sickness he came to visit him, and to receive his dying counsel and blessing; and it was no disparagement to him, though a king, thus to honour one whom God honoured. Note, It may turn much to our spiritual advantage to attend the sick-beds and death-beds of good ministers and other good men, that we may learn to die, and may be encouraged in religion by the living comforts they have from it in a dying hour. (2.) Though Elisha was very old, had been a great while useful, and, in the course of nature, could not continue long, yet the king, when he saw him sick and likely to die, wept over him. The aged are most experienced and therefore can worst be spared. In many causes, one old witness is worth ten young ones. (3.) He lamented him in the same words with which Elisha had himself lamented the removal of Elijah: *My father, my father*. It is probable he had heard or read them in that famous story. Note, Those that give just honours to the generation that goes before them are often recompensed with the like from the generation that comes after them. He that watereth, that watereth with tears, shall be watered, shall be so watered, also himself, when it comes to his own turn, Prov. 11:25. (4.) This king was herein selfish; he lamented the loss of Elisha because he was as the chariot and horsemen of Israel, and therefore could be ill spared when Israel was so poor in chariots and horsemen, as we find they were (v. 7), when they had in all but fifty horsemen and ten chariots. Those who consider how much good men contribute to the defence of a nation, and the keeping off of God's judgments, will see cause to lament the removal of them.

3. Elisha gave the king great assurances of his success against the Syrians, Israel's present oppressors, and encouraged him to prosecute the war against them with vigour. Elisha was aware that therefore he was loth to part with him because he looked upon him as the great bulwark of the kingdom against that common enemy, and depended much upon his blessings and prayers in his designs against them. "Well," says Elisha, "if that be the cause of your grief, let not that trouble thee, for thou shalt be victorious over the Syrians when I am in my grave. *I die, but God will surely visit you*. He has the residue of the Spirit, and can raise up other prophets to pray for you." God's grace is not tied to one hand. He can bury his workmen and yet carry on his work. To animate the king against the Syrians he gives him a sign, orders him to *take bow and arrows* (v. 15), to intimate to him that, in order to the deliverance of his kingdom from the Syrians, he must put himself into a military posture and resolve to undergo the perils and fatigues of war. God would be the agent, but he must be the instrument. And that he should be successful he gives him a token, by directing him,

(1.) To shoot an arrow towards Syria, v. 16, 17. The king, no doubt, knew how to manage a bow better than the prophet did,

and yet, because the arrow now to be shot was to have its significancy from the divine institution, as if he were now to be disciplined, he received the words of command from the prophet: *Put thy hand upon the bow—Open the window—Shoot*. Nay, as if he had been a child that never drew a bow before, *Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands*, to signify that in all his expeditions against the Syrians he must look up to God for direction and strength, must reckon his own hands not sufficient for him, but go on in a dependence upon divine aid. *He teacheth my hands to war*, Ps. 18:34; 144:1. The trembling hands of a dying prophet, as they signified the concurrence and communication of the power of God, gave this arrow more force than the hands of the king in his full strength. The Syrians had made themselves masters of the country that lay eastward, ch. 10:33. Thitherward therefore the arrow was directed, and such an interpretation given by the prophet of the shooting of this arrow, though shot in one respect at random, as made it, [1.] A commission to the king to attack the Syrians, notwithstanding their power and possession. [2.] A promise of success therein. It is the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance, even the arrow of deliverance from Syria*. It is God that commands deliverance; and, when he will effect it, who can hinder? The arrow of deliverance is his. He shoots out his arrows, and the work is done, Ps. 18:14. *"Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, where they are now encamped, or where they are to have a general rendezvous of their forces, till thou have consumed those of them that are vexatious and oppressive to thee and thy kingdom."*

(2.) *To strike with the arrows*, v. 18, 19. The prophet having in God's name assured him of victory over the Syrians, he will now try him and see what improvement he will make of his victories, whether he will push them on with more zeal than Ahab did when Benhadad lay at his mercy. For the trial of this he bids him *smite with the arrows on the ground*: "Believe them brought to the ground by the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance*, and laid at thy feet; and now show me what thou wilt do to them when thou hast them down, whether thou wilt do as David did when God *gave him the necks of his enemies, beat them small as the dust before the wind*," Ps. 18:40, 42. The king showed not that eagerness and flame which one might have expected upon this occasion, but smote thrice, and no more. Either out of foolish tenderness to the Syrians, he smote as if he were afraid of hurting them, at least of ruining them, willing to show mercy to those that never did, nor ever would, show mercy to him or his people. Or, perhaps, he smote thrice, and very coldly, because he thought it but a silly thing, that it looked idle and childish for a king to beat the floor with his arrows; and thrice was often enough for him to play the fool merely to please the prophet. But, by contemning the sign, he lost the thing signified, sorely to the grief of the dying prophet, who was angry with him, and told him he should have smitten five or six times. Not being straitened in the power and promise of God, why should he be straitened in his own expectations and endeavours? Note, It cannot but be a trouble to good men to see those they wish well to stand in their own light and forsake their own mercies, to see them lose their advantages against their spiritual enemies, and to give them advantage.

Verses 20-25

We must here attend,

I. The sepulchre of Elisha: he died in a good old age, and they buried him; and what follows shows, 1. What power there was in his life to keep off judgments; for, as soon as he was dead, the bands of the Moabites invaded the land—not great armies to

face them in the field, but roving skulking bands, that murdered and plundered by surprise. God has many ways to chastise a provoking people. The king was apprehensive of danger only from the Syrians, but, behold, the Moabites invade him. Trouble comes sometimes from that point whence we least feared it. The mentioning of this immediately upon the death of Elisha intimates that the removal of God's faithful prophets is a presage of judgments coming. When ambassadors are recalled heralds may be expected. 2. What power there was in his dead body: it communicated life to another dead body, v. 21. This great miracle, though very briefly related, was a decided proof of his mission and a confirmation of all his prophecies. It was also a plain indication of another life after this. When Elisha died, there was not an end of him, for then he could not have done this. From operation we may infer existence. By this it appeared that the Lord was still the God of Elisha; therefore Elisha still lived, for *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. And it may, perhaps, have a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial the grave is made to all believers a safe and happy passage to life. It likewise intimated that though Elisha was dead, yet, in virtue of the promises made by him, Israel's interests, though they seemed quite sunk and lost, should revive and flourish again. The neighbours were carrying the dead body of a man to the grave, and, fearing to fall into the hands of the Moabites, a party of whom they saw at a distance near the place where the body was to be interred, they laid the corpse in the next convenient place, which proved to be Elisha's sepulchre. The dead man, upon touching Elisha's bones, revived, and, it is likely, went home again with his friends. Josephus relates the story otherwise, That some thieves, having robbed and murdered an honest traveller, threw his dead body into Elisha's grave, and it immediately revived. Elijah was honoured *in* his departure. Elisha was honoured *after* his departure. God thus dispenses honours as he pleases, but, one way or other, the rest of all the saints will be glorious, Isa. 11:10. It is good being near the saints and having our lot with them both in life and death.

II. The sword of Joash king of Israel; and we find it successful against the Syrians. 1. The cause of his success was God's favour (v. 23): *The Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them* in their miseries and *respect unto them*. The several expressions here of the same import call upon us to observe and admire the triumphs of divine goodness in the deliverance of such a provoking people. It was of the Lord's mercies that they were not consumed, because he would not destroy them as yet. He foresaw they would destroy themselves at last, but as yet he would relieve them, and give them space to repent. The slowness of God's processes against sinners must be construed to the honour of his mercy, not the impeachment of his justice.

2. The effect of his success was Israel's benefit. He recovered out of the hands of Benhadad the cities of Israel which the Syrians were possessed of, v. 25. This was a great kindness to the cities themselves, which were hereby brought from under the yoke of oppression, and to the whole kingdom, which was much strengthened by the reduction of those cities. Thrice Joash beat the Syrians, just as often as he had struck the ground with the arrows, and then a full stop was put to the course of his victories. Many have repented, when it was too late, of their distrusts and the straitness of their desires.

Chapter 14

This chapter continues the history of the succession in the kingdoms both of Judah and Israel. I. In the kingdom of Judah here is, 1. The entire history (as much as is recorded in this book) of Amaziah's reign (1.) His good character (v. 1-4). (2.) The justice he executed on the murderers of his father (v. 5, 6). (3.) His victory over the Edomites (v. 7). (4.) His war with Joash, and his defeat in that war (v. 8-14). (5.) His fall, as last, by a conspiracy against him (v. 17-20). 2. The beginning of the history of Azariah (v. 21, 22). II. In the kingdom of Israel, the conclusion of the reign of Joash (v. 15, 16), and the entire history of Jeroboam his son, the second of that name (v. 23-29). How many great men are made to stand in a little compass in God's book!

Verses 1-7

Amaziah, the son and successor of Joash, is the king whom here we have an account of. Let us take a view of him,

I. In the temple; and there he acted, in some measure, well, like Joash, but not like David, v. 3. He began well, but did not persevere: He *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, kept up his attendance on God's altars and his attention to God's word, yet not like David. It is not enough to do that which our pious predecessors did, merely to keep up the usage, but we must do it *as* they did it, from the same principle of faith and devotion and with the same sincerity and resolution. It is here taken notice of, as before, that *the high places were not taken away*, v. 4. It is hard to get clear of those corruptions which, by long usage, have gained both prescription and a favourable opinion.

II. On the bench; and there we have him doing justice on the traitors that murdered his father, not as soon as ever he came to the crown, lest it should occasion some disturbance, but he prudently deferred it till *the kingdom was confirmed in his hand*, v. 5. To weaken a factious party gradually, when it is not safe to provoke, often proves the way to ruin it effectually. Justice strikes surely by striking slowly, and is often executed most prudently when it is not executed presently. Wisdom here is profitable to direct. Amaziah did thus, 1. According to the rule of the law, that ancient rule, that *he that sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed*. Never let traitors or murderers expect to come to their graves like other men. *Let them flee to the pit, and let no man stay them*. 2. Under the limitation of the law: *The children of the murderers he slew not*, because the law of Moses had expressly provided that *the children should not be put to death for the fathers*, v. 6. It is probable that this is taken notice of because there were those about him that advised him to that rigour, both in revenge (because the crime was extraordinary—the murder of a king) and in policy, that the children might not plot against him, in revenge of their father's death. But against these insinuations he opposed the express law of God (Deu. 24:16), which he was to judge by, and which he resolved to adhere to and trust God with the issue. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, because every man is guilty before him and owes him a death; so that, if he require the life for the father's sin, he does not wrong, the sinner having forfeited it already by his own. But he does not allow earthly princes to do thus: the children, before them, are innocent, and therefore must not suffer as guilty.

III. In the field; and there we find him triumphing over the Edomites, v. 7. Edom had *revolted from under the hand of Judah* in

Joram's time, ch. 8:22. Now he makes war upon them to bring them back to their allegiance, kills 10,000 and takes the chief city of Arabia the stony (called *Selah—a rock*), and gave it a new name. We shall find a larger account of this expedition, 2 Chr. 25:5, etc.

Verses 8-14

For several successions after the division of the kingdoms that of Judah suffered much by the *enmity* of Israel. After Asa's time, for several successions, it suffered more by the *friendship* of Israel, and by the alliance and affinity made with them. But now we meet with hostility between them again, which had not been for some ages before.

I. Amaziah, upon no provocation, and without showing any cause of quarrel, challenged Joash into the field (v. 8): "*Come, let us look one another in the face; let us try our strength in battle.*" Had he challenged him to a personal duel only, the error would have remained with himself, but each must bring all their forces into the field, and thousands of lives on both sides must be sacrificed to his capricious humour. Hereby he showed himself proud, presumptuous, and prodigal of blood. Some think that he intended to avenge the injury which the dismissed disgusted Israelites had lately done to his country, in their return (2 Chr. 25:13), and that he had also the vanity to think of subduing the kingdom of Israel, and reuniting it to Judah. *A fool's lips thus enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.* Those that challenge are chargeable with that beginning of strife, which is as the letting forth of water. He that is eager either to fight or to go to law may perhaps have enough of it quickly, and be the first that repents it.

II. Joash sent him a grave rebuke for his challenge, with advice to withdraw it, v. 9, 10. 1. He mortifies his pride, by comparing himself to a cedar, a stately tree, and Amaziah to a thistle, a sorry weed, telling him he was so far from fearing him that he despised him, and scorned as much to have any thing to do with him, or make any alliance with him, as the cedar would to match his daughter to a thistle. The ancient house of David he thinks not worthy to be named the same day with the house of Jehu, though an upstart. How may a humble man smile to hear two proud and scornful men set their wits on work to vilify and undervalue one another! 2. He foretels his fall: *A wild beast trode down the thistle*, and so put an end to his treaty with the cedar; so easily does Joash think his forces can crush Amaziah, and so unable does he think him to make any resistance. 3. He shows him the folly of his challenge: "*Thou hast indeed smitten Edom*, a weak, unarmed, undisciplined body of men, and therefore thinkest thou canst carry all before thee and subdue the regular forces of Israel with as much ease. *Thy heart has lifted thee up.*" See where the root of all sin lies; it is in the heart, thence it flows, and that must bear the blame. It is not Providence, the event, the occasion (whatever it is), that makes men proud, or secure, or discontented, or the like, but it is their own heart that does it. "Thou art proud of the blow thou hast given to Edom, as if that had made thee formidable to all mankind." Those wretchedly deceive themselves that magnify their own performances, and, because they have been blessed with some little success and reputation, conclude themselves fit for any thing and no less sure of it. 4. He counsels him to be content with the honour he has won, and not to hazard that, by grasping at more that was out of his reach: *Why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt*, as fools often do, that will be meddling? Prov. 20:3. Many would have had wealth and honour enough if they had but known when they had enough. He warns him of the consequence, that it would be fatal not to himself only, but to

his kingdom, which he ought to protect.

III. Amaziah persisted in his resolution, and the issue was bad; he had better have tarried at home, for Joash gave him such a look in the face as put him to confusion. Challengers commonly prove to be on the losing side. 1. His army was routed and dispersed, v. 12. Josephus says, When they were to engage they were struck with such terror that they did not strike a stroke, but every one made the best of his way. 2. He himself was taken prisoner by the king of Israel, and then had enough of *looking him in the face*. Amaziah's pedigree comes in here somewhat abruptly (*the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah*), because perhaps he had gloried in the dignity of his ancestors, or because he now smarted for their iniquity. 3. The conqueror entered Jerusalem, which tamely opened to him, and yet he broke down their wall (and, as Josephus says, drove his chariot in triumph through the breach), in reproach to them, and that he might, when he pleased, take possession of the royal city. 4. He plundered Jerusalem, took away all that was valuable, and returned to Samaria, laden with spoils, v. 14. It was said of Joash that he did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord*, and of Amaziah that he did *that which was right*; and yet Joash triumphs thus over Amaziah, and why so? Because God would show, in Amaziah's fate, that he resists the proud, or because, whatever they were otherwise, Joash had lately been respectful to one of God's prophets (ch. 13:14), but Amaziah had been abusive to another (2 Chr. 25:16), and God will honour those who honour him in his prophets, but those who despise them, and him in them, shall be lightly esteemed.

Verses 15-22

Here are three kings brought to their graves in these few verses:-1. Joash king of Israel, v. 15, 16. We attended his funeral once before, ch. 13:12, 13. But, because the historian had occasion to give a further account of his life and actions, he again mentions his death and burial. 2. Amaziah king of Judah. Fifteen years he survived his conqueror the king of Israel, v. 17. A man may live a great while after he has been shamed, may be thoroughly mortified (as Amaziah no doubt was) and yet not dead. His acts are said to be found written in his annals (v. 18), but not his might; for his cruelty when he was a conqueror over the Edomites, and his insolence when he challenged the king of Israel, showed him void of true courage. He was slain by his own subjects, who hated him for his maladministration (v. 19) and made Jerusalem too hot for him, the ignominious breach made in their walls being occasioned by his folly and presumption. He fled to Lachish. How long he continued concealed or sheltered there we are not told, but, at last, he was there murdered, v. 19. No further did the rage of the rebels extend, for they brought him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him there among his ancestors. 3. Azariah succeeded Amaziah, but not till twelve years after his father's death, for Amaziah died in the fifteenth year of Jeroboam (as appears by comparing v. 23 with v. 2), but Azariah did not begin his reign till the twenty-seventh of Jeroboam (ch. 15:1), for he was but four years old at the death of his father, so that, for twelve years, till he came to be sixteen, the government was in the hands of protectors. He reigned very long (ch. 15:2) and yet the account of his reign is here industriously huddled up, and broken off abruptly (v. 22): *He built Elath* (which had belonged to the Edomites, but, it is probable, was recovered by his father, v. 7), *after that the king slept with his fathers*, as if that had been all he did that was worth mentioning, or rather it is meant of king Amaziah: he built it soon after Amaziah died.

Verses 23-29

Here is an account of the reign of Jeroboam the second. I doubt it is an indication of the affection and adherence of the house of Jehu to the sins of *Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin*, that they called an heir-apparent to the crown by his name, thinking that an honourable name which in the book of God is infamous and stigmatized as much as any.

I. His reign was long, the longest of all the reigns of the kings of Israel: *He reigned forty-one years*; yet his contemporary Azariah, the king of Judah, reigned longer, even fifty-two years. This Jeroboam reigned just as long as Asa had done (1 Ki. 15:10), yet one did that which was good and the other that which was evil. We cannot measure men's characters by the length of their lives or by their outward prosperity. *There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.*

II. His character was the same with that of the rest of those kings: *He did that which was evil* (v. 24), for *he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*; he kept up the worship of the calves, and never left that, thinking there was no harm in it, because it had been the way of all his ancestors and predecessors. But a sin is never the less evil in God's sight, whatever it is in ours, for its being an ancient usage; and a frivolous plea it will be against doing good, that we have been accustomed to do evil.

III. Yet he prospered more than most of them, for though, in that one thing, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, yet it is likely, in other respects, there was some good found in him and therefore God owned him, 1. By prophecy. He raised up Jonah the son of Amittai, a Galilean (so much were those mistaken that said, *Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*, Jn. 7:52), and by him intimated the purposes of his favour to Israel, notwithstanding their provocations, encouraged him and his kingdom to take up arms for the recovery of their ancient possessions, and (which would contribute not a little to their success) assured them of victory. It is a sign that God has not cast off his people if he continue faithful ministers among them; when Elisha, who strengthened the hands of Joash, was removed, Jonah was sent to encourage his son. Happy is the land that has a succession of prophets running parallel with a succession of princes, that the word of the Lord may endure for ever. Of this Jonah we read much in that little book of scripture that bears his name. It is probable that it was when he was a young man, and fit for such an expedition, that God sent him to Nineveh, and that it was when he had yet been but a little conversant with the visions of God that he flew off and fretted as he did; and, if so, this is an undoubted evidence of the forgiveness of his faults and follies, that he was afterwards employed as a messenger of mercy to Israel. A commission amounts to a pardon, and he that had himself found mercy, notwithstanding his provocations, could the better encourage them with the hope of mercy notwithstanding theirs. Some that have been foolish and passionate, and have gone about their work very awkwardly at first, yet afterwards have proved useful and eminent. Men must not be thrown away for every fault. 2. By providence. The event was *according to the word of the Lord*: his arms were successful; he *restored the coast of Israel*, recovered those frontier-towns and countries that lay from Hamath in the north to the sea of the plain, (that is, the sea of Sodom) in the south, all which the Syrians had possessed themselves of, v. 25. Two reasons are here given why God blessed them with those victories:—(1.) Because their distress was very great, which made them the objects of his compassion, v. 26. Though he saw not any signs of their repentance and formation, yet *he saw their affliction, that it was very bitter*. Those that lived in those countries which the enemies were masters of were miserably oppressed and enslaved, and could call nothing their own; the rest, we may suppose,

were much impoverished by the frequent incursions the enemy made upon them to plunder them, and continually terrified by their threatenings, so that *there was none shut up or left*, both towns and countries were laid waste and stripped of their wealth, and no helper appeared. To this extremity were they reduced, in many parts of the country, in the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, when God, in mere pity to them, heard the cry of their affliction (for no mention is made here of the cry of their prayers), and wrought this deliverance for them by the hand of Jeroboam. Let those whose case is pitiable take comfort from the divine pity; we read of God's bowels of mercy (Isa. 63:15; Jer. 31:20) and that he is full of compassion, Ps. 86:15. (2.) Because the decree had not yet gone forth for their utter destruction; he had not as yet said *he would blot out the name of Israel* (v. 27), and because he had not said it he would not do it. If this be understood of the dispersion of the ten tribes, he did say it and do it, for that name still remains under heaven in the *gospel Israel*, and will to the end of time; and because they, at present, bore that name which was to have this lasting honour, he showed them this favour, as well as for the sake of the ancient honour of that name, ch. 13:23.

IV. Here is the conclusion of Jeroboam's reign. We read (v. 28) of his might, and how he warred, but (v. 29) he *slept with his fathers*; for the mightiest must yield to death, and there is no discharge in that war. Many prophets there had been in Israel, a constant succession of them in every age, but none of the prophets had left any of their prophecies in writing till those of this age began to do it, and their prophecies are part of the canon of scripture. It was in the reign of this Jeroboam that *Hosea* (who continued very long a prophet) began to prophesy, and he was the first that wrote his prophecies; therefore the word of the Lord by him is called *the beginning of the word of the Lord*, Hos. 1:2. Then *that part of the word of the Lord* began to be written. At the same time *Amos* prophesied, and wrote his prophecy, soon afterwards *Micah*, and then *Isaiah*, in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah. Thus God never left himself without witness, but, in the darkest and most degenerate ages of the church, raised up some to be burning and shining lights in it to their own age by their preaching and living, and a few by their writings to reflect light upon us on whom the ends of the world have come.

of the house of Jehu, reigned six months, and then was slain and succeeded by Shallum (v. 8–12). 2. Shallum reigned one month, and then was slain and succeeded by Menahem (v. 13–15). 3. Menahem reigned ten years, or tyrannised rather, such were his barbarous cruelties (v. 16) and unreasonable exactions (v. 20), and then died in his bed, and left his son to succeed him first, and then suffer for him (v. 16–22). 4. Pekahiah reigned two years, and then was slain and succeeded by Pekah (v. 23–26). 5. Pekah reigned twenty years, and then was slain and succeeded by Hoshea, the last of all the kings of Israel (v. 27–31) for things were now working and hastening apace towards the final destruction of that kingdom.

Verses 1-7

This is a short account of the reign of Azariah. 1. Most of it is general, and the same that has been given of others; he began young and reigned long (v. 2), did, for the most part, that which was right, v. 3 (it was happy for the kingdom that a good reign was a long one), only he had not zeal and courage enough to take away the high places, v. 4. 2. That which is peculiar, v. 5 (that God smote him with a leprosy) is more largely related, with the occasion of it, 2 Chr. 26:16, etc., where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign, as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it. He did that which was right, as Amaziah had done; like him, he began well, but failed before he finished. Here we are told, (1.) That he was a leper. The greatest of men are not only subject to the common calamities, but also to the common infirmities, of human nature; and, if they be guilty of any heinous sin, they lie as open as the meanest to the most grievous strokes of divine vengeance. (2.) God smote him with this leprosy, to chastise him for his presumptuous invasion of the priests' office. If great men be proud men, some way or other God will humble them, and make them know he is both above them and against them, for he resisteth the proud. (3.) That he was a leper *to the day of his death*. Though we have reason to think he repented and the sin was pardoned, yet, for warning to others, he was continued under this mark of God's displeasure as long as he lived, and perhaps it was for the good of his soul that he was so. (4.) That he *dwelt in a separate house*, as being made ceremonially unclean by the law, to the discipline of which, though a king, he must submit. He that presumptuously intruded into God's temple, and pretended to be a priest, was justly shut out from his own palace, and shut up as a prisoner or recluse, ever after. We suppose that his *separate house* was made as convenient and agreeable as might be. Some translate it a *free house*, where he had liberty to take his pleasure. However, it was a great mortification to one that had been so much a man of honour, and a man of business, as he had been, to be cut off from society and dwell always in a *separate house*: it would almost make life itself a burden, even to kings, though they have never any to converse with but their inferiors; the most contemplative men would soon be weary of it. (5.) That his son was his viceroy in the affairs both of his court (for *he was over the house*) and of his kingdom (for he was *judging the people of the land*); and it was both a comfort to him and a blessing to his kingdom that he had such a son to fill up his room.

Verses 8-31

The best days of the kingdom of Israel were while the government was in Jehu's family. In his reign, and the next three reigns, though there were many abominable corruptions and miserable grievances in Israel, yet the crown went in succession, the kings died in their beds, and some care was taken of public affairs; but, now that those days are at an end, the history which we

have in these verses of about thirty-three years represents the affairs of that kingdom in the utmost confusion imaginable. Woe to those that were with child (v. 16) and to those that gave suck in those days, for then must needs be great tribulations, when, for *the transgression of the land, many were the princes thereof*.

I. Let us observe something, in general, concerning these unhappy revolutions and the calamities which must needs attend them—these bad times, as they may truly be called. 1. God had tried the people of Israel both with judgments and mercies, explained and enforced by his servants the prophets, and yet they continued impenitent and unreformed, and therefore God justly brought these miseries upon them, as Moses had warned them. If you will yet *walk contrary to me, I will punish you yet seven times more*, Lev. 26:21, etc. 2. God made good his promise to Jehu, that his sons to the fourth generation after him should sit upon the throne of Israel, which was a greater favour than was shown to any of the royal families either before or after his. God had said it should be so (ch. 10:30) and we are told in this chapter (v. 12) that so it came to pass. See how punctual God is to his promises. These calamities God long designed for Israel, and they deserved them, yet they were not inflicted till that word had taken effect to the full. Thus God rewarded Jehu for his zeal in destroying the worship of Baal and the house of Ahab; and yet, when the measure of the sins of the house of Jehu was full, God avenged upon it the blood then shed, called *the blood of Jezreel*, Hos. 1:4. 3. All these kings did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord, for they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat*. Though at variance with one another, yet in this they agreed, to keep up idolatry, and the people loved to have it so; though they were emptied from vessel to vessel, that *taste remained in them, and that scent was not changed*. It was sad indeed when their government was so often altered, yet never for the better—that among all those contending interests none of them should think it as much their interest to destroy the calves as others had done to support them. 4. Each of these (except one) conspired against his predecessor, and slew him—*Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea*, all traitors and murderers, and yet all kings awhile, one of them ten, another twenty, and another nine years; for God may suffer wickedness to prosper and to carry away the wealth and honours awhile, but, sooner or later, blood shall have blood, and he that dealt treacherously shall be dealt treacherously with. One wicked man is often made a scourge to another, and every wicked man, at length, a ruin to himself. 5. The ambition of the great men made the nation miserable. Here is Tiphshah, a city of Israel, barbarously destroyed, with all the coasts thereof, by one of these pretenders (v. 16), and no doubt it was through blood that each of them waded to the throne, nor could any of these kings perish alone. No land can have greater pests, nor Israel worse troubles, than such men as care not how much the welfare and repose of their country are sacrificed to their revenge and affectation of dominion. 6. While the nation was thus shattered by divisions at home the kings of Assyria, first one (v. 19) and then another (v. 29), came against it and did what they pleased. Nothing does more towards the making of a nation an easy prey to a common enemy than intestine broils and contests for the sovereignty. Happy the land where that is settled. 7. This was the condition of Israel just before they were quite ruined and carried away captive, for that was in the ninth year of Hoshea, the last of these usurpers. If they had, in these days of confusion and perplexity, humbled themselves before God and sought his face, that final destruction might have been prevented; but when God judgeth he will overcome. These factions, the fruit of an evil spirit sent among them, hastened that captivity, for a kingdom thus divided against itself will soon come to

desolation.

II. Let us take a short view of the particular reigns.

1. Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign in the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah, v. 8. Some of the most critical chronologers reckon that between Jeroboam and his son Zachariah the throne was vacant twenty-two years, others eleven years, through the disturbances and dissensions that were in the kingdom; and then it was not strange that Zachariah was deposed before he was well seated on the throne: he reigned but six months, and then Shallum *slew him before the people*, perhaps as Caesar was slain in the senate, or he put him to death publicly as a criminal, with the approbation of the people, to whom he had, some way or other, made himself odious; so ended the line of Jehu.

2. But had Shallum peace, who slew his master? No, he had not (v. 13), one month of days measured his reign and then he was cut off; perhaps to this the prophet, who then lived, refers (Hos. 5:7), *Now shall a month devour them with their portions*. That dominion seldom lasts long which is founded in blood and falsehood. Menahem, either provoked by his crime or animated by his example, soon served him as he had served his master—*slew him and reigned in his stead*, v. 14. Probably he was general in the army, which then lay encamped at Tirzah, and, hearing of Shallum's treason and usurpation, hastened to punish it, as Omri did that of Zimri in a like case, 1 Ki. 16:17.

3. Menahem held the kingdom ten years, v. 17. But, whereas we have heard that the *kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings* (1 Ki. 20:31), this Menahem (the scandal of his country) was so prodigiously cruel to those of his own nation who hesitated a little at submitting to him that he not only ruined a city, and the coasts thereof, but, forgetting that he himself was born of a woman, *ripped up all the women with child*, v. 16. We may well wonder that ever it should enter into the heart of any man to be so barbarous, and to be so perfectly lost to humanity itself. By these cruel methods he hoped to strengthen himself and to frighten all others into his interests; but it seems he did not gain his point, for when the king of Assyria came against him, (1.) So little confidence had he in his people that he durst not meet him as an enemy, but was obliged, at a vast expense, to purchase a peace with him. (2.) Such need had he of help *to confirm the kingdom in his hand* that he made it part of his bargain with him (a bargain which, no doubt, the king of Assyria knew how to make a good hand of another time) that he should assist him against his own subjects that were disaffected to him. The money wherewith he purchased his friendship was a vast sum, no less than 1000 talents of silver (v. 19), which Menahem exacted, it is probable, by military execution, *of all the mighty men of wealth*, very considerately sparing the poor, and laying the burden (as was fit) on those that were best able to bear it; being raised, it was given *to the king of Assyria*, as pay for his army, fifty shekels of silver for each man in it. Thus he got clear of the king of Assyria for this time; he staid not to quarter in the land (v. 20), but his army now got so rich a booty with so little trouble that it encouraged them to come again, not long after, when they laid all waste. Thus was *he* the betrayer of his country that should have been the protector of it.

4. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, succeeded his father, but reigned only two years, and then was treacherously slain by Pekah, falling under the load both of his own and of his father's wickedness. It is repeated concerning him as before that he *departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*. Still this is mentioned, to show that God was righteous in bringing that destruction upon them

which came not long after, because they hated to be reformed, v. 24. Pekah, it seems, had some persons of figure in his interest, two of whom are here named (v. 25), and with their help he compassed his design.

5. Pekah, though he got the kingdom by treason, kept it twenty years (v. 27), so long it was before his violent dealing returned upon his own head, but it returned at last. This Pekah, son of Remaliah, (1.) Made himself more considerable abroad than any of these usurpers, for he was, even in the latter end of his time (in the reign of Ahaz, which began in his seventeenth year), a great terror to the kingdom of Judah, as we find, Isa. 7:1, etc. (2.) He lost a great part of his kingdom to the king of Assyria. Several cities are here named (v. 29) which were taken from him, all the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, and Galilee in the north containing the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulon, were seized, and the inhabitants carried captive into Assyria. By this judgment God punished him for his attempt upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was then foretold that within two or three years after he made that attempt, before a child, then born, should be able to cry *My father and my mother*, the riches of Samaria should be *taken away before the king of Assyria* (Isa. 8:4), and here we have the accomplishment of that prediction. (3.) Soon after this he forfeited his life to the resentments of his countrymen, who, it is probable, were disgusted at him for leaving them exposed to a foreign enemy, while he was invading Judah, of which Hoshea took advantage and, to gain his crown, seized his life, *slew him, and reigned in his stead*. Surely he was fond of a crown indeed who, at this time, would run such a hazard as a traitor did; for the crown of Israel, now that it had lost the choicest of its flowers and jewels, was lined more than ever with thorns, had of late been fatal to all the heads that had worn it, was forfeited to divine justice, and now ready to be laid in the dust—a crown which a wise man would not have taken up in the street, yet Hoshea not only ventured *upon* it but ventured *for* it, and it cost him dear.

Verses 32-38

We have here a short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah, of whom we are told, 1. That he reigned very well, *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 34. Josephus gives him a very high character, stating that he was pious towards God, just towards men, and laid out himself for the public good,—that, whatever was amiss, he took care to have it rectified,—and, in short, wanted no virtue that became a good prince. Though the high places were not taken away, yet to draw people from them, and keep them close to God's holy place, he showed great respect to the temple, and built the higher gate which he went through to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do so much the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue, and the bringing of them into reputation. If they cannot pull down the high places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high gate of God's house. 2. That he died in the midst of his days, v. 33. Of most of the kings of Judah we are told how old they were when they began their reign, and by that may compute how old they were when they died; but no account is kept of the *age* of any of the kings of Israel that I remember, only of the years of their *reigns*. This honour God would put upon the kings of the house of David above those of other families. And by these accounts it appears that there was none of all the kings of Judah that reached David's age, seventy, the common age of man. Asa's age I do not find. Uzziah lived to be sixty-eight, Manasseh sixty-seven, and Jehoshaphat sixty; and these were the three oldest; many of those that were of note did not reach fifty. This Jotham died at forty-one. He was too great a blessing to be continued long to such an unworthy people. His death was a judgment, especially considering the character of

his son and successor. 3. That in his days the confederacy was formed against Judah by Rezin and Remaliah's son, the king of Syria and the king of Israel, which appeared so very formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz that, upon notice of it, the heart of that prince was moved and *the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*, Isa. 7:2. The confederates were unjust in the attempt, yet it is here said (v. 37), *The Lord began to send them against Judah*, as he bade Shimei curse David, and took away from Job what the Sabeans robbed him of. Men are God's hand—the sword, the rod in his hand—which he makes use of as he pleases to serve his own righteous counsels, though men be unrighteous in their intentions. This storm gathered in the reign of pious Jotham, but he came to his grave in peace and it fell upon his degenerate son.

Chapter 16

This chapter is wholly taken up with the reign of Ahaz; and we have quite enough of it, unless it were better. He had a good father, and a better son, and yet was himself one of the worst of the kings of Judah. I. He was a notorious idolater (v. 1-4). II. With the treasures of the temple, as well as his own, he hired the king of Assyria to invade Syria and Israel (v. 5-9). III. He took pattern from an idol's altar which he saw at Damascus for a new altar in God's temple (v. 10-16). IV. He abused and embezzled the furniture of the temple (v. 17, 18). And so his story ends (v. 19, 20).

Verses 1-4

We have here a general character of the reign of Ahaz. Few and evil were his days—few, for he died at thirty-six—evil, for we are here told, 1. That he *did not that which was right like David* (v. 2), that is, he had none of that concern and affection for the instituted service and worship of God for which David was celebrated. He had no love for the temple, made no conscience of his duty to God, nor had any regard to his law. Herein he was unlike David; it was his honour that he was of the house and lineage of David, and it was owing to God's ancient covenant with David that he was now upon the throne, which aggravated his wickedness; for he was a reproach to that honourable name and family, which therefore was really a reproach to him (*Degeneranti genus opprobrium—A good extraction is a disgrace to him who degenerates from it*), and though he enjoyed the benefit of David's piety he did not tread in the steps of it. 2. That he walked *in the way of the kings of Israel* (v. 3), who all worshipped the calves. He was not joined in any affinity with them, as Jehoram and Ahaziah were with the house of Ahab, but, *ex mero motu—without any instigation*, walked in their way. The kings of Israel pleaded policy and reasons of state for their idolatry, but Ahaz had no such pretence: in him it was the most unreasonable impolitic thing that could be. They were his enemies, and had proved enemies to themselves too by their idolatry; yet he walked in their way. 3. That he *made his sons to pass through the fire*, to the honour of his dunghill-deities. He burnt them, so it is expressly said of him (2 Chr. 28:3), burnt some of them, and perhaps made others of them (Hezekiah himself not excepted, though afterwards he was never the worse for it) to pass between two fires, or to be drawn through a flame, in token of their dedication to the idol. 4. That he did *according to the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out*. it was an instance of his great folly that he would be guided in his religion by those whom he saw fallen into the ditch before his eyes, and follow them; and it was an instance of his great impiety that he would conform to those usages which God had declared to be abominable to him, and set himself to write after the copy of those whom God had cast out, thus walking directly contrary to God. 5. That he *sacrificed in the high places*, v. 4. If his father had but had zeal enough to take them away, the debauching of his sons might have been prevented; but those that connive at sin know not what dangerous snares they lay for those that come after them. He forsook God's house, was weary of that place where, in his father's time, he had often been detained before the Lord, and performed his devotions on high hills, where he had a better prospect, and under green trees, where he had a more pleasant shade. It was a religion little worth, which was guided by fancy, not by faith.

Verses 5-9

Here is, 1. The attempt of his confederate neighbours, the kings of Syria and Israel, upon him. They thought to make themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to set a king of their own in it, Isa. 7:6. In this they fell short, but the king of Syria recovered Elath, a considerable port upon the Red Sea, which Amaziah had taken from the Syrians, ch. 14:22. What can those keep that have lost their religion? Let them expect, thenceforward, to be always on the losing hand. 2. His project to get clear of them. Having forsaken God, he had neither courage nor strength to make head against his enemies, nor could he, with any boldness, ask help of God; but he made his court to the king of Assyria, and got him to come in for his relief. Those whose hearts condemn them will go any where in a day of distress rather than to God. Was it because there was not a God in Israel that he sent to the Assyrian for help? Was the rock of ages removed out of its place, that he stayed himself on this broken reed? The sin itself was its own punishment; for, though it is true that he gained his point (the king of Assyria hearkened to him, and, to serve his own turn, made a descent upon Damascus, whereby he gave a powerful diversion to the king of Syria, v. 9, and obliged him to let fall his design against Ahaz, carrying the Syrians captive to Kir, as Amos had expressly foretold, ch. 1:5), yet, considering all, he made but a bad bargain; for, to compass this, (1.) He enslaved himself (v. 7): *I am thy servant and thy son*, that is, "I will be as dutiful and obedient to thee as to a master or father, if thou wilt but do me this good turn." Had he thus humbled himself to God, and implored his favour, he might have been delivered upon easier terms; he might have saved his money, and needed only to have parted with his sins. But, if the prodigal forsake his father's house, he soon becomes a slave to the worst of masters, Lu. 15:15. (2.) He impoverished himself; for he took the silver and gold that were laid up in the treasury both of the temple and of the kingdom, and sent it to the king of Assyria, v. 8. Both church and state must be squeezed and exhausted, to gratify this his new patron and guardian. I know not what authority he had thus to dispose of the public stock; but it is common for those that have brought themselves into straits by one sin to help themselves out by another; and those that have alienated themselves from God will make no difficulty of alienating any of his rights.

Verses 10-16

Though Ahaz had himself sacrificed in high places, on hills, and under every green tree (v. 4), yet God's altar had hitherto continued in its place and in use, and the *king's burnt-offering and his meat-offering* (v. 15) had been offered upon it by the priests that attended it; but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the room of it—a bolder stroke than the worst of the kings had yet given to religion. We have here,

I. The model of this new altar, taken from one at Damascus, by the king himself, v. 10. The king of Assyria having taken Damascus, thither Ahaz went, to congratulate him on his success, to return him thanks for the kindness he had done him by this expedition, and, as his servant and son, to receive his commands. Had he been faithful to his God, he would not have needed to crouch thus meanly to a foreign power. At Damascus, either while viewing the rarities of the place, or rather while joining with them in their devotions (for, when he was there, he thought it no harm to do as they did), he saw an altar that pleased his fancy extremely, not such a plain old-fashioned one as that which he had been trained up in attendance upon at Jerusalem, but curiously carved, it is likely, and adorned with image-work; there were many pretty things about it which he thought significant, surprising, very charming, and calculated to excite his devotion. Solomon had but a dull fancy, he thought,

compared with the ingenious artist that made this altar. Nothing will serve him but he must have an altar just like this: a pattern of it must be taken immediately; he cannot stay till he returns himself, but sends it before him in all haste, with orders to Urijah the priest to get one made exactly according to this model and have it ready against he came home. The pattern God showed to Moses in the mount or to David by the Spirit was not comparable to this pattern sent from Damascus. The hearts of idolaters walked after their eyes, which are therefore said to *go a whoring after their idols*; but the true worshippers worship the true God by faith.

II. The making of it by Urijah the priests, v. 11. This Urijah, it is likely, was the chief priest who at this time presided in the temple-service. To him Ahaz sent an intimation of his mind (for we read not of any express orders he gave him), to get an altar made by this pattern. And, without any dispute or objection, he put it in hand immediately, being perhaps as fond of it as the king was, at least being very willing to humour the king and desirous to curry favour with him. Perhaps he might have this excuse for gratifying the king herein, that, by this means, he might keep him to the temple at Jerusalem and prevent his totally deserting it for the high places and the groves. "Let us oblige him in this," thinks Urijah, "and then he will bring all his sacrifices to us; for by this craft we get our living." But, whatever pretence he had, it was a most base wicked thing for him that was a priest, a chief priest, to make this altar, in compliance with an idolatrous prince, for hereby, 1. He prostituted his authority and profaned the crown of his priesthood, making himself a servant to the lusts of men. There is not a greater disgrace to the ministry than obsequiousness to such wicked commands as this was. 2. He betrayed his trust. As priest, he was bound to maintain and defend God's institutions, and to oppose and witness against all innovations; and, for him to assist and serve the king in setting up an altar to confront the altar which by divine appointment he was consecrated to minister at, was such a piece of treachery and perfidiousness as may justly render him infamous to all posterity. Had he only connived at the doing of it,—had he been frightened into it by menaces,—had he endeavoured to dissuade the king from it, or but delayed the doing of it till he came home, that he might first talk with him about it,—it would not have been so bad; but so willingly to walk after his commandment, as if he were glad of the opportunity to oblige him, was such an affront to the God he served as was utterly inexcusable.

III. The dedicating of it. Urijah, perceiving that the king's heart was much upon it, took care to have it ready against he came down, and set it near the brazen altar, but somewhat lower and further from the door of the temple. The king was exceedingly pleased with it, approached it with all possible veneration, and offered thereon his burnt-offering, etc., v. 12, 13. His sacrifices were not offered to the God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus (as we find 2 Chr. 28:23), and, when he borrowed the Syrians' altar, no marvel that he borrowed their gods. Naaman, the Syrian, embraced the God of Israel when he got earth from the land of Israel to make an altar of.

IV. The removal of God's altar, to make room for it. Urijah was so modest that he put this altar at the lower end of the court, and left God's altar in its place, *between this and the house of the Lord*, v. 14. But that would not satisfy Ahaz; he removed God's altar to an obscure corner in the north side of the court, and put his own before the sanctuary, in the place of it. He thinks his new altar is much more stately, and much more sightly, and disgraces that; and therefore "let that be laid aside as a vessel

in which there is no pleasure." His superstitious invention, at first, jostled *with* God's sacred institution, but at length jostled it *out*. Note, Those will soon come to make nothing of God that will not be content to make him their all. Ahaz durst not (perhaps for fear of the people) quite demolish the brazen altar and knock it to pieces; but, while he ordered all the sacrifices to be offered upon this new altar (v. 15), *The brazen altar (says he) shall be for me to enquire by*. Having thrust it out from the use for which it was instituted, which was to sanctify the gifts offered upon it, he pretends to advance it above its institution, which it is common for superstitious people to do. The altar was never designed for an oracle, yet Ahaz will have it for that use. The Romish church seemingly magnifies Christ's sacraments, yet wretchedly corrupts them. But some give another sense of Ahaz's purpose: "As for the brazen altar, I will consider what to do with it, and give order about it." The Jews say that, afterwards, of the brass of it he made that famous dial which was called *the dial of Ahaz*, ch. 20:11. The base compliance of the poor-spirited priest with the presumptuous usurpations of an ill-spirited king is again taken notice of (v. 16): *Urijah the priest did according to all that king Ahaz commanded*. Miserable is the case of great men when those that should reprove them for their sins strengthen and serve them in their sins.

Verses 17-20

Here is, I. Ahaz abusing the temple, not the building itself, but some of the furniture of it. 1. He defaced the bases on which the lavers were set (1 Ki. 7:28, 29) and took down the molten sea, v. 17. These the priests used for washing; against them therefore he seems to have had a particular spite. It is one of the greatest prejudices that can be done to religion to obstruct the purifying of the priests, the Lord's ministers. 2. He removed *the covert for the sabbath*, erected either in honour of the sabbath or for the conveniency of the priests, when, on the sabbath, they officiated in greater numbers than on other days. Whatever it was, it should seem that in removing it he intended to put a contempt upon the sabbath, and so to open as wide an inlet as any to all manner of impiety. 3. The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, for the convenience of the royal family (perhaps that ascent which Solomon had made, and which the queen of Sheba admired, 1 Ki. 10:5), he turned another way, to show that he did not intend to frequent the house of the Lord any more. This he did for the king of Assyria, to oblige him, who perhaps returned his visit, and found fault with this entry, as an inconvenience and disparagement to his palace. When those that have had a ready passage to the house of the Lord, to please their neighbours, turn it another way, they are going down the hill apace towards their ruin.

II. Ahaz resigning his life in the midst of his days, at thirty-six years of age (v. 19) and leaving his kingdom to a better man, Hezekiah his son (v. 20), who proved as much a friend to the temple as he had been an enemy to it. Perhaps this very son he had made to pass through the fire, and thereby dedicated him to Moloch; but God, by his grace, snatched him as a brand out of the burning.

Chapter 17

This chapter gives us an account of the captivity of the ten tribes, and so finishes the history of that kingdom, after it had continued about 265 years, from the setting up of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. In it we have, I. A short narrative of this destruction (v. 1-6). II. Remarks upon it, and the causes of it, for the justifying of God in it and for warning to others (v. 7–23). III. An account of the nations which succeeded them in the possession of their land, and the mongrel religion set up among them (v. 24–41).

Verses 1-6

We have here the reign and ruin of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, concerning whom observe,

- I. That, though he forced his way to the crown by treason and murder (as we read ch. 15:30), yet he gained not the possession of it till seven or eight years after; for it was in the fourth year of Ahaz that he slew Pekah, but did not himself begin to reign till the twelfth year of Ahaz, v. 1. Whether by the king of Assyria, or by the king of Judah, or by some of his own people, does not appear, but it seems so long he was kept out of the throne he aimed at. Justly were his bad practices thus chastised, and the word of the prophet was thus fulfilled (Hos. 10:3), *Now they shall say We have no king, because we feared not the Lord.*
- II. That, though he was bad, yet not so bad as the kings of Israel had been before him (v. 2), not so devoted to the calves as they had been. One of them (that at Dan), the Jews say, had been, before this, carried away by the king of Assyria in the expedition recorded ch. 15:29, (to which perhaps the prophet refers, Hos. 8:5, *Thy calf, O Samaria! has cast thee off*), which made him put the less confidence in the other. And some say that this Hoshea took off the embargo which the former kings had put their subjects under, forbidding them to go up to Jerusalem to worship, which he permitted those to do that had a mind to it. But what shall we think of this dispensation of providence, that the destruction of the kingdom of Israel should come in the reign of one of the best of its kings? *Thy judgments, O God! are a great deep.* God would hereby show that in bringing this ruin upon them he designed to punish, 1. Not only the sins of that generation, but of the foregoing ages, and to reckon for the iniquities of their fathers, who had been long in filing the measure and treasuring up wrath against this day of wrath. 2. Not only the sins of their kings, but the sins of the people. If Hoshea was not so bad as the former kings, yet the people were as bad as those that went before them, and it was an aggravation of their badness, and brought ruin the sooner, that their king did not set them so bad an example as the former kings had done, nor hinder them from reforming; he gave them leave to do better, but they did as bad as ever, which laid the blame of their sin and ruin wholly upon themselves.
- III. That the destruction came gradually. They were for some time made tributaries before they were made captives to the king of Assyria (v. 3), and, if that less judgment had prevailed to humble and reform them, the greater would have been prevented.
- IV. That they brought it upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, v. 4. Had the king and people of Israel applied to God, made their peace with him and their prayers to him, they might have recovered their liberty, ease, and honour; but they withheld their tribute, and trusted to the king of Egypt to assist them in their revolt, which, if it had taken effect, would have been but to change their oppressors. But Egypt became to them the staff of a

broken reed. This provoked the king of Assyria to proceed against them with the more severity. Men get nothing by struggling with the net, but entangle themselves the more.

V. That it was an utter destruction that came upon them. 1. The king of Israel was made a prisoner; he was shut up and bound, being, it is probable, taken by surprise, before Samaria was besieged. 2. The land of Israel was made a prey. The army of the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, made themselves master of it (v. 5), and treated the people as traitors to be punished with the sword of justice rather than as fair enemies. 3. The royal city of Israel was besieged, and at length taken. Three years it held out after the country was conquered, and no doubt a great deal of misery was endured at that time which is not particularly recorded; but the brevity of the story, and the passing of this matter over lightly, methinks, intimate that they were abandoned of God and he did not now regard the affliction of Israel, as sometimes as he had done. 4. The people of Israel were carried captives into Assyria, v. 6. The generality of the people, those that were of any note, were forced away into the conqueror's country, to be slaves and beggars there. (1.) Thus he was pleased to exercise a dominion over them, and to show that they were entirely at his disposal. (2.) By depriving them of their possessions and estates, real and personal, and exposing them to all the hardships and reproaches of a removal to a strange country, under the power of an imperious army, he chastised them for their rebellion and their endeavour to shake off his yoke. (3.) Thus he effectually prevented all such attempts for the future and secured their country to himself. (4.) Thus he got the benefit of their service in his own country, as Pharaoh did that of their fathers; and so this unworthy people were lost as they were found, and ended as they began, in servitude and under oppression. (5.) Thus he made room for those of his own country that had little, and little to do, at home, to settle in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. In all these several ways he served himself by this captivity of the ten tribes. We are here told in what places of his kingdom he disposed of them—in *Halah* and *Habor*, in places, we may suppose, far distant from each other, lest they should keep up a correspondence, incorporate again, and become formidable. There, we have reason to think, after some time they were so mingled with the nations that they were lost, and *the name of Israel was no more in remembrance*. Those that forgot God were themselves forgotten; those that studied to be like the nations were buried among them; and those that would not serve God in their own land were made to serve their enemies in a strange land. It is probable that they were the men of honour and estates who were carried captive, and that many of the meaner sort of people were left behind, many of every tribe, who either went over to Judah or became subject to the Assyrian colonies, and their posterity were *Galileans* or *Samaritans*. But thus ended Israel as a nation; now they became *Lo-ammi*—*not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah*—*unpitied*. Now Canaan spued them out. When we read of their entry under Hoshea the son of Nun who would have thought that such as this should be their exit under Hoshea the son of Elah? Thus Rome's glory in Augustus sunk, many ages after, in Augustulus. Providence so ordered the eclipsing of the honour of the ten tribes that the honour of Judah (the royal tribe) and Levi (the holy tribe), which yet remained, might shine the brighter. Yet we find a number sealed of every one of the twelve tribes (Rev. 7) except Dan. James writes to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (Jam. 1:1) and Paul speaks of the twelve tribes which *instantly served God day and night* (Acts 26:7); so that though we never read of those that were carried captive, nor have any reason to credit the conjecture of some (that they yet remain a distinct body in some remote corner of the world), yet

a remnant of them did escape, to keep up the name of Israel, till it came to be worn by the gospel church, the spiritual Israel, in which it will ever remain, Gal. 6:16.

Verses 7-23

Though the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was but briefly related, it is in these verses largely commented upon by our historian, and the reasons of it assigned, not taken from the second causes—the weakness of Israel, their impolitic management, and the strength and growing greatness of the Assyrian monarch (these things are overlooked)—but only from the First Cause. Observe, 1. It was *the Lord that removed Israel out of his sight*; whoever were the instruments, he was the author of this calamity. It was *destruction from the Almighty*; the Assyrian was but the *rod of his anger*, Isa. 10:5. It was *the Lord that rejected the seed of Israel*, else their enemies could not have seized upon them, v. 20. *Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord?* Isa. 43:24. We lose the benefit of national judgments if we do not eye the hand of God in them, and the fulfilling of the scripture, for that also is taken notice of here (v. 23): *The Lord removed Israel out of his favour, and out of their own land, as he had said by all his servants the prophets*. Rather shall heaven and earth pass than one tittle of God's word fall to the ground. When God's word and his works are compared, it will be found not only that they agree, but that they illustrate each other. But why would God ruin a people that were raised and incorporated, as Israel was, by miracles and oracles? Why would he undo that which he himself had done at so vast an expense? Was it purely an act of sovereignty? No, it was an act of necessary justice. For, 2. They provoked him to do this by their wickedness. Was it God's doing? Nay, it was their own; by their *way and their doings they procured all this to themselves*, and it was their own wickedness that did correct them. This the sacred historian shows here at large, that it might appear that God did them no wrong and that others might hear and fear. Come and see what it was that did all this mischief, that broke their power and laid their honour in the dust; it was sin; that, and nothing else, separated between them and God. This is here very movingly laid open as the cause of all the desolations of Israel. He here shows,

I. What God had done for Israel, to engage them to serve him. 1. He gave them their liberty (v. 7): He *brought them from under the hand of Pharaoh* who oppressed them, asserted their freedom (*Israel is my son*), and effected their freedom with a high hand. Thus they were bound in duty and gratitude to be his servants, for he had loosed their bonds; nor would he that rescued them out of the hand of the king of Egypt have contradicted himself so far as to deliver them into the hand of the king of Assyria, as he did, if they had not, by their iniquity, betrayed their liberty and sold themselves. 2. He gave them their law, and was himself their king. They were immediately under a divine regimen. They could not plead ignorance of good and evil, sin and duty, for God had particularly charged them against those very things which here he charges them with (v. 15), *That they should not do like the heathen*. Nor could they be in any doubt concerning their obligation to observe the laws which they are here charged with rejecting, for they were *the commandments and statutes of the Lord their God* (v. 13), so that no room was left to dispute whether they should keep them or no. He had not *dealt so with other nations*, Ps. 147:19, 20. 3. He gave them *their land*, for he *cast out the heathen from before them* (v. 8), to make room for them; and the casting out of them for their idolatries was as fair a warning as could be given to Israel not to do like them.

II. What they had done against God, notwithstanding these engagements which he had laid upon them. 1. In general. They *sinned against the Lord their God* (v. 7), they *did those things that were not right* (v. 9), but *secretly*. So wedded were they to their evil practices that when they could not do them publicly, could not for shame or could not for fear, they would do them secretly—an evidence of their atheism, that they thought what was done in secret was from under the eye of God himself and would not be required. Again, they wrought wicked things in such a direct contradiction to the divine law that they seemed as if they were done on purpose to *provoke the Lord to anger* (v. 11), in contempt of his authority and defiance of his justice. They *rejected God's statutes and his covenant* (v. 15), would not be bound up either by his command or the consent they themselves had given to the covenant, but threw off the obligations of both, and therefore God justly rejected them, v. 20. See Hos. 4:6. They *left all the commandments of the Lord their God* (v. 16), left the way, left the work, which those commandments prescribed them and directed them in. Nay, lastly, they *sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord*, that is, they wholly addicted themselves to sin, as slaves to the service of those to whom they are sold, and, by their obstinately persisting in sin, so hardened their own hearts that at length it had become morally impossible for them to recover themselves, as one that has sold himself has put his liberty past recall. 2. In particular. Though they were guilty (no doubt) of many immoralities, and violated all the commands of the second table, yet nothing is here specified, but their idolatry. *This* was the sin that did most easily beset them; this was, of all sins, most provoking to God: it was the spiritual adultery that broke the marriage-covenant, and was the inlet of all other wickedness. Hence it is again and again mentioned here as the sin that ruined them. (1.) They feared other gods (v. 7), that is, worshipped them and paid their homage to them, as if they feared their displeasure. (2.) They *walked in the statutes of the heathen*, which were contrary to God's statutes (v. 8), did *as did the heathen* (v. 11), *went after the heathen that were round about them* (v. 15), so prostituting the honour of their peculiarity, and defeating God's design concerning them, which was that they should be distinguished from the heathen. Must those that were taught of God go to school to the heathen—those that were appropriated to God take their measures from the nations that were abandoned by him? (3.) They *walked in the statutes of the idolatrous kings of Israel* (v. 8), *in all the sins of Jeroboam*, v. 22. When their kings assumed a power to alter and add to the divine institutions they submitted to them, and thought the command of their kings would bear them out in disobedience to the command of their God. (4.) They *built themselves high places in all their cities*, v. 9. If in any place there was but the tower of the watchmen (a country tower that had no walls, but only a tower to shelter the watch in time of danger), or but a lodge for shepherds, it must be honoured with a high place, and that with an altar. If there was a fenced city, it must be further fortified with a high place. Having forsaken God's only place, they knew no end of high places, in which every man followed his own fancy and directed his devotion to what god he pleased. Sacred things were hereby profaned and laid common, when their altars were *as heaps in the furrows of the field*, Hos. 12:11. (5.) They *set them up images and groves—Asherim* (even *wooden images*, so some think the term, which we translate *groves*, should be rendered) or *Ashtaroth* (so others)—directed contrary to the second commandment, v. 10. They served idols (v. 12), the works of their own hands and creatures of their own fancy, though God had warned them particularly not to do this thing. (6.) They *burnt incense in all the high places*, to the honour of strange gods, for it was to the dishonour of the true God, v. 11. (7.) They

followed vanity. Idols are called so, because they could do neither good nor evil, but were the most insignificant things that could be; those that worshipped them were like unto them, and so they became vain and good for nothing (v. 16), vain in their devotions, which were brutish and ridiculous, and so became vain in their whole conversation. (8.) Besides the molten images, even the two calves, they *worshipped all the host of heaven*—the sun, moon, and stars: for it is not meant of the heavenly host of angels; they could not rise so far above sensible things as to think of them. And, withal, they served Baal, the deified heroes of the Gentiles, v. 16. (9.) *They caused their children to pass through the fire*, in token of their dedicating them to their idols. (10.) They used divinations and enchantments, that they might receive directions from the gods to whom they paid their devotions.

III. What means God used with them, to bring them off from their idolatries, and to how little purpose. He testified against them, showed them their sins and warned them of the fatal consequences of them by all the prophets and all the *seers* (for so the prophets had been formerly called), and pressed them to *turn from their evil ways*, v. 13. We have read of prophets, more or less, in every reign. Though they had forsaken God's family of priests, he did not leave them without a succession of prophets, who made it their business to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord, but all in vain (v. 14); they would not hear, but hardened their necks, persisted in their idolatries, and were like their fathers, that would not bow their necks to God's yoke, because they *did not believe in him*, did not receive his truths, nor would venture upon his promises: it seems to refer to their fathers in the wilderness; the same sin that kept them out of Canaan turned these out, and that was unbelief.

IV. How God punished them for their sins. He *was very angry with them* (v. 18); for, in the matter of his worship, he is a jealous God, and resents nothing more deeply than giving that honour to any creature which is due to himself only. He afflicted them (v. 20) and *delivered them into the hand of spoilers*, in the days of the judges and of Saul, and afterwards in the days of most of their kings, to see if they would be awakened by the judgments of God to consider and amend their ways; but, when all these corrections did not prevail to drive out the folly, God first *rent Israel from the house of David*, under which they might have been happy. As Judah was hereby weakened, so Israel was hereby corrupted; for they made a man king who *drove them from following the Lord and caused them to sin a great sin*, v. 21. This was a national judgment, and the punishment of their former idolatries; and, at length, he *removed them quite out of his sight* (v. 18, 23), without giving them any hopes of a return out of their captivity.

Lastly, Here is a complaint against Judah in the midst of all (v. 19): *Also Judah kept not the commandments of God*; though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel, yet they *walked in the statutes of Israel*; and this aggravated the sin of Israel, that they communicated the infection of it to Judah; see Eze. 23:11. Those that bring sin into a country or family bring a plague into it and will have to answer for all the mischief that follows.

Verses 24-41

Never was land lost, we say, for want of an heir. When the children of Israel were dispossessed, and turned out of Canaan, the king of Assyria soon transplanted thither the supernumeraries of his own country, such as it could well spare, who should be servants to him and masters to the Israelites that remained; and here we have an account of these new inhabitants, whose story

is related here that we may take our leave of Samaria, as also of the Israelites that were carried captive into Assyria.

I. Concerning the Assyrians that were brought into the land of Israel we are here told, 1. That they possessed Samaria and *dwelt in the cities thereof*, v. 24. It is common for lands to change their owners, but sad that the holy land should become a heathen land again. See what work sin makes. 2. That at their first coming God *sent lions among them*. They were probably insufficient to people the country, which occasioned *the beasts of the field to multiply against them* (Ex. 23:29); yet, besides the natural cause, there was a manifest hand of God in it, who is Lord of hosts, of all the creatures, and can serve his own purposes by which he pleases, small or great, lice or lions. God ordered them this rough welcome to check their pride and insolence, and to let them know that though they had conquered Israel the God of Israel had power enough to deal with them—that he could have prevented their settling here, by ordering lions into the service of Israel, and that he permitted it, not for their righteousness, but the wickedness of his own people—and that they were now under his visitation. They had lived without God in their own land, and were not plagued with lions; but, if they do so in this land, it is at their peril. 3. That they sent a remonstrance of this grievance to the king their master, setting forth, it is likely, the loss their infant colony had sustained by the lions and the continual fear they were in of them, and stating that they looked upon it to be a judgment upon them for not worshipping the God of the land, which they could not, because they knew not how, v. 26. The God of Israel was the God of the whole world, but they ignorantly call him the *God of the land*, apprehending themselves therefore within his reach, and concerned to be upon good terms with him. Herein they shamed the Israelites, who were not so ready to hear the voice of God's judgments as they were, and who had not served the *God of that land*, though he was the God of their fathers and their great benefactor, and though they were well instructed in the manner of his worship. Assyrians begged to be taught that which Israelites hated to be taught. 4. That the king of Assyria took care to have them taught *the manner of the God of the land* (v. 27, 28), not out of any affection to that God, but to save his subjects from the lions. On this errand he sent back one of the priests whom he had carried away captive. A prophet would have done them more good, for this was but one of the priests of the calves, and therefore chose to dwell at Bethel for old acquaintance' sake, and, though he might teach them to do better than they did, he was not likely to teach them to do well, unless he had taught his own people better. However, he came and dwelt among them, to teach them how they should *fear the Lord*. Whether he taught them out of the book of the law, or only by word of mouth, is uncertain. 5. That, being thus taught, they made a mongrel religion of it, worshipped the God of Israel for fear and their own idols for love (v. 33): *They feared the Lord*, but they *served their own gods*. They all agreed to worship the God of the land according to the manner, to serve the Jewish festivals and rites of sacrificing, but every nation made gods of their own besides, not only for their private use in their own families, but to be put *in the houses of their high places*, v. 9. The idols of each country are here named, v. 30, 31. The learned are at a loss for the signification of several of these names, and cannot agree by what representations these gods were worshipped. If we may credit the traditions of the Jewish doctors, they tell us that Succoth-Benoth was worshipped in a hen and chickens, Nergal in a cock, Ashima in a smooth goat, Nibhaz in a dog, Tartak in an ass, Adrammelech in a peacock, Anammelech in a pheasant. Our own tell us, more probably, that Succoth-Benoth (signifying *the tents of the daughters*) was Venus. Nergal, being worshipped by the Cuthites, or Persians, was *the fire*,

Adrammelech and Anammelech were only distinctions of Moloch. See how vain idolaters were in their imaginations, and wonder at their sottishness. Our very ignorance concerning these idols teaches us the accomplishment of that word which God has spoken, that these false gods should all perish (Jer. 10:11); they are all buried in oblivion, while the name of the true God shall continue for ever. 6. This medley superstition is here said to *continue unto this day* (v. 41), till the time when this book was written and long after, above 300 years in all, till the time of Alexander the Great, when Manasse, brother to Jaddus the high priest of the Jews, having married the daughter of Sanballat, governor of the Samaritans, went over to them, got leave of Alexander to build a temple in Mount Gerizim, drew over many of the Jews to him, and prevailed with the Samaritans to cast away all their idols and to worship the God of Israel only; yet their worship was mixed with so much superstition that our Saviour told them they knew not what they worshipped, Jn. 4:22.

II. Concerning the Israelites that were carried into the land of Assyria. This historian has occasion to speak of them (v. 22), showing that their successors in the land did as they had done (*after the manner of the nations whom they carried away*), they worshipped both the God of Israel and those other gods; but what did the captives do in the land of their affliction? Were they reformed, and brought to repentance, by their troubles? No, they did after the former manner, v. 34. When the two tribes were afterwards carried into Babylon, they were cured by it of their idolatry, and therefore, after seventy years, they were brought back with joy; but the ten tribes were hardened in the furnace, and therefore were justly lost in it and left to perish. This obstinacy of theirs is here aggravated by the consideration, 1. Of the honour God had put upon them, as the seed of Jacob, *whom he named Israel*, and from him they were so named, but were a reproach to *that worthy name by which they were called*. 2. Of the covenant he made with them, and the charge he gave them upon that covenant, which is here very fully recited, that they should *fear and serve the Lord Jehovah* only, who had *brought them up out of Egypt* (v. 36), that, having received his statutes and ordinances in writing, they should *observe to do them for evermore* (v. 37), and never forget that covenant which God had made with them, the promises and conditions of that covenant, especially that great article of it which is here thrice repeated, because it had been so often inculcated and so much insisted on, that they *should not fear other gods*. He had told them that, if they kept close to him, he would *deliver them out of the hand of all their enemies* (v. 39); yet when they were in the hand of their enemies, and stood in need of deliverance, they were so stupid, and had so little sense of their own interest, that they did after the former manner (v. 40), they served both the true God and false gods, as if they knew no difference. *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone*. So they did, and so did the nations that succeeded them. Well might the apostle ask, *What then, Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin*, Rom. 3:9.

Chapter 18

When the prophet had condemned Ephriam for lies and deceit he comforted himself with this, that Judah yet "ruled with God, and was faithful with the Most Holy," Hos. 11:12. It was a very melancholy view which the last chapter gave us of the desolations of Israel; but this chapter shows us the affairs of Judah in a good posture at the same time, that it may appear God has not quite cast off the seed of Abraham, Rom. 11:1. Hezekiah is here upon the throne, I. Reforming his kingdom (v. 1-6). II. Prospering in all his undertakings (v. 7, 8), and this at the same time when the ten tribes were led captive (v. 9-12). III. Yet invaded by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria (v. 13). 1. His country put under contribution (v. 14-16). 2. Jerusalem besieged (v. 17). 3. God blasphemed, himself reviled, and his people solicited to revolt, in a virulent speech made by Rabshakeh (v. 18-37). But how well it ended, and how much to the honour and comfort of our great reformer, we shall find in the next chapter.

Verses 1-8

We have here a general account of the reign of Hezekiah. It appears, by comparing his age with his father's, that he was born when his father was about eleven or twelve years old, divine Providence so ordering that he might be of full age, and fit for business, when the measure of his father's iniquity should be full. Here is,

I. His great piety, which was the more wonderful because his father was very wicked and vile, one of the worst of the kings, yet he was one of the best, which may intimate to us that what good there is in any is not of nature, but of grace, free grace, sovereign grace, which, contrary to nature, grafts into the good olive that which was wild by nature (Rom. 11:24), and also that grace gets over the greatest difficulties and disadvantages: Ahaz, it is likely, gave his son a bad education as well as a bad example; Urijah his priest perhaps had the tuition of him; his attendants and companions, we may suppose, were such as were addicted to idolatry; and yet Hezekiah became eminently good. When God's grace will work what can hinder it?

1. He was a genuine son of David, who had a great many degenerate ones (v. 3): *He did that which was right, according to all that David his father did*, with whom the covenant was made, and therefore he was entitled to the benefit of it. We have read of some of them who did that which was right, *but not like David*, ch. 14:3. They did not love God's ordinances, nor cleave to them, as he did; but Hezekiah was a second David, had such a love for God's word, and God's house, as he had. Let us not be frightened with an apprehension of the continual decay of virtue, as if, when times and men are bad, they must needs, of course, grow worse and worse; that does not follow, for, after many bad kings, God raised up one that was like David himself.

2. He was a zealous reformer of his kingdom, and as we find (2 Chr. 29:3) he began betimes to be so, fell to work as soon as ever he came to the crown, and lost no time. He found his kingdom very corrupt, the people in all things too superstitious. They had always been so, but in the last reign worse than ever. By the influence of his wicked father, a deluge of idolatry had overspread the land; his spirit was stirred against this idolatry, we may suppose (as Paul's at Athens), while his father lived, and therefore, as soon as ever he had power in his hands, he set himself to abolish it (v. 4), though, considering how the people were wedded to it, he might think it could not be done without opposition. (1.) The images and the groves were downright idolatrous and of heathenish original. These he broke and destroyed. Though his own father had set them up, and shown an

affection for them, yet he would not protect them. We must never dishonour God in honour to our earthly parents. (2.) The high places, though they had sometimes been used by the prophets upon special occasions and had been hitherto connived at by the good kings, were nevertheless an affront to the temple and a breach of the law which required them to worship there only, and, being from under the inspection of the priests, gave opportunity for the introducing of idolatrous usages. Hezekiah therefore, who made God's word his rule, not the example of his predecessors, removed them, made a law for the removal of them, the demolishing of the chapels, tabernacles, and altars there erected, and the suppressing of the use of them, which law was put in execution with vigour; and, it is probable, the terrible judgments which the kingdom of Israel was now under for their idolatry made Hezekiah the more zealous and the people the more willing to comply with him. It is well when our neighbours' harms are our warnings. (3.) The brazen serpent was originally of divine institution, and yet, because it had been abused to idolatry, he broke it to pieces. The children of Israel had brought that with them to Canaan; where they set it up we are not told, but, it seems, it had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness and a traditional evidence of the truth of that story, Num. 21:9, for the encouragement of the sick to apply to God for a cure and of penitent sinners to apply to him for mercy. But in process of time, when they began to worship the creature more than the Creator, those that would not worship images borrowed from the heathen, as some of their neighbours did, were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the brazen serpent, because that was made by order from God himself and had been an instrument of good to them. But Hezekiah, in his pious zeal for God's honour, not only forbade the people to worship it, but, that it might never be so abused any more, he showed the people that it was *Nehushtan*, nothing else but *a piece of brass*, and that therefore it was an idle wicked thing to burn incense to it; he then broke it to pieces, that is, as bishop Patrick expounds it, ground it to powder, which he scattered in the air, that no fragment of it might remain. If any think that the just honour of the brazen serpent was hereby diminished they will find it abundantly made up again, Jn. 3:14, where our Saviour makes it a type of himself. Good things, when idolized, are better parted with than kept.

3. Herein he was a nonesuch, v. 5. None of all the kings of Judah were like him, *either before or after him*. Two things he was eminent for in his reformation:—(1.) Courage and confidence in God. In abolishing idolatry, there was danger of disobliging his subjects, and provoking them to rebel; but *he trusted in the Lord God of Israel* to bear him out in what he did and save him from harm. A firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to protect and reward us will conduce much to make us sincere, bold, and vigorous, in the way of our duty, like Hezekiah. When he came to the crown he found his kingdom compassed with enemies, but he did not seek for succour to foreign aids, as his father did, but trusted in the God of Israel to be the keeper of Israel. (2.) Constancy and perseverance in his duty. For this there was none like him, that he clave to the Lord with a fixed resolution and never *departed from following him*, v. 6. Some of his predecessors that began well fell off: but he, like Caleb, followed the Lord *fully*. He not only abolished all idolatrous usages, but kept God's commandments, and in every thing made conscience of his duty.

II. His great prosperity, v. 7, 8. He was with God, and then God was with him, and, having the special presence of God with him, *he prospered whithersoever he went*, had wonderful success in all his enterprises, in his wars, his buildings, and

especially his reformation, for that good work was carried on with less difficulty than he could have expected. Those that do God's work with an eye to his glory, and with confidence in his strength, may expect to prosper in it. Great is the truth and will prevail. Finding himself successful, 1. He threw off the yoke of the king of Assyria, which his father had basely submitted to. This is called *rebellling against him*, because so the king of Assyria called it; but it was really an asserting of the just rights of his crown, which it was not in the power of Ahaz to alienate. If it was imprudent to make this bold struggle so soon, yet I see not that it was, as some think, unjust; when he had thrown out the idolatry of the nations he might well throw off the yoke of their oppression. The surest way to liberty is to serve God. 2. He made a vigorous attack upon the Philistines, and smote them even unto Gaza, both the country villages and the fortified town, *the tower of the watchmen and the fenced cities*, reducing those places which they had made themselves masters of in his father's time, 2 Chr. 28:18. When he had purged out the corruptions his father had brought in he might expect to recover the possessions his father had lost. Of his victories over the Philistines Isaiah prophesied, Isa. 14:28, etc.

Verses 9-16

The kingdom of Assyria had now grown considerable, though we never read of it till the last reign. Such changes there are in the affairs of nations and families: those that have been despicable become formidable, and those, on the contrary, are brought low that have made a great noise and figure. We have here an account,

I. Of the success of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, against Israel, his besieging Samaria (v. 9), taking it (v. 10), and carrying the people into captivity (v. 11), with the reason why God brought this judgment upon them (v. 12): *Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God*. This was related more largely in the foregoing chapter, but it is here repeated, 1. As that which stirred up Hezekiah and his people to purge out idolatry with so much zeal, because they saw the ruin which it brought upon Israel. When their neighbour's house was on fire, and their own in danger, it was time to cast away the accursed thing. 2. As that which Hezekiah much lamented, but had not strength to prevent. Though the ten tribes had revolted from, and often been vexatious to, the house of David, no longer ago than in his father's reign, yet being of the seed of Israel he could not be glad at their calamities. 3. As that which laid Hezekiah and his kingdom open to the king of Assyria, and made it much more easy for him to invade the land. It is said of the ten tribes here that they would neither *hear* God's commandments nor *do* them, v. 12. Many will be content to give God the hearing that will give him no more (Eze. 33:31), but these, being resolved not to do their duty, did not care to hear of it.

II. Of the attempt of Sennacherib, the succeeding king of Assyria, against Judah, in which he was encouraged by his predecessor's success against Israel, whose honours he would vie with and whose victories he would push forward. The descent he made upon Judah was a great calamity to that kingdom, by which God would try the faith of Hezekiah and chastise the people, who are called *a hypocritical nation* (Isa. 10:6), because they did not comply with Hezekiah's reformation, nor willingly part with their idols, but kept them up in their hearts, and perhaps in their houses, though their high places were removed. Even times of reformation may prove troublesome times, made so by those that oppose it, and then the blame is laid upon the reformers. This calamity will appear great upon Hezekiah if we consider, 1. How much he lost of his country, v. 13.

The king of Assyria took all or most of the fenced cities of Judah, the frontier-towns and the garrisons, and then all the rest fell into his hands of course. The confusion which the country was put into by this invasion is described by the prophet, Isa. 10:28–31. 2. How dearly he paid for his peace. He saw Jerusalem itself in danger of falling into the enemies' hand, as Samaria had done, and was willing to purchase its safety at the expense, (1.) Of a mean submission: "*I have offended* in denying the usual tribute, and am ready to make satisfaction as shall be demanded," v. 14. Where was Hezekiah's courage? Where his confidence in God? Why did he not advise with Isaiah before he sent this crouching message? (2.) Of a vast sum of money-300 talents of silver and thirty of gold (above 200,000*l.*), not to be paid annually, but as a present ransom. To raise this sum, he was forced not only to empty the public treasures (v. 15), but to take the golden plates off from the doors of the temple, and from the pillars, v. 16. Though *the temple sanctified the gold* which he had dedicated, yet, the necessity being urgent, he thought he might make as bold with that as his father David (whom he took for his pattern) did with the show-bread, and that it was neither impious nor imprudent to give a part for the preservation of the whole. His father Ahaz had plundered the temple in contempt of it, 2 Chr. 28:24. He had repaid with interest what his father took; and now, with all due reverence, he only begged leave to borrow it again in an exigency and for a greater good, with a resolution to restore it in full as soon as he should be in a capacity to do so.

Verses 17-37

Here is, I. Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib's army, v. 17. He sent three of his great generals with a great host against Jerusalem. Is this the great king, the king of Assyria? No, never call him so; he is a base, false, perfidious man, and worthy to be made infamous to all ages; let him never be named with honour that could do such a dishonourable thing as this, to take Hezekiah's money, which he gave him upon condition he should withdraw his army, and then, instead of quitting his country according to the agreement, to advance against his capital city, and not send him his money again either. Those are wicked men indeed, and, let them be ever so great, we will call them so, whose principle it is not to make their promises binding any further than is for their interest. Now Hezekiah had too much reason to repent his treaty with Sennacherib, which made him much the poorer and never the safer.

II. Hezekiah, and his princes and people, railed upon by Rabshakeh, the chief speaker of the three generals, and one that had the most satirical genius. He was no doubt instructed what to say by Sennacherib, who intended hereby to pick a new quarrel with Hezekiah. He had promised, upon the receipt of Hezekiah's money, to withdraw his army, and therefore could not for shame make a forcible attack upon Jerusalem immediately; but he sent Rabshakeh to persuade Hezekiah to surrender it, and, if he should refuse, the refusal would serve him for a pretence (and a very poor one) to besiege it, and, if it hold out, to take it by storm. Rabshakeh had the impudence to desire audience of the king himself at the conduit of the upper pool, without the walls; but Hezekiah had the prudence to decline a personal treaty, and sent three commissioners (the prime ministers of state) to hear what he had to say, but with a charge to them not to answer that fool *according to his folly* (v. 36), for they could not convince him, but would certainly provoke him, and Hezekiah had learned of his father David to believe that God would hear when he, *as a deaf man, heard not*, Ps. 38:13–15. One interruption they gave him in his discourse, which was only to desire that he

would speak to them now in the Syrian language, and they would consider what he said and report it to the king, and, if they did not give him a satisfactory answer, then he might appeal to the people, by speaking *in the Jews' language*, v. 26. This was a reasonable request, and agreeable to the custom of treaties, which is that the plenipotentiaries should settle matters between themselves before any thing be made public; but Hilkiah did not consider what an unreasonable man he had to deal with, else he would not have made this request, for it did but exasperate Rabshakeh, and make him the more rude and boisterous, v. 27. Against all the rules of decency and honour, instead of treating with the commissioners, he menaces the soldiery, persuades them to desert or mutiny, threatens if they hold out to reduce the to the last extremities of famine, and then goes on with his discourse, the scope of which is to persuade Hezekiah, and his princes and people, to surrender the city. Observe how, in order to do this,

1. He magnifies his master the king of Assyria. Once and again he calls him *That great king, the king of Assyria*, v. 19, 28.

What an idol did he make of that prince whose creature he was! God is the great King, but Sennacherib was in his eye a little god, and he would possess them with the same veneration for him that he had, and thereby frighten them into a submission to him. But to those who by faith see the King of kings in his power and glory even the king of Assyria looks mean and little.

What are the greatest of men when either they come to compare with God or God comes to contend with them? Ps. 82:6, 7.

2. He endeavours to make them believe that it will be much for their advantage to surrender. If they held out, they must expect no other than to eat their own dung, by reason of the want of provisions, which would be entirely cut off from them by the besiegers; but if they would capitulate, seek his favour with a present and cast themselves upon his mercy, he would give them very good treatment, v. 31. I wonder with what face Rabshakeh could speak of making an agreement with a present when his master had so lately broken the agreement Hezekiah made with him with that great present, v. 14. Can those expect to be trusted that have been so grossly perfidious? But, *Ad populum phaleras—Gild the chain and the vulgar will let you bind them*. He thought to soothe up all with a promise that if they would surrender upon discretion, though they must expect to be prisoners and captives, yet it would really be happy for them to be so. One would wonder he should ever think to prevail by such gross suggestions as these, but that the devil does thus impose upon sinners every day by his temptations. He will needs persuade them, (1.) That their imprisonment would be to their advantage, for they should *eat every man of his own vine* (v. 31); though the property of their estates would be vested in the conquerors, yet they should have the free use of them. But he does not explain it now to them as he would afterwards, that it must be understood just as much, and just as long, as the conqueror pleases. (2.) That their captivity would be much more to their advantage: *I will take you away to a land like your own land*; and what the better would they be for that, when they must have nothing in it to call their own?

3. That which he aims at especially is to convince them that it is to no purpose for them to stand it out: *What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?* So he insults over Hezekiah, v. 19. To the people he says (v. 29), "*Let not Hezekiah deceive you into your own ruin, for he shall not be able to deliver you; you must either bend or break.*" It were well if sinners would submit to the force of this argument, in making their peace with God—That it is *therefore* our wisdom to yield to him, because it is in vain to contend with him: what confidence is that which those trust in who stand it out against him? *Are we stronger than he?*

Or what shall we get by setting briars and thorns before a consuming fire? But Hezekiah was not so helpless and defenceless as Rabshakeh would here represent him. Three things he supposes Hezekiah might trust to, and he endeavours to make out the insufficiency of these:—(1.) His own military preparations: *Thou sayest, I have counsel and strength for the war*; and we find that so he had, 2 Chr. 32:3. But this Rabshakeh turns off with a slight: "*They are but vain words; thou art an unequal match for us*," v. 20. With the greatest haughtiness and disdain imaginable, he challenges him to produce 2000 men of all his people that know how to manage a horse, and will venture to give him 2000 horses if he can. He falsely insinuates that Hezekiah has no men, or none fit to be soldiers, v. 23. Thus he thinks to run him down with confidence and banter, and will lay him any wager that one captain of the least of his master's servants is able to baffle him and all his forces. (2.) His alliance with Egypt. He supposes that Hezekiah trusts to Egypt for chariots and horsemen (v. 24), because the king of Israel had done so, and of this confidence he truly says, It is *a broken reed* (v. 21), it will not only fail a man when he leans on it and expects it to bear his weight, but *it will run into his hand and pierce it*, and rend his shoulder, as the prophet further illustrates this similitude, with application to Egypt, Eze. 29:6, 7. So is the king of Egypt, says he; and truly so had the king of Assyria been to Ahaz, who trusted in him, but he *distressed him, and strengthened him not*, 2 Chr. 28:20. Those that trust to any arm of flesh will find it no better than a broken reed; but God is the rock of ages. (3.) His interest in God and relation to him. This was indeed the confidence in which Hezekiah trusts, v. 22. He supported himself by depending on the power and promise of God; with this he encouraged himself and his people (v. 30): *The Lord will surely deliver us*, and again v. 32. This Rabshakeh was sensible was their great stay, and therefore he was most large in his endeavours to shake this, as David's enemies, who used all the arts they had to drive him from his confidence in God (Ps. 3:2; 11:1), and thus did Christ's enemies, Mt. 27:43. Three things Rabshakeh suggested to discourage their confidence in God, and they were all false:—[1.] That Hezekiah had forfeited God's protection, and thrown himself out of it, by *destroying the high places and the altars*, v. 22. Here he measures the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, who delighted in the multitude of altars and temples, and concludes that Hezekiah has given a great offence to the God of Israel, in confining his people to one altar: thus is one of the best deeds he ever did in his life misconstrued as impious and profane, by one that did not, or would not, know the law of the God of Israel. If that be represented by ignorant and malicious men as evil and a provocation to God which is really good and pleasing to him, we must not think it strange. If this was to be sacrilegious, Hezekiah would ever be so. [2.] That God had given orders for the destruction of Jerusalem at this time (v. 25): *Have I now come up without the Lord?* This is all banter and rhodomontade. He did not himself think he had any commission from God to do what he did (by whom should he have it?) but he made this pretence to amuse and terrify the *people that were on the wall*. If he had any colour at all for what he said, it might be taken from the notice which perhaps he had had, by the writings of the prophets, of the hand of God in the destruction of the ten tribes, and he thought he had as good a warrant for the seizing of Jerusalem as of Samaria. Many that have fought against God have pretended commissions from him. [3.] That if Jehovah, the God of Israel, should undertake to protect them from the king of Assyria, yet he was notable to do it. With this blasphemy he concluded his speech (v. 33–35), comparing the God of Israel with the gods of the nations whom he had conquered and putting him upon the level with them, and concluding that because

they could not defend and deliver their worshippers the God of Israel could not defend and deliver his. See here, *First*, His pride. When he conquered a city he reckoned himself to have conquered its gods, and valued himself mightily upon it. His high opinion of the idols made him have a high opinion of himself as too hard for them. *Secondly*, His profaneness. The God of Israel was not a local deity, but the God of the whole earth, the only living and true God, the ancient of days, and had often proved himself to be above all gods; yet he makes no more of him than of the upstart fictitious gods of Hamath and Arpad, unfairly arguing that the gods (as some now say the priests) of all religions are the same, and himself above them all. The tradition of the Jews is that Rabshakeh was an apostate Jew, which made him so ready in the Jews' language; if so, his ignorance of the God of Israel was the less excusable and his enmity the less strange, for apostates are commonly the most bitter and spiteful enemies, witness Julian. A great deal of art and management, it must be owned, there were in this speech of Rabshakeh, but, withal, a great deal of pride, malice, falsehood, and blasphemy. One grain of sincerity would have been worth all this wit and rhetoric.

Lastly, We are told what the commissioners on Hezekiah's part did. 1. They held their peace, not for want of something to say both on God's behalf and Hezekiah's: they might easily and justly have upbraided him with his master's treachery and breach of faith, and have asked him, What religion encourages you to hope that such conduct will prosper? At least they might have given that grave hint which Ahab gave to Benhadad's like insolent demands—*Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast as though he had put it off*. But the king had commanded them not to answer him, and they observed their instructions. There is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak, and there are those to whom to offer any thing religious or rational is to cast pearls before swine. What can be said to a madman? It is probable that their silence made Rabshakeh yet more proud and secure, and so his heart was lifted up and hardened to his destruction. 2. They rent their clothes in detestation of his blasphemy and in grief for the despised afflicted condition of Jerusalem, the reproach of which was a burden to them. 3. They faithfully reported the matter to the king, their master, and *told him the words of Rabshakeh*, that he might consider what was to be done, what course they should take and what answer they should return to Rabshakeh's summons.

Chapter 19

Jerusalem's great distress we read of in the foregoing chapter, and left it besieged, insulted, threatened, terrified, and just ready to be swallowed up by the Assyrian army. But in this chapter we have an account of its glorious deliverance, not by sword or bow, but by prayer and prophecy, and by the hand of an angel. I. Hezekiah, in great concern, sent to the prophet Isaiah, to desire his prayers (v. 1-5) and received from him an answer of peace (v. 6, 7). II. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah to fright him into a surrender (v. 8-13). III. Hezekiah thereupon, by a very solemn prayer, recommended his case to God, the righteous Judge, and begged help from him (v. 14-19). IV. God, by Isaiah, sent him a very comfortable message, assuring him of deliverance (v. 20-34). V. The army of the Assyrians was all cut off by an angel and Sennacherib himself slain by his own sons (v. 35-37). And so God glorified himself and saved his people.

Verses 1-7

The contents of Rabshakeh's speech being brought to Hezekiah, one would have expected (and it is likely Rabshakeh did expect) that he would call a council of war and it would be debated whether it was best to capitulate or no. Before the siege, he had *taken counsel with his princes and his mighty men*, 2 Chr. 32:3. But that would not do now; his greatest relief is that he has a God to go to, and what passed between him and his God on this occasion we have here an account of.

I. Hezekiah discovered a deep concern at the dishonour done to God by Rabshakeh's blasphemy. When he heard it, though at second hand, he *rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth*, v. 1. Good men were wont to do so when they heard of any reproach cast on God's name; and great men must not think it any disparagement to them to sympathize with the injured honour of the great God. Royal robes are not too good to be rent, nor royal flesh too good to be clothed with sackcloth, in humiliation for indignities done to God and for the perils and terrors of his Jerusalem. To this God now called, and was displeased with those who were not thus affected. Isa. 22:12-14, *Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep*, though it was a *day of trouble and perplexity in the valley of vision* (v. 5), which refers to this very event. The king was in sackcloth, but many of his subjects were in soft clothing.

II. He *went up to the house of the Lord*, according to the example of the psalmist, who, when he was grieved at the pride and prosperity of the wicked, *went into the sanctuary of God* and there *understood their end*, Ps. 73:17. He went to the house of God, to meditate and pray, and get his spirit into a sedate composed frame, after this agitation. He was not considering what answer to return to Rabshakeh, but refers the matter to God. "*Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.*"—Herbert. In the house of the Lord he found a place both of rest and refuge, a treasury, a magazine, a council-chamber, and all he needed, all in God. Note, When the church's enemies are very daring and threatening it is the wisdom and duty of the church's friends to apply to God, appeal to him, and leave their cause with him.

III. He sent to the prophet Isaiah, by honourable messengers, in token of the great respect he had for him, to desire his prayers, v. 2-4. Eliakim and Shebna were two of those that had heard the words of Rabshakeh and were the better able both to acquaint and to affect Isaiah with the case. The elders of the priests were themselves to pray for the people in time of trouble (Joel

2:17); but they must go to engage Isaiah's prayers, because he could pray better and had a better interest in heaven. The messengers were to go in sackcloth, because they were to represent the king, who was so clothed.

1. Their errand to Isaiah was, "*Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left*, that is, for Judah, which is but a remnant now that the ten tribes are gone—for Jerusalem, which is but a remnant now that the defenced cities of Judah are taken." Note, (1.) It is very desirable, and what we should be desirous of when we are in trouble, to have the prayers of our friends for us. In begging to have them we honour God, we honour prayer, and we honour our brethren. (2.) When we desire the prayers of others for us we must not think we are excused from praying for ourselves. When Hezekiah sent to Isaiah to pray for him he himself *went into the house of the Lord* to offer up his own prayers. (3.) Those who speak from God to us we should in a particular manner desire to speak to God for us. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. 20:7. The great prophet is the great intercessor. (4.) Those are likely to prevail with God that *lift up* their prayers, that is, that lift up their hearts in prayer. (5.) When the interests of God's church are brought very low, so that there is but a remnant left, few friends, and those weak and at a loss, then it is time to *lift up our prayer for that remnant*.

2. Two things are urged to Isaiah, to engage his prayers for them:—(1.) Their fears of the enemy (v. 3): "He is insolent and haughty; it is *a day of rebuke and blasphemy*. We are despised. God is dishonoured. Upon this account it is a day of trouble. Never were such a king and kingdom so trampled on and abused as we are: *our soul is exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud*, and it is *a sword in our bones* to hear them reproach our confidence in God, and say, Where is now your God? and, which is worst of all, we see not which way we can help ourselves and get clear of the reproach. Our cause is good, our people are faithful; but we are quite overpowered with numbers. The children are brought to the birth; now is the time, the critical moment, when, if ever, we must be relieved. One successful blow given to the enemy would accomplish our wishes. But, alas! we are not able to give it: *There is not strength to bring forth*. Our case is as deplorable, and calls for as speedy help, as that of a woman in travail, that is quite spent with her throes, so that she has not strength to bear the child. Compare with this Hos. 13:13. We are ready to perish; *if thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon us and help us*." (2.) Their hopes in God. To him they look, on him they depend, to appear for them. One word from him will turn the scale, and save the sinking remnant. If he but reprove the words of Rabshakeh (that is, disprove them, v. 4)—if he undertake to convince and confound the blasphemer—all will be well. And this they trust he will do, not for their merit's sake, but for his own honour's sake, because he has *reproached the living God*, by levelling him with deaf and dumb idols. They have reason to think the issue will be good, for they can interest God in the quarrel. Ps. 74:22, *Arise O God! plead thy own cause*. "He is the Lord thy God," say they to Isaiah—"*thine*, whose glory thou art concerned for, and whose favour thou art interested in. He has heard and known the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh, and therefore, it may be, he will hear and rebuke them. We hope he will. Help us with thy prayers to bring the cause before him, and then we are content to leave it with him."

IV. God, by Isaiah, sent to Hezekiah, to assure him that he would glorify himself in the ruin of the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, not to enquire concerning the event, as many did that sent to the prophets (*Shall I recover?* or the like), but to desire his assistance in his duty. It was this that he was solicitous about; and therefore God let him know what the event should be, in

recompence of his care to do his duty, v. 6, 7. 1. God interested himself in the cause: *They have blasphemed me*. 2. He encouraged Hezekiah, who was much dismayed: *Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard; they are but words (though swelling and fiery words), and words are but wind*. 3. He promised to frighten the king of Assyria worse than Rabshakeh had frightened him: *"I will send a blast upon him (that pestilential breath which killed his army), upon which terrors shall seize him and drive him into his own country, where death shall meet him."* This short threatening from the mouth of God would do execution, when all the impotent menaces that came from Rabshakeh's mouth would vanish into air.

Verses 8-19

Rabshakeh, having delivered his message and received no answer (whether he took this silence for a consent or a slight does not appear), left his army before Jerusalem, under the command of the other generals, and went himself to attend the king his master for further orders. He found him besieging Libnah, a city that had revolted from Judah, ch. 8:22. Whether he had taken Lachish or no is not certain; some think he departed from it because he found the taking of it impracticable, v. 8. However, he was now alarmed with the rumour that the king of the Cushites, who bordered upon the Arabians, was coming out against him with a great army, v. 9. This made him very desirous to gain Jerusalem with all speed. To take it by force would cost him more time and men than he could well spare, and therefore he renewed his attack upon Hezekiah to persuade him tamely to surrender it. Having found him an easy man once (ch. 18:14), when he said, *That which thou puttest on me I will bear*, he hoped again to frighten him into a submission, but in vain. Here,

I. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah, a railing letter, a blaspheming letter, to persuade him to surrender Jerusalem, because it would be to no purpose for him to think of standing it out. His letter is to the same purport with Rabshakeh's speech; there is nothing new offered in it. Rabshakeh had said to the people, *Let not Hezekiah deceive you*, ch. 18:29. Sennacherib writes to Hezekiah, *Let not thy God deceive thee*, v. 10. Those that have the God of *Jacob for their help, and whose hope is in the Lord their God*, need not fear being deceived by him, as the heathen were by their gods. To terrify Hezekiah, and drive him from his anchor, he magnifies himself and his own achievements. See how proudly he boasts, 1. Of the lands he had conquered (v. 11): *All lands*, and destroyed utterly! How are the mole-hills of his victories swelled to mountains! So far was he from destroying all lands that at this time the land of Cush, and Tirhakah its king, were a terror to him. What vast hyperboles may one expect in proud men's praises of themselves! 2. Of the gods he had conquered, v. 12. "Each vanquished nation and its gods, which were so far from being able to deliver them that they fell with them: and shall thy God deliver thee?" 3. Of the kings he had conquered (v. 13), the *king of Hamath and the king of Arpad*. Whether he means the prince or the idol, he means to make himself appear greater than either, and therefore very formidable, and the *terror of the mighty in the land of the living*.

II. Hezekiah encloses this in another letter, a praying letter, a believing letter, and sends it to the King of kings, who judges among the gods. Hezekiah was not so haughty as not to receive the letter, though we may suppose the superscription did not give him his due titles; when he had received it he was not so careless as not to read it; when he had read it he was not in such a passion as to write an answer to it in the same provoking language; but he immediately went up to the temple, presented himself, and then *spread the letter before the Lord* (v. 14), not as if God needed to have the letter shown to him (he knew what

was in it before Hezekiah did), but hereby he signified that he acknowledged God in all his ways,—that he desired not to aggravate the injuries his enemies did him nor to make them appear worse than they were, but desired they might be set in a true light,—and that he referred himself to God, and his righteous judgment, upon the whole matter. Hereby likewise he would affect himself in the prayer he came to the temple to make; and we have need of all possible helps to quicken us in that duty. In the prayer which Hezekiah prayed over this letter, 1. He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed (v. 15), calls him *the God of Israel*, because Israel was his peculiar people, and *the God that dwelt between the cherubim*, because there was the peculiar residence of his glory upon earth; but he gives glory to him as *the God of the whole earth*, and not, as Sennacherib fancied him to be, *the God of Israel only*, and confined to the temple. "Let them say what they will, thou art sovereign Lord, for thou art the God, the God of gods, sole Lord, even thou alone, universal Lord *of all the kingdoms of the earth*, and rightful Lord, *for thou hast made heaven and earth*. Being Creator of all, by an incontestable title thou art owner and ruler of all." 2. He appeals to God concerning the insolence and profaneness of Sennacherib (v. 16): "*Lord, hear; Lord, see*. Here it is under his own hand; here it is in black and white." Had Hezekiah only been abused, he would have passed it by; but it is God, the living God, that is reproached, the jealous God. *Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name?* 3. He owns Sennacherib's triumphs over the gods of the heathen, but distinguishes between them and the God of Israel (v. 17, 18): He has indeed *cast their gods into the fire*; for *they were no gods*, unable to help either themselves or their worshipers, and therefore no wonder that he has destroyed them; and, in destroying them, though he knew it not, he really served the justice and jealousy of the God of Israel, who has determined to extirpate all the gods of the heathen. But those are deceived who think they can therefore be too hard for him. He is none of the gods whom men's hands have made, but he has himself made all things, Ps. 115:3, 4. 4. He prays that God will now glorify himself in the defeat of Sennacherib and the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands (v. 19): "*Now therefore save us*; for if we be conquered, as other lands are, they will say that thou art conquered, as the gods of those lands were: but, Lord, distinguish thyself, by distinguishing us, and let all the world know, and be made to confess, that *thou art the Lord God*, the self-existent sovereign God, *even thou only*, and that all pretenders are vanity and a lie." Note, The best pleas in prayer are those which are taken from God's honour; and therefore the Lord's prayer begins with *Hallowed be thy name*, and concludes with *Thine is the glory*.

Verses 20-34

We have here the gracious copious answer which God gave to Hezekiah's prayer. The message which he sent him by the same hand (v. 6, 7), one would think, was an answer sufficient to his prayer; but, that he might have strong consolation, he was encouraged by two immutable things, *in which it was impossible for God to lie*, Heb. 6:18. In general, God assured him that his prayer was heard, his prayer against Sennacherib, v. 20. Note, The case of those that have the prayers of God's people against them is miserable. For, if the oppressed cry to God against the oppressor, *he will hear*, Ex. 22:23. God hears and answers, *hears with the saving strength of his right hand*, Ps. 20:6.

This message bespeaks two things:—

I. Confusion and shame to Sennacherib and his forces. It is here foretold that he should be humbled and broken. The prophet

elegantly directs his speech to him, as he does, Isa. 10:5. *O Assyrian! the rod of my anger.* Not that this message was sent to him, but what is here said to him he was made to know by the event. Providence spoke it to him with a witness; and perhaps his own heart was made to whisper this to him: for God has more ways than one of speaking to sinners in his wrath, so as to *vex them in his sore displeasure*, Ps. 2:5. Sennacherib is here represented,

1. As the scorn of Jerusalem, v. 21. He thought himself the terror of the daughter of Zion, that chaste and beautiful virgin, and that by his threats he could force her to submit to him: "But, being a virgin in her Father's house and under his protection, she defies thee, despises thee, laughs thee to scorn. Thy impotent malice is ridiculous; he that sits in heaven laughs at thee, and therefore so do those that abide under his shadow." By this word God intended to silence the fears of Hezekiah and his people. Though to an eye of sense the enemy looked formidable, to an eye of faith he looked despicable.
2. As an enemy to God; and that was enough to make him miserable. Hezekiah pleaded this: "Lord, he has reproached thee," v. 16. "He has," saith God, "and I take it as against myself (v. 22): *Whom hast thou reproached?* Is it not the Holy One of Israel, whose honour is dear to him, and who has power to vindicate it, which the gods of the heathen have not?" *Meno me impune lacesset—No one shall provoke me with impunity.*
3. As a proud vainglorious fool, that spoke *great swelling words of vanity*, and *boasted of a false gift*, by his boasts, as well as by his threats, reproaching the Lord. For, (1.) He magnified his own achievements out of measure and quite above what really they were (v. 23, 24): *Thou hast said* so and so. This was not in the letter he wrote, but God let Hezekiah know that he not only saw what was written there, but heard what he said elsewhere, probably in the speeches he made to his councils or armies. Note, God takes notice of the boasts of proud men, and will call them to an account, that he *may look upon them and abuse them*, Job 40:11. What a mighty figure does Sennacherib think he makes! Driving his chariots to the tops of the highest mountains, forcing his way through woods and rivers, breaking through all difficulties, making himself master of all he had a mind to. Nothing could stand before him or be withheld from him; no hills too high for him to climb, no trees too strong for him to fell, no waters too deep for him to dry up; as if he had the power of a God, to speak and it is done. (2.) He took to himself the glory of doing these great things, whereas they were all *the Lord's doing*, v. 25, 26. Sennacherib, in his letter, had appealed to what Hezekiah had heard (v. 11): *Thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done*; but, in answer to that, he is reminded of what God has done for Israel of old, drying up the Red Sea, leading them through the wilderness, planting them in Canaan. "What are all thy doings to these? And as for the desolations thou hast made in the earth, and particularly in Judah, thou art but the instrument in God's hand, a mere tool: it is *I that have brought it to pass*. I gave thee thy power, gave thee thy success, and made thee what thou art, raised thee up to lay waste fenced cities and so to punish them for their wickedness, and *therefore their inhabitants were of small power.*" What a foolish insolent thing was it for him to exalt himself above God, and against God, upon that which he had done by him and under him. Sennacherib's boasts here are expounded in Isa. 10:13, 14, *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom*, etc.; and they are answered (v. 15), *Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?* It is surely absurd for the fly upon the wheel to say, What a dust do I make! or for the sword in the hand to say, What execution I do! If God be the principal agent in all that is done, boasting is for ever excluded.

4. As under the check and rebuke of that God whom he blasphemed. All his motions were, (1.) Under the divine cognizance (v. 27): "*I have thy abode, and what thou dost secretly devise and design, thy going out and coming in, marches and counter-marches, and thy rage against me and my people, the tumult of thy passions, the tumult of thy preparations, the noise and bluster thou makest: I know it all.*" That was more than Hezekiah did, who wished for intelligence of the enemy's motions; but what need was there for this when the eye of God was a constant spy upon him? 2 Chr. 16:9. (2.) Under the divine control (v. 28): "*I will put my hook in thy nose, thou great Leviathan (Job 41:1, 2), my bridle in thy jaws, thou great Behemoth. I will restrain thee, manage thee, turn thee where I please, send thee home like a fool as thou camest, re infecta—disappointed of thy aim.*" Note, It is a great comfort to all the church's friends that God has a hook in the nose and a bridle in the jaws of all her enemies, can make even their wrath to serve and praise him and then restrain the remainder of it. *Here shall its proud waves be stayed.*

II. Salvation and joy to Hezekiah and his people. This shall be a sign to them of God's favour, and that he is reconciled to them, and *his anger is turned away* (Isa. 12:1), a wonder in their eyes (for so a sign sometimes signifies), a token for good, and an earnest of the further mercy God has in store for them, that a good issue shall be put to their present distress in every respect.

1. Provisions were scarce and dear; and what should they do for food? The fruits of the earth were devoured by the Assyrian army, Isa. 32:9, 10, etc. Why, they shall not only dwell in the land, but *verily they shall be fed*. If God save them, he will not starve them, nor let them die by famine, when they have escaped the sword: "*Eat you this year that which groweth of itself, and you shall find enough of that. Did the Assyrians reap what you sowed? You shall reap what you did not sow.*" But the next year was the sabbatical year, when the land was to rest, and they must neither sow nor reap. What must they do that year? Why, *Jehovah-jireh—The Lord will provide*. God's blessing shall save them seed and labour, and, that year too, the voluntary productions of the earth shall serve to maintain them, to remind them that the earth brought forth before there was a man to till it, Gen. 1:11. And then, the third year, their husbandry should return into its former channel, and they should sow and reap as they used to do. 2. The country was laid waste, families were broken up and scattered, and all was in confusion; how should it be otherwise when it was over-run by such an army? As to this, it is promised that *the remnant that has escaped of the house of Judah* (that is, of the country people) shall yet again be planted in their own habitations, upon their own estates, shall take root there, shall increase and grow rich, v. 30. See how their prosperity is described: it is *taking root downwards, and bearing fruit upwards*, being well fixed and well provided for themselves, and then doing good to others. Such is the prosperity of the soul: it is taking root downwards by faith in Christ, and then being fruitful in fruits of righteousness. 3. The city was shut up, none went out or came in; but now the remnant in Jerusalem and Zion shall go forth freely, and there shall be none to hinder them, or make them afraid, v. 31. Great destruction had been made both in city and country, but in both there was a remnant that escaped, which typified the saved remnant of Israelites indeed (as appears by comparing Isa. 10:22, 23, which speaks of this very event, with Rom. 9:27, 28), and they shall go forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 4. The Assyrians were advancing towards Jerusalem, and would in a little time besiege it in form, and it was in great danger of falling into their hands. But it is here promised that the siege they feared should be prevented,—that, though the enemy had now (as it should

seem) encamped before the city, yet they should never *come into the city*, no, nor so much as *shoot an arrow* into it (v. 32, 33),—that he should be forced to retire with shame, and a thousand times to repent his undertaking. God himself undertakes to defend the city (v. 34), and that person, that place, cannot but be safe, the protection of which he undertakes. 5. The honour and truth of God are engaged for the doing of all this. These are great things, but how will they be effected? Why, *the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this*, v. 31. He is Lord of hosts, has all creatures at his beck, therefore he is able to do it; he is *jealous for Jerusalem with great jealousy* (Zec. 1:14); having espoused her a chaste virgin to himself, he will not suffer he to be abused, v. 21. "You have reason to think yourselves unworthy that such great things should be done for you; but God's own zeal will do it." His zeal, (1.) For his own honour (v. 34): "I will do it for my own sake, to make myself an everlasting name." God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself. (2.) For his own truth: "I will do it for my servant David's sake; not for the sake of his merit, but the promise made to him and the covenant made with him, those sure mercies of David." Thus all the deliverances of the church are wrought for the sake of Christ, the Son of David.

Verses 35-37

Sometimes it was long ere prophecies were accomplished and promises performed; but here the word was no sooner spoken than the work was done.

I. The army of Assyria was entirely routed. That night which immediately followed the sending of this message to Hezekiah, when the enemy had just set down before the city and were preparing (as we now say) to open the trenches, that night was the main body of their army slain upon the spot by an angel, v. 35. Hezekiah had not force sufficient to sally out upon them and attack their camp, nor would God do it by sword or bow; but he sent his angel, a destroying angel, in the dead of the night, to make an assault upon them, which their sentinels, though ever so wakeful, could neither discover nor resist. It was *not by the sword of a mighty man or of a mean man*, that is, not of any man at all, but of an angel, that the Assyrians army was to fall (Isa. 31:8), such an angel as slew the first-born of Egypt. Josephus says it was done by a pestilential disease, which was instant death to them. The number slain was very great, 185,000 men, and Rabshakeh, it is likely, among the rest. When the besieged *arose, early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses*, scarcely a living man among them. Some think the 76th Psalm was penned on this occasion, where we read that the *stout-hearted were spoiled and slept their sleep*, their last, their long sleep, v. 5. See how great, in power and might, the holy angels are, when one angel, in one night, could make so great a slaughter. See how weak the mightiest of men are before almighty God: who ever hardened himself against him and prospered? The pride and blasphemy of the king are punished by the destruction of his army. All these lives are sacrificed to God's glory and Zion's safety. The prophet shows that *therefore* God suffered this vast rendezvous to be made, *that they might be gathered as sheaves into the floor*, Mic. 4:12, 13.

II. The king of Assyria was hereby put into the utmost confusion. Ashamed to see himself, after all his proud boasts, thus defeated and disabled to pursue his conquests and secure what he had (for this, we may suppose, was the flower of his army), and continually afraid of falling under the like stroke himself, *He departed, and went, and returned*; the manner of the expression intimates the great disorder and distraction of mind he was in, v. 36. And it was not long before God cut him off

too, by the hands of *two of his own sons*, v. 37. 1. Those that did it were very wicked, to kill their own father (whom they were bound to protect) and in the act of his devotion; monstrous villany! But, 2. God was righteous in it. Justly are the sons suffered to rebel against their father that begat them, when he was in rebellion against the God that made him. Those whose children are undutiful to them ought to consider whether they have not been so to their Father in heaven. The God of Israel had done enough to convince him that he was the only true God, whom therefore he ought to worship; yet he persists in his idolatry, and seeks to his false god for protection against a God of irresistible power. Justly is his blood mingled with his sacrifices, since he will not be convinced by such a plain and dear-bought demonstration of his folly in worshipping idols. His sons that murdered him were suffered to escape, and no pursuit was made after them, his subjects perhaps being weary of the government of so proud a man and thinking themselves well rid of him. And his sons would be looked upon as the more excusable in what they had done if it be true (as bishop Patrick suggested) that he was now vowing to sacrifice them to his god, so that it was for their own preservation that they sacrificed him. His successor was another son, *Esarhaddon*, who (as it should seem) did not aim, like his father, to enlarge his conquests, but rather to improve them; for he it was that first sent colonies of Assyrians to inhabit the country of Samaria, though it is mentioned before (ch. 17:24), as appears, Ezra 4:2, where the Samaritans say it was *Esarhaddon that brought them thither*.

Chapter 20

In this chapter we have, I. Hezekiah's sickness, and his recovery from that, in answer to prayer, in performance of a promise, in the use of means, and confirmed with a sign (v. 1–11). II. Hezekiah's sin, and his recovery from that (v. 12–19). In both of these, Isaiah was God's messenger to him. III. The conclusion of his reign (v. 20, 21).

Verses 1-11

The historian, having shown us blaspheming Sennacherib destroyed in the midst of the prospects of life, here shows us praying Hezekiah delivered in the midst of the prospects of death—the days of the former shortened, of the latter prolonged.

I. Here is Hezekiah's sickness. *In those days*, that is, in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem; for he reigning *reigned?* in all twenty-nine years, and surviving this fifteen years, this must be in his fourteenth year, and so was that, ch. 18:13. Some think it was at the time that the Assyrian army was besieging the city or preparing for it, because God promises (v. 6): *I will defend the city*, which promise was afterwards repeated, when the danger came to be most imminent, ch. 19:34. Others think it was soon after the defeat of Sennacherib; and then it shows us the uncertainty of all our comforts in this world. Hezekiah, in the midst of his triumphs in the favour of God, and over the forces of his enemies, is seized with sickness, and under the arrest of death. We must therefore always rejoice with trembling. It should seem he was sick of the plague, for we read of the boil or plague-sore, v. 7. The same disease which was killing to the Assyrians was trying to him; God took it from him, and put it upon his enemies. Neither greatness nor goodness can exempt us from sickness, from sore and mortal sicknesses. Hezekiah, lately favoured of heaven above most men, yet is sick unto death—in the midst of his days (under forty) and yet sick and dying; and perhaps he was the more apprehensive of its being fatal to him because his father died when he was about his age, two or three years younger. "In the midst of life we are in death."

II. Warning brought him to prepare for death. It is brought by Isaiah, who had been twice, as stated in the former chapter, a messenger of good tidings to him. We cannot expect to receive from God's prophets any other than what they have received from the Lord, and we must welcome that, be it pleasing or displeasing. The prophet tells him, 1. That his disease is mortal, and, if he be not recovered by a miracle of mercy, will certainly be fatal: *Thou shalt die, and not live*. 2. That therefore he must, with all speed, get ready for death: *Set thy house in order*. This we should feel highly concerned to do when we are in health, but are most loudly called to do when we come to be sick. Set the heart in order by renewed acts of repentance, and faith, and resignation to God, with cheerful farewells to this world and welcomes to another; and, if not done before (which is the best and wisest course), set the house in order, make thy will, settle thy estate, put thy affairs in the best posture thou canst, for the ease of those that shall come after thee. Isaiah speaks not to Hezekiah of his *kingdom*, only of his *house*. David, being a prophet, had authority to appoint who should reign after him, but other kings did not pretend to bequeath their crowns as part of their goods and chattels.

III. His prayer hereupon: *He prayed unto the Lord*, v. 2. Is any sick? Let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray. Hezekiah had found, as recorded in the foregoing chapter, that it was not in vain to wait upon God, but that the prayers of

faith bring in answers of peace; therefore will he *call upon God as long as he lives*. Happy experiences of the prevalency of prayer are engagements and encouragements to continue instant in prayer. He had now received the sentence of death within himself, and, if it was reversible, it must be reversed by prayer. When God purposes mercy he will, *for this, be enquired of*, Eze. 36:37. We have not if we ask not, or ask amiss. If the sentence was irreversible, yet prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we fetch in strength and grace from God to enable us to finish well. Observe,

1. The circumstances of this prayer. (1.) He *turned his face to the wall*, probably as he lay in his bed. This he did perhaps for privacy; he could not retire to his closet as he used to do, but he retired as well as he could, turned from the company that were about him, to converse with God. When we cannot be so private as we would be in our devotions, nor perform them with the usual outward expressions of reverence and solemnity, yet we must not therefore omit them, but compose ourselves to them as well as we can. Or, as some think, he turned his face towards the temple, to show how willingly he would have gone up thither, to pray this prayer (as he did, ch. 19:1, 14), if he had been able, and remembering what encouragements were given to all the prayers that should be made in or towards that house. Christ is our temple; to him we must have an eye in all our prayers, for no man, no service, *comes to the Father but by him*. (2.) He *wept sorely*. Some gather from this that he was unwilling to die. It is in the nature of man to have some dread of the separation of soul and body, and it was not strange if the Old-Testament saints, to whom another world was but darkly revealed, were not so willing to leave this as Paul and other New-Testament saints were. There was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case: he was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which he feared would, through the corruption of the people, fall to the ground, if he should die. If this was before the defeat of the Assyrian army, as some think, he might therefore be loth to die, because his kingdom was in imminent danger of being ruined. However, it does not appear that he had now any son: Manasseh, that succeeded him, was not born till three years after; and, if he should die childless, both the peace of his kingdom and the promise to David would be in danger. But perhaps these were only tears of importunity, and expressions of a lively affection in prayer. Jacob wept and made supplication; and our blessed Saviour, though most willing to die, yet offered up strong cries, with tears, to him whom he knew to be *able to save him*, Heb. 5:7. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in *that* we find nothing that intimates him to have been under any of that fear of death which has either bondage or torment.

2. The prayer itself: "*Remember now, O Lord! how I have walked before thee in truth*"; and either spare me to live, that I may continue thus to walk, if, if my work be done, receive me to that glory which thou hast prepared for those that have thus walked." Observe here, (1.) The description of Hezekiah's piety. He had had his conversation in the world with right intentions ("I have walked before thee, as under thy eye and with an eye ever towards thee"), from a right principle ("*in truth, and with an upright heart*"), and by a right rule—"I have done that which is good in thy sight." (2.) The comfort he now had in reflecting upon it; it made his sick-bed easy. Note, The testimony of conscience for us that we have walked with God in our integrity will be much our support and rejoicing when we come to look death in the face, 2 Co. 1:12. (3.) The humble mention he makes of it to God. *Lord, remember it now*; not as if God needed to be put in mind of any thing by us (he is greater than our hearts, and knows all things), or as if the reward were of debt, and might be demanded as due (it is Christ's righteousness only that is the

purchase of mercy and grace); but our own sincerity may be pleaded as the condition of the covenant which God has wrought in us: "It is the work of thy own hands. Lord, own it." Hezekiah does not pray, "Lord, spare me," or, "Lord, take me; God's will be done;" but, *Lord, remember me; whether I live or die, let me be thine.*

IV. The answer which God immediately gave to this prayer of Hezekiah. The prophet had got but to the middle court when he was sent back with another message to Hezekiah (v. 4, 5), to tell him that he should recover; not that there is with God yea and nay, or that he ever says and unsays; but upon Hezekiah's prayer, which he foresaw and which his Spirit inclined him to, God did that for him which otherwise he would not have done. God here calls Hezekiah *the captain of his people*, to intimate that he would relieve him for his people's sake, because, in this time of war, they could ill spare such a captain: he calls himself *the God of David*, to intimate that he would relieve him out of a regard to the covenant made with David and the promise that he would always ordain a lamp for him. In this answer, 1. God honours his prayers by the notice he takes of them and the reference he has to them in this message: *I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears.* Prayers that have much life and affection in them are in a special manner pleasing to God. 2. God exceeds his prayers; he only begged that God would remember his integrity, but God here promises (1.) To restore him from his illness: *I will heal thee.* Diseases are his servants; as they go where he sends them, so they come when he remands them. Mt. 8:8, 9. *I am the Lord that healeth thee*, Ex. 15:26. (2.) To restore him to such a degree of health that *on the third day he should go up to the house of the Lord*, to return thanks. God knew Hezekiah's heart, how dearly he loved the habitation of God's house and the place where his honour dwelt, and that as soon as he was well he would go to attend on public ordinances; thitherward he turned his face when he was sick, and thitherward he would turn his feet when he was recovered; and therefore, because nothing would please him better, he promises him this, *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.* The man whom Christ healed was soon after *found in the temple*, Jn. 5:14. (3.) To add fifteen years to his life. This would not bring him to be an old man; it would reach but to fifty-four or fifty-five; yet that was longer than he had lately expected to live. His lease was renewed, which he thought was expiring. We have not the instance of any other that was told before-hand just how long he should live; that good man no doubt made a good use of it; but God has wisely kept us at uncertainties, that we may be always ready. (4.) To deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria, v. 6. This was the thing which Hezekiah's heart was upon a much as his own recovery, and therefore the promise of this is here repeated. If this was after the raising of the siege, yet there was cause to fear Sennacherib's rallying again. "No," says God, *"I will defend this city."*

V. The means which were to be used for his recovery, v. 7. Isaiah was his physician. He ordered an outward application, a very cheap and common thing: "Lay a *lump of figs to the boil*, to ripen it and bring it to a head, that the matter of the disease may be discharged that way." This might contribute something to the cure, and yet, considering to what a height the disease had come, and how suddenly it was checked, the cure was no less than miraculous. Note, 1. It is our duty, when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him. 2. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man, in consideration of the poor. 3. What God appoints he will bless and make effectual.

VI. The sign which was given for the encouragement of his faith. 1. He begged it, not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, or as if he staggered at that, but because he looked upon the things promised to be very great things and worthy to be so confirmed, and because it had been usual with God thus to glorify himself and favour his people; and he remembered how much God was displeased with his father for refusing to ask a sign, Isa. 7:10–12. Observe, Hezekiah asked *What is the sign*, not that I shall go up to the thrones of judgment or up to the gate, but *up to the house of the Lord*? He desired to recover that he might glorify God *in the gates of the daughter of Zion*. It is not worth while to live for any other purpose than to serve God. 2. It was put to his choice whether the sun should go back or go forward; for it was equal to Omnipotence, and it would be the more likely to confirm his faith if he chose that which he thought the more difficult of the two. Perhaps to this that of this prophet may refer (Isa. 45:11), *Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command you me*. It is supposed that the degrees were half hours, and that it was just noon when the proposal was made, and the question is, "Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning or forward to its place at five in the evening?" 3. He humbly desired the sun might go back ten degrees, because, though either would be a great miracle, yet, it being the natural course of the sun to go forward, its going back would seem more strange, and would be more significant of Hezekiah's *returning to the days of his youth* (Job 33:25) and the lengthening out of the day of his life. It was accordingly done, upon the prayer of Isaiah (v. 11): He *cried unto the Lord* by special warrant and direction, and God brought the sun back ten degrees, which appeared to Hezekiah (for the sign was intended for him) by the going back of the shadow upon the dial of Ahaz, which, it is likely, he could see through his chamber-window; and the same was observed upon all other dials, even in Babylon, 2 Chr. 32:31. Whether this retrograde motion of the sun was gradual or *per saltum—suddenly*—whether it went back at the same pace that it used to go forward, which would make the day ten hours longer than usual—or whether it darted back on a sudden, and, after continuing a little while, was restored again to its usual place, so that no change was made in the state of the heavenly bodies (as the learned bishop Patrick thinks)—we are not told; but this work of wonder shows the power of God in heaven as well as on earth, the great notice he takes of prayer, and the great favour he bears to his chosen. The most plausible idolatry of the heathen was theirs that worshipped the sun; yet that was hereby convicted of the most egregious folly and absurdity, for by this it appeared that their god was under the check of the God of Israel. Dr. Lightfoot suggests that the fifteen songs of degrees (Ps. 120, etc.) might perhaps be so called because selected by Hezekiah to be sung to his stringed instruments (Isa. 38:20) in remembrance of the degrees on the dial which the sun went back and the fifteen years added to his life; and he observes how much of these psalms is applicable to Jerusalem's distress and deliverance and Hezekiah's sickness and recovery.

Verses 12-21

Here is, I. An embassy sent to Hezekiah by the king of Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, v. 12. The kings of Babylon had hitherto been only deputies and tributaries to the kings of Assyria, and Nineveh was the royal city. We find Babylon subject to the king of Assyria, ch. 17:24. But this king of Babylon began to set up for himself, and by degrees things were so changed that Assyria became subject to the kings of Babylon. This king of Babylon sent to compliment Hezekiah, and ingratiate himself with him upon a double account. 1. Upon the account of religion. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, and,

perceiving what honour their god had done to Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honour to him likewise. It is good having those our friends whom we perceive to be the favourites of heaven. 2. Upon the account of civil interest. If the king of Babylon was now mediating a revolt from the king of Assyria, it was policy to get Hezekiah into his interest, in answer to whose prayers, and for whose protection, heaven had given that fatal blow to the king of Assyria. He found himself obliged to Hezekiah, and his God, for the weakening of the Assyrian forces, and had reason to think he could not have a more powerful and valuable ally than one that had so good an interest in the upper world. He therefore made his court to him with all possible respect by ambassadors, letters, and a present.

II. The kind entertainment Hezekiah gave to these ambassadors, v. 13. It was his duty to be civil to them, and receive them with the respect due to ambassadors; but he exceeded, and was courteous to a fault. 1. He was too fond of them. He *hearkened unto them*. Though they were idolaters, yet he became intimate with them, was forward to come into a confederacy with the king their master, and granted them all they came for. He was more open and free than he should have been, and stood not so much upon his guard. What reason had he that was in covenant with God so eagerly to catch at an alliance with a heathen prince, or to value himself at all upon his respectful notice? What honour could this embassy add to one whom God had so highly favoured, that he should please himself so much with it? 2. He was too fond of showing them his palace, his treasures, and his magazines, that they might see, and might report to their master, what a great king he was, and how well worthy of the honour their master did him. It is not said that he showed them the temple, the book of the law, and the manner of his worship, that he might proselyte them to the true religion, which he had now a fair opportunity of doing; but in compliment to them, lest he should affront them, he waived that, and showed them the rich furniture of his closet, that house of his precious things, the wealth he had heaped up since the king of Assyria had emptied his coffers, his *silver, and gold, and spices*. All the valuable things he had he showed them, either himself or by his officers. And what harm was there in this? What is more commonly, and (as we think) more innocently, done, than to show strangers the riches and rarities of a country—to show our friends our houses and their furniture, our gardens, stables, and libraries? But if we do this in the pride of our hearts, as Hezekiah did, to gain applause from men, and not giving praise to God, it turns into sin to us, as it did to him.

III. The examination of Hezekiah concerning this matter, v. 14, 15. Isaiah, who had often been his comforter, is now his reprover. The blessed Spirit is both, Jn. 16:7, 8. Ministers must be both, as there is occasion. Isaiah spoke in God's name, and therefore called him to account as one having authority: "Who are these? Whence come they? What is their business? What have they seen?" Hezekiah not only submitted to the examination (did not ask him, "Why should you concern yourself and question me about this affair?"), but made an ingenuous confession: *There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them*. Why then did he not bring them to Isaiah, and show him to them who was without doubt the best treasure he had in his dominions, and who by his prayers and prophecies had been instrumental in all those wonders which these ambassadors came to enquire into? I hope Hezekiah had the same value for Isaiah now that he had in his distress; but it would have become him to show it by bringing these ambassadors to him in the first place, which might have prevented the false step he took.

IV. The sentence passed upon him for his pride and vanity, and the too great relish he had of the things of the world, after that

intimate acquaintance he had so lately been admitted into with divine things. The sentence is (v. 17, 18), 1. That the treasures he was so proud of should hereafter become a prey, and his family should be robbed of them all. It is just with God to take that from us which we make the matter of our pride and in which we put our confidence. 2. That the king of Babylon, with whom he was so fond of an alliance, should be the enemy that should make a prey of them. Not that it was for this sin that that judgment should be brought upon them: the sins of Manasseh, his idolatries and murders, were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride and of the value he had for the king of Babylon, and to make him ashamed of it. Hezekiah was fond of assisting the king of Babylon to rise, and to reduce the exorbitant power of the kings of Assyria; but he is told that the snake he is cherishing will ere long sting the bosom that cherishes it, and that his royal seed shall become the king of Babylon's slave (which was fulfilled, Dan. 1:1, etc.), than which there could not be any thing more mortifying to Hezekiah to think of. Babylon will be the ruin of those that are fond of Babylon. Wise therefore and happy are those that *come out from her*, Rev. 18:4.

V. Hezekiah's humble and patient submission to this sentence, v. 19. Observe how he argues himself into this submission. 1. He lays it down for a truth that "*good is the word of the Lord*, even this word, though a threatening; for every word of his is so. It is not only just, but good; for, as he does no wrong to any, so he means no hurt to good men. It is good; for he will bring good out of it, and do me good by the foresight of it." We should believe this concerning every providence, that it is good, is working for good. 2. He takes notice of that in this word which was good, that he should not live to see this evil, much less to share in it. He makes the best of the bad: "Is it not good? Yes, certainly it is, and better than I deserve." Note, (1.) True penitents, when they are under divine rebukes, call them not only just, but good; not only submit to the punishment of their iniquity, but accept of it. So Hezekiah did, and by this it appeared that he was indeed *humbled for the pride of his heart*. (2.) When at any time we are under dark dispensations, or have dark prospects, public or personal, we must take notice of what is *for* us as well as what is *against* us, that we may by thanksgiving honour God, and may in our patience possess our own souls. (3.) As to public affairs, it is good, and we are bound to think it *so, if peace and truth be in our days*. That is, [1.] Whatever else we want, it is good if we have peace and truth, if we have the true religion professed and protected, Bibles and ministers, and enjoy these in peace, not terrified with the alarms of war or persecution. [2.] Whatever trouble may come when we are gone, it is good if all be well in our days. Not that we should be unconcerned for posterity; it is a grief to foresee evils: but we should own that the deferring of judgments is a great favour in general, and to have them deferred so long as what we may die in peace is a particular favour to us, for charity begins at home. We know not how we shall bear the trial, and therefore have reason to think it well if we may but get safely to heaven before it comes.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and story, v. 20, 21. In 2 Chr. ch. 29–32 much more is recorded of Hezekiah's work of reformation than in this book of Kings; and it seems that in the civil chronicles, not now extant, there were many things recorded of his might and the good offices he did for Jerusalem, particularly his bringing water by pipes into the city. To have water in plenty, without striving for it and without being terrified with the noise of archers in the drawing of it, to have it at hand and convenient for us, is to be reckoned a great mercy; for the want of water would be a great calamity. But here this

historian leaves him *asleep with his fathers*, and a son in his throne that proved very untoward; for parents cannot give grace to their children. Wicked Ahaz was the son of a godly father and the father of a godly son; holy Hezekiah was the son of a wicked father and the father of a wicked son. When the land was not reformed, as it should have been, by a good reign, it was plagued and ripened for ruin by a bad one; yet then tried again with a good one, that it might appear how loth God was to cut off his people.

Chapter 21

In this chapter we have a short but sad account of the reigns of two of the kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon. I. Concerning Manasseh, all the account we have of him here is, 1. That he devoted himself to sin, to all manner of wickedness, idolatry, and murder (v. 1-9 and 16). 2. That therefore God devoted him, and Jerusalem for his sake, to ruin (v. 10–18). In the book of Chronicles we have an account of his troubles, and his repentance. II. Concerning Amon we are only told that he lived in sin (v. 19–22), died quickly by the sword, and left good Josiah his successor (v. 23–26). By these two reigns Jerusalem was much debauched and much weakened, and so hastened apace towards its destruction, which slumbered not.

Verses 1-9

How delightful were our meditations on the last reign! How many pleasing views had we of Sion in its glory (that is, in its purity and in its triumphs), of the king in his beauty! (for Isa. 33:17 refers to Hezekiah), and (as it follows there, v. 20) Jerusalem was *a quiet habitation* because *a city of righteousness*, Isa. 1:26. But now we have melancholy work upon our hands, unpleasant ground to travel, and cannot but drive heavily. *How has the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed!* The beauty of Jerusalem is stained, and all her glory, all her joy, sunk and gone. These verses give such an account of this reign as make it, in all respects, the reverse of the last, and, in a manner, the ruin of it.

I. Manasseh began young. He was but *twelve years old when he began to reign* (v. 1), born when his father was about forty-two years old, three years after his sickness. If he had sons before, either they were dead, or set by as unpromising. As yet they knew of nothing bad in *him*, and they hoped he would prove good; but he proved very bad, and perhaps his coming to the crown so young might help to make it so, which yet will by no means excuse him, for his grandson Josiah came to it younger than he and yet acted well. But being young, 1. He was puffed up with his honour and proud of it; and thinking himself very wise, because he was very great, valued himself upon his undoing what his father had done. It is too common for novices to be lifted up with pride, and so to *fall into the condemnation of the devil*. 2. He was easily wrought upon and drawn aside by seducers, that lay in wait to deceive. Those that were enemies to Hezekiah's reformation, and retained an affection for the old idolatries, flattered him, and so gained his ear, and used his power at their pleasure. Many have been undone by coming too soon to their honours and estates.

II. He reigned long, longest of any of the kings of Judah, fifty-five years. This was the only very bad reign that was a long one; Joram's was but eight years, and Ahaz's sixteen; as for Manasseh's, we hope that in the beginning of his reign for some time affairs continued to move in the course that his father left them in, and that in the latter end of his reign, after his repentance, religion got head again; and, no doubt, when things were at the worst God had his remnant that kept their integrity. Though he reigned long, yet some of this time he was a prisoner in Babylon, which may well be looked upon as a drawback from these years, though they are reckoned in the number because then he repented and began to reform.

III. He reigned very ill.

1. In general, (1.) *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, and which, having been well educated, he could not but

know was so (v. 2): *He wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord*, as if on purpose to provoke him to anger, v. 6. (2.) *He did after the abominations of the heathen* (v. 2) and as did Ahab (v. 3), not taking warning by the destruction both of the nations of Canaan and the house of Ahab for their idolatry; nay (v. 9), he *did more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed*. When the holy seed degenerate, they are commonly worse than the worst of the profane.

2. More particularly, (1.) He *rebuilt the high places which his father had destroyed*, v. 3. Thus did he trample upon the dust, and affront the memory, of his worthy father, though he knew how much he was favoured of God and honoured of men. He concurred, it is probable, with Rabshakeh's sentiments (ch. 18:22), that Hezekiah had done ill in destroying those high places, and pretended the honour of God, and the edification and convenience of the people, in rebuilding them. This he began with, but proceeded to that which was much worse; for, (2.) He set up other gods, *Baal* and *Ashtaroath* (which we translate *a grove*), and all the host of heaven, the sun and moon, the other planets, and the constellations; these he worshipped and served (v. 3), gave their names to the images he made, and then did homage to them and prayed for help from them. To these he built altars (v. 5), and offered sacrifices, no doubt, on these altars. (3.) He *made his son pass through the fire*, by which he dedicated him a votary to Moloch, in contempt of the seal of circumcision by which he had been dedicated to God. (4.) He made the devil his oracle, and, in contempt both of urim and prophecy, he *used enchantments and dealt with familiar spirits* (v. 6) like Saul. Conjurers and fortune-tellers (who pretended, by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, to foretel things to come) were great men with him, his intimates, his confidants; their arts pleased his fancy, and gained his belief, and his counsels were under their direction. (5.) We find afterwards (v. 16) that he shed innocent blood very much in gratification of his own passion and revenge; some perhaps were secretly murdered, others taken off by colour of law. Probably much of the blood he shed was theirs that opposed idolatry and witnessed against it, that would not bow the knee to Baal. The *blood of the prophets* is, in a particular manner, charged upon Jerusalem, and it is probable that he put to death many of them. The tradition of the Jews is that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder; and many think the apostle refers to this in Heb. 11:37, where he speaks of those that had so suffered.

3. Three things are here mentioned as aggravations of Manasseh's idolatry:—(1.) That he set up his images and altars *in the house of the Lord* (v. 4), in the two courts of the temple (v. 5), in the very house of which God had said to Solomon, *Here will I put my name*, v. 7. Thus he defied God to his face, and impudently affronted him with his rivals immediately under his eye, as one that was neither afraid of God's wrath nor ashamed of his own folly and wickedness. Thus he desecrated what had been consecrated to God, and did, in effect, turn God out of his own house and put the rebels in possession of it. Thus, when the faithful worshippers of God came to the place he had appointed for the performance of their duty to him, they found, to their great grief and terror, other gods ready to receive their offerings. God had said that here he would record his name, here he would put it for ever, and here it was accordingly preserved, while the idolatrous altars were kept at a distance; but Manasseh, by bringing them into God's house, did what he could to alter the property, and to make the name of the God of Israel to be no more in remembrance. (2.) That hereby he put a great slight upon the word of God, and his covenant with Israel. Observe the favour he had shown to that people in putting his name among them,—the kindness he intended them, never to *make them*

move out of that good land,—and the reasonableness of his expectations from them, *only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them*, v. 7, 8. Upon these good terms did Israel stand with God, and had as fair a prospect of being happy as any people could have; but *they hearkened not*, v. 9. They would not be kept close to God either by his precepts or by his promises; both were cast behind their back. (3.) That hereby he seduced the people of God, debauched them, and drew them into idolatry, v. 9. He caused Judah to sin (v. 11), as Jeroboam had caused *Israel to sin*. His very example was enough to corrupt the generality of unthinking people, who would do as their king did, right or wrong. All that aimed at preferment would do as the court did; and others thought it safest to comply, for fear of making their king their enemy. Thus, one way or other, the holy city became a harlot, and Manasseh made her so. Those will have a great deal to answer for that not only are wicked themselves, but help to make others so.

Verses 10-18

Here is the doom of Judah and Jerusalem read, and it is heavy doom. The prophets were sent, in the first place, to teach them the knowledge of God, to remind them of their duty and direct them in it. If they succeeded not in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, and to set them in view before them, that they might repent and reform, and return to their duty. If in this they prevailed not, but sinners went on frowardly, their next work was to foretel the judgments of God, that the terror of them might awaken those to repentance who would not be made sensible of the obligations of his love, or else that the execution of them, in their season, might be a demonstration of the divine mission of the prophets that foretold them. The prophets were deputed judges to those that would not hear and receive them as teachers. We have here,

I. A recital of the crime. The indictment is read upon which the judgment is grounded, v. 11. Manasseh had done wickedly himself, though he knew better things, had even justified the Amorites, whose copy he wrote after, by outdoing them in impieties, and debauched the people of God, whom he had taught to sin and forced to sin; and besides that (though that was bad enough) *he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood* (v. 16), had multiplied his murders in every corner of the city, and filled the measure of Jerusalem's blood-guiltiness (Mt. 23:32) up to the brim, and all this against the crown and dignity of the King of kings, the peace of his kingdom, and the statutes in these cases made and provided.

II. A prediction of the judgment God would bring upon them for this: *They have done that which was evil*, and therefore *I am bringing evil upon them* (v. 12); it will come and it is not far off. The judgment should be, 1. Very terrible and amazing; the very report of it should *make men's ears to tingle* (v. 12), that is, their hearts to tremble. It should make a great noise in the world and occasion many speculations. 2. It should be copied out (as the sins of Jerusalem had been) from Samaria and the house of Ahab, v. 13. When God lays righteousness to the line it shall be the line of Samaria, measuring out to Jerusalem that which had been the lot of Samaria; when he lays judgment to the plummet it shall be *the plummet of the house of Ahab*, marking out for the same ruin to which that wretched family was devoted. See Isa. 28:17. Note, Those who resemble and imitate others in their sins must expect to fare as they fared. 3. That it should be an utter destruction: *I will wipe it as a man wipes a dish*. This intimates, (1.) That every thing should be put into disorder, and their state subverted; they should be turned upside down, and all their foundations put out of course. (2.) That the city should be emptied of its inhabitants, which had been

the filth of it, as a dish is emptied when it is wiped: "They shall all be carried captive, the *land shall enjoy her sabbaths*, and be laid by as a dish when it is wiped." See the comparison of the boiled pot, not much unlike this, Eze. 24:1–14. (3.) That yet this should be in order to the purifying, not the destroying, of Jerusalem. The dish shall not be dropped, not broken to pieces, or melted down, but only wiped. This shall be the fruit, the taking away of the sinners first, and then of the sin. 4. That *therefore* they should be destroyed, because they should be deserted (v. 14): *I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance*. Justly are those that forsake God forsaken of him; nor does he ever leave any till they have first left him: but, when God has forsaken a people, their defence has departed, and they become a prey, an easy prey, to all their enemies. Sin is spoken of here as the alpha and omega of their miseries. (1.) Old guilt came in remembrance, as that which began to fill the measure (v. 15): *"They have provoked me to anger from their conception and birth as a people, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt."* The men of this generation, treading in their fathers' steps, are justly reckoned with for their fathers' sins. (2.) The guilt of blood was that which filled the measure, v. 16. Nothing has a louder cry, nor brings a sorer vengeance, than that.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; he stands convicted and condemned; but we hope in the book of Chronicles to hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. Meantime, we must be content, in this place, to have only one intimation of his repentance (for so we are willing to take it), that he was buried, it is likely by his own order, *in the garden of his own house* (v. 18); for, being truly humbled for his sins, he judged himself *no more worthy to be called a son*, a son of David, and therefore not worthy to have even his dead body buried *in the sepulchres of his fathers*. True penitents take shame to themselves, not honour; yet, having lost the credit of an innocent, the credit of a penitent was the next best he was capable of. And better it is, and more honourable, for a sinner to die repenting, and be buried in a garden, than to die impenitent, and be buried in the abbey.

Verses 19-26

Here is a short account of the short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh. Whether Manasseh, in his blind and brutish zeal for his idols, had sacrificed his other sons—or whether, having been dedicated to his idols, they were refused by the people—so it was that his successor was a son not born till he was forty-five years old. And of him we are here told, 1. That his reign was very wicked: *He forsook the God of his fathers* (v. 22), disobeyed the commands given to his fathers, and disclaimed the covenant made with his fathers, *and walked not in the way of the Lord, but in all the way which his father walked in*, v. 20, 21. He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he, in the latter end of his days, had put down. Note, Those who set bad examples, though they may repent themselves, yet cannot be sure that those whom they have drawn into sin by their example will repent; it is often otherwise. 2. That his end was very tragical. He having rebelled against God, his own servants *conspired against him and slew him*, probably upon some personal disgust, when he had reigned but two years, v. 23. His servants, who should have guarded him, murdered him; his own house, that should have been his castle of defence, was the place of his execution. He had profaned God's house with his idols, and now God suffered his own house to be polluted with his blood. How unrighteous soever those were that did it, God was righteous who suffered it to be done. Two things the people of the land did, by their representatives, hereupon:—(1.) They did justice on the traitors that had slain the

king, and put them to death; for, though he was a *bad* king, he was *their* king, and it was a part of their allegiance to him to avenge his death. Thus they cleared themselves from having any hand in the crime, and did what was incumbent on them to deter others from the like villainous practices. (2.) They did a kindness to themselves in *making Josiah his son king in his stead*, whom probably the conspirators had a design to put by, but the people stood by him and settled him in the throne, encouraged, it may be, by the indications he gave, even in his early days, of a good disposition. Now they made a happy change from one of the worst to one of the best of all the kings of Judah. "Once more," says God, "they shall be tried with a reformation; and, if that succeed, well; if not, then after that I will cut them down." Amon was buried in the same garden where his father was, v. 26. If his father put himself under that humiliation, the people will put him under it.

Chapter 22

This chapter begins the story of the reign of good king Josiah, whose goodness shines the brighter because it came just after so much wickedness, which he had the honour to reform, and just before so great a destruction, which yet he had not the honour to prevent. Here, after his general character (v. 1, 2), we have a particular account of the respect he paid I. To God's house, which he repaired (v. 3-7). II. To God's book, which he was much affected with the reading of (v. 8-11). III. To God's messengers, whom he thereupon consulted (v. 12-14). And by whom he received from God an answer threatening Jerusalem's destruction (v. 15-17), but promising favour to him (v. 18-20), upon which he set about that glorious work of reformation which we have an account of in the next chapter.

Verses 1-10

Concerning Josiah we are here told,

I. That he was very young when he began to reign (v. 1), only eight years old. Solomon says, *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is a child*; but happy art thou, O land! when thy king is *such* a child. Our English Israel had once a king that was such a child, Edward VI. Josiah, being young, had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather, but soon saw their errors, and God gave his grace to take warning by them. See Eze. 18:14, etc.

II. That he *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 2. See the sovereignty of divine grace—the father passed by and left to perish in his sin, the son a chosen vessel. See the triumphs of that grace—Josiah born of a wicked father, no good education nor good example given him, but many about him who no doubt advised him to tread in his father's steps and few that gave him any good counsel, and yet the grace of God made him an eminent saint, *cut him off from the wild olive and grafted him into the good olive*, Rom. 11:24. Nothing is too hard for that grace to do. He walked in a good way, and turned not aside (as some of his predecessors had done who began well) *to the right hand nor to the left*. There are errors on both hands, but God kept him in the right way; he fell neither into superstition nor profaneness.

III. That he took care for the repair of the temple. This he did in the eighteenth year of his reign, v. 3. Compare 2 Chr. 34:8. He began much sooner to *seek the Lord* (as appears, 2 Chr. 34:3), but it is to be feared the work of reformation went slowly on and met with much opposition, so that he could not effect what he desired and designed, till his power was thoroughly confirmed. The consideration of the time we unavoidably lost in our minority should quicken us, when we have come to years, to act with so much the more vigour in the service of God. Having begun late we have need work hard. He sent Shaphan, the secretary of state, to Hilkiyah the high priest, to take an account of the money that was collected for this use by the door-keepers (v. 4); for, it seems, they took much the same way of raising the money that Joash took, ch. 12:9. When people gave by a little at a time the burden was insensible, and, the contribution being voluntary, it was not complained of. This money, so collected, he ordered him to lay out for the repair of the temple, v. 5, 6. And now, it seems, the workmen (as in the days of Joash) acquitted themselves so well that *there was no reckoning made with them* (v. 7), which is certainly mentioned to the praise of the workmen, that they gained such a reputation for honesty, but whether to the praise of those that employed them I know not; a

man should count money (we say) after his own father; it would not have been amiss to have *reckoned with the workmen*, that others also might be satisfied of their honesty.

IV. That, in repairing the temple, *the book of the law* was happily found and brought to the king, v. 8, 10. Some think this book was the autograph, or original manuscript, of the five books of Moses, under his own hand; others think it was only an ancient and authentic copy. Most likely it was that which, by the command of Moses, was laid up in the most holy place, Deu. 31:24, etc. 1. It seems, this book of the law was lost or missing. Perhaps it was carelessly mislaid and neglected, thrown by into a corner (as some throw their Bibles), by those that knew not the value of it, and forgotten there; or it was maliciously concealed by some of the idolatrous kings, or their agents, who were restrained by the providence of God or their own consciences from burning and destroying it, but buried it, in hopes it would never see the light again; or, as some think, it was carefully laid up by some of its friends, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies. Whoever were the instruments of its preservation, we ought to acknowledge the hand of God in it. If this was the only authentic copy of the Pentateuch then in being, which had (as I may say) so narrow a turn for its life and was so near perishing, I wonder the hearts of all good people did not tremble for that sacred treasure, as Eli's for the ark, and I am sure we now have reason to thank God, upon our knees, for that happy providence by which Hilkiyah found this book at this time, found it when *he sought it not*, Isa. 65:1. If the holy scriptures had not been of God, they would not have been in being at this day; God's care of the Bible is a plain indication of his interest in it. 2. Whether this was the only authentic copy in being or no, it seems the things contained in it were new both to the king himself and to the high priest; for the king, upon the reading of it, rent his clothes. We have reason to think that neither the command for the king's writing a copy of the law, nor that for the public reading of the law every seventh year (Deu. 17:18; 31:10, 11), had been observed for a long time; and when the instituted means of keeping up religion are neglected religion itself will soon go to decay. Yet, on the other hand, if the book of the law was lost, it seems difficult to determine what rule Josiah went by in doing that which was *right in the sight of the Lord*, and how the priests and people kept up the rites of their religion. I am apt to think that the people generally took up with abstracts of the law, like our abridgements of the statutes, which the priests, to save themselves the trouble of writing and the people of reading the book at large, had furnished them with—a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out what they thought fit, and particularly the promises and threatenings (Lev. 26 and Deu. 28, etc.), for I observe that these were the portions of the law which Josiah was so much affected with (v. 13), for these were new to him. No summaries, extracts, or collections, out of the Bible (though they may have their use) can be effectual to convey and preserve the knowledge of God and his will like the Bible itself. It was no marvel that the people were so corrupt when the book of the law was such a scarce thing among them; where that vision is not the people perish. Those that endeavoured to debauch them no doubt used all the arts they could to get that book out of their hands. The church of Rome could not keep up the use of images but by forbidding the use of the scripture. 3. It was a great instance of God's favour, and a token for good to Josiah and his people, that the book of the law was thus seasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken that blessed reformation which Josiah had begun. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people when he magnifies his law among them and makes that honourable, and furnishes them with means for the increase of

scripture-knowledge. The translating of the scriptures into vulgar tongues was the glory, strength, and joy of the Reformation from Popery. It is observable that they were about a good work, repairing the temple, when they found the book of the law. Those that do their duty according to their knowledge shall have their knowledge increased. To him that hath shall be given. The book of the law was an abundant recompence for all their care and cost about the repair of the temple. 4. Hilkiah the priest was exceedingly well pleased with the discovery. "O," says he to Shaphan, "rejoice with me, for *I have found the book of the law, heureka, heureka,—I have found, I have found*, that jewel of inestimable value. Here, carry it to the king; it is the richest jewel of his crown. Read it before him. He walks in *the way of David his father*, and, if he be like him, he will love the book of the law and bid that welcome; that will be his delight and his counsellor."

Verses 11-20

We hear no more of the repairing of the temple: no doubt that good work went on well; but the book of the law that was found in it occupies us now, and well it may. It is not laid up in the king's cabinet as a piece of antiquity, a rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king. Those put the truest honour upon their Bibles that study them and converse with them daily, feed on that bread and walk by that light. Men of honour and business must look upon an acquaintance with God's word to be their best business and honour. Now here we have,

I. The impressions which the reading of the law made upon Josiah. He rent his clothes, as one ashamed of the sin of his people and afraid of the wrath of God; he had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, by reason of the idolatries and impieties that had been found among them, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be by the book of the law now read to him. The rending of his clothes signified the rending of his heart for the dishonour done to God, and the ruin he saw coming upon his people.

II. The application he made to God hereupon: *Go, enquire of the Lord for me*, v. 13.

1. Two things we may suppose he desired to know:—"Enquire, (1.) What we shall do; what course we shall take to turn away God's wrath and prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved." Convictions of sin and wrath should put us upon this enquiry, *What shall we do to be saved? Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord?* If you will thus enquire, enquire quickly, before it be too late. (2.) "What we may expect and must provide for." He acknowledges, *"Our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book;* if this be the rule of right, certainly our fathers have been much in the wrong." Now that *the commandment came sin revived*, and appeared sin; in the glass of the law, he saw the sins of his people more numerous and more heinous than he had before seen them, and more exceedingly sinful. He infers hence, *"Certainly great is the wrath that is kindled against us;* if this be the word of God, as no doubt it is, and he will be true to his word, as no doubt he will be, we are all undone. I never thought the threatenings of the law so severe, and the curses of the covenant so terrible, as now I find them to be; it is time to look about us if these be in force against us." Note, Those who are truly apprehensive of the weight of God's wrath cannot but be very solicitous to obtain his favour, and inquisitive how they may make their peace with him. Magistrates should enquire for their people, and study how to prevent the judgments of God that they see hanging over them.

2. This enquiry Josiah sent, (1.) By some of his great men, who are named v. 12, and again v. 14. Thus he put an honour upon

the oracle, by employing those of the first rank to attend it. (2.) To Huldah the prophetess, v. 14. The spirit of prophecy, that inestimable treasure, was sometimes put not only into *earthen* vessels, but into the *weaker* vessels, *that the excellency of the power might be of God*. Miriam helped to lead Israel out of Egypt (Mic. 6:4), Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God, and her being a wife was no prejudice at all to her being a prophetess; *marriage is honourable in all*. It was a mercy to Jerusalem that when Bibles were scarce they had prophets, as afterwards, when prophecy ceased, that they had more Bibles; for God never leaves himself without witness, because he will leave sinners without excuse. Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied at this time, yet the king's messengers made Huldah their oracle, probably because her husband having a place at court (for he was keeper of the wardrobe) they had had more and longer acquaintance with her and greater assurances of her commission than of any other; they had, it is likely, consulted her upon other occasions, and had found that the word of God in her mouth was truth. She was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in a place called *Mishneh*, the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. The Jews say that she prophesied among the women, the court ladies, being herself one of them, who it is probable had their apartments in that place. Happy the court that had a prophetess within the verge of it, and knew how to value her.

III. The answer he received from God to his enquiry. Huldah returned it not in the language of a courtier—"Pray give my humble service to his Majesty, and let him know that this is the message I have for him from the God of Israel;" but in the dialect of a prophetess, speaking from him before whom all stand upon the same level—*Tell the man that sent you to me*, v. 15. Even kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall so be dealt with; for *with him there is no respect of persons*.

1. She let him know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem (v. 16, 17): *My wrath shall be kindled against this place*; and what is hell itself but the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners? Observe, (1.) The degree and duration of it. It is so kindled that *it shall not be quenched*; the decree has gone forth; it is too late now to think of preventing it; the iniquity of Jerusalem shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering. Hell is unquenchable fire. (2.) The reference it has, [1.] To their sins: "They have committed them, as it were, with design, and on purpose to provoke me to anger. It is a fire of their own kindling; they would provoke me, and at length I am provoked." [2.] To God's threatenings: "The evil I bring is according to the words of the book which the king of Judah has read; the scripture is fulfilled in it. Those that would not be bound by the precept shall be bound by the penalty." God will be found no less terrible to impenitent sinners than his word makes him to be.

2. She let him know what mercy God had in store for him. (1.) Notice is taken of his great tenderness and concern for the glory of God and the welfare of his kingdom (v. 19): *Thy heart was tender*. Note, God will distinguish those that distinguish themselves. The generality of the people were hardened and their hearts unhumbed, so were the wicked kings his predecessors, but Josiah's heart was tender. He received the impressions of God's word, trembled at it and yielded to it; he was exceedingly grieved for the dishonour done to God by the sins of his fathers and of his people; he was afraid of the judgments of God, which he saw coming upon Jerusalem, and earnestly deprecated them. This is tenderness of heart, and thus he *humbled himself before the Lord*, and expressed these pious affections by rending his clothes and weeping before God, probably in his closet; but he that sees in secret says it was *before him*, and he heard it, and put every tear of tenderness into his bottle. Note,

Those that most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it. It should seem that those words (Lev. 26:32) much affected Josiah, *I will bring the land into desolation*; for when he heard of *the desolation and of the curse*, that is, that God would forsake them and *separate them to evil* (for till it came to that they were neither desolate nor accursed), then he rent his clothes: the threatening went to his heart. (2.) A reprieve is granted till after his death (v. 20): *I will gather thee to thy fathers*. The saints then, no doubt, had a comfortable prospect of happiness on the other side death, else being gathered to their fathers would not have been so often made the matter of a promise as we find it was. Josiah could not prevail to prevent the judgment itself, but God promised him he should not live to see it, which (especially considering that he died in the midst of his days, before he was forty years old) would have been but a small reward for his eminent piety if there had not been another world in which he should be abundantly recompensed, Heb. 11:16. When the righteous is *taken away from the evil to come he enters into peace*, Isa. 57:1, 2. This is promised to Josiah here: *Thou shalt go to thy grave in peace*, which refers not to the manner of his death (for he was killed in a battle), but to the time of it; it was a little before the captivity in Babylon, that great trouble, in comparison with which the rest were as nothing, so that he might be truly said to die in peace that did not live to share in that. He died in the love and favour of God, which secure such a peace as no circumstances of dying, no, not dying in the field of war, could alter the nature of, or break in upon.

Chapter 23

We have here, I. The happy continuance of the goodness of Josiah's reign, and the progress of the reformation he began, reading the law (v. 1, 2), renewing the covenant (v. 3), cleansing the temple (v. 4), and rooting out idols and idolatry, with all the relics thereof, in all places, as far as his power reached (v. 5–20), keeping a solemn passover (v. 21–23), and clearing the country of witches (v. 24); and in all this acting with extraordinary vigour (v. 25). II. The unhappy conclusion of it in his untimely death, as a token of the continuance of God's wrath against Jerusalem (v. 26–30). III. The more unhappy consequences of his death, in the bad reigns of his two sons Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, that came after him (v. 31–37).

Verses 1-3

Josiah had received a message from God that there was no preventing the ruin of Jerusalem, but that he should deliver only his own soul; yet he did not therefore sit down in despair, and resolve to do nothing for his country because he could not do all he would. No, he would do his duty, and then leave the event to God. A public reformation was the thing resolved on; if any thing could prevent the threatened ruin it must be that; and here we have the preparations for that reformation. 1. He summoned a general assembly of the states, the elders, the magistrates or representatives of Judah and Jerusalem, to meet him *in the house of the Lord*, with the priests and prophets, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers, that, they all joining in it, it might become a national act and so be the more likely to prevent national judgments; they were all called to attend (v. 1, 2), that the business might be done with the more solemnity, that they might all advise and assist in it, and that those who were against it might be discouraged from making any opposition. Parliaments are no diminution at all to the honour and power of good princes, but a great support to them. 2. Instead of making a speech to this convention, he ordered the book of the law to be read to them; nay, it should seem, he read it himself (v. 2), as one much affected with it and desirous that they should be so too. Josiah thinks it not below him to be a reader, any more than Solomon did to be a preacher, nay, and David himself to be a door-keeper in the house of God. Besides the convention of the great men, he had a congregation of the *men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem* to hear the law read. It is really the interest of princes to promote the knowledge of the scriptures in their dominions. If the people be but as stedfastly resolved to obey by law as he is to govern by law, the kingdom will be happy. All people are concerned to know the scripture, and all in authority to spread the knowledge of it. 3. Instead of proposing laws for the confirming of them in their duty, he proposed an association by which they should all jointly engage themselves to God, v. 3. The book of the law was the book of the covenant, that, if they would be to God a people, he would be to them a God; they here engage themselves to do their part, not doubting but that then God would do his. (1.) The covenant was that they should walk after the Lord, in compliance with his will, in his ordinances and his providences, should answer all his calls and attend all his motions—that they should make conscience of all his commandments, moral, ceremonial, and judicial, and should carefully observe them *with all their heart and all their soul*, with all possible care and caution, sincerity, vigour, courage, and resolution, and so fulfil the conditions of this covenant, in dependence upon the promises of it. (2.) The covenanters were, in the first place, the king himself, who stood by his pillar (ch. 11:14) and publicly declared his consent to this covenant, to set

them an example, and to assure them not only of his protection but of his presidency and all the furtherance his power could give them in their obedience. It is no abridgment of the liberty even of princes themselves to be in bonds to God. *All the people likewise stood to the covenant*, that is, they signified their consent to it and promised to abide by it. It is of good use to oblige ourselves to our duty with all possible solemnity, and this is especially seasonable after notorious backslidings to sin and decays in that which is good. He that bears an honest mind does not shrink from positive engagements: fast bind, fast find.

Verses 4-24

We have here an account of such a reformation as we have not met with in all the history of the kings of Judah, such thorough riddance made of all the abominable things and such foundations laid of a glorious good work; and here I cannot but wonder at two things:-1. That so many wicked things should have got in, and kept standing so long, as we find here removed. 2. That notwithstanding the removal of these wicked things, and the hopeful prospects here given of a happy settlement, yet within a few years Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, and even this did not save it; for the generality of the people, after all, hated to be reformed. *The founder melteth in vain*, and therefore *reprobate silver shall men call them*, Jer. 6:29, 30. Let us here observe, I. What abundance of wickedness there was, and had been, in Judah and Jerusalem. One would not have believed it possible that in Judah, where God was known—in Israel, where his name was great—in Salem, in Sion, where his dwelling place was, such abominations should be found as here we have an account of. Josiah had now reigned eighteen years, and had himself set the people a good example, and kept up religion according to law; and yet, when he came to make inquisition for idolatry, the depth and extent of the dunghill he had to carry away appeared almost incredible. 1. Even in the house of the Lord, that sacred temple which Solomon built, and dedicated to the honour and for the worship of the God of Israel, there were found vessels, all manner of utensils, for the worship of Baal, *and of the grove* (or *Ashtaroth*), and *of all the host of heaven*, v. 4. Though Josiah had suppressed the worship of idols, yet the utensils made for that worship were all carefully preserved, even in the temple itself, to be used again whenever the present restraint should be taken off; nay, even the grove itself, the image of it, was yet standing in the temple (v. 6); some make it the image of Venus, the same with Ashtaroth. 2. Just *at the entering in of the house of the Lord* was a stable for horses kept (would you think it?) for a religious use; they were holy horses, *given to the sun* (v. 11), as if he needed them who *rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race* (Ps. 19:5), or rather they would thus represent to themselves the swiftness of his motion, which they much admired, making their religion to conform to the poetical fictions of the chariot of the sun, the follies of which even a little philosophy, without any divinity, would have exposed and made them ashamed of. Some say that those horses were to be led forth in pomp every morning to meet the rising sun, others that the worshippers of the sun rode out upon them to adore the rising sun; it should seem that they drew the chariots of the sun, which the people worshipped. Strange that ever men who had the written word of God among them should be thus *vain in their imaginations!* 3. *Hard by the house of the Lord* there were *houses of the Sodomites*, where all manner of lewdness and filthiness, even that which was most unnatural, was practised, and under pretence of religion too, in honour of their impure deities. Corporal and spiritual whoredom went together, and the vile affections to which the people were given up were the punishment of their vain imaginations. Those that dishonoured their God were justly left thus to dishonour themselves, Rom.

1:24, etc. There were women that *wove hangings for the grove* (v. 7), tents which encompassed the image of Venus, where the worshippers committed all manner of lewdness, and this *in the house of the Lord*. Those did ill that made our Father's house a house of merchandise; those did worse that made it a den of thieves; but those did worst of all that made it (*Horrendum dictu!—Horrible to relate!*) a brothel, in an impudent defiance of the holiness of God and of his temple. Well might the apostle call them *abominable idolatries*. 4. There were many idolatrous altars found (v. 12), some in the palace, *on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz*. The roofs of their houses being flat, they made them their high places, and set up altars upon them (Jer. 19:13; Zep. 1:5), domestic altars. The kings of Judah did so: and, though Josiah never used them, yet to this time they remained there. Manasseh had built altars for his idols in the house of the Lord. When he repented he removed them, and *cast them out of the city* (2 Chr. 33:15), but, not destroying them, his son Amon, it seems, had brought them again into the courts of the temple; there Josiah found them, and thence he *broke them down*, v. 12. 5. There was *Tophet, in the valley of the son of Hinnom*, very near Jerusalem, where the image of Moloch (that god of unnatural cruelty, as others were of unnatural uncleanness) was kept, to which some sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire, others dedicated them, making them to pass through the fire (v. 10), *labouring in the very fire*, Hab. 2:13. It is supposed to have been called *Tophet* from *toph*, a drum, because they beat drums at the burning of the children, that their shrieks might not be heard. 6. There were *high places before Jerusalem*, which *Solomon had built*, v. 13. The altars and images on those high places, we may suppose, had been taken away by some of the preceding godly kings, or perhaps Solomon himself had removed them when he became a penitent; but the buildings, or some parts of them, remained, with other high places, till Josiah's time. Those that introduce corruptions into religion know not how far they will reach nor how long they will last. Antiquity is no certain proof of verity. There were also high places all the kingdom over, from *Geba to Beer-sheba* (v. 8), and *high places of the gates, in the entering in of the gate of the governor*. In these high places (bishop Patrick thinks) they burnt incense to those tutelary gods to whom their idolatrous kings had committed the protection of their city; and probably the governor of the city had a private altar for his *penates—his household-gods*. 7. There were idolatrous priests, that officiated at all those idolatrous altars (v. 5), chemarim, black men, or that wore black. See Zep. 1:4. Those that sacrificed to Osiris, or that wept for Tammuz (Eze. 8:14), or that worshipped the infernal deities, put on black garments as mourners. These idolatrous priests the kings of *Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places*; they were, it should seem, priests of the house of Aaron, who thus profaned their dignity, and there were others also who had no right at all to the priesthood, who burnt incense to Baal. 8. There were conjurers and wizards, and such as *dealt with familiar spirits*, v. 24. When they worshipped the devil as their god no marvel that they consulted him as their oracle.

II. What a full destruction good Josiah made of all those relics of idolatry. Such is his zeal for the Lord of hosts, and his holy indignation against all that is displeasing to him, that nothing shall stand before him. The law was that the monuments of the Canaanites' idolatry must be all destroyed (Deu. 7:5), much more those of the idolatry of the Israelites, in whom it was much more impious, profane, and perfidious. 1. He ordered Hilkiah, and the other priests, to clear the temple. This was their province, v. 4. Away with all the vessels that were made for Baal. They must never be employed in the service of God, no, nor

reserved for any common use; they must all be burnt, and the ashes of them carried to Bethel. That place had been the common source of idolatry, for there was set up one of the calves, and, that lying next to Judah, the infection had thence spread into that kingdom, and therefore Josiah made it the lay-stall of idolatry, the dunghill to which he carried the filth and offscouring of all things, that, if possible, it might be made loathsome to those that had been fond of it. 2. The idolatrous priests were all put down. Those of them that were not of the house of Aaron, or had sacrificed to Baal or other false gods, he put to death, according to the law, v. 20. He *slew them upon their own altars*, the most acceptable sacrifice that ever had been offered upon them, a sacrifice to the justice of God. Those that were descendants from Aaron, and yet had burnt incense in the high places, but to the true God only, he forbade ever to approach the altar of the Lord; they had forfeited that honour (v. 9): He *brought them out of the cities of Judah* (v. 8), that they might not do mischief in the country by secretly keeping up their old idolatrous usages; but he allowed them to *eat of the unleavened bread* (the bread of the meat-offering, Lev. 2:4, 5) *among their brethren*, with whom they were to reside, that being under their eye they might be kept from doing hurt and taught to do well; that bread, that unleavened bread (heavy and unpleasant as it was), was better than they deserved, and that would serve to keep them alive. But whether they were permitted to eat of all the sacrifices, as blemished priests were (Lev. 21:22), which is called, in general, *the bread of their God*, may be justly questioned. 3. All the images were broken to pieces and burnt. The image of the grove (v. 6), some goddess or other, was reduced to ashes, and the *ashes cast upon the graves of the common people* (v. 6), the common burying-place of the city. By the law a ceremonial uncleanness was contracted by the touch of a grave, so that in casting them here he declared them most impure, and none could touch them without thereby making themselves unclean. *He cast it into the graves* (so the Chaldee), intimating that he would have all idolatry buried out of his sight, as a loathsome thing, and forgotten, as dead men are out of mind, v. 14. *He filled the places of the groves with the bones of men*; as he carried the ashes of the images to the graves, to mingle them with dead men's bones, so he carried dead men's bones to the places where the images had been, and put them in the room of them, that, both ways, idolatry might be rendered loathsome, and the people kept both from the dust of the images and from the ruins of the places where they had been worshipped. Dead men and dead gods were much alike and fittest to go together. 4. All the wicked houses were suppressed, those nests of impiety that harboured idolaters, the houses of the Sodomites, v. 7. "Down with them, down with them, rase them to the foundations." The high places were in like manner broken down and levelled with the ground (v. 8), even that which belonged to the governor of the city; for no man's greatness or power may protect him in idolatry or profaneness. Let governors be obliged, in the first place, to reform, and then the governed will be the sooner influenced. He defiled the high places (v. 8 and again v. 13), did all he could to render them abominable, and put the people out of conceit with them, as Jehu did when he made the house of Baal a draught-house, 2 Ki. 10:27. Tophet, which, contrary to other places of idolatry, was in a valley, whereas they were on hills or high places, was likewise defiled (v. 10), was made the burying-place of the city. Concerning this we have a whole sermon, Jer. 19:1, 2, etc., where it is said, *They shall bury in Tophet*, and the whole city is threatened to be made like Tophet. 5. The horses that had been given to the sun were taken away and put to common use, and so were delivered from the vanity to which they were made subject; and the chariots of the sun (what a pity was it that those horses and chariots should be kept as the chariots and

horsemen of Israel!) he burnt with fire; and, if the sun be a flame, they never resembled him so much as they did when they were chariots of fire. 6. The workers with familiar spirits and the wizards were put away, v. 24. Those of them that were convicted of witchcraft, it is likely, he put to death, and so deterred others from those diabolical practices. In all this he had a sincere regard to *the words of the law which were written in the book lately found*, v. 24. He made that law his rule and kept that in his eye throughout this reformation.

III. How his zeal extended itself to the cities of Israel that were within his reach. The ten tribes were carried captive and the Assyrian colonies did not fully people the country, so that, it is likely, many cities had put themselves under the protection of the kings of Judah, 2 Chr. 30:1; 34:6. These he here visits, to carry on his reformation. As far as our influence goes our endeavours should go to do good and bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end.

1. He defiled and demolished Jeroboam's altar at Bethel, with the high place and the grove that belonged to it, v. 15, 16. The golden calf, it should seem, was gone (*thy calf, O Samaria! has cast thee off*), but the altar was there, which those that were wedded to their old idolatries made use of still. This was, (1.) Defiled, v. 16. Josiah, in his pious zeal, was ransacking the old seats of idolatry, and spied the sepulchres in the mount, in which probably the idolatrous priests were buried, not far from the altar at which they had officiated, and which they were so fond of that they were desirous to lay their bones by it; these he opened, took out the bones, and *burnt them upon the altar*, to show that thus he would have done by the priests themselves if they had been alive, as he did by those whom he found alive, v. 20. Thus he polluted the altar, desecrated it, and made it odious. It is threatened against idolaters (Jer. 8:1, 2) that *their bones shall be spread before the sun*; that which is there threatened and this which is here executed (bespeaking their *iniquity to be upon their bones*, Eze. 32:27) are an intimation of a punishment after death, reserved for those that live and die impenitent in that or any other sin; the burning of the bones, if that were all, is a small matter, but, if it signify the torment of the soul in a worse flame (Lu. 16:24), it is very dreadful. This, as it was Josiah's act, seems to have been the result of a very sudden resolve; he would not have done it but that he happened to turn himself, and spy the sepulchres; and yet it was foretold above 350 years before, when this altar was first built by Jeroboam, 1 Ki. 13:2. God always foresees, and has sometimes foretold as certain, that which yet to us seems most contingent. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*; king Josiah's was so, and he turned it (or ever he himself was aware, Cant. 6:12) to do this. No work of God shall fall to the ground. (2.) It was demolished. He broke down the altar and all its appurtenances (v. 15), burnt what was combustible, and, since an idol is nothing in the world, he went as far towards the annihilating of it as he could; for he *stamped it small to powder* and made it *as dust before the wind*.

2. He destroyed all the houses of the high places, all those synagogues of Satan that were *in the cities of Samaria*, v. 19. These the kings of Israel built, and God raised up this king of Judah to pull them down, for the honour of the ancient house of David, from which the ten tribes had revolted; the priests he justly made sacrifices *upon their own altars*, v. 20.

3. He carefully preserved the sepulchre of that man of God who came from Judah to foretel this, which now a king who came from Judah executed. This was that good prophet who *proclaimed these things against the altar of Bethel*, and yet was himself slain by a lion for disobeying the word of the Lord; but to show that God's displeasure against him went no further than his

death, but ended there, God so ordered it that when all the graves about his were disturbed his was safe (v. 17, 18) and no man moved his bones. He had entered into peace, and therefore should rest in his bed, Isa. 57:2. The old lying prophet, who desired to be buried as near him as might be, it should seem, knew what he did; for his dust also, being mingled with that of the good prophet, was preserved for his sake; see Num. 23:10.

IV. We are here told what a solemn passover Josiah and his people kept after all this. When they had cleared the country of the old leaven they then applied themselves to the keeping of the feast. When Jehu had destroyed the worship of Baal, yet he took no heed to walk in the commandments and ordinances of God; but Josiah considered that we must learn to do well, and no *only* cease to do evil, and that the way to keep out all abominable customs is to keep up all instituted ordinances (see Lev. 18:30), and therefore he commanded all the people to keep the passover, which was not only a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, but a token of their dedication to him that brought them out and their communion with him. This he found written in the *book of the law*, here called *the book of the covenant*; for, though the divine authority may deal with us in a way of absolute command, divine grace condescends to federal transactions, and therefore he observed it. We have not such a particular account of this passover as of that in Hezekiah's time, 2 Chr. 30. But, in general, we are told that *there was not holden such a passover* in any of the foregoing reigns, no, not *from the days of the judges* (v. 22), which, by the way, intimates that, though the account which the book of Judges gives of the state of Israel under that dynasty looks but melancholy, yet there were then some golden days. This passover, it seems, was extraordinary for the number and devotion of the communicants, their sacrifices and offerings, and their exact observance of the laws of the feast; and it was not now as in Hezekiah's passover, when many communicated that were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary, and the Levites were permitted to do the priests' work. We have reason to think that during all the remainder of Josiah's reign religion flourished and the feasts of the Lord were very carefully observed; but in this passover the satisfaction they took in the covenant lately renewed, the reformation in pursuance of it, and the revival of an ordinance of which they had lately found the divine original in the book of the law, and which had long been neglected or carelessly kept, put them into great transports of holy joy; and God was pleased to recompense their zeal in destroying idolatry with uncommon tokens of his presence and favour. All this concurred to make it a distinguished passover.

Verses 25-30

Upon the reading of these verses we must say, Lord, though *thy righteousness be as the great mountains*—evident, conspicuous, and past dispute, yet *thy judgments are a great deep*, unfathomable and past finding out, Ps. 36:6. What shall we say to this?

I. It is here owned that Josiah was one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of David, v. 25. As Hezekiah was a non-such for faith and dependence upon God in straits (ch. 18:5), so Josiah was a non-such for sincerity and zeal in carrying on a work of reformation. For this there was none like him, 1. That he *turned to the Lord* from whom his fathers had revolted. It is true religion to turn to God as one we have chosen and love. He did what he could to turn his kingdom also to the Lord. 2. That he did this *with his heart and soul*; his affections and aims were right in what he did. Those make nothing of their religion that

do not make heart-work of it. 3. That he did it with *all his heart*, and *all his soul*, and *all his might*—with vigour, and courage, and resolution: he could not otherwise have broken through the difficulties he had to grapple with. What great things may we bring to pass in the service of God if we be but lively and hearty in it! 4. That he did this *according to all the law of Moses*, in an exact observance of that law and with an actual regard to it. His zeal did not transport him into any irregularities, but, in all he did, he walked by rule.

II. Notwithstanding this he was cut off by a violent death in the midst of his days, and his kingdom was ruined within a few years after. Consequent upon such a reformation as this, one would have expected nothing but the prosperity and glory both of king and kingdom; but, quite contrary, we find both under a cloud. 1. Even the reformed kingdom continues marked for ruin. For all this (v. 26) *the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath*. That is certainly true, which God spoke by the prophet (Jer. 18:7, 8), that if a nation, doomed to destruction, *turn from the evil* of sin, God will *repent of the evil* of punishment; and therefore we must conclude that Josiah's people, though they submitted to Josiah's power, did not heartily imbibe Josiah's principles. They were turned by force, and did not voluntarily *turn from their evil way*, but still continued their affection for their idols; and therefore he that knows men's hearts would not recall the sentence, which was, That Judah should be removed, as Israel had been, and Jerusalem itself cast off, v. 27. Yet even this destruction was intended to be their effectual reformation; so that we must say, not only that the criminals had filled their measure and were ripe for ruin, but also that the disease had come to a crisis, and was ready for a cure; and this shall be all the fruit, even the taking away of sin. 2. As an evidence of this, even the reforming king is cut off in the midst of his usefulness—in mercy to him, that he might not see the evil which was coming upon his kingdom, but in wrath to his people, for his death was an inlet to their desolations. The king of Egypt waged war, it seems, with the king of Assyria: so the king of Babylon is now called. Josiah's kingdom lay between them. He therefore thought himself concerned to oppose the king of Egypt, and check the growing, threatening, greatness of his power; for though, at this time, he protested that he had no design against Josiah, yet, if he should prevail to unite the river of Egypt and the river Euphrates, the land of Judah would soon be overflowed between them. Therefore *Josiah went against him*, and was killed in the first engagement, v. 29, 30. Here, (1.) We cannot justify Josiah's conduct. He had no clear call to engage in this war, nor do we find that he asked counsel of God by urim or prophets concerning it. What had he to do to appear and act as a friend and ally to the king of Assyria? *Should he help the ungodly and love those that hate the Lord?* If the kings of Egypt and Assyria quarrelled, he had reason to think God would bring good out of it to him and his people, by making them instrumental to weaken one another. Some understand the promise made to him that he should *come to his grave in peace* in a sense in which it was not performed because, by his miscarriage in this matter, he forfeited the benefit of it. God has promised to keep us *in all our ways*; but, if we go out of our way, we throw ourselves out of his protection. I understand the promise so as that I believe it was fulfilled, for he *died in peace* with God and his own conscience, and saw not, nor had any immediate prospect of, the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; yet I understand the providence to be a rebuke to him for his rashness. (2.) We must adore God's righteousness in taking away such a jewel from an unthankful people that knew not how to value it. They greatly lamented his death (2 Chr. 35:25), urged to it by Jeremiah, who told them the meaning of it, and

what a threatening omen it was; but they had not made a due improvement of the mercies they enjoyed by his life, of which God taught them the worth by the want.

Verses 31-37

Jerusalem saw not a good day after Josiah was laid in his grave, but one trouble came after another, till within twenty-two years it was quite destroyed. Of the reign of two of his sons here is a short account; the former we find here a prisoner and the latter a tributary to the king of Egypt, and both so in the very beginning of their reign. This king of Egypt having slain Josiah, though he had not had any design upon Judah, yet, being provoked by the opposition which Josiah gave him, now, it should seem, he bent all his force against his family and kingdom. If Josiah's sons had trodden in his steps, they would have fared the better for his piety; but, deviating from them, they fared the worse for his rashness.

I. Jehoahaz, a younger son, was first made king by *the people of the land*, probably because he was observed to be of a more active warlike genius than his elder brother, and likely to make head against the king of Egypt and to avenge his father's death, which perhaps the people were more solicitous about, in point of honour, than the keeping up and carrying on of his father's reformation; and the issue was accordingly. 1. He did ill, v. 32. Though he had a good education and a good example given him, and many a good prayer, we may suppose, put up for him, yet he *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, and, it is to be feared, began to do so in his father's lifetime, for his reign was so short that he could not, in that, show much of his character. He did *according to all that his wicked fathers had done*. Though he had not time to do much, yet he had chosen his patterns, and showed whom he intended to follow and whose steps he resolved to tread in; and, having done this, he is here reckoned to have done according to all the evil which those did whom he proposed to imitate. It is of great consequence to young people whom they choose to take for their patterns and whom they emulate. An error in this choice is fatal. Phil. 3:17, 18. 2. Doing ill, no wonder that he fared ill. He was but three months a prince, and was then made a prisoner, and lived and died so. The king of Egypt seized him, and put him in bands (v. 33), fearing lest he should give him disturbance, and carried him to Egypt, where he died soon after, v. 34. This Jehoahaz is that young lion whom Ezekiel speaks of in his *lamentation for the princes of Israel*, that learnt to *catch the prey and devour men* (that was the evil which he did in the sight of the Lord); but *the nations heard of him, he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains into the land of Egypt*, Eze. 19:1-4. See Jer. 22:10-12.

II. Eliakim, another son of Josiah, was made king by the king of Egypt, it is not said *in the room of Jehoahaz* (his reign was so short that it was scarcely worth taking notice of), but *in the room of Josiah*. The crown of Judah had hitherto always descended from a father to a son, and never, till now, from one brother to another; once the succession had so happened in the house of Ahab, but never, till now, in the house of David. The king of Egypt, having used his power in making him king, further showed it in changing his name; he called him *Jehoiakim*, a name that has reference to Jehovah, for he had no design to make him renounce or forget the religion of his country. "All people will walk in the name of their God, and let him do so." The king of Babylon did not do so by those whose names he changed, Dan. 1:7. Of this Jehoiakim we are here told, 1. That the king of Egypt made him poor, exacted from him a vast tribute of 100 *talents of silver and a talent of gold* (v. 33), which, with much

difficulty, he squeezed out of his subjects and gave to Pharaoh, v. 35. Formerly the Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians; now the Egyptians spoil Israel. See what woeful changes sin makes. 2. That which made him poor, yet did not make him good. Notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence he was under, by which he should have been convinced, humbled, and reformed, he *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord* (v. 37), and so prepared against himself greater judgments; for such God will send if less do not do the work for which they are sent.

Chapter 24

Things are here ripening for, and hastening towards, the utter destruction of Jerusalem. We left Jehoiakim on the throne, placed there by the king of Egypt: now here we have, I. The troubles of his reign, how he was brought into subjection by the king of Babylon, and severely chastised for attempting to shake off the yoke (v. 1-6), and how Egypt also was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (v. 7). II. The desolations of his son's reign, which continued but three months; and then he and all his great men, being forced to surrender at discretion, were carried captives to Babylon (v. 8-16). III. The preparatives of the next reign (which was the last of all) for the utter ruin of Jerusalem, which the next chapter will give us an account of (v. 17-20).

Verses 1-7

We have here the first mention of a name which makes a great figure both in the histories and in the prophecies of the Old Testament; it is that of *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon (v. 1), that head of gold. He was a potent prince, and one that was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living; and yet his name would not have been known in sacred writ if he had not been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews.

I. He made Jehoiakim his tributary and kept him in subjection three years, v. 1. Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In his eighth year he made him his prisoner, but restored him upon his promise of faithfulness to him. That promise he kept about three years, but then rebelled, probably in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt. If Jehoiakim had served his God as he should have done, he would not have been servant to the king of Babylon; but God would thus make him know the difference between his service and *the service of the kings of the countries*, 2 Chr. 12:8. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition would have been no worse; but, rebelling against the king of Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble.

II. When he rebelled Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces against him to destroy his country, bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, who were all now in the service and pay of the king of Babylon (v. 2), and withal retained, and now showed, their ancient enmity to the Israel of God. Yet no mention is here made of their commission from the king of Babylon, but only of that from the King of kings: *The Lord sent against him* all these bands; and again (v. 3), *Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah*, else the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar could not have brought it. Many are serving God's purposes who are not aware of it. Two things God intended in suffering Judah to be thus harassed:-1. The punishment of the sins of Manasseh, which God now visited upon *the third and fourth generation*. So long he waited before he visited them, to see if the nation would repent; but they continued impenitent, notwithstanding Josiah's endeavours to reform them, and ready to relapse, upon the first turn, into their former idolatries. Now that the old bond was put in suit they were called up upon the former judgment; that was revived which God had *laid up in store*, and *sealed among his treasures* (Deu. 32:34; Job 14:17), and in remembrance of that he removed Judah out of his sight, and let the world know that *time will not wear out the guilt of sin* and that reprieves are not pardons. All that Manasseh did was called to mind, but especially the *innocent blood that he shed*, much of which, we may suppose, was the blood of God's witnesses and worshippers, *which the*

Lord would not pardon. Is there then any unpardonable sin but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? This is meant of the remitting of the temporal punishment. Though Manasseh repented, and we have reason to think even the persecutions and murders he was guilty of were pardoned, so that he was delivered from the wrath to come; yet, as they were national sins, they lay still charged upon the land, crying for national judgments. Perhaps some were now living who were aiding and abetting; and the present king was guilty of innocent blood, as appears Jer. 22:17. See what a provoking sin murder is, how loud it cries, and how long. See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. God intended hereby the accomplishment of the prophecies; it was *according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servants the prophets*. Rather shall Judah be *removed out of his sight*, nay, rather shall *heaven and earth pass away*, than any word of God fall to the ground. Threatenings will be fulfilled as certainly as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not.

III. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon, and a great part of his country taken from him, v. 7. It was but lately that he had oppressed Israel, ch. 23:33. Now he is himself brought down and disabled to attempt any thing for the recovery of his losses or the assistance of his allies. He dares not *come any more out of his land*. Afterwards he attempted to give Zedekiah some relief, but was obliged to retire, Jer. 37:7.

IV. Jehoiakim, seeing his country laid waste and himself ready to fall into the enemy's hand, as it should seem, died of a broken heart, in the midst of his days (v. 6). So *Jehoiakim slept with his fathers*; but it is not said that he was *buried with them*, for no doubt the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, that he should not be lamented, as his father was, but *buried with the burial of an ass* (Jer. 22:18, 19), and his dead body cast out, Jer. 36:30.

Verses 8-20

This should have been the history of king Jehoiachin's *reign*, but, alas! it is only the history of king Jehoiachin's *captivity*, as it is called, Eze. 1:2. He came to the crown, not to have the honour of wearing it, but the shame of losing it. *Ideo tantum venerat, ut exiret—He came in only to go out.*

I. His reign was short and inconsiderable. He reigned but three months, and then was removed and carried captive to Babylon, as his father, it is likely, would have been if he had lived but so much longer. What an unhappy young prince was this, that was thrust into a falling house, a sinking throne! What an unnatural father had he, who begat him to suffer for him, and by his own sin and folly had left himself nothing to bequeath to his son but his own miseries! Yet this young prince reigned long enough to show that he justly smarted for his fathers' sins, for he trod in their steps (v. 9): *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, as they had done; he did nothing to cut off the entail of the curse, to discharge the incumbrances of his crown, and therefore (*transit cum onere—the incumbrance descends with the crown*) with his own iniquity that of his fathers shall come into the account.

II. The calamities that came upon him, and his family, and people, in the very beginning of his reign, were very grievous. 1. Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, v. 10, 11. He had sent his forces to ravage the country, v. 2. Now he came himself, and laid siege to the city. Now the word of God was fulfilled (Deu. 28:49, etc.), *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, of fierce countenance*, that shall first *eat of the fruit of thy land* and then *besiege thee in all thy gates*. 2.

Jehoiachin immediately surrendered at discretion. As soon as he heard the king of Babylon had come in person against the city, his name having at this time become very formidable, he beat a parley and went out to him, v. 12. Had he made his peace with God, and taken the method that Hezekiah did in the like case, he needed not to have feared the king of Babylon, but might have held out with courage, honour, and success (one should have chased a thousand); but, wanting the faith and piety of an Israelite, he had not the resolution of a man, of a soldier, of a prince. He and his royal family, his mother and wives, his servants and princes, delivered themselves up prisoners of war; this was the consequence of their being servants of sin. 3. Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasuries both of the church and of the state, and carried away the silver and gold of both, v. 13. Now the word of God by Isaiah was fulfilled (ch. 20:17), *All that is in thy house shall be carried to Babylon*. Even the vessels of the temple which Solomon had made, and laid up in store to be used as the old ones were worn out, he cut off from the temple, and began to cut them in pieces, but, upon second thoughts, reserved them for his own use, for we find Belshazzar drinking wine in them, Dan. 5:2, 3. 4. He carried away a great part of Jerusalem into captivity, to weaken it, that he might effectually secure to himself the dominion of it and prevent its revolt, and to enrich himself with the wealth or service of those he took away. There had been some carried away eight years before this, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar and the third of Jehoiakim, among whom were Daniel and his fellows. See Dan. 1:1, 6. They had approved themselves so well that this politic prince coveted more of them. Now he carried off, (1.) The young king himself and his family (v. 15), and we find (ch. 25:27–29) that for thirty-seven years he continued a close prisoner. (2.) All the great men, the princes and officers, whose riches were *kept for the owners thereof to their hurt* (Eccl. 5:13), tempting the enemies to make a prey of them first. (3.) All the military men, the *mighty men of valour* (v. 14), *the mighty of the land* (v. 15), *the men of might, even all that were strong and apt for war*, v. 16. These could not defend themselves, and the conqueror would not leave them to defend their country, but took them away, to be employed in his service. (4.) All the craftsmen and smiths who made weapons of war; in taking them he did, in effect, disarm the city, according to the Philistines' policy, 1 Sa. 13:19. In this captivity Ezekiel the prophet was carried away (Eze. 1:1, 2) and Mordecai, Esth. 2:6. This Jehoiachin was also called *Jeconiah* (1 Chr. 3:16), and in contempt (Jer. 22:24, where his captivity is foretold) *Coniah*.

III. The successor whom the king of Babylon appointed in the room of Jehoiachin. God had written him childless (Jer. 22:30) and therefore his uncle was entrusted with the government. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king, the son of Josiah; and to remind him, and let all the world know, that he was his creature, he changed his name and called him *Zedekiah*, v. 17. God had sometimes charged it upon his people, *They have set up kings, but not by me* (Hos. 8:4), and now, to punish them for that, the king of Babylon shall have the setting up of their kings. Those are justly deprived of their liberty that use it, and insist upon it, against God's authority. This Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah. The name which the king of Babylon gave him signifies *The justice of the Lord*, and was a presage of the glorifying of God's justice in his ruin. 1. See how impious this Zedekiah was. Though the judgments of God upon his three immediate predecessors might have been a warning to him not to tread in their steps, yet *he did that which was evil*, like all the rest, v. 19. 2. See how impolitic he was. As his predecessor lost his courage, so he his wisdom, with his religion, for he *rebelled against the king of Babylon* (v. 20), whose tributary he was,

and so provoked him whom he was utterly unable to contend with, and who, if he had continued true to him, would have protected him. This was the most foolish thing he could do, and hastened the ruin of his kingdom. This came to pass *through the anger of the Lord, that he might cast them out from his presence*. Note, When those that are entrusted with the counsels of a nation act unwisely, and against their true interest, we ought to take notice of the displeasure of God in it. It is for the sins of a people that God *removes the speech of the trusty and takes away the understanding of the aged, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to the public peace*. Whom God will destroy he infatuates.

Chapter 25

Ever since David's time Jerusalem had been a celebrated place, beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole earth: while the book of psalms lasts that name will sound great. In the New Testament we read much of it, when it was, as here, ripening again for its ruin. In the close of the Bible we read of a new Jerusalem. Every thing therefore that concerns Jerusalem is worthy our regard. In this chapter we have, I. The utter destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the city besieged and taken (v. 1-4), the houses burnt (v. 8, 9), and wall broken down (v. 10), and the inhabitants carried away into captivity (v. 11, 12). The glory of Jerusalem was, 1. That it was the royal city, where were set "the thrones of the house of David;" but that glory has now departed, for the prince is made a most miserable prisoner, the seed royal is destroyed (v. 5-7), and the principal officers are put to death (v. 18-21). 2. That it was the holy city, where was the testimony of Israel; but that glory has departed, for Solomon's temple is burnt to the ground (v. 9) and the sacred vessels that remained are carried away to Babylon (v. 13-17). Thus has Jerusalem become as a widow, Lam. 1:1. Ichabod—Where is the glory? II. The distraction and dispersion of the remnant that was left in Judah under Gedaliah (v. 22-26). III. The countenance which, after thirty-seven years' imprisonment, was given to Jehoiachin the captive king of Judah (v. 27-30).

Verses 1-7

We left king Zedekiah in rebellion against the king of Babylon (ch. 24:20), contriving and endeavouring to shake off his yoke, when he was no way able to do it, nor took the right method by making God his friend first. Now here we have an account of the fatal consequences of that attempt.

I. The king of Babylon's army laid siege to Jerusalem, v. 1. What should hinder them when the country was already in their possession? ch. 24:2. They *built forts against the city round about*, whence, by such arts of war as they then had, they battered it, sent into it instruments of death, and kept out of it the necessary supports of life. Formerly Jerusalem had been compassed with the favour of God as with a shield, but now their defence had departed from them and their enemies surrounded them on every side. Those that by sin have provoked God to leave them will find that *innumerable evils will compass them about*. Two years this siege lasted; at first the army retired, for fear of the king of Egypt (Jer. 37:11), but, finding him not so powerful as they thought, they soon returned, with a resolution not to quit the city till they had made themselves masters of it.

II. During this siege the famine prevailed (v. 3), so that for a long time they *ate their bread by weight and with care*, Eze. 4:16. Thus they were punished for their gluttony and excess, their *fulness of bread* and *feeding themselves without fear*. At length *there was no bread for the people of the land*, that is, the common people, the soldiers, whereby they were weakened and rendered unfit for service. Now they ate their own children for want of food. See this foretold by one prophet (Eze. 5:10) and bewailed by another, Lam. 4:3, etc. Jeremiah earnestly persuaded the king to surrender (Jer. 38:17), but his heart was hardened to his destruction.

III. At length the city was taken by storm: it was *broken up*, v. 4. The besiegers made a breach in the wall, at which they forced their way into it. The besieged, unable any longer to defend it, endeavoured to quit it, and make the best of their way; and

many, no doubt, were put to the sword, the victorious army being much exasperated by their obstinacy.

IV. The king, his family, and all his great men, made their escape in the night, by some secret passages which the besiegers either had not discovered or did not keep their eye upon, v. 4. But those as much deceive themselves who think to escape God's judgments as those who think to brave them; the feet of him that flees from them will as surely fail as the hands of him that fights against them. When God judges he will overcome. Intelligence was given to the Chaldeans of the king's flight, and which way he had gone, so that they soon overtook him, v. 5. His guards were scattered from him, every man shifting for his own safety. Had he put himself under God's protection, that would not have failed him now. He presently fell into the enemies' hands, and here we are told what they did with him. 1. He was brought to the king of Babylon, and tried by a council of war for rebelling against him who set him up, and to whom he had sworn fidelity. God and man had a quarrel with him for this; see Eze. 17:16, etc. The king of Babylon now lay at Riblah (which lay between Judea and Babylon), that he might be ready to give orders both to his court at home and his army abroad. 2. His *sons were slain before his eyes*, though children, that this doleful spectacle, the last his eyes were to behold, might leave an impression of grief and horror upon his spirit as long as he lived. In slaying his sons, they showed their indignation at his falsehood, and in effect declared that neither he nor any of his were fit to be trusted, and therefore that they were not fit to live. 3. His eyes were put out, by which he was deprived of that common comfort of human life which is given even to *those that are in misery, and to the bitter in soul*, the light of the sun, by which he was also disabled for any service. He dreaded being mocked, and therefore would not be persuaded to yield (Jer. 38:19), but that which he feared came upon him with a witness, and no doubt added much to his misery; for, as those that are deaf suspect that every body talks of them, so those that are blind suspect that every body laughs at them. By this two prophecies that seemed to contradict one another were both fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah should be brought to Babylon, Jer. 32:5; 34:3. Ezekiel prophesied that he should not see Babylon, Eze. 12:13. He was brought thither, but, his eyes being put out, he did not see it. Thus he ended his days, before he ended his life. 4. He was *bound in fetters of brass* and so *carried to Babylon*. He that was blind needed not be bound (his blindness fettered him), but, for his greater disgrace, they led him bound; only, whereas common malefactors are laid in irons (Ps. 105:18; 107:10), he, being a prince, was bound with fetters of brass; but that the metal was somewhat nobler and lighter was little comfort, while still he was in fetters. Let it not seem strange if those that have been held in the cords of iniquity come to be thus *held in the cords of affliction*, Job 36:8.

Verses 8-21

Though we have reason to think that the army of the Chaldeans were much enraged against the city for holding out with so much stubbornness, yet they did not therefore put all to fire and sword as soon as they had taken the city (which is too commonly done in such cases), but about a month after (compare v. 8 with v. 3) Nebuzar-adan was sent with orders to complete the destruction of Jerusalem. This space God gave them to repent, after all the foregoing days of his patience, but in vain; their hearts (for aught that appears) were still hardened, and therefore execution is awarded to the utmost. 1. The city and temple are burnt, v. 9. It does not appear that the king of Babylon designed to send any colonies to people Jerusalem and therefore he ordered it to be laid in ashes, as a nest of rebels. At the burning of the king's house and *the houses of the great men*

one cannot so much wonder (the inhabitants had, by their sins, made them combustible), but that the *house of the Lord* should perish in these flames, that that holy and beautiful house should be burnt with fire (Isa. 64:11), is very strange. That house which David prepared for, and which Solomon built at such a vast expense—that house which had the eye and heart of God perpetually upon it (1 Ki. 9:3)—might not that have been snatched as a brand out of this burning? No, it must not be fire-proof against God's judgments. This stately structure must be turned into ashes, and it is probable the ark in it, for the enemies, having heard how dearly the Philistines paid for the abusing of it, durst not seize that, nor did any of its friends take care to preserve it, for then we should have heard of it again in the second temple. One of the apocryphal writers does indeed tell us that the prophet Jeremiah got it out of the temple, and conveyed it to a cave in Mount Nebo on the other side Jordan, and hid it there (2 Macc. 2:4, 5), but that could not be, for Jeremiah was a close prisoner at that time. By the burning of the temple God would show how little cares for the external pomp of his worship when the life and power of religion are neglected. The people trusted to the temple, as if that would protect them in their sins (Jer. 7:4), but God, by this, let them know that when they had profaned it they would find it but a refuge of lies. This temple had stood about 420, some say 430 years. The people having forfeited the promises made concerning it, those promises must be understood of the gospel-temple, which is God's rest for ever. It is observable that the second temple was burnt by the Romans the same month, and the same day of the month, that the first temple was burnt by the Chaldeans, which, Josephus says, was the tenth of August. 2. The walls of Jerusalem are demolished (v. 10), as if the victorious army would be revenged on them for having kept them out so long, or at least prevent the like opposition another time. Sin unwalls a people and takes away their defence. These walls were never repaired till Nehemiah's time. 3. The residue of the people are carried away captive to Babylon, v. 11. Most of the inhabitants had perished by sword or famine, or had made their escape when the king did (for it is said, v. 5, *His army was scattered from him*), so that there were very few left, who with the deserters, making in all but 832 persons (as appears, Jer. 52:29), were carried away into captivity; only *the poor of the land were left behind* (v. 12), to till the ground and dress the vineyards for the Chaldeans. Sometimes poverty is a protection; for those that have nothing have nothing to lose. When the rich Jews, who had been oppressive to the poor, were made strangers, nay, prisoners, in an enemy's country, the poor whom they had despised and oppressed had liberty and peace in their own country. Thus Providence sometimes remarkably humbles the proud and favours those of low degree. 4. The brazen vessels, and other appurtenances of the temple, are carried away, those of silver and gold being most of them gone before. Those two famous columns of brass, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, which signified the strength and stability of the house of God, were broken to pieces and the brass of them was carried to Babylon, v. 13. When the things signified were sinned away what should the signs stand there for? Ahaz had profanely *cut off the borders of the bases*, and put *the brazen sea upon a pavement of stones* (2 Ki. 16:17); justly therefore are the brass themselves, and the brazen sea, delivered into the enemy's hand. It is just with God to take away his ordinances from those that profane and abuse them, that curtail and depress them. Some things remained of gold and silver (v. 15) which were now carried off; but most of this plunder was brass, such a vast quantity of it that it is said to be *without weight*, v. 16. The carrying away of *the vessels wherewith they ministered* (v. 14) put an end to the ministrations. It was a righteous thing with God to deprive those of the benefit of his worship who had

slighted it so long and preferred false worships before it. Those that would have many altars shall now have none. 5. Several of the great men are slain in cold blood—Seraiah the chief priest (who was the father of Ezra as appears, Ezra 7:1), the second priest (who, when there was occasion, officiated for him), and three door-keepers of the temple (v. 18), the general of the army, five privy-counsellors (afterwards they made them up seven, Jer. 52:25), the secretary of war, or pay-master of the army, and sixty country gentlemen who had concealed themselves in the city. These, being persons of some rank, were brought to the king of Babylon (v. 19, 20), who ordered them to be all put to death (v. 21), when, in reason, they might have hoped that surely the bitterness of death was past. These the king of Babylon's revenge looked upon as most active in opposing him; but divine justice, we may suppose, looked upon them as ringleaders in that idolatry and impiety which were punished by these desolations. This completed the calamity: *So Judah was carried away out of their land*, about 860 years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua. Now the scripture was fulfilled, *The Lord shall bring thee, and the king which thou shalt set over thee, into a nation which thou hast not known*, Deu. 28:36. Sin kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, and now turned them out. The Lord is known by those judgments which he executes, and makes good that word which he has spoken, Amos 3:2. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

Verses 22-30

In these verses we have,

I. The dispersion of the remaining people. The city of Jerusalem was quite laid waste. Some people there were in the land of Judah (v. 22) that had weathered the storm, and (which was no small favour at this time, Jer. 45:5) had *their lives given them for a prey*. Now see, 1. What a good posture they were put into. The king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, one of themselves, to be their governor and protector under him, a very good man, and one that would make the best of the bad, v. 22. His father Ahikam was one that countenanced and protected Jeremiah when the princes had vowed his death, Jer. 26:24. It is probable that this Gedaliah, by the advice of Jeremiah, had gone over the Chaldeans, and had conducted himself so well that the king of Babylon entrusted him with the government. He resided not at Jerusalem, but at Mizpah, in the land of Benjamin, a place famous in Samuel's time. Thither those came who had fled from Zedekiah (v. 4) and put themselves under his protection (v. 23), which he assured them of if they would be patient and peaceable under the government of the king of Babylon, v. 24. Gedaliah, though he had not the pomp and power of a sovereign prince, yet might have been a greater blessing to them than many of their kings had been, especially having such a privy-council as Jeremiah, who was now with them, and interested himself in their affairs, Jer. 40:5, 6. 2. What a fatal breach was made upon them, soon afterwards, by the death of Gedaliah, within two months after he entered upon his government. The utter extirpation of the Jews, for the present, was determined, and therefore it was in vain for them to think of taking root again: the whole land must be plucked up, Jer. 45:4. Yet this hopeful settlement is dashed to pieces, not by the Chaldeans, but by some of themselves. The things of their peace were so hidden from their eyes that they knew not when they were well off, nor would believe when they were told. (1.) They had a good governor of their own, and him they slew, out of spite to the Chaldeans, because he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, v. 25. Ishmael, who was of the royal family, envying Gedaliah's advancement and the happy settlement of the people under him,

though he could not propose to set up himself, resolved to ruin him, and basely slew him and all his friends, both Jews and Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar would not, could not, have been a more mischievous enemy to their peace than this degenerate branch of the house of David was. (2.) They were as yet in their own good land, but they forsook it, and went to Egypt, for fear of the Chaldeans, v. 26. The Chaldeans had reason enough to be offended at the murder of Gedaliah; but if those that remained had humbly remonstrated, alleging that it was only the act of Ishmael and his party, we may suppose that those who were innocent of it, nay, who suffered greatly by it, would not have been punished for it: but, under pretence of this apprehension, contrary to the counsel of Jeremiah, they all went to Egypt, where, it is probable, they mixed with the Egyptians by degrees, and were never heard of more as Israelites. Thus was there a full end made of them by their own folly and disobedience, and Egypt had the last of them, that the last verse of that chapter of threatenings might be fulfilled, after all the rest, Deu. 28:68, *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again*. These events are more largely related by the prophet Jeremiah, ch. 40 to ch. 45. *Quaeque ipse miserrima vidit, et quorum pars magna fuit—Which scenes he was doomed to behold, and in which he bore a melancholy part.*

II. The reviving of the captive prince. Of Zedekiah we hear no more after he was carried blind to Babylon; it is probable that he did not live long, but that when he died he was buried with some marks of honour, Jer. 34:5. Of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who surrendered himself (ch. 24:12), we are here told that as soon as Evil-merodach came to the crown, upon the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, he released him out of prison (where he had lain thirty-seven years, and was now fifty-five years old), *spoke kindly to him*, paid more respect to him than to any other of the kings his father had left in captivity (v. 28), gave him princely clothing instead of his prison-garments, maintained him in his own palace (v. 29), and allowed him a pension for himself and his family in some measure corresponding to his rank, *a daily rate for every day as long as he lived*. Consider this, 1. As a very happy change of Jehoiachin's condition. To have honour and liberty after he had been so long in confinement and disgrace, the plenty and pleasure of a court after he had been so long accustomed to the straits and miseries of a prison, was like the return of the morning after a very dark and tedious night. Let none say that they shall never see good again because they have long seen little but evil; the most miserable know not what blessed turn Providence may yet give to their affairs, nor what comforts they are reserved for, *according to the days wherein they have been afflicted*, Ps. 110:15. However the death of afflicted saints is to them such a change as this was to Jehoiachin: it will release them out of their prison, shake off the body, that prison-garment, and open the way to their advancement; it will send them to the throne, to the table, of the King of kings, the glorious liberty of God's children. 2. As a very generous act of Evil-merodach's. He thought his father made the yoke of his captives too heavy, and therefore, with the tenderness of a man and the honour of a prince, made it lighter. It should seem all the kings he had in his power were favoured, but Jehoiachin above them all, some think for the sake of the antiquity of his family and the honour of his renowned ancestors, David and Solomon. None of the kings of the nations, it is likely, had descended from so long a race of kings in a direct lineal succession, and by a male line, as the king of Judah. The Jews say that this Evil-merodach had been himself imprisoned by his own father, when he returned from his madness, for some mismanagement at that time, and that in prison he contracted a friendship with Jehoiachin, in consequence of which, as soon as he had it in his power, he

showed him this kindness as a sufferer, as a fellow-sufferer. Some suggest that Evil-merodach had learned from Daniel and his fellows the principles of the true religion, and was well affected to them, and upon that account favoured Jehoiachin. 3. As a kind dispensation of Providence, for the encouragement of the Jews in captivity, and the support of their faith and hope concerning their enlargement in due time. This happened just about the midnight of their captivity. Thirty-six of the seventy years were now past, and almost as many were yet behind, and now to see their king thus advanced would be a comfortable earnest to them of their own release in due time, in the set time. *Unto the upright there thus ariseth light in the darkness*, to encourage them to hope, even in the *cloudy and dark day*, that at *evening time it shall be light*; when therefore we are perplexed, let us not be in despair.