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Fearless Eagle Publishing, Toronto, Ontario

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## Preface

It is a very foolish fancy of some of the Jewish rabbin that this prophet was the son of the Shunamite woman that was at first miraculously given, and afterwards raised to life, by Elisha (2 Ki. 4), as they say also that the prophet Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, which Elijah raised to life. It is a more probable conjecture of their modern chronologers that he lived and prophesied in the reign of king Manasseh, when wickedness abounded, and destruction was hastening on, destruction by the Chaldeans, whom this prophet mentions as the instruments of God's judgments; and Manasseh was himself carried to Babylon, as an earnest of what should come afterwards. In the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon mention is made of Habakkuk the prophet in the land of Judah, who was carried thence by an angel to Babylon, to feed Daniel in the den; those who give credit to that story take pains to reconcile our prophet's living before the captivity, and foretelling it, with that. Huetius thinks that that was another of the same name, a prophet, this of the tribe of Simeon, that of Levi; others that he lived so long as to the end of that captivity, though he prophesied of it before it came. And some have imagined that Habakkuk's feeding Daniel in the den is to be understood mystically, that Daniel then *lived by faith*, as Habakkuk had said *the just should do*; he was *fed* by that word, Hab. 2:4. The prophecy of this book is a mixture of the prophet's addresses to God in the people's name and to the people in God's name; for it is the office of the prophet to carry messages both ways. We have in it a lively representation of the intercourse and communion between a gracious God and a gracious soul. The whole refers particularly to the invasion of the land of Judah by the Chaldeans, which brought spoil upon the people of God, a just punishment of the spoil they had been guilty of among themselves; but it is of general use, especially to help us through that great temptation with which good men have in all ages been exercised, arising from the power and prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous by it.

## Chapter 1

In this chapter, I. The prophet complains to God of the violence done by the abuse of the sword of justice among his own people and the hardships thereby put upon many good people (v. 1-4). II. God by him foretels the punishment of that abuse of power by the sword of war, and the desolations which the army of the Chaldeans should make upon them (v. 5–11). III. Then the prophet complains of that too, and is grieved that the Chaldeans prevail so far (v. 12–17), so that he scarcely knows which is more to be lamented, the sin or the punishment of it, for in both many harmless good people are very great sufferers. It is well that there is a day of judgment, and a future state, before us, in which it shall be eternally well with all the righteous, and with them only, and ill with all the wicked, and them only; so the present seeming disorders of Providence shall be set to rights, and there will remain no matter of complaint whatsoever.

### Verses 1-4

We are told no more in the title of this book (which we have, v. 1) than that the penman was *a prophet*, a man divinely inspired and commissioned, which is enough (if that be so, we need not ask concerning his tribe or family, or the place of his birth), and that the book itself is *the burden which he saw*; he was as sure of the truth of it as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes already accomplished. Here, in these verses, the prophet sadly laments the iniquity of the times, as one sensibly touched with grief for the lamentable decay of religion and righteousness. It is a very melancholy complaint which he here makes to God, 1. That no man could call what he had his own; but, in defiance of the most sacred laws of property and equity, he that had power on his side had what he had a mind to, though he had no right on his side: The land was *full of violence*, as the old world was, Gen. 6:11. The prophet *cries out of violence* (v. 2), *iniquity* and *grievance*, *spoil* and *violence*. In families and among relations, in neighbour-hoods and among friends, in commerce and in courts of law, every thing was carried with a high hand, and no man made any scruple of doing wrong to his neighbour, so that he could but make a good hand of it for himself. It does not appear that the prophet himself had any great wrong done him (in losing times it fared best with those that had nothing to lose), but it grieved him to see other people wronged, and he could not but mingle his tears with those of the oppressed. Note, Doing wrong to harmless people, as it is an iniquity in itself, so it is a great grievance to all that are concerned for God's Jerusalem, who *sigh and cry for abominations* of this kind. He complains (v. 4) that *the wicked doth compass about the righteous*. One honest man, one honest cause, shall have enemies besetting it on every side; many wicked men, in confederacy against it, run it down; nay, one wicked man (for it is singular) with so many various arts of mischief sets upon a righteous man, that he perfectly besets him. 2. That the kingdom was broken into parties and factions that were continually biting and devouring one another. This is a lamentation to all the sons of peace: *There are that raise up strife and contention* (v. 3), that foment divisions, widen breaches, incense men against one another, and sow discord among brethren, by doing the work of him that is the accuser of the brethren. Strifes and contentions that have been laid asleep, and begun to be forgotten, they awake, and industriously raise up again, and blow up the sparks that were hidden under the embers. And, if *blessed are the peace-makers*, cursed are such peace-breakers, that make parties, and so make mischief that spreads further, and lasts longer, than they can

imagine. It is sad to see bad men warming their hands at those flames which are devouring all that is good in a nation, and stirring up the fire too. 3. That the torrent of violence and strife ran so strongly as to bid defiance to the restraints and regulations of laws and the administration of justice, v. 4. Because God did not appear against them, nobody else would; *therefore the law is slacked*, is silent; it breathes not; *its pulse beats not* (so, it is said, the word signifies); it intermits, *and judgment does not go forth* as it should; no cognizance is taken of those crimes, no justice done upon the criminals; nay, *wrong judgment proceeds*; if appeals be made to the courts of equity, the righteous shall be condemned and the wicked justified, so that the remedy proves the worst disease. The legislative power takes no care to supply the deficiencies of the law for the obviating of those growing threatening mischiefs; the executive power takes no care to answer the good intentions of the laws that are made; the stream of justice is dried up by violence, and has not its free course. 4. That all this was open and public, and impudently avowed; it was barefaced. The prophet complains that this iniquity was shown him; he *beheld it* which way soever he turned his eyes, nor could he look off it: *Spoiling and violence are before me*. Note, The abounding of wickedness in a nation is a very great eye-sore to good people, and, if they did not see it, they could not believe it to be so bad as it is. Solomon often complains of the vexation of this kind which he *saw under the sun*; and the prophet would therefore gladly turn hermit, that he might not see it, Jer. 9:2. But *then we must needs go out of the world*, which *there-fore* we should long to do, that we may remove to that world where holiness and love reign eternally, and no spoiling and violence shall be before us. 5. That he complained of this to God, but could not obtain a redress of those grievances: "*Lord,*" says he, "*why dost thou show me iniquity? Why hast thou cast my lot in a time and place when and where it is to be seen, and why do I continue to sojourn in Mesech and Kedar? I cry to thee of this violence; I cry aloud; I have cried long; but thou wilt not hear, thou wilt not save; thou dost not take vengeance on the oppressors, nor do justice to the oppressed, as if thy arm were shortened or thy ear heavy.*" When God seems to connive at the wickedness of the wicked, nay, and to countenance it, by suffering them to prosper in their wickedness, it shocks the faith of good men, and proves a sore temptation to them to say, *We have cleansed our hearts in vain* (Ps. 73:13), and hardens those in their impiety who say, *God has forsaken the earth*. We must not think it strange if wickedness be suffered to prevail far and prosper long. God has reasons, and we are sure they are good reasons, both for the reprieves of bad men and the rebukes of good men; and therefore, though we plead with him, and humbly expostulate concerning his judgments, yet we must say, "He is wise, and righteous, and good, in all," and must believe the day will come, though it may be long deferred, when the cry of sin will be heard against those that do wrong and the cry of prayer for those that suffer it.

#### **Verses 5-11**

We have here an answer to the prophet's complaint, giving him assurance that, though God bore long, he would not bear always with this provoking people; for the day of vengeance was in his heart, and he must tell them so, that they might by repentance and reformation turn away the judgment they were threatened with.

I. The preamble to the sentence is very awful (v. 5): *Behold, you among the heathen, and regard*. Since they will not be brought to repentance by the long-suffering of God, he will take another course with them. No resentments are so keen, so deep, as those of abused patience. The Lord will inflict upon them, 1. A public punishment, which shall be beheld and regarded

among the heathen, which the neighbouring nations shall take notice of and stand amazed at; see Deu. 29:24, 25. This will aggravate the desolations of Israel, that they will thereby be made a spectacle to the world. 2. An amazing punishment, so strange and surprising, and so much out of the common road of Providence, that it shall not be paralleled among the heathen, shall be sorer and heavier than what God has usually inflicted upon the nations that know him not; nay, it shall not be credited even by those that had the prediction of it from God before it comes, or the report of it from those that were eye-witnesses of it when it comes: *You will not believe it, though it be told you*; it will be thought incredible that so many judgments should combine in one, and every circumstance so strangely concur to enforce and aggravate it, that so great and potent a nation should be so reduced and broken, and that God should deal so severely with a people that had been taken into the bond of the covenant and that he had done so much for. The punishment of God's professing people cannot but be the astonishment of all about them. 3. A speedy punishment: *"I will work a work in your days*, now quickly; this generation shall not pass till the judgment threatened be accomplished. The sins of former days shall be reckoned for in your days; for now the measure of the iniquity is full," Mt. 23:36. 4. It shall be a punishment in which much of the hand of God shall appear; it shall be a work of his own working, so that all who see it shall say, *This is the Lord's doing*; and it will be found a fearful thing to fall into his hands; woe to those whom he takes to task! 5. It shall be such a punishment as will typify the destruction to be brought upon the despisers of Christ and his gospel, for to that these words are applied Acts 13:41, *Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish*. The ruin of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans for their idolatry was a figure of their ruin by the Romans for rejecting Christ and his gospel, and it is a very marvellous thing, and almost incredible. *Is there not a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?*

II. The sentence itself is very dreadful and particular (v. 6): *Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans*. There were those that raised up a great deal of strife and contention among them, which was their sin; and now God will raise up the Chaldeans against them, who shall strive and contend with them, which shall be their punishment. Note, When God's professing people quarrel among themselves, snarl at, and devour one another, it is just with God to bring the common enemy upon them, that shall make peace by making a universal devastation. The contending parties in Jerusalem were inveterate one against another, when the Romans came and *took away their place and nation*. The Chaldeans shall be the instruments of the destruction threatened, and, though themselves acting unrighteously, they shall *execute the righteousness of the Lord* and punish the unrighteousness of Israel. Now, here we have,

1. A description of the people that shall be raised up against Israel, to be a scourge to them. (1.) They are *a bitter and hasty nation*, cruel and fierce, and what they do is done with violence and fury; they are precipitate in their counsels, vehement in their passions, and push on with resolution in their enterprises; they show no mercy and they spare no pains. Miserable is the case of those that are given up into the hand of these cruel ones. (2.) They are strong, and therefore formidable, and such as there is no standing before, and yet no fleeing from (v. 7): *They are terrible and dreadful*, famed for the gallant troops they bring into the field (v. 8); *their horses are swifter than leopards* to charge and pursue, and *more fierce than the evening wolves*; and wolves are observed to be the most ravenous towards the evening, after they have been kept hungry all day, waiting for

that darkness under the protection of which *all the beasts of the forest creep forth*, Ps. 104:20. Their squadrons of horse shall be very numerous: "*Their horse-men shall spread themselves a great way, for they shall come from far, from all parts of their own country, and shall be dispersed into all parts of the country they invade, to plunder it, and enrich themselves with the spoil of it. And, in making speed to spoil, they shall hasten to the prey* (as those, Isa. 8:1, *margin*), for they shall *fly as the eagle* towards the earth when she *hastens to eat* and strikes at the prey she has an eye upon." (3.) Their own will is a law to them, and, in the fierceness of their pursuits, they will not be governed by any laws of humanity, equity, or honour: *Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves*, v. 7. Appetite and passion rule them, and not reason nor conscience. Their principle is, *Quicquid libet, licet—My will is my law*. And, *Sic volo, sic jubeo; stat pro ratione voluntas—This is my wish, this is my command; it shall be done because I choose it*. What favour can be hoped for from such an enemy? Note, Those who have been unjust and unmerciful, among whom *the law is slacked, and judgment doth not go forth*, will justly be paid in their own coin and fall into the hands of those who will deal unjustly and unmercifully with them.

2. A prophecy of the terrible execution that shall be made by this terrible nation: *They shall march through the breadth of the earth* (so it may be read); for in a little time the Chaldean forces subdued all the nations in those parts, so that they seemed to have conquered the world; they overran Asia and part of Africa. Or, through the breadth of *the land* of Israel, which was wholly laid waste by them. It is here foretold, (1.) That they shall seize all as their own that they can lay their hands on. They shall come to *possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs*, which they have no right to, but that which their sword gives them. (2.) That they shall push on the war with all possible vigour: *They shall all come for violence* (v. 9), not to determine any disputed right by the sword, but, right or wrong, to enrich themselves with the spoil. *Their faces shall sup up as the east wind*; their very countenances shall be so fierce and frightful that a look will serve to make them masters of all they have a mind to; so that they shall *swallow up* all, as the east wind nips and blasts the buds and flowers. *Their faces shall look towards the east* (so some read it); they shall still have an eye to their own country, which lay eastward from Judea, and all the spoil they seize they shall remit thither. (3.) That they shall take a vast number of prisoners, and send them into Babylon: *They shall gather the captivity as the sand* for multitude, and shall never know when they have enough, as long as there are any more to be had. (4.) That they shall make nothing of the opposition that is given to them, v. 10. Do the distressed Jews depend upon their great men to make a stand, and with their wisdom and courage to give check to the victorious arms of the Chaldeans? Alas! they will make nothing of them. *They shall scoff* (he shall, so it is in the original, meaning Nebuchadnezzar, who being puffed up with his successes, shall scoff) *at the kings* and commanders of the forces that think to make head against him; and *the princes shall be a scorn to them*, so unequal a match shall they appear to be. Do they depend upon their garrisons and fortified towns? *He shall deride every stronghold*, for to him it shall be weak, and *he shall heap dust, and take it*; a little soil, thrown up for ramparts, shall serve to give him all the advantage against them that he can desire; he shall make but a jest of them, and a sport of taking them. (5.) By all this he shall be puffed up with an intolerable pride, which shall be his destruction (v. 11): *Then shall his mind change* for the worse. The spirit both of the people and of the king shall grow more haughty and insolent. Those that will not be content with their own rights will not be content when they have made themselves masters of other people's rights

too; but as the condition rises the mind rises too. This victorious king shall *pass over* all the bounds of reason, equity, and modesty, and break through all their bonds, and thereby *he shall offend*, shall make God his enemy, and so prepare ruin for himself by *imputing this his power to his god*, whereas he had it from the God of Israel. *Bel* and *Nebo* were the gods of the Chaldeans, and to them they gave the glory of their successes; they were hardened in their idolatry, and blasphemously argued that because they had conquered Israel their gods were too strong for the God of Israel. Note, It is a great offence (and the common offence of proud people) to take that glory to ourselves, or to give it to gods of our own making, which is due to the living and true God only. These closing words of the sentence give a glimpse of comfort to the afflicted people of God; it is to be hoped that they will change their minds, and grow better, and ripen for deliverance; and they did so. However, their enemies will change their minds, and grow worse, and ripen for destruction, which will inevitably come in God's due time; for a haughty spirit, lifted up against God, *goes before a fall*.

### Verses 12-17

The prophet, having received of the Lord that which he was to deliver to the people, now turns to God, and again addresses himself to him for the ease of his own mind under the burden which he saw. And still he is full of complaints. If he look about him, he sees nothing but violence done by Israel; if he look before him, he sees nothing but violence done against Israel; and it is hard to say which is the more melancholy sight. His thoughts of both he pours out before the Lord. It is our duty to be affected both with the iniquities and with the calamities of the church of God and of the times and places wherein we live; but we must take heed lest we grow peevish in our resentments, and carry them too far, so as to entertain any hard thoughts of God, or lose the comfort of our communion with him. The world is bad, and always was so, and will be so; it is out of our power to mend it; but we are sure that God governs the world, and will bring glory to himself out of all, and therefore we must resolve to make the best of it, must be ourselves better, and long for the better world. The prospect of the prevalence of the Chaldeans drives the prophet to his knees, and he takes the liberty to plead with God concerning it. In his plea we may observe, I. The truths which he lays down, which he resolves to abide by, and with which he endeavours to comfort himself and his friends, under the growing threatening power of the Chaldeans; and they will furnish us with pleasing considerations for our support in the like case.

1. However it be, yet God is *the Lord our God*, and *our Holy One*. The victorious Chaldeans impute their power to their idols, but we are taught to tell them that the *God of Israel is the true God, the living God*, Jer. 10:10, 11. (1.) He is *Jehovah*, the fountain of all being, power, and perfection. *Our rock is not as theirs*. (2.) "He is *my God*." He speaks in the people's name; every Israelite may say, "He is *mine*. Though we are thus sore broken, and *all this has come upon us, yet have we not forgotten the name of our God*, nor quitted our relation to him, yet have we not disowned him, nor hath he disowned us, Ps. 44:17. We are an offending people; he is an offended God; yet he is ours, and we will not entertain any hard thoughts of him, nor of his service, for all this." (3.) "He is *my Holy One*." This intimates that the prophet loved God as a holy God, loved him for the sake of his holiness. "He is *mine* because he is a *Holy One*; and *therefore* he will be my sanctifier and my Saviour, because he is *my Holy One*. Men are unholy, but *my God is holy*."

2. Our God is from everlasting. This he pleads with him: *Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God?* It is matter of great and continual comfort to God's people, under the troubles of this present life, that their God is from everlasting. This intimates, (1.) The eternity of his nature; if he is from everlasting, he will be to everlasting, and we must have recourse to this first principle, when things seen, which are temporal, are discouraging, that we have hope and help sufficient in a god that is not seen, that is eternal. "Art thou not from everlasting, and then wilt thou not make bare thy everlasting arm, in pursuance of thy everlasting counsels, to make unto thyself an everlasting name?" (2.) The antiquity of his covenant: "Art thou not *from of old*, a God in covenant with thy people" (so some understand it), "and hast thou not done great things for them *in the days of old*, which we have heard with our ears, and which our fathers have told us of; and art thou not the same God still that thou ever wast? Thou art *God, and changest not.*"

3. While the world stands God will have a church in it. Thou art from everlasting, and then *we shall not die*. The Israel of God shall not be extirpated, nor the name of Israel blotted out, though it may sometimes seem to be very near it; like the apostles (2 Co. 6:9), *chastened, and not killed; chastened sorely, but not delivered over to death*, Ps. 118:18. See how the prophet infers the perpetuity of the church from the eternity of God; for Christ has said, *Because I live*, and therefore as long as I live, *you shall live also*, Jn. 14:19. He is the rock on which the church is so firmly built that the *gates of hell shall not, cannot, prevail against it. We shall not die.*

4. Whatever the enemies of the church may do against her, it is according to the counsel of God, and is designed and directed for wise and holy ends: *Thou hast ordained them; thou hast established them*. It was God that gave the Chaldeans their power, made them a formidable people, and in his counsel determined what they should do, nor had they any power against his Israel but what was *given them from above*. He gave them their commission *to take the spoil and to take the prey*, Isa. 10:6. Herein God appears a mighty God, that the power of mighty men is derived from him, depends upon him, and is under his check; he says concerning it, *Hitherto shall it come, and no further*. Those whom God ordains shall do no more than what God has ordained, which is a great comfort to God's suffering people. Men are God's hand, the rod in his hand, Ps. 17:14. And he has *ordained them for judgment, and for correction*. God's people need correction, and deserve it; they must expect it; they shall have it; when wicked men are let loose against them, it is not for their destruction, that they may be ruined, but for their correction, that they may be reformed; they are not intended for a sword, to cut them off, but for a rod, to drive out the foolishness that is found in their hearts, though they *mean not so, neither does their heart think so*, Isa. 10:7. Note, It is matter of great comfort to us, in reference to the troubles and afflictions of the church, that, whatever mischief men design to them, God designs to bring good out of them, and we are sure that *his counsel shall stand*.

5. Though the wickedness of the wicked may prosper for a while, yet God is a holy God, and does not approve of that wickedness (v. 13): *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*. The prophet, observing how very vicious and impious the Chaldeans were, and yet what great success they had against God's Israel, found a temptation arising from it to say that it was vain to serve God, and that it was indifferent to him what men were. But he soon suppresses the thought, by having recourse to his first principle, That God is not, that he cannot be, the author or patron of sin; as he cannot do iniquity himself, so he is *of*

*purser eyes than to behold it* with any allowance or approbation; no, it is that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*. He sees all the sin that is committed in the world, and it is an offence to him, it is odious in his eyes, and those that commit it are thereby made obnoxious to his justice. There is in the nature of God an antipathy to those dispositions and practices that are contrary to his holy law; and, though an expedient is happily found out for his being reconciled to sinners, yet he never will, nor can, be reconciled to sin. And this principle we must resolve to abide by, though the dispensations of his providence may for a time, and in some instances, seem to be inconsistent with it. Note, God's connivance at sin must never be interpreted into a giving countenance to it; for *he is not a God that has pleasure in wickedness*, Ps. 5:4, 5. The iniquity which, it is here said, God does not look upon, may be meant especially of the mischief done to God's people by their persecutors; though God sees cause to permit it, yet he does not approve of it; so it agrees with that of Balaam (Num. 23:21), *He has not beheld iniquity against Jacob*, nor *seen*, with allowance, *perverseness against Israel*, which is very comfortable to the people of God, in their afflictions by the rage of men, that they cannot infer God's anger from it; though the instruments of their trouble hate them, it does not therefore follow that God does; nay, he loves them, and it is in love that he corrects them.

II. The grievances he complains of, and finds hard to reconcile with these truths: "Since we are sure that thou art a holy God, why have atheists temptation given them to question whether thou art so or no? *Wherefore lookest thou upon the Chaldeans that deal treacherously* with thy people, and givest them success in their attempts upon us? Why dost thou suffer thy sworn enemies, who blaspheme thy name, to deal thus cruelly, thus perfidiously, with thy sworn subjects, who desire to fear thy name? What shall we say to this?" This was a temptation to Job (ch. 21:7; 24:1), to David (Ps. 73:2, 3), to Jeremiah, ch. 12:1, 2. 1. That God permitted sin, and was patient with the sinners. He *looked upon them*; he saw all their wicked doings and designs, and did not restrain nor punish them, but suffered them to speed in their purposes, to go on and prosper, and to carry all before them. Nay, his looking upon them intimates that he not only gave them no check or rebuke, but that he gave them encouragement and assistance, as if he smiled upon them and favoured them. He *held his tongue* when they went on in their wicked courses, said nothing against them, gave no orders to stop them. *These things thou hast done, and I kept silence*. 2. That his patience was abused, and, *because sentence* against these evil works and workers *was not executed speedily*, therefore *their hearts* were the more *fully set in them to do evil*. (1.) They were false and deceitful, and there was no credit to be given them, nor any confidence to be put in them. They deal *treacherously*; under colour of peace and friendship, they prosecute and execute the most mischievous designs, and make no conscience of their word in any thing. (2.) They hated and persecuted men because they were better than themselves, as Cain hated Abel because *his own works were evil and his brother's righteous*. *The wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he*, for that very reason, because he shames him; they have an ill will to the image of God, and *therefore* devour good men, because they bear that image. Though many of the Jews were as bad as the Chaldeans themselves, and worse, yet there were those among them that were much more righteous, and yet were devoured by them. (3.) They made no more of killing men that of catching fish. The prophet complains that, Providence having delivered up the weaker to be prey to the stronger, they were, in effect, made as *the fishes of the sea*, v. 14. So they had been among themselves, preying upon one another as the greater fishes do upon the less (v. 3), and they were made so to the common

enemy. They were *as the creeping things*, or *swimming things* (for the word is used for *fish*, Gen. 1:20), *that have no ruler* over them, either to restrain them from devouring one another or to protect them from being devoured by their enemies. They are given up to the Chaldeans as fish to the fishermen. Those proud oppressors make no conscience of killing them, any more than men do of pulling fish out of the water, so small account do they make of human lives. They make no difficulty of killing them, but do it with as much ease as men catch fish, that make no resistance, but are unguarded and unarmed, and it is rather a pastime than any pains to take them. They make no distinction among them, but all is fish that comes to their net; and they reckon every thing their own that they can lay their hands on. They have various ways of spoiling and destroying, as men have of taking fish. Some they *take up with the angle* (v. 15), one by one; others *they catch* in shoals, and by wholesale, *in their net*, and *gather them in their drag*, their enclosing net. Such variety of methods have they to destroy those by whom they hope to enrich themselves. (4.) They gloried in what they got, and pleased themselves with it, though it was got dishonestly: *Their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous*; they prosper in their oppression and fraud; they have a great deal, and it is of the best; their land is good, and they have abundance of it. And therefore, [1.] They have great complacency in themselves, and are very pleasant; they live merrily (v. 15): *Therefore they rejoice and are glad*, because their wealth is great, and their projects succeed for the increase of it, Job 31:25. *Soul, take thy ease*, Lu. 12:19. [2.] They have a great conceit of themselves, and are great admirers of their own ingenuity and management: They *sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag*; they applaud themselves for having got so much money, though ever so dishonestly. Note, There is a proneness in us to take the glory of our outward prosperity to ourselves, and to say, *My might, and the power of my hands, have gotten me this wealth*, Deu. 8:17. This is idolizing ourselves, sacrificing to the dragnet, because it is our own, which is as absurd a piece of idolatry as sacrificing to Neptune or Dagon. That which makes them adore their net thus is because by it *their portion is fat*. Those that make a god of their money will make a god of their drag-net, if they can but get money by it.

III. The prophet, in the close, humbly expresses his hope that God will not suffer these destroyers of mankind always to go on and prosper thus, and expostulates with God concerning it (v. 17): *"Shall they therefore empty their net? Shall they enrich themselves, and fill their own vessels, with that which they have by violence and oppression taken away from their neighbours? Shall they empty their net of what they have caught, that they may cast it into the sea again, to catch more? And wilt thou suffer them to proceed in this wicked course? Shall they not spare continually to slay the nations? Must the numbers and wealth of nations be sacrificed to their net? As if it were a small thing to rob men of their estates, shall they rob God of his glory? Is not God the king of nations, and will he not assert their injured rights? Is he not jealous for his own honour, and will he not maintain that?"* The prophet lodges the matter in God's hand, and leaves it with him, as the psalmist does. Ps. 74:22, *Arise, O God! Plead thy own cause.*

## Chapter 2

In this chapter we have an answer expected by the prophet (v. 1), and returned by the Spirit of God, to the complaints which the prophet made of the violences and victories of the Chaldeans in the close of the foregoing chapter. The answer is, I. That after God has served his own purposes by the prevailing power of the Chaldeans, has tried the faith and patience of his people, and distinguished between the hypocrites and the sincere among them, he will reckon with the Chaldeans, will humble and bring down, not only that proud monarch Nebuchadnezzar, but that proud monarchy, for their boundless and insatiable thirst after dominion and wealth, for which they themselves should at length be made a prey (v. 2-8). II. That not they only, but all other sinners like them, should perish under a divine woe. 1. Those that are covetous, are greedy of wealth and honours (v. 9, 11). 2. Those that are injurious and oppressive, and raise estates by wrong and rapine (v. 12-14). 3. Those that promote drunkenness that they may expose their neighbours to shame (v. 15-17). 4. Those that worship idols (v. 18-20).

### Verses 1-4

Here, I. The prophet humbly gives his attendance upon God (v. 1): "*I will stand upon my watch*, as a sentinel on the walls of a besieged city, or on the borders of an invaded country, that is very solicitous to gain intelligence. I will look up, will look round, will look within, *and watch to see what he will say unto me*, will listen attentively to the words of his mouth and carefully observe the steps of his providence, that I may not lose the least hint of instruction or direction. *I will watch to see what he will say in me*" (so it may be read), "what the Spirit of prophecy in me will dictate to me, by way of answer to my complaints." Even in an ordinary way, God not only speaks to us by his word, but speaks in us by our own consciences, whispering to us, *This is the way, walk in it*; and we must attend to the voice of God in both. The prophet's standing upon his *tower*, or high place, intimates his prudence, in making use of the helps and means he had within his reach to know the mind of God, and to be instructed concerning it. Those that expect to hear from God must withdraw from the world, and get above it, must raise their attention, fix their thought, study the scriptures, consult experiences and the experienced, continue instant in prayer, and thus set themselves *upon the tower*. His standing upon his watch intimates his patience, his constancy and resolution; he will wait the time, and weather the point, as a watchman does, but he will have an answer; he will know what God will *say to him*, not only for his own satisfaction, but to enable him as a prophet to give satisfaction to others, and answer their exceptions, when he is reprov'd or argued with. Herein the prophet is an example to us. 1. When we are tossed and perplexed with doubts concerning the methods of Providence, are tempted to think that it is fate, or fortune, and not a wise God, that governs the world, or that the church is abandoned, and God's covenant with his people cancelled and laid aside, then we must take pains to furnish ourselves with considerations proper to clear this matter; we must stand upon our watch against the temptation, that it may not get ground upon us, must set ourselves upon the tower, to see if we can discover that which will silence the temptation and solve the objected difficulties, must do as the psalmist, *consider the days of old* and make a *diligent search* (Ps. 77:6), must go into the sanctuary of God, and there labour to understand the end of these things (Ps. 73:17); we must not give way to our doubts, but struggle to make the best of our way out of them. 2. When we have been at prayer,

pouring out our complaints and requests before God, we must carefully observe what answers God gives by his word, his Spirit, and his providences, to our humble representations; when David says, *I will direct my prayer unto thee*, as an arrow to the mark, he adds, *I will look up*, will look after my prayer, as a man does after the arrow he has shot, Ps. 5:3. We must *hear what God the Lord will speak*, Ps. 85:8. 3. When we go to read and hear the word of God, and so to consult the lively oracles, we must set ourselves to observe what God will thereby *say unto us*, to suit our case, what word of conviction, caution, counsel, and comfort, he will bring to our souls, that we may receive it, and submit to the power of it, and may consider what we shall answer, what returns we shall make to the word of God, when we are reprov'd by it. 4. When we are attacked by such as quarrel with God and his providence as the prophet here seems to have been—beset, besieged, as in a tower, by hosts of objectors—we should consider how to answer them, fetch our instructions from God, hear what he says to us for our satisfaction, and have that ready to say to others, *when we are reprov'd*, to satisfy them, as a *reason of the hope that is in us* (1 Pt. 3:15), and beg of God *a mouth and wisdom*, and that it may be *given us in that same hour what we shall speak*.

II. God graciously gives him the meeting; for he will not disappoint the believing expectations of his people that wait to hear what he will say unto them, but will *speak peace*, will *answer them with good words and comfortable words*, Zec. 1:13. The prophet had complain'd of the prevalence of the Chaldeans, which God had given him a prospect of; now, to pacify him concerning it, he here gives him a further prospect of their fall and ruin, as Isaiah, before this, when he had foretold the captivity in Babylon, foretold also the destruction of Babylon. Now, this great and important event being made known to him by a vision, care is taken to publish the vision, and transmit it to the generations to come, who should see the accomplishment of it.

1. The prophet must *write the vision*, v. 2. Thus, when St. John had a vision of the New Jerusalem, he was ordered to *write*, Rev. 21:5. He must write it, that he might imprint it on his own mind, and make it more clear to himself, but especially that it might be notified to those in distant places and transmitted to those in future ages. What is handed down by tradition is easily mistaken and liable to corruption; but what is written is reduced to a certainty, and preserved safe and pure. We have reason to bless God for written visions, that God has written to us the great things of his prophets as well as of his law. He must *write the vision*, and *make it plain upon tables*, must write it legibly, in large characters, so that *he who runs may read it*, that those who will not allow themselves leisure to read it deliberately may not avoid a  *cursory* view of it. Probably, the prophets were wont to write some of the most remarkable of their predictions in tables, and to hang them up in the temple, Isa. 8:1. Now the prophet is told to *write this very plain*. Note, Those who are employed in preaching the word of God should study plainness as much as may be, so as to make themselves intelligible to the meanest capacities. The things of our everlasting peace, which God has written to us, are made plain, *they are all plain to him that understands* (Prov. 8:9), and they are published with authority; God himself has prefixed his *imprimatur* to them; he has said, *Make them plain*.

2. The people must wait for the accomplishment of the *vision* (v. 3): "*The vision is yet for an appointed time to come. You shall now be told of your deliverance by the breaking of the Chaldeans' power, and that the time of it is fixed in the counsel and decree of God. There is an appointed time*, but it is not near; it is yet to be deferred a great while;" and that comes in here

as a reason why it must be written, that it may be reviewed afterwards and the event compared with it. Note, God has an appointed time for his appointed work, and will be sure to do the work when the time comes; it is not for us to anticipate his appointments, but to wait his time. And it is a great encouragement to wait with patience, that, though the promised favour be deferred long, it will come at last, and be an abundant recompence to us for our waiting: *At the end it shall speak and not lie*. We shall not be disappointed of it, for it will come at the time appointed; nor shall we be disappointed in it, for it will fully answer our believing expectations. The promise may seem silent a great while, but at the end it shall speak; and therefore, *though it tarry* longer than we expected, yet we must continue *waiting for it*, being assured it will come, and willing to tarry until it does come. The day that God has set for the deliverance of his people, and the destruction of his and their enemies, is a day, (1.) That will surely come at last; it is never adjourned *sine die*—*without fixing another day*, but it will without fail come at the fixed time and the fittest time. (2.) *It will not tarry*, for *God is not slack, as some count slackness* (2 Pt. 3:9); *though it tarry* past our time, yet *it does not tarry* past God's time, which is always the best time.

3. This vision, the accomplishment of which is so long waited for, will be such an exercise of faith and patience as will try and discover men what they are, v. 4. (1.) There are some who will proudly disdain this vision, whose hearts are so lifted up that they scorn to take notice of it; if God will work for them immediately, they will thank him, but they will not give him credit; their hearts are lifted up towards vanity, and, since God puts them off, they will shift for themselves and not be beholden to him; they think *their own hands sufficient for them*, and God's promise is to them an insignificant thing. That man's soul that is thus *lifted up is not upright in him*; it is not right with God, is not as it should be. Those that either distrust or despise God's all-sufficiency will not walk uprightly with him, Gen. 17:1. But, (2.) Those who are truly good, and whose hearts are upright with God, will value the promise, and venture their all upon it; and, in confidence of the truth of it, will keep close to God and duty in the most difficult trying times, and will then live comfortably in communion with God, dependence on him, and expectation of him. *The just shall live by faith*; during the captivity good people shall support themselves, and live comfortably, by faith in these precious promises, while the performance of them is deferred. *The just shall live by his faith*, by that faith which he acts upon the word of God. This is quoted in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38), for the proof of the great doctrine of justification by faith only and of the influence which the grace of faith has upon the Christian life. Those that are made *just by faith shall live*, shall be happy here and for ever; while they are here, they live by it; when they come to heaven faith shall be swallowed up in vision.

#### **Verses 5-14**

The prophet having had orders to *write the vision*, and the people to wait for the accomplishment of it, the vision itself follows; and it is, as divers other prophecies we have met with, the burden of Babylon and Babylon's king, the same that was said to *pass over and offend*, ch. 1:11. It reads the doom, some think, of Nebuchadnezzar, who was principally active in the destruction of Jerusalem, or of that monarchy, or of the whole kingdom of the Chaldeans, or of all such proud and oppressive powers as bear hard upon any people, especially upon God's people. Observe,

I. The charge laid down against this enemy, upon which the sentence is grounded, v. 5. The *lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the*

*eye*, and *the pride of life*, are the entangling snares of men, and great men especially; and we find him that led Israel captive himself led captive by each of these. For, 1. He is sensual and voluptuous, and given to his pleasures: *He transgresses by wine*. Drunkenness is itself a transgression, and is the cause of abundance of transgression. We read of those that *err through wine*, Isa. 28:7. Belshazzar (in whom particularly this prophecy had its accomplishment) was in the height of his transgression by wine when the hand-writing upon the wall signed the warrant for his immediate execution, pursuant to this sentence, Dan. 5:1. 2. He is haughty and imperious: *He is a proud man*, and his pride is a certain presage of his fall coming on. If great men be proud men, the great God will make them know he is above them. His transgressing by wine is made the cause of his arrogance and insolence: therefore *he is a proud man*. When a man is drunk, though he makes himself as mean as a beast, yet he thinks himself as great as a king, and prides himself in that by which he shames himself. We find *the crown of pride* upon the head of the *drunkards of Ephraim*, and a *woe* to both, Isa. 28:1. 3. He is covetous and greedy of wealth, and this is the effect of his pride; he thinks himself worthy to enjoy all, and therefore makes it his business to engross all. The Chaldean monarchy aimed to be a universal one. He *keeps not at home*, is not content with his own, which he has an incontestable title to, but thinks it too little, and so enjoys it not, nor takes the comfort he might in his own palace, in his own dominion. His sin is his punishment, his ambition is his perpetual uneasiness. Though the home be a palace, yet to a discontented mind it is a prison. He *enlarges his desire as hell*, or *the grave*, which daily receives the body of the dead, and yet still cries, *Give, give*; he is *as death*, which continues to devour, and *cannot be satisfied*. Note, It is the sin and folly of many who have a great deal of the wealth of this world that they do not know when they have enough, but the more they have the more they would have, and the more eager they are for it. And it is just with God that the desires which are insatiable should still be unsatisfied; it is the doom passed on those that *love silver* that they shall never be *satisfied with it*, Eccl. 5:10. Those that will not be content with their allotments shall not have the comfort of their achievements. This proud prince is still *gathering to him all nations, and heaping to him all people*, invading their rights, seizing their properties, and they must not be unless they will be his, and under his command. One nation will not satisfy him unless he has another, and then another, and all at last; as those in a lower sphere, to gratify the same inordinate desire, *lay house to house, and field to field, that they may be placed alone in the earth*, Isa. 5:8. And it is hard to say which is more to be pitied, the folly of such ambitious princes as place their honour in enlarging their dominions, and not in ruling them well, or the misery of those nations that are harassed and pulled to pieces by them.

II. The sentence passed upon him (v. 6): *Shall not all these take up a parable against him?* His doom is,

1. That, since pride has been his sin, disgrace and dishonour shall be his punishment, and he shall be loaded with contempt, shall be laughed at and despised by all about him, as those that look big, and aim high, deserve to be, and commonly are, when they are brought down and baffled.

2. That, since he has been abusive to his neighbours, those very persons whom he has abused shall be the instruments of his disgrace: *All those shall take up a taunting proverb against him*. They shall have the pleasure of insulting over him and he the shame of being trampled upon by them. Those that shall triumph in the fall of this great tyrant are here furnished with a *parable*, and a *taunting proverb*, to take up against him. *He shall say* (he that draws up the insulting ditty shall say thus), *Ho*,

*he that increases that which is not his! Aha!* what has become of him now? So it may be read in a taunting way. Or, *He shall say*, that is, *the just*, who lives by his faith, he to whom the vision is written and made plain, with the help of that shall say this, shall foretel the enemy's fall, even when he sees him flourishing, and *suddenly curse his habitation*, even when he is *taking root*, Job 5:3. He shall indeed denounce woes against him.

(1.) Here is a woe against him for increasing his own possessions by invading his neighbour's rights, v. 6-8. He *increases that which is not his*, but other people's. Note, No more of what we have is to be reckoned ours than what we came honestly by; nor will it long be ours, for *wealth gotten by vanity will be diminished*. Let not those that thrive in the world be too forward to bless themselves in it, for, if they do not thrive lawfully, they are under a woe. See here, [1.] What this prosperous prince is doing; he is *lading himself with thick clay*. Riches are but clay, thick clay; what are gold and silver but white and yellow earth? Those that travel through thick clay are both retarded and dirtied in their journey; so are those that go through the world in the midst of an abundance of the wealth of it; but, as if that were not enough, what fools are those that *load themselves with it*, as if this trash would be their treasure! They burden themselves with continual care about it, with a great deal of guilt in getting, saving, and spending it, and with a heavy account which they must give of it another day. They overload their ship with this thick clay, and so sink it and themselves *into destruction and perdition*. [2.] See what people say of him, while he is thus increasing his wealth; they cry, "*How long? How long will it be ere he has enough?*" They cry to God, "How long wilt thou suffer this proud oppressor to trouble the nations?" Or they say to one another, "See how long it will last, how long he will be able to keep what he gets thus dishonestly." They dare not speak out, but we know what they mean when they say, *How long?* [3.] See what will be in the end hereof. What he has got by violence from others, others shall take by violence from him. The Medes and Persians shall make a prey of the Chaldeans, as they have done of other nations, v. 7, 8. "There shall be those that will *bite thee* and *vex thee*; those from whom thou didst not fear any danger, that seemed *asleep*, shall *rise up* and *awake* to be a plague to thee. They shall rise up *suddenly* when thou are most secure, and least prepared to receive the shock and ward off the blow. *Shall they not rise up suddenly?* No doubt they shall, and thou thyself hast reason to expect it, to be dealt with as thou hast dealt with others, that *thou shalt be for booties unto them*, as others have been unto thee, that, according to the law of retaliation, as *thou hast spoiled many nations* so thou shalt thyself be *spoiled* (v. 8); *all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee*." The king of Babylon thought he had brought all the nations round about him so low that none of them would be able to make reprisals upon him; but though they were but a remnant of people, a very few left, yet these shall be sufficient to spoil him, when God has such a controversy with him, *First*, For *men's blood*, and the thousands of lives that have been sacrificed to his ambition and revenge, especially for the blood of Israelites, which is in a special manner precious to God. *Secondly*, For *the violence of the land*, his laying waste so many countries, and destroying the fruits of the earth, especially in the land of Israel. *Thirdly*, For *the violence of the city*, the many cities that he had turned into ruinous heaps, especially Jerusalem the holy city, and of *all that dwelt therein*, who were ruined by him. Note, The violence done by proud men to advance and enrich themselves will be called over again (and must be accounted for) another day, by him *to whom vengeance belongs*.

(2.) Here is a woe against him for coveting still more, and aiming to be still higher, v. 9-11. The crime for which this woe is

denounced is much the same with that in the foregoing article—an insatiable desire of wealth and honour; it is *coveting an evil covetousness to his house*, that is, grasping at an abundance for his family. Note, Covetousness is a very evil thing in a family; it brings disquiet and uneasiness into it (*he that is greedy of gain troubles his own house*), and, which is worse, it brings the curse of God upon it and upon all the affairs of it. *Woe to him that gains an evil gain*; so the margin reads it. There is a lawful gain, which by the blessing of God may be a comfort to a house (*a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children*), but what is got by fraud and injustice is ill-got, and will be poor gain, will not only do no good to a family, but will bring poverty and ruin upon it. Now observe, [1.] What this covetous wretch aims at; it is *to set his nest on high*, to raise his family to some greater dignity than it had before arrived at, or to set it, as he apprehends, out of the reach of danger, that he may be *delivered from the power of evil*, that it may not be in the power of the worst of his enemies to do him a mischief nor so much as to disturb his repose. Note, It is common for men to pretend it as an excuse for their covetousness and ambition that they only consult their own safety, and aim to secure themselves; and yet they do but deceive themselves when they think *their wealth* will be a *strong city* to them, *and a high wall*, for it is so only *in their own conceit*, Prov. 18:11. [2.] What he will get by it: *Thou hast consulted*, not safety, but *shame, to thy house, by cutting off many people*, v. 10. Note, An estate raised by iniquity is a scandal to a family. Those that cut off, or undermine, others, to make room for themselves, that impoverish others to enrich themselves, do but consult shame to their houses, and fasten upon them a mark of infamy. Yet that is not the worst of it: "*Thou hast sinned against thy own soul*, hast brought that under guilt and wrath, and endangered that." Note, Those that do wrong to their neighbour do a much greater wrong to their own souls. But if the sinner pleads, Not guilty, and thinks he has managed his frauds and violence with so much art and contrivance that they cannot be proved upon him, let him know that if there be no other witnesses against him *the stone shall cry out of the wall* against him, and *the beam out of the timber* in the roof *shall answer it*, shall second it, shall witness it, that the money and materials wherewith he built the house were unjustly gotten, v. 11. The stones and timber cry to heaven for vengeance, as *the whole creation groans under* the sin of man and waits to be delivered from that *bondage of corruption*.

(3.) Here is a woe against him for building a town and a city by blood and extortion (v. 12): He *builds a town*, and is him-self lord of it; he *establishes a city*, and makes it his royal seat. So Nebuchadnezzar did (Dan. 4:30): *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom?* But it is built with the blood of his own subjects, whom he has oppressed, and the blood of his neighbours, whom he has unjustly invaded; it is *established by iniquity*, by the unrighteous laws that are made for the security of it. *Woe* to him that does so; for the towns and cities thus built can never be established; they will fall, and their founders be buried in the ruins of them. Babylon, which was built by blood and iniquity, did not continue long; its day soon came to fall; and then this woe took effect, when that prophecy, which is expressed as a history (Isa. 21:9), proved a history indeed: *Babylon has fallen, has fallen!* And the destruction of that city was, [1.] The shame of the Chaldeans, who had taken so much pains, and were at such a vast expense, to fortify it (v. 13): *Is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people* who have laboured so hard to defend that city shall *labour in the very fire*, shall see the out-works which they confided in the strength of set on fire, and shall labour in vain to save them? Or they, in their pursuits of worldly wealth and honour, put themselves to

great fatigue, and ran a great hazard, as those that *labour in the fire* do. The worst that can be said of the labourers in God's vineyards is that *they have borne the burden and heat of the day* (Mt. 20:12); but those that are eager in their worldly pursuits *labour in the very fire*, make themselves perfect slaves to their lusts. There is not a greater drudge in the world than he that is under the power of reigning covetousness. And what comes of it? Though they take a world of pains they are but poorly paid for it; for, after all, *they weary themselves for very vanity*; they were told it was vanity, and when they find themselves disappointed of it, and disappointed in it, they will own it is worse than vanity, it is *vexation of spirit*. [2.] It was the honour of God, as a God of impartial justice and irresistible power; for by the ruin of the Chaldean monarchy (which all the world could not but take notice of) *the earth was filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*, v. 14. *The Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, especially when he is pleased to *look upon proud men and abase them*, for he thereby proves himself to be *God alone*, Job 40:11, 12. See what good God brings out of the staining and sinking of earthly glory; he thereby manifests and magnifies his own glory, and *fills the earth* with the knowledge of it as plentifully as the *waters cover the sea*, which lie deep, spread far, and shall not be dried up until time shall be no more. Such is the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* given by the gospel (2 Co. 4:6), and such was the knowledge of his glory by the miraculous ruin of Babylon. Note, Such as will not be taught the knowledge of God's glory by the judgments of his mouth shall be made to know and acknowledge it by the judgments of his hand.

#### **Verses 15-20**

The three foregoing articles, upon which the woes here are grounded, are very near akin to each other. The criminals charged by them are oppressors and extortioners, that raise estates by rapine and injustice; and it is mentioned here again (v. 17), the very same that was said v. 8, for that is the crime upon which the greatest stress is laid; it is *because of men's blood*, innocent blood, barbarously and unjustly shed, which is a provoking crying thing; it is *for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein*, which God will certainly reckon for, sooner or later, as the asserter of right and the avenger of wrong. But here are two articles more, of a different nature, which carry a *woe* to all those in general to whom they belong, and particularly to the Babylonian monarchs, by whom the people of God were taken and held captives.

I. The promoters of drunkenness stand here impeached and condemned. Belshazzar was one of those; he was so, remarkably that very night that the prophecy of this chapter was fulfilled in the period of his life and kingdom, when he *drank wine before a thousand* of his lords (Dan. 5:1), began the healths, and forced them to pledge him. And perhaps it was one reason why the succeeding monarchs of Persia made it a law of their kingdom that *in drinking none should compel, but they should do according to every man's pleasure* (as we find, Esth. 1:8), because they had seen in the kings of Babylon the mischievous consequences of forcing healths and making people drunk. But the woe here stands firm and very fearful against all those, whoever they are, who are guilty of this sin at any time, and in any place, from the stately palace (where that was) to the paltry ale-house. Observe,

1. Who the sinner is that is here articulated against; it is he that *makes his neighbour drunk*, v. 15. To give a neighbour drink who is in want, who is thirsty and poor, though it be but a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, to give drink to

weary traveller, nay, and to give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that are heavy of heart, is a piece of charity which is required of us, and shall be recompensed to us. *I was thirsty, and you gave me drink*. But to give a neighbour drink who has enough already, and more than enough, with design to intoxicate him, that he may expose himself, may talk foolishly, and make himself ridiculous, may disclose his own secret concerns, or be drawn in to agree to a bad bargain for himself—this is abominable wickedness; and those who are guilty of it, who make a practice of it, and take a pride and pleasure in it, are rebels against God in heaven, and his sacred laws, factors for the devil in hell, and his cursed interests, and enemies to men on earth, and their honour and welfare; they are like the son of Nebat, who *sinned and made Israel to sin*. To entice others to drunkenness, to *put the bottle to them*, that they may be allured to it by its charms, by *looking on the wine when it is red and gives its colour in the cup*, or to force them to it, obliging them by the rules of the club (and club-laws indeed they are) to drink so many glasses, and so filled, is to do what we can, and perhaps more than we know of, towards the murder both of soul and body; and those that do so have a great deal to answer for.

2. What the sentence is that is here passed upon him. There is a woe to him (v. 15), and a punishment (v. 16) that shall answer to the sin. (1.) Does he put the cup of drunkenness into the hand of his neighbour? The cup of fury, the cup of trembling, the *cup of the Lord's right hand*, shall be *turned unto him*; the power of God shall be armed against him. That cup which had gone round among the nations, to make them *a desolation, an astonishment, and a hissing*, which had made them stumble and *fall*, so that they could *rise no more*, shall at length be put into the hand of the king of Babylon, as was foretold, Jer. 25:15, 16, 18, 26, 27. Thus the New-Testament Babylon, which had made the nations drunk with the cup of her fornications, shall *have blood given her to drink, for she is worthy*, Rev. 18:3, 6. (2.) Does he take a pleasure in putting his neighbour to shame? He shall himself be loaded with contempt: *"Thou art filled with shame for glory, with shame instead of glory*, or art filled now with shame more than ever thou wast with glory; and the glory thou hast been filled with shall but serve to make thy shame the more grievous to thyself, and the more ignominious in the eyes of others. Thou *also shalt drink* of the cup of trembling, and shalt expose thyself by thy fear and cowardice, which shall be as the *uncovering of thy nakedness*, to thy shame; and all about thee shall load thee with disgrace, for *shameful spewing shall be on thy glory*, on that which thou hast most prided thyself in, thy dignity, wealth, and dominion; those whom thou hast made drunk shall themselves spew upon it. For *the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts* (v. 17); thou shalt be hunted and run down with as much violence as ever any wild beasts in Lebanon were, shall be spoiled as they are, and thy fall made a sport of; for thou art as one of the beasts that made them afraid, and therefore they triumph when they have got the mastery of thee." Or, "It is because of the violence thou hast done to Lebanon, that is, the land of Israel (Deu. 3:25) and the temple (Zec. 11:1), that God now reckons with thee; that is the sin that now covers thee."

II. The promoters of idolatry stand here impeached and condemned; and this also was a sin that Babylon was notoriously guilty of; it was the *mother of harlots*. Belshazzar, in his revels, *praised his idols*. And for this, here is a woe against them, and in them against all others that do likewise, particularly the New-Testament Babylon. Now see here,

1. What they do to promote idolatry; they are *mad upon their idols*; so the Chaldeans are said to be, Jer. 50:38. For, (1.) They

have a great variety of idols, their *graven images* and *molten images*, that people may take their choice, which they like best. (2.) They are very nice and curious in the framing of them: The *maker of the work* has performed his part admirably well, the *fashioner of his fashion* (so it is in the margin), that contrived the model in the most significant manner. (3.) They are at great expense in beautifying and adorning them: *They lay them over with gold and silver*; because these are things people love and dote upon wherever they meet with them, they dress up their idols in them, the more effectually to court the adoration of the children of this world. (4.) They have great expectations from them: *The maker of the work trusts therein* as his god, puts a confidence in it, and gives honour to it as his god. The worshippers of God give honour to him, by offering up their prayers to him, and waiting to receive instructions and directions from him; and these honours they give to their idols. [1.] They pray to them: *They say to the wood, Awake for our relief, "awake to hear our prayers;"* and to the dumb stone, *"Arise, and save us,"* as the church prays to her God, *Awake, O Lord! arise, Ps. 44:23.* They own their image to be a god by praying to it. *Deliver me, for thou art my God, Isa. 44:17. Deos qui rogat ille facit—That to which a man addresses petitions is to him a god.* [2.] They consult them as oracles, and expect to be directed and dictated to by them: *They say to the dumb stone, though it cannot speak, yet it shall teach.* What the wicked demon, or no less wicked priest, speaks to them from the image, they receive with the utmost veneration, as of divine authority, and are ready to be governed by it. Thus is idolatry planted and propagated under the specious show of religion and devotion.

2. How the extreme folly of this is exposed. God, by Isaiah, when he foretold the deliverance of his people out of Babylon, largely showed the shameful stupidity and sottishness of idolaters, and so he does here by the prophet, on the like occasion.

(1.) Their images, when they have made them, are but mere matter, which is the meanest lowest rank of being; and all the expense they are at upon them cannot advance them one step above that. They are wholly void both of sense and reason, lifeless and speechless (the idol is a *dumb idol*, a *dumb stone*, and there is *no breath at all in the midst of it*), so that the most minute animal, that has but breath and motion, is more excellent than they. They have not so much as the spirit of a beast. (2.) It is not in their power to do their worshippers any good (v. 18): *What profits the graven image?* Though it be mere matter, if it were cast into some other form it might be serviceable to some purpose or other of human life; but, as it is made a god of, it is of no profit at all, nor can do its worshippers the least kindness. Nay, (3.) It is so far from profiting them that it puts a cheat upon them, and keeps them under the power of a strong delusion; they say, *It shall teach*, but it is a *teacher of lies*; for it represents God as having a body, as being finite, visible, and dependent, whereas he is a Spirit, infinite, invisible, and independent, and it confirms those that become vain in their imaginations in the false notions they have of God, and makes the idea of God to be a precarious thing, and what every man pleases. If we may say to the *works of our hands, You are our gods*, we may say so to any of the creatures of our own fancy, though the chimera be ever so extravagant. An image is a *doctrine of vanities*; it is *falsehood*, and a *work of errors*, Jer. 10:8, 14, 15. It is therefore easy to see what the religion of those is, and what they aim at, who recommend those teachers of lies as laymen's books, which they are to study and govern themselves by, when they have locked up from them the book of the scriptures in an unknown tongue.

3. How the people of God triumph in him, and therewith support themselves, when the idolaters thus shame themselves (v. 20):

*But the Lord is in his holy temple. (1.) Our rock is not as their rock, Deu. 32:31. Theirs are dumb idols; ours is Jehovah, a living God, who is what he is, and not, as theirs, what men please to make him. He is in his holy temple in heaven, the residence of his glory, where we have access to him in the way, not which we have invented, but which he himself has instituted. Compare Ps. 115:3, But our God is in the heavens, and Ps. 11:4. (2.) The multitude of their gods which they set up, and take so much pains to support, cannot thrust out our God; he is, and will be, in his holy temple still, and glorious in holiness. They have laid waste his temple at Jerusalem; but he has a temple above that is out of the reach of their rage and malice, but within the reach of his people's faith and prayers. (3.) Our God will make all the world silent before him, will strike the idolaters as dumb as their idols, convincing them of their folly, and covering them with shame. He will silence the fury of the oppressors, and check their rage against his people. (4.) It is the duty of his people to attend him with silent adorings (Ps. 65:1), and patiently to wait for his appearing to save them in his own way and time. Be still, and know that he is God, Zec. 2:13.*

### Chapter 3

Still the correspondence is kept up between God and his prophet. In the first chapter he spoke to God, then God to him, and then he to God again; in the second chapter God spoke wholly to him by the Spirit of prophecy; now, in this chapter, he speaks wholly to God by the Spirit of prayer, for he would not let the intercourse drop on his side, like a genuine son of Abraham, who "returned not to his place until God had left communing with him." Gen. 18:33. The prophet's prayer, in this chapter, is in imitation of David's psalms, for it is directed "to the chief musician," and is set to musical instruments. The prayer is left upon record for the use of the church, and particularly of the Jews in their captivity, while they were waiting for their deliverance, promised by the vision in the foregoing chapter. I. He earnestly begs of God to relieve and succour his people in affliction, to hasten their deliverance, and to comfort them in the mean time (v. 2). II. He calls to mind the experiences which the church formerly had of God's glorious and gracious appearances on her behalf, when he brought Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan, and there many a time wrought wonderful deliverances for them (v. 3–15). III. He affects himself with a holy concern for the present troubles of the church, but encourages himself and others to hope that the issue will be comfortable and glorious at last, though all visible means fail (v. 16–19).

#### Verses 1-2

This chapter is entitled *a prayer of Habakkuk*. It is a meditation with himself, an intercession for the church. Prophets were praying men; this prophet was so (*He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. 20:7); and sometimes they prayed for even those whom they prophesied against. Those that were intimately acquainted with the mind of God concerning future events knew better than others how to order their prayers, and what to pray for, and, in the foresight of troublous times, could lay up a stock of prayers that might then receive a gracious answer, and so be serving the church by their prayers when their prophesying was over. This prophet had found God ready to answer his requests and complaints before, and therefore now repeats his applications to him. Because *God has inclined his ear to us*, we must resolve that *therefore we will call upon him as long as we live*. 1. The prophet owns the receipt of God's answer to his former representation, and the impression it made upon him (v. 2): "*O Lord! I have heard thy speech, thy hearing*" (so some read it), "that which thou wouldst have us hear, the decree that has gone forth for the afflicting of thy people. *I received thine*, and it is before me." Note, Those that would rightly order their speech to God must carefully observe, and lay before them, his speech to them. He had said (ch. 2:1), *I will watch to see what he will say*; and now he owns, *Lord, I have heard thy speech*; for, if we turn a deaf ear to God's word, we can expect no other than that he should turn a deaf ear to our prayers, Prov. 28:9. I heard it, *and was afraid*. Messages immediately from heaven commonly struck even the best and boldest men into a consternation; Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel, did *exceedingly fear and quake*. But, besides that, the matter of this message made the prophet afraid, when he heard how low the people of God should be brought, under the oppressing power of the Chaldeans, and how long they should continue under it; he was afraid lest their spirits should quite fail, and lest the church should be utterly rooted out and run down, and, being kept low so long, should be lost at length. 2. He earnestly prays that *for the elect's sake these days of trouble* might be *shortened*, or the trouble

of these days mitigated and moderated, or the people of God supported and comforted under it. He thinks it very long to wait till the *end of the years*; perhaps he refers to the seventy years fixed for the continuance of the captivity, and therefore, "Lord," says he, "do something on our behalf *in the midst of the years*, those years of our distress; though we be not delivered, and our oppressors destroyed, yet let us not be abandoned and cast off." (1.) "Do something for thy own cause: *Revive thy work*, thy church" (that is the *work of God's own hand*, formed by him, formed for him); "*revive* that, even when it *walks in the midst of trouble*, Ps. 138:7, 8. Grant thy people *a little reviving in their bondage*, Ezra 9:8; Ps. 85:6. *Preserve alive thy work*" (so some read it); "though thy church be chastened, let it not be killed; though it have not its liberty, yet continue its life, save a remnant alive, to be a seed of another generation. *Revive the work of thy grace* in us, by sanctifying the trouble to us and supporting us under it, though the time be not yet come, *even the set time*, for our deliverance out of it. Whatever becomes of us, though we be as dead and dry bones, Lord, let *thy work be revived*, let not that sink, and go back, and come to nothing." (2.) "Do something for thy own honour: *In the midst of the years make known*, make thyself known, for now *verily thou art a God that hidest thyself* (Isa. 45:15), make known thy power, thy pity, thy promise, thy providence, in the government of the world, for the safety and welfare of thy church. Though we be buried in obscurity, yet, Lord, make thyself known; whatever becomes of Israel, let not the God of Israel be forgotten in the world, but discover himself even in the midst of the dark years, before thou art expected to appear." When *in the midst of the years* of the captivity God miraculously owned the three children in the fiery furnace, and humbled Nebuchadnezzar, this prayer was answered, *In the midst of the years make known*. (3.) "Do something for thy people's comfort: *In wrath remember mercy*, and *make that known*. *Show us thy mercy, O Lord!*" Ps. 85:7. They see God's displeasure against them in their troubles, and that makes them grievous indeed. There is wrath in the bitter cup; that therefore they deprecate, and are earnest in begging that he is a merciful God and they are vessels of his mercy. Note, Even those that are under the tokens of God's wrath must not despair of his mercy; and mercy, mere mercy, is that which we must flee to for refuge, and rely upon as our only plea. He does not say, Remember our merit, but, Lord, *remember thy own mercy*.

### **Verses 3-15**

It has been the usual practice of God's people, when they have been in distress and ready to fall into despair, to help themselves by recollecting their experiences, and reviving them, *considering the days of old*, and *the years of ancient times* (Ps. 77:5), and pleading with God in prayer, as he is pleased sometimes to plead them with himself. Isa. 63:11, *Then he remembered the days of old*. This is that which the prophet does here, and he looks as far back as the first forming of them into a people, when they were brought by miracles out of Egypt, *a house of bondage*, through the wilderness, *a land of drought*, into Canaan, then possessed by *mighty nations*. He that thus brought them at first into Canaan, through so much difficulty, can now bring them thither again out of Babylon, how great soever the difficulties are that lie in the way. Those works of wonder, wrought of old, are here most magnificently described, for the greater encouragement to the faith of God's people in their present straits.

I. God appeared in his glory, so as he never did before or since (v. 3, 4): *He came from Teman, even the Holy One from Mount Paran*. This refers to the visible display of the glory of God when he gave the law upon Mount Sinai, as appears by Deu. 33:2 whence these expressions are borrowed. Then *the Lord came down* upon Mount Sinai in a cloud (Ex. 19:20) and his glory was

*as the devouring fire*, not only to enforce the law he then gave them, but to avow the deliverance he had wrought for them and to magnify it; for the first word he said there was, "*I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*. I that appear in this glory am the author of that work." Then *his glory covered the heavens*, which shone with the reflection of that glorious appearance of his; the *earth also* was *full of his praise*, or of his *splendour*, as some read it. People at a distance saw the cloud and fire on the top of Mount Sinai, and praised the God of Israel. Or the earth was full of those works of God which were to be praised. *His brightness was as the light*, as the light of the sun when he goes forth in his strength; *he had horns*, or *bright beams* (so it should be rendered), *coming out of his side* or *hand*. Rays of glory were darted forth around him; and with some rays borrowed thence it was that Moses's face shone when he *came down from that mount* of glory. Some by the horns, the *two horns* (for the word is dual), *coming out of his hand*, understand the *two tables of the law*, which perhaps, when God delivered them to Moses, though they were tables of stone, had a glory round them; those books were gilt with beams, and so it agrees with Deu. 33:2, *From his right hand went a fiery law for them*. It is added, *And there was the hiding of his power*; there was his hidden power, in the rays that came out of his hand. The operations of his power, compared with what he could have done, were rather the hiding of it than the discovery of it; the secrets of his power, as well as of his wisdom, are *double to that which is*, Job 11:6.

II. God sent plagues on Egypt, for the humbling of proud Pharaoh, and the obliging of him to let the people go (v. 5): *Before him went the pestilence*, which slew all the first-born of Egypt in one night; and *burning coals went forth at his feet*, when, in the plague of hail, there was *fire mingled with hail—burning diseases* (so the margin reads it), some think those that wasted Egypt, others those with which the number of the Canaanites was diminished before Israel was brought in upon them. These were *at his feet*, that is, at his coming, for they are at his command; he says to them, Go, and they go, Come, and they come, Do this, and they do it.

III. He divided the land of Canaan to his people Israel, and expelled the heathen from before them (v. 6): *He stood, and measured the earth*, measured that land, to assign it for an inheritance to Israel his people, Deu. 32:8, 9. *He beheld, and drove asunder the nations* that were in possession of it; though they combined together against Israel, God dispersed and discomfited them before Israel. Or he exerted such a mighty power as was enough to shake in pieces all the nations of the earth. Then *the everlasting mountains were scattered, and the perpetual hills did bow*; the mighty princes and potentates of Canaan, that seemed as high, as strong, and as firmly fixed, as the mountains and hills, were broken to pieces; they and their kingdoms were totally subdued. Or the power of God was so exerted as to shake the mountains and hills; nay, and Sinai did tremble, and the adjacent hills; see Ps. 68:7, 8. To this he adds, *His ways are everlasting*, that is, all the motions of his providence are according to his eternal counsels; and he is the same for ever, that which he was yesterday and to-day. His covenant is unchangeable, and *his mercy endures for ever*. When he *drove asunder the nations of Canaan* one might have seen the *tents of Cushan in affliction, the curtains of the land of Midian trembling*, and all the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries taking the alarm; and though they were not in the commission given to Israel to destroy, nor their land within the warrant given to Israel to possess, yet they thought their own house in danger when their neighbour's house was on fire, and therefore they were in a

great fright, v. 7. Balak the king of Moab was so, Num. 22:3, 4. Some make the tents of Cushan to be in affliction when, in the days of judge Othniel, God delivered Cushan-rishathaim into his hand (Jdg. 3:8), and the *curtains of the land of Midian to tremble* when, in the days of judge Gideon, a barley cake, in a dream, overthrew the tent of Midian, Jdg. 7:13.

IV. He divided the Red Sea and Jordan, when they stood in the way of Israel's progress, and yet fetched a river out of a rock when Israel wanted it, v. 8. One would have thought that God was *displeased with the rivers*, and that *his wrath was against the sea*, for he made them give way and flee before him when he *rode upon his horses and chariots of salvation*, as a general at the head of his forces, mighty to save. Note, God's chariots are not so much chariots of state to himself as chariots of salvation to his people; it is his glory to be Israel's Saviour. This seems to be referred to again (v. 15): "*Thou didst walk through the sea, through the Red Sea, with thy horses*, in the pillar of cloud and fire (that was his chariot drawn by angels); thus thou didst walk secure, and so as to accommodate thyself to the slow pace that Israel could go, as Jacob tenderly drove, in consideration of his children and cattle: *Thou didst walk through the heap*, or mud, *of great waters*; and Israel likewise was led *through the deep as a horse through the wilderness*," Isa. 63:13, 14. When they came to enter Canaan the *overflowing of the water passed by*, that is, Jordan, which at that time overflowed all his banks, was divided, Jos. 3:15. Note, When the difficulties in the way of perfecting the salvation of Israel seem most insuperable, when they rise to the height, and overflow, yet then God can put them by, break through them, and get over them. Then *the deep uttered his voice*, when, the Red Sea and Jordan being divided, the waters roared and made a noise, as if they were sensible of the restraint they were under from proceeding in their natural course, and complained of it. They *lifted up their hands*, or sides, *on high* (for the waters *stood up on a heap*, Jos. 3:16), as if they would have made opposition to the orders given them. They *lifted up their voice, lifted up their waves*; but in vain. *The Lord on high was mightier than they*, Ps. 93:3, 4. With the dividing of the sea and Jordan, notice is again taken of the trembling of the mountains, as if the stop given to the waters gave a shock to the adjacent hills; they are put together, Ps. 114:3, 4. When *the sea saw it and fled*, and *Jordan was driven back, the mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs*. The whole creation yielded; earth and waters trembled *at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the mighty God of Jacob*. But (as Mr. Cowley paraphrases it)

Fly where thou wilt, thou sea; and, Jordan's current, cease.

Jordan, there is no need of thee;

For at God's word, whene'er he please,

The rocks shall weep new waters forth instead of these.

So here, *Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers*; channels were made in the wilderness, such as seemed to cleave the earth, for the waters to run in, which issued out of the rock, to supply the camp of Israel, and which followed them in all their removes.

Note, The God of nature can alter and control the powers of nature, which way he pleases, can turn waters into crystal rocks and rocks into crystal streams.

V. He arrested the motion of the sun and moon, to befriend and complete Israel's victories (v. 11): *The sun and moon stood still* at the prayer of Joshua, that the Canaanites might not have the benefit of the night to favour their escape; they *stood still in*

*their habitation* in the heaven (Ps. 19:4), but with an eye to Gibeon and the *valley of Ajalon*, where God's work was in the doing, and of which they, though at so vast a distance, attended the motions. *At the light, at the direction, of thy arrows, they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear;* they followed Israel's arms, to favour them; according to the intimation of the arrows God shot (as Jonathan's arrows, 1 Sa. 20:20), and which way soever his spear pointed (the glittering light of which they acknowledged to outshine theirs) that way they directed their influences, benign to Israel and malignant against their enemies, as when *the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*. Note, The heavenly bodies, as well as earth and seas, are at God's command, and, when he pleases, at Israel's service too.

VI. He carried on and completed Israel's victories over the nations of Canaan and their kings; he *slew great kings and famous*, Ps. 136:17, 18. This is largely insisted upon here, as a proper plea with God to enforce the present petition, that he would restore them again to that land which they were, at the expense of so many lives, so many miracles, first put in possession of.

1. Many expressions are here used to set forth the conquest of Canaan. (1.) God's *bow was made quite naked*, taken out of the case, to be employed for Israel; we should say, his *sword was quite unsheathed*, not drawn out a little way, to frighten the enemy, and then put up again, but quite drawn out, not to be returned till they are all cut off. (2.) He *marched through the land* from end to end, *in indignation*, as scorning to let that wicked generation of Canaanites any longer possess so good a land. He marched *cum fastidio—with distaste* (so some), despising their confederacies. (3.) He *threshed the heathen in anger*, trod them down, nay, he trod them out, as corn in the floor, to give them, and what they had, to be meat to his people Israel, Mic. 4:13. (4.) He *wounded the heads out of the house of the wicked*; he destroyed the families of the Canaanites, and wounded their princes, the heads of their families; nay, he cut off the heads, and so *discovered the foundations of them, even to the neck*. Are they a building? They are razed even to the foundation. Are they a body? They are plunged into deep mire even to the neck, so that they cannot get out, or help themselves. He *broke the heads of leviathan in pieces*, Ps. 74:14. Some apply this to Christ's victories over Satan and the powers of darkness, in which he *wounded the heads over many countries*, Ps. 110:6. (5.) He *struck through with his staves the head of the villages* (v. 14); with Israel's staves God *struck through the head of the villages* of the enemies, whether Egypt or Canaan. Staves shall do the same execution as swords when God pleases to make use of them. The enemy came out with the utmost force and fury, *as a whirlwind to scatter me* (says Israel); for *many a time have they thus afflicted me*, thus attacked me, *from my youth*, Ps. 129:1. Pharaoh, when he pursued Israel to the Red Sea, *came out as a whirlwind*; so did the kings of Canaan in their confederacies against Israel. *Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly*; they were as confident of success in their enterprise as ever any great man was of devouring a poor man, that was no way a match for him; and his design against him was carried on with secrecy. But God disappointed them, and their pride did but make their fall the more shameful and God's care of his poor the more illustrious. (6.) He *walked to the sea with his horses* (so some read it, v. 15), that is, he carried Israel's victories to the Great Sea, which was opposite to that side of Canaan at which they entered, so that they went quite through it, and made themselves masters of it all, or rather God made them so, for they *got it not by their own sword*, Ps. 44:3. Now,

2. There were three things that God had a eye to, in giving Israel so many bloody victories over the Canaanites:—(1.) He

would hereby make good his promise to the fathers; it was *according to the oaths of the tribes, even his word*, v. 9. He had sworn to give this land to the *tribes of Israel*; it was his oath *to Isaac confirmed to Jacob*, and repeated many a time to *the tribes of Israel, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan*. This word God will accomplish, though Israel be ever so unworthy (Deu. 9:5) and their enemies ever so many and mighty. Note, What God does for his tribes is according to the oaths of the tribes, according to what he has said and sworn to them; *for he is faithful that has promised*. (2.) He would hereby show his kindness to *his people*, because of their relation to him, and his interest in them: *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people*, v. 13. All the powers of nature are shaken, and the course of nature changed, and every thing seems to be thrown into disorder, and all is *for the salvation of God's people*. There are a people in the world who are God's people, and their salvation is that which he has in his eye in all the operations of his providence. Heaven and earth shall sooner come together than any of the links in the golden chain of their salvation shall be broken; and even that which seems most unlikely shall by an overruling hand be made to work for their salvation, Phil. 1:19. (3.) He would hereby give a type and figure of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. It is *for salvation with thy anointed*, with Joshua, who led the armies of Israel and was a figure of him whose name he bore, even Jesus our Joshua. What God did for his Israel of old was done with an eye to his anointed, for the sake of the Mediator, who was both the founder and foundation of the covenant made with them. It was salvation *with him*, for in all the salvations wrought for them, *God looked upon the face of the anointed*, and did them by him.

#### **Verses 16-19**

Within the compass of these few lines we have the prophet in the highest degree both of trembling and triumphing, such are the varieties both of the state and of the spirit of God's people in this world. In heaven there shall be no more trembling, but everlasting triumphs.

I. The prophet had foreseen the prevalence of the church's enemies and the long continuance of the church's troubles; and the sight made him tremble, v. 16. Here he goes on with what he had said v. 2, "*I have heard thy speech and was afraid. When I heard what sad times were coming upon the church my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice*; the news made such an impression that it put me into a perfect ague fit." The blood retiring to the heart, to succour that when it was ready to faint, the extreme parts were left destitute of spirits, so that *his lips quivered*. Nay, he was so weak, and so unable to help himself, that he was as if *rotteness had entered into his bones*; he had no strength left in him, could neither stand nor go; he *trembled in himself*, trembled all over him, trembled within him; he yielded to his trembling, and *troubled himself*, as our Savior did; his *flesh trembled for fear of God and he was afraid of his judgments*, Ps. 119:120. He was touched with a tender concern for the calamities of the church, and trembled for fear lest they should end at length in ruin, and the *name of Israel be blotted out*. Nor did he think it any disparagement to him, nor any reproach to his courage, but freely owned he was one of those that *trembled at God's word*, for to them he will look with favour: *I tremble in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble*. Note, When we see a day of trouble approaching it concerns us to provide accordingly, and to lay up something in store, by the help of which we may rest in that day; and the best way to make sure rest for ourselves in the day of trouble is to tremble within ourselves at the word of God and the threatenings of that word. He that has joy in store for those that *sow in tears* has rest in store for those

that tremble before him. *Good hope through grace* is founded in a *holy fear*. Noah, who was *moved with fear*, trembled within himself at the warning given him of the deluge coming, had the ark for his resting place in the day of that trouble. The prophet tells us what he said in his trembling. His fear is that, *when he comes up to the people*, when the *Chaldean comes up to the people* of Israel, *he will invade them*, will surround them, will break in upon them, nay (as it is in the margin), He will *cut them in pieces with his troops*; he cried out, We are all undone; the whole nation of the Jews is lost and gone. Note, When things look bad we are too apt to aggravate them, and make the worst of them.

II. He had looked back upon the experiences of the church in former ages, and had observed what great things God had done for them, and so he recovered himself out of his fright, and not only retrieved his temper, but fell into a transport of holy joy, with an express *non obstante*—*notwithstanding* to the calamities he foresaw coming, and this not for himself only, but in the name of every faithful Israelite.

1. He supposes the ruin of all his creature comforts and enjoyments, not only of the delights of this life, but even of the necessary supports of it, v. 17. Famine is one of the ordinary effects of war, and those commonly feel it first and most that sit still and are quiet; the prophet and his pious friends, when the Chaldean army comes, will be plundered and stripped of all they have. Or he supposes himself deprived of all by blasting and unseasonable weather, or some other immediate hand of God. Or though the captives in Babylon have not that plenty of all good things in their own land. (1.) He supposes the fruit-tree to be withered and become barren; the *fig-tree* (which used to furnish them with much of their food; hence we often read of *cakes of figs*) shall not so much as *blossom, nor shall fruit be in the vine*, from which they had their drink, that made glad the heart: he supposes *the labour of the olive to fail*, their oil, which was to them as butter is to us; the *labour of the olive shall lie* (so it is in the margin); their expectations from it shall be disappointed. (2.) He supposes the bread-corn to fail; *the fields shall yield no meat*; and, since *the king himself is served of the field*, if the productions of that be withdrawn, every one will feel the want of them. (3.) He supposes the cattle to perish for want of the food which the field should yield and does not, or by disease, or being destroyed and carried away by the enemy: *The flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stall*. Note, When we are in the full enjoyment of our creature comforts we should consider that there may come a time when we shall be stripped of them all, and use them accordingly, as not abusing them, 1 Co. 7:29, 30.

2. He resolves to delight and triumph in God notwithstanding; when all is gone his God is not gone (v. 18): *"Yet will I rejoice in the Lord; I shall have him to rejoice in, and will rejoice in him."* *Destroy the vines and the fig-trees*, and you make all the mirth of a carnal heart to cease, Hos. 2:11, 12. But those who, when they were full, enjoyed God in all, when they are emptied and impoverished can *enjoy all in God*, and can sit down upon a melancholy heap of the ruins of all their creature comforts and even then can sing to the praise and glory of God, as the God of their salvation. This is the principal ground of our joy in God, that he is the God of our salvation, our eternal salvation, the salvation of the soul; and, if he be so, we may rejoice in him as such in our greatest distresses, since by them our salvation cannot be hindered, but may be furthered. Note, Joy in God is never out of season, nay, it is in a special manner seasonable when we meet with losses and crosses in the world, that it may then appear that our hearts are not set upon these things, nor our happiness bound up in them. See how the prophet triumphs in God:

*The Lord God is my strength*, v. 19. He that is the *God of our salvation* in another world will be our strength in this world, to carry us on in our journey thither, and help us over the difficulties and oppositions we meet with in our way. Even when provisions are cut off, to make it appear that *man lives not by bread alone*, we may have the want of bread supplied by the graces and comforts of God's Spirit and with the supplies of them. (1.) We shall be strong for our spiritual warfare and work: *The Lord God is my strength*, the strength of my heart. (2.) We shall be swift for our spiritual race: "*He will make my feet like hinds' feet*, that with enlargement of heart I may run the way of his commands and outrun my troubles." (3.) We shall be successful in our spiritual enterprises: "*He will make me to walk upon my high places*; that is, I shall gain my point, shall be restored unto my own land, and tread upon the high places of the enemy," Deu. 32:13; 33:29. Thus the prophet, who began his prayer with fear and trembling, concludes it with joy and triumph, for prayer is heart's ease to a gracious soul. When Hannah had prayed she *went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad*. This prophet, finding it so, publishes his experience of it, and puts it into the hand of the *chief singer* for the use of the church, especially in the day of our captivity. And, though then the harps were hung upon the willow-trees, yet in the hope that they would be resumed, and their right hand retrieve its cunning, which it had forgotten, he set his song upon *Shigionoth* (v. 1), wandering tunes, *according to the variable songs*, and upon *Neginoth* (v. 19), *the stringed instruments*. He that is afflicted, and has prayed aright, may then be so easy, may then be so merry, as to sing psalms.