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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Prophecy of Amos

Though this prophet appeared a little before Isaiah, yet he was not, as some have mistaken, that Amos who was the father of Isaiah (Isa. 1:1), for in the Hebrew their names are very different; their families too were of a different character, for Isaiah was a courtier, Amos a country-farmer. Amos signifies a *burden*, whence the Jews have a tradition that he was of a slow tongue and spoke with stammering lips; we may rather, in allusion to his name, say that his speech was *weighty* and his word the *burden of the Lord*. He was (as most think) of Judah, yet prophesied chiefly against Israel, and at Bethel, 7:13. Some think his style savours of his extraction, and is more plain and rustic than that of some other of the prophets; I do not see it so; but it is plain that his matter agreed with that of his contemporary Hosea, that *out of the mouth of these two witnesses the word might be established*. It appears by his contest with Amaziah the priest of Bethel that he met with opposition in his work, but was a man of undaunted resolution in it, faithful and bold in reproving sin and denouncing the judgments of God for it, and pressing in his exhortations to repentance and reformation. He begins with threatenings against the neighbouring nations that were enemies to Israel, ch. 1 and 2. He then calls Israel to account, and judges them for their idolatry, their unworthy walking under the favours God had bestowed upon them, and their incorrigibleness under his judgments, ch. 3 and 4. He calls them to repentance (ch. 5), rejecting their hypocritical sacrifices unless they did repent. He foretels the desolations that were coming upon them notwithstanding their security (ch. 6), some particular judgments (ch. 7), particularly on Amaziah; and, after other reproofs and threatenings (ch. 8 and 9), concludes with a promise of the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom and the happiness of God's spiritual Israel therein, just as the prophecy of Joel concluded. These prophets, having opened the wound in their reproofs and threatenings, which show all wrong, in the promises of gospel-grace open the remedy, which alone will set all to rights.

Chapter 1

In this chapter we have, I. The general title of this prophecy (v. 1), with the general scope of it (v. 2). II. God's particular controversy with Syria (v. 3-5), with Palestine (v. 6-8), with Tyre (v. 9, 10), with Edom (v. 11, 12), and with Ammon (v. 13-15), for their cruelty to his people and the many injuries they had done them. This explains God's pleading with the nations, Joel 3:2.

Verses 1-2

Here is, I. The general character of this prophecy. It consists of *the words which the prophet saw*. Are words to be seen? Yes, God's words are; the apostles speak of the *word of life*, which they had not only *heard*, but *which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their hands had handled* (1 Jn. 1:1), such a real substantial thing is the word of God. The prophet saw these words, that is, 1. They were revealed to him in a *vision*, as John is said to see *the voice* that spoke to him, Rev. 1:12. 2. That which was foretold by them was to him as certain as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. It intimates how strong he was in that faith which is *the evidence of things not seen*.

II. The person by whom this prophecy was sent—*Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa*, and was one of them. Some think he was a rich dealer in cattle; the word is used concerning the king of Moab (2 Ki. 3:4, *He was a sheep-master*); it is probable that he got money by that business, and yet he must quit it, to follow God as a prophet. Others think he was a poor keeper of cattle, for we find (ch. 7:14, 15) that he was withal a *gatherer of wild figs*, a poor employment by which we may suppose he could but just get his bread, and that God took him, as he did David, from following the flock, and Elisha from following the plough. Many were trained up for great employments, in the quiet, innocent, contemplative business of shepherds. When God would send a prophet to reprove and warn his people, he employed a shepherd, a herdsman, to do it; for they had made themselves *as the horse and mule that have no understanding*, nay, worse than the *ox that knows his owner*. God sometimes *chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*, 1 Co. 1:27. Note, Those whom God has endued with abilities for his service ought not to be despised nor laid aside for the meanness either of their origin or of their beginnings. Though Amos himself is not ashamed to own that he was a herdsman, yet others ought not to upbraid him with it nor think the worse of him for it.

III. The persons concerned in the prophecy of this book; it is *concerning Israel*, the *ten tribes*, who were now ripened in sin and ripening apace for ruin. God has raised them up prophets among themselves (ch. 2:11), but they regarded them not; therefore God sends them one from Tekoa, in the land of Judah, that, coming from another country, he might be the more valued, and perhaps he was the rather sent out of his own country because there he was despised for his having been a herdsman. See Mt. 13:55-57.

IV. The time when these prophecies were delivered. 1. The book is dated, as laws used to be, by the reigns of the kings under whom the prophet prophesied. It was in the days of *Uzziah king of Judah*, when the affairs of that kingdom went very well, and of *Jeroboam the second king of Israel*, when the affairs of that kingdom went pretty well; yet then they must both be told both

of the sins they were guilty of and of the judgments that were coming upon them for those sins, that they might not with the present gleam of prosperity flatter themselves either into an opinion of their innocence or a confidence of their perpetual security. 2. It is dated by a particular event to which is prophecy had a reference; it was *two years before the earthquake*, that earthquake which is mentioned to have been *in the days of Uzziah* (Zec. 14:5), which put the nation into a dreadful fright, for it is there said, *They fled before it*. But how could they flee from it? Some conjecture that this earthquake was at the time of Isaiah's vision, when the *posts of the door were moved*, Isa. 6:4. The tradition of the Jews is that it happened just at the time when Uzziah presumptuously invaded the priest's office and went in to burn incense, 2 Chr. 26:16. Josephus mentions this earthquake, *Antiq.* 9.225, and says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off; and it spoiled the king's gardens." God by this prophet gave warning of it *two years* before, that God by it would shake down their houses, ch. 3:15.

V. The introduction to these prophecies, containing the general scope of them (v. 2): *The Lord will roar from Zion*. His threatenings by his prophets, and the executions of those threatenings in his providence, will be as terrible as the roaring of a lion is to the shepherds and their flocks. Amos here speaks the same language with his contemporaries, Hosea (ch. 11:10) and Joel, ch. 3:16. The lion roars before he tears; God gives warning before he strikes. Observe, 1. Whence this warning comes—*from Zion* and Jerusalem, from the oracles of God there delivered; for *by them is they servant warned*, Ps. 19:11. Our God, whose special residence is there, will issue out warrants, *given at that court*, as it were, for the executing of judgments on the land. See Jer. 25:30. In Zion was the mercy-seat; thence the Lord roars, intimating that God's acts of justice are consistent with mercy, allayed and mitigated by mercy, nay, as they are warnings, they are really acts of mercy. We are chastened, that we may be not be condemned. 2. What effect the warning has: *The habitations of the shepherds mourn*, either because they fear the roaring lion or because they feel what is signified by that comparison, the consequences of a *great drought* (ch. 4:7), which made *the top of Carmel* (of the most fruitful fields) to *wither* and become a desert, Joel 1:12–17.

Verses 3-15

What the Lord says here may be explained by what he says Jer. 12:14, *Thus said the Lord, against all my evil neighbours that touch the inheritance of my people Israel, Behold, I will pluck them out*. Damascus was a near neighbour to Israel on the north, Tyre and Gaza on the west, Edom on the south, Ammon and (in the next chapter) Moab on the east; and all of them had been, one time, one way, or other, *pricking briars and grieving thorns* to Israel, evil neighbours to them; and, because God espouses his people's cause, he there calls them *his evil neighbours*, and here comes forth to reckon with them. The method is taken in dealing with each of them is, in part, the same, and therefore we put them together, and yet in each there is something peculiar. I. Let us see what is repeated, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, concerning them all. The controversy God has with each of them is prefaced with, *Thus said the Lord*, Jehovah the God of Israel. Though those nations will not worship him as their God, yet they shall be made to know that they are accountable to him as their Judge. The God of Israel is *the God of the whole earth*, and has something to say to them that shall make them tremble. Against them the Lord *roars out of Zion*. And before God, by the prophet, threatens Israel and Judah, he denounces judgments against those nations whom he made use of as

scourges to them for their being so, which might serve for a check to their pride and insolence and a relief to his people under their dejections; for hereby they might see that God had not quitted his interest in them, and therefore might hope they had not lost their interest in him. Now as to all these nations here arraigned,

1. The indictment drawn up against them all is thus far the same, (1.) That they are charged in general with *three transgressions, and with four*, that is, with many transgressions (as by one or two we mean *a few*, so by three or four we mean many, as in Latin a man that is very happy is said to be *terque quarterque beatus—three and four times happy*); or *with three and four*, that is, with seven transgressions, a number of perfection, intimating that they have *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, and are ripe for ruin; or *with three* (that is, a variety of sins) *and with a fourth* especially, which is specified concerning each of them, though the other three are not, as Prov. 30:15, 18, 21, 29, where we read of *three things, yea, four*, generally one seems to be more especially intended. (2.) That the particular sin which is fastened upon as the fourth, and which alone is specified, is the sin of persecution: it is some mischief or other done to the people of God that is particularly charged upon every one of them, for persecution is the measure-filling sin of any people, and it is this sin that will be particularly reckoned for—*I was hungry, and you gave me no meat*; much more if it may be said, *I was hungry, and you took my meat from me*.

2. The judgment given against them all is thus far the same, (1.) That, their sin having risen to such a height, *God will not turn away the punishment thereof*. Though he has granted them a long reprieve, and has often *turned away their punishment*, yet now he will turn it away no longer, but justice shall take its course. "*I will not revoke it* (so some read it); *I will not recall the voice which has gone forth from Zion to Jerusalem* (v. 2), speaking death and terror to the sinful nations." It is an irrevocable sentence. God has spoken it, and he will not *call it back*. Note, Though God bear long, he will not bear always, with those that provoke him; and, when the decree brings forth, it will bring up. (2.) That God will *kindle a fire* among them; this is said concerning all these *evil neighbours*, v. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14. God will *send a fire* into their cities. When fires are kindled that lay cities, towns, and houses in ashes, whether designedly or casually, God must be acknowledged in it; they are of his sending. Sin stirs up the fire of his jealousy, and that kindles other fires.

II. Let us see what is mentioned, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, that is peculiar to each of them, that every one may take his portion.

1. Concerning Damascus, the head-city of Syria, a kingdom that was often vexatious to Israel. (1.) The peculiar sin of Damascus was using the Gileadites barbarously: *They threshed Gilead with threshing-instruments of iron* (v. 3), which may be understood literally of their putting to the torture, or to cruel deaths, the inhabitants of Gilead whom they got into their hands, as David put the Ammonites under *saws and harrows* 2 Sa. 12:31. We read with what inhumanity Hazael king of Syria prosecuted his wars with Israel (2 Ki. 8:12); he *dashed their children, and ripped up their women with child*; and see what desolations he made in their land, 2 Ki. 10:32, 33. Or it may be taken figuratively, for his laying the country waste, and this very similitude is used in the history of it. 2 Ki. 13:7, He *destroyed them, and made them like the dust by threshing*. Note, Men often do that unjustly and wickedly, and shall be severely reckoned with for it, which yet God just permits them to do. The

church is called *God's threshing, and the corn of his floor* (Isa. 21:10); but if men make it their threshing, and the chaff of their floor, they shall be sure to hear of it. (2.) The peculiar punishment of Damascus is [1.] That the fire which shall be sent shall fasten upon the court in the first place, not on the chief city, nor the country towns, but on *the house of Hazeael*, which he built; and *it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad*, the royal palaces inhabited by the kings of Syria, many of whom were of that name. Note, Even royal palaces are no defence against the judgments of God, though ever so richly furnished, though ever so strongly fortified. [2.] That the enemy shall force his way into the city (v. 5): *I will break the bar of Damascus*, and then the gate flies open. Or it may be understood figuratively: all that which is depended upon as the strength and safety of that great city shall fail, and prove insufficient. When God's judgments come with commission it is in vain to think of *turning them out*. [3.] That the people shall be destroyed with the sword: *I will cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, the valley of idolatry*, for the gods of the Syrians were *gods of the valleys* (1 Ki. 20:23), were worshipped in valleys; as the idols of Israel were worshipped on *the hills*; *him also that holdeth the sceptre of power*, some petty king or other that used to boast of the sceptre he held from Beth-Eden, the *house of pleasure*. Both those that were given to idolatry and those that were given to sensuality should be cut off together. [4.] That the body of the nation shall be carried off. *The people shall go into captivity unto Kir*, which was in the country of the Medes. We find this fulfilled (2 Ki. 16:9) about fifty years after this, when *the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin*, at the instigation of Ahaz king of Judah.

2. Concerning Gaza, a city of the Philistines, and now the metropolis of that country. (1.) The peculiar sin of the Philistines was *carrying away captive the whole captivity*, either of Israel or Judah, which some think refers to that inroad made upon Jehoram when they took away *all the king's sons and all his substance* (2 Chr. 21:17), or, perhaps, it refers to their seizing those that fled to them for shelter when Sennacherib invaded Judah, and *selling them to the Grecians* (Joel 3:4-6), or (as here) to the Edomites, who were always sworn enemies to the people of God. They spared none, but carried off all they could lay their hands on, designing, if possible, to *cut off the name of Israel*, Ps. 83:4-7. (2.) The peculiar punishment of the Philistines is that the fire which God will send shall devour the palaces of Gaza, and that the *inhabitants* of the other cities of the Philistines, Ashdod (or Azotus), Ashkelon, and Ekron, shall all be *cut off*, and God will make as thorough work with them in their ruin as they would have made with God's people when they carried away the whole captivity; for even the *remnant* of them *shall perish*, v. 8. Note, God will make a full end of those that think to make a full end of his church and people.

3. Concerning Tyre, that famous city of wealth and strength, that was itself a kingdom, v. 9. (1.) The peculiar sin of Tyre is *delivering up the whole captivity to Edom*, that is, selling to the Edomites those of Israel that fled to them for shelter, or in any way fell into their hands; not caring what hardships they put upon them, so that they could but make gain of them to themselves. Herein they forgot the *brotherly covenant*, the league that was between Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre (1 Ki. 5:12), which was intimate that Hiram called Solomon his *brother*, 1 Ki. 9:13. Note, It is a great aggravation of enmity and malice when it is the violation of friendship and of a *brotherly covenant*. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in the punishment of Tyre but that *the palaces thereof* shall be *devoured*, which was done when Nebuchadnezzar took it after thirteen years' siege.

Their merchants were all princes, and their private houses were as palaces; but the fire shall make no more of them than of cottages.

4. Concerning Edom, the posterity of Esau. (1.) Their peculiar sin was an unmerciful, unwearied, pursuit of the people of God, and their taking all advantages against them to do them a mischief, v. 11. He did *pursue his brother with the sword*, not only of old, when the king of Edom took up arms to oppose the children of Israel's passage *through his border* (Num. 20:18), but ever since upon all occasions; they had not strength and courage enough to face them in the field of battle, but, whenever any other enemy had put Judah or Israel to flight, then the Edomites set in with the pursuers, fell upon the rear, slew those that were half dead already, and (as is usual with cowards when they have an enemy at an advantage) they did *cast off all pity*. Those that are least courageous are commonly most cruel. Edom was so; his malice *destroyed his compassion* (so the word is); he stripped himself of the tenderness of a man, and put on the fierceness of a beast of prey; and, as such a one, he did tear, his *anger did tear perpetually*. His cruelty was insatiable, and he never knew when he had sucked enough of the blood of Israel, but, like the horse-leech, still cried, *Give, give*. Nay, he *kept his wrath for ever*; when he wanted objects of his wrath, and opportunity to show it, yet he kept it in reserve (it *rested in his bosom*), he rolled it under his tongue as a sweet morsel, and had it ready to spit in the face of Israel upon the next occasion. Cursed be such cruel wrath, and anger so fierce, so outrageous, which makes men like the devil, who *continually seeks to devour*, and unlike to God, who *keeps not his anger for ever*. Edom's malice was unnatural, for thus he pursued his brother, whom he ought to have protected: it was hereditary, as if it had been entailed upon the family ever since Esau hated Jacob, and time itself could not wear it out, no, nor the brotherly conduct of Israel towards them (Deu. 2:4), and the express law given to Israel (Deu. 23:7), *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother*. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in their punishment; but (v. 12) a *fire shall be sent to devour their palaces*. Note, The fire of our anger against our brethren kindles the fire of God's anger against us.

5. Concerning the Ammonites, v. 13–15. (1.) See how violently the fire of their anger turned against the people of God; they not only triumphed in their calamities (as we find, Eze. 25:2, 6), but they did themselves use them barbarously; they *ripped up the women with child of Gilead*, a piece of cruelty the very mention of which strikes a horror upon one's mind; one would think it is not possible that any of the human race should be so inhuman. Hazael was guilty of it, 2 Ki. 8:12. It was done not only in a brutish rage, which falls without consideration upon all that comes before it, but with a devilish design to extirpate the race of Israel by killing not only all that were born, but all that were to be born, worse than Egyptian cruelty. It was *that they might enlarge their border*, that they might make the land of Gilead their own, and there might be none to lay claim to it or given them any disturbance in the possession of it. We find (Jer. 49:1) that the Ammonites inherited *Gad* (that is, Gilead) under pretence that Israel had no sons, no heirs. We know how heavy the doom of those was, and how heinous their crime, who said, *This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours* by occupancy. See what cruelty covetousness is the cause of, and what horrid practices those are often put upon that are greedy to *enlarge their own border*. (2.) See how violently the fire of God's anger burned against them; shall not God *visit for these things* done to any of mankind, especially when they are done to his own people? *Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* No doubt, it shall. The fire shall be kindled

with shouting in the day of battle, that is, war shall kindle the fire; it shall be a fire accompanied with the sword, or a roaring fire, which shall make a noise like that of soldiers ready to engage, and it shall be as a *tempest in the day of the whirlwind*, which comes swiftly, furiously, and bears down all before it. Or this tempest and whirlwind shall be as bellows to the fire, to make it burn the stronger, and spread the further. It is particularly threatened that *their king and his princes shall go together into captivity*, carried away by the king of Babylon, not long after Judah was. See what changes God's providence often makes with men, or rather their own sin; kings become captives, and princes prisoners. *Milchom shall go into captivity*; some understand it of the god of the Ammonites, whom they called *Moloch—a king. He, and his princes*, and his priests that attended him, shall to *into captivity*; their idol shall be so far from protecting them that it shall itself go into captivity with them. Note, Those who by violence and fraud seek to enlarge their own border will justly be expelled and excluded their own border; nor is it strange if those who make no conscience of invading the rights of others be able to make no resistance against those who invade theirs.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I. God, by the prophet, proceeds in a like controversy with Moab as before with other nations (v. 1-3). II. He shows what quarrel he had with Judah (v. 4, 5). III. He at length begins his charge against Israel, to which all that goes before is but an introduction. Observe, 1. The sins they are charged with—injustice, oppression, whoredom (v. 6-8). 2. The aggravations of those sins—the temporal and spiritual mercies God had bestowed upon them, for which they had made him such ungrateful returns (v. 9–12). 3. God's complaint of them for their sins (v. 13) and his threatenings of their ruin, and their utter inability to prevent it (v. 14–16).

Verses 1-8

Here is, I. The judgment of Moab, another of the nations that bordered upon Israel. They are reckoned with and shall be punished *for three transgressions and for four*, as those before. Now, 1. Moab's fourth transgression, as theirs who were before set to the bar, was cruelty. The instance given refers not to the people of God, but to a heathen like themselves: The king of Moab *burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime*. We find there was war between the Edomites and the Moabites, in which the king of Moab, in distress and rage, offered his own son for a burnt-offering, to appease his deity, 2 Ki. 3:26, 27. And it should seem that afterwards he, or some of his successors, in revenge upon the Edomites for bringing him to that extremity, having an advantage against the *king of Edom*, seized him alive and burnt him to ashes, or slew him and burnt his body, or dug up the bones of their dead king, of that particularly who had so straitened him, and, in token of his rage and fury, *burnt them to lime*. and perhaps made use of the powder of his bones for the white-washing of the walls and ceilings of his palace, that he might please himself with the sight of that monument of his revenge. *Est vindicta bonum vita jucundius ipsa—Revenge is sweeter than life itself*. It is barbarous to abuse human bodies, for we ourselves also are *in the body*; it is senseless to abuse dead bodies, nay, it is impious, for we believe and look for their resurrection; and to abuse the dead bodies of kings (whose persons and names ought to be in a particular manner respected and had in veneration) is an affront to majesty; it is an argument of a base spirit for those to trample upon a dead lion who, were he alive, would tremble before him. 2. Moab's doom for this transgression is, (1.) A judgment of death. Those that deal cruelly shall be cruelly dealt with (v. 2): *Moab shall die*; the Moabites shall be cut off with the sword of war, which kills *with tumult, with shouting, and with sound of trumpet*, circumstances that make it so much the more terrible, as the lion's roaring aggravates his tearing. *Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise*, Isa. 9:5. (2.) It is a judgment upon their judge, who had passed the sentence upon the bones of the king of Edom that they should be burnt to lime: *I will cut him off*, says God (v. 3); he shall know there is a judge that is higher than he. The king, the chief judge, and all the inferior judges and princes, shall be cut off together. If the people sometimes suffer for the sin of their princes, yet the princes themselves shall not escape, Jer. 48:47. *Thus far is the judgment of Moab*. II. Judah also is a near neighbour to Israel, and therefore, now that justice is riding the circuit, that shall not be passed by; that nation has made itself like the heathen and mingled with them, and therefore the indictment here runs against them in the same form in which it had run against all the rest: *For these transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the*

punishment thereof; their sins are as many as the sins of other nations, and we find them huddled up with them in the same character, Jer. 9:26, "As for *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom*, jumble them together; they are all alike;" the sentence here also is the same (v. 5): "*I will send a fire upon Judah*, though it is the land where God is known, and it shall *devour the palaces of Jerusalem*, though it is the holy city, and God has formerly been *known in its palaces for a refuge*," Ps. 48:3. But the sin here charged upon Judah is different from all the rest. The other nations were reckoned with for injuries done to men, but Judah is reckoned with for indignities done to God, v. 4. 1. They put contempt upon his statutes and persisted in disobedience to them: *They have despised the law of the Lord*, as if it were not worth taking notice of, nor had any thing in it valuable; and herein they despised the wisdom, justice, and goodness, as well as the authority and sovereignty, of the Lawmaker; this they did, in effect, when they *kept not his commandments*, made no conscience of them, took no care about them. 2. They put honour upon his rivals, their idols, here called *their lies* which caused *them to err*; for *an image is a teacher of lies*, Hab. 2:18. And those that are led away into the error of idolatry are by that led into a multitude of other errors, *Uno dato absurdo mille sequuntur—One absurdity draws after it a thousand*. God is an infinite eternal Spirit; but, when the *truth of God* is by idolatry *changed into a lie*, all his other truths are in danger of being so changed likewise; thus their idols caused them to err, and God justly gave them up to strong delusions; nor was it any excuse for their sin that they were lies *after which their father walked*, for they should rather have taken warning than taken pattern by those that perished with these *lies in their right hand*.

III. We now at length come to *the words which Amos saw concerning Israel*. The reproofs and threatenings having walked the round, here they centre, here they settle. He begins with them as with the rest: *For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof*; it all these nations must be punished for their iniquities, shall Israel go unpunished? Observe here what their sins were, for which God would reckon with them. 1. Perverting justice. This was the sin of those who were entrusted with the administration of justice, the judges and magistrates, and all parties concerned. They made nothing of selling a righteous man, and his righteous cause when it came to be tried before them, for a piece of silver; sentence was passed, not according to the merits of the cause, but the bribe always turned the scale, and judgment was set to sale by auction to the highest bidder. They would sell the life and livelihood of a *poor man for a pair of shoes*, for the least advantage to themselves that could be proposed to them; give them but a *pair of shoes*, and the cause of a poor man, who could not give them as much as that, should be betrayed, and left at the mercy of those that will have no mercy. They will rather play at small game that sit out. *For a piece of bread such a man will transgress*. Note, Those who will wrong their consciences for any thing will come at length to do it for next to nothing; those who begin to sell justice for silver will in time be so sordid as to see it *for a pair of shoes*, for a pair of old shoes. 2. Oppressing the poor, and seeking to benefit themselves by doing them a mischief: *They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor*; they swallow up the poor with the utmost greediness, and make a prey of those that are in sorrow with dust on their heads, poor orphans that are in mourning for their parents; they catch at them to get their estates into their hands; they never rest till they have got the heads of the poor in the dust, to be trodden on. Or, *They pant after the dust of the earth*, that is, silver and gold, white and yellow dust; they covet it earnestly, and levy it *upon the head of the poor* by their unjust exactions. Note, Men's seeking to enrich themselves by the impoverishing of

others is a transgression which God will not long *turn away the punishment of*. This is *turning aside the way of the meek*, contriving to do injury to those who, they know, are mild and patient and will bear injury. They invade their rights, break their measures, and obstruct the course of justice in favour of them, not suffering them to go on with their righteous cause; this is *turning aside their way*. Note, The more patiently men bear injuries that are done them the greater is the sin of those that injure them, and the more occasion they have to expect that God will give them redress, and take vengeance for them. I, *as a deaf man, heard not*, and then *thou wilt hear*. 3. Abominable uncleanness, even incest itself, such as it not named among the Gentiles, that *a man should have his father's wife* (1 Co. 5:1), his father's concubine: *A man and his father will go in unto the same young woman*, as black an instance as any other of an unbounded promiscuous lust; and yet where the former iniquities of oppression and extortion are this also is found; for laws of modesty seldom hold those that have broken the bands of justice and *cast away its cords* from them. This wickedness is such a scandal to religion, and the profession of it, that those who are guilty of it are looked upon as designing thereby to *profane God's holy name*, and to render it odious among the heathen, as if he countenanced the villainies which those who pretend relation to him allow themselves in, and were altogether such a one as they. 4. Regaling themselves and yet pretending to honour their God with that which they had got by oppression and extortion, v. 8. They add idolatry to their injustice, and then think to atone for their injustice with their idolatry. (1.) They make merry with that which they have unjustly squeezed from the poor. They *lay themselves down* at ease, and in state, and stretch themselves upon *clothes laid to pledge*, which they ought to have restored the same night, according to the law, Deu. 24:12, 13. And they *drink the wine of the condemned*, of such as they have fined and laid heavy mulcts upon, spending that in sensuality which they have got by injustice. (2.) They think to make atonement for this by feasting on the gains of oppression *before their altars*, and *drinking this wine in the house of their God*, in the temples where they worshipped their calves, as if they would make God a *partner in their crimes* by making him a *partner of the profits* of them—service good enough for false gods; but the true God will not thus be mocked; he has declared that he *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*, and cannot be served acceptably but with that which is got honestly.

Verses 9-16

Here, I. God puts his people Israel in mind of the great things he has done for them, in putting them into possession of the land of Canaan, the greatest part of which these ten tribes now enjoyed, v. 9, 10. Note, We need often to be reminded of the mercies we have received, which are the heaviest aggravations of the sins we have committed. God gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our meanness and unworthiness, and the disproportion between his gifts and our merits; but he justly upbraids us with our ingratitude, and ill requital of his favours, and tells us what he has done for us, to shame us for not rendering again according to the benefit done to us. "*Son, remember; Israel, remember*, 1. That God brought thee out of a house of bondage, rescued thee out of the *land of Egypt*, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished in slavery." 2. That he *led thee forty years* through a desert land, and fed thee in a *wilderness*, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished with hunger. Mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us, for, if they had been cut off, we should not have been. 3. That he made room for them in Canaan, by extirpating the natives by a series of wonders little inferior to those by which they were redeemed out of Egypt: *I destroyed the*

Amorite before them, here put for all the devoted nations. Observe the magnificence of the enemies that stood in their way, which is taken notice of, that God may be the more magnified in the subduing of them. They were of great stature (*whose height was like the height of the cedars*) and the people of Israel were as shrubs to them; and they were also of great strength, not only tall, but well-set: *He was strong as the oaks*. Their kingdom was eminent among the nations, and over-topped all its neighbours. The supports and defences of it seemed impregnable; it was as fine as the stately cedar; it was as firm as the sturdy oak; yet, when God had a vine to plant there (Ps. 80:8, 9), this Amorite was not only cut down, but plucked up: *I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath*, so that the Amorites were no more a nation, nor ever read of any more. Thus highly did God value Israel. He gave men *for them and people for their life*, Is. 43:4. How ungrateful then were those who put such contempt upon him! 4. That he made them *possess the land of the Amorite*, not only put it into their hands, so that they became masters of it *jure belli—by right of conquest*, but gave them a better title to it, so that it became theirs by promise.

II. He likewise upbraids them with the spiritual privileges and advantages they enjoyed as a holy nation, v. 11. They had helps for their souls, which taught them how to make good use of their temporal enjoyments and were therefore more valuable. It is true the *ten tribes* had not God's temple, altar, and priesthood, and it was their own fault that they deserted them, and for that they might justly have been left in utter darkness; but God *left not himself without witness*, nor them without guides to show them the way. 1. They had prophets that were powerful instructors in piety, divinely inspired, and commissioned to make known the mind of God to them, to show them what is pleasing to God and what displeasing, to reprove them for their faults and warn them of their dangers, to direct them in their difficulties and comfort them in their troubles. God raised them up prophets, animated them for that work and employed them in it. He *raised them up of their sons*, from among themselves, as Moses and Christ were raised up *from among their brethren*, Deu. 18:15. It was an honour put upon their nation, and upon their families, that they had children of their own to be God's messengers to them, of their own language, not strangers sent from another country, whom they might suspect to be prejudiced against them and their land, but those who, they knew, wished well to them. Note, Faithful ministers are great blessings to any people, and it is God that raises them up to be so, that they may justly be reckoned an honour to the families they are of. 2. They had Nazarites that were bright examples of piety: *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*, men that bound themselves by a vow to God and his service, and, in pursuance of that, denied themselves many of the lawful delights of sense, as drinking wine and eating grapes. There were some of their young men that were in their prime for the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life and yet voluntarily abridged themselves of them; these God raised up by the power of his grace, to be *monuments of his grace*, to his glory, and to be his witnesses against the impieties of that degenerate age. Note, It is as great a blessing to any place to have eminent good Christians in it as to have eminent good ministers in it; for so they have examples to their rules. We must acknowledge that it bodes well to any people when God raises up numbers of hopeful young people among them, when he makes their young men Nazarites, devout, and conscientious, and mortified to the pleasures of sense; and those that are such Nazarites are *purser than snow, whiter than milk*; they are indeed the polite young men, for their *polishing is of sapphires*, Lam. 4:7. Those that have such men, such young men, among them, have therein such an advantage, both for direction and encouragement, to be religious, as they will be called to an

account for another day if they do not improve. Israel is here reckoned with, not only for the prophets, but for the Nazarites, raised up among them. Concerning the truth of this, he appeals to themselves: "*Is it not even thus, O you children of Israel? Can you deny it? Have not you yourselves been sensible of the advantage you had by the prophets and Nazarites raised up among you?*" Note, Sinners' own consciences will be witnesses for God that he has not been wanting to them in the means of grace, so that, if they perish, it is because they have been wanting to themselves in not improving those means. The men of Judah shall themselves *judge between God and his vineyard*, whether he could have done more for it, Isa. 5:3, 4.

III. He charges them with the abuse of the means of grace they enjoyed, and the opposition they gave to God's designs in affording them those means, v. 12. They were so far from walking in the light that they rebelled against it, and did what they could to extinguish it, that it might not shine in their faces, to their conviction. 1. They did what they could to debauch good people, to draw them off from their seriousness in devotion and their strictness in conversation: *You gave the Nazarites wine to drink*, contrary to their vow, that, having broken it in that instance, they might not pretend to keep it in any other. Some they surprised, or allured into it, and *with their much fair speech caused them to yield*; others they forced and frightened into it, reproached and threatened them if they were more precise than their neighbours; and, by drawing them in to drink wine, they spoiled them for Nazarites. Note, Satan and his agents are very busy to corrupt the minds of young people that look heavenward; and many that we thought would have been Nazarites they have overcome by giving them wine to drink, by drawing them in to the love of mirth and pleasure, and drinking company. Multitudes of young men that bade fair for eminent professors of religion have *erred through wine*, and been undone for ever. And how do the factors for hell triumph in the debauching of a Nazarite! 2. They did what they could to silence good ministers, and to stop their mouths: "*You commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not*, and threatened them if they did prophesy (ch. 7:12), as if God's messengers were bound to observe your orders, and might not deliver their errand unless you gave them leave, and so you not only *received the grace of God*, in raising up those prophets, *in vain*, but put the highest affront imaginable upon that God in whose name the prophets spoke." Note, Those have a great deal to answer for that cannot bear faithful preaching, and those much more that suppress it.

IV. He complains of the wrong they did him by their sins (v. 13): "*I am pressed under you*, I am *straitened* by you, and can no longer bear it, and therefore *I will ease myself of my adversaries*, Isa. 1:24. *I am pressed under you* and the load of your sins *as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*, is loaded with corn, in the midst of the *joy of harvest*, as long as any will lie on." Note, The great God complains of sin, especially the sins of his professing people, as a burden to him. He is *grieved with this generation* (Ps. 95:10), *is broken with their whorish heart* (Eze. 6:9), a consideration which, if it make not the sinner's repentance very deep, will make his ruin very great. The great God that upholds the world, and never complains that his is pressed under the weight of it (he *fainteth not, neither is weary*), yet complains of the sins of Israel, yea, and of their hypocritical services too, that he is *weary of bearing them*, Isa. 1:14. No wonder the *creature groans being burdened* (Rom. 8:22), when the Creator says, *I am pressed under them*.

V. He threatens them with unavoidable ruin. And so some read, v. 13, "*Behold I will press*, or straiten, *your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses*; they shall be loaded with judgments till they shall sink under them, and shall make a noise, as a cart

overloaded does." Those that will not submit to the convictions of the word, that will neither be won by that nor by the conversation of those about them, shall be made to sink under the weight of God's judgments. If God load us daily with his benefits, and we, notwithstanding that, load him with our sins, how can we expect any other than that he should load us with his judgments? And it is here threatened in the last three verses that, when God comes forth to contend with this provoking people, they shall not be able to stand before him, to flee from him, nor to make their part good with him; for when God judges he will overcome. Though his patience be tired out, his power is not, and so the sinner shall find, to his cost. When the Assyrian army comes to lay the country waste by sword and captivity none shall escape, but every one shall have his share in the common desolation. 1. It will be in vain to think of fleeing from the enemy that comes armed with a commission to make all desolate: *The flight shall perish from the swift*; those that have been famed for happy escapes and happy retreats shall now find their arts fail them; they shall have no time to flee, or shall find no way to take, or they shall have no strength or spirit to attempt it; they shall be at their wits' end, and then they are soon at their flight's end. Are they, as Asahel, as *swift of foot as a wild roe*? (2 Sa. 2:18), yet, like him, they shall run the faster upon their own destruction: *He that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself*, v. 15. Or do they say (as those, Isa. 30:16), *We will flee upon horses, and we will ride upon the swift*? Yet they shall be overtaken: *Neither shall he that rides the horse deliver himself* from his pursuers. *A horse is a vain thing for safety*. 2. It will be in vain to think of fighting it out. God is at war with them; and *are they stronger than he*? Is there any military force that can pretend to be a match for Omnipotence? No: *The strong shall not strengthen his force*. He that has a habit of strength shall not be able to exert it when he has occasion for it. And *the mighty*, whose should protect and deliver others, shall not be able to *deliver himself*, to deliver *his soul* (so the word is), shall not save his life. Let not the *strong man* then *glory in his strength*, nor trust in it, but *strengthen himself in the Lord his God*, for in him is *everlasting strength*. And, as the bodily strength shall fail, so shall the weapons of war. The armour as well as the arm shall become insufficient: *Neither shall he stand that handles the bow*, though he stand at a distance, but shall betake himself to flight, and not trust to his own bow to save him. Though the arm be ever so strong, and the armour ever so well fixed, neither will avail when the spirit fails (v. 16): *He that is courageous among the mighty*, that used to look danger in the face, and not be dismayed at it, shall *flee away naked in that day*, not only disarmed, having thrown away his weapons both offensive and defensive, but plundered of his treasure, which he thought to carry away with him, and he shall think it as much as he could expect that he has *his life for a prey*. Thus when God pleases *he takes away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth*, and causes those who used to boast of their courage, and their daring enterprises in the field, to *wander and sneak in a wilderness where there is no way*, Job 12:24.

Chapter 3

A stupid, senseless, heedless people, are, in this chapter, called upon to take notice, I. Of the judgments of God denounced against them and the warnings he gave them of those judgments, and to be hereby awakened out of their security (v. 1-8). II. Of the sins that were found among them, by which God was provoked thus to threaten, thus to punish, that they might justify God in his controversy with them, and, unless they repented and reformed, might expect no other than that God should proceed in his controversy (v. 9–15).

Verses 1-8

The scope of these verses is to convince the people of Israel that God had a controversy with them. That which the prophet has to say to them is to let them know that the Lord has something to say against them, v. 1. They were his peculiar people above others, knew his name, and were called by it; *nevertheless he had something against them*, and they were called to hear what it was, that they might consider what answer they should make, as the prisoner at the bar is told to hearken to his indictment. The *children of Israel* would not regard the words of counsel and comfort that God had many a time spoken to them, and now they shall be made to hear the word of reproof and threatening that the Lord has spoken against them; for he will act as he has spoken.

I. Let them know that the gracious cognizance God has taken of them, and the favours he has bestowed upon them, should not exempt them from the punishment due to them for their sins. Israel is a *family* that *God brought up out of the land of Egypt*, (v. 1), and it was no more than a family when it went down thither; thence God delivered it; thence he fetched it to be a family to himself. It is not only the ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel, that must take notice of this, but that of Judah also, for it is spoken against the whole *family* that *God brought up out of Egypt*. It is a family that God has bestowed distinguishing favours upon, has owned in a peculiar manner. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth*. Note, God's church in the world is a family dignified above all the families of the earth. Those that know God are known of him. *In Judah is God known*, and therefore Judah is more than any people known of God. God has *known* them, that is, he has chosen them, covenanted with them, and conversed with them as his acquaintance. Now, one would think, it should follow, "Therefore I will spare you, will connive at your faults, and excuse you." No: *Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*. Note, The distinguishing favours of God to us, if they do not serve to restrain us from sin, shall not serve to exempt us from punishment; nay, the nearer any are to God in profession, and the kinder notice he has taken of them, the more surely, the more quickly, and the more severely will he reckon with them, if they by a course of wilful sin profane their character, disgrace their relation to him, violate their engagements, and put a slight upon the favours and honours with which they have been distinguished. *Therefore* they shall be punished, because their sins dishonour him, affront him, and grieve him, more than the sins of others, and because it is necessary that God should vindicate his own honour by making it appear that he hates sin and hates it most in those that are nearest to him; if they be but as bad as others, they shall be punished worse than others, because it is justly expected that they should be so much better than others. *Judgment begins at the house of God*, begins at the sanctuary; for God will be

sanctified either by or upon those that *come nigh unto him*, Lev. 10:3.

II. Let them know that they could not expect any comfortable communion with God unless they first made their peace with him (v. 3): *Can two walk together except they be agreed?* No; how should they? Where there is not friendship there can be no fellowship; if two persons be at variance, they must first accommodate the matters in difference between them before there can be any interchanging of good offices. Israel has affronted God, had broken their covenant with him, and ill-requited his favours to them; and yet they expected that he should continue to walk with them, should take their part, act for them, and give them assurances of his presence with them, though they took no care by repentance and reformation to *agree with their adversary* and to turn away his wrath. "But how can that be?" says God. "While you continue to *walk contrary to God* you can look for no other than that he should *walk contrary to you*," Lev. 26:23, 24. Note, We cannot expect that God should be present with us, or act for us, unless we be reconciled to him. God and man cannot *walk together except they be agreed*. Unless we agree with God in our end, which is his glory, we cannot walk with him by the way.

III. Let them know that the warnings God gave them of judgments approaching were not causeless and groundless, merely to amuse them, but certain declarations of the wrath of God against them, which (if they did not speedily repent) they would infallibly feel the effects of (v. 4): *Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey in view?* No: he roars upon his prey. Nor will a *young lion cry out of his den* if the old lion *have taken nothing* to bring home to him; nor would God thus give you warning both by the threatenings of his word, and by less judgments, if you had not by your sins made yourselves a prey to his wrath, nor if he were not really about to fall upon you with desolating destroying judgments." Note, The threatenings of the word and providence of God are not bugbears, to frighten children and fools, but are certain inferences from the sin of man and certain presages of the judgments of God.

IV. Let them know that, as their own wickedness was the procuring cause of these judgments, so they shall not be removed till they have done their work, v. 5. When God has come forth to contend with a sinful people it is necessary that they should understand, 1. That it is their own sin that has entangled them; for *can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him?* No, nature does not lay snares for the creatures, but the art of men; a bird is not taken in a snare by chance, but with the fowler's design; so the providence of God prepares trouble for sinners, and it is *in the work of their own hands* that they are *snares*. Affliction does not *spring out of the dust*, but it is God's justice, and *our own wickedness*, that *correct us*. 2. It is nothing but their own repentance that can disentangle them; for *shall one take up a snare from the earth*, which he laid with design, except he have *taken something* as he designed? So neither will God remove the affliction he has sent till it have done its work and accomplished that for which he sent it. If our hearts be duly humbled, and we are brought by our afflictions to confess and forsake our sins, then the snare has taken something, then the point is gained, the end is answered, and then, and not till then, the *snare is broken*, is taken up from the earth, and *we are delivered* in love and mercy.

V. Let them know that all their troubles came from the hand of God's providence and from the counsel of his will (v. 6): *Shall there be evil in a city*, in a family, in a nation, *and the Lord has not done it*, appointed it, and performed what he appointed? The evil of sin is from ourselves; it is our own doing. But the evil of trouble, personal or public, is from God, and is his doing;

whoever are the instruments, God is the principal agent. *Out of his mouth both evil and good proceed.* This consideration, that, whatever evil is in the city, the Lord has done it, should engage us patiently to bear our share in public calamities and to study to answer God's intention in them.

VI. Let them know that their prophets, who give them warning of judgments approaching, deliver nothing to them but what they have *received from the Lord* to be delivered to his people. 1. God makes it known beforehand to the prophets (v. 7): *Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing*, none of that evil in the city spoken of (v. 6), *but he reveals it to his servants the prophets*, though to others it is a secret. Therefore those know not what they do who make light of the warnings which the prophets give them, in God's name. Observe, God's prophets are *his servants*, whom he employs to go on his errands to the children of men. The *secret* of God is with them; it is in some sense with all *the righteous* (Prov. 3:32), with *all that fear God* (Ps. 25:14), but in a peculiar manner with the prophets, to whom the Spirit of prophecy is a Spirit of revelation. It would have put honour enough upon prophets if it had been only said that sometimes God is pleased to reveal to his prophets what he designs to do, but it speaks something very great to say that he *does nothing* but what he *reveals to them*, as if they were *the men of his counsel*. *Shall I hide from Abraham*, who is a prophet, *the thing which I do?* Gen. 18:17. God will therefore be sure to reckon with those that put contempt on the prophets, whom he puts this honour upon. 2. The prophets cannot but make that known to the people which God has made known to them (v. 8): *The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?* His prophets, to whom he has spoken in secret by dreams and visions, cannot but speak in public to the people what they have heard from God. They are so full of those things themselves, so well assured concerning them, and so much affected with them, that they cannot but speak of them; for *out of the abundance of the heart* the mouth will speak. *I believed; therefore have I spoken*, Acts 4:20. Nay, and besides the prophetic impulse which went along with the inspiration, and made the word *like a fire in their bones* (Jer. 20:9), they received a command from God to deliver what they had been charged with; and they would have been false to their trust if they had not done it. *Necessity was laid upon them*, as upon the preachers of the gospel, 1 Co. 9:16.

VII. Let them know that they ought to tremble before God upon the fair warning he had given them, as they would, 1. Upon the sounding of a trumpet, to give notice of the approach of the enemy, that all may stand upon their guard and stand to their arms: *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people be not afraid, or run together?* so some read it, v. 6. Will they not immediately come together in a fright, to consider what is best to be done for the common safety? Yet when God by his prophets gives them notice of their danger, and summons them to come and enlist themselves under his banner, it makes no impression; they will sooner give credit to a watchman on their walls than to a prophet sent of God, will sooner obey the summons of the governor of their city than the orders given them by the Governor of the world. God says, *Hearken to the voice of the trumpet;* but *they will not hearken*, nay, and they tell him plainly that they will not, Jer. 6:17. 2. Upon the roaring of a lion. God is sometimes *as a lion, and a young lion, to the house of Judah*, Hos. 5:14. The lion roars before he tears; thus God warns before he wounds. If therefore the lion roars upon a poor traveller (as he did against Samson, Jdg. 14:5), he cannot but be put into great consternation; yet the *Lord roars out of Zion* (ch. 1:2), and none are afraid, but they go on securely as if

they were in no danger. Note, The fair warning given to a careless world, if it be not taken, will aggravate its condemnation another day. The lion roared, and they were not moved with fear to prepare an ark. O the amazing stupidity of an unbelieving world, that will not be wrought upon, no, not by the *terrors of the Lord!*

Verses 9-15

The Israelites are here again convicted and condemned, and particular notice given of the crimes they are convicted of and the punishment they are condemned to.

1. Notice is given of it to their neighbours. The prophet is ordered to *publish it in the palaces of Ashdod*, one of the chief cities of the Philistines; nay, the summons must go further, even to *the palaces in the land of Egypt*. "The great men of both those nations, that dwell in the palaces, that are inquisitive concerning the affairs of the neighboring nations, and are conversant with the public intelligence, let them *assemble themselves upon the mountains of Samaria*," v. 9. There, upon *a throne high and lifted up*, the judgment is set. Samaria is the criminal that is to be tried; let them be present at the trial, for it shall be (as other trials are) public, in the face of the country; let them make an appointment to meet there from all parts, to judge between God and his vineyard. God appeals to all impartial righteous men, Eze. 23:45. They will all subscribe to the equity of his proceedings when they see how the case stands. Note, God's controversies with sinners do not fear a scrutiny; even Philistines and Egyptians will be made to see, and say, that *the ways of the Lord are equal*, but *our ways are unequal*. They are likewise summoned to attend, not only that they may justify God and be witness for him that he deals fairly, but that they may themselves take warning; for, if *judgment begin at the house of God*, as they see it does, what shall be the end of those that are strangers to him? 1 Pt. 4:17. *If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?* Or this intimates that the sin of Israel had been so notorious that the neighboring nations could come in witnesses against them, and therefore it was fit that their punishment should be so. "If it could have been concealed, we would have said, *Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;*" but why should their friends consult their reputation, when they themselves do not consult it? If they have grown impudent in sin, let them bear the shame: "*Publish it in Ashdod, in Egypt.*"

1. Let them see how black the charge is, and how well proved. Let them observe the behaviour of the inhabitants of Samaria; let them look off from the adjacent hills, and they may see how rude and boisterous they are, and hear how loud they cry of their sin is, as was that of Sodom. (1.) Look into their streets and you will see nothing but riot and disorder, *great tumults in the midst thereof*; reason and justice are upon all occasions run down by the noise and fury of an outrageous mob, the dominion of which is the sin and shame of any people, and is likely to be their ruin. (2.) Look into their prisons, and you will see them filled with injured innocents: *The oppressed are in the midst thereof*, thrown down and crushed by their oppressors, overpowered and overwhelmed, and *they had no comforter*, Eccl. 4:1. (3.) Look into their courts of justice, and you will see that those who preside in those courts *know not to do right*, because they have always been accustomed to do wrong; they act as if they had no notion at all of the thing called justice, are in no care to do justice themselves nor to see that others do justice. (4.) Look into their treasures and stores, and you will see them replenished with *violence and robbery*, with that which was unjustly got and is still unjustly kept. Thus *they have heaped treasures together for the last days*, but it will prove a *treasure of wrath against the*

day of wrath. It may well be said, Those *know not to do right* who think to enrich themselves by doing wrong.

2. Let them see how heavy the doom is, and how well executed, v. 11, 12.

(1.) Their country shall be invaded and ruined; and observe how the punishment answers to the sin. [1.] *Great tumults are in the midst of the land*, and therefore *an adversary shall be even round about the land*; the Assyrian forces shall surround it and break in upon it on every side. Note, When sin is harboured and indulged in the midst of a people they can expect no other than that adversaries should be round about them, so that, go which way they will, they go into the mouth of danger, Lu. 19:43. [2.] They strengthened themselves in their wickedness, but the enemy shall *bring down their strength* from them, that strength which they abused in oppressing the poor, and doing violence to all about them. Note, That power which is made an instrument of unrighteousness will justly be brought down and broken. [3.] They *stored up robbery in their palaces*, and therefore their *palaces shall be spoiled*; for what is got and kept wrongfully will not be kept long. Even palaces will be no protection to fraud and oppression; but the greatest of men, if they have spoiled others, shall themselves be spoiled, for *the Lord is the avenger of all such*.

(2.) Their countrymen shall not escape, v. 12. They shall be in the hands of the enemy, as a lamb in the mouth of a lion, all devoured and eaten up, and they shall be utterly unable to make an resistance; and if any do make their escape, so as neither to fall by the sword or go into captivity, yet they shall be very few, and those of the meanest and least considerable, like *two legs*, or *shanks*, of a lamb, or, it may be, *a piece of an ear*, which the lion drops, or *the shepherd* takes from him, when he has eaten the whole body; so, perhaps, here and there one may escape from Samaria and from Damascus, when the king of Assyria shall fall upon them both, but none to make any account of; and those that do escape shall do so with the utmost difficult and hazard, by hiding themselves in the *corner of a bed* or under the *bed's feet*, which intimates that their spirits shall sneak shamefully in the time of danger. They shall not hide themselves in dens and caves, but in the *corner of a bed*, or the *piece of a bed*, such as poor people must be content with. They shall very narrowly escape, as it is foretold concerning the last destruction of Jerusalem that there shall be *two in a bed together, one taken and the other left*. Note, When God's judgments come forth against a people with commission it will be in vain to think of escaping them. Some make their *dwelling in the corner of a bed*, and *in a couch*, to denote their present security and sensuality; they are at ease, as *in a bed*, or *on a couch*, but, when God comes to contend with them, he shall make them uneasy, shall take them away out of the bed of their sloth and slumber. Those that stretch themselves lazily upon their couches when God's judgments are abroad shall *go captive with the first that go captive*.

II. Notice is given of it to themselves, v. 13. Let this be *testified*, and *heard, in the house of Jacob*, among all the seed of Israel, for it is spoken by *the Lord God, the God of hosts*, who has authority to pass this sentence and ability to execute it; let them know from him that the day is at hand when God will *visit the transgressions of Israel upon him*, when he will enquire into them and reckon for them: there will come *a day of visitation*, a day of punishment, and in that day all those things they are proud of, and put confidence in, shall fail them, and so they shall smart for the sins they have been guilty of about them. 1. Woe to *their altars*, for God will *visit* them. He will enquire into the sins they have been guilty of at their altars, and bring into

the account all their superstition and idolatry, all their expenses on their false gods, and all their expectations from them; and he will lay the altars themselves under the marks of his displeasure, for *the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground*, and with them the altar itself demolished and broken to pieces. We find the altar at Bethel prophesied against (1 Ki. 13:2), and immediately *rent* (v. 3), and that prophecy fulfilled with *Josiah burnt men's bones upon it*, 2 Ki. 23:15, 16. This seconds that prophecy, and seems to point at the same event. Note, If men will not destroy idolatrous altars, God will, and those with them that had them in veneration. Some make *the horns of the altar* to signify all those things which they flee to for refuge, and trust in, and which they make their sanctuary: they shall all be cut off, so that they shall have nothing to take hold of. 2. Woe to their houses, for God will visit them too. He will enquire into the sins they have been guilty of in their houses, the robbery that have stored up in their houses, and the luxury in which they lived: *and I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house*, v. 15. Their nobility, and gentry, and rich merchants, had their winter-houses in the city and their summer-houses in the country, so nice were they in guarding against the inconveniences of the winter when the country was thought too cold, and of the summer when the city was thought too hot, though the climate of that good land was so temperate, like that of ours, that neither the cold nor heat was ever in extremity. They indulged a foolish affectation of change and variety; but God will, either by war or by the earthquake, smite both the winter-house and the summer-house; neither shall serve to shelter them from his judgments. *The houses of ivory* (so called because the ceiling, or wainscot, or some of the ornaments of them, were edged or inlaid with ivory) *shall perish*, shall be burnt or pulled down; *and the great houses shall have an end*; the most splendid and spacious houses, the houses of their great men, shall no longer be, or at least be no longer theirs. Note, The pomp or pleasantness of men's houses will be so far from fortifying them against God's judgments that it will make them the more grievous and vexatious, as their extravagance about them will be put to the score of their sins and follies.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, I. The oppressors in Israel are threatened for their oppression of the poor (v. 1-3). II. The idolaters in Israel, being joined to idols, are given up to their own heart's lusts (v. 4, 5). III. All the sins of Israel are aggravated from their incorrigibleness in them, and their refusal to return and reform, notwithstanding the various rebukes of Providence which they had been under (v. 6–11). IV. They are invited yet at length to humble themselves before God, since it is impossible for them to make their part good against him (v. 12, 13).

Verses 1-5

It is here foretold, in the name of God, that oppressors shall be humbled and idolaters shall be hardened.

I. That proud oppressors shall be humbled for their oppressions: for *he that does wrong shall receive according to the wrong that he has done*. Now observe,

1. How their sin is described, v. 1. They are compared to the *kine of Bashan*, which were a breed of cattle very large and strong, especially if, though bred there, they were fed upon *the mountain of Samaria*, where the pastures were extraordinarily fat. Amos had been a herdsman, and he speaks in a dialect of his calling, comparing the rich and great men, that lived in luxury and wantonness, to the *kine of Bashan*, which were wanton and unruly, would not be kept within the bounds of their own pasture, But broke through the hedges, broke down all the fences, and trespassed upon the neighboring grounds; and not only so, but pushed and gored the smaller cattle that were not a match for them. Those that had their summer-houses upon the mountains of Samaria when they went thither for fresh air were as mischievous as the *kine* upon the mountains of Bashan and as injurious to those about them. (1.) They oppress the poor and needy themselves; they *crush* them, to squeeze something to themselves out of them. They took advantage of their poverty, and necessity, and inability to help themselves, to make them poorer and more necessitous than they were. They made use of their power as judges and magistrates for the invading of men's rights and properties, the poor not excepted; for they made no conscience of robbing even the hospital. (2.) They are in confederacy with those that do so. They *say to their masters* (to the masters of the poor, that abuse them and violently take from them what they have, when they ought to relieve them), "*Bring, and let us drink; let us feast with you upon the gains of our oppression, and then we will protect you, and stand by you in it, and reject the appeals of the poor against you.*" Note, What is got by extortion is commonly made use of as *provisions for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; and therefore* men are tyrants to the poor because they are slaves to their appetites. *Bring, and let us drink*, is the language of those that *crush the needy*, as if the *tears of the oppressed*, mingled with their wine, made it drink the better. And by their associations for drinking and reveling, and an excess of riot, they strengthen their combinations for persecution and oppression, and harden the hearts of one another in it.

2. How their punishment is described, v. 2, 3. God will *take them away with hooks, and their posterity with fish-hooks*; he will send the Assyrian army upon them, that shall make a prey of them, shall not only enclose the body of the nation in their net, but shall angle for particular persons, and take them prisoners and captives as with hooks and fish-hooks, shall draw them out

of their own land as fish are drawn out of the water, which is their element, them and their children with them, or, They in their day shall be drawn out by one victorious enemy, and their posterity in their day by another, so that by a succession of destroying judgments they shall at length be wholly extirpated. These *kine of Bashan* thought they could no more be drawn out with a hook and a cord than the Leviathan can, Job 41:1, 2. But God will make them know that he has a *hook for their nose* and a *bridle for their jaws*, Isa. 37:29. The enemy shall take them away as easily as the fisherman takes away the little fish, and shall make it their sport and recreation. When the enemy has made himself master of Samaria, then, (1.) Some shall attempt to escape by flight: *You shall go out at the breaches* made in the wall of the city, *every cow at that which is before her*, to shift for her own safety, and make the best of her way; and now the unruly kine of Bashan are tamed, and are themselves crushed, as they crushed the poor and needy. Note, Those to whom God has given a good pasture, if they are wanton in it, will justly be turned out of it; and those who will not be kept within the hedge of God's precept forfeit the benefit of the hedge of God's protection, and will be forced in vain to flee through the breaches they have themselves fearfully made in that hedge. (2.) Others shall think to shelter themselves, or at least their best effects, in the palace, because it is a castle well fortified and a garrison well manned: *You shall throw yourselves* (so some read it), or *throw them* (that is, your posterity, your children, or whatever is dear to you), *into the palace*, where the enemy will find it ready to be seized. Note, What is got by oppression cannot long be enjoyed with satisfaction.

3. How their sentence to this punishment is ratified: *The Lord God has sworn it by his holiness*. He had often said it, and they regarded it not; they thought God and his prophets did but jest with them; therefore he *swears* it *in his wrath*, and what he has sworn he will not revoke. He swears by *his holiness*, that attribute of his which is so much his glory, and which is so much glorified in the punishment of wicked people; for, as sure as God is a holy God, those that *plough iniquity and sow wickedness shall reap the same*.

II. That obstinate idolaters shall be hardened in their idolatries (v. 4, 5): *Come to Bethel, and transgress*. It is spoken ironically: "Do so; take your course; *multiply your transgressions* by multiplying your sacrifices, *for this liketh you*; but what will you do in the end hereof?" Here we see, 1. How intent they were upon the service of their idols, and how willing they were to be at cost upon them; they *brought their sacrifices*, and their *tithes*, and their *free-will offerings*, hoping that therein they should be accepted of God, but it was all an abomination to him. The profuseness of idolaters in the service of their false gods may shame our strait-handedness in the service of the true and living God. 2. How they mimicked God's institutions. They had their *daily sacrifice* at the altar of Bethel, as God had at his altar; they had their *thank-offerings* as God had, only they allowed *leaven* in them, which God had forbidden, because their priests did not like to have the bread to heavy and tasteless as it would be if it had not leaven in it, for something to ferment it. Holy bread would not serve them, unless it were pleasant bread. 3. How well pleased they were with these services themselves: *This liketh you, O you children of Israel! So you love*. What was their own invention they were fond of and wedded to, and thought it must be pleasing to God because it was agreeable to their own fancy. 4. How they upbraided with it: *"Come to Bethel, to Gilgal; bring the sacrifices and tithes yourselves; proclaim and publish to the nation the free-offerings*, pressing them to bring in abundance of such; *go on* in this way;" that is, (1.) "It is plain

that you are resolved to do it, whatever God and conscience say to the contrary." (2.) "Your prophets shall let you alone in it, and not admonish you as they have done, for it is to no purpose. *Let no man strive nor rebuke his neighbour.*" (3.) "Your foolish hearts shall be more and more darkened and besotted, and you shall be quite *given up to* these *strong delusions, to believe a lie.*" (4.) "What will you get by it? *Come to Bethel and multiply your sacrifices,* and see what the better you will be, what returns you will have to your sacrifices, what stead they will stand you in in the day of distress. *You shall be ashamed of Bethel your confidence,*" Jer. 48:13. (5.) "*Come, and transgress, come, and multiply your transgression,* that you may *fill up the measure* of your iniquity and be ripened for ruin." Thus Christ said to Judas, *What thou doest do quickly;* and to the Jews, *Fill you up the measure of your fathers,* Mt. 23:32.

Verses 6-13

Here, I. God complains of his people's incorrigibility under the judgments which he had brought upon them in order to their humiliation and reformation. He had by several tokens intimated to them his displeasure, with this design, that they might by repentance make their peace with him; but it had not that effect.

1. It is five times repeated in these verses, as the burden of the charge, "*Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord;* you have been several times corrected, but in vain; you are not reclaimed, there is no sign of amendment. You have been sent for by one messenger after another, but you have not come back, you have not come home." (1.) This intimates that that which God designed in all his providential rebukes was to reduce them to their allegiance, to influence them to return to him. (2.) That, if they had returned to their God, they would have been accepted, he would have bidden them welcome, and the troubles they were in would have been removed. (3.) That the reason why God sent further troubles was because former troubles had not done the work, otherwise it is *no pleasure to the Almighty that he should afflict.* (4.) That God was grieved at their obstinacy, and took it unkindly that they should force him to do that which he did so unwillingly: "*You have not returned to me from whom you have revolted, to me with whom you are in covenant, to me who stands ready to receive you, to me who have so often called you.*" Now,

2. To aggravate their incorrigibility, and to justify himself in inflicting greater judgments, he recounts the less judgments with which he had tried to bring them to repentance.

(1.) There had sometimes been a scarcity of provisions, though there was no visible cause of it (v. 6): "*I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,* for you had no meat to chew, whereby your teeth might be fouled," especially no flesh, which dirties the teeth. Or, *I have given you emptiness of teeth,* nothing to fill your mouths with. "*Bread,* the staff of life, has been wanting, for you have *sown much and brought in little,*" as Hag. 1:9. Some think this refers to that *seven years' famine* that was in Elisha's time, which we read of 2 Ki. 8:1. Now when God thus *took away their corn in the season thereof,* because they had prepared it for Baal, they should have said, *We will go and return to our first husband,* having paid dearly for leaving him; but it had not that effect. *They have not returned to me,* saith the Lord.

(2.) Sometimes they had wanted rain, and then of course they wanted the fruits of the earth. This evil was of the Lord: *I have withholden the rain from you.* God has the key of the clouds, and, if he shut up, who can open? v. 7. The rain was withheld

when there were yet three months to the harvest, at the time when they used to have it, and therefore the withholding of it was an extraordinary thing, and, if the course of nature was altered, they must therein own the hand of the God of nature; and it was at a time when they most needed it, and therefore the want of it was a very sore judgment, and blasted their expectations of a crop at harvest. And one circumstance which made this very remarkable was that when there were some places that wanted rain, and withered for want of it, there were other places near adjoining that had it in abundance. God *caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another*, in the same country; nay, he caused it to rain *upon one field, one piece* of a field, and it was thereby made fruitful and flourishing, but on the next field, on the other side of the hedge, nay, on another part of the same field, *it rained not* at all, and it was so long without rain that all the products of it *withered*. No doubt this was literally true, and there were many instances of it which were generally taken notice of. Now, [1.] By this it appeared that the withholding of the rain was not casual, but by a divine direction and disposal, and that the cloud which waters the earth is *turned round about by the counsels of God, to do whatsoever he commands it, whether for correction, or for his land, or for his mercy*, Job 37:12–18. Rain does not go by planets (as common people speak), but as God sends it by his winds. [2.] We have reason to think that those cities on which it rained not were the most infamous for wickedness, such as Bethel and Gilgal (v. 4), and that those on which it rained were such as retained something of religion and virtue among them. And so in the town-fields it rained or rained not, upon the piece, according as the owner was; for we are sure *the curse of the Lord is in the house*, and upon the ground, *of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the just*, and his field is a *field that the Lord has blessed*. [3.] It would be the greater grief and vexation to those whose fields withered for want of rain to see their neighbours' fields well watered and flourishing. *My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry*, Isa. 65:13. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved*. Probably those that were oppressed were rained upon, and so they recovered their losses, while the oppressors withered, and so lost their gains. [4.] Yet, as to the nation in general, it was a mixture of mercy with the judgment, and, consequently, strengthened the call to repentance and reformation, and encouraged them to hope for all mercy, in their returns to God, since there was so much mercy even in God's rebukes of them. But, because they did not make good use of this gracious allay to the extremity of the judgment, they had not the benefit of it, which otherwise they might have had, for (v. 8) *two or three cities wandered at uncertainty, as beggars, unto one city, to drink water*, and, if possible, to have some to carry home with them, but *they were not satisfied*; it was but here and there one city that had water, while many wanted, and then it was not, as usual, *Usus communis aquarum—Water is free to all*. Those that had it had occasion for it, or knew not how soon they might, and therefore could afford but little to those that wanted, saying, *Lest there be not enough for us and you*. Those that came *drank water*, but *they were not satisfied*, because they drank it *by measure, and with astonishment*; and those that *drink of this water shall thirst again*, Jn. 4:13. They were not satisfied, because their desires were greedy, and what they had God did not bless to them, Hag. 1:6. And now, one would think, when they met with all this disappointment, they should have considered their ways and repented; but it had not that effect: *"Yet have you not returned to me*, no, not so much as to pray in a right manner for the former and latter rain," Zec. 10:1. See the folly of carnal hearts; they will wander from city to city, from one creature to another, in pursuit of satisfaction, and still they miss of it; they *labour for that which satisfies not* (Isa. 55:2), and yet, after all,

they *will not return to God*, will not incline their ear to him in whom they might have satisfaction. The preaching of the gospel is as rain; God sometimes blesses one place with it more than another; some countries, some cities, are, like Gideon's fleece, wet with this dew, while the ground about is dry; all withers where this rain is wanting. But it were well if people were but as wise for their souls as they are for their bodies, and, when they have not this rain near them, would go and seek it where it is to be had; and, if they seek aright, they shall not seek in vain.

(3.) Sometimes the fruits of their ground were eaten up by caterpillars, or blasted with mildew, v. 9. Heaven and earth are armed against those who have made God their enemy. When God pleased, that is, when he was displeased, [1.] They suffered by a malignant air, the influence of which, either too hot or too cold, blasted their fruits, with a force that could be neither discerned nor resisted, and against which there was no defence. [2.] They suffered by malignant animals. Their *vineyards* and *gardens* yielded their increase in great abundance, so did their *fig-trees* and *olive-trees*; but the *palmer-worm devoured them* before the fruits were ripe, and fit to be gathered in. This was either the same judgment with that which we read of Joel 1:4-6, or a less judgment of the same nature, sent before to give warning of that. But they did not take warning: *Yet have you not returned unto me*.

(4.) Sometimes the plague had raged among them, and the sword of war had cut off multitudes, v. 10. *The pestilence* is God's messenger; this he *sent among* them, with directions whom to strike dead, and it was done. It was a *pestilence after the manner of Egypt*; deaths were scattered among them by the hand of a *destroying angel at midnight*. And perhaps this pestilence, as that of Egypt, fastened upon the first-born. *In the way of Egypt* (so the margin); when they were making their escape to Egypt, or going thither to seek for aid, the pestilence seized them by the way and stopped their journey. The sword of war is likewise *the sword of the Lord*; this was drawn among them with commission; and then it *slew their young men*, the strength of the present generation and the seed of the next. God says, *I have slain them*; he avows the execution. *The slain of the Lord are many*. The enemy *took away their horses*, and converted them to their own use; and the dead carcasses of those that were slain either with sword or pestilence were so many, and for want of surviving friends were left so long unburied, that the *stench of their camps came up into their nostrils*, and was both noisome and dangerous, and might put them in mind of the offensiveness of their sin to God. And yet this did not prevail to humble and reclaim them: *You have not returned to him that smites you*. Such a rueful woeful sight as this prevailed not to make them religious.

(5.) In these and other judgments some were remarkably cut off, and made monuments of justice, others were remarkably spared, and made monuments of mercy, the setting of which the one over against the other one would have thought likely to work upon them, but it had not its effect, v. 11. [1.] Some were quite ruined, their families destroyed, and themselves in them: *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah*. Perhaps they were consumed with lightning, as Sodom was, or the houses were, in some other way, burnt to the ground, and the inhabitants in them. Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be *condemned with an overthrow, and so made an example*, 2 Pt. 2:6. God had threatened to destroy the whole land with such an overthrow as that of Sodom, Deu. 29:23. But he began with some particular places first, to give them warning, or perhaps with some particular persons, whose *sins went beforehand to judgment*. [2.] Others very narrowly escaped: "You were

many of you as a *firebrand plucked out of the burning*, like Lot out of Sodom, when the fire had already kindled upon you; and yet you hate sin never the more for the danger it has brought you to, nor love God ever the more for the deliverance he wrought for you. You that have been so signally delivered, and in such a distinguishing way, *have not returned unto me.*"

II. God, in the close, calls upon his people, now at length, in this their day, to understand the things that belong to their peace, before they were hidden from their eyes, v. 12, 13. Observe here,

1. How God threatens them with sorer judgments than any they had yet been under: "Therefore, seeing you have not been wrought upon by correction hitherto, *thus will I do unto thee, O Israel!*" He does not say how he will do, but it shall be something worse than had come yet, Jn. 5:14. Or, "*Thus I will go on to do unto thee*, following one judgment with another, like the plagues of Egypt, till I have made a full end." Nothing but reformation will prevent the ruin of a sinful people. If they turn not to him, his anger is not *turned away*, but *his hand is stretched out still. I will punish you yet seven times more, if you will not be reformed*; so it was written in the law, Lev. 26:23, 24.

2. How he awakens them therefore to think of making their peace with God: "*Seeing I will do this unto thee*, and there is no remedy, *prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!*" that is, (1.) "Consider how unable thou art to meet him as a combatant." Some make it to be spoken by way of irony or challenge: "Prepare to meet God, who is coming forth to contend with thee. What armour of proof canst thou put on? What courage canst thou steel thyself with? Alas! it is but putting *briers and thorns* before a consuming fire, Isa. 27:4, 5. Art thou able with less than 10,000 to meet him that comes forth against thee with more than 20,000?" Lu. 14:31. (2.) "Resolve therefore to meet him as a penitent, as a humble suppliant, to meet him as *thy God*, in covenant with thee, to submit, and stand it out no longer." We must prepare to *meet God in the way of his judgments* (Isa. 26:8), to *take hold on his strength, that we may make peace*. Note, Since we cannot flee from God we are concerned to prepare to meet him; and therefore he gives us warning, that we may prepare. When we are to meet him in his ordinances we must prepare to meet him, prepare to seek him.

3. How he sets forth the greatness and power of God as a reason why we should prepare to meet him, v. 13. If he be such a God as he is here described to be, it is folly to contend with him, and our duty and interest to make our peace with him; it is good having him our friend and bad having him our enemy. (1.) He *formed the mountains*, made the earth, the strongest stateliest parts of it, and by the word of his power still upholds it and them. Whatever are the products of the everlasting mountains, he formed them; whatever *salvation is hoped for from hills and mountains*, he is the founder of it, Ps. 89:11, 12. He that formed the *great mountains can make them plain*, when they stand in the way of his people's salvation. (2.) He *creates the wind*. The power of the air is derived from him, and directed by him; he brings the wind out of his treasures, and orders from what point of the compass it shall blow; and he that made it rules it; even *the winds and the seas obey him*. (3.) He *declares unto man what is his thought*. He makes known his counsel by his servants the prophets to the children of men, the thought of his justice against impenitent sinners, and the thought of good he thinks towards those that repent. He can also make known, for he perfectly knows, the thought that is in man's heart; he *understands it afar off*, and in the day of conviction will set the evil thoughts among the other sins of sinners *in order before them*. (4.) He often *makes the morning darkness*, by thick clouds

overspreading the sky immediately after the sun rose bright and glorious; so when we look for prosperity and joy he can dash our expectations with some unlooked-for calamity. (5.) He *treads upon the high places of the earth*, is not only higher than the highest, but has dominion over all, tramples upon proud men, and upon the idols that were worshipped in the highest places. (6.) *Jehovah the God of hosts is his name*, for he has his being of himself, and is the fountain of all being, and all the hosts of heaven and earth are at his command. Let us humble ourselves before this God, prepare to meet him, and give all diligence to make him our God, for happy are the people whose God he is, who have all this power engaged for them.

Chapter 5

The scope of this chapter is to prosecute the exhortation given to Israel in the close of the foregoing chapter to prepare to meet their God; the prophet here tells them, I. What preparation they must make; they must "seek the Lord," and not seek any more to idols (v. 4-8); they must seek good, and love it (v. 14, 15). II. Why they must make this preparation to meet their God, 1. Because of the present deplorable condition they were in (v. 1-3). 2. Because it was by sin that they were brought into such a condition (v. 7, 10-12). 3. Because it would be their happiness to seek God, and he was ready to be found of them (v. 8, 9, 14). 4. Because he would proceed, in his wrath, to their utter ruin, if they did not seek him (v. 5, 6, 13, 16, 17). 5. Because all their confidences would fail them if they did not seek unto God, and make him their friend. (1.) Their profane contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance, would not secure them (v. 18-20). (2.) Their external services in religion, and the shows of devotion, would not avail to turn away the wrath of God (v. 21-24). (3.) Their having been long in possession of church-privileges, and in a course of holy duties, would not be their protection, while all along they had kept up their idolatrous customs (v. 25-27). They have therefore no way left them to save themselves, but by repentance and reformation.

Verses 1-3

This chapter begins, as those two next foregoing began, with, *Hear this word*. Where God has a mouth to speak we must have an ear to hear; it is our duty, it is our interest, yet so stupid are most men that they need to be again and again called upon to *hear the word of the Lord*, to give audience, to give attention. *Hear this word*. this convincing awakening word must be heard and heeded, as well as words of comfort and peace; the word that is taken up against us, as well as that which makes for us; for, whether we hear or forbear, the word of God shall take effect, and not a tittle of it shall fall to the ground. It is the *word which I take up*—not the prophet only, but the God that sent him. It is *the word that the Lord has spoken*, ch. 3:1. The word to be heard is *a lamentation*, a lamentable account of the present calamitous state of the kingdom of Israel, and a lamentable prediction of its utter destruction. Their condition is sad: *The virgin of Israel has fallen* (v. 2), has come down from what she was; that state, though not pure and chaste as a virgin, yet was beautiful and gay, and had its charms; she looked high herself, and was courted by many as a virgin; but *she has fallen* into contempt and poverty, and is universally slighted. Nay, and their condition is helpless: *She shall no more rise*, shall never recover her former dignity again. God had lately begun to *cut Israel short* (2 Ki. 10:32), and, because they repented not, it was not long before he *cut Israel down*. 1. Their princes, that should have helped them up, were disabled: *She is forsaken upon her land*. Not only those she was in alliance with abroad failed her, but her friends at home deserted her; she would not have been carried captive into a strange land if she had not first been *forsaken upon her own land and thrown to the ground* there, and all her true interests abandoned by those that should have had them at heart. *There is none to raise her up*, none that can do it, not that cares to lend her a hand. 2. Their people, that should have helped them up, were diminished, v. 3. "The city that had a militia, 1000 strong, and, in the beginning of the war, had furnished out 1000 effective men, able-bodied and well-armed, when they come to review their troops after the battle, shall find but 100 left; and, in proportion, the city that sent out 100 shall have but *ten* come back, so great a slaughter shall be made,

and so few left to the house of Israel for the public service and safety." Scarcely one in ten shall escape of the hands that should relieve this abject, this dejected, nation. Note, The lessening of the numbers of God's spiritual Israel, by death or desertion, is just a matter for lamentation; for *by whom shall Jacob arise*, by whom shall the decays of piety be repaired, when he is thus *made small*?

Verses 4-15

This is a message from God to the house of Israel, in which,

I. They are told of their faults, that they might see what occasion there was for them to repent and reform, and that, when they were called to return, they might not need to ask, *Wherein shall we return?*

1. God tells them, in general (v. 12), *"I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins; and you shall be made to know them too."* In our penitent reflections upon our sins we must consider, as God does in his judicial remarks upon them, and will do in the great day, (1.) That they are very numerous; they are our *manifold transgressions*, sins of various kinds and often repeated. Oh what a multitude of vain and vile thoughts lodge within us! What a multitude of idle, foolish, wicked words have been spoken by us! In what a multitude of instances have we gratified and indulged our corrupt appetites and passions! And how many our own omissions of duty and in duty! Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends? God knows how many, just how many, our transgressions are; none of them pass him unobserved; we know that they are to us innumerable; *more than the hairs of our head*; and we have reason to see what danger we have brought ourselves into, and what abundance of work we have made for repentance, by our *manifold transgressions*, by the numberless number of our sins of daily incursion. (2.) That some of them are very heinous; they are our *mighty sins*; sins that are more exceedingly sinful in their own nature and by being committed presumptuously and with a high hand, sins against the light of nature, flagrant crimes, that are mighty to overpower your convictions and to pull down judgments upon you.

2. He specifies some of these mighty sins. (1.) They corrupted the worship of God, and turned to idols; this is implied v. 5. They had *sought to Bethel*, where one of the golden calves was; they had frequented Gilgal, a place which they chose to set up idols in, because it had been made famous in the days of Joshua by God's wonderful appearances to and for his people. Beer-sheba likewise, a place that had been famous in the days of the patriarchs, was now another rendezvous of idols; as we find also, ch. 8:14. And thither *they passed*, though it lay at a distance, in the land of Judah. Now, having thus shamefully gone a whoring from God, no doubt they should have felt themselves concerned to return to him. (2.) They perverted justice among themselves (v. 7): *"You turn judgment to wormwood*, that is, you make your administrations of justice bitter and nauseous, and highly displeasing both to God and man." That fruit has become a *weed*, a weed in the garden; as nothing is more venerable, nothing more valuable, than justice duly administered, so nothing is more hurtful, nothing more abominable, than designedly doing wrong under colour and pretence of doing right. *Corruptio optimi est pessima—The best, when corrupted, becomes the worst. "You leave off righteousness in the earth*, as if those that do wrong were accountable to the God of heaven only, and not to the princes and *judges of the earth."* Thus it was as before the flood, when the *earth was filled with violence*. (3.) They were very oppressive to the poor, and made them poorer; they trod upon the poor (v. 11), trampled upon them, hectored over them,

made them their footstool, and were most imperious and barbarous to those that were most obsequious and submissive; they care not what shame and slavery they put those to who were poor and such as they could get nothing by. The judges aimed at nothing but to enrich themselves; and therefore they *took from* the poor *burdens of wheat*, took it by extortion, either by way of bribe or by usury. The poor had no other way to save themselves from being trodden upon, and trodden to dirt, by them, than by presenting to them horse-loads of that corn which they and their families should have had to subsist upon, and they forced them to do it. They took from the poor *debts of wheat*, so some read it. It was legally due either for rent or for corn lent, but they exacted it with rigour from those who were disabled by the providence of God to pay it, as Neh. 5:2, 5. In demanding and recovering even a just debt we must take heed lest we act either unjustly or uncharitably. This sin of oppression by are again charged with (v. 12): *They afflict the just*, by turning the edge of the law and of the sword of justice against those that are the innocent and *quiet in the land*; they hated men because they were more righteous than themselves, and he that *departed from evil* thereby *made himself a prey* to them. They take a bribe from the rich to patronize and protect them in oppressing the poor, so that he who has money in his hand is sure to have the judgment on his side, be his cause ever so bad. Thus they *turn aside the poor in the gate*, in the courts of justice, *from their right*. If the poor sue for their right, who cannot bribe them, or are so honest that they will not, though they have it ever so clear in view and ever so *near*, yet they are turned away from it by their unrighteous sentence and cannot come at it. And *therefore the prudent will keep silence*, v. 13. Men will reckon it their prudence, when they are wronged and injured, to be silent, and make no complaints to the magistrates, for it will be to no purpose; they shall not have justice done them. (4.) They were malicious persecutors of God's faithful ministers and people, v. 10. Their hearts were so fully set in them to do evil that they could not bear to be reprov'd, [1.] By the ministry of the word, by the reading and expounding of the law, and the messages which prophets delivered to them in the name of the Lord. *They hate him that rebukes in the gate*, in the gate of the Lord's house, or in their courts of justice, or in the places of concourse, where Wisdom is lifting up her voice, Prov. 1:21. Reprovers in the gate are reprov'ers by office; these they hated, counting them their *enemies because they told them the truth*, as Ahab hated Micaiah. They not only despised them, but had an enmity to them, and sought to do them mischief. Those that hate reproof love ruin. [2.] By the conversation of their honest neighbours. Though things were generally very bad, yet there were some among them that *spoke uprightly* that made conscience of what they said, and, as it was their praise, so it was the shame of those that spoke deceitfully, and condemned them, as Noah's faith condemned the unbelief of the old world, and for that reason *they abhorred them*; they were such inveterate enemies to the thing called honesty that they could not endure the sight of an honest man. All that have any sense of the common interest of mankind will love and value such as speak uprightly, for veracity is the bond of human society; to what a pitch of folly and madness then have those arrived who, having banished all notions of justice out of their own hearts, would have them banished out of the world too, and so put mankind into a state of war, for the *abhor him that speaks uprightly!* And for this reason *the prudent shall keep silence in that time*, v. 13. Prophets cannot, dare not, keep silence; the impulse they are under will not allow them to act on prudential considerations; they must *cry aloud, and not spare*. But as for other wise and good men they shall keep silence, and shall reckon it is their prudence to do so, because it is an evil time. *First*, They shall think it dangerous to

complain, and therefore shall keep silence; this was one way in which they afflicted the just, that by false suggestions and strained innuendos they made men *offenders for a word* (Isa. 19:21); and therefore the *prudent*, who were *wise as serpents*, because they knew not how what they said might be misinterpreted and misrepresented, were so cautious as to say nothing, lest they should run themselves into a premunire, because it was an evil time. Note, Through the iniquity of the times, as good men are hidden, so good men are silent, and it is their wisdom to be so; *little said soon amended*. But it is their comfort that they may speak freely to God when they know not to whom else they can speak freely. *Secondly*, They shall think it fruitless to reprove. They see what wickedness is committed, and their spirits are stirred up, as Paul's at Athens; but they shall think it prudent not to bear an open testimony against it, because it is to no purpose. They are *joined to their idols; let them alone. Let no man strive or rebuke another*; for it is but *casting pearls before swine*. The cautious men will say to a bold reprover, as Erasmus to Luther, "*Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei, Domine—Away to they cell, and cry, Have mercy on me, O Lord!*" Let grave lessons and counsels be kept for better men and better times. And there is *a time to keep silence* as well as *a time to speak*, Eccl. 3:7. *Evil times* will not bear plain dealing, that is *evil men* will not; and the men the prophet here speaks of had reason to think themselves evil men indeed, when wise and good men thought it in vain to speak to them and were afraid of having any thing to do with them.

II. They are told of their danger and what judgments they lay exposed to for their sins. 1. The places of their idolatry are in danger of being ruined in the first place, v. 5. *Gilgal*, the head-quarters of idolatry, *shall go into captivity*, not only its inhabitants, but its images, *and Bethel*, with its golden calf *shall come to nought*. The victorious enemy shall make nothing of it, so easily shall it be spoiled, and shall bring it to nothing, so effectually shall it be spoiled. Idols were always vanity, and *things of nought*, and so they shall prove when God appears to abolish them. 2. The body of the kingdom is in danger of being ruined with them, v. 6. There is danger lest, if you seek him not in time, he *break out like a fire in the house of Joseph and devour it*; for our God is a righteous Judge, is a *consuming fire*, and the men of Israel, as criminals, are stubble before him; woe to those that make themselves fuel to the fire of God's wrath. It follows, *And there shall be none to quench it in Bethel*. There their idols were, and their idolatrous priests; thither they brought their sacrifices, and there they offered up their prayers. But God tells them that when the fire of his judgments should kindle upon them all the gods they served at Bethel should not be able to quench it, should not turn away the judgment, nor be any relief to them under it. Thus those that make an idol of the world will find it insufficient to protect them when God comes to reckon with them for their spiritual idolatry. 3. What they have got by oppression and extortion shall be taken from them (v. 11): "*You have built houses of hewn stone*, which you thought would be lasting; *but you shall not dwell in them*, for your enemies shall burn them down, or possess them for themselves, or take you into captivity. *You have planted pleasant vineyards*, have contrived how to make them every way agreeable, and have promised yourselves many a pleasant walk in them; but you shall be forced to walk off, and shall never *drink wine of them*." The law had tenderly provided that if a man had *built a house*, or *planted a vineyard*, he should be at his liberty to return from the wars, Deu. 20:5, 6. But now the necessity would be so urgent that it would not be allowed; all must go to the battle, and many of those who had lately been building and planting should fall in battle, and never enjoy what they

had been labouring for. What is not honestly got is not likely to be long enjoyed.

III. They are told their duty, and have great encouragement to set about it in good earnest, and good reason. The duties here prescribed to them are godliness and honesty, seriousness in their applications to God and justice in their dealings with men; and each of these is here pressed upon them with proper arguments to enforce the exhortation.

1. They are here exhorted to be sincere and devout in their addresses to God, v. 4. God says to the *house of Israel*, *Seek you me*, and with good reason, for *should not a people seek unto their God?* Isa. 8:19. Whither else should they go but to their protector? Israel was a *prince with God*; let his descendants *seek the Lord*, as he did, and they shall be so too. Now, in order to their doing this, they must abandon their idolatries. God is not sought truly if he be not sought exclusively, for he will endure no rivals: "*Seek you the Lord, and seek not Bethel* (v. 5), consult not your idol-oracles, nor ask at the mouth of the priests of Bethel; seek not to the golden calf there for protection, nor bring your prayers and sacrifices any longer thither, or to Gilgal, for you *forsake your own mercies* if you observe those *lying vanities*. But *seek the Lord* (v. 6, 8); enquire after him; enquire of him; seek to know his mind as your rule, to secure his favour as your felicity." To press this exhortation we are told to consider, (1.) What we shall get by seeking God; it will be *our life*; we shall find him, and shall be happy in him. So he tells them himself (v. 4): *Seek you me, and you shall live*. Those that seek perishing gods shall perish with them (v. 5), but those that seek the living God shall live with him: "You shall be delivered from the killing judgments which you are threatened with; your nation shall live, shall recover from its present languishings; your souls shall live; you shall be sanctified and comforted, and made for ever blessed. *You shall live*." (2.) What a God he is whom we are to *seek*, v. 8, 9. [1.] He is a God of almighty power himself. The idols were impotent things, could do neither good nor evil, and therefore it was folly either to fear or trust them; but the God of Israel does every thing, and can do any thing, and therefore we ought to seek him; he challenges our homage who has all power in his hand, and it is our interest to have him on our side. Divers proofs and instances are here given of God's power, as Creator, in the kingdom of nature, as both founding and governing that kingdom. Compare ch. 4:13. *First*, The stars are the work of his hands; those stars which the heathens worshipped (v. 26), the *stars of your god*, those stars are God's creatures and servants. He *makes the seven stars and Orion*, two very remarkable constellations, which Amos, a herdsman, while he kept his cattle by night, had particularly observed the motions of. He made them at the first, he still makes them to be what they are to this earth and either *binds* or *looses* the *sweet influences of Peliades and Orion*, the two constellations here mentioned. See Job 38:31; 9:9, to which passages Amos seems here to refer, putting them in mind of those ancient discoveries of the glory of God before he was called the *God of Israel*. *Secondly*, The constant succession of day and night is under his direction, and is kept up by his power and providence. It is he that *turns* the night (which is dark as *the shadow of death*) *into the morning* by the rising of the sun, and by the setting of the sun *makes the day dark with night*; and the same power can, for humble penitents, easily turn affliction and sorrow into prosperity and joy, but can as easily turn the prosperity of presumptuous sinners into darkness, into utter darkness. *Thirdly*, The rain rises and falls as he appoints. He *calls for the waters of the sea*; out of them vapours are drawn up by the heat of the sun, which gather into clouds, and are *poured out upon the face of the earth*, to water it and make it fruitful. This was the mercy that had been *withholden from them* of late (ch.

4:7); and therefore to whom should they apply but to him who had power to give it? For all the *vanities of the heathen* could not *give rain*, nor could the *heavens* themselves *give showers* Jer. 14:22. It is God that has *made these things*; *Jehovah is his name*, the name by which the God of nature, the God of the whole earth, has made himself known to his people Israel and covenanted with them. [2.] As he is God of almighty power himself, so he *gives strength and power unto his people* that seek him, and *renews strength* to those that had lost it, if they *wait upon him* for it; for (v. 9) he *strengthens the spoiled against the strong* to such a degree that the spoiled come *against the fortress* and make bold and brave attacks upon those that had spoiled them. This is an encouragement to the people to *seek the Lord*, that, if they do so, they shall find him above to retrieve their affairs, when they are brought to the lowest ebb; though they are the spoiled, and their enemies are the strong, if they can but engage God for them, they shall soon recruit so as the next time to be not only the aggressors, but the conquerors; they *come against the fortress*, to make reprisals and become masters of it.

2. They are here exhorted to be honest and just in their dealings with men, v. 14, 15, where observe, (1.) The duty required: *Seek good, and not evil. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate*; re-establish it there, whence it has been banished, v. 7. Note, Things are not so bad but that they may be amended if the right course be taken; we must not despair but that grievances may be redressed and abuses rectified; justice may yet triumph where injustice tyrannizes. In order to this, good must be loved and sought, evil must be hated and no longer sought. We must love good principles and adhere to them, love to do good and abound in doing it, love good people, and good converse, and good duties; and, whatever good we do, we must do it from a principle of love, do it of choice and with delight. Those who thus *love good* will *seek it*, will contrive to do all the good they can, enquire for opportunities of doing it, and endeavor to do it to the utmost of their power. They will also *hate evil*, will abhor the thought of doing an unjust thing, and abstain from all appearance of it. In vain do we pretend to seek God in our devotions if we do not seek good in our whole conversations. (2.) The reasons annexed. [1.] This is the sure way to be happy ourselves and to have the continual presence of God with us: "*Seek good, and not evil, that you may live*, may escape the punishment of the evil you have sought and loved (*righteousness delivereth from death*), that you may have the favour of God, which is your life, which is better than life itself, that you may have comfort in yourselves and may live to some good purpose. You shall live, for *so the Lord God of hosts shall be with you* and be your life." Note, Those that keep in the way of duty have the presence of God with them, as the *God of hosts*, a God of almighty power. "He will be with you *as you have spoken*, that is, as you have *gloried*; you shall have that really which, while you went on in unrighteous ways, you only seemed to have and boasted of as if you had." Those that truly repent and reform enter into the enjoyment of that comfort which before they had only flattered themselves with the imagination of. Or, "As you have prayed when *you sought the Lord*. Live up to your prayers, and you shall have what you pray for." [2.] This is the likeliest way to make the nation happy: "If you seek and love that which is good, you may contribute to the saving of the land from ruin." *It may be, the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*; though there is but a remnant left, yet, if God be gracious to that remnant, it will rise to a great nation again; and if some among them turn from sin, especially if *judgment be established in the gate*, though we cannot be certain, yet there is a great probability that public affairs will take a new and happy turn, and every thing will mend if men

mend their lives. Temporary promises are made with an *It may be*; and our prayers must be made accordingly.

Verses 16-20

Here is, I. A very terrible threatening of destruction approaching, v. 16, 17. Since they would not take the right course to obtain the favour of God, God would take an effectual course to make them feel the weight of his displeasure. The threatening is introduced with more than ordinary solemnity, to strike an awe upon them; it is not the word of the prophet only (if so, it might be made light of) but it is the *Lord Jehovah*, who has an infinite eternal being; it is the *God of hosts*, who has a boundless irresistible power, and it is *Adonai—the Lord*, who has an absolute incontestable sovereignty, and a universal dominion; it is he who says it, who can and will make his words good, and he has said, 1. That the land of Israel shall be put in mourning, true mourning, that all places shall be filled with lamentation for the calamities coming upon them. Look into the cities, and *wailing shall be in all streets*, in the great streets, in the by-streets. Look into the country, and *they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas!* we are all undone! The lamentation shall be so great as not to be confined within doors, nor kept within the bounds of decency, but it shall be proclaimed in the streets and highways, and shall run wild. The husbandman shall be called from the plough by the calamities of his country to the natural expressions of mourning; and, because those who will come short of the merits of the cause, such as are skilful of lamentation shall be called to artificial mourning, to put accents upon the lamentations of the real mourners with their *Ahone, ahone*. Even in all vineyards, where there used to be nothing but mirth and pleasure, there shall be general wailing, when a foreign force invades the country, lays all waste, and there is no making any head against it, no weapons left but prayers and tears. 2. That the land of Israel shall be brought to ruin, and the advances of that ruin are the occasion of all this wailing: *I will pass through thee*, as the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy the first-born, but then passed over the houses of the Israelites. God's judgments had often passed by them, but now they shall pass through them, shall run them through.

II. A just and severe reproof to those who made light of these threatenings, and impudently bade defiance to the justice of God and his judgments, v. 18. Woe unto you that *desire the day of the Lord*, that really wish for times of war and confusion, as some do who have restless spirits, and long for changes, or who choose to *fish in troubled waters*, hoping to raise their families, as some had done, upon the ruins of their country; but the prophet tells them that this should be so great a desolation that nobody could get by it. Or it is spoken to those who, in their wailings and lamentations for the calamities they were in, wished they might die, and be delivered out of their misery, as Job did, with passion. The prophet shows them the folly of this. Do they know what death is to those who are unprepared for it, and how much more terrible it will be than any thing that can befall them in this life? Or, rather, it is spoken to those who speak jestingly of that day of the Lord which the prophet spoke so seriously of; they desired it, that is, they challenged it; they said, Let him do his worst; *let him make speed, and hasten his work*, Isa. 5:19. *Where is the promise of his coming?* 2 Pt. 3:4. It intimates, 1. That they do not believe it. They say that they wish it would come because they do not believe it will ever come; nor will they believe it unless they see it. 2. That they do not fear it; though they may have some belief of it, yet they had so little consideration of it, and their mind is so intent upon other things, that they are under no apprehension at all of peril from it; instead of having the conscience to dread it, they have the

curiosity to desire it. In answer to this, (1.) He shows the folly of those who impudently wished for any of God's judgments, and made a jest of any of the terrors of the Lord: "*To what end is it for you that the day of the Lord should come? You will find it both certain and sad; not a thing to be bantered, for it is neither a thing to be questioned whether it will come or no nor a thing to be turned off with a slight when it does come. The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light, v. 18. Shall it not be so? v. 20. Do not your own consciences tell you that it will be so, that it will be very dark, and no brightness in it?*" Note, The *day of the Lord* will be a dark, dismal, gloomy day to all impenitent sinners; the *day of judgment* will be so; and sometimes the day of their present trouble. And, when God makes a day dark, all the world cannot make it light. (2.) He shows the folly of those who impatiently wished for a change of God's judgment, in hopes that the next would be better and more tolerable. They desire *the day of the Lord*, in hopes to better themselves (though their hearts and lives be not amended), or, at least, to know the worst. But the prophet tells them that they know not what they ask, v. 19. It is *as if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him*, a beast of prey more cruel and ravenous than a lion, or as if a man, to escape all dangers abroad, *went into the house for security, and leaned his hand on the wall to rest himself, and there a serpent bit him*. Note, Those who are not reformed by the judgments of God will be pursued by them; and, if they escape one, another stands ready to seize them; *fear and the pit and snare* surround them, Isa. 24:17, 18. It is madness therefore to *defy the day of the Lord*.

Verses 21-27

The scope of these verses is to show how little God valued their shows of devotion, nay, how much he detested them, while they went on in their sins. Observe,

I. How displeasing, nay, how displeasing, their hypocritical services were to God. They had their *feast-days* at Bethel, in imitation of those at Jerusalem, in which they pretended to rejoice before God. They had their *solemn assemblies* for religious worship, in which they put on the gravity of those who *come before God as his people come, and sit before him as his people sit*. They offered to God *burnt-offerings*, to the honour of God, together with the *meat-offerings* which by the law were to be offered with them; they offered the *peace-offerings*, to implore the favour of God, and they offered them of the *fat beasts* that they had, v. 21, 22. In imitation likewise of the temple-music, they had the *noise of their songs* and the *melody of their viols* (v. 23), vocal and instrumental music, with which they praised God. With these services they hoped to make God amend for the sins they had committed, and to obtain leave to go on in sin; and therefore they were so far from being acceptable to God that they were abominable. He *hated*, he *despised*, their *feast-days*, not only despised them as no valuable services done to him, but hated them as an affront and provocation to him, as we hate to see men dissemble with us, pretend a respect for us when really they have none. Nothing more hateful, more despicable, than hypocrisy. *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, it shall be counted a curse*, when it appears that his heart is not with him. God will not *smell* in their *solemn assemblies*, for there is nothing in them that is grateful to him, but a great deal that is offensive. Their sacrifices are not to him *of a sweet smelling savour*, as Noah's was, Gen. 8:21. He will not accept them; he will not regard them, will not take any notice of them; he will not hear the melody of their viols; for, when sin is a jar in the harmony, it grates in his ears: "*Take it away,*" says God, "I cannot bear it." Now this intimates, 1. That sacrifice itself is of small account with God in comparison with moral duties; to

love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt offering and sacrifice*. 2. That the sacrifice of the wicked is really an abomination to him, Prov. 15:8. Dissembled piety is double iniquity, and so it will be found when, if any place in hell be hotter than another, that will be the hypocrite's portion.

II. What it was that he required in order to the acceptableness of their sacrifices and without which no sacrifice would be acceptable (v. 24): *Let judgment run down as waters*, among you, *and righteousness as a mighty stream*, that is 1. "Let there be a general reformation of manners among you; let religion (God's *judgment*) and *righteousness* have their due influence upon you; let your land be watered with it, and let it bear down all the opposition of vice and profaneness; let it run wide as overflowing waters, and yet run strong as might stream." (2.) "In particular, let justice be duly administered by magistrates and rulers; let not the current of it be stopped by partiality and bribery, but let it come freely as waters do, in the natural course; let it be pure as running waters, not muddied with corruption or whatever may pervert justice; let it run *like a might stream*, and not suffer itself to be obstructed, or its course retarded, by the fear of man; let all have free access to it as a common stream, and have benefit by it as *trees planted by the rivers of waters*." The great thing laid to Israel's charge was *turning judgment into wormwood* (v. 7); in that matter therefore they must reform, Zec. 7:9. This was what God desired *more than sacrifices*, Hos. 6:6; 1 Sa. 15:22.

III. What little stress God had laid upon the law of sacrifices, though it was his own law, in comparison with the moral precepts (v. 25): "*Did you offer unto me sacrifices in the wilderness forty years?* No, you did not." For the greatest part of that time sacrifice was very much neglected, because of the unsettledness of their state; after the second year, the passover was not kept till they came into Canaan, and other institutions were in like manner intermitted; and yet, because God will have mercy and not sacrifice, he never imputed the omission to them as their fault, but continued his care of them and kindness to them: it was not that, but their murmuring and unbelief, for which God was displeased with them. He that so owned his people, though they did not sacrifice, when in other things they kept close to him, will certainly disown them, though they do sacrifice, if in other things they depart from him. But, though ritual sacrifices may thus be dispensed with, spiritual sacrifices will not; even justice and honesty will not excuse for the want of prayer and praise, a broken heart and the love of God. Stephen quotes this passage (Acts 7:42), to show the Jews that they ought not to think it strange that ceremonial law was repealed when from the beginning it was comparatively made light of. Compare Jer. 7:22, 23.

II. What little reason they had to expect that their sacrifices should be acceptable to God, when they and their fathers had been all along addicted to the worship of other gods. So some take v. 25, "*Did you offer to me sacrifices*, that is, to me only? No, and therefore not at all to me acceptably;" for the law of worshipping the Lord our God is, *Him only we must serve*. "*But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch* (v. 26), little shrines that you made to carry about with you, pocket-idols for your private superstition, when you durst not be seen to do it publicly. You have had the images of your *Moloch—your king*" (probably representing *the sun*, that sits king among the heavenly bodies), "and *Chiun*, or *Remphan*" (as Stephen calls it, Acts 7:43, after the Septuagint), which it is supposed, represented Saturn, the highest of the seven planets. The worship of the sun, moon, and stars, was the most ancient, most general, and most plausible idolatry. They *made to themselves the star of their*

God, some particular star which they took to be their god, or the name of which they gave to their god. This idolatry Israel was from the beginning prone to (Deu. 4:19); and those that retain an affection for false gods cannot expect the favour of the true God.

V. What punishment God would inflict upon them for their persisting in idolatry (v. 27): *I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus*. They were led captive by Satan into idolatry, and therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters, and hurried them into a strange land, since they were so fond of strange gods. They were carried *beyond Damascus*. Their captivity by the Assyrians was far beyond that by the Syrians; for, if less judgments do not work that for which they were sent, God will send greater. Or the captivity of Israel under Shalmaneser was far beyond that of Damascus under Tiglath-pileser, and much more grievous and destructive, which was foretold ch. 1:5. For, as the sins of God's professing people are greater than the sins of others, so it may be expected that their punishments will be proportionable. We find the spoil of Damascus and that of Samaria carried off together by the king of Assyria, Isa. 8:4. Stephen reads it, *I will carry you away beyond Babylon* (Acts 7:43), further than Judah shall be carried, so far further as not to return. And, to make this sentence appear both the more certain and the more dreadful, he that passes it calls himself *the Lord, whose name is, The God of hosts*, and who is therefore able to execute the sentence, having hosts at command.

Chapter 6

In this chapter we have, I. A sinful people studying to put a slight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear trivial, confiding in their privileges and pre-eminences above other nations (v. 2, 3), and their power (v. 13), and wholly addicted to their pleasures (v. 4-6). II. A serious prophet studying to put a weight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear terrible, by setting forth the severity of those judgments that were coming upon these sensualists (v. 7), God's abhorring them, and abandoning them and theirs to death (v. 8-11), and bringing utter desolation upon them, since they would not be wrought upon by the methods he had taken for their conviction (v. 12-14).

Verses 1-7

The first words of the chapter are the contents of these verses; but they sound very strangely, and contrary to the sentiments of a vain world: *Woe to those that are at ease!* We are ready to say, *Happy are those that are at ease*, that neither feel any trouble nor fear any, that lie soft and warm, and lay nothing to heart; and wise we think are those that do so, that bathe themselves in the delights of sense and care not how the world goes. Those are looked upon as doing well for themselves that do well for their bodies and make much of them; but against them this woe is denounced, and we are here told what their ease is, and what the woe is.

I. Here is a description of their pride, security, and sensuality, for which God would reckon with them.

1. They were vainly conceited of their own dignities, and thought those would secure them from the judgments threatened and be their defence against the wrath both of God and man. (1.) Those that dwelt in Zion thought that was honour and protection enough for them, and they might there be quiet from all fear of evil, because it was a strong city, well fortified both by nature and art (we read of Zion's *strong-holds* and her *bulwarks*), and because it was a royal city, where were set the thrones of the house of David (it was the head-city of Judah, and therefore truly great), and especially because it was the holy city, where the temple was, and the testimony of Israel; those that dwelt there doubted not but that God's sanctuary would be a sanctuary to them and would shelter them from his judgments. The *temple of the Lord are these*, Jer. 7:4. They are *haughty because of the holy mountain*, Zep. 3:11. Note, Many are puffed up with pride, and rocked asleep in carnal security, by their church-privileges, and the place they have in Zion. (2.) Those that dwelt *in the mountain of Samaria*, though it was not a holy hill, like that of Zion, yet they trusted in it, because it was the metropolis of a potent kingdom, and perhaps, in imitation of Jerusalem, was the head-quarters of its religion; and by lapse of time the hill of Shemer became with them in as good repute as the hill of Zion ever was. They hoped for salvation from these hills and mountains. (3.) Both these two kingdoms valued themselves upon their relation to Israel, that prince with God, which they looked upon as masking them the *chief of the nations*, more ancient and honourable than any of them; the *first-fruits of the nations* (so the word is), dedicated to God and sanctifying the whole harvest. The *house of Israel* came to them, that is, was divided into those kingdoms, of which Zion and Samaria were the mother cities. Those that were at ease were the princes and rulers, the great men, that were *chief of the nations*, chief of those two kingdoms, and to whom, having their residence in Zion and Samaria, the whole house of Israel applied for judgment.

Note, It is hard to be great and not to be proud. Great nations and great men are apt to overvalue themselves, and to overlook their neighbours, because they think they a little overtop them. But, for a check to their pride and security, the prophet bids them take notice of those cities that were within the compass of their knowledge, that had been as illustrious in their time as ever Zion or Samaria was, and yet were destroyed, v. 2. "Go to *Calneh* (which was an ancient city built by Nimrod, Gen. 10:10), and see what has become of that, it is now in ruins; so is *Hamath the great*, one of the chief cities of Syria. Sennacherib boasts of *destroying the gods of Hamath*. Gath was likewise made desolate by Hazael, and not long ago, 2 Ki. 12:17. Now *were they better than these kingdoms* of Judah and Israel? Yes, they were, and *their border greater than your border*, so that they had more reason than you to be confident of their own safety; yet you see what has become of them, and dare you be secure? *Art thou better than populous No?*" Nah. 3:8. Note, The examples of others' ruin forbid us to be secure.

2. They persisted in their wicked courses upon a presumption that they should never be called to an account for them (v. 3): "*You put far away the evil day*, the day of reckoning, as a thing that shall never come, or you look upon it as at such a distance that it makes no impression at all upon you; you *put it far away*, and think you can still put it yet further, and adjourn it *de die in diem—from day to day*, and therefore you *cause the seat of violence to draw near*; you venture upon all acts of injustice and oppression, and have *fellowship with the throne of iniquity, which frames mischief by a law*, Ps. 94:20. You cause that to come near, as if that would be your protection from these judgments which really ripens you for them." Note, *Therefore* men take sin to be near them, because they take judgment to be far off from them; but those deceive themselves who thus mock God.

3. They indulged themselves in all manner of sensual pleasures and delights, v. 4-6. These Israelites were perfect epicures and slaves to their appetites. Their dignities (in consideration of which they ought to have been examples of self-denial and mortification), they thought, would justify them in their sensuality; the gains of their oppression and violence, they thought, would bear the charge of it; and they put the evil day at a distance, that they might give them no disturbance in it. That which they are here charged with is not in itself sinful (these things might be soberly and moderately used), but they placed their happiness in the gratification of their carnal appetites; and though they were men in office, that had business to mind, they gave themselves up to their pleasures, spent their time in them, and threw away their thoughts, and cares, and estates upon them. They were in these enjoyments as in their element. Their hearts were upon them; they exceeded all bounds in them, and this at a time when God in his providence was calling them to *weeping and mourning*, Isa. 22:12, 13. When they were under guilt and wrath, and the judgments of God were ready to break in upon them, they called for *wine and strong drink*, presuming that *to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant* (Isa. 56:12), thus walking contrary to God and setting his justice at defiance. (1.) They were extravagant in their furniture. Nothing would serve them but *beds of ivory* to sleep upon, or to sit on at their meat, when sackcloth and ashes would have become them better. (2.) They were lazy, and humoured themselves in the love of ease. They did not only lie down, but *stretched themselves* upon their couches, when they should have stirred up themselves to their business; they were willingly slothful, and took a pride in doing nothing; they *abound in superfluities* (so the margin reads it), when many of their poor brethren wanted necessaries. (3.) They were nice and curious in their diet, must have every thing of the best and abundance of it: They ate *the lambs out of the flock* (lambs by wholesale) and the *calves out of*

the midst of the stall, the fattest they could lay their hand on; and these perhaps not out of their own flock and their own stall, but taken by oppression from the poor. (4.) They were merry and jovial, and diverted themselves at their feasts with music and singing: They *chant to the sound of the viol*, sing and play in concert, and they invent new-fashioned *instruments of music*, striving herein, more than in any thing else, to excel their ancestors; they set their wits on work to contrive how to please their fancy. Some men never show their ingenuity but in their luxury; on that they bestow all their faculty of invention and contrivance. They invent *instruments of music, like David*, entertain themselves with that which formerly used to be the entertainment of kings only. Or it intimates their profaneness in their mirth; they mimicked the temple-music, and made a jest of that, because, it may be, it was old-fashioned, and they took a pride in bantering it as the Babylonians did when they urged the captives to sing to them the *songs of Zion*; such was Belshazzar's profaneness when he drank wine in temple-bowls, and such is theirs that sing vain and loose songs in psalm-tunes, on purpose to ridicule a divine institution. (5.) They drank to excess, and never thought they could pour down enough: They *drank wine in bowls*, not in glasses, or cups (as Jer. 35:5); they hate to be stinted, and must have large draughts, and therefore make use of vessels that they can steal a draught out of. (6.) They affected the strongest perfumes: They *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*, to please the smell, and to make them more in love with their own bodies, and to guard against those presages of putrefaction which they carry about with them while they live. No ordinary ointments would serve their turn; they must have the chief, such as were far-fetched and dear-bought, when cheaper would have served as well.

4. They had no concern at all for the interests of the church of God, and of the nation, that were sinking and going to decay: *They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*; the church of God, including both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (which are called *Joseph*, Ps. 80:1), was in distress, invaded, insulted, and broken in upon. As to their own kingdom which they were entrusted with the government of, the affairs of which they were directors of, the peace of which they were the conservators of, great breaches were made upon it, upon its peace and welfare; and they were so besotted that they were not aware of them, so indulgent of their pleasures that they never laid them to heart, and had such an aversion to the thing called business that they were in no care or concern to get them repaired. It is all one to them whether the nation sink or swim, so that they can but lie at ease and live in pleasure. Particular persons that belonged to Joseph were in affliction, and they took no cognizance of their case of the wrongs and hardships they sustained and the troubles they were in, nor took any care to relieve them, and right them, contrary to the temper of holy Job, who, when he was in prosperity, *wept with him that was in misery* and his *soul was grieved for the poor*, Job 30:25. Some think that, in calling the afflicted church *Joseph*, there is an allusion to the story of Pharaoh's butler, who, when he preferred to give the cup again into his master's hand, *remembered not Joseph, but forgot him*, Gen. 40:21, 23. Thus they *drank wine in bowls*, but *were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. Note, Those are commonly careless of the troubles of others who are set upon their own pleasures; and it is a great offence to God when his church is in affliction and we are not grieved for it, nor lay it to heart.

II. Here is the doom passed upon them (v. 7): *Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive*, and shall fall into all the miseries that attend captives; and the *banquet of those that stretched themselves upon their couches shall be*

removed. Their plenty shall be taken from them, and they from it, because they made it the food and fuel of their lusts. 1. Those who lived in luxury shall lose even their liberty; and by being brought into servitude shall be justly punished for the abuse of their dignity and dominion. 2. Those who trusted in the delights and pleasures of their own land shall be carried away into a strange land, and so made ashamed of their pride and confidence; they shall *go captive*. 3. Those who placed their happiness in the pleasures of sense, and set their hearts upon them, shall be deprived of those pleasures; their banquet shall be removed, and they shall know what it is to fare hard. 4. Those who *stretched themselves* shall be made to contract themselves, and to come into a less compass. 5. Those who *put the evil day far from them* shall find it nearer to them than it is to others; *those shall go captive with the first* who flattered themselves with hopes that if trouble did come they should be the last who should be seized by it. Those are ripening apace for trouble themselves who lay not to heart the trouble of others and of the church of God. Those who give themselves to mirth, when God calls them to mourning, will find it a sin that shall not go unpunished, Isa. 22:14.

Verses 8-14

In the former part of the chapter we had these secure Israelites loading themselves with pleasures, as if they could never be made merry enough; here we have God loading them with punishments, as if they could never be made miserable enough. And observe,

I. How strongly this burden is bound on, not to be shaken off by their presumption and security; for it is bound by *the Lord the God of hosts*, by his mighty, his almighty, hand, which none can resist; it is bound with an oath, which puts the sentence past revocation: *The Lord God has sworn, and he will not repent*, and, since he could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself. How dreadful, how miserable, is the case of those whose ruin, whose eternal ruin, God himself has sworn, who can execute his purpose and cannot alter it!

II. How heavily this burden lies! Let us see the particulars. 1. God will abhor and abandon them, and that implies misery enough, all misery: *I abhor the excellency of Jacob*, all that which they are proud of, and value themselves upon, and for which they call and count themselves the *chief of nations*. Their visible church-membership, and the privileges of that, their temple, altar, and priesthood, these were, more than any thing, the excellencies of Jacob; but, when these were profaned and polluted by sin, God abhorred them; he hated and despised them, ch. 5:21. Note, God abhors that form of godliness which hypocrites keep up, while they abhor the power of it. And if he abhors their temple, for the iniquity of that, no marvel that he hates their palaces, for the injustices and oppression he finds there. Note, that creature which we take such a complacency and put such a confidence in as to make it a rival with God is thereby made abominable to him. He *hates the palaces* of sinners, for the sake of wickedness of those that dwell therein. Prov. 3:33, *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked*. And, if God abhor them, immediately it follows, He will *deliver up the city with all that is therein*, deliver it up into the hands of the enemy, that will lay it waste, and make a prey of all its wealth. Note, Those that are abhorred and abandoned of God are undone to all intents and purposes. 2. There shall be a great and general mortality among them (v. 9): *If there remain ten men in one house*, that have escaped the sword of the enemy, yet they shall be met with another way; *they shall all die* by famine or pestilence. In

the most sickly times, if there be ten in a house, one may hope that at least the one-half of them will escape, according to the proportion of two in a bed, *one taken and the other left*; but here not one of ten shall live to bury the rest. Another instance of the greatness of the mortality is (v. 10) that the nearest relations of the dead shall be forced with their own hands to wind up their bodies, and bury them, for want of other hands to be employed in it; that is all that the *next of kin*, to whom the right of redemption belongs, can do for them, and with great reluctance will they do that. It intimates that the young people shall be cut off soonest; for the uncle that survives is, ordinarily, the senior relation. "When the uncle comes with the sexton (or *him that burns*), to bring out the bones out of the house, he shall say to him that he sees next about the house, 'Is there any yet with thee? Are there any left alive?' And he shall say, 'No, this is the last; now the whole family is cut off by death, and neither root nor branch remains.'" But that which makes the judgment the more grievous is that their hearts seem to be hardened under it. "When he that is found by the sides of the house begin to enter into discourse with those that are carrying off the dead, they shall say, 'Hold thy tongue; do not stand preaching to us about the hand of Providence in this calamity, for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord; God is so angry with us that there is no speaking to him; he is so extreme to mark what we do amiss that we dare not so much as make mention of his name.'" Thus *the foolishness of men perverts their way*, and brings them into distress, and then *their heart frets against the Lord*. Even then they will not take notice of his hand, nor suffer those about them to do it. Perhaps it was forbidden by some of the idolatrous kings to make mention of the name of *Jehovah*, as by the law of Moses it was forbidden to make mention of the names of the heathen-gods: "We may not do it without incurring the penalty." Note, Those hearts are wretchedly hardened indeed that will not be brought to make mention of God's name, and to worship him, when the hand of God has gone out against them, and when, as here, sickness and death are in their families. Thus those *heap up wrath who cry not when God binds them*. 3. Their houses shall be destroyed, v. 11. *God will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts*; they shall both be cracked so as to lose their beauty and strength, and to be hastening towards a fall. The princes' palaces are not above the rebuke of divine justice, nor the poor men's cottages beneath it; neither shall escape. When sin has marked them for ruin God will find ways to bring it about. It is by order from him that breaches are made.

III. How justly they are thus burdened. If we understand the matter aright, we shall say, *The Lord is righteous*. 1. The methods used for their reformation had been all fruitless and ineffectual (v. 12): *Shall horses run upon the rock*, to hurl or harrow the ground there? Or will *one plough there with oxen*? No, for there will be no profit to countervail the pains. God has sent them his prophets, to *break up their fallow-ground*; but they found them as hard and inflexible as the rock, rough and rugged, and they could do no good with them, nor work upon them, and therefore they shall not attempt it any more. They will not be reclaimed, and therefore shall not be reprov'd, but quite abandoned. Note, Those who will not be cultivated as fields and vineyards shall be rejected as barren rocks and deserts, Heb. 6:7, 8. 2. They had abused their power to the wrong and oppression of many, whose injured cause the sovereign Judge would not only right, but revenge: *You have turned judgment into gall*, which is nauseous, and *the fruit of righteousness into hemlock*, which is noxious; it would make one sick to see how those that were entrusted with the administration of public justice bore down equity with that power which they out to have

defended and supported it, and so turned its own artillery against itself. Note, When our services of God are soured with sin his providences will justly be embittered to us. 3. They had set the judgments of God at defiance, and, confiding in their own strength, thought themselves a match for Omnipotence, v. 13. They *rejoiced in a thing of nought*, pleased themselves with a fancy that no evil should befall them, though they had no ground at all for that confidence, nothing to trust to that would bear any weight. They said, "*Have we not taken to us horns*; have we not arrived to great dignity and dominion, have we not pushed down our enemies and pushed on our victories, and this *by our own strength*, our own skill and courage, our own wealth and military force? Who then need we be afraid of? Who then need we make court to? Not God himself." Note, Prosperity and success commonly make men secure and haughty; and those that have done much think they can do any thing, any thing without God, nay, any thing against him. But those who trust in their own strength rejoice in *a thing of nought*, and so they will find. Probably they did not say this with their lips, *totidem verbis—in so many words*, but it was the language of their hearts and of their actions, both which God understands.

IV. How easily and effectually this burden shall be brought upon them, v. 14. He that brings it upon them is *the Lord the God of hosts*, who both may do and can do what he pleases, who has all creatures at his command, and who, when he has work to do, will not be at a loss for instruments to do it with; though they are the house of Israel, yet he will *raise up against them a nation* which they feared not, but had many a time hoped in, even the Assyrians, and this nation shall *afflict them*, bring them into straits, and put them to pain, from the *entering in of Hamath*, in the north, to *the river of the wilderness*, the river of Egypt, Sihor or Nile, in the south. The whole nation has shared in the iniquity, and therefore must expect to share in the calamity. Note, When men are in any way instruments of affliction to us we must see God raising them up against us, for they are in his hand—the rod, the sword, in his hand. The Lord has bidden Shimei curse David.

Chapter 7

In this chapter we have, I. God contending with Israel, by the judgments, but are reprieved, and the judgments turned away at the prayer of Amos (v. 1-6). 2. God's patience is at length worn out by their obstinacy, and they are rejected, and sentenced to utter ruin (v. 7-9). II. Israel contending with God, by the opposition given to his prophet. 1. Amaziah informs against Amos (v. 10, 11) and does what he can to rid the country of him as a public nuisance (v. 12, 13). 2. Amos justifies himself in what he did as a prophet (v. 14, 15) and denounces the judgments of God against Amaziah his prosecutor (v. 16, 17); for, when the contest is between God and man, it is easy to foresee, it is very easy to foretel, who will come off with the worst of it.

Verses 1-9

We here see that God bears long, but that he will not bear always, with a provoking people, both these God here showed the prophet: *Thus hath the Lord God showed me*, v. 1, 4, 7. He showed him what was present, foreshowed him what was to come, gave him the knowledge both of what he did and of what he designed; for the *Lord God reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets*, ch. 3:7.

I. We have here two instances of God's sparing mercy, remembered in the midst of judgment, the narratives of which are so much like one another that they will be best considered together, and very considerable they are.

1. God is here coming forth against this sinful nation, first by one judgment and then by another. (1.) He begins with the judgment of famine. The prophet saw this in vision. He saw God *forming grasshoppers*, or *locusts*, and bringing them up upon the land, to eat up the fruits of it, and so to strip it of its beauty and starve its inhabitants, v. 1. God formed these grasshoppers, not only as they were his creatures (and much of the wisdom and power of God appears in the formation of minute animals, as much in the structure of an ant as of an elephant), but as they were instruments of his wrath. God is said to *frame evil* against a sinful people, Jer. 18:11. These grasshoppers were framed on purpose to *eat up the grass of the land*; and vast numbers of them were prepared accordingly. They were sent *in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth, after the king's mowings*. See here how the judgment was mitigated by the mercy that went before it. God could have sent these insects to eat up the grass at the beginning of the first growth, in the spring, when the grass was most needed, was most plentiful, and was the best in its kind; but God suffered that to grow, and suffered them to gather it in; the king's mowings were safely housed, for *the king himself is served from the field* (Eccl. 5:9), and could as ill be without his mowings as without any other branch of his revenues. Uzziah, who was now king of Judah, *loved husbandry*, 2 Chr. 26:10. But the grasshoppers were commissioned to eat up only the *latter growth* (the edgrew we call it in the country), the after-grass, which is of little value in comparison with the former. The mercies which God give us, and continues to us, are more numerous and more valuable than those he removes from us, which is a good reason why we should be thankful and not complain. The remembrance of the mercies of the former growth should make us submissive to the will of God when we meet with disappointments in the latter growth. The prophet, in vision, saw this judgment prevailing far. These grasshoppers *ate up the grass of the land*, which should have been for the cattle, which the owners must of course suffer by. Some understand this figuratively of a wasting destroying army brought

upon them. In the days of Jeroboam the kingdom of Israel began to recover itself from the desolations it had been under in the former reigns (2 Ki. 14:25); the latter growth shot up, after the mowings of the kings of Syria, which we read of 2 Ki. 13:3. And then God commissioned the king of Assyria with an army of caterpillars to come upon them and lay them waste, that nation spoken of ch. 6:14, which afflicted them *from the entering of Hamath to the river of the wilderness*, which seems to refer to 2 Ki. 14:25, where Jeroboam is said to have restored their coast *from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain*. God can bring all to ruin when we think all is in some good measure repaired. (2.) He proceeds to the judgment of fire, to show that he has many arrows in his quiver, many ways of humbling a sinful nation (v. 4): *The Lord God called to contend by fire*. He contended, for God's judgment upon a people are his controversies with them; in them he prosecutes his action against them; and his controversies are neither causeless nor groundless. He *called to contend*; he did by his prophets give them notice of his controversy, and drew up a declaration, setting forth the meaning of it. Or he called for his angels, or other ministers of his justice, that were to be employed in it. A fire was kindled among them, by which perhaps is meant a great drought (the heat of the sun, which should have warmed the earth, scorched it, and burnt up the roots of the grass which the locusts had eaten the spires of), or a raging fever, which was as a fire in their bones, which devoured and ate up multitudes, or lightning, fire from heaven, which consumed their houses, as Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed (ch. 4:11), or it was the burning of their cities, either by accident or by the hand of the enemy, for fire and sword used to go together; thus were the towns wasted, as the country was by the grasshoppers. This fire, which God called for, did terrible execution; it *devoured the great deep*, as the fire that fell from heaven on Elijah's altar licked up the water that was in the trench. Though the water designed for the stopping and quenching of this fire was as the water of the great deep, yet it devoured it; for who, or what, can stand before a fire kindled by the wrath of God! It did *eat up a part*, a great part, of the cities where it was sent; or it was as the fire at Taberah, which *consumed the outermost parts of the camp* (Num. 11:1); when some were overthrown others were *as brands plucked out of the fire*. All deserved to be devoured, but it ate up only a part, for God does not stir up all his wrath.

2. The prophet goes forth to meet him in the way of his judgments, and by prayer seeks to turn away his wrath, v. 2. When he saw, in vision, what dreadful work these caterpillars made, that they had eaten up in a manner *all the grass of the land* (he foresaw they would do so, if suffered to go on), then he said, *O Lord God! forgive, I beseech thee* (v. 2); *cease, I beseech thee*, v. 5. He that foretold the judgment in his preaching to the people, yet deprecated it in his intercessions for them. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*. It was the business of prophets to pray for those to whom they prophesied, and so to make it appear that though they denounced they did not *desire the woeful day*. Therefore, God showed his prophets the evils coming, that they might befriend the people, not only by warning them, but by praying for them, and *standing in the gap*, to turn away God's wrath, as Moses, that great prophet, often did. Now observe here,

(1.) The prophet's prayer: *O Lord God! [1.] Forgive, I beseech thee*, and take away the sin, v. 2. He sees sin at the bottom of the trouble, and therefore concludes that the pardon of sin must be at the bottom of deliverance, and prays for that in the first place. Note, Whatever calamity we are under, personal or public, the forgiveness of sin is that which we should be most earnest with God for. [2.] *Cease, I beseech thee*, and take away the judgment; cease the fire, cease the controversy; *cause they*

anger towards us to cease. This follows upon the forgiveness of sin. Take away the cause and effect will cease. Note, Those whom God contends with will soon find what need they have to cry for a cessation of arms; and there are hopes that though God has begun, and proceeded far, in his controversy, yet it may be obtained.

(2.) The prophet's plea to enforce this prayer: *By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?* v. 2. And it is repeated (v. 5) and yet no vain repetition. Christ, *in his agony*, prayed earnestly, *saying the same words*, again and again. [1.] It is Jacob that he is interceding for, the professing people of God, called by his name, calling on his name, the seed of Jacob, his chosen, and in covenant with him. It is Jacob's case that is in this prayer spread before the God of Jacob. [2.] *Jacob is small*, very small already, weakened and brought low by former judgments; and therefore, if these come, he will be quite ruined and brought to nothing. The people are few; *the dust of Jacob*, which was once innumerable, is now soon counted. Those few are feeble (it is *the worm Jacob*, Isa. 41:14); they are unable to help themselves or one another. Sin will soon make a great people small, will diminish the numerous, impoverish the plenteous, and weaken the courageous. [3.] *By whom shall he arise?* He has fallen, and cannot help himself up, and he has no friend to help him, none to raise him, unless the hand of God do it; what will become of him, then, if the hand that should raise him be stretched out against him? Note, When the state of God's church is very low and very helpless it is proper to be recommended by our prayers to God's pity.

3. God graciously lets fall his controversy, in answer to the prophet's prayer, once and again (v. 3): *The Lord repented for this.* He did not change his mind, for he is one mind and who can turn him? But he changed his way, took another course, and determined to deal in mercy and not in wrath. He said, *It shall not be.* And again (v. 6), *This also shall not be.* The caterpillars were countermanded, were remanded; a stop was put to the progress of the fire, and thus a reprieve was granted. See the power of prayer, of *effectual fervent prayer*, and how much it *avails*, what great things it prevails for. A stop has many a time been put to a judgment by making *supplication to the Judge*. This was not the first time that Israel's life was begged, and so saved. See what a blessing praying people, praying prophets, are to a land, and therefore how highly they ought to be valued. Ruin would many a time have broken in if they had not stood in the breach, and made good the pass. See how ready, how swift, God is to show mercy, how he *waits to be gracious*. Amos moves for a reprieve, and obtains it, because God inclines to grant it and looks about to see if there be any that will intercede for it, Isa. 59:16. Nor are former reprieves objected against further instances of mercy, but are rather encouragements to pray and hope for them. This also shall not be, any more than that. It is the glory of God that he *multiplies to pardon*, that he spares, and forgives, to more than seventy times seven times.

II. We have here the rejection of those at last who had been often reprieved and yet never reclaimed, reduced to straits and yet never reduced to their God and their duty. This is represented to the prophet by a vision (v. 7, 8) and an express prediction of utter ruin, v. 9.

1. The vision is of a *plumb-line*, a line with a plummet at the end of it, such as masons and bricklayers use to run up a wall by, that they may work it straight and true, and by rule. (1.) Israel was a wall, a strong wall, which God himself had reared, as a bulwark, or wall of defence, to his sanctuary, which he set up among them. The Jewish church says of herself (Cant. 8:10), *I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers.* This wall was *made by a plumb-line*, very exact and firm. So happy was its

constitution, so well compacted, and every thing so well ordered according to the model; it had long stood fast as a wall of brass. But, (2.) God now *stands upon* this wall, not to hold it up, but to tread it down, or, rather, to consider what he should do with it. He *stands upon it with a plumb-line in his hand*, to take measure of it, that it may appear to be a bowing, bulging wall. *Recti est index sui et oblique—This plumb-line would discover where it was crooked.* Thus God would bring the people of Israel to the trial, would discover their wickedness, and show wherein they erred; and he would likewise bring his judgments upon them according to equity, would set a *plumb-line in the midst of them*, to mark how far their wall must be pulled down, as David measured the *Moabites with a line* (2 Sa. 8:2) to *put them to death*. And, when God is coming to the ruin of a people, he is said to *lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet*; for when he punishes it is with exactness. It is now determined: "*I will not again pass by them any more*; they shall not be spared and reprieved as they have been; their punishment shall not be *turned away*," ch. 1:3. Note, God's patience, which has long been sinned against, will at length be sinned away; and the time will come when those that have been spared often shall be no longer spared. *My spirit shall not always strive*. After frequent reprieves, yet a day of execution will come.

2. The prediction is of utter ruin, v. 9. (1.) The body of the people shall be destroyed, with all those things that were their ornament and defence. They are here called *Isaac* as well as *Israel, the house of Isaac* (v. 16), some think in allusion to the signification of Isaac's name; it is *laughter*; they shall become a jest among all their neighbours; their neighbours shall *laugh at them*. The desolation shall fasten upon their high places and their *sanctuaries*, either their *castles* or their *temples*, both built on high places. Their castles they thought safe, and their temples sacred as sanctuaries. These shall be *laid waste*, to punish them for their idolatry and to make them ashamed of their carnal confidences, which were the two things for which God had a controversy with them. When these were made desolate they might read their sin and folly in their punishment. (2.) The royal family shall sink first, as an earnest of the ruin of the whole kingdom: *I will rise against the house of Jeroboam*, Jeroboam the second, who was now king of the ten tribes; his family was extirpated in his son Zecharias, who was *slain with the sword before the people*, by Shallum who *conspired against him*, 2 Ki. 15:10. How unrighteous soever the instruments were, God was righteous, and in them God rose up against that idolatrous family. Even king's houses will be no shelter against the sword of God's wrath.

Verses 10-17

One would have expected, 1. That what we met with in the former part of the chapter would awaken the people to repentance, when they saw that they were reprieved in order that they might have *space to repent* and that they could not obtain a pardon unless the did repent. 2. That it would endear the prophet Amos to them, who had not only shown his good-will to them in praying against the judgments that invaded them, but had prevailed to turn away those judgments, which, if they had had any sense of gratitude, would have gained him an interest in their affections. But it fell out quite contrary; they continue impenitent, and the next news we hear of Amos is that he is persecuted. Note, As it is the praise of great saints that they pray for those that are enemies to them, so it is the shame of many great sinners that they are enemies to those who pray for them, Ps. 35:13, 15; 109:4. We have here,

I. The malicious information brought to the king against the prophet Amos, v. 10, 11. The informer was *Amaziah the priest of Bethel*, the chief of the priests that ministered to the golden calf there, the *president of Bethel* (so some read it), that had the principal hand in civil affairs there. He complained against Amos, not only because he prophesied without license from him, but because he prophesied against his altars, which would soon be deserted and demolished if Amos's preaching could but gain credit. Thus the shrine-makers at Ephesus hated Paul, because his preaching tended to spoil their trade. Note, Great pretenders to sanctity are commonly the worst enemies to those who are really sanctified. Priests have been the most bitter persecutors. Amaziah brings an information to Jeroboam against Amos. Observe, 1. The crime he is charged with is no less than treason: "*Amos has conspired against thee, to depose and murder thee; he aims at succeeding thee, and therefore is taking the most effectual way to weaken thee. He sows the seeds of sedition in the hearts of the good subjects of the king, and makes them disaffected to him and his government, that he may draw them by degrees from their allegiance; upon this account the land is not able to bear his words.*" It is slyly insinuated to the king that the country was exasperated against him, and it is given in as their sense that his preaching was intolerable, and such as nobody could be reconciled to, such as the times would by no means bear, that is, the men of the times would not. Both the impudence of his supposed treason, and the bad influence it would have upon the country, are intimated in that part of the charge, that he conspired against the king in the midst of the house of Israel. Note, It is no new thing for the accusers of the brethren to misrepresent them as enemies to the king and kingdom, as traitors to their prince and troublers of the land, when really they are the best friends to both. And it is common for designing men to assert that as the sense of the country which is far from being so. And yet here, I doubt, it was too true, that the people could not bear plain dealing any more than the priests. 2. The words laid in the indictment for the support of this charge (v. 11): *Amos says* (and they have witnesses ready to prove it) *Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be led away captive;* and hence they infer that he is an enemy to his king and country, and not to be tolerated. See the malice of Amaziah; he does not tell the king how Amos had interceded for Israel, and by his intercession had turned away first one judgment and then another, and did not let fall his intercession till he saw the decree had gone forth; he does not tell him that these threatenings were conditional, and that he had often assured them that if they would repent and reform the ruin should be prevented. Nay, it was not true that he said, *Jeroboam shall die by the sword*, nor did he so die (2 Ki. 14:28), but that God would *rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword*, v. 9. God's prophets and ministers have often had occasion to make David's complaint (Ps. 56:5), *Every day they wrest my words*. But shall it be made the watchman's crime, when he sees the sword coming, to give warning to the people, that they may get themselves secured? or the physician's crime to tell his patient of the danger of his disease, that he may use means for the cure of it? What enemies are foolish men to themselves, to their own peace, to their best friends! It does not appear that Jeroboam took any notice of this information; perhaps he revered a prophet, and stood more in awe of the divine authority than Amaziah his priest did.

II. The method he used to persuade Amos to withdraw and quit the country (v. 12, 13); when he could not gain his point with the king to have Amos imprisoned, banished, or put to death, or at least to have him frightened into silence or flight, he tried what he could do by fair means to get rid of him; he insinuated himself into his acquaintance, and with all the arts of wheedling

endeavored to persuade him to go and prophesy in the *land of Judah*, and not at Bethel. He owns him to be a seer, and does not pretend to enjoin him silence, but suggests to him,

1. That Bethel was not a proper place for him to exercise his ministry in, for it was *the king's chapel*, or *sanctuary*, where he had his idols and their altars and priests; and it was *the king's court*, or *the house of the kingdom*, where the royal family resided and where were set the thrones of judgment; and therefore *prophesy not any more* here. And why not? (1.) Because Amos is too plain and blunt a preacher for the court and the king's chapel. Those that *wear silk and fine clothing*, and speak silken soft words, are fit for king's palaces. (2.) Because the worship that is in the king's chapel will be a continual vexation and trouble to Amos; let him therefore get far enough from it, and what the eye sees not the heart grieves not for. (3.) Because it was not fit that the king and his house should be affronted in their own court and chapel by the reproofs and threatenings which Amos was continually teasing them with in the name of the Lord; as if it were the prerogative of the prince, and the privilege of the peers, when they are running headlong upon a precipice, not to be told of their danger. (4.) Because he could not expect any countenance or encouragement there, but, on the contrary, to be bantered and ridiculed by some and to be threatened and brow-beaten by others; however, he could not think to make any converts there, or to persuade any from that idolatry which was supported by the authority and example of the king. To preach his doctrine there was but (as we say) to run his head against a post; and therefore *prophesy no more* there. But,

2. He persuades him that the land of Judah was the fittest place for him to set up in: *Flee thee away* thither with all speed, and *there eat bread*, and *prophesy there*. There thou wilt be safe; there thou wilt be welcome; the king's court and chapel there are on thy side; the prophets there will second thee; the priests and princes there will take notice of thee, and allow thee an honourable maintenance. See here, (1.) How willing wicked men are to get clear of their faithful reprovers, and how ready to *say to the seers, See not*, or *See not for us*; the two witnesses were a torment to those that dwelt on the earth (Rev. 11:10), and it were indeed a pity that men should be *tormented before the time*, but that it is in order to the preventing of eternal torment. (2.) How apt worldly men are to measure others by themselves. Amaziah, as a priest, aimed at nothing but the profits of his place, and he thought Amos, as a prophet, had the same views, and therefore advised him to prophesy where he might *eat bread*, where he might be sure to have as much as he chose; whereas Amos was to prophesy where God appointed him, and where there was most need of him, not where he would get most money. Note, Those that make gain their godliness, and are governed by the hopes of wealth and preferment themselves, are ready to think these the most powerful inducements with others also.

III. The reply which Amos made to these suggestions of Amaziah's. He did not *consult with flesh and blood*, nor was it his care to enrich himself, but to *make full proof of his ministry*, and to be found faithful in the discharge of it, not to sleep in a whole skin, but to keep a good conscience; and therefore he resolved to abide by his post, and, in answer to Amaziah,

1. He justified himself in his constant adherence to his work and to his place (v. 14, 15); and that which he was sure would not only bear him out, but bind him to it, was that he had a divine warrant and commission for it: *"I was no prophet, nor prophet's son*, neither born nor bred to the office, not originally designed for a prophet, as Samuel and Jeremiah, not educated in the

schools of the prophets, as many others were; but *I was a herdsman*, a keeper of cattle, and *a gatherer of sycamore-fruit*." Our sycamores bear no fruit, but, it seems, theirs did, which Amos gathered either for his cattle or for himself and his family, or to sell. He was a plain country-man, bred up and employed in country work and used to country fare. He *followed the flocks* as well as the herds, and thence God *took him*, and bade him *go and prophesy to his people Israel*, deliver to them such messages as he should from time to time *receive from the Lord*. God made him a prophet, and a prophet to them, appointed him his work and appointed him his post. Therefore he ought not to be silenced, for, (1.) He could produce a divine commission for what he did. He did not run before he was sent, but pleads, as Paul, that he was *called to be an apostle*; and men will find it is at their peril if they contradict and oppose any that come in God's name, if they say to his *seers*, *See not*, or silence those whom he has bidden to speak; such *fight against God*. An affront done to an ambassador is an affront to the prince that sends him. Those that have a warrant from God ought not to *fear the face of man*. (2.) The mean character he wore before he received that commission strengthened his warrant, so far was it from weakening it. [1.] He had no thoughts at all of ever being a prophet, and therefore his prophesying could not be imputed to a raised expectation or a heated imagination, but purely to a divine impulse. [2.] He was not educated nor instructed in the art or mystery of prophesying, and therefore he must have his abilities for it immediately from God, which is an undeniable proof that he had his mission from him. The apostles, being originally unlearned and ignorant men, evidenced that they owed their knowledge to their having *been with Jesus*, Acts 4:13. When the treasure is put into such earthen vessels, it is thereby made to appear that the *excellency of the power is of God, and not of man*, 2 Co. 4:7. [3.] He had an honest calling, by which he could comfortably maintain himself and his family; and therefore did not need to prophesy for bread, as Amaziah suggested (v. 12), did not take it up as a trade to live by, but as a trust to honour God and do good with. [4.] He had all his days been accustomed to a plain homely way of living among poor husbandmen, and never affected either gaities or dainties, and therefore would not have thrust himself so near the king's court and chapel if the business God had called him to had not called him thither. [5.] Having been so meanly bred, he could not have the courage to speak to kings and great men, especially to speak such bold and provoking things to them, if he had not been animated by a greater spirit than his own. If God, that sent him, had not strengthened him, he could not thus have *set his face as a flint*, Isa. 50:7. Note, God often chooses the *weak and foolish things of the world* to confound the wise and mighty; and a herdsman of Tekoa puts to shame a priest of Bethel, when he receives from God authority and ability to act for him.

2. He condemns Amaziah for the opposition he gave them, and denounces the judgments of God against him, not from any private resentment or revenge, but in the name of the Lord and by authority from him, v. 16, 17. Amaziah would not suffer Amos to preach at all, and therefore he is particularly ordered to preach against him: *Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord*, hear it and tremble. Those that cannot bear general woes may expect woes of their own. The sin he is charged with is forbidding Amos to prophesy; we do not find that he beat him, or put him in the stocks, only he enjoined him silence: *Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac*; he must not only thunder against them, but he must not so much as drop a word against them; he cannot bear, no, not the most gentle distilling of that rain, that small rain. Let him therefore hear his doom.

(1.) For the opposition he gave to Amos God will bring ruin upon himself and his family. This was the sin that filled the measure of his iniquity. [1.] He shall have no comfort in any of his relations, but be afflicted in those that were nearest to him: *His wife shall be a harlot*; either she shall be forcibly abused by the soldiers, as the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah (they *ravish the women of Zion*, Lam. 5:11), or she shall herself wickedly play the harlot, which, though her sin, her great sin, would be his affliction, his great affliction and reproach, and a just punishment upon him for promoting spiritual whoredom. Sometimes the sins of our relations are to be looked upon as judgments of God upon us. His children, though they keep honest, yet shall not keep alive: *His sons and his daughters shall fall by the sword* of war, and he himself shall live to see it. He has trained them up in iniquity, and therefore God will cut them off in it. [2.] He shall be stripped of all his estate; it shall fall into the hand of the enemy, and be *divided by line*, by lot, among the soldiers. What is ill begotten will not be long kept. [3.] He shall himself perish in a strange country, not in the *land of Israel*, which had been holiness to the Lord, but in a *polluted land*, in a heathen country, the fittest place for such a heathen to end his days in, that hated and silenced God's prophets and contributed so much to the polluting of his own land with idolatry.

(2.) Notwithstanding the opposition he gave to Amos, God will bring ruin upon the land and nation. He was accused for saying, *Israel shall be led away captive* (v. 11), but he stands to it, and repeats it; for the unbelief of man shall not make the word of God of no effect. The *burden of the word of the Lord* may be striven with, but it cannot be shaken off. Let Amaziah rage, and fret, and say what he will to the contrary, *Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land*. Note, it is to no purpose to contend with the judgments of God; for when God judges he will overcome. Stopping the mouths of God's ministers will not stop the progress of God's word, for it shall not return void.

Chapter 8

Sinful times are here attended with sorrowful times, so necessary is the connexion between them; it is threatened here again and again that the laughter shall be turned into mourning. I. By the vision of "basket of summer-fruit" is signified the hastening on of the ruin threatened (v. 1-3) and that shall change their note. II. Oppressors are here called to an account for their abusing the poor; and their destruction is foretold, which will set them a mourning (v. 4–10). III. A famine of the word of God is here made the punishment of a people that go a whoring after other gods (v. 11–14); yet for this, which is the most mournful judgment of all, they are not here brought in mourning.

Verses 1-3

The great reason why sinners defer their repentance *de die in diem*-from day to day, is because they think God thus defers his judgments, and there is no song wherewith they so effectually sing themselves asleep as that, *My Lord delays his coming*; and therefore God, by his prophets, frequently represents to Israel the day of his wrath not only as just and certain, but as very near and hastening on apace; so he does in these verses.

I. The approach of the threatened ruin is represented by *a basket of summer-fruit* which Amos saw in vision; for the Lord *showed it* to him (v. 1) and obliged him to take notice of it (v. 2): *Amos, what seest thou?* Note, It concerns us to enquire whether we do indeed see that which God has been pleased to show us, and hear what he has been pleased to say to us; for many a thing God speaks, God shows *once, yea twice*, and men *perceive it not*. Are we in the midst of the visions of the Almighty? Let us consider what we see. He saw *a basket of summer-fruit* gathered and ready to be eaten, which signified, 1. That they were ripe for destruction, rotten ripe, and it was time for God to put in the sickle of his judgments and to cut them off; nay, the thing was in effect done already, and they lay ready to be eaten up. 2. That the year of God's patience was drawing towards a conclusion; it was autumn with them, and their year would quickly have its period in a dismal winter. 3. Those we call *summer-fruits* that will not keep till winter, but must be used immediately, an emblem of this people, that had nothing solid or consistent in them.

II. The intent and meaning of this vision is no more than this: It signifies that *the end has come upon my people Israel*. The word that signifies *the end* is *ketz*, which is of near affinity with *kitz*, the word used for *summer-fruit*. God has long spared them, and borne with them, but now his patience is tired out; they are indeed *his people Israel*, but their end, that *latter end* they have been so often reminded of, but have so long forgotten, has now come. Note, If sinners do not make an end of sin, God will make an end of them, yea though they be *his people Israel*. What was said ch. 7:8 is here repeated as God's determined resolution, *I will not again pass by them any more*; they shall not be connived at as they have been, nor the judgment coming turned away.

III. The consequence of this shall be a universal desolation (v. 3): When *the end* shall come sorrow and death shall ride in triumph; they are accustomed to go together, and shall at length go away together, when in heaven *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow*, Rev. 21:4. But here in a sinful world, in a sinful nation, 1. Sorrow reigns, reigns to such a degree that *the*

songs of the temple shall be howlings—the songs of God's temple at Jerusalem, or rather of their idol-temples, where they used, when, in honour of the golden calves, they had *eaten and drunk, to rise up to play*. They were perhaps wanton profane songs; and it is certain that sooner or later those will be turned into howlings. Or, if they had a sound and show of piety and religion, yet, not coming from the heart, nor being sung to the glory of God, he valued them not, but would justly turn them into howlings. Note, Mourning will follow sinful mirth, yea, and sacred mirth too, if it be not sincere. And, when God's judgments are abroad, they will soon turn the greatest joy into the greatest heaviness, the temple-songs, which used to sound so pleasantly, not only into sighs and groans, but into loud howlings, which sound dismally. They shall come to the temple, and, finding that in ruins, there they shall howl most bitterly. 2. Death reigns, reigns to such a degree that there shall be *dead bodies, many dead bodies in every place* (Ps. 110:6), slain by sword or pestilence, so many that the survivors shall not bury them with the usual pomp and solemnity of funerals; they shall not so much as have the bell tolled, but they shall *cast them forth with silence*, shall bury them in the dead of the night, and charge all about them to be silent and to take notice of it, either because they have not wherewithal to bear the charges of a funeral, or because, the killing disease being infectious, none will come near them, or for fear the enemy should be provoked, if they should be known to lament their slain. Or they shall charge themselves and one another silently to submit to the hand of God in these desolating judgments, and not to repine and quarrel with him. Or it may be taken not for a patient, but a sullen silence; their hearts shall be hardened, and all these judgments shall not extort from them one word of acknowledgment either of God's righteousness or their own unrighteousness.

Verses 4-10

God is here contending with proud oppressors, and showing them,

I. The heinousness of the sin they were guilty of; in short, they had the character of the unjust judge (Lu. 18:2) that neither *feared God nor regarded man*.

1. Observe them in their devotions, and you will say, "They had no reverence for God." Bad as they are, they do indeed keep up a show and form of godliness; they observe the *sabbath* and the *new moon*; they put some difference between those days and other days, but they were soon weary of them, and had no affection at all to them, for their hearts were wholly set upon the world and the things of it. It is a sad character which this gives of them, that they said, *When will the sabbath be gone, that we may sell corn?* Yet is still the character of many that are called Christians. (1.) They were weary of sabbath days. "When will they be *gone*?" They were weary of the restraints of the sabbaths and the new-moons, and wished them over because they might *do no servile work therein*. They were weary of the work or business of the sabbaths and new-moons, snuffed at it (Mal. 1:13), and were, as *Doeg, detained before the Lord* (1 Sa. 21:7); they would rather have been any where else than about God's altars. Note, Sabbath days and sabbath work are a burden to carnal hearts, that are always afraid of doing too much for God and eternity. Can we spend our time better than in communication with God? And how much time do we spend pleasantly with the world? Will not the sabbath be gone before we have done the work of it and reaped the gains of it? Why then should we be in such haste to part with it? (2.) They were fond of market-days: they longed to be *selling corn* and *setting forth wheat*. When they were employed in religious services they were thinking of their marketings; their hearts *went after their covetousness*

(Eze. 33:31), and thus made my Father's house a house of merchandise, nay, a den of thieves. They were weary of holy duties because their worldly business stood still the while; in this they were as in their element, but in God's sanctuary as a fish upon dry ground. Note, Those are strangers to God, and enemies to themselves, that love market days better than sabbath days, that would rather be selling corn than worshipping God.

2. Observe them in their conversations, and you will see they have no regard to man; and this commonly follows upon the former; those that have lost the savour of piety will not long retain the sense of common honesty. They neither *do justly* nor *love mercy*. (1.) They cheat those they deal with. When they *sell their corn* they impose upon the buyer, both in giving out the goods and in receiving the money for them. They measure him the corn by their own measure, and pretend to give him what he agreed for, but they *make the ephah small*. The measure is scanty, and not statute-measure, and so they wrong him that way. When they receive his money they must weigh fit in their own scales, by their own weights, and the *shekel* they weigh by is above standard: *They make the shekel great*, so that the money, being found too light, must have more added to it; and so they cheat that way too, and this under colour and pretence of exactness in doing justice. By such wicked practices as these men show such a greediness of the world, such a love of themselves, such a contempt of mankind in general, of the particular persons they deal with, and of the sacred laws of justice, as prove them to have in their hearts neither the fear nor the love of that God who has so plainly said that *false weights and balances are an abomination to him*. Another instance of their fraudulent dealing is that they *sell the refuse of the wheat*, and, taking advantage of their neighbour's ignorance or necessity, make them take it at the same price at which they sell the *finest of the wheat*. (2.) They are barbarous and unmerciful to the poor: *They swallow up the needy*, and *make the poor of the land to fail*. [1.] They valued themselves so much on their wealth that they looked upon all that were poor with the highest contempt imaginable; they hated them, could not endure them, but abandoned them, and therefore did what they could to make them cease, not by relieving them to make them cease to be poor, but by banishing and destroying them to make them cease to be, or at least to be in their land. But he who thus *reproaches the poor despises his Maker*, in whose hands *rich and poor meet together*. [2.] They were so eager to increase their wealth, and make it more, that they robbed the poor to enrich themselves; and they fastened upon the poor, to *make a prey* of them, because they were not able to obtain any redress nor to resist or revenge the violence of their oppressors. Those riches that are got by the ruin of the poor will bring ruin on those that get them. They swallowed up the poor by making them hard bargains, and cheating them in those bargains; for *therefore they falsify the balances by deceit*, not only that they *may enrich themselves*, may have money at command, and so may have every thing else (as they think) at command too, but that they may impoverish those about them, and bring them so low that they may force them to become slaves to them, and so, having drained them of every thing else, they may have their labour for nothing, or next to nothing. Thus *they buy the poor for silver*; they bring them and their *children into bondage*, because they have not wherewithal to pay for the corn they have bought; see Neh. 5:2-5. And there were so many that they were reduced to this extremity that the price was very low; and the oppressors had beaten it down so that you might buy a poor man to be your slave *for a pair of shoes*. Property was first invaded and then liberty; it is the method of oppressors first to make men beggars and then to make them their vassals. Thus is the dignity of the human nature

lost in the misery of those that are trampled on and the tenderness of it in the sin of those that trample on them.

II. The grievousness of the punishment that shall be inflicted on them for this sin. When the poor are injured they will *cry unto God*, and he will hear their cry, and reckon with those that are injurious to them, for, they being his receivers, he takes the wrongs done to them as done to himself, Ex. 22:23, 24.

1. God will remember their sin against them: *He has sworn by the excellency of Jacob* (v. 7), by himself, for he can swear by no greater; and who but he is the glory and magnificence of Jacob? He has sworn by those tokens of his presence with them, and his favour to them, which they had profaned and abused, and had done what they could to make them detestable to him; for he is said (ch 6:8) to *abhor the excellency of Jacob*. He swears *in his wrath*, swears by his own name, that name which was so well known and was so great in Israel. He swears, *Surely I will never forget any of their works*, but upon all occasions they shall be remembered against them, for more is implied than is expressed. *I will never forget them* is as much as to say, *I will never forgive them*; and then it proclaims the case of these unjust unmerciful men to be miserable indeed, eternally miserable; woe, and a thousand woes, to that man that is cut off by an oath of God from all benefit by pardoning mercy; and those have reason to fear judgment without mercy that have *shown no mercy*.

2. He will bring utter ruin and confusion upon them. It is here described largely, and in a great variety of emphatic expressions, that, if possible, they might be frightened into a sincere repentance and reformation. (1.) There shall be a universal terror and consternation: *Shall not the land tremble for this* (v. 8), *this land*, out of which you thought to drive the poor? *Shall not every one mourn that dwells therein?* Certainly he shall. Note, Those that will not tremble and mourn as they ought for national sins shall be made to tremble and mourn for national judgments; those that look without concern upon the sins of the oppressors, which should make them tremble, and upon the miseries of the oppressed, which should them mourn, God will find out a way to make them tremble at the fury of those that oppress them and mourn for their own losses and sufferings by it. (2.) There shall be a universal deluge and desolation. When God comes forth against them the waters of trouble and calamity shall *rise up wholly as a flood*, that swells, when it is dammed up, and soon overflows its banks. Every thing shall make against them. That with which they thought to check the progress of God's judgments shall but make them rise the higher. Judgments shall force their way as the *breaking forth of waters*. The whole land *shall be cast out, and drowned*, and laid under water, as the land of Egypt is every year by the overflowing of its river Nile. Or the expressions may allude to some former judgments of God. Their ruin *shall rise up wholly as a flood*, as Noah's flood, which overwhelmed the whole world, so shall this the whole land; and the land shall be *cast out, and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt*, as Pharaoh and his Egyptians were buried in the Red Sea, which was to them the *flood of Egypt*, both which judgments, as this which is here threatened, were the punishment of violence and oppression, which the Lord is the avenger of.

3. It shall surprise them, and come upon them when they little think of it (v. 9): *"I will cause the sun to go down at noon*, when it is in its full strength and lustre, at their noon, when they promise themselves a long afternoon, and think they have at least half a day good before them. The *earth shall be darkened in the clear day*, when every thing looks pleasant and hopeful." Thus uncertain are all our creature-comforts and enjoyments, even life itself; the highest degree of health and prosperity often proves

the next degree to sickness and adversity; Job's sun *went down at noon*; many are taken away in the midst of their days, and their sun goes down at noon. In the midst of life we are in death. Thus *terrible* are the judgments of God to those that sleep in security; they are to them as the sun's *going down at noon*; the less they are expected the more confounding they are. When they *cry Peace and safety* then *sudden destruction* comes, comes *as a snare*, Lu. 21:35.

4. It shall change their note, and mar all their mirth (v. 10): *I will turn your feasts into mourning*, as (v. 3) the *songs of the temple into howlings*. Note, The end of the sinner's mirth and jollity is heaviness. *As to the upright there arises light in the darkness*, which gives them *the oil of joy for mourning*, so on the wicked their falls darkness in the midst of light, which turns their *laughter into mourning*, their *joy into heaviness*. So great, so general, shall the desolation be, that *sackcloth shall be brought upon all loins, and baldness upon every head*, instead of the *well-set hair* and the rich garments they used to wear. The mourning at that day shall be as *mourning for an only son*, which denotes the most bitter and lasting lamentation. But are there are no hopes that when things are at the worst they will mend, and that at evening time it will yet be light? No, even *the end thereof shall be as a bitter day*, a day of bitter mourning; that state of impenitent sinners grows worse and worse, and the last of all will be the worst of all. *This shall you have at my hand, you shall lie down in sorrow*.

Verses 11-14

In these verses is threatened,

I. A general judgment of spiritual famine coming upon the whole land, a *famine of the word of God*, the failing of oracles and the scarcity of good preaching. This is spoken of as a thing at some distance: *The days come*, they will come hereafter, when another kind of darkness shall come upon that land of light. When Amos prophesied, and for a considerable time after, they had great plenty of prophets, abundant opportunities of *hearing the word of God*, in season and out of season; they had precept upon precept and line upon line; prophecy was their daily bread; and it is probable that they surfeited upon it, as Israel on the manna, and therefore God threatens that hereafter he will deprive them of this privilege. Probably in the land of Israel there were not so many prophets, about the time that their destruction came upon them, as there were in the land of Judah; and when the ten tribes went into captivity they *saw not their signs*, there were *no more any prophets*, none to *show them how long*, Ps. 74:9. The Jewish church, after Malachi, had no prophets for many ages; and some think this threatening looks further yet, to the blindness which has in part happened to Israel in the days of the Messiah, and the veil that is on the heart of the unbelieving Jews. They reject the gospel, and the ministers of it that God sends to them, and covet to have prophets of their own, as their fathers had, but they shall have none, *the kingdom of God being taken from them and given to another people*. Observe here, 1. What the judgment itself is that is threatened. It is a famine, a scarcity, not of bread and water (which are the necessary support of the body, and the want of which is very grievous), but a much sorer judgment than that, even a *famine of hearing the words of the Lord*. There shall be no congregations for ministers to preach to, nor any ministers to preach, nor any instructions and abilities given to those that do set up for preachers, to fit them for their work. The *word of the Lord* shall be *precious* and scarce; there shall be no *vision*, 1 Sa. 3:1. They shall have the written word, Bibles to read, but no ministers to explain and apply it to them, the water in the well, but nothing to draw with. It is a gracious promise (Isa. 30:20) that though

they have a scarcity of bread they shall have plenty of the means of grace. God will *give them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction*, but their eyes shall see their teachers; and it was a common saying among the Puritans that brown bread and the gospel are good fare. But it is here a threatening that on the contrary they should have plenty enough of bread and water, and yet their teachers should be removed. Now, (1.) This was the departure of a great part of their glory from their land. This made their nation great and high, that *to them were committed the oracles of God*; but, when these were taken from them, their beauty was stained and their honour laid in the dust. (2.) This was a token of God's highest displeasure against them. Surely he was angry indeed with them when he would no more speak to them as he had done, and had abandoned them to ruin when he would no more afford them the means of bringing them to repentance. (3.) This made all the other calamities that were upon them truly melancholy, that they had no prophets to instruct and comfort them from the word of God, nor to give them any hopeful prospect. We should say at any time, and shall say in a time of trouble, that a famine of the word of God is the sorest famine, the heaviest judgment.

2. What will be the effect of this (v. 12): *They shall wander from sea to sea*, from the sea of Tiberias to the Great Sea, from one border of the country to another, to see if God will send them prophets, either by sea or land, from other countries; since they have none among themselves, they shall go from the *north to the east*; when they are disappointed in one place they shall try another, and shall *run to and fro*, as men at a loss, and in a hot pursuit to *seek the word of the Lord*, to enquire if there be any prophets, any prophecy, any message from God, but they *shall not find it*. (1.) Though to many this is no affliction at all, yet some will be very sensible of it as a great grievance, and will gladly travel far to hear a good sermon; but they shall sensibly feel the loss of those mercies which others have foolishly sinned away. (2.) Even those that slighted prophets when they had them shall wish for them as Saul did for Samuel, when they are deprived of them. Many never know the worth of mercies till they feel the want of them. Or it may be meant thus, Though they should thus wander from sea to sea, in quest of the word of God, yet shall they not find it. Note, The means of grace are moveable things; and the candlestick, when we think it stands most firmly, may be removed out of its place (Rev. 2:5); and those that now slight the *days of the son of man* may wish in vain to see them. And *in the day of this famine the fair virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst* (v. 13); those who, one would think, could well enough have borne the toil, shall sink under it. The *Jewish churches*, and the *masters of their synagogues*, some take to be meant by the *virgins* and the *young men*; these shall lose the word of the Lord, and the benefit of divine revelation, and shall faint away for want of it, shall lose all their strength and beauty. Those that trust in their own merit and righteousness, and think they have no need of Christ, others take to be meant by the *fair virgins* and the *choice young men*; they shall *faint for thirst*, when those that *hunger and thirst after the righteousness* of Christ shall be abundantly satisfied and filled.

II. The particular destruction of those that were ringleaders in idolatry, v. 14. Observe, 1. The sin they are charged with: They *swear by the sin of Samaria*, that is, by the god of Samaria, the idol that was worshipped at Bethel, not far off from Samaria. Thus did they glory in their shame, and swear by them as their god which was their iniquity, thinking that could help them which would certainly ruin them, and giving the highest honour to that which they should have looked upon with the utmost

abhorrence and detestation. They say, *Thy god, O Dan! liveth*; that was the other golden calf, a dumb deal idol, and yet caressed and complimented as if it had been the living and true God. They say, *The manner, or way, of Beer-sheba liveth*; they swore by the *religion* of Beer-sheba, the way and manner of worship used there, which they looked upon as sacred, and therefore swore by and appealed to as a judge of controversy. Thus the papists swear by the mass, as the *manner of Beer-sheba*. 2. The destruction they are threatened with. Those who thus give that honour to idols which is due to God alone will find that the God they affront is thereby made their enemy, so that *they shall fall*, and the gods they serve cannot stand their friends, so that they shall *never rise again*. They will find that God is jealous and will resent the indignity done him, and that he will be victorious and it is to no purpose to contend with him.

Chapter 9

In this chapter we have, I. Judgment threatened, which the sinners shall not escape (v. 1-4), which an almighty power shall inflict (v. 5, 6), which the people of Israel have deserved as a sinful people (v. 7, 8); and yet it shall not be the utter ruin of their nation (v. 8), for a remnant of good people shall escape (v. 9). But the wicked ones shall perish (v. 10). II. Mercy promised, which was to be bestowed in the latter days (v. 11-15), as appears by the application of it to the days of the Messiah, Acts 15:16. And with those comfortable promises, after all the foregoing rebukes and threatenings, the book concludes.

Verses 1-10

We have here the justice of God passing sentence upon a provoking people; and observe,

I. With what solemnity the sentence is passed. The prophet saw in vision *the Lord standing upon the altar* (v. 1), the altar of burnt-offerings; for the *Lord has a sacrifice*, and multitudes must fall as victims to his justice. He is removed from the *mercy-seat* between the *cherubim*, and stands upon *the altar*, the *judgment-seat*, on which the fire of God used to fall, to devour the sacrifices. He stands upon *the altar*, to show that the ground of his controversy with this people was their profanation of his holy things; here he stands to avenge the quarrel of his altar, as also to signify that the sin of the house of Israel, like that of the house of Eli, shall *not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever*, 1 Sa. 3:14. He stands on the altar, to prohibit sacrifice. Now the order given is, *Smite the lintel of the door* of the temple, the chapter, smite it with such a blow *that the posts may shake*, and *cut them*, wound them *in the head, all of them*; break down the doors of God's house, or of the courts of his house, in token of this, that he is going out from it, and forsaking it, and then all judgments are breaking in upon it. Or it signifies the destruction of those in the first place that should be as the door-posts to the nation for its defence, so that, they being broken down, it becomes as a *city without gates and bars*. "Smite the king, who is as the lintel of the door, that the princes, who are as *the posts*, may *shake*; *cut them in the head*, cleave them down, *all of them*, as wood for the fire; and *I will slay the last of them*, the posterity of them, them and their families, or the *least* of them, them and all that are employed under them; or, *I will slay them all*, them and all that remain of them, till it comes to the last man; the slaughter shall be general." There is no living for those on whom God has said, *I will slay* them, no standing before his sword.

II. What effectual care is taken that none shall escape the execution of this sentence. This is enlarged upon here, and is intended for warning to all that *provoke the Lord to jealousy*. Let sinners read it, and tremble; as there is no fighting it out with God, so there is no fleeing from him. His judgments, when they come with commission, as they will overpower the strongest that think to outface them, so they will overtake the swiftest that think to out-run them, v. 2. Those of them that flee, and take to their heels, shall soon be out of breath, and shall not flee away out of the reach of danger; for, as sometimes *the wicked flee when none pursues*, so he cannot flee away when God pursues, though *he would fain flee out of his hand*. Nay, *he that escapes of them*, that thinks he has gained his point, *shall not be delivered*. *Evil pursues sinners*, and will arrest them. This is here enlarged upon by showing that wherever sinners flee for shelter from God's justice, it will overtake them, and the shelter will prove but a *refuge of lies*. What David says of the ubiquity of God's presence (Ps. 139:7-10) is here said of the extent of God's

power and justice. (1.) Hell itself, though it has its name in English from its being *hilled*, or *covered over*, or *hidden*, cannot hide them (v. 2): "Though *they dig into hell*, into the centre of the earth, or the darkest recesses of it, yet *thence shall my hand take them*, and bring them forth to be made public monuments of divine justice." The grave is a hiding-place to the righteous from the malice of the world (Job 3:17), but it shall be no hiding-place to the righteous from the justice of God; thence God's hands shall take them, when they shall rise in the great day to *everlasting shame and contempt*. (2.) Heaven, though it has its name from being *heaved*, or lifted up, shall not put them out of reach of God's judgments; as hell cannot hide them, so heaven will not. Though they *climb up to heaven* in their conceit, yet *thence will I bring them down*. Those whom God brings to heaven by his grace shall never be brought down; but those who climb thither themselves, by their own presumption, and confidence in themselves, will be brought down and filled with shame. (3.) *The top of Carmel*, one of the highest parts of the dust of the world in that country, shall not protect them: "*Though they hide themselves there*, where they imagine nobody will look for them, *I will search, and take them out thence*; neither the thickest bushes, nor the darkest caves, in the *top of Carmel*, will serve to hide them." (4.) The *bottom of the sea* shall not serve to conceal them; though they think to hide themselves there, even there the judgments of God shall find them out, and lay hold on them: *Thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them, the crooked serpent, even the dragon that is in the sea*, Isa. 27:1. They shall find their plague and death where they hope to find shelter and protection; diving will stand them in no more stead than climbing. (5.) Remote countries will not befriend them, nor shall less judgments excuse them from greater (v. 4): *Thought they go into captivity before their enemies*, who carry them to places at a great distance, and mingle them with their own people, among whom they seem to be lost, yet that shall not serve their turn: *Thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them*, the sword of the enemy, or one another's sword. When God judges he will overcome. That which binds on all this, makes their escape impossible and their ruin inevitable, is that God will *set his eyes upon them for evil, and not for good*. His eyes are in every place, are upon all men and upon all the ways of men, upon some for good, to *show himself strong* on their behalf, but upon others for evil, to take notice of their sins (Job 13:27) and take all opportunities of punishing them for their sins. *Their case is truly miserable* who have the providence of God: and all the dispensations of it, against them, working for their hurt.

3. What a great and mighty God he is that passes this sentence upon them, and will take the executing of it into his own hands. Threatenings are more or less formidable according to the power of him that threatens. We laugh at impotent wrath; but the wrath of God is not so; it is omnipotent wrath. *Who knows the power* of it? What he had before said he would do (ch. 8:8) is here repeated, that he would *make the land melt* and tremble, and *all that dwell therein mourn*, that the judgment should *rise up wholly like a flood*, and the country should be *drowned*, and laid under water, *as by the flood of Egypt*, v. 5. But is he able to make his words good? Yes, certainly he is; he does but *touch the land* and it melts, *touch the mountains* and they smoke; he can do it with the greatest ease, for, (1.) He is *the Lord God of hosts*, who undertakes to do it, the God who has all the power in his hand, and all creatures at his beck and call, who having made them all, and given them their several capacities, makes what use he pleases of them and all their powers. Very miserable is the case of those who have the Lord of hosts against them, for they have hosts against them, the whole creation at war with them. (2.) He is the Creator and governor of the upper world: *It is*

he that builds his stories in the heavens, the celestial orbs, or spheres, one over another, as so many stories in a high and stately palace. They are his, for he built them at first, when he said, *Let there be a firmament, and he made the firmament*; and he builds them still, is continually building them, not that they need repair, but by his providence he still upholds them; his power is the pillars of heaven, by which it is borne up. Now he that has the command of those stories is certainly to be feared, for thence, as from a castle, he can fire upon his enemies, or cast upon them great hailstones, as on the Canaanites, or make the stars in their courses, the furniture of those stories, to fight against them, as against Sisera. (3.) He has the management and command of this lower world too, in which we dwell, the terraqueous globe, both *earth* and *sea*, so that, which way soever his enemies think to make their escape, he will meet them, or to make opposition, he will match them. Do they think to make a land-fight of it? He *has founded his troop in the earth*, his troop of guards, which he has at command, and makes use of for the protection of his subjects and the punishment of his enemies. All the creatures on earth make one bundle (as the margin reads it), one bundle of arrows, out of which he takes what he pleases to discharge against the persecutors, Ps. 7:13. They are all one *army*, one *body*, so closely are they connected, and so harmoniously and so much in concert do they act for the accomplishing of their Creator's purposes. Do they think to make a sea-fight of it? He will be too hard for them there, for he has the waters of the sea at command; even its waves, the most tumultuous rebellious waters, do obey him. He *calls for the waters of the sea* in the course of his common providence, *causes vapours to ascend* out of it, and *pours them out* in showers, the small rain and the great rain of his strength, *upon the face of the earth*; this was mentioned before as a reason why we should *seek the Lord* (ch. 5:8) and make him our friend, as it is here made a reason why we should fear him and dread having him for our enemy.

4. How justly God passes this sentence upon the people of Israel. He does not destroy them by an act of sovereignty, but by an act of righteousness; for (v. 8), it is a *sinful kingdom*, and the *eyes of the Lord* are upon it, discovering it to be so; he sees the great sinfulness of it, and therefore he will *destroy it from off the face of the earth*. Note, When those kingdoms that in name and profession were holy kingdoms, and kingdoms of priests, as Israel was, become sinful kingdoms, no other can be expected than that they should be cut off and abandoned. Let sinful kingdoms, and sinful families, and sinful persons too, see the eyes of the Lord upon them, observing all their wickedness, and reserving the notice of it for the day of reckoning and recompence. This being a sinful kingdom, see how light God makes of it, v. 7.

(1.) Of the relation wherein he stood to it: *Are you not as children of Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?* A sad change! Children of Israel become as children of the Ethiopians! [1.] They were so in themselves; that was their sin. It is a thing to be greatly lamented that the children of Israel often become as children of the Ethiopians; this children of godly parents degenerate, and become the reverse of those that went before them. Those that were well-educated, and trained up in the knowledge and fear of God, and set out well, and promised fair, throw off their profession and become as bad as the worst. *How has the gold become dim!* [2.] They were so in God's account, and that was their punishment. He valued them no more, though they were children of Israel, than if they had been *children of the Ethiopians*. We read of one in the title of Ps. 7 that was *Cush* (an *Ethiopian*, as some understand it) and yet a Benjamite. Those that by birth and profession are children of Israel, if they degenerate, and become wicked and vile, are to God no more than children of the Ethiopians. This is an intimation of

the rejection of the unbelieving Jews in the days of the Messiah; because they embraced not the doctrine of Christ, the kingdom of God was taken from them, they were unchurched, and cast out of covenant, became as children of the Ethiopians, and are so to this day. And it is true of those that are called Christians, but do not live up to their name and profession, that rest in the form of piety, but live under the power of reigning iniquity, that they are to God as children of the Ethiopians; he rejects them, and their services.

(2.) See how light he makes of the favours he had conferred upon them; they thought he would not, he could not, cast them off, and put them upon a level with other nations, because he had done that for them which he had not done for other nations, whereby they thought he was bound to them, so as never to leave them. "No," says he, "The favours shown to you are not so distinguishing as you think they are: *Have I not brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt?*" It is true I have; but I have also brought the *Philistines from Caphtor*, or *Cappadocia*, where they were natives, or captives, or both; they are called the *remnant of the country of Caphtor* (Jer. 47:4), and the Philistim are joined with the Caphtorim, Gen. 10:14. In like manner the Syrians were brought up from Kir when they had been carried away thither, 2 Ki. 16:9. Note, If God's Israel lose the peculiarity of their holiness, they lose the peculiarity of their privileges; and what was designed as a favour of special grace shall be set in another light, shall have its property altered, and shall become an act of *common providence*; if professors liken themselves to the world, God will level them with the world. And, if we live not up to the obligation of God's mercies, we forfeit the honour and comfort of them.

5. How graciously God will separate between the precious and the vile in the day of retribution. Though the wicked Israelites shall be as the wicked Ethiopians, and their being called Israelites shall stand them in no stead, yet the pious Israelites shall not be as the *wicked* ones; no, the *Judge of all the earth will do right*, more right than to *slay the righteous with the wicked*, Gen. 18:25. His *eyes are upon the sinful kingdom*, to spy out those in it who preserve their integrity and swim against the stream, who sigh and cry for the abominations of their land, and they shall be marked for preservation, so that the destruction shall not be total: *I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob*, not ruin them by wholesale and in the gross, good and bad together, but I will distinguish, as becomes a righteous judge. The house of Israel shall be *sifted as corn is sifted*; they shall be greatly hurried, and shaken, and tossed, but still in the hands of God, in both his hands, as the sieve in the hands of him that sifts (v. 9): *I will sift the house of Israel among all nations*. Wherever they are shaken and scattered, God will have his eye upon them, and will take care to separate between the corn and chaff, which was the thing he designed in sifting them. (1.) The righteous ones among them, that are as the solid wheat, shall none of them perish; they shall be delivered either from or through the common calamities of the kingdom; *not the least grain shall fall on the earth*, so as to be lost and forgotten—not the least *stone* (so the word is), for the good corn is weighty as a stone in comparison with that which we call *light corn*. Note, Whatever shakings there may be in the world, God does and will effectually provide that none who are truly his shall be truly miserable. (2.) The wicked ones among them who are hardened in their sins shall all of them perish, v. 10. See what a height of impiety they have come to: *They say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us*. They think they are innocent, and do not deserve punishment, or that the profession they make of relation to God will be their exemption and security from punishment, or that they shall be

able to make their part good against the judgments of God, that they shall flee so swiftly from them that they shall not overtake them, or guard so carefully against them that they shall not prevent or surprise them. Note, Hope of impunity is the deceitful refuge of the impenitent. But see what it will come to at last: *All the sinners* that thus flatter themselves, and affront God, shall *die by the sword*, the sword of war, which to them shall be the sword of divine vengeance; yea, though they be the *sinner of my people*, for their profession shall not be their protection. Note, Evil is often nearest those that put it at the greatest distance from them.

Verses 11-15

To him to whom all the prophets bear witness this prophet, here in the close, bears his testimony, and speaks of *that day*, those days that shall come, in which God will do great things for his church, by the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, for the rejecting of which the rejection of the Jews was foretold in the foregoing verses. The promise here is said to agree to the planting of the Christian church, and in that to be fulfilled, Acts 15:15–17. It is promised,

I. That in the Messiah the kingdom of David shall be restored (v. 11); the *tabernacle of David* it is called, that is, his house and family, which, though great and fixed, yet, in comparison with the kingdom of heaven, was mean and movable as a tabernacle. The church militant, in its present state, dwelling as in shepherds' tents to feed, as in soldiers' tents to fight, is the *tabernacle of David*. God's tabernacle is called the tabernacle of David because David desired and chose to *dwell in God's tabernacle for ever*, Ps. 61:4. Now, 1. These tabernacles had fallen and gone to decay, the royal family was so impoverished, its power abridged, its honour stained, and laid in the dust; for many of that race degenerated, and in the captivity it lost the imperial dignity. Sore breaches were made upon it, and at length it was laid in ruins. So it was with the church of the Jews; in the latter days of it its glory departed; it was like a tabernacle broken down and brought to ruin, in respect both of purity and of prosperity. 2. By Jesus Christ these tabernacles were raised and rebuilt. In him God's covenant with David had its accomplishment; and the glory of that house, which was not only sullied, but quite sunk, revived again; the *breaches* of it were *closed* and its *ruins raised up, as in the days of old*; nay, the spiritual glory of the family of Christ far exceeded the temporal glory of the family of David when it was at its height. In him also God's covenant with Israel had its accomplishment, and in the gospel-church the tabernacle of God was set up among men again, and raised up out of the ruins of the Jewish state. This is quoted in the first council at Jerusalem as referring to the calling in of the Gentiles and God's *taking out of them a people for his name*. Note, While the world stands God will have a church in it, and, if it be fallen down in one place and among one people, it shall be raised up elsewhere.

II. That that kingdom shall be enlarged, and the territories of it shall extend far, by the accession of many countries to it (v. 12), that the house of David may possess the *remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen*, that is, that Christ may have them given him for his *inheritance, even the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession*, Ps. ii. 8. Those that had been strangers and enemies shall become willing faithful subjects to the Son of David, shall be *added to the church*, or those of them that are *called by my name, saith the Lord*, that is, that belong to the election of grace and are ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48), for it is true of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews that *the election hath obtained and the rest were blinded*, Rom. 11:7. Christ died to gather

together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad, here said to be those that were called by his name. The promise is to all that are *afar off*, even as *many of them as the Lord our God shall call*, Acts 2:39. St. James expounds this as a promise *that the residue of men should seek after the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called*. But may the promise be depended upon? Yes, the Lord says this, who does this, who can do it, who has determined to do it, the power of whose grace is engaged for the doing of it, and with whom saying and doing are not two things, as they are with us.

III. That in the kingdom of the Messiah there shall be great plenty, an abundance of all good things that the country produces (v. 13): *The ploughman shall overtake the reaper*, that is, there shall be such a plentiful harvest every year, and so much corn to be gathered in, that it shall last all summer, even till autumn, when it is time to begin to plough again; and in like manner the vintage shall continue till seed-time, and there shall be such abundance of grapes that even the *mountains shall drop new wine* into the vessels of the grape-gatherers, and the hills that were dry and barren shall be moistened and shall melt with the *fatness or mellowness* (as we call it) *of the soil*. Compare this with Joel 2:24, and 3:18. This must certainly be understood of the abundance of spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which all those are, and shall be, blessed with, who are in sincerity added to Christ and his church; they shall be abundantly replenished with the goodness of God's house, with the graces and comforts of his Spirit; they shall have bread, the bread of life, to *strengthen their hearts*, and the wine of divine consolations to *make them glad-meat indeed and drink indeed*—all the benefit that comes to the souls of men from the word and Spirit of God. These had been long confined to the vineyard of the Jewish church; divine revelation, and the power that attended it, were to be found only within that enclosure; but in gospel-times the mountains and hills of the Gentile world shall be enriched with these privileges by the gospel of Christ preached, and professed, and received in the power of it. When great multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ, and nations were born at once, when the preachers of the gospel were *always caused to triumph* in the success of their preaching, then the *ploughman overtook the reaper*; and when, the Gentile churches were *enriched in all utterance, and in all knowledge, and all manner of spiritual gifts* (1 Co. 1:5), then the *mountains dropped sweet wine*.

IV. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall be well peopled; as the country shall be replenished, so shall the cities be; there shall be mouths for this meat, v. 14. Those that were carried captives shall be brought back out of their captivity; their enemies shall not be able to detain them in the land of their captivity, nor shall they themselves incline to settle in it, but the remnant shall return, and shall *build the waste cities and inhabit them*, shall form themselves into Christian churches and set up pure doctrine, worship, and discipline among them, according to the gospel charter, by which Christ's cities are incorporated; and they shall enjoy the benefit and comfort thereof; they shall *plant vineyards, and make gardens*. Though the mountains and hills drop wine, and the privileges of the gospel-church are laid in common, yet they shall enclose for themselves, not to monopolize these privileges, to the exclusion of others, but to appropriate and improve these privileges, in communion with others, and they shall *drink the wine, and eat the fruit*, of their own *vineyards and gardens*; for those that take pains in religion, as men must do about their vineyards and gardens, shall have both the pleasure and profit of it. The *bringing again* of the *captivity* of God's Israel, which is here promised, may refer to the cancelling of the ceremonial law, which had been long to

God's Israel as a *yoke of bondage*, and the investing of them in the liberty wherewith Christ came to make his church free, Gal. 5:1.

V. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall take such deep rooting in the world as never to be rooted out of it (v. 15): *I will plant them upon their land*. God's spiritual Israel shall be planted by the right hand of God himself upon the land assigned them, and *they shall no more be pulled up out of it*, as the old Jewish church was. God will preserve them from throwing themselves out of it by a total apostasy, and will preserve them from being thrown out of it by malice of their enemies; the church may be corrupted, but shall not quite forsake God, may be persecuted, but shall not quite be forsaken of God, so that the gates of hell, neither with their temptations nor with their terrors, shall prevail against it. Two things secure the perpetuity of the church:—1. God's grants to it: *It is the land which I have given them*; and God will confirm and maintain his own grants. The part he has given to his people is that good part which shall never be taken from them; he will not revoke his grant, and all the powers of earth and hell shall not invalidate it. 2. Its interest in him: He is *the Lord thy God*, who has said it, and will make it good, *thine, O Israel!* who shall *reign for ever* as thine *unto all generations*. And because he lives the church shall live also.