

66 Kindles of Matthew Henry Commentary

Buy all the 66 Kindles for \$2.99 on a secure website

THE BIG BOOK OF CHRISTIAN QUOTES Kindle Edition

Let's Celebrate Advent Every Day!: Through Practicing God's Presence! Kindle Edition

Practicing The Presence Of God — The Best Rule of Holy Life Kindle Edition

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/BrokenByHim>

Let's Celebrate Advent Every Day!: Through Practicing God's Presence! Kindle Edition

More books you might be interested in checking out

The Art of Prophesying with The Calling of the Ministry

MEMORIES OF PATMOS: A Study Of The Apocalypse & Exposition Of The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

A Lamp Unto My Feet:366 Bible Verses & Prayers - Tools for the Believer's Daily Renewal [Kindle Edition] \$1.49
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00AUN6DC6>

Practicing The Presence Of God \$0.99

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00DJYQSDC/>

The Sinful Desires Of The Flesh! \$1.49

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Sinful-Desires-Flesh-ebook/dp/B00EEPZAN4/>

Copyright © 2014 Public Domain Work

Kindle edited by: M. J. Andre
Fearless Eagle Publishing, Toronto, Ontario

Table of Contents

No table of contents entries found.

Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Book of the Prophet Hosea

I. We have now before us the twelve minor prophets, which some of the ancients, in reckoning up the books of the Old Testament, put all together, and reckon but as *one book*. They are called the minor prophets, not because their writings are of any less authority or usefulness than those of the greater prophets, or as if these prophets were less in God's account or might be so in ours than the other, but only because they are shorter, and less in bulk, than the other. We have reason to think that these prophets preached as much as the others, but that they did not write so much, nor is so much of their preaching kept upon record. Many excellent prophets wrote nothing, and others but little, who yet were very useful in their day. And so in the Christian church there have been many burning and shining lights, who are not known to posterity by their writings, and yet were no way inferior in gifts, and graces, and serviceableness to their own generation, than those who are; and some who have left but little behind them, and make no great figure among authors, were yet as valuable men as the more voluminous writers. These twelve small prophets, Josephus says, were put into one volume by the *men of the great synagogue* in Ezra's time, of which learned and pious body of men the last three of these twelve prophets are supposed to have been themselves members. These are what remained of the scattered pieces of inspired writing. Antiquaries value the *fragmenta veterum—the fragments of antiquity*; these are the fragments of prophecy, which are carefully gathered up by the divine Providence and the care of the church, that nothing might be lost, as St. Paul's short epistles after his long ones. The son of Sirach speaks of these twelve prophets with honour, as men that *strengthened Jacob*, *Ecclus.* 49:10. Nine of these prophets prophesied before the captivity, and the last three after the return of the Jews to their own land. Some difference there is in the order of these books. We place them as the ancient Hebrew did; and all agree to put Hosea first; but the ancient thing is not material. And, if we covet to place them according to their seniority, as to some of them we shall find no certainty.

II. We have before us the prophecy of Hosea, who was the first of all the writing prophets, being raised up somewhat before the time of Isaiah. The ancients say, He was of Bethshemesh, and of the tribe of Issachar. He continued very long a prophet; the Jews reckoned that he prophesied nearly fourscore and ten years; so that, as Jerome observes, he prophesied of the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes when it was at a great distance, and lived himself to see and lament it, and to improve it when it was over, for warning to its sister kingdom. The scope of his prophecy is to discover sin, and to denounce the judgments of God against a people that would not be reformed. The style is very concise and sententious, above any of the prophets; and in some places it seems to be like the book of Proverbs, without connexion, and rather to be called Hosea's *sayings* than Hosea's *sermons*. And a weighty adage may sometimes do more service than a laboured discourse. Huetius observes that many passages in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to refer to, and to be borrowed from, the prophet Hosea, who wrote a good while before them. As Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; and Eze. 26:13, speak the same with Hos. 2:11; so Eze. 16:16, etc., is taken from Hos. 2:8. And that promise of *servng the Lord their God, and David their king*, Jer. 30:8, 9. Eze.

34:23, *Hosea* had before, 3:5. And Eze. 19:12 is taken from Hos. 13:15. Thus one prophet confirms and corroborates another; and all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit.

Chapter 1

The mind of God is revealed to this prophet, and by him to the people, in the first three chapters, by signs and types, but afterwards only by discourse. In this chapter we have, I. The general title of the whole book (v. 1). II. Some particular instructions which he was ordered to give to the people of God. 1. He must convince them of their sin in going a whoring from God, by marrying a wife of whoredoms (v. 2, 3). 2. He must foretel the ruin coming upon them for their sin, in the names of his sons, which signified God's disowning and abandoning them (v. 4–6, 8, 9). 3. He must speak comfortable to the kingdom of Judah, which still retained the pure worship of God, and assure them of the salvation of the Lord (v. 7). 4. He must give an intimation of the great mercy God had in store both for Israel and Judah, in the latter days (v. 10, 11), for in this prophecy many precious promises of mercy are mixed with the threatenings of wrath.

Verse 1

1. Here is the prophet's name and surname; which he himself, as other prophets, prefixes to his prophecy, for the satisfaction of all that he is ready to attest what he writes to be of God; he sets his hand to it, as that which he will stand by. His name, *Hosea*, or *Hosea* (for it is the very same with Joshua's original name), signifies a *saviour*; for prophets were instruments of salvation to the people of God, so are faithful ministers; they help to save many a soul from death, by saving it from sin. his surname was *Ben-Beeri*, or *the son of Beeri*. As with us now, so with them then, some had their surname from their place, as Micah the Morashite, Nahum the Elkoshite; others from their parents, as Joel the son of Bethuel, and here Hosea the son of Beeri. And perhaps they made use of that distinction when the eminence of their parents was such as would bring honour upon them; but it is a groundless conceit of the Jews that where a prophet's father is named he also was a prophet. *Beeri* signifies a *well*, which may put us in mind of the fountain of life and living waters from which prophets are drawn and must be continually drawing.

2. Here are his authority and commission: *The word of the Lord came to him. It was to him*; it came with power and efficacy to him; it was revealed to him as a real thing, and not a fancy or imagination of his own, in some such way as God then discovered himself to his servants the prophets. What he said and wrote was by divine inspiration; it was *by the word of the Lord*, as St. Paul speaks concerning that which he had purely by revelation, 1 Th. 4:15. Therefore this book was always received among the canonical books of the Old Testament, which is confirmed by what is quoted out of it in the New Testament, Mt. 2:15; 9:13; 12:7; Rom. 9:25, 26; 1 Pt. 2:10. For the word of the Lord endures for ever. 3. Here is a particular account of the times in which he prophesied—in *the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel*. We have only this general date of his prophecy; and not the date of any particular part of it, as, before, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and, afterwards, in Haggai and Zechariah. Here is only one king of Israel named, though there were many more within this time, because, having mentioned the kings of Judah, there was no necessity of naming the other; and, they being all wicked, he took no pleasure in naming them, nor would do them the honour. Now by this account here given of the several reigns in which Hosea prophesied (and it should seem the word of the Lord still came to him, more or less, at times, throughout all these reigns) it appears, (1.) That he prophesied a long time, that

he began when he was very young, which gave him the advantage of strength and sprightliness, and that he continued at his work till he was very old, which gave him the advantage of experience and authority. It was a great honour to him to be thus long employed in such good work, and a great mercy to the people to have a minister so long among them that so well knew their state, and naturally cared for it, one they had been long used to and who therefore was the more likely to be useful to them. And yet, for aught that appears, he did but little good among them; the longer they enjoyed him the less they regarded him; they despised his youth first, and afterwards his age. (2.) That he passed through a variety of conditions. Some of these kings were very good, and, it is likely, countenanced and encouraged him; others were very bad, who (we may suppose) frowned upon him and discouraged him; and yet he was still the same. God's ministers must expect to pass through *honour and dishonour, evil report and good report*, and must resolve in both to hold fast their integrity and keep close to their work. (3.) That he began to prophesy at a time when the judgments of God were abroad, when God was himself contending in a more immediate way with that sinful people, who *fell into the hands of the Lord*, before they were turned over *into the hands of man*; for in the days of Uzziah, and of Jeroboam his contemporary, the dreadful earthquake was, mentioned Zec. 14:5 and Amos 1:1. And then was the plague of locusts, Joel 1:2-4; Amos 7:1; Hos. 4:3. The rod of God is sent to enforce the word and the word of God is sent to explain the rod, yet neither prevails till God by his Spirit opens the ear to instruction and discipline. (4.) That he began to prophesy in Israel at a time when their kingdom was in a flourishing prosperous condition, for so it was in the reign of Jeroboam the second, as we find 2 Ki. 14:25, *He restored the coast of Israel*, and *God saved them by his hand*; yet then Hosea boldly tells them of their sins and foretells their destruction. Men are not to be flattered in their sinful ways because they prosper in the world, but even then must be faithfully reprov'd, and plainly told that their prosperity will not be their security, nor will it last long if they *go on still in their trespasses*.

Verses 2-7

These words, *The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea*, may refer either, 1. To that glorious set of prophets which was raised up about this time. About this time there lived and prophesied Joel, Amos, Micah, Jonah, Obadiah, and Isaiah; but Hosea was the first of them that foretold the destruction of Israel; the *beginning of this word of the Lord was by him*. We read in the history of this Jeroboam here named (2 Ki. 14:27) that *the Lord had not yet said* he would *blot out the name of Israel*, but soon after he said he would, and Hosea was the man that began to say it, which made it so much the harder task to him, to be the first that should carry an unpleasing message and some time before any were raised up to second him. Or, rather, 2. To Hosea's own prophecies. This was the first message God sent him upon to this people, to tell them that they were *an evil and an adulterous generation*. He might have desired to be excused from dealing so roughly with them till he had gained authority and reputation, and some interest in their affections. No; he must *begin with this*, that they might know what to expect from a prophet of the Lord. Nay, he must not only preach this to them, but he must write it, and publish it, and leave it upon record as a witness against them. Now here,

I. The prophet must, as it were in a looking-glass, show them *their sin*, and show it to be exceedingly sinful, exceedingly hateful. The prophet is ordered to *take unto him a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms*, v. 2. And he did so, v. 3. He

married a woman of ill fame, *Gomer the daughter of Diblaim*, not one that had been married and had committed adultery, for then she must have been put to death, but one that had lived scandalously in the single state. To marry such a one was not *malum in se*—*evil in itself*, but only *malum per accidens*—*incidentally an evil*, not prudent, decent, or expedient, and therefore forbidden to the priests, and which, if it were really done, would be an affliction to the prophet (it is threatened as a curse on Amaziah that his wife should be a harlot, Amos 7:17), but not a sin when God commanded it for a holy end; nay, if commanded, it was his duty, and he must trust God with his reputation. But most commentators think that it was done *in vision*, or that it is no more than a parable; and that was a way of teaching commonly used among the ancients, particularly prophets; what they meant of others they *transferred to themselves in a figure*, as St. Paul speaks, 1 Co. 4:6. He must take a *wife of whoredoms*, and have such children by her as every one would suspect, though born in wedlock, to be *children of whoredoms*, begotten in adultery, because it is too common for those who have lived lewdly in the single state to live no better in the married state. "Now" (saith God) "Hosea, this people is to me such a dishonour, and such a grief and vexation, as a *wife of whoredoms* and *children of whoredoms* would be to thee. *For the land has committed great whoredoms.*" In all instances of wickedness they had departed from the Lord; but their idolatry especially is the whoredom they are here charged with. Giving that glory to any creature which is due to God alone is such an injury and affront to God as for a wife to embrace the bosom of a stranger is to her husband. It is especially so in those that have made a profession of religion, and have been taken into covenant with God; it is breaking the marriage-bond; it is a heinous odious sin, and, as much as any thing, besots the mind and takes away the heart. *Idolatry is great whoredom*, worse than any other; it is departing from *the Lord*, to whom we lie under greater obligations than any wife does or can do to her husband. *The land has committed whoredom*; it is not here and there a particular person that is guilty of idolatry, but the whole land is polluted with it; the sin has become national, the disease epidemical. What an odious thing would it be for the prophet, a *holy man*, to have a whorish wife, and children whorish like her! What an exercise would it be of his patience, and, if she persisted in it, what could be expected but that he should give her a bill of divorce! And is it not then much more offensive to the *holy God* to have such a people as this to be called by his name and have a place in his house? How great is his patience with them! And how justly may he cast them off! It was as if he should have married Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, who probably was at that time a noted harlot. The land of Israel was like Gomer the daughter of Diblaim. *Gomer* signifies *corruption*; *Diblaim* signifies *two cakes*, or *lumps of figs*; this denotes that Israel was near to ruin, and that their luxury and sensuality were the cause of it. They were as the *evil figs* that could not be eaten, they were so evil. It intimates sin to be the daughter of plenty and destruction the daughter of the abuse of plenty. Some give this sense of the command here given to the prophet: "Go, take thee a wife of *whoredoms*, for, if thou shouldst go to seek for an honest modest woman, thou wouldst not find any such, for the whole land, and all the people of it, are given to whoredom, the usual concomitant of idolatry."

II. The prophet must, as it were through a perspective glass, show them their ruin; and this he does in the names given to the children born of this adulteress; for as *lust*, when it has *conceived*, *brings forth sin*, so *sin*, when it is finished, *brings forth death*.

1. He foretels the fall of the royal family in the name he is appointed to give to his first child, which was a son: *Call his name Jezreel*, v. 4. We find that the prophet Isaiah gave prophetic names to his children (Isa. 7:3; 7:3), so this prophet here. Jezreel signifies *the seed of God* (so they should have been); but it signifies also the *scattered of God*; they shall be as sheep on the mountains that have no shepherds. *Call them not Israel*, which signifies *dominion*, they have lost all the honour of that name; but call them Jezreel, which signifies *dispersion*, for those that have departed from the Lord will wander endlessly. Hitherto they have been scattered as seek; let them now be scattered as chaff. Jezreel was the name of one of the royal seats of the kings of Israel; it was a beautiful city, seated in a pleasant valley, and it is with allusion to that city that this child is called *Jezreel*, for *yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*, from whom the present king, Jeroboam, was lineally descended. The house of Jehu smarted for the sins of Jehu, for God often lays up men's iniquity for their children and visits it upon them. It is *the kingdom of the house of Israel*, which may be meant either of the present royal family, that of Jehu, which God did quickly *cause to cease* (for the son of this Jeroboam, Zechariah, reigned but *six months*, and he was the last of Jehu's race), or of the whole kingdom in general, which continued corrupt and wicked, and which was *made to cease* in the reign of Hoshea, about seventy years after; and with God that is but a *little while*. Note, Note, Neither the pomp of kings nor the power of kingdoms can secure them from God's destroying judgments, if they continue to rebel against him. (2.) What is the ground of this controversy: *I will revenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*, the blood which Jehu shed at Jezreel, when by commission from God and in obedience to his command, he utterly destroyed the house of Ahab, and all that were in alliance with it, with all the worshippers of Baal. God approved of what he did (2 Ki. 10:30): *Thou has done well in executing that which is right in my eyes*; and yet here God will avenge that *blood upon the house of Jehu*, when the time has expired during which it was promised that his family should reign, even to the fourth generation. But how comes the same action to be both rewarded and punished? Very justly; the matter of it was good; it was the execution of a righteous sentence passed upon the house of Ahab, and, as such, it was rewarded; but Jehu did it not in a right manner; he aimed at his own advancement, not at the glory of God, and mingled his own resentments with the execution of God's justice. He did it with a malice against the sinners, but not with any antipathy to the sin; for he kept up the worship of the golden calves, and *took no heed to walk in the law of God*, 2 Ki. 10:31. And therefore when the measure of the iniquity of his house was full, and God came to reckon with them, the first article in the account is (and, being first, it is put for all the rest) for the blood of the house of Ahab, here called the *blood of Jezreel*. Thus when the house of Baasha was rooted out it was because he did *like the house of Jeroboam, and because he killed him*, 1 Ki. 16:7. Note, Those that are entrusted with the administration of justice are concerned to see to it that they do it from a right principle and with a right intention, and that they do not themselves live in those sins which they punish in others, lest even their just executions should be reckoned for, another day, as little less than murders. (3.) How far the controversy shall proceed; it shall be not a correction, but a destruction. Some make those words, *I will visit, or appoint, the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*, to signify, not as we read it the revenging of that bloodshed, but the repeating of that bloodshed: "I will punish the house of Jehu, as I punished the house of Ahab, because Jehu did not take warning by the punishment of his predecessors, but trod in the steps of their idolatry. And after the house of Jehu is

destroyed *I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel*; I will begin to bring it down, though now it flourish." After the death of Zechariah, the last of the house of Jehu, the kingdom of the ten tribes went to decay, and dwindled sensibly. And, in order to the ruin of it, it is threatened (v. 5), *I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel*; the *strength of the warriors of Israel*, so the Chaldee. God will disable them either to defend themselves or to resist their enemies. And the *bow abiding in strength*, and being *renewed in the hand*, intimates a growing power, so the *breaking of the bow* intimates a sinking ruined power. The bow shall be broken *in the valley of Jezreel*, where, probably, the armoury was; or, it may be, in that valley some battle was fought, wherein the kingdom of Israel was very much weakened. Note, There is no fence against God's controversy; when he comes forth against a people their strong bows are soon broken and their strong-holds broken down. In the valley of Jezreel they shed that blood which the righteous God would in that very place avenge upon them; as some notorious malefactors are hanged in chains just where the villainy they suffer for was perpetrated, that the punishment may answer the sin.

2. He foretels God's abandoning the whole nation in the name he gives to the second child. This was a daughter, as the former was a son, to intimate that both sons and daughters had corrupted their way. Some make to signify that Israel grew effeminate, and was thereby enfeebled and made weak. Call the name of this daughter *Lo-ruhamah—not beloved* (so it is translated Rom. 9:25), or *not having obtained mercy*, so it is translated 1 Pt. 2:10. It comes all to one. This reads the doom of the *house of Israel*: *I will no more have mercy upon them*. It intimates that God had shown them great mercy, but they had abused his favours, and forfeited them, and now he would show them favour no more. Note, Those that forsake their own mercies for lying vanities have reason to expect that their own mercies should forsake them, and that they should be left to their *lying vanities*, Jonah 2:8. Sin turns away the mercy of God even from *the house of Israel*, his own professing people, whose case is sad indeed when God says that he will no more have mercy upon them. And then it follows, *I will utterly take them away*, will *utterly remove them* (so some), will *utterly pluck them up*, so others. Note, When the streams of mercy are stopped we can expect no other than that the vials of wrath should be opened. Those whom God will no more have mercy upon shall be utterly taken away, as dross and dung. The word for *taking away* sometimes signifies to *forgive sin*; and some take it in that sense here: *I will no more have mercy upon them, though in pardoning I have pardoned them* heretofore. Though God has borne long, he will not bear always, with a people that hate to be reformed. Or, *I will no more have mercy upon them, that I should in any wise pardon them*, or (as our margin reads it) *that I should altogether pardon them*. If pardoning mercy is denied, no other mercy can be expected, for that opens the door to all the rest. Some make this to speak comfort: *I will no more have mercy upon them till in pardoning I shall pardon them*, that is, till the Redeemer comes to Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob. The Chaldee reads it, *But, if they repent, in pardoning I will pardon them*. Even the greatest sinners, if in time they bethink themselves and return, will find that *there is forgiveness with God*.

III. He must show them what mercy God had in store for the house of Judah, at the same time that he was thus contending with the house of Israel (v. 7): *But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah*. Note, Though some are justly cast off for their disobedience, yet God will always secure to himself a remnant that shall be the vessels and monuments of mercy. When divine

justice is glorified in some, yet there are others in whom free grace is glorified. And, though some through unbelief are broken off, yet God will have a church in this world till the end of time. It aggravates the rejection of Israel that God will have mercy on Judah, and not on them, and magnifies God's mercy to Judah that, though they also have done wickedly, yet God did not reject them, as he rejected Israel: *I will have mercy upon them and will save them*. Note, Our salvation is owing purely to God's mercy, and not to any merit of our own. Now,

1. This, without doubt, refers to the temporal salvations which God wrought for Judah in a distinguishing way, the favours shown to them and not to Israel. When the Assyrian armies had destroyed Samaria, and carried the ten tribes away into captivity, they proceeded to besiege Jerusalem; but God had mercy on the house of Judah, and saved them by the vast slaughter which an angel made, in one night, in the camp of the Assyrians; then they were *saved by the Lord their God* immediately, and not by sword or bow. When the ten tribes were continued in their captivity, and their land was possessed by others, they being *utterly taken away*, God *had mercy on the house of Judah and saved them*, and, after seventy years, brought them back, *not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Zec. 4:6. *I will save them by the Lord their God*, that is, by myself. God will be exalted *in his own strength*, will take the work into his own hands. That salvation is sure which he undertakes to be the author of; for, if he will work, none shall hinder. And that salvation is most acceptable which he does *by himself*. *So the Lord alone did lead him*. The less there is of man in any salvation, and the more of God, the brighter it shines and the sweeter it tastes. I will save them *in the word of the Lord* (so the Chaldee), for the sake of Christ, the eternal word, and by his power. *I will save them not by bow nor by sword*, that is, (1.) They shall be saved when they are reduced to so low an ebb that they have neither bow nor sword to defend themselves with, Jdg. 5:8; 1 Sa. 13:22. (2.) They shall be saved by the Lord when they are brought off from trusting to their own strength and their weapons of war, Ps. 44:6. (3.) They shall be saved easily, without the trouble of sword and bow, v. 7. Isa. 9:5, *I will save them by the Lord their God*. In the calling him *their God*, he upbraids the ten tribes who had *cast him off* from being *theirs*, for which reason he had *cast them off*, and intimates what was the true reason why he had mercy, distinguishing mercy, for the house of Judah, and saved them: it was in pursuance of his covenant with them as the Lord their God, and in recompence for their faithful adherence to him and to his word and worship. But,

2. This may refer also to the salvation of Judah from idolatry, which qualified and prepared them for their other salvations. And this is indeed a salvation *by the Lord their God*; it is wrought only by the power of his grace, and can never be wrought by *sword or bow*. Just at the time that the kingdom of Israel was *utterly taken away*, under Hoshea, the kingdom of Judah was gloriously reformed, under Hezekiah, and was therefore preserved; and in Babylon God saved them from their idolatry first, and then from their captivity.

3. Some make this promise to look forward to the great salvation which, in the fulness of time, was to be wrought out *by the Lord our God*, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to *save his people from their sins*.

Verses 8-11

We have here a prediction,

I. Of the rejection of Israel for a time, which is signified by the name of another child that Hosea had by his adulterous spouse, v. 8, 9. And still we must observe that those children whose names carried these direful omens in them to Israel were all *children of whoredoms* (v. 2), all born of the harlot that Hosea married, to intimate that the ruin of Israel was the natural product of the sin of Israel. If they had not first revolted from God, they would never have been rejected by him; God never leaves any till they first leave him. Here is, 1. The birth of this child: *When she had weaned her daughter, she conceived and bore a son*. Notice is taken of the delay of the birth of this child, which was to carry in its name a certain presage of their utter rejection, to intimate God's patience with them, and his unwillingness to proceed to extremity. Some think that her bearing another son signifies that people's persisting in their wickedness; lust still *conceived and brought forth sin*. They *added to do evil* (so the Chaldee paraphrase expounds it); they were old in adulteries, and obstinate. 2. The name given him: *Call him Lo-ammi—Not my people*. When they were told that God would *no more have mercy on them* they regarded it not, but buoyed up themselves with this conceit, that they were God's people, whom he could not but have mercy on. And therefore he plucks that staff from under them, and disowns all relation to them: *You are not my people, and I will not be your God. "I will not be yours* (so the word it); I will be in no relation to you, will have nothing to do with you; I will not be *your King, your Father, your patron and protector*." We supply it very well with that which includes all, *"I will not be your God; I will not be to you what I have been, nor what you vainly expect I should be, nor what I would have been if you had kept close to me."* Observe, *"You are not my people; you do not act as becomes my people; you are not observant of me and obedient to me, as my people should be; you are not my people, but the people of this and the other dunghill-deity; and therefore I will not own you for my people, will not protect you, will not put in any claim to you, not demand you, not deliver you out of the hands of those that have seized you; let them take you; you are none of mine. You will not have me to be your God, but pay your homage to the pretenders, and therefore I will not be your God; you shall have no interest in me, shall expect no benefit from me."* Note, Our being taken into covenant with God is owing purely to him and to his grace, for then it begins on his side: *I will be to them a God*, and then they shall be *to me a people; we love him because he first loved us*. But our being cast out of covenant is owing purely to ourselves and our own folly. The breach is on man's side: *You are not my people*, and therefore *I will not be your God*; if God *hate any*, it is because they *first hated him*. This was fulfilled in Israel when they were *utterly taken away into the land of Assyria*, and their place knew them no more. They were no longer *God's people*, for they lost the knowledge and worship of him; no prophets were sent to them, no promises made to them, as were to the two tribes in their captivity; nay, they were no longer *a people*, but, for aught that appears, were mingled with the nations into which they were carried, and lost among them.

II. Of the reduction and restoration of Israel in the fulness of time. Here, as before, mercy is remembered in the midst of wrath; the rejection, as it shall not be total, so it shall not be final (v. 10, 11): *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea*. See how the same hand that wounded is stretched forth to heal, and how tenderly he that has *torn binds up*; though God *cause grief* by his threatenings, yet *he will have compassion*, and will gather with everlasting kindness. They are very precious promises which are here made concerning the Israel of God, and which may be of use to us now.

1. Some think that these promises had their accomplishment in the return of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, when many of the ten tribes joined themselves to Judah, and took the benefit of the liberty which Cyrus proclaimed, came up in great numbers out of the several countries into which they were dispersed, to their own land, appointed Zerubbabel their head, and coalesced into one people, whereas before they had been two distinct nations. And in their own land, where God had by his prophets disowned and rejected them as none of his, he would by his prophets own them and appear for them as his children; and from all parts of the country they should come up to the temple to worship. And we have reason to think that, though this promise has a further reference, yet it was graciously intended and piously used for the support and comfort of the captives in Babylon, as giving them a general assurance of mercy which God had in store for them and their land; their nation could not be destroyed so long as this blessing was in it, was in reserve for it.

2. Some think that these promises will not have their accomplishment, at least not in full, till the general conversion of the Jews in the latter days, which is expected yet to come, when the vast incredible numbers of Jews, that are now dispersed as the sand of the sea, shall be brought to embrace the faith of Christ and be incorporated in the gospel-church. Then, and not till then, God will own them as his people, his children, even there where they had lain under the dismal tokens of their rejection. The Jewish doctors look upon this promise as not having had its accomplishment yet. But,

3. It is certain that this promise had its accomplishment in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, by the preaching of the gospel, and the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles to it, for to this these words are applied by St. Paul (Rom. 9:25, 26), and by St. Peter when he writes to the Jews of the dispersion, 1 Pt. 2:10. Israel here is the gospel-church, the spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16), all believers who follow the steps, and inherit the blessing of faithful Abraham, who is the father of all that believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, Rom. 4:11, 12. Now let us see what is promised concerning this Israel.

(1.) That it shall greatly multiply, and the numbers of it be increased; it shall be *as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered*. Though Israel according to the flesh be diminished and made few, the spiritual Israel shall be numerous, shall be innumerable. In the vast multitudes that by the preaching of the gospel have been brought to Christ, both in the first ages of Christianity and ever since, this promise is fulfilled, thousands out of every tribe in Israel, and out of other nations, *a multitude which no man can number*, Rev. 7:4, 9; Gal. 4:27. In this the promise made to Abraham, when God called him Abraham the *high father of a multitude*, had its full accomplishment (Gen. 17:5), and that Gen. 22:17. Some observe that they are here compared to the *sand of the sea*, not only for their numbers, but as the sand of the sea serves for a boundary to the waters, that they shall not overflow the earth, so the Israelites indeed are a wall of defence to the places where they live, to keep off judgments. God can do nothing against Sodom while Lot is there.

(2.) That God will renew his covenant with the gospel-Israel, and will incorporate it a church to himself, by as full and ample a charter as that whereby the Old-Testament church was incorporated; nay, and its privileges shall be much greater: *"In the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people, there shall you be again admitted into covenant, and owned as my people."* The *abandoned Gentiles* in their respective places, and the *rejected Jews* in theirs, shall be favoured and blessed. There, where the fathers were cast off for their unbelief, the children, upon their believing, shall be taken in. This is a blessed

resurrection, the making of those the people of God that were *not a people*. Nay, but the privilege is enlarged; now it is not only, *You are my people*, as formerly, but *You are the sons of the living God*, whether by birth you were Jews or Gentiles. Israel under the law was *God's son, his first-born*, but then they were as children *under age*; now, under the gospel, they have grown up both to greater understanding and greater liberty, Gal. 4:1, 2. Note, [1.] It is the unspeakable privilege of all believers that they have the living God for their Father, the ever-living God, and may look upon themselves as his children by grace and adoption. [2.] The sonship of believers shall be owned and acknowledged; it shall be *said to them*, for their comfort and satisfaction, nay, and it shall be said for their honour in the hearing of the world, *You are the sons of the living God*. Let not the saints disquiet themselves; let not others despise them; for, sooner or later, there shall be a manifestation of the children of God, and all the world shall be made to know their excellency and the value God has for them. [3.] It will add much to their comfort, very much to their honour, when they are dignified with the tokens of God's favour in that very place where they had long lain under the tokens of his displeasure. This speaks comfort to the believing Gentiles, that they need not go up to Jerusalem, to be received and owned as God's children; no, they may stay where they are, and *in that place*, though it be in the remotest corner of the earth, *in that place* where they were at a distance, where it was said to them, "*You are not God's people*," but are separated from them (Isa. 56:3, 6), even there, without leaving their country and kindred, they may by faith receive the *Spirit of adoption*, witnessing with their spirits that "*they are the children of God*."

(3.) That those who had been at variance should be happily brought together (v. 11): *Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together*. This uniting of Judah and Israel, those two kingdoms that were now so much at variance, biting and devouring one another, is mentioned only as a specimen, or one instance, of the happy effect of the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the world, the bringing of those that had been at the greatest enmity one against another to a good understanding one of another and a good affection one to another. This was literally fulfilled when the Galileans, who inhabited that part of the country which belonged to the ten tribes, and probably for the most part descended from them, so heartily joined with those that were probably called *Jews* (that were of Judea) in following Christ and embracing his gospel; and his first disciples were partly Jews and partly Galileans. The first that were blessed with the light of the gospel were of the *land of Zebulun and Naphtali* (Mt. 4:15); and, though there was no good-will at all between the Jews and the Galileans, yet, upon their believing in Christ, they were happily consolidated, and there were no remains of the former disaffection they had to one another; nay, when the Samaritans believed, though between them and the Jews there was a much greater enmity, yet in Christ there was a perfect unanimity, Acts 8:14. Thus Judah and Israel were *gathered together*; yet this was but a type of the much more celebrated coalition between Jews and Gentiles, when, by the death of Christ, the partition-wall of the ceremonial law was taken down. See Eph. 2:14–16. Christ died, to *gather together in one all the children of God that were scattered abroad*, Jn. 11:51; Eph. 1:10.

(4.) That Jesus Christ should be the centre of unity to all God's spiritual Israel. They shall all agree to *appoint to themselves one head*, which can be no other than he whom God has appointed, even Christ. Note, Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the one only head of it, not only a head of government, as of the body politic, but a head of vital influence, as of the natural

body. To believe in Christ is to appoint him to ourselves for our head, that is, to consent to God's appointment, and willingly commit ourselves to his guidance and government; and this in concurrence and communion with all good Christians that make him their head; so that, though they are many, yet in him they are one, and so become one with each other. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt—Those who agree with a third agree with each other.*

(5.) That, having appointed Christ for their head, *they shall come up out of the land*; they shall come, some of all sorts, from all parts, to join themselves to the church, as, under the Jewish economy, they came up from all corners of the land of Israel to Jerusalem, to worship (Ps. 122:4), *Thither the tribes go up*, to which there is a plain allusion in that prophecy of the accession of the Gentiles to the church (Isa. 2:3), *Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord*. It denotes not a local remove (for they are said to be in the same place, v. 10), but a change of their mind, a spiritual ascent to Christ. They shall *come up from the earth* (so it may be read); for those who have given up themselves to Christ as their head take their affections off from *this earth*, and the things of it, to set them upon *things above* (Col. 3:1, 2); for they are not of the world (Jn. 15:19), but have their conversation in heaven. They shall *come up out of the land*, though it be the land of their nativity; they shall, in affection, come out from it, that they may *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes*. Thus the learned Dr. Pocock takes it.

(6.) That, when all this comes to pass, *great shall be the day of Jezreel*. Though *great* is *the day of Jezreel's* affliction (so some understand it), yet *great shall be the day of Jezreel's* glory. This shall be Israel's day; the day shall be *their own*, after their enemies have long had their day. Israel is here called *Jezreel*, the *seed of God*, the *holy seed* (Isa. 6:13), the *substance* of the land. This seed is now sown in the earth, and buried under the clods; but great shall be its day when the harvest comes. Great was the church's day when there were *added to it daily such as should be saved*; then did the Almighty *do great things* for it.

Chapter 2

The scope of this chapter seems to be much the same with that of the foregoing chapter, and to point at the same events, and the causes of them. As there, so here, I. God, by the prophet, discovers sin to them, and charges it home upon them, the sin of their idolatry, their spiritual whoredom, their serving idols and forgetting God and their obligations to him (v. 1, 2, 5, 8). II. He threatens to take away from them that plenty of all good things with which they had served their idols, and to abandon them to ruin without remedy (v. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9–13). III. Yet he promises at last to return in ways of mercy to them for his own sake (v. 14), to restore them to their former plenty (v. 15), to cure them of their inclination to idolatry (v. 16, 17), to renew his covenant with them (v. 18–20), and to bless them with all good things (v. 21–23).

Verses 1-5

The first words of this chapter some make the close of the foregoing chapter, and add them to the promises which we have here of the great things God would do for them. When they shall have appointed Christ their head, and centered in him, then let them say to one another, with triumph and exultation (*let the prophets say it to them, so the Chaldee—Comfort you, comfort you, my people, is now their commission*), "say to them, *Ammi*, and *Ruhamah*; call them so again, for they shall no longer lie under the reproach and doom of *Lo-ammi* and *Lo-ruhamah*; they shall now be *my people* again, and shall *obtain mercy*." God's spiritual Israel, made up of Jews and Gentiles without distinction, shall call one another brethren and sisters, shall own one another for the people of God and beloved of him, and, for that reason, shall embrace one another, and stir up one another both to give thanks for and to walk worthy of this *common salvation* which they partake of. Or rather, because the following words seem to have a coherence with these, these also are designed for conviction and humiliation. The *mother* (v. 2) seems to be the same with the *brethren* and *sisters* (v. 1), the church of the ten tribes, the body of the people, who were brethren, and in a special manner with the heads and leaders, who were as the mother by whom the rest were brought up and nursed. But who are the children that must *plead with their mother* thus? Either, 1. The godly that were among them, that witnessed against the iniquities of the times, let them boldly go on to bear their testimony against the idolatries and gross corruptions that prevail among them. Let those that had not bowed the knee to Baal reason the case with those that had, and endeavour to convince them with such arguments as are here put into their mouths. Note, Private persons may, and ought in their places, to appear and plead against the public profanations of God's name and worship. Children may humbly and modestly argue with their parents when they do amiss: *Plead with your mother, plead*, as Jonathan with Saul concerning David. Or, 2. The sufferers among them, that shared in the calamities of the times, let them not complain of God, let them not quarrel with him, nor lay the blame on him, as if he had dealt hardly with them, and not like a tender father. No; let them *plead with their mother*, and lay the fault on her, where it ought to be laid; compare Isa. 50:1. "*For her transgressions is your mother put away; she may thank herself, and you may thank her for all your miseries.*" Let us see now how they must plead with her.

I. They must put here in mind of the relation wherein she had stood to God, the kindness he had had for her, the many favours he had bestowed upon her, and the further favours he had designed her. Let them tell their *brethren* and *sisters* that they had

been *Ammi* and *Ruhamah*, that they had been God's people and vessels of his mercy, and might have been so still if it had not been their own fault, v. 1. Note, Our relation to God and dependence on him are a great aggravation of our revolts from him and rebellions against him.

II. They must, in God's name, charge her with the violation of the marriage-covenant between her and God. Let them tell her that God does not look upon her as his wife, nor upon himself as her husband any longer. Tell her (v. 2) that *she is not my wife, neither am I her husband*, that by her spiritual whoredom she has forfeited all the honour and comfort of her relation to God, and provoked him to give her a bill of divorce. Note, No consideration can be more powerful to awaken us to repentance than the provocation we have by sin given to God to disown and cast us off. It is time to look about us, and to think what course we must take, when God threatens to reject us; for woe unto us if he be not *our husband*. They must charge this home upon her (v. 5): *Their mother has played the harlot; their congregation has run a whoring after false prophets* (so the Chaldee), or, rather, *after idols*, wherein they were encouraged by their false prophets; *she that conceived them has done shamefully*, in making and worshipping idols. An idol is called a *shame* (ch. 9:10) and idolatry is a *shameful thing*. It is not only an affront to God, but a reproach to men, to *fall down to the stock of a tree*, as the prophet speaks. Or it denotes that the sinner was shameless, impudent in sin, and could not blush; Jer. 6:15. Or, *She has made ashamed*, has made all that see her ashamed of her; her own children are ashamed of their relation to her.

III. They must upbraid her with her horrid ingratitude to God her benefactor, in ascribing to her idols the glory of the gifts he had given her, and then giving that for a reason why she paid them the homage due to him only, v. 5. In this she *did shamefully* indeed, that *she said, I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water*. Observe here, 1. Her wicked resolution to persist in idolatry, notwithstanding all that God said, both by his prophets and by his providences, to draw her from it. *She said*, Whatever is offered to the contrary, *I will go after my lovers, or those that cause me to love them*, whom I cannot but be in love with. The Chaldee understands it of the nations whose alliance Israel courted and depended upon, who supplied them with what they needed. But it is rather to be understood of the idols they worshipped, to justify their love of which they called them their lovers. See who do shamefully; those that are wilful and resolute in sin, and those that openly profess and own their resolution to go on in it. See the folly of idolaters, to call those their lovers that had not so much as life; yet let us learn to call our God our lover; let us keep up good thoughts of him, and put a high value upon our interest in him and in his love. 2. The gross mistake upon which this resolution was grounded: "I will go after my lovers, because they give me my *bread and my water*, which are necessary to sustain the body, *my wool and my flax*, which are necessary to clothe the body, and pleasant things, *my oil*, and *my drink*, my liquors" (so the word is), "wine and strong drink." Note, (1.) The things of sense are the best things with carnal hearts, and the most powerful attractives, in pursuit of which they care not what they follow after. The God of Israel set before them his *statutes and judgments* (Deu. 4:8), *more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey* (Ps. 119:10), promised them his favour, which would *put gladness in their hearts more than corn, wine, and oil* (Ps. 4:7); but they had no relish at all for these things. Whence they thought their oil and their drink came, thither they would return their best affections. *O curvae in terram animae et coelestium inanes!*—*O degenerate minds, bending towards the earth, and devoid of*

every thing heavenly! (2.) It is a great abuse and injury to God, in pursuance of the pleasures and delights of sense to forsake him, who not only gives us better things, but gives us even those things too. The idolaters made Ceres the goddess of their corn, Bacchus the god of their wine, etc., and then foolishly fancied they had their corn and wine from these, forgetting the Lord their God, who both gave them that good land and *gave them power to get wealth* out of it. (3.) Many are hardened in sin by their worldly prosperity. They had an abundance of those things when they served their idols, and then imagined them to be given them by their idols, which kept them to their service; thus they argued (Jer. 44:17, 18), *While we burnt incense to the queen of heaven we had plenty of victuals.*

IV. They must persuade her to repent and reform. God will disown her if she persist in her whoredoms; *let her therefore put away her whoredoms*, v. 2. Let her be convinced that it is possible for her to reform; the idols, dear as they are, may yet be parted with; and it will certainly be well with her if she do reform. Note, Our pleading with sinners must be to drive them to repentance, not to drive them to despair. Let her *put away her whoredoms and her adulteries*; the doubling of words to the same purport, and both plural, denotes the abundance of idolatries they were guilty of, all which must be abandoned ere God would be reconciled to them. Let her put them *out of her sight*, as detestable things which she cannot endure to look upon; let her say unto them, *Get you hence*, Isa. 30:22. Let her put them *from her face* and from *between her breasts*, that is, let her not do as harlots use to do, that both discover their own wicked disposition, and allure others to wickedness, by painting their faces, and exposing their naked breasts, and adorning them; let her not thus, by annexing all possible gaieties and pleasures to the worship of idols, engage herself and allure others to it. let her put away all these. Every sinful course, persisted in, is an adulterous departure from God. And here we may see what it is truly to repent of it and turn from it. 1. True penitents will forsake both open sins, will put away not only the whoredoms that lie in sight, but those that lie in secret *between their breasts*, the sin that is *rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel*. 2. They will both avoid the outward occasions of sin and mortify the inward disposition to it. Idolaters walked after their own eyes, which *went a whoring* after their idols (Eze. 6:9, Deu. 4:19), and *therefore* they must put them away *out of their sight*, lest they should be tempted to worship them. *Look not upon the wine when it is red*. But that is not enough: the axe must be *laid to the root*; the corrupt bent and inclination of the heart must be changed, and it must be put away *from between the breasts*, that Christ alone may have the innermost and uppermost place there. Cant. 1:13.

V. They must show her the utter ruin that will certainly be the fatal consequence of her sin if she do not repent and reform (v. 3): *Lest I strip her naked*. This comes in here not by way of sentence passed upon her, but by way of warning given to her, that she may prevent it: *Let her put away her whoredoms, that I may not strip her naked* (so it may be read), intimating that God waits to show mercy to sinners, if they would but qualify themselves for that mercy. It is here threatened that God will deal with her as the just and jealous husband at length does with an adulterous wife, that has filled his house with a spurious brood, and will not be reclaimed; he turns her and her children out of doors and sends them a begging; *I will not have mercy upon her children* (v. 4); the particular persons that share in the calamity of the nation, and the rising generation, shall be ruined by it, for they are *children of whoredoms*, and keep up the *vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers*. Now it is here

threatened that they shall be both stripped and starved. They thought their idols gave them *their bread and their water, their wool and their flax*; but God, by taking them away, will let them know that it was he that gave them. 1. She shall be stripped: *Lest I strip her* of all her ornaments which she is proud of, and with which she courts her lovers, *strip her* and set her *as in the day that she was born*, send her as naked out of the world as she came into it; this death does, Job 1:21. *I will strip her*, and so expose her to cold, and expose her to shame; and justly is she exposed to shame that *did shamefully*, v. 5. The day when God brought them out of Egypt, where they were no better than slaves and beggars, was *the day in which they were born*; and God threatens to bring them back to as low and miserable a condition as he then found them in. Whatever they had that either gained them respect or screened them from contempt, among their neighbours, should be taken from them. See Eze. 16:4, 39. 2. She shall be starved, shall be deprived not only of her honours, but of her comforts and necessary supports. She shall be famished, shall be made *as a wilderness and a dry land*, and *slain with thirst*. She that boasted so much of her bread and water, her oil and her drinks, which her lovers had *given her*, shall not have so much as necessary food. The land shall not afford subsistence for the inhabitants, for want of the rain of heaven; or, if it do, it shall be taken from them by the enemy, so that the rightful owners shall perish for want of it. Some understand it thus: *I will make her as she was in the wilderness*, and set her as she was *in the desert land*, where she was sometimes ready to perish *for thirst*. So it explains the former part of the verse: *I will set her as in the day that she was born*; for it was in the vast howling wilderness that Israel was first formed into a people. They shall be in as deplorable a condition as their fathers were, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, and in this respect, worse, that then the children were reserved to be heirs of the land of promise, but now *I will not have mercy upon her children, for their mother has played the harlot*.

Verses 6-13

God here goes on to threaten what he would do with this treacherous idolatrous people; and he warns that he may not wound, he threatens that he may not strike. *If he turn not, he will whet his sword* (Ps. 7:12); but, if he turn, he will sheathe it. They did not turn, and therefore all this came upon them: and its being threatened before shows that it was the execution of a divine sentence upon them for their wickedness; and it is written for admonition to us.

I. They shall be perplexed and embarrassed in all their counsels, and disappointed in all their expectations. This is threatened v. 6, 7. But to the threatening is annexed a promise that this shall be a means to convince them of their folly, and bring them home to their duty; and so good shall be brought out of evil, in token of the mercy God has yet in reserve for them. And, this being the happy fruit and effect of the distress, it is hard to say whether the prediction, or the distress itself, should be called a threatening or a promise.

1. God will raise up difficulties and troubles in their way, so that their public counsels and affairs shall have no success, nor shall they be able to get forward in them: *I will hedge up thy way with thorns*, with such crosses as, like thorns and briars, are the product of sin and the curse, and are scratching, and tearing, and vexing, and, when the way we are in is hedged up with them, stop our progress, and force us to turn back. She said, *"I will go after my lovers; I will pursue my leagues and alliances with foreign powers, and depend upon them."* But God says, "She shall be frustrated in these projects, and not be able to

proceed in them. *I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and, if that do not serve, I will make a wall.*" If some smaller difficulties be got over, and prevail not to break her measures, God will raise greater, for he will overcome when he judges. It shall be such a hedge, and such a wall, that *she shall not find her paths*. The change of the person here, I will hedge up *thy way*, and then, *She shall not find it*, is usual in scripture, especially in an earnest way of speaking. "Sinner, do thou take notice, *I will hedge up thy way*, and all you that are bystanders take notice what will be the effect of this, you may observe that *she* cannot find her paths." She shall be as a traveller that not only knows not which way to go, of many that are before him, but that finds no way at all to go forward. And then *she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them*; she shall endeavour to make an interest in the Assyrians and Egyptians, and to have them for her protectors, but she shall not gain her point; they shall either not come into confederacy with her or not do her any service, shall *help in vain* and be as the *staff of a broken reed*. *She shall seek them, but shall not find them*, shall seek to her idols, but shall not find that satisfaction in them which she promised herself; the gods whom she trusted and courted not only can do nothing for her, but have nothing to say to her to encourage her. Now, (1.) This is such a just judgment as the Sodomites met with, that were *struck with blindness, and wearied themselves to find the door* (Gen. 19:11), and the Syrians, 2 Ki. 6:18. Note, Those that are most resolute in their sinful pursuits are commonly most crossed in them. *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward* (Prov. 22:5); and thus with them God *shows himself froward* (Ps. 18:26), and *walks contrary to those that walk contrary to him*, Lev. 26:23, 24. The lamenting prophet complains, *He has enclosed my ways*, Lam. 3:7, 9. The way of God and duty is often hedged about with thorns, but we have reason to think it is a sinful way that is hedged up with thorns. (2.) This is such a kind rebuke, and indeed such a mercy, as Balaam met with, when the angel stood in his way, to hinder his going forward to *curse Israel*, Num. 22:22. Note, Crosses and obstacles in an evil course are great blessings, and are so to be accounted. They are God's hedges, to keep us from transgressing, to restrain us from wandering out of the green pastures, to *withdraw man from his purpose* (Job 33:17), to make the way of sin difficult, that we may not go on in it, and to keep us from it whether we will or not. We have reason to bless God both for restraining grace and for restraining providences.

2. These difficulties that God raises up in their way shall raise up in their minds thoughts of turning back: "*Then shall she say, Since I cannot overtake my lovers, I will even go and return to my first husband*, that is, will return to God, and humble myself to him, and desire him to take me in again; for, when I kept close to him, it was every way *better with me than now.*" Two things are here extorted from this degenerate apostate people:—(1.) A just acknowledgement of the folly of their apostasy. They are now brought to own that it was better with them while they kept close to their God than ever it was since they forsook him. Note, Whoever have exchanged the service of God for the services of the world and the flesh have, sooner or later, been made to own that they *changed for the worse*, and that while they continued in good company, and went on in the way of good duties, and made conscience how they spent their time and what they said or did, it was better with them; they had more true comfort and enjoyment of themselves than ever they had since they went astray. (2.) A good purpose, to come back again to their duty: *I will go, and return to my first husband*; and she knows so much of his goodness and readiness to forgive that she speaks without any doubt of his receiving her again into favour and making her condition as good as ever. Note, The

disappointments we meet with in our pursuits of satisfaction in the creature should, if nothing else will do it, drive us at length to the Creator, in whom alone it is to be had. When Moab is *weary of the high place* he shall *go to the sanctuary*, Isa. 16:12. And when the prodigal son is reduced to husks, short allowance indeed, and remembers that *in his father's house there is bread enough*, then he says, *I will arise and go to my father's house*, Lu. 15:17, 18.

II. The necessary supports and comforts of life shall be taken from them, because they had dishonoured God with them, v. 8, 9. Their land was plenteous. Now see here, 1. How graciously their plenty was given to them. God gave them not only corn for necessity, but wine for delight, and oil for ornament. Nay, he *multiplied their silver and gold*, wherewith to traffic with other nations and bring home their products, and which they might hoard up for posterity. *Silver and gold* will keep longer than *corn, and wine, and oil*. He gave them *wool and flax* too, to *cover their nakedness*, and to serve for ornament enough to them, Eze. 16:10. Note, God is a bountiful benefactor even to those who, he foresees, will be ungrateful and unthankful to him.

2. How basely their plenty was abused by them. (1.) They robbed God of the honour of his gifts: *She did not know that I gave her corn and wine*; she did not remember it. The law and the prophets had told them, again and again, that all their comforts they received from God's bountiful providence; but they were so often told by their false prophets and idolatrous priests that they had their corn from such an idol, and their wine from such an idol, etc., that they had quite forgotten their relation to their great benefactor and their obligations to him. She did not consider it; she would not acknowledge it. This they were *willingly ignorant of*, and more brutish than the ox, that *knows his owner*, and the ass, that *knows his master's crib*. *She did not know it*, for she did not return thanks to him for his gifts, nor study what she should render; nor did she give him his dues out of them, but acted as if she were ignorant who was the donor. (2.) They served and honoured his enemies with them: *They prepared them for Baal*; they adorned their images with *gold and silver* (Jer. 10:4), and adorned themselves for the worship of their images, v. 13. See Eze. 16:17–19. *Wherewith they made Baal* (so the margin reads it), that is, the image of Baal. Note, It is a very great dishonour to the God of heaven to make those gifts of his providence the food and fuel of our lusts which he gave us for our support in his service, and to be oil to the wheels of our obedience.

3. How justly their plenty should be taken from them: *"Therefore will I return*; I will alter my dealings with them, will take another course, *and will take away my corn* and other good things that I gave her." I will *recover* them, a law term, as a man by due course of law recovers what is unjustly detained from him, or as, when the tenant has committed waste, the landlord recovers *locum vastatum—dilapidations*. Observe, God calls their abundance *my corn* and *my wine, my wool* and *my flax*. They called it theirs (*my bread* and *my water*, v. 5), but God lets them know that it is not theirs; he only allowed them the use of it as tenants, entrusted them with the management of it as stewards, but still reserved the property in himself. "It is *my corn* and *my wine*." God will have us to know, not only that we have all our creature-comforts and enjoyments from him, but that he has still an incontestable right and title to them, that they are more his than ours, and therefore are to be used for him, and accounted for to him. He will therefore take their plenty away from them, because they have forfeited it by disowning his right, as a tenant by copy of court-roll, who holds at the will of his lord, forfeits his estate if he makes a feoffment of it as though he were a freeholder. He will *recover* it, will *free* or *deliver* it, that it may be no longer abused, as the creature is said to be

delivered from the bondage of corruption under which it groans, Rom. 8:21. He will take it away *in the time thereof*, and *in the season thereof*, just when they expected it, and thought that they were sure of it. It shall suffer shipwreck in the harbour; and *the harvest shall be a heap*. He will take it away by unseasonable weather or by unreasonable men. Note, Those that abuse the mercies God gives them, to his dishonour, cannot expect to enjoy them long.

III. They shall lose *all their honour*, and be exposed to contempt (v. 10): *"I will discover her lewdness*, will bring to light all her secret wickedness, and make it public, to her shame; I will show by the punishment of it how heinous, how odious, how offensive it is. The fact has been denied, but now it shall appear; the fault has been diminished, but now it shall appear exceedingly sinful. And this *in the sight of her lovers*, in the sight of the neighbouring nations, with whom she courted an alliance, and on whom she had a dependence; they shall despise her and be ashamed of her because of her weakness, and poverty, and ill conduct; they shall not think her any longer worthy of their friendship." See this fulfilled, Lam. 1:8, *All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness*. Or in the sight of *the sun and moon*, which she worshipped as *her lovers*; before them shall *her lewdness be discovered*. Compare this with Jer. 7:1, 2, *They shall bring out the bones of their kings and princes, and spread them before the sun and moon, whom they have loved and served*. Note, Sin will have shame; let those expect it that have done shamefully. What other lot can this impudent adulteress expect but that of a common harlot, to be carted through the town? And, when God comes to deal thus with her, *none shall deliver her out of his hands*, neither the gods nor the men they confide in. Note, Those who will not deliver themselves into the hand of God's mercy cannot be delivered out of the hand of his justice.

IV. They shall lose all their pleasure, and shall be left melancholy (v. 11): *I will cause her mirth to cease*. It seems, then, though they had *gone a whoring from their God*, yet they could find in their hearts to *rejoice as other people*, which is forbidden, ch. 9:1. Note, Many who lie under guilt and wrath are yet very jocund and merry, and live jovially; but, whether in their laughter their hearts be sad or no, it is certain that the *end of their mirth* will be *heaviness*; for *God will cause all their mirth to cease*. It is as Mr. Burroughs observes here, *Sin and mirth can never hold long together*; but, *if men will not take away sin from their mirth, God will take away mirth from their sin*.

1. God will take away the occasions of their sacred mirth—*their feast-days, their new moons, their sabbaths, and all their solemn feasts*. These God instituted to be observed in a religious manner, and they were to be observed with rejoicing; and, it seems, though they had departed from the pure worship of God, yet they kept up the observance of these, not at God's temple at Jerusalem, for they had long since forsaken that, but probably at Dan and Bethel, where the calves were, or in some other places of meeting that they had. They observed them, not for the honour of God, nor with any true devotion towards him, but only because they were times of mirth and feasting, music and dancing, and meeting of friends, received by tradition from their fathers. Thus, when they had lost the power of godliness, and denied that, yet, for the pleasing of a vain and carnal mind, they kept up the form of it; and by this means their new-moons and their sabbaths became an iniquity which God *could not away with*, Isa. 1:13. Now observe, (1.) God calls them their new-moons and their sabbaths, not his (he disowns them), but theirs. (2.) He will *cause them to cease*. Note, When men by their sins have caused the life and substance of ordinances to cease it is

just with God by his judgments to cause the remaining show and shadow of them to cease.

2. He will take away the supports of their carnal mind. They loved the new-moons and the sabbaths only for the sake of the good cheer that was stirring then, not for the sake of any religious exercises then performed; these they had dropped long ago; and now God will take away their provisions for these solemnities (v. 12): *I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees*. Note, If men destroy God's words and ordinances, by which he should be honoured on their feast-days, it is just with him to destroy their vines and fig-trees, with which they regale themselves. While they took the pleasure of these, they gave their lovers the praise of them: *"These are my rewards which my lovers have given me; I may thank my stars for these, and my worship of them; I may thank my neighbours for these, and my alliance with them."* And therefore God will destroy them, will wither them with a blast, or bring in a foreign enemy that shall lay the country waste, so that their vineyards shall become *a forest*; the enclosures shall be thrown down, as is usual in war; all shall be laid in common, so that the *beasts of the field* shall eat their grapes and their figs. Or they shall be so blasted with the east wind that fruit-trees shall be of no more use than forest-trees; but, being withered and good for nothing, what fruit there is shall be left to the *beasts of the field*. Or it shall be devoured by their enemies, by men as barbarous as wild beasts. Now, (1.) This shall be the ruin of their mirth: God will *cause all her mirth to cease*. How will he do it? Taking away the new-moons and the sabbaths will not do it; they can very easily part with them, and find no loss; but "I will *destroy her vines and her fig-trees*, will take away her sensual pleasures, and then she will think herself undone indeed." Note, The destruction of the vines and the fig-trees causes all the mirth of a carnal heart to cease; it will say, as Micah, You have *taken away my gods, and what have I more?* (2.) This shall be the punishment of her idolatry (v. 13): *"I will visit upon her the days of Baalim; I will reckon with her for all the worship of all the Baals they have made gods of, from the days of their fathers unto this day."* We read of their worshipping Baal as long ago as the time of the Judges, and, for aught I know, this may look as far back as those times, those *days of Baalim*; for it is in the second commandment, which forbids idolatry, that God threatens to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*; and justly is that sin so visited, more than any other, because it commonly supports itself by prescription and long usage. Now that the measure of the iniquity of Israel was full all their former sins came into the account, and shall be *required of this generation*. Or the *days of Baalim* are the solemn festival days which they kept in honour of their idols. Days of sinful mirth must be visited in days of mourning. These were the days wherein she *burnt incense* to idols, and, to grace the solemnity, *decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels*, that, appearing honourable, the honour she did to Baal might be thought the greater. Or she was as a wife that decks herself with the ear-rings and jewels that her husband gave her, to make herself amiable to her lovers, whom she follows after, and is ever mindful of. But *she forgot me, saith the Lord*. Note, Our treacherous departures from God are owing to our forgetfulness of him, of his nature and attributes, his relation to us and our obligations to him. Many who plead that they have weak memories, and forget the things of God, can remember other things well enough; nay, it is because they are so mindful of lying vanities that they are so forgetful of their own mercies.

Verses 14-23

The state of Israel ruined by their own sin did not look so black and dismal in the former part of the chapter, but that the state

of Israel, restrained by the divine grace, looks as bright and pleasant here in the latter part of the chapter, and the more surprisingly so as the promises follow thus close upon the threatenings; nay, which is very strange, they are by a note of connexion joined to, and inferred from, that declaration of their sinfulness upon which the threatenings of their ruin are grounded: *She went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord; therefore I will allure her.* Fitly therefore is that *therefore* which is the note of connexion immediately followed with a note of admiration: *Behold I will allure her!* When it was said, *She forgot me*, one would think it should have followed, "Therefore I will abandon her, I will forget her, I will never look after her more." No, *Therefore I will allure her.* Note, God's thoughts and ways of mercy are infinitely above ours; his reasons are all fetched from within himself, and not from any thing in us; nay, his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious, Isa. 57:17, 18. *Therefore*, because she will not be restrained by the denunciations of wrath, God will try whether she will be wrought upon by the offers of mercy. Some think it may be translated, *Afterwards*, or *nevertheless*, I will allure her. It comes all to one; the design is plainly to magnify free grace to those on whom God will have mercy purely for mercy's sake. Now that which is here promised to Israel is,

I. That though now they were disconsolate, and ready to despair, they should again be revived with comforts and hopes, v. 14, 15. This is expressed here with an allusion to God's dealings with that people when he brought them out of Egypt, through the wilderness to Canaan, as their forlorn and deplorable condition in their captivity was compared to their state in *Egypt in the day that they were born*, v. 3. They shall be new-formed by such miracles of love and mercy as they were first-formed by, and such a transport of joy shall they be in as they were in then. It is hard to say when this had its accomplishment in the kingdom of the ten tribes; but it principally aims, no doubt, at the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles into the church by the gospel of Christ; and it is applicable, nay, we have reason to think it was designed that it should be applied, to the conversion of particular souls to God. Now observe,

1. The gracious methods God will take with them. (1.) He will *bring them into the wilderness*, as he did at first when he brought them out of Egypt, where he instructed them, and took them into covenant with himself. The land of their captivity shall be to them now, as that wilderness was then, the *furnace of affliction*, in which God will *choose them*. See Eze. 20:35, 36, *I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you.* God had said that he would *make them as a wilderness* (v. 3), which was a threatening; now, when it is here made part of a promise that he would bring them into the wilderness, the meaning may be that he would by his grace bring their minds to their condition: "They shall have humble hearts under humbling providences; being poor, they shall be poor in spirit, shall *accept of the punishment of their iniquity*, and then they are prepared to have comfort spoken to them." When God delivered Israel out of Egypt he led them into the wilderness, to *humble them and prove them, that he might do them good* (Deu. 8:2, 3, 15, 16), and so he will do again. Note, Those whom God has mercy in store for he first *brings into a wilderness*—into solitude and retirement, that they may the more freely converse with him out of the noise of this world,—into distress of mind, through sense of guilt and dread of wrath, which brings a soul to be quite at a loss in itself and bewildered, and by those convictions he prepares for consolations,—and sometimes into outward distress and trouble, thereby to open the ear to discipline. (2.) He will then *allure them and speak*

comfortably to them, will persuade them and speak to their hearts, that is, he will by his word and Spirit incline their hearts to return to him, and encourage them to do so. He will allure them with the promises of his favour, as before he had terrified them with the threatenings of his wrath, will speak friendly to them, both by his prophets and by his providences, as before he had spoken roughly, Isa. 40:1, 2. *By the hand of my servants the prophets I will speak comfort to her heart*; so the Chaldee. This refers to the gospel of Christ, and the offers of divine grace in the gospel, by which we are allured to forsake our sins and to turn to God, and which speaks to the heart of a convinced sinner that which is every way suited to his case, speaks abundant consolation to those that sorrow for sin and lament after the Lord. And when by the Spirit it is indeed spoken to the heart effectually, and so as to reach the conscience (which it is God's prerogative to do), O what a blessed change is wrought by it! Note, The best way of reducing wandering souls to God is by fair means. By the promise of rest in Christ we are invited to take his yoke upon us; and the work of conversion may be forwarded by comforts as well as by convictions. (3.) *He will give her her vineyards thence*. From that time and from that place where he has afflicted her, and brought her to see her folly and to humble herself, thenceforward he will *do her good*; not only speak comfortably to her, but do well for her, and undo what he had done against her. He had *destroyed her vines* (v. 12), but now he will give her whole *vineyards*, as if for every vine destroyed she should have a vineyard restored, and so be repaid with interest; she shall not only have corn for necessity, but vineyards for delight. These denote the privileges and comforts of the gospel, which are prepared for those that *come up out of the wilderness leaning upon Christ as their beloved*, Cant. 8:5. Note, God has vineyards of consolation ready to bestow on those who repent and return to him; and he can give vineyards *out of a wilderness*, which are of all others the most welcome, as rest to the weary. (4.) He will give her *the valley of Achor for a door of hope*. *The valley of Achor* was that in which Achan was stoned; it signifies *the valley of trouble*, because he troubled Israel, and there God troubled him. This was the beginning of the wars of Canaan; and their putting away the accursed thing in that place gave them ground to hope that God would continue his presence with them and complete their victories. So when God returns to his people in mercy, and they to him in duty, it will be to them as happy an omen as any thing. If they put away the accursed thing from among them, if by mortifying sin they stone the Achan that has troubled their camp, their subduing that enemy within themselves is an earnest to them of victory over all the kings of Canaan. Or, if the allusion be to the name, it intimates that trouble for sin, if it be sincere, opens a door of hope; for that sin which truly troubles us shall not ruin us. The valley of Achor was a very fruitful pleasant valley, some think the same with the valley of Engedi, famous for vineyards, Cant. 1:14. This God gave to Israel as a pattern and pledge of the whole land of Canaan; so "God will by his gospel give to all believers such gifts, graces, and comforts in this life, as shall be a taste of those more perfect good things of the kingdom of heaven, and shall give them as assured hope of a full possession of them in due time." So the learned Dr. Pocock expounds it; and, to the same purport, this whole context.

2. The great rejoicing with which they shall receive God's gracious returns towards them: *She shall sing there as in the days of her youth*. This plainly refers to that triumphant and prophetic song which Moses and the children of Israel sang at the *Red Sea*, Ex. 15:1. When they are delivered out of captivity they shall repeat that song, and to them it shall be a new song, because sung upon a new occasion, not inferior to the former. God had said (v. 11) that he would *cause all her mirth to cease*, but now he

would cause it to revive: She shall sing *as in the day that she came out of Egypt*. Note, When God repeats former mercies we must repeat former praises; we find the song of Moses sung in the New Testament, Rev. 15:3. This promise of Israel's singing has its accomplishment in the gospel of Christ, which furnishes us with abundant matter for joy and praise, and wherever it is received in its power enlarges the heart in joy and praise; and this is that land flowing with milk and honey which *the valley of Achor opens a door of hope to. We rejoice in tribulation.*

II. That, though they had been much addicted to the worship of Baal, they should now be perfectly weaned from it, should relinquish and abandon all appearances of idolatry and approaches towards it, and cleave to God only, and worship him as he appoints, v. 16, 17. Note, The surest pledge and token of God's favour to any people is his effectual parting between them and their beloved sins. The worship of Baal was the sin that did most easily beset the people of Israel; it was their own iniquity, the sin that had dominion over them; but now that idolatry shall be quite abolished, and there shall not be the least remains of it among them. 1. The idols of Baal shall not be mentioned, not any of the Baals that *in the days of Baalim* had made so great a noise with, *O Baal! hear us; O Baal! hear us*. The very *names of Baalim* shall be *taken out of their mouths*; they shall be so disused that they shall be quite forgotten, as if their names had never been known in Israel; they shall be so detested that people will not bear to mention them themselves, nor to hear others mention them, so that posterity shall scarcely know that ever there were such things. They shall be so ashamed of their former love to Baal that they shall do all they can to blot out the remembrance of it. They shall tie themselves up to the strictest literal meaning of that law against idolatry (Ex. 23:13), *Make no mention of the names of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth*, as David, Ps. 16:4. Thus the apostle expresses the abhorrence we ought to have of all fleshly lusts: *Let them not be once named among you*, Eph. 5:3. But how can such a change of the Ethiopian's skin be wrought? It is answered, The power of God can do it, and will. *I will take away the names of Baalim*; as Zec. 13:2, *I will cut off the names of the idols*. Note, God's grace in the heart will change the language by making that iniquity to be loathed which was beloved. Zep. 3:9, *I will turn to the people a pure language*. One of the rabbins says, This promise relates to the Gentiles, by the gospel of Christ, from the idolatries which they had been wedded to, 1 Th. 1:9. 2. The very word Baal shall be laid aside, even in its innocent signification. God says, *Thou shalt call me Ishi, and call me no more Baali*; both signify *my husband*, and both had been made use of concerning God. Isa. 54:5, *Thy Maker is thy husband, thy Baal* (so the word is), thy owner, patron, and protector. It is probable that many good people had, accordingly, made use of the word *Baali* in worshipping the God of Israel; when their wicked neighbours bowed the knee to Baal they gloried in this, that God was their Baal. "But," says God, "you shall call me so no more, because I will have the very names of Baalim taken away." Note, That which is very innocent in itself should, when it has been abused to idolatry, be abolished, and the very use of it taken away, that nothing may be done to keep idols in remembrance, much less to keep them in reputation. When calling God *Ishi* will do as well, and signify as much, as *Baali*, let that word be chosen rather, lest, by calling him Baali, others should be put in mind of their *quondam* Baals. Some think that there is another reason intimated why God would be called *Ishi* and not *Baali*; they both signify *my husband*, but *Ishi* is a compellation of love, and sweetness, and familiarity, *Baali* of reverence and subjection. *Ishi* is *vir meus—my man*; *Baali* is *dominus meus—my lord*. In gospel-times God has so revealed himself to us as to

encourage us to come boldly to the throne of his grace, and to use a holy humble freedom there; we ought to call God our Master, for so he is, but we are more taught to call him our Father. *Ishi is a man the Lord* (Gen. 4:1), and intimates that in gospel-times the church's husband shall be *the man Christ Jesus*, made like unto his brethren, and therefore they shall call him *Ishi*, not *Baali*.

III. That though they had been in continual troubles, as if the whole creation had been at war with them, now they shall enjoy perfect peace and tranquillity, as if they were in a league of friendship with the whole creation (v. 18): *In that day*, when they have forsaken their idols, and put themselves under the divine protection, *I will make a covenant for them*. 1. They shall be protected from evil; nothing shall hurt them, nor do them any mischief. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat amnia—When God is at peace with us he makes every creature to be so too*. The inferior creatures shall do them no harm, as they had done when the *beasts of the field* ate up their vineyards (v. 12) and when *noisome beasts* were one of God's *sore judgments*, Eze. 14:15. The *fowl* and the *creeping things* are taken into this covenant; for they also, when God makes use of them as the instruments of his justice, may be come very hurtful, but they shall be no more so; nay, by virtue of this covenant, they shall be made serviceable to them and brought into their interests. Note, God has the command of the inferior creatures, and brings them into what covenant he pleases; he can make *the beasts of the field* to honour him (so he has promised, Isa. 43:20) and to contribute to his people's comfort. And, if the inferior creatures are thus laid under an engagement to serve us, it is our part of the covenant not to abuse them, but to serve God with them. Some think that this had its accomplishment in the miraculous power Christ gave his disciples to *take up serpents*, Mk. 16:17, 18. It agrees with the promises made particularly to Israel, in their return out of captivity (Eze. 34:25, *I will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land*), and the more general ones to all the saints. Job 5:22, 23, *The beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee*; and Ps. 91:13, *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder*. But this is not all; men are more in danger from one another than from the brute beast, and therefore it is further promised that God will *make wars to cease*, will disarm the enemy: *I will break the bow, and sword, and battle*. He can do it when he pleases (Ps. 44:9), and will do it for those whose *ways please him*, for he *makes even their enemies to be at peace with them*, Prov. 16:7. This agrees with the promise that in gospel-times *swords shall be beaten into plough-shares*, Isa. 2:4. 2. They shall be quiet from the fear of evil. God will not only keep them safe, but *make them to lie down safely*, as those that know themselves to be under the protection of Heaven, and therefore are not afraid of the powers of hell.

IV. That, though God had given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms, yet, upon their repentance, he would again take them into covenant with himself, into a marriage-covenant, v. 19, 20. God's making a covenant for them with the inferior creatures was a great favour; but it was nothing to this, that he took them into covenant with himself and engaged himself to do them good. Observe,

1. The nature of this covenant; it is a *marriage-covenant*, founded in choice and love, and founding the nearest relation: *I will betroth thee unto me*; and again, and a third time, *I will betroth thee*. Note, All that are sincerely devoted to God are betrothed to him; God gives them the most sacred and inviolable security imaginable that he will love them, protect them, and provide for them, that he will do the part of a husband to them, and that he will incline their hearts to join themselves to him and will

graciously accept of them in so doing. Believing souls are espoused to Christ, 2 Co. 11:2. The gospel-church is *the bride, the Lamb's wife*; and they would never come into that relation to him if he did not by the power of his grace betroth them to himself. The separation begins on our side; we alienate ourselves from God. The coalition begins on his side; he betroths us to himself.

2. The duration of this covenant: *"I will betroth thee for ever.* The covenant itself shall be inviolable; God will not break it on his part, and you shall not on yours; and the blessings of it shall be everlasting." One of the Jewish rabbins says, This is a promise that *she shall attain to the life of the world to come, which is absolute eternity or perpetuity.*

3. The manner in which this covenant shall be made. (1.) *In righteousness and judgment,* that is, God will deal sincerely and uprightly in covenant with them; they have broken covenant, and God is righteous. "But," says God, "I will renew the covenant *in righteousness.*" The matter shall be so ordered that God may receive even these backsliding children into his family again, without any reflection upon his justice, nay, his justice being satisfied by the Mediator of this covenant very much to the honour of it. But what reason can there be why God should take a people into covenant with him that had so often dealt treacherously? Will it not reflect upon his wisdom? "No," says God; "I will do it *in judgment,* not rashly, but upon due consideration; let me alone to give a reason for it and to justify my own conduct." (2.) *In lovingkindness and in mercies.* God will deal tenderly and graciously in covenanting with them; and will be not only as good as his word, but better; and, as he will be just in keeping covenant with them, so he will be merciful in keeping them in the covenant. They are subject to many infirmities, and, if he be extreme to mark what they do amiss, they will soon lose the benefit of the covenant. He therefore promises that it shall be a covenant of grace, made in a compassionate consideration of their infirmities, so that every transgression in the covenant shall not throw them out of covenant; he will *gather with everlasting lovingkindness.* (3.) *In faithfulness.* Every article of the covenant shall be punctually performed. *Faithful is he that has called them, who also will do it; he cannot deny himself.*

4. The means by which they shall be kept tight and faithful to the covenant on their part: *Thou shalt know the Lord.* This is not only a promise that God will reveal himself to them more fully and clearly than ever, but that he will give them *a heart to know him*; they shall know more of him, and shall know him in another manner than ever yet. The ground of their apostasy was their not knowing God to be their benefactor (v. 8); therefore, to prevent the like, they shall all be *taught of God* to know him. Note, God keeps up his interest in men's souls by giving them a good understanding and a right knowledge of things, Heb. 8:11.

V. That, though the heavens had been to them as brass, and the earth as iron, now the heavens shall yield their dews, and by that means the earth its fruits, v. 21, 22. God having betrothed the gospel-church and in it all believers to himself, how shall he not with himself and with his Son freely *give them all things*, all things pertaining both to life and godliness, all things they need or can desire? *All is theirs*, for they are *Christ's*, betrothed to him; and with the righteousness of the kingdom of God, which they *seek first*, all *other things* shall be *added unto them.* And yet this promise of *corn and wine* is to be taken also in a spiritual sense (so the learned Dr. Pocock thinks): it is an effusion of those blessings and graces which relate to the soul that is here promised under the metaphor of temporal blessings, the dew of heaven, as well as the fatness of the earth, and that put

first, as in the blessing of Jacob, Gen. 27:28. God had threatened (v. 9) that he would *take away the corn and the wine*; but now he promises to restore them, and that in the common course and order of nature. While they lay under the judgment of famine they called to the earth for *corn and wine* for the support of themselves and their families. Very gladly would the earth have supplied them, but she cannot give unless she receive, cannot produce *corn and wine* unless she be *enriched with the river of God* (Ps. 65:9); and therefore she calls to the heavens for rain, the former and latter rain in their season, grapes for it, and by her melancholy aspect when rain is denied pleads for it. "But," say the heavens, "we have no rain to give unless he who has the key of the clouds unlock them, and open these bottles; so that, *if the Lord do not help you*, we cannot." But, when God takes them into covenant with himself, then the wheel of nature shall be set a-going again in favour of them, and the streams of mercy shall flow in the usual channel: Then *I will hear, saith the Lord; I will receive your prayers* (so the Chaldee interprets the first *hearing*); God will graciously take notice of their addresses to him. And then *I will hear the heavens*; I will *answer* them (so it may be read); and then they shall *hear and answer the earth*, and pour down seasonable rain upon it; and then the *earth* shall *hear the corn and vines*, and supply them with moisture, and *they shall hear Jezreel*, and be nourishment and refreshment for those that inhabit Jezreel. See here the coherence of second causes with one another, as links in a chain, and the necessary dependence they all have upon God, the first Cause. Note, We must expect all our comforts from God in the usual method and by the appointed means; and, when we are at any time disappointed in them, we must look up to God, *above the hills and the mountains*, Ps. 121:1, 2. See how ready the creatures are to serve the people of God, how desirous of the honour: the corn cries to the earth, the earth to the heavens, the heavens to God, and all that they may supply them. And see how ready God is to give relief: *I will hear, saith the Lord, yea, I will hear*. And, if God will hear the cry of the heavens for his people, much more will he hear the intercession of his Son for them, who is made *higher than the heavens*. See what a peculiar delight those that are in covenant with God may take in their creature-comforts, as seeing them all come to them from the hand of God; they can trace up all the streams to the fountain, and taste covenant-love in common mercies, which makes them doubly sweet.

VI. That whereas they were now dispersed, not only, as Simeon and Levi, divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel, but divided and scattered all the world over, God will turn this curse, as he did that, into a blessing: "I will not only water the earth for her, but will *sow her unto me in the earth*; her dispersion shall be not like that of the chaff in the floor, which *the wind drives away*, but like that of the seed in the field, in order to its greater increase; wherever they are scattered they shall *take root downward and bear fruit upward*. *The good seed are the children of the kingdom. I will sow her unto me*." This alludes to the name of Jezreel, which signifies *sown of God, or for God*; as she was scattered of him (which is one signification of the words) so she shall be sown of him; and to what he sows he will give the increase. When in all parts of the world Christianity got footing, and every where there were professors of it, then this promise was fulfilled, *I will sow her unto me in the earth*. Note, The greatest blessing of this earth is that God has a church in it, and from that arises all the tribute of glory which he has out of it; it is what he has sown to himself, and what he will therefore secure to himself.

VII. That, whereas they had been *Lo-ammi—not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah—not finding mercy* with God, now they shall be

restored to his favour and taken again into covenant with him (v. 23): They *had not obtained mercy*, but seemed to be abandoned; they were *not my people*, not distinguished, not dealt with, as my people, but left to lie in common with the nations. This was the case with the rejected Jews; and the same, or more deplorable, was that of the Gentile world (to whom the apostle applies this, Rom. 9:24, 25), that had *no hope*, and was *without God in the world*; but when great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were, upon their believing in Christ, incorporated into a Christian church, then, 1. God had mercy on those who *had not obtained mercy*. Those found favour with God, and became the children of his love, who had been long out of favour and the children of his wrath, and, if infinite mercy had not interposed, would have been for ever so. Note, God's mercy must not be despaired of any where on this side hell. 2. He took those into a covenant-relation to himself who had been strangers and foreigners. He says to them, "*Thou art my people*, whom I will own and bless, protect and provide for;" and they shall say, "*Thou art my God*, whom I will serve and worship, and to whose honour I will be entirely and for ever devoted." Note, (1.) The sum total of the happiness of believers is the mutual relation that is between them and God, that he is theirs and they are his; this is the crown of all the promises. (2.) This relation is founded in free grace. We have not chosen him, but he has chosen us. He first says, They are my people, and makes them willing to be so in the day of his power, and then they avouch him to be theirs. (3.) As we need desire no more to make us happy than to be the people of God, so we need desire no more to make us easy and cheerful than to have him to assure us that we are so, to say unto us, by his Spirit witnessing with ours, *Thou art my people*. (4.) Those that have accepted the Lord for their God must avouch him to be so, must go to him in prayer and tell him so, *Thou art my God*, and must be ready to make profession before men. (5.) It adds to the comfort of our covenant with God that in it there is a communion of saints, who, though they *are many*, yet here are one. It is not, I will *say to them*, *You are my people*, but, *Thou art*; for he looks upon them as all *one in Christ*, and, as such in him, he speaks to them and covenants with them; and they also do not say, Thou art *our God*, for they look upon themselves as one body, and desire with one mind and one mouth to glorify him, and therefore say, *Thou art my God*. Or it intimates that such a covenant as God made of old with his people Israel, in general, now under the gospel he makes with particular believers, and says to *each of them*, even the meanest, with as much pleasure as he did of old to the *thousands of Israel*, *Thou art my people*, and invites and encourages each of them to say, *Thou art my God*, and to triumph therein, as Moses and all Israel did. Ex. 15:2, He is *my God*, and my *father's God*.

Chapter 3

God is still by the prophet inculcating the same thing upon this careless people, and much in the same manner as before, by a type or sign, that of the dealings of a husband with an adulterous wife. In this chapter we have, I. The bad character which the people of Israel now had; they were, as is said of the Athenians (Acts 17:16), "wholly given to idolatry," (v. 1). II. The low condition which they should be reduced to by their captivity, and the other instances of God's controversy with them (v. 2-4). III. The blessed reformation that should at length be wrought upon them in the latter days (v. 5).

Verses 1-5

Some think that this chapter refers to Judah, the two tribes, as the adulteress the prophet married (ch. 1:3) represented the *ten tribes*; for this was not to be divorced, as the ten tribes were, but to be left desolate for a long time, and then to return, as the two tribes did. But these are called the *children of Israel*, which was the ten tribes, and therefore it is more probable that of them this parable, as well as that before, is to be understood. *Go*, and repeat it, says God to the prophet; *Go yet again*. Note, For the conviction and reduction of sinners it is necessary that precept be upon precept, and line upon line. If they will not believe one sign, try another, Ex. 4:8, 9. Now,

I. In this parable we may observe,

1. God's goodness and Israel's badness strangely serving for a foil to each other, v. 1. Israel is as a woman *beloved of her friend*, either of him that has married her or of him that only courts her, and *yet an adulteress*; such is the case between God and Israel. We say of those whose affection is mutual that there is *no love lost* between them; but here we find a great deal of the love even of God himself lost and thrown away upon an unworthy ungrateful people. The God of Israel retains a very great love for the *children of Israel*, and yet they are an evil and adulterous generation. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth!* (1.) That God's goodness has not put an end to their badness; the Lord loves them, has a kindness for them, and is continually showing kindness to them; they know it, they cannot but own it, that he has been as a friend and Father to them; and yet they *look to other gods*, gods that they can see, and to the love of which they are drawn by the eye; they look to them with an eye of adoration (they offer up all their services to them) and with an eye of dependence (they expect all their comforts from them); if they were restrained from bowing the knee to idols, yet they gave them an amorous glance, and had *eyes full of that spiritual adultery*. And they loved *flagons of wine*; they joined with idolaters because they lived merrily and drank hard; they had a kindness for *other gods* for the sake of the plenty of good wine with which they had been sometimes treated in their temples. Idolatry and sensuality commonly go together; those that make a god of their belly, as drunkards do, will easily be brought to make a god of any thing else. God's priests were to *drink no wine* when they went in to minister, and his Nazarites none at all. But the worshippers of other gods *drank wine in bowls*; nay, no less than *flagons of wine* would content them. (2.) That their badness had not stopped the current of his favours to them. This is a wonder of mercy indeed, that she is thus *beloved of her friend, though an adulteress*; such is the *love of the Lord towards the children of Israel*. "Go," says God, *"love such a woman; see if thou canst find in thy heart to do it. No, thou canst not, the breast of no man would admit such*

a love; yet such is my *love to the children of Israel*; it is love to the loveless, to the unlovely, to those that have a thousand times forfeited it." Note, In God's goodwill to poor sinners his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, and his love is more condescending and compassionate than ours is, or can be; in this, as much as any thing, he is *God, and not man*, Hos. 11:9.

2. The method found for the bringing of a God so very good and a people so very bad together again; this is the thing aimed at, and what God aims at he will accomplish. To our great surprise, we find a breach thus wide as the sea effectually healed; miracles cease not so long as divine mercy does not cease. Observe here, (1.) The course God takes to humble them and make them know themselves (v. 2): *I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a homer and a half of barley*, that is, I courted her to be reconciled, to leave her ill courses, and return to her first husband, as ch. 2:14. I *allured* her, and *spoke comfortably* to her; as the *Levite who went after* his concubine that had *played the harlot* from him, and had run away with another man, *spoke friendly to her*, Jdg. 19:3. But here the present which the prophet brought her for the purchasing of her favour is observed to be a very small one; but it was all that was intended for her separate maintenance, and in it she is reduced to a short allowance, and, to punish her for her pride, is made to look very mean. When Samson went to be reconciled to his wife that had disobliged him he *visited her with a kid* (Jdg. 15:1), which was a genteel entertainment. But the prophet here visited his wife with *fifteen pieces of silver*, a small sum, which yet she must be content to live upon a great while, so long as till her husband thought fit to restore her to her first estate. She shall also have *a homer and a half of barley*, for bread-corn, and that is all she must expect till she be sufficiently humbled, and, by a competent time of trial, satisfactory proof given that she is indeed reformed. Let her be made sensible that it is not for her own merit that her husband makes court to her; it is but a lame price that he values her at. The price of a servant was thirty shekels, Ex. 21:32. This was but half so much; yet let her know that it is more than she is worth. God had given Egypt for Israel's ransom once, so precious were they then in his sight, and so honourable, Isa. 43:3, 4. But now that they have gone a whoring from him he will give but fifteen pieces of silver for them, so much have they lost in their value by their iniquity. Note, Those whom God designs honour and comfort for he first makes sensible of their own worthlessness, and brings them to acknowledge, with the prodigal, *I am no more worthy to be called thy son*. Time was when Israel was *fed with the finest of the wheat*, but they grew wanton, *and loved flagons of wine*, and therefore, in order to the humbling and reducing of them, they must be brought in the land of their captivity to eat barley-bread, and be thankful they can get it, and to eat that too by weight and measure, whereas they did not use to be stinted. Note, Poverty and disgrace sometimes prove a happy means of making great sinners true penitents. (2.) The new terms upon which God is willing to come with them (v. 3): *Thou shalt abide for me many days, and shalt not be for another, so will I be for thee*. He might justly have given them a bill of divorce, and have resolved to have no more to do with them; but he is willing to show them kindness, and that the matter should be compromised; he deals not with them in strict justice, according to the rigour of the law, but according to the multitude of his mercies; and it represents God's gracious dealings with the apostate race of mankind, that had gone a whoring from him; he bought them indeed with an inestimable price, not for their honour, but for the honour of his own justice; and now this is the proposal he makes to them, the covenant of grace he is willing to enter into with them—they must

be to him a people, and he will be to them a God, the same with the proposal here made to Israel. [1.] They must take to themselves the shame of their apostasy from him, must submit to, and accept of, the punishment of their iniquity: *Thou shalt abide for me many days in solitude and silence*, as a widow that is *desolate* and in sorrow; they must *lay aside their ornaments*, and wait with patience and submission to know what God will do with them, and whether he will please to admit such unworthy wretches into his favour again, as they did Ex. 33:4, 5. *Their father*, their husband, has *spit in their face* (as God said concerning Miriam), has put them under the marks of his displeasure, and therefore, like her, they must be *ashamed seven days*, and be *shut out of the camp* (Num. 12:14), till *their uncircumcised hearts be humbled*, Lev. 26:41. Let them *sit alone* and *keep silence, waiting for the salvation of the Lord*, and in the mean time let them *bear the yoke*, Lam. 3:26–28. Let them not expect that God should speedily return in mercy to them; no, let them want it, let them wait for it *many days*, during all the days of their captivity, and reckon it a miracle of mercy, and well worth waiting for, if it come at last. Note, Those whom God designs mercy for he will first bring to abase themselves and to put a high value upon his favours. [2.] They must never return to folly again; that is the condition upon which God will *speak peace to his people and to his saints* (Ps. 85:8), and no other. *"Thou shalt not play the harlot, shalt not worship idols in the land of thy captivity, while thou art there set apart for the uncleanness."* Note, It is not enough to take shame to ourselves for the sins we have committed, and to justify God in correcting us for them, but we must resolve, in the strength of God's grace, that we will not offend any more, that we will not again go a whoring from God, after the world and the flesh. Blessed be God, though it is the law of the covenant, it is not the condition of it that we shall never in any thing do amiss: "But thou shalt not *play the harlot*; thou shalt not serve other gods, *shalt not be for another man*." In the land of their captivity they would be courted to worship the idols of the country; that would be a trial for them, a *long* trial, many days: "But if thou keep thy ground, and hold fast thy integrity, if, when *all this comes upon thee*, thou dost not *stretch out thy hand to a strange god*, thou wilt be qualified for the returns of God's favour." Note, It is a certain sign that our afflictions are means of much good to us, and earnest of more, when we are kept by the grace of God from being overcome by the temptations of an afflicted state. [3.] Upon these terms their Maker will again be their husband: *So will I also be for thee*. This is the covenant between God and returning sinners, that, if they will be for him to serve him, he will be for them to save them. Let them renounce and abjure all rivals with God for the throne in the heart, and devote themselves entirely to him and him only, and he will be to them a God all-sufficient. If we be faithful and constant to God in a way of duty, and will never leave nor forsake him, he will be so to us in a way of mercy, and will never leave nor forsake us. And a fairer proposal could not be made.

II. In the last two verses we have the interpretation of the parable and the application of it to Israel.

1. They must long *sit like a widow*, stripped of all their joys and honours, Lam. 4:1, 2. *They shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince*; and a nation in this condition may well be called *a widow*. They want the blessing, (1.) Of civil government: They shall abide *without a king, and without a prince*, of their own. There were kings and princes over them to oppress them and rule them with rigour, but they had no king nor prince to protect them, to fight their battles for them, to administer justice to them, and to take care of their common safety and welfare. Note, Magistracy is a very great blessing to a

people, and it is a sad and sore judgment to want it. (2.) Of public worship: *They shall abide without a sacrifice, and without an image* (or a *statue*, or *pillar*; the word is used concerning the pillars Jacob erected, Gen. 28:18; 31:45; 35:20), and *without an ephod and teraphim*. The *teraphim* being here closely joined to the *ephod*, some thing the *urim* and *thummim* were meant by it in the breast-plate of the high priest. The meaning is that in their captivity they should not only have no face of a nation upon them, but no face of a church; they should not have (as a learned expositor speaks) liberty of any public profession or exercise of religion, either true or false, according to their choice. They shall have *no sacrifice or altar* (so the Septuagint), and therefore no sacrifice because no altar. They shall have *no ephod*, nor *teraphim*, no legal priesthood, no means of knowing God's mind, no oracle to consult in doubtful cases, but shall be all in the dark. Note, The case of those is very melancholy that are deprived of all opportunities to worship God in public. This was the case of the Jews in their captivity; and it is so far the case of the scattered Jews at this day that, though they have their synagogues, they have no temple-service. Desolate indeed is their condition that are shut out from communion with God, that have no opportunity of directing their addresses to God by sacrifice and altar, and of receiving instruction from him by ephod and teraphim.

2. They shall at length be received again as a wife (v. 5): *Afterwards*, in process of time, when they have gone through this discipline, *they shall return*, that is, they shall repent of their idolatries and forsake them, they shall apply themselves to God and adhere to him, and herein they shall be accepted of him. Two things are here promised as instances of their return, and steps towards their acceptance with God in their return:—(1.) The enquiries they shall make after God: *They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king*. Note, Those that would find God, and find favour with him, must seek him, must ask after him, covet acquaintance with him, desire to be reconciled to him, set their love on him, and labour in this that they may be accepted of him. Their seeking him implies that they had lost him, that they were lamenting their loss, and that they were solicitous to retrieve what they had lost. They shall seek him as *their God*; for *should not a people seek unto their God?* And they shall seek *David their King*, who can be no other than the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the *root and offspring of David*, whom David himself called *Lord* (Ps. 110:1), and to whom God gave the *throne of his father David*, Lu. 1:32. The Chaldee reads it, *They shall seek the service of the Lord their God, and shall obey Messiah, the Son of David their king*. Compare this with Jer. 30:9; Eze. 34:23; 37:25. Note, Those that would seek the Lord so as to find him must apply to Jesus Christ, and must seek to him as their King, and become his willing people, and take an oath of fealty and allegiance to him. (2.) The reverence they shall have of God: *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness*. Some by his *goodness* here understand the temple, towards which they shall look, in worshipping God. The Jews say, There were three things which Israel cast off in the days of Rehoboam—the *kingdom of heaven*, the *family of David*, and the *house of the sanctuary*; and it will never be well with them till they return, and seek them all three, which is here promised. They shall seek the kingdom of heaven in *the Lord their God*, the royal family in *David their King*, and the temple in *the goodness of the Lord*. Others by his *goodness* understand Christ, the same *with David their King*. But it is rather to be taken for that attribute of God which he showed as his glory, and by which he proclaimed his name. Note, It is not only the Lord and his greatness that we are to fear, but the Lord and his goodness, not only his majesty, but his mercy. They shall *flee for fear to the Lord and his goodness* (so

some take it), shall flee to it as their city of refuge. We must *fear God's goodness*, that is, we must admire it, and stand amazed at it, must adore it, and *worship* as Moses did at the proclaiming of this name, Ex. 34:6. We must be afraid of offending his goodness, of making any ungrateful returns for it, and so forfeiting it. *There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared*, Ps. 130:4. We must *rejoice with trembling* in the goodness of God, must not be *high-minded, but fear*. Now this promise had its accomplishment when by the gospel of Christ great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were brought home to God, and incorporated in the New-Testament church, served God in Christ, with a filial fear of divine grace, and were accepted of God as his Israel. And some think it is to be yet further accomplished in the conversion of those Jews to the faith of Christ who shall remain in unbelief, when they shall seek their Messiah as *David their King*, and by him *all Israel shall be saved*, when the *fulness of the Gentiles is brought in*. Time was when they sought him to put him to death, saying, *We have no king but Caesar*; but the day is coming when they shall seek him to *appoint him their head*, and to lay their necks under his yoke. He that has here promised that they shall do it will enable them to do it, and bring about this great work in his own way and time, *in the latter days of the last times*, the times of the Messiah: but, alas! who shall live when God does this? How far we are to expect a general conversion of that nation I cannot say; but I am sure we ought to pray that the Jews may be converted

Chapter 4

Prophets were sent to be reprovers, to tell people of their faults, and to warn them of the judgments of God, to which by sin they exposed themselves; so the prophet is employed in this and the following chapters. He is here, as counsel for the King of kings, opening an indictment against the people of Israel, and labouring to convince them of sin, and of their misery and danger because of sin, that he might prevail with them to repent and reform. I. He shows them what were the grounds of God's controversy with them, a general prevalency of vice and profaneness (v. 1, 2), ignorance and forgetfulness of God (v. 6, 7), the worldly-mindedness of the priests (v. 8), drunkenness and uncleanness (v. 11), using divination and witchcraft (v. 12), offering sacrifice in the high places (v. 13), whoredoms (v. 14, 18), and bribery among magistrates (v. 18). II. He shows them what would be the consequences of God's controversy. God would punish them for these things (v. 9). The whole land should be laid waste (v. 3), all sorts of people cut off (v. 5), their honour lost (v. 7), their creature-comforts unsatisfying (v. 10), and themselves made ashamed (v. 19). And, which is several times mentioned here as the sorest judgment of all, they should be let alone in their sins (v. 17), they shall not reprove one another (v. 4), God will not punish them (v. 14), nay, he will let them prosper (v. 16). III. He gives warning to Judah not to tread in the steps of Israel, because they saw their steps went down to hell (v. 15).

Verses 1-5

Here is, I. The court set, and both attendance and attention demanded: "*Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for to you is the word of this conviction sent, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear.*" Whom may God expect to give him a fair hearing, and take from him a fair warning, but the children of Israel, his own professing people? Yea, they will be ready enough to hear when God speaks comfortably to them; but are they willing to hear when he has a controversy with them? Yes, they must hear him when he pleads against them, when he has something to lay to their charge: *The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land*, of this land, of this holy land. Note, Sin is the great mischief-maker; it sows discord between God and Israel. God sees sin in his own people, and a good action he has against them for it. Some more particular actions lie against his own people, which do not lie against other sinners. He has a controversy with them for breaking covenant with him, for bringing a reproach upon him, and for an ungrateful return to him for his favours. God's controversy will be pleaded, pleaded by the judgments of his mouth before they are pleaded by the judgments of his hand, that he may be justified in all he does and may make it appear that he desires not the death of sinners; and God's pleadings ought to be attended to, for, sooner or later, they shall have a hearing.

II. The indictment read, by which the whole nation stands charged with crimes of a heinous nature, by which God is highly provoked. 1. They are charged with national omissions of the most important duties: *There is no truth nor mercy, neither justice nor charity, these most weighty matters of the law*, as our Saviour accounts them (Mt. 23:23), *judgment, mercy, and faith*. The generality of the people seemed to have no sense at all of the thing called honesty; they made no conscience of what they said and did, though ever so contrary to the truth and injurious to their neighbour. Much less had they any sense of mercy,

or any obligation they were under to pity and help the poor. And it is not strange that there is no truth and mercy when there is *no knowledge of God in the land*. What good can be expected where there is no knowledge of God? It was the privilege of that land that *in Israel God was made known*, and his *name was great*, which was an aggravation of their sin, that they did not *know him*, Ps. 76:1. 2. Hence follows national commissions of the most enormous sins against both the first and second table, for they had no regard at all to either. *Swearing*, and *lying*, and *killing*, and *stealing*, and *committing adultery*, against the third, ninth, sixth, eighth, and seventh commandments, were to be found in all corners of the land, and among all orders and degrees of men among them, v. 2. The corruption was universal; what good people there were among them were either lost or hid, or they hid themselves. By these they *break out*, that is, they transgress all bounds of reason and conscience, and the divine law; *they have exceeded* (Job 36:9); they have been *overmuch wicked* (Eccl. 7:17); they suffer their corruptions to break out; they themselves break over, and break through, all that stands in their way and would stop them in their sinful career, as water overflows the banks. Note, Sin is a violent thing and its power exorbitant; when men's hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* (Eccl. 8:11) *what will be restrained from them?* Gen. 11:6. When they break out thus *blood touches blood*, that is, abundance of murders are committed in all parts of the country, and, as it were, in a constant series and succession. *Caedes aliae aliis sunt contiguae—Murders touch murders*; a stream of blood runs down among them, even royal blood. It was about this time that there was so much blood shed in grasping at the crown; Shallum slew Zechariah, and Menahem slew Shallum, Pekah slew Pekahiah, and Hoshea slew Pekah; and the like bloody work, it is likely, there was among other contenders, so that the land was *polluted with blood* (Ps. 106:38); *it was filled with blood from one end to the other*, 2 Ki. 21:16.

III. Sentence passed upon this guilty and polluted land, v. 3. It shall be utterly destroyed and laid waste. The whole land is infected with sin, and therefore *the whole land shall mourn* under God's sore judgments, shall sit in mourning, being stripped of all its wealth and beauty. As the valleys are said to *shout for joy, and sing*, when there are plenty and peace, so here they are said to *mourn* when by war and famine they are made desolate. The *whole land shall be brimstone, and salt, and burning*, was as threatened in the law, Deu. 29:33. They had broken all God's commandments, and now God threatens to take away all their comforts. The *land mourns* when there is neither *grass for the cattle nor herbs for the service of man*; and then *every one that dwells therein shall languish* for want of nice food to support a wasting life, and fret for want of the usual dainties for delight. The *beasts of the field* will languish, Jer. 14:5, 6. Nay, the destruction of the fruits of the earth shall be so great that there shall not be picking for the *fowls of the air*, to keep them alive; they shall suffer with man, and their dying, or growing lean, will be a punishment to those who used to have their tables replenished with wild-fowl. Nay, *the fishes of the sea shall be taken away, or gathered together*, that they may go away in shoals to some other coast, and then the fishing trade will be worth nothing. This desolation shall be in that respect more general than that by Noah's flood, for that did not affect the fishes of the sea, but this shall. It was part of one of the plagues of Egypt that he *slew their fish* (Ps. 105:29); when the waters are dried the *fish die*, Isa. 50:2; Zep. 1:2, 3. Note, When man becomes disobedient to God, it is just that the inferior creatures should be made unserviceable to man. Oh what reason have we to admire God's patience and mercy to our land, that though there is in it so much swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and adultery, yet there is plenty of flesh, and fish, and fowl, on our tables!

IV. An order of court that no pains should be taken with the condemned criminal to bring him to repentance, with the reason for that order. Observe, 1. The order itself (v. 4): *Yet let no man strive nor reprove another*; let no means be used to reduce and reclaim them; let their physicians give them up as desperate and past cure. It intimates that as long as there is any hope we ought to reprove sinners for their sins; it is a duty we owe to one another to give and to take reproofs; it was one of the laws of Moses (Lev. 19:17), *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour*; it is an instance of brotherly love. Sometimes there is need to rebuke sharply, not only to reprove, but to strive, so loth are men to part with their sins. But it is a sign that persons and people are abandoned to ruin when God says, *Let them not be reprov'd*. Yet this is to be understood as God's commands sometimes to the prophets not to *pray for them*, notwithstanding which they did pray for them; but the meaning is, They are so hardened in sin, and so ripened for ruin, that it will be to little purpose either to deal with them or to deal with God for them. Note, It bodes ill to a people when reprovers are silenced, and when those who should witness against the sins of the times, retire into a corner, and give up the cause. See 2 Chr. 25:16. 2. The reasons of this order. Let them not reprove one another; for, (1.) They are determin'd to *go on in sin*, and no reproofs will cure them of that: *Thy people are as those that strive with the priests*; they have grown so very impudent in sin, so very insolent, and impatient of reproof, that they will fly in the face even of a priest himself if he should but give them the least check, without any regard to his character and office; and how then can it be thought that they should take a reproof from a private person? Note, Those sinners have their hearts wickedly hardened who quarrel with their ministers for dealing faithfully with them; and those who rebel against ministerial reproof, which is an ordinance of God for their reformation, have forfeited the benefit of brotherly reproof too. Perhaps this may refer to the late wickedness of Joash king of Judah, and his people, who stoned Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, for delivering them a message from God, 2 Chr. 24:21. He was a *priest*; with him they *strove* when he was officiating *between the temple and the altar*; and Dr. Lightfoot thinks the prophet had an eye to his case when he spoke (v. 2) of *blood touching blood*; the blood of the *sacrificer was mingled with the blood of the sacrifice*, That, says he, was the *apex of their wickedness*—thence their ruin was to be dated (Mt. 23:35), as this is of *their incorrigibleness*, that they are as those who *strive with the priest*, therefore let no man reprove them; for, (2.) God also is determin'd to *proceed in their ruin* (v. 5): *"Therefore, because thou wilt take no reproof, no advice, thou shalt fall, and it is in vain for any to think of preventing it, for the decree has gone forth. Thou shalt stumble and fall in the day, and the prophet, the false prophet that flattered and seduced thee, shall fall with thee in the night; both thou and thy prophet shall fall night and day, shall be continually falling into one calamity or other; the darkness of the night shall not help to cover thee from trouble nor the light of the day help thee to flee from it."* The prophets are blind leaders and the people blind followers; and to the blind day and night are alike, so that whether it be day or night both shall *fall together into the ditch*. "Thou shalt fall *in the day*, when thy fall is least feared by thyself and thou art very *secure*; and *in the day*, when it will be seen and observed by others, and turn most to thy shame; and the prophet shall *fall in the night*, when to himself it will be most terrible." Note, The ruin of those who have helped to ruin others will, in a special manner, be intolerable. And did the children think that when they were in danger of falling their mother would help them? It shall be in vain to expect it, for *I will destroy thy mother*, Samaria, the mother-city, the whole *state*, or *kingdom*, which is as a mother to

every part. It shall all be *made silent*. Note, When all are involved in guilt nothing less can be expected than that all should be involved in ruin.

Verses 6-11

God is here proceeding in his controversy both with the priests and with the people. *The people* were as those *that strove with the priests* (v. 4) when they had priests that did their duty; but the generality of them lived in the neglect of their duty, and here is a word for those priests, and for the people that love to have it so, Jer. 5:31. And it is observable here how the punishment answers to the sin, and how, for the justifying of his own proceedings, God sets the one over-against the other.

I. The people *strove with the priests* that should have taught them the knowledge of God; justly therefore were they *destroyed for lack of knowledge*, v. 6. Note, Those that rebel against the light can expect no other than to perish in the dark. Or it is a charge upon the priests, who should have been still *teaching the people knowledge* (Eccl. 12:9), but they did not, or did it in such a manner that it was as if they had not done it at all, so there was *no knowledge of God in the land*; and because there was no vision, or none to any purpose, the people *perished*, Prov. 29:18. Note, Ignorance is so far from being the mother of devotion that it is the mother of destruction; lack of knowledge is ruining to any person or people. They are *my people* that are thus *destroyed*; their relation to God as his people aggravates both their sin in not taking pains to get the knowledge of that God whose command they were under and with whom they were taken into covenant, and likewise the sin of those who should have taught them; God set his children to school to them, and they never minded them nor took any pains with them.

II. Both priests and people rejected knowledge; and justly therefore will God *reject them*. The reason why the people did not learn, and the priests did not teach, was not because they had not the light, but because they hated it—not because they had not ways of coming to the knowledge of God and of communicating it, but because they had no heart to it; they *rejected* it. They *desired not the knowledge of God's ways*, but put it from them, and shut their eyes against the light; and therefore *"I will also reject thee; I will refuse to take cognizance of thee and to own thee; you will not know me, but bid me depart; I will therefore say, Depart from me, I know you not. Thou shalt be no priest to me."* 1. The priests shall be no longer admitted to the privileges, or employed in the services, of the priesthood, nor shall they ever be received again, as we find, Eze. 44:13. Note, Ministers that reject knowledge, that are grossly ignorant and scandalous, ought not to be owned as ministers; but that which they *seem to have* should be *taken away*, Lu. 8:18. 2. The people shall be no longer as they have been, a *kingdom of priests*, a royal priesthood, Ex. 19:6. God's people, by rejecting knowledge, forfeit their honour and profane their own crown.

III. They *forgot the law of God*, neither desired nor endeavoured to retain it in mind, nor to transmit the remembrance of it to their posterity, and therefore justly will God *forget* them and *their children*, the people's children; they did not educate them, as they ought to have done, in the knowledge of God and their duty to him, and therefore God will disown them, as not in covenant with him. Note, If parents do not teach their children, when they are young, to *remember their Creator*, they cannot expect that their Creator should remember them. Or it may be meant of the priests' children; they shall not succeed them in the priests' office, but shall be reduced to poverty, as is threatened against Eli's house, 1 Sa. 2:20.

IV. They dishonoured God with that which was their honour, and justly therefore will God strip them of it, v. 7. It was their

honour that they were increased in number, wealth, power, and dignity. The beginning of their nation was small, but in process of time it *greatly increased*, and grew very considerable; the family of the priests increased wonderfully. But, *as they were increased, so they sinned* against God. The more populous the nation grew, the more sin was committed and the more profane they were; their wealth, honour, and power, did but make them the more daring in sin. Therefore, says God, *will I change their glory into shame*. Are their numbers their glory? God will diminish them and make them few. Is their wealth their glory? God will impoverish them and bring them low; so that they shall themselves be ashamed of that which they gloried in. Their priests shall be made *contemptible and base*, Mal. 2:9. Note, That which is our honour, if we dishonour God with it, will sooner or later be turned into shame to us: for *those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed*, 1 Sa. 2:30.

V. The priests ate up the sin of God's people, and therefore *they shall eat and not have enough*. 1. They abused the maintenance that was allowed to the priests, to the priests of the house of Aaron, by the law of God, and to the mock-priests of the calves by their constitution (v. 8): *They eat up the sin of my people*, that is, their sin-offerings. If it be meant of the priests of the calves, it intimates their seizing that which they had no right to; they usurped the revenues of the priests, though they were no priests. If it be meant of those who were legal priests, it intimates their greediness of the profits and perquisites of their office, when they took no care at all to do the duty of it. They feasted upon their part of the offerings of the Lord, but forgot the work for which they were so well paid. They *set their heart* upon the people's *iniquities*; they *lifted up their soul* to them, that is, they were glad then people did commit iniquity, that they might be obliged to bring an offering to make atonement for it, which they should have their share of; the more sins the more sacrifices, and therefore they cared not how much sin people were guilty of. Instead of warning the people against sin, from the consideration of the sacrifices, which showed them what an offence sin was to God, since it needed such an expiation, they emboldened and encouraged the people to sin, since an atonement might be made at so small an expense. Thus they glutted themselves upon the sins of the people, and helped to keep up that which they should have beaten down. Note, It is a very wicked thing to be well pleased with the sins of others because, in some way or other, they may turn to our advantage. 2. God will therefore deny them his blessing upon their maintenance (v. 10): *They shall eat and not have enough*. Though they have great plenty by the abundance of offerings that are brought in, yet they shall have no satisfaction in it. Either their food shall yield no good nourishment or their greedy appetites shall not be satisfied with it. Note, What is unlawfully gained cannot be comfortably used; no, nor that which is inordinately coveted; it is just that the desires which are insatiable should always be unsatisfied, and that those should never have enough who never know when they have enough. See Mic. 6:14; Hag. 1:6.

VI. The more they increased the more they sinned (v. 7), and therefore though they *commit whoredom*, though they take the most wicked methods to multiply their people, yet *they shall not increase*. Though they have many wives and concubines, as Solomon had, yet they shall not have their families built up thereby in a numerous progeny, any more than he had. Note, Those that hope any way to increase by unlawful means will be disappointed. And therefore God will thus blast all their projects *because they have left off to take heed to the Lord*; time was when they had some regard to God, and to his authority over them and interest in them, but they have *left it off*; they take no heed to his word nor to his providences; they do not eye him in

either. They *forsake him, so as not to take heed to him*; they have apostatized to such a degree that they have no manner of regard to God, but are perfectly *without God in the world*. Note, Those that leave off to take heed to the Lord leave off all good, and can expect no other than that all good should leave them.

VII. The people and the priests did harden one another in sin; and therefore justly shall they be sharers in the punishment (v. 9): *There shall be, like people, like priest*. So they were in character; people and priest were both alike ignorant and profane, regardless of God and their duty, and addicted to idolatry: and so they shall be in condition; God will bring judgments upon them, that shall be the destruction both of priest and people; the famine that deprives the people of their meat shall deprive the priests of their *meat-offerings*, Joel 1:9. It is part of the description of a universal desolation that it shall be *as with the people, so with the priest*, Isa. 24:2. God's judgments, when they come with commission, will make no difference. Note, Sharers in sin must expect to be sharers in ruin. Thus God will *punish them both for their ways, and reward them for their doings*. God will *cause their doings to return upon them* (so the word is); when a sin is committed the sinner thinks *it is gone* and he shall hear no more of it, but he shall find it *called over again*, and made to *return*, either to his humiliation or to his condemnation.

VIII. They indulged themselves in the delights of sense, to hold up their hearts; but they shall find that they *take away their hearts* (v. 11): *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine take away the heart*. Some join this with the foregoing words. *They have forsaken the Lord, to take heed to whoredom, and wine, and new wine*. Or, *Because these have taken away their heart*. Their sensual pleasures have taken them off from their devotions and drowned all that is good in them. Or we may take it as a distinct sentence, containing a great truth which we see confirmed by every day's experience, that drunkenness and uncleanness are sins which besot and infatuate men, weaken and enfeeble them. They take away both the understanding and the courage.

Verses 12-19

In these verses we have, as before,

I. The sins charged upon the people of Israel, for which God had a controversy with them, and they are,

1. Spiritual whoredom, or idolatry. They have in them a *spirit of whoredoms*, a strong inclination to that sin; the bent and bias of their hearts are that way; it is *their own iniquity*; they are carried out towards it with an unaccountable violence, and this *causes them to err*. Note, The errors and mistakes of the judgment are commonly owing to the corrupt affections; men *therefore* have a good opinion of sin, because they have a disposition towards it. And having such erroneous notions of idols, and such passionate motions towards them, no marvel that with such a head and such a heart they have *gone a whoring from under their God*, v. 12. They ought to have been in subjection to him as their head and husband, to have been under his guidance and command, but they revolted from their allegiance, and put themselves under the guidance and protection of false gods. So (v. 15) Israel has *played the harlot*; their conduct in the worship of their idols was like that of a harlot, wanton and impudent. And (v. 16), *Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer*, as an *untamed heifer* (so some), or as a *perverse* or *refractory* one (so others), as a heifer that is turned loose runs madly about the pasture, or, if put under the yoke (which seems rather to be alluded to here), will draw back instead of going forward, will struggle to get her neck out of the yoke and her feet

out of the furrow. Thus unruly, ungovernable, untractable, were the people of Israel. They had begun to draw in the yoke of God's ordinances, but they drew back, as *children of Belial*, that will not endure the yoke; and when the prophets were sent with the goads of reproof, to put them forward, they *kicked against the pricks*, and ran backwards. The sum of all is (v. 17), *Ephraim is joined to idols*, is perfectly wedded to them; his affections are glued to them, and his heart is upon them. There are two instances given of their spiritual whoredom, in both which they gave that honour to their idols which is due to God only:— (1.) They consulted them as oracles, and used those arts of divination which they had learned from their idolatrous priests (v. 12): *My people ask counsel at their stocks*, their wooden gods; they apply to them for advice and direction in what they should do and for information concerning the event. They *say to a stock, Thou art my father* (Jer. 2:27); and, if it were indeed a father, it were worthy of this honour; but it was a great affront to God, who was indeed their Father, and whose lively oracles they had among them, with which they had liberty to consult at any time, thus to *ask counsel at their stocks*. And they expect that their *staff* should *declare to them* what course they should take and what the event should be. It is probable that this refers to some wicked methods of divination used among the Gentiles, and which the Jews learned from them, by a *piece of wood*, or by a *staff*, like Nebuchadnezzar's divining by *his arrows*, Eze. 21:21. Note, Those who forsake the oracles of God, to take their measures from the world and the flesh, do in effect but consult with their stocks and their staves. (2.) They offered sacrifice to them as gods, whose favour they wanted and whose wrath they dreaded and deprecated (v. 13): *They sacrifice to them*, to atone and pacify them, and *burn incense* to them, to please and gratify them, and hope by both to recommend themselves to them. God had pitched upon the place where he would record his name; but they, having forsaken that, chose places for their irreligious rites which pleased their own fancies; they chose, [1.] High places, *upon the tops of the mountains* and *upon the hills*, foolishly imagining that the height of the ground gave them some advantage in their approaches towards heaven. [2.] Shady places, *under oaks, and poplars, and elms, because the shadow thereof* is pleasant to them, especially in those hot countries, and therefore they thought it was pleasing to their gods; or they fancied that a thick shade befriends contemplation, possesses the mind with something of awe, and therefore is proper for devotion.

2. Corporal whoredom is another crime here charged upon them: *They have committed whoredom continually*, v. 18. They drove a trade of uncleanness; it was not a single act now and then, but their constant practice, as it is of many that have *eyes full of adultery* and *which cannot cease from that sin*, 2 Pt. 2:14. Now the abominable filthiness and lewdness that was found in Israel is here spoken of, (1.) As a concomitant of their idolatry; their false gods drew them to it; for the devil whom they worshipped, though a spirit, is an unclean spirit. Those that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots*, and they *sacrificed with harlots*; for because they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, but dishonoured him, therefore God *gave them up to vile affections*, by the indulging of which they *dishonoured themselves*, Rom. 1:24, 28. (2.) As a punishment of it. The *men* that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots* that attended the idolatrous rites, as in the worship of *Baal-peor*, Num. 25:1, 2. To punish them for that God gave up their wives and daughters to the like vile affections: They *committed whoredom and adultery* (v. 13), which could not but be a great grief and reproach to their husbands and parents; for those that are not chaste themselves desire to have their wives and daughters so. But thus they might read their sin in their punishment, as David's

adultery was punished in the debauching of his concubines by his own son, 2 Sa. 12:11. Note, When the same sin in others is made men's grief and affliction which they have themselves been guilty of they must own that the Lord is righteous.

3. The perverting of justice, v. 18. *Their rulers* (be it spoken to their shame) *do love, Give ye*, that is, they love bribes, and have it continually in their mouths, *Give, give*. They are given to *filthy lucre*; every one that has any business with them must expect to be asked, What will you give? Though, as rulers, they are bound by office to do justice, yet none can have justice done them without a fee; and you may be sure that for a fee they will do injustice. Note, The love of money is the ruin of equity and the root of all iniquity. But of all men it is a shame for rulers (who should be men *fearing God* and *hating covetousness*) to love *Give ye*. Perhaps this is intended in that part of the charge here, *Their drink is sour; it is dead; it is gone*. Justice, duly administered, is refreshing, like drink to the thirsty, but when it is perverted, and rulers take rewards either to acquit the guilty or to condemn the innocent, the *drink is sour; they turn judgment into wormwood*, Amos 5:7. Or it may refer in general to the depraved morals of the whole nation; they had lost all their life and spirit, and were as offensive to God as dead and sour drink is to us. See Deu. 31:32, 33.

II. The tokens of God's wrath against them for their sins. 1. Their wives and daughters should not be punished for the injury and disgrace they did to their families (v. 14): *I will not punish your daughters*; and, not being punished for their sin, they would go on in it. Note, The impunity of one sinner is sometimes made the punishment of another. Or, "*I will not punish them as I will punish you; for you must own, as Judah did concerning his daughter-in-law, that they are more righteous than you,*" Gen. 38:26. 2. They themselves should prosper for a while, but their prosperity should help to destroy them. It comes in as a token of God's wrath (v. 16): *The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place*; they shall have a fat pasture, and a large one, in which they shall be fed to the full, and fed of the best, but it shall be only to prepare them for the slaughter, as a lamb is that is so fed. If they *wax fat and kick*, they do but wax fat for the butcher. But others make them feed as *a lamb on the common*, a large place indeed, but where it has short grass and lies exposed. The Shepherd of Israel will turn them both out of his pastures and out of his protection. 3. No means should be used to bring them to repentance (v. 17): "*Ephraim is joined to idols, is in love with them and addicted to them, and therefore let him alone*, as v. 4, *Let no man reprove him*. Let him be given up to *his own heart's lusts*, and walk *in his own counsel*; we would have healed him, and he would not be healed, therefore forsake him," See *what their end will be*, Deu. 32:20. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment for any man to be let alone in sin, for God to say concerning a sinner, "He is joined to his idols, the world and the flesh; he is incurably proud, covetous, or profane, an incurable drunkard or adulterer; *let him alone*; conscience, let him alone; minister, let him alone; providences, let him alone. Let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it." The father corrects not the rebellious son any more when he determines to disinherit him. "Those that are not disturbed in their sin will be destroyed for their sin." 4. They should be hurried away with a swift and shameful destruction (v. 19): *The wind has bound her up in her wings*, to carry her away into captivity, suddenly, violently, and irresistibly; he shall take *them away as with a whirlwind*, Ps. 58:9. And then *they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices*, ashamed of their sin in offering sacrifice to idols, ashamed of their folly in putting themselves to such an expense upon gods that have no power to help them, and thereby making that God their enemy who has almighty power to

destroy them. Note, There are sacrifices that men will one day be ashamed of. Those that have sacrificed their time, strength, honour, and all their comforts, to the world and the flesh, will shortly be ashamed of it. Yea, and those that bring to God blind, and lame, and heartless sacrifices, will be ashamed of them too.

III. The warning given to Judah not to sin after the similitude of Israel's transgression. It is said in the close of v. 14, *Those that do not understand shall fall*; those must needs fall that do not understand how to avoid, or get over, the stumbling-blocks they meet with (and therefore *let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*), particularly the two tribes (v. 15): *Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend*. Though Israel be given to idolatry, yet let not Judah take the infection. Now, 1. This was a very needful caution. The men of Israel were brethren, and near neighbours, to the men of Judah; Israel was more numerous, and at this time in a prosperous condition, and therefore there was danger lest the men of Judah should learn their way and get a snare to their souls. Note, The nearer we are to the infection of sin the more need we have to stand upon our guard. 2. It was a very rational caution: "*Let Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah do so; for Judah has greater means of knowledge than Israel, has the temple and priesthood, and a king of the house of David; from Judah Shiloh is to come; and for Judah God has reserved great blessings in store; therefore let not Judah offend, for more is expected from them than from Israel, they will have more to answer for if they do offend, and from them God will take it more unkindly. If Israel play the harlot, let not Judah do so too, for then God will have no professing people in the world.*" God bespeaks Judah here, as Christ does the twelve, when many turned their backs upon him, *Will you also go away?* Jn. 6:67. Note, Those that have hitherto kept their integrity should, for that reason, still hold it fast, even in times of general apostasy. Now, to preserve Judah from offending as Israel had done, two rules are here given:—(1.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must keep at a distance from the places of idolatry: *Come not you unto Gilgal, where all their wickedness was* (ch. 9:15; 12:11); there they *multiplied transgression* (Amos 4:4); and perhaps they contracted a veneration for that place because there it was said to Joshua, *The place where thou standest is holy ground* (Jos. 5:15); therefore they are forbidden to *enter into Gilgal*, Amos 5:5. And for the same reason they must *not go up to Bethel*, here called the *house of vanity*, for so *Bethaven* signifies, not the *house of God*, as *Bethel* signifies. Note, Those that would be kept from sin, and not fall into the devil's hands, must studiously avoid the occasions of sin and not come upon the devil's ground. (2.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must take heed of profaneness, and *not swear, The Lord liveth*. They are commanded to swear, *The Lord liveth in truth and righteousness* (Jer. 4:2); and therefore that which is here forbidden is swearing so in untruth and unrighteousness, swearing rashly and lightly, or falsely and with deceit, or swearing by the Lord and the idol, Zep. 1:5. Note, Those that would be steady in their adherence to God must possess themselves with an awe and reverence of God, and always speak of him with solemnity and seriousness; for those that can make a jest of the true God will make a god of any thing.

Chapter 5

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the foregoing chapter, to discover the sin both of Israel and Judah, and to denounce the judgments of God against them. I. They are called to hearken to the charge (v. 1, 8). II. They are accused of many sins, which are here aggravated. 1. Persecution (v. 1, 2). 2. Spiritual whoredom (v. 3, 4). 3. Pride (v. 5). 4. Apostasy from God (v. 7). 5. The tyranny of the princes, and the tameness of the people in submitting to it (v. 10, 11). III. They are threatened with God's displeasure for their sins; he knows all their wickedness (v. 3) and makes known his wrath against them for it (v. 9). 1. They shall fall in their iniquity (v. 5). 2. God will forsake them (v. 6). 3. Their portions shall be devoured (v. 7). 4. God will rebuke them, and pour out his wrath upon them (v. 9, 10). 5. They shall be oppressed (v. 11). 6. God will be as a moth to them in secret judgments (v. 12) and as a lion in public judgments (v. 14). IV. They are blamed for the wrong course they took under their afflictions (v. 13). V. It is intimated that they shall at length take a right course (v. 15). The more generally these things are expressed of so much the more general use they are for our learning, and particularly for our admonition.

Verses 1-7

Here, I. All orders and degrees of men are cited to appear and answer to such things as shall be laid to their charge (v. 1): *Hear you this, O priests!* whether in *holy orders* (as those in Judah, and perhaps many in Israel too, for in the ten tribes there were divers cities of priests and Levites, who, it is probable, staid in their own lot after the revolt of the ten tribes and did so much of their office as might be done at a distance from the temple) or *pretending holy orders*, as the priests of the calves, who, some think, are included here. "Hearken, *you house of Israel*, the common people, and *give ear, O house of the king!*" let them all take notice, for they have all contributed to the national guilt, and they shall all share in the national judgments. Note, If neither the sanctity of the priesthood nor the dignity of the royal family will prevail to keep out sin, it cannot be expected that they should avail to keep out wrath. If the priests, and the house of the king, though they bear such noble characters, sin like others, their noble characters will not excuse them, but they must smart like others. Nor shall it be any plea for *the house of Israel* that they were misled by their priests and princes, but they shall receive their doom with them, and neither their meanness nor their multitude shall be their exemption.

II. Witness is produced against them, one instead of a thousand; it is God's omniscience (v. 3): *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me.* They have *not known the Lord* (v. 4), but the Lord has known them, knows their true character however disguised, knows their secret wickedness however concealed. Note, Men's rejecting the knowledge of God will not secure them from his knowledge of them; and when he contends with them he will prove their sins upon them by his own knowledge, so that it will be in vain to plead *Not guilty*.

III. Very bad things are laid to their charge. 1. They had been very ingenious and very industrious to draw people either into sin or into trouble: You have been *a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor* (v. 1), that is, such snares and nets as the huntsmen used to lay upon those mountains in pursuit of their game. When the worship of the calves was set up in Israel the patrons of that idolatry, and sticklers for it, contrived by all possible arts and wiles to draw men into it and reconcile those to it

that at first had a dread of it. Note, Those that allure and entice men to sin, however they may pretend friendship and goodwill, are to be looked upon as *snares and nets* to them, and *their hands as bands*, Eccl. 7:26. But to those whom they could not seduce into sin they were as a net and a snare to bring them into trouble. Some think it was their practice to set spies in the road, and particularly upon the mountains of Mizpah and Tabor, at the times of the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, to watch if any of their people who were piously affected went thither, and to inform against them, that they might be prosecuted for it, thus doing the devil's work, who disquiets those whom he cannot debauch. 2. They had been both very crafty and very cruel in carrying on their designs (v. 2): *The revolters are profound to make slaughter*. Note, Those who have themselves apostatized from the truths of God are often the most subtle and barbarous persecutors of those who still adhere to them. Nothing will serve them but to *make slaughter* (it is the blood of the saints that they thirst after): and with the serpent's sting they have his head; they are *profound* to do it. O the depth of *the depths of Satan*, of the wickedness of his agents, of those that have *deeply revolted!* Isa. 31:6. Now that which aggravated this was the many reproofs and warnings that had been given them: *Though I have been a rebuker of them all*. The prophet had been so, a reprovee by office. He had many a time told them of the evil of their ways and doings, had dealt plainly *with them all*, and had not spared either the priests or the house of the king. God himself had been *a rebuker of them all* by their own consciences and by his providences. Note, Sins against reproof are doubly sinful, Prov. 29:1. 3. They had *committed whoredom*, had defiled their own bodies with fleshly lusts, had defiled their own souls with the worship of idols, v. 3. This God was a witness to, though secretly committed and artfully palliated. Nay, the piercing eye of God saw *the spirit of whoredom* that was *in the midst of them*, their secret inclination and disposition to those sins, the love they had to their sins, and the dominion their sins had over them, how much they were under the power of a *spirit of whoredom*, that *root of bitterness* which bore all this gall and wormwood, that corrupt and poisoned fountain. 4. They had no disposition at all to come into acquaintance and communion with God. The *spirit of whoredoms*, having *caused them to err* from him, keeps them wandering endlessly, v. 4. (1.) They *have not known the Lord*, nor desire to know him, but have rather declined, nay dreaded, the knowledge of him, for that would disturb them in their sinful ways. (2.) Therefore *they will not frame their doings to turn to their God*, by which it appeared that they did not know him aright. This intimates their obstinate persistence in their apostasy from God; they would not *turn to God*, though he was *their God*, theirs in covenant, by whose name they had been called, and whom they were bound to *serve*. They would not return to the worship of him, from which they had turned aside. Nay, *they would not frame their doings to turn to God*. They would not *consider their ways*, nor dispose themselves into a serious temper, nor apply their minds to think of those things that would bring them to God. It is true we cannot by our own power, without the special grace of God, turn to him; but we may by the due improvement of our faculties, and the common aids of his Spirit, *frame our doings* to turn to him. Those that will not do this, that *prepare not their hearts to seek the Lord* (2 Chr. 12:14), owe it to themselves that they are not turned; they die because they will die; and to those that will do this further grace shall not be wanting. (5.) They were guilty of notorious arrogance, and insolence in sin (v. 5): *The pride of Israel doth testify to his face*, doth witness against him that he is a rebel to God and his government. The *spirit of whoredoms* which was *in the midst of them* showed itself in the gaiety and gaudiness of their worship, as a harlot is known by

her attire, Prov. 7:10. The wantonness of her dress testifies to her face that she is not a modest woman. Or their pride in confronting the prophets God sent them and the message they brought (Jer. 43:2), or a haughty scornful conduct towards their brethren and those that were under them, *witnessed against* them that they were not God's people and justified God in all the humbling judgments he brought upon them. His pride testifies *in his face*; so some read it, agreeing with Isa. 3:9, *The show of their countenance doth witness against them*. They have that *proud look* which *the Lord hates*. (6.) They departed from God to idols, and bred up their children in idolatry (v. 7): *They have dealt treacherously against the Lord*, as a wife, who, in contempt of the marriage covenant, forsakes her husband, and lives in adultery with another. Thus those who are guilty of spiritual idolatry, whose god is their money, whose god is their belly, *deal treacherously against the Lord*; they violate their engagements to him and frustrate his expectations from them. Note, Wilful sinners are treacherous dealers. *They have begotten strange children*, that is, their children which they have begotten are estranged from God, and trained up in a false way of worship; they are a spurious brood, as *children of fornication* (Jn. 8:41), whom God will disown. Note, Those deal treacherously with God indeed who not only turn from following him themselves but train up their children in wicked ways. IV. Very sad things are made to be their doom. In general (v. 1), *"Judgment is towards you. God is coming forth to contend with you, and to testify his displeasure against you for your sins."* It is time to hearken when judgment is towards us. In particular,

1. They shall *fall in their iniquity*. This follows upon their *pride testifying to their face* (v. 5) *Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity*. Note, Pride will have a fall; it is the certain presage and forerunner of it. Those that exalt themselves shall be abased. The face in which pride testifies shall be filled with confusion. They shall not only fall, but fall in their iniquity, the saddest fall of any. Their pride kept them from repenting of their iniquity, and therefore they shall fall in it. Note, Those that are not humbled for their sins are likely to perish for ever in their sins. it is added, *Judah also shall fall with them* in her iniquity. As the ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria, for their idolatry, so the two tribes, in process of time, were carried into Babylon for following their bad example; but the former fell and were utterly cast down, the latter fell and were raised up again. Judah had the temple and priesthood, and yet these shall not secure them, but, if they sin with Israel and Ephraim, with them they shall fall.

2. They shall fall short of God's favour when they profess to seek it (v. 6): *They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord*, but in vain; *they shall not find him*. This seems to be spoken principally of Judah, when they fell into their iniquity, and when they fell in their iniquity. (1.) When they fell into their iniquity they *sought the Lord*; but they did not *seek him only*, and therefore he was not *found of them*. When they worshipped strange gods, yet they kept up the show and shadow of the worship of the true God; they went as usual, at the solemn feasts, *with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord*; but their hearts were not *upright with him*, because they were not *entire for him*, and therefore he would not accept them; for *then* only shall we find him when we *seek him with our whole heart*, not divided between God and Baal, Eze. 14:3. (2.) When they fell in their iniquity, or found themselves falling by it, they *sought the Lord*; but they did not seek him *early*, and therefore he will not be found of them. They shall see ruin coming upon them, and shall then, in their distress, flee to God, and think to make him

their friend with burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but it will be too late then to turn away his wrath when *the decree has gone forth*. Even Josiah's reformation did not prevail to *turn away the wrath of God*, 2 Ki. 23:25, 26. Those that go with *their flocks and their herds* only to seek the Lord, and not with their hearts and souls, cannot expect to find him, for his favour is not to be purchased with *thousands of rams*. Nor shall those speed who do not seek the Lord *while he may be found*, for there is a time when he will not be found. They shall not find him, for he has withdrawn himself; he will not be enquired of by them, but will turn a deaf ear to their sacrifices. See how much it is our concern to seek God early, now while the accepted time is, and the day of salvation.

3. They and their portions shall all be swallowed up. They have *dealt treacherously against the Lord*, and have thought to strengthen themselves in it by their alliances with strange children; but *now shall a month devour them with their portions*, that is, their estates and inheritances, all those things which they have taken, and taken up with, as their portion; or by their *portions* is meant their idols, whom they chose for their portion instead of God. Note, Those that make an idol of the world, by taking it for their portion, will themselves perish with it. A *month* shall *devour* them, or eat them up—a certain time prefixed, and a short time. When God's judgments begin with them they shall soon make an end; one month will do their business. How much may a body be weakened by one month's sickness, or a kingdom wasted by one month's war! *Three shepherds* (says God) *I cut off in one month*, Zec. 11:8. Note, The judgments of God sometimes make quick work with a sinful people. A month devours more, and more portions, than many years can repair.

Verses 8-15

Here is, I. A loud alarm sounded, giving notice of judgments coming (v. 8): *Blow you the cornet in Gibeah and in Ramah*, two cities near together in the confines of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, Gibeah a frontier-town of the kingdom of Judah, Ramah of Israel; so that the warning is hereby sent into both kingdoms. "*Cry aloud at Beth-aven*, or Bethel, which place seems to be already seized upon by the enemy, and therefore the trumpet is not sounded there, but you hear the outcries of those that shout for mastery, mixed with theirs that are overcome." Let them *cry aloud*, "*After thee, O Benjamin!*" comes the enemy. The tribe of Ephraim is already vanquished, and the enemy will be upon thy back, O Benjamin! in a little time; thy turn comes next. The cup of trembling shall go round." The prophet had described God's controversy with them as a trial at law (ch. 4:1); here he describes it as a trial by battle; and here also *when he judges he will overcome*. Let all therefore prepare to meet their God. He had before spoken of the judgments as certain; here he speaks of them as near; and, when they are apprehended as just at the door, they are very startling and awakening. The blowing of this cornet is explained, v. 9. *Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be*, that which is *true* or *certain*, so the word is. Note, The destruction of impenitent sinners is a thing which shall surely be; it is not mere talk, to frighten them, but it is an irrevocable sentence. And it is a mercy to us that it is *made known* to us, that we have timely warning given us of it, that we may *flee from the wrath to come*. It is the privilege of the tribes of Israel that, as they are told their duty, so they are told their danger, by the oracles of God committed to them.

II. The ground of God's controversy with them. 1. He has a quarrel with *the princes of Judah*, because they were daring leaders

in sin, v. 10. They are *like those that remove the bound*, or the ancient land-marks. God has given them his law, to be a fence about his own property; but they have sacrilegiously broken through it, and set it aside; they have encroached even upon God's rights, have trampled upon the distinctions between good and evil, and the most sacred obligations of reason and equity, thinking, because they were princes, that they might do any thing, *Quicquid libet, licet*—Their will was a law. Or it may be understood of their invading the liberty and property of the subject for the advancing of the prerogative, which was like removing the ancient land-marks. Some have observed that the princes of Judah were more absolute, and assumed a more arbitrary power, than the princes of Israel did; now, for this, God has a controversy with them: *I will pour out my wrath upon them like water*, in great abundance, like the waters of the flood, which were poured upon the *giants* of the *old world*, for the violence which the earth was filled with through them, Gen. 6:13. Note, There are *bounds* which even princes themselves must not remove, bounds both of religion and justice, which they are limited by, and, if they break through them, they must know that there is a God above them that will call them to account for it. 2. He has a quarrel with the *people of Ephraim*, because they were sneaking followers in sin (v. 11): *He willingly walked after the commandment*, that is, the commandment of Jeroboam and the succeeding kings of Israel, who obliged all their subjects by a law to worship the calves at Dan and Bethel, and never to go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was *the commandment*; it was the law of the land, and backed with reasons of state; and the people not only walked after it in a blind implicit obedience to authority, but they willingly walked after it, from a secret antipathy they had to the worship of idols. Note, An easy compliance with the commandments of men that thwart the commandments of God ripens a people for ruin as much as any thing. And the punishment of the sequacious disobedience (if I may so call it) answers to the sin; for it is for this that *Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment*, has all his civil rights and liberties broken in upon and trodden down; and, (1.) It is just with God that it should be so, that those who betray God's property should lose their own, that those who subject their consciences to an infallible judge, and an arbitrary power, should have enough of both. (2.) There is a natural tendency in the thing itself towards it. *Those that willingly walk after the commandment*, even when it walks contrary to the command of God, will find the commandment an encroaching thing, and that the more power is given it the more it will claim. Note, Nothing gives greater advantage to a mastiff-like tyranny, that is fierce and furious, than a spaniel-like submission, that is fawning and flattering. Thus is *Ephraim oppressed and broken in judgment*, that is, he is wronged under a face and colour of right. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment upon any people to be oppressed under pretence of having justice done them. This explains the threatening v. 9, *Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke*. Note, Daring sinners must expect that a day of rebuke will come, and such a day of rebuke as will make them desolate, will deprive them of the comfort of all they have and all they hope for.

III. The different methods that God would take both with Judah and Ephraim, sometimes one method and sometimes the other, and sometimes both together, or rather by which, first the one and then the other, he would advance towards their complete ruin.

1. He would begin with less judgments, which should sometimes work silently and insensibly (v. 12): *I will be* (that is, my providences shall be) *unto Ephraim as a moth*; nay (as it might better be supplied), *they are unto Ephraim as a moth*, for it is

such a *sickness* as Ephraim now sees, v. 13. Note, The judgments of God are sometimes to a sinful people *as a moth*, and *as rottenness*, or as *a worm*. The former signifies the little animals that breed in clothes, the latter those that breed in wood; as these consume the clothes and the wood, so shall the judgments of God consume them. (1.) Silently, so as not to make any noise in the world, nay, so as they themselves shall not be sensible of it; they shall think themselves safe and thriving, but, when they come to look more narrowly into their state, shall find themselves wasting and decaying. (2.) Slowly, and with long delays and intervals, that he may give them *space to repent*. Many a nation, as well as many a person, in the prime of its time, dies of a consumption. (3.) Gradually. God comes upon sinners with less judgments, so to prevent greater, if they will be wise and take warning; he comes upon them step by step, to show he is not willing that they should perish. (4.) The moth breeds in the clothes, and the worm or rottenness in the wood; thus sinners are consumed by a fire of their own kindling.

2. When it appeared that those had not done their work he would come upon them with greater (v. 14): *I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and to the house of Judah as a young lion*, though Judah is himself, in Jacob's blessing, a *lion's whelp*. Lest any should think his power weakened, because he was said to be *as a moth* to them, he says that he will now be as *a lion* to them, not only to frighten them with his roaring, but to pull them to pieces. Note, If less judgments prevail not to do their work, it may be expected that God will send greater. *Christ* is sometimes a lion of the tribe of Judah, here he is a lion against that tribe. See what God will do to a people that are secure in sin: *Even I will tear*. He seems to glory in it, as his prerogative, to be able to *destroy*, as the *alone lawgiver*, Jam. 4:12. "*I, even I, will take the work into my own hands; I say it that will do it.*" There is a more immediate work of God in some judgments than in others. *I will tear, and go away*. He will go away, (1.) As not fearing them; he will go away in state, and with a majestic face, as the lion from his prey. (2.) As not helping them. If God tear by afflicting providences, and yet by his graces and comforts stays with us, it is well enough; but our condition is sad indeed if he *tear and go away*, if, when he deprives us of our creature comforts, he does himself depart from us. When he goes away he will take away all that is valuable and dear, for, when God goes, all good goes along with him. He will take away, *and none shall rescue him*, as the prey cannot be rescued from the lion, Mic. 5:8. Note, None can be delivered out of the hands of God's justice but those that are delivered into the hands of his grace. It is in vain for a man to strive with his Maker.

IV. The different effects of those different methods. 1. When God contended with them by less judgments they neglected him, and sought to creatures for relief, but sought in vain, v. 13. When God was to them *as a moth*, and *as rottenness*, they perceived *their sickness* and *their wound*; after a while they found themselves going down the hill, and that they were behind—hand in their affairs, their estate was sensibly decaying, and then they sent *to the Assyrian*, to come in to their assistance, made their court to king Jareb, which some think, was one of the names of Pul, or Tiglathpileser, kings of Assyria, to whom both Israel and Judah applied for relief in their distress, hoping by an alliance with them to repair and re-establish their declining interests. Note, Carnal hearts, in time of trouble, see their sickness and see their wound, but do not see the sin that is the cause of it, nor will be brought to acknowledge that, no, nor to acknowledge the hand of God, his *mighty hand*, much less his righteous hand, in their trouble; and therefore, instead of going the next way to the Creator, who could relieve them, they take a great deal of pains to go about to creatures, who can do them no service. Those who repent not that they have

offended God by their sins are loth to be beholden to him in their afflictions, but would rather seek relief any where than with him. And what is the consequence? *Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.* Note, Those who neglect God, and seek to creatures for help, will certainly be disappointed; those who depend upon them for support will find them, not *foundations*, but *broken reeds*; those who depend upon them for supply will find them, not *fountains*, but *broken cisterns*; those who depend upon them for comfort and a cure will find them *miserable comforters*, and *physicians of no value*. The kings of Assyria, whom Judah and Israel sought unto, *distressed them and helped them not*, 2 Chr. 28:16, 28. Some make king *Jareb* to signify the *great, potent, or magnificent king*, for they built much upon his power; others *the king that will plead, or should plead*, for they built much upon his wisdom and eloquence, and in his interesting himself in their affairs. They had sent him *a present* (ch. 10:6), a good fee, and, having so retained him of counsel for them, they doubted not of his fidelity to them; but he deceived them, as an arm of flesh does those that trust in it, Jer. 17:5, 6. 2. When, to convince them of their folly, God brought greater judgments upon them, then they would at length be forced to apply to him, v. 15. When he has *torn* as a *lion*, (1.) He will leave them: *I will go and return to my place*, to heaven, or to the mercy-seat, the throne of grace, which is his glory. When God punishes sinners he *comes out of his place* (Isa. 26:21); but, when he designs them favour, he *returns to his place*, where he *waits to be gracious*, upon their submission. Or he will *return to his place* when he has corrected them, as not regarding them, hiding his face from them, and not taking notice of their troubles or prayers; and this for their further humiliation, till they are qualified in some measure for the returns of his favour. (2.) He will at length work upon them, and bring them home to himself, by their afflictions, which is the thing he waits for; and then he will no longer withdraw from them. Two things are here mentioned as instances of their return:—[1.] Their penitent confession of sin: *Till they acknowledge their offence*; marg. *Till they be guilty*, that is, till they be sensible of their guilt, and be brought to own it, and humble themselves before God for it. Note, When men begin to complain more of their sins than of their afflictions then there begins to be some hope of them; and this is that which God requires of us, when we are under his correcting hand, that we own ourselves in a fault and justly corrected. [2.] Their humble petition for the favour of God: *Till they seek my face*, which, it may be expected, they will do when they are brought to the last extremity, and they have tried other helpers in vain. *In their affliction they will seek me early*, that is, diligently and earnestly, and with great importunity; and if they seek him thus, and be sincere in it, though it might be called seeking him late, because it was long ere they were brought to it, yet it is not too late, nay, he is pleased to call it seeking him early, so willing is he to make the best of true penitents in their return to him. Note, When we are under the convictions of sin, and the corrections of the rod, our business is to seek God's face; we must desire the knowledge of him, and an acquaintance with him, that he may manifest himself to us, and for us, in token of his being at peace with us. And it may reasonably be expected that affliction will bring those to God that had long gone astray from him, and kept at a distance. *Therefore* God for a time turns away from us, that he may turn us to himself, and then return to us. *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.*

Chapter 6

The closing words of the foregoing chapter gave us some hopes that God and his Israel, notwithstanding their sins and his wrath, might yet be happily brought together again, that they would seek him and he would be found of them; now this chapter carries that matter further, and some join the beginning of this chapter with the end of that, "They will seek me early," saying, "Come and let us return." But God doth again complain of the wickedness of this people; for, though some did repent and reform, the greater part continued obstinate. Observe, I. Their resolution to return to God, and the comforts wherewith they encourage themselves in their return (v. 1-3). II. The instability of many of them in their professions and promises of repentance, and the severe course which God therefore took with them (v. 4, 5). III. The covenant God made with them, and his expectations from them (v. 6); their violation of that covenant and frustrating those expectations (v. 7-11).

Verses 1-3

These may be taken either as the words of the prophet to the people, calling them to repentance, or as the words of the people to one another, exciting and encouraging one another to *seek the Lord*, and to humble themselves before him, in hopes of finding mercy with him. God had said, *In their affliction they will seek me*; now the prophet, and the good people his friends, would strike while the iron was hot, and set in with the convictions their neighbours seemed to be under. Note, Those who are disposed to turn to God themselves should do all they can to excite, and engage, and encourage others to return to him.

Observe,

I. What it is they engage to do: "*Come, and let us return to the Lord*, v. 1. Let us go no more to the Assyrian, nor send to king Jareb; we have had enough of that. But let us *return to the Lord*, return to the worship of him from our idolatries, and to our hope in him from all our confidences in the creature." Note, It is the great concern of those who have revolted from God to return to him. And those who have gone from him by consent, and in a body, drawing one another to sin, should by consent, and in a body, return to him, which will be for his glory and their mutual edification.

II. What inducements and encouragements to do this they fasten upon, to stir up one another with.

1. The experience they had had of his displeasure: "Let us return to him, for *he has torn, he has smitten*. We have been torn, and it was he that tore us; we have been smitten, and it was he that smote us. *Therefore* let us return to him, because it is for our revolts from him that he has torn and smitten us in anger, and we cannot expect that he should be reconciled to us till we return to him; and for this end he has afflicted us thus, that we might be wrought upon to return to him. His hand will be stretched out still against us if the people *turn not to him that smites them*," Isa. 9:12, 13. Note, The consideration of the judgments of God upon us and our land, especially when they are tearing judgments, should awaken us to return to God by repentance, and prayer, and reformation.

2. The expectation they had of his favour: "He that has torn will *heal us*, he that has smitten will *bind us up*," as the skilful surgeon with a tender hand binds up the broken bone or bleeding wound. Note, The same providence of God that afflicts his people relieves them, and the same Spirit of God that convinces the saints comforts them; that which is first a *Spirit of*

bondage is afterwards a *Spirit of adoption*. This is an acknowledgement of the power of God (he can heal though we be ever so ill torn), and of his mercy (he will do it); nay, *therefore* he has torn that he may heal. Some think this points particularly to the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when they sought the Lord, and joined themselves to him, in the prospect of his gracious return to them in a way of mercy. Note, It will be of great use to us, both for our support under our afflictions and for our encouragement in our repentance, to keep up good thoughts of God and of his purposes and designs concerning us. Now this favour of God which they are here in expectation of is described in several instances:—

(1.) They promise themselves that their deliverance out of their troubles should be to them as *life from the dead* (v. 2): "*After two days he will revive us* (that is, in a short time, in a day or two), *and the third day*, when it is expected that the dead body should putrefy and corrupt, and be buried *out of our sight*, then will he *raise us up*, and *we shall live in his sight*, we shall see his face with comfort and it shall be reviving to us. Though he *forsake* for a *small moment*, he will *gather* with *everlasting kindness*." Note, The people of God may not only be torn and smitten, but left for dead, and may lie so a great while; but they shall not always lie so, nor shall they long lie so; God will in a little time revive them; and the assurance given them of this should engage them to return and adhere to him. But this seems to have a further reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the time limited is expressed by *two days* and the *third day*, that it may be a type and figure of Christ's rising the *third day*, which he is said to do *according to the scriptures*, according to this scripture; for all the prophets testified of *the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*. Let us see and admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in ordering the prophet's words so that when he foretold the deliverance of the church out of her troubles he should at the same time point out our salvation by Christ, which other salvations were both figures and fruits of; and, though they might not be aware of this mystery in the words, yet now that they are fulfilled in the letter of them in the resurrection of Christ it is a confirmation to our faith that *this is he that should come*, and we are to *look for no other*. And it is every way suitable that a prophecy of Christ's rising should be thus expressed, "He will raise *us* up, and *we shall live*," for Christ rose as the first-fruits, and we revive with him, we live through him; he rose for our justification, and all believers are said to be *risen with Christ*. See Isa. 26:19. And it would serve for a comfort to the church then, and an assurance that God would raise them out of their low estate, for in his fulness of time he would raise his Son from the grave, who would be the life and glory of his people Israel. Note, A regard by faith to a rising Christ is a great support to a suffering Christian, and gives abundant encouragement to a repenting returning sinner; for he has said, *Because I live, you shall live also*.

(2.) That then they shall improve in the knowledge of God (v. 3): *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know, the Lord*. Then, when God returns in mercy to his people and designs favour for them, he will, as a pledge and fruit of his favour, give them more of the knowledge of himself; the earth shall be *full of that knowledge*, Isa. 11:9. *Knowledge shall be increased*, Dan. 12:4. *All shall know God*, Jer. 31:34. *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord*, (so the words are); and it may be taken as the fruit of Christ's resurrection, and the life we live in God's sight by him, that we shall have not only greater means of knowledge, but grace to improve in knowledge by those means. Note, When God designs mercy for a people he gives them a *heart to know him*, Jer. 24:7. Those that have *risen with Christ* have the spirit of wisdom and revelation given them. And if we

understand our living in his sight, as the Chaldee paraphrast does, of the day of the resurrection of the dead, it fitly follows, *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord*; for in that day we shall see him be perfected, and yet be eternally increasing. Or, taking it as we read it, *If we follow on to know*, we have here, [1.] A precious blessing promised: *Then shall we know, shall know the Lord*, then when *we return to God*; those that come to God shall be brought into an acquaintance with him. When we are designed to *live in his sight*, then he gives us to know him; for this is *life eternal to know God*, Jn. 17:3. [2.] The way and means of obtaining this blessing. We must *follow on to know* him. We must value and esteem the knowledge of God as the best knowledge, we must *cry after it*, and *dig for it* (Prov. 2:3, 4), must *seek and intermeddle with all wisdom* (Prov. 18:1), and must proceed in our enquiries after this knowledge and our endeavours to improve in it. And, if we do the prescribed duty, we have reason to expect the promised mercy, that we shall know more and more of God, and be at last perfect in this knowledge.

(3.) That then they shall abound in divine consolations: *His going forth is prepared as the morning*, that is, the returns of his favour, which he had withdrawn from us when he went and *returned to his place*. His out-goings again are prepared and secured to us as firmly as the return of the morning after a dark night, and we expect it, as those do that *wait for the morning* after a long night, and are sure that it will come at the time appointed and will not fail; and the light of his countenance will be both welcome to us and growing upon us, unto the perfect day, as the light of the morning is. *He shall come to us*, and be welcome to us, *as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth*, which refreshes it and makes it fruitful. Now this looks further than their deliverance out of captivity, and, no doubt, was to have its full accomplishment in Christ, and the grace of the gospel. The Old-Testament saints *followed on to know him*, earnestly looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and at length the out-goings of divine grace in him, in his going forth to visit this world, were [1.] As the morning to this earth when it is dark for he went forth as the *sun of righteousness*, and in him *the day-spring from on high visited us*. *His going forth was prepared as the morning*, for he came in the fulness of time; John Baptist was his fore-runner, nay, he was himself the *bright and morning star*. [2.] As the rain to this earth when it is *dry*. *He shall come down as the rain upon the mown grass*, Ps. 72:6. In him showers of blessings descend upon this world, which *give seed to the sower and bread to the eater*, Isa. 55:10. And the favour of God in Christ is what is said of the king's favour, *like the cloud of the latter rain*, Prov. 16:15. The grace of God in Christ is both the *latter and the former rain*, for by it the good work of our fruit-bearing is both begun and carried on.

Verses 4-11

Two things, two evil things, both Judah and Ephraim are here charged with, and justly accused of:—

I. That they were not firm to their own convictions, but were unsteady, *unstable as water*, v. 4, 5. *O Ephraim! what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee?* This is a strange expression. Can Infinite Wisdom be at a loss what to do? Can it be nonplussed, or put upon taking new measures? By no means; but God speaks after the manner of men, to show how absurd and unreasonable they were, and how just his proceedings against them were. Let them not complain of him as harsh and severe in tearing them, and smiting them, as he has done; for what else should he do? What other course could he take with them? God had tried various methods with them (*What could have been done more to his vineyard than he had done?* Isa. 5:4), and very loth he was to let things go to extremity; he reasons with himself (as ch. 11:9), *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?*

God would have done them good, but they were not qualified for it: "*What shall I do unto thee? What else can I do but cast thee off, when I cannot in honour save thee?*" Note, God never destroys sinners till he sees there is no other way with them. See here, 1. What their conduct was towards God: *Their goodness, or kindness, was as the morning cloud*. Some understand it of their kindness to themselves and their own souls, in their repentance; it is indeed mercy to ourselves to repent of our sins, but they soon retracted that kindness to themselves, undid it again, and wronged their own souls as much as ever. But it is rather to be taken for their piety and religion; what good appeared in them sometimes, it soon vanished and disappeared again, *as the morning cloud and the early dew*. Such was the goodness of Israel in Jehu's time, and of Judah in Hezekiah's and Josiah's time; it was soon gone. In time of drought the *morning-cloud* promises rain, and the *early dew* is some present refreshment to the earth; but the cloud is dispersed (and hypocrites are compared to *clouds without water*, Jude 12) and the dew does not soak into the ground, but is drawn back again into the air, and the earth is parched still. What shall he do with them? Shall he accept their goodness? No, for it *passes away*; and *factum non dicitur quod non perseverat-that which does not continue can scarcely be said to be done*. Note, That goodness will never be either pleasing to God or profitable to ourselves which is as the morning cloud and the early dew. When men promise fair and do not perform, when they begin well in religion and do not hold on, when they leave their first love and their first works, or, though they do not quite cast off religion, are yet unsteady, uneven, and inconstant in it, then is their *goodness as the morning cloud and the early dew*. 2. What course God had taken with them (v. 5): "*Therefore, because they were so rough and ill-shapen, I have hewn them by the prophets, as timber or stone is hewn for use; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.*" What the prophets did was done by the word of God in their mouths, which never returned void. By it they thought themselves slain, were ready to say that the prophets killed them, or cut them to the heart when they dealt faithfully with them. (1.) The prophets hewed them by convictions of sin, endeavouring to cut off their transgressions from them. They were uneven in religion (v. 4), therefore God hewed them. The hearts of sinners are not only as stone, but as rough stone, which requires a great deal of pains to bring it into shape, or as knotty timber, that is not squared without a great deal of difficulty; ministers' work is to hew them, and God by the minister hews them, *for with the froward will he show himself froward*. And there are those whom ministers must rebuke sharply; every word should cut, and though the chips fly in the face of the workman, though the reprov'd fly in the face of the reprov'er and reckon him an enemy because he tells the truth, yet he goes on with his work. (2.) They slew them by the denunciations of wrath, foretelling that they should be slain, as Ezekiel is said to destroy the city when he prophesied of the destruction of it, Eze. 43:3. And God accomplished that which was foretold: "*I have slain them by my judgments, according to the words of my mouth.*" Note, The word of God will be the death either of the sin or of the sinner, a savour either of life unto life or of death unto death. Some read it, "*I have hewn the prophets, and slain them by the words of my mouth*, that is, I have employed them in laborious service for the people's good, which has wasted their strength; they have spent themselves, and hews away all their spirits, in their work, and in hazardous service, which has cost many of them their lives." Note, Ministers are the tools which God makes use of in working upon people; and, though with many they labour in vain, yet God will reckon for the wearing out of his tools. (3.) God was hereby justified in the severest proceedings against them afterwards. His prophets had taken a great deal of pains with them, had

admonished them of their sin and warned them of their danger, but the means used had not the desired effect; some good impressions perhaps were made for the present, but they wore off, and passed away as the morning cloud, and now they cannot charge God with severity if he bring upon them the miseries threatened. The prophet turns to him and acknowledges, *Thy judgments are as the light that goes forth*, evidently just and righteous. Note, Though sinners be not reclaimed by the pains that ministers take with them, yet thereby God will be *justified when he speaks and clear when he judges*. See Mt. 11:17–19.

II. That they were not faithful to God's covenant with them, v. 6, 7. Here observe,

1. What the covenant was that God made with them, and upon what terms they should obtain his favour and be accepted of him (v. 6): *I desired mercy and not sacrifice* (that is, rather than sacrifice), and insisted upon *the knowledge of God more than upon burnt-offerings*. *Mercy* here is the same word which in v. 4 is rendered *goodness-cheses—piety, sanctity*; it is put for all practical religion; it is the same with *charity* in the New Testament, the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and this accompanied with and flowing from the *knowledge of God*, as he has revealed himself in his word, a firm belief that he is, and is the *rewarder of those that diligently seek him*, a good affection to divine things guided by a good judgment, which cannot but produce a very good conversation; this is that which God by his covenant requires, and *not sacrifice and offering*. This is fully explained, Jer. 7:22, 23. *I spoke not to your fathers concerning burnt-offerings* (that was the smallest of the matters I spoke to them of, and on which the least stress was laid), but *this I said, Obey my voice*, Mic. 6:6-8. To love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt offering and sacrifice*, Mk. 12:33; Ps. 51:16, 17. Not but that sacrifice and offering were required, and to be paid, and had their use, and, when they were accompanied with mercy and the knowledge of God, were acceptable to him, but, without them, God regarded them not, he despised them, Isa. 1:10, 11. Perhaps this is mentioned here to show a difference between the God whom they deserted and the gods whom they went over to. The true God aimed at nothing but that they should be good men, and live good lives for their own good, and the ceremony of honouring him with sacrifices was one of the smallest matters of his law; whereas the false gods required that only; let their priests and altars be regaled with sacrifices and offerings, and the people might live as they listed. What fools were those then that left a God who aimed at giving his worshippers a new nature, for gods who aimed at nothing but making themselves a new name! It is mentioned likewise to show that God's controversy with them was not for the omission of sacrifices (*I will not reprove thee for them*, Ps. 50:8), but because there was no *justice, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God*, among them (ch. 4:1), and to teach us all that the *power of godliness* is the main thing God looks at and requires, and without it the *form of godliness* is of no avail. Serious piety in the heart and life is the *one thing needful*, and, separate from that, the performances of devotion, though ever so plausible, ever so costly, are of no account. Our Saviour quotes this to show that moral duties are to be preferred before rituals whenever they come in competition, and to justify himself in *eating with publicans and sinners*, because it was in mercy to the souls of men, and in healing on the sabbath day, because it was in mercy to the bodies of men, to which the ceremony of singularity in eating and the sabbath-rest must give way, Mt. 9:13; 12:7.

2. How little they had regarded this covenant, though it was so well ordered in all things, though they, and not God, would be the gainers by it. See here what came of it.

(1.) In general, they broke with God, and proved unfaithful; there were *good things committed* to them to keep, the jewels of mercy and piety, and the knowledge of God, in the cabinet of sacrifice and burnt-offering, but they betrayed their trust, kept the cabinet, but pawned the jewels for the gratification of a base lust, and this is that for which God has justly a quarrel with them (v. 7): *They, like men, have transgressed the covenant*, that covenant which God made with them; they have broken the conditions of it, and so forfeited the benefit of it. By casting off mercy and the knowledge of God, and other instances of disobedience, [1.] They had contracted the guilt of perjury and covenant-breaking; they were like men that transgress a covenant by which they had solemnly bound themselves, which is a thing that all the world cries out shame on; men that have done so deserve not again to be valued, or trusted, or dealt with. "*There, in that thing, they have dealt treacherously against me*; they have been perfidious, base, and false children, in whom is no faith, though I depended upon their being *children that would not lie*." [2.] In this they had but acted like themselves, *like men*, who are generally false and fickle, and in whose nature (their corrupt nature) it is to deal treacherously; *all men are liars*, and they are like the rest of that degenerate race, *all gone aside*, Ps. 14:2, 3. They have *transgressed the covenant like men* (like the Gentiles that transgressed the covenant of nature), like *mean men* (the word here used is sometimes put for *men of low degree*); they have dealt deceitfully, like base men that have no sense of honour. [3.] Herein they trod in the steps of our first parents: *They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant* (so it might very well be read); as he transgressed the covenant of innocency, so they transgressed the covenant of grace, so treacherously, so foolishly; *there* in paradise he violated his engagements to God, and there in Canaan, another paradise, they violated their engagements. And by their treacherous dealing they, like Adam, have ruined themselves and theirs. Note, Sin is so much the worse the more there is in it of the *similitude of Adam's transgression*, Rom. 5:14. [4.] Low thoughts of God and of his authority and favour were at the bottom of all this; for so some read it: *They have transgressed the covenant, as of a man*, as if it had been but the covenant of a man, that stood upon even ground with them, as if the commands of the covenant were but like those of a man like themselves, and the kindness conveyed by it no more valuable than that of a man. There is something sacred and binding in *a man's covenant* (as the apostle shows, Gal. 3:15), but much more in the covenant of God, which yet they made small account of; and *there* in that covenant they *dealt treacherously*, promised fair, but performed nothing. Dealing treacherously with God is here called dealing treacherously against him, for it is both an affront and an opposition. Deserters are traitors, and will be so treated; the revolting heart is a rebellious heart.

(2.) Some particular instances of their treachery are here given: *There they dealt treacherously*, that is, in the places hereafter named [1.] Look on the other side Jordan, to the country which lay most exposed to the insults of the neighbouring nations, and where therefore the people were concerned to keep themselves under the divine protection, and yet there you will find the most daring provocations of the divine Majesty, v. 8. Gilead, which lay in the lot of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, was *a city of the workers of iniquity*. Wickedness was the trade that was driven there; the country was called *Gilead*, but it was all called *a city*, because they were all as it were incorporated in one society of rebels against God. Or (as most think) Ramoth Gilead is the city here meant, one of the three cities of refuge on the other side Jordan, and a Levites' city; the inhabitants of it, though of the sacred tribe, were *workers of iniquity*, contrived it, and practised it. Note, It is bad indeed when a Levites' city is

a city of those that work iniquity, when those that are to preach good doctrine live bad lives. Particularly it is *polluted with blood*, as if that were a sin which the wicked Levites were in a special manner guilty of. In popish countries the clergy are observed to be the most bloody persecutors. Or, as it was a *city of refuge*, by abusing the power it had to judge of murders it became *polluted with blood*. They would, for a bribe, protect those that were guilty of wilful murder, whom they ought to have put to death, and would deliver those to the avenger of blood who were guilty but of chance-medley, if they were poor and had nothing to give them; and both these ways they were *polluted with blood*. Note, Blood defiles the land where it is shed, and where no inquisition is made or no vengeance taken for it. See how the best institutions, that are ever so well designed to keep the balance even between justice and mercy, are capable of being abused and perverted to the manifest prejudice and violation of both. [2.] Look among those whose business it was to minister in holy things, and they were as bad as the worst and as vile as the vilest (v. 9): *The company of priests* are so, not here and there one that is the scandal of his order, but the whole order and body of them, the *priests* go all one way *by consent, with one shoulder* (as the word is), one and all; and they make one another worse, more daring, and fierce, and impudent, in sin, more crafty and more cruel. *A company of priests* will say and do that in conspiracy which none of them would dare to say or do singly. The *companies of priests* were as *troops of robbers*, as *banditti*, or gangs of highwaymen, that cut men's throats to get their money. *First*, They were cruel and blood-thirsty. They *murder* those that they have a pique against, or that stand in their way; nothing less will satisfy them. *Secondly*, They were cunning. They *laid wait* for men, that they might have a fair opportunity to compass their mischievous malicious designs; thus the company of priests laid wait for Christ to take him, saying, *Not on the feast-day*. *Thirdly*, They were concurring as one man: *They murder in the way*; in the highway, where travellers should be safe, there *they murder by consent*, aiding and abetting one another in it. See how unanimous wicked people are in doing mischief; and should not good people be so then in doing good? *They murder in the way to Shechem* (so the margin reads it, as a proper name) such as were going to Jerusalem (for that way Shechem lay) to worship. Or *in the way to Shechem* (some think) means in the same manner that their father Levi, with Simeon his brother, murdered the Shechemites (Gen. 34), by fraud and deceit; and some understand it of their destroying the souls of men by drawing them to sin. *Fourthly*, They did it with contrivance: *They commit lewdness*; the word signifies such wickedness as is committed with deliberation, and of malice prepense, as we say. The more there is of device and design in sin the worse it is. [3.] Look into the body of the people, take a view of the whole house of Israel, and they are all alike (v. 10): *I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel*, and, though it be ever so artfully managed, God discovers it, and will discover it to them; and who can deny that which God himself says that he has seen? *There is the whoredom of Ephraim*, both corporal and spiritual whoredom; there it is too plain to be denied. Note, The sin of sinners, especially sinners of the house of Israel, has enough in it to make them tremble, for it is a horrible thing, it is amazing, and it is threatening, enough to make them blush, for Israel is thereby defiled and rendered odious in the sight of God. [4.] Look into Judah, and you find them sharing with Israel (v. 11): *Also, O Judah! he has set a harvest for thee*; thou must be reckoned with as well as Ephraim; thou art ripe for destruction too, and the time, even the set time, of thy destruction is hastening on, when thou that hast *ploughed iniquity*, and *sown wickedness*, shalt *reap the same*. The general judgment is compared to a *harvest* (Mt. 13:39),

so are particular judgments, Joel 3:13; Rev. 14:15. I have appointed a time to call thee to account, even *when I returned the captivity of my people*, that is, when those captives of Judah which were taken by the men of Israel were restored, in obedience to the command of God sent them by Oded the prophet, 2 Chr. 28:8–15. When God spared them that time he *set them a harvest*, that is, he designed to reckon with them another time for all together. Note, Preservations from present judgments, if a good use be not made of them, are but reservations for greater judgments.

Chapter 7

In this chapter we have, I. A general charge drawn up against Israel for those high crimes and misdemeanors by which they had obstructed the course of God's favours to them (v. 1, 2). II. A particular accusation, 1. Of the court—the king, princes, and judges (v. 3-7). 2. Of the country. Ephraim is here charged with conforming to the nations (v. 8), senselessness and stupidity under the judgments of God (v. 9–11), ingratitude to God for his mercies (v. 13), incorrigibleness under his judgments (v. 14), contempt of God (v. 15), and hypocrisy in their pretences to return to him (v. 16). They are also threatened with a severe chastisement, which shall humble them (v. 12), and, if that prevail not, then with an utter destruction (v. 13), particularly their princes (v. 16).

Verses 1-7

Some take away the last words of the foregoing chapter, and make them the beginning of this: "*When I returned, or would have returned, the captivity of my people, when I was about to come towards them in ways of mercy, even when I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim (the country and common people) was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria, the court and the chief city.*" Now, in these verses, we may observe,

I. A general idea given of the present state of Israel, v. 1, 2. See how the case now stood with them.

1. God graciously designed to do well for them: *I would have healed Israel*. Israel were sick and wounded; their disease was dangerous and malignant, and likely to be fatal, Isa. 1:6. But God offered to be their physician, to undertake the cure, and there was balm in Gilead sufficient to recover the health of the daughter of his people; their case was bad, but it was not desperate, nay, it was hopeful, when God *would have healed Israel*. (1.) He would have reformed them, would have separated between them and their sins, would have purged out the corruptions that were among them, by his laws and prophets. (2.) He would have delivered them out of their troubles, and restored to them their peace and prosperity. Several healing attempts were made, and their declining state seemed sometimes to be in a hopeful way of recovery; but their own folly put them back again. Note, If sinful miserable souls be not healed and helped, but perish in their sin and misery, they cannot lay the blame on God, for he both could and *would have healed them*; he offered to take the ruin under his hand. And there are some special seasons when God manifests his readiness to heal a distempered church and nation, now and then a hopeful crisis, which, if carefully watched and improved, might, even when the case is very bad, turn the scale for life and health.

2. They stood in their own light and put a bar in their own door. When God *would have healed them*, when they bade fair for reformation and peace, then their *iniquity* was *discovered* and their *wickedness*, which stopped that current of God's favours, and undid all again. (1.) *Then*, when their case came to be examined and enquired into, in order to their cure, that wickedness which had been concealed and palliated was *found out*; not that it was ever hid from God, but he speaks after the manner of men; as a surgeon, when he probes a wound in order to the cure of it and finds that it touches the vitals and is incurable, goes no further in his endeavour to cure it, so, when God *came down to see* the case of Israel (as the expression is, Gen. 18:21), with kind intentions towards them, he found their wickedness so very flagrant, and them so hardened in it, so impudent and

impenitent, that he could not in honour show them the favour he designed them. Note, Sinners are not healed because they would not be healed. Christ *would have gathered* them, and they *would not*. (2.) *Then*, when some endeavours were used to reform and reclaim them, that wickedness which had been restrained and kept under *broke out*; and from God's steps towards the healing of them they took occasion to be so much the more provoking. When endeavours were used to reform them vice grew more impetuous, more outrageous, and swelled so much the higher, as a stream when it is damned up. When they began to prosper they grew more proud, wanton, and secure, and so stopped the progress of their cure. Note, It is sin that turns away good things from us when they are coming towards us; and it is the folly and ruin of multitudes that, when God would do well for them, they do ill for themselves. And what was it that did them this mischief? In one word, *they commit falsehood*; they worship idols (so some), defraud one another (so others), or, rather, they dissemble with God in their professions of repentance and regard to him. They say that they are desirous to be healed by him, and, in order to that, willing to be ruled by him; but they *lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue*.

3. A practical disbelief of God's omniscience and government was at the bottom of all their wickedness (v. 2): "*They consider not in their hearts*, they never say it to their own hearts, never think of this, *that I remember all their wickedness*." As if God could not see it, though he is all eye, or did not heed it, though his name is Jealous, or had forgotten it, though he is an eternal mind that can never be unmindful, or would not reckon for it, though he is the *Judge of heaven and earth*. This is the sinner's atheism; as good say that there is *no God* as say that he is either ignorant or forgetful, that there is *none that judges in the earth* as that he remembers not the things he is to give judgment upon. It is a high affront they put upon God; it is a damning cheat they put upon themselves; they say, *The Lord shall not see*, Ps. 94:7. They cannot but know that *God remembers all their works*; they have been told it many a time; nay, if you ask them, they cannot but own it, and yet they do not *consider it*; they do not think of it when they should, and with application to themselves and their own works, else they would not, they durst not, do as they do. But the time will come when those who thus deceive themselves shall be undeceived: "*Now their own doings have beset them about*, that is, they have come at length to such a pitch of wickedness that their sins appear on every side of them; all their neighbours see how bad they are, and can they think that God does not see it?" Or, rather, "The punishment of their doings besets them about; they are surrounded and embarrassed with troubles, so that they cannot get out, by which it appears that the sins they smart for are *before my face*, not only that I have seen them, but that I am displeased at them;" for, till God by pardoning our sins has cast them behind his back, they are still before his face. Note, Sooner or later, God will convince those who do not now consider it that he *remembers all their works*.

4. God had begun to contend with them by his judgments, in earnest of what was further coming: *The thief comes in, and the troop of robbers spoils without*. Some take this as an instance of their wickedness, that they robbed and spoiled one another. *Nec hospes ab hospite tutus—The host and the guest stand in fear of each other*. It seems rather to be a punishment of their sin; they were infested with secret thieves among themselves, that robbed their houses and shops and picked their pockets, and *troops of robbers*, foreign invaders, that with open violence *spoiled abroad*; so far was Israel from being healed that they had fresh wounds given them daily by robbers and spoilers; and all this the effect of sin, all to punish them for robbing God, Isa.

42:24; Mal. 3:8, 11.

II. A particular account of the sins of the court, of the king and princes, and those about them, and the tokens of God's displeasure that they were under for them.

1. Their king and princes were pleased with the wickedness and profaneness of their subjects, who were emboldened thereby to be so much more wicked (v. 3): *They make the king and princes glad with their wickedness*. It pleased them to see the people conform to their wicked laws and examples, in the worship of their idols, and other instances of impiety and immorality, and to hear them flatter and applaud them in their wicked ways. When Herod saw that his wickedness pleased the people he proceeded further in it, much more will the people do so when they see that it pleases the prince, Acts 12:3.

Particularly, they made them glad *with their lies*, with the lying praises with which they crowned the favourites of the prince and the lying calumnies and censures with which they blackened those whom they knew the princes had a dislike to. Those who show themselves pleased with slanders and ill-natured stories shall never want those about them who will fill their ears with such stories. Prov. 29:12, *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked*, and will make him glad with their lies.

2. Drunkenness and revelling abound much at the court, v. 5. The *day of our king* was a merry day with them, either his birthday or his inauguration-day, of which it is probable that they had an anniversary observation, or perhaps it was some holiday of his appointing, which was therefore called *his day*; on that day the princes met to drink the king's health, and got him among them, to be merry, and *made him sick with bottles of wine*. It should seem the king did not ordinarily drink to excess, but he was not upon a high day brought to it by the artifices of the princes, tempted by the goodness of the wine, the gaiety of the company, or the healths they urged; and so little was he used to it that it *made him sick*; and it is justly charged as a crime, as *crimen laesae majestatis—treason*, upon those who thus imposed upon him and *made him sick*; nor would it serve for an excuse that it was *the day of their king*, but was rather an aggravation of the crime, that, when they pretended to do him honour, they dishonoured him to the highest degree. If it is a great affront and injury to a common person to make him drunk, and there is a woe to those that do it (Hab. 2:15), much more to a crowned head; for the greater any man's dignity is the greater disgrace it is to him to be drunk. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel! it is not for kings, to drink wine*, Prov. 31:4, 5. See what a prejudice the sin of drunkenness is to a man, to a king. (1.) In his health; it *made him sick*. It is a force upon nature; and strange it is by what charms men, otherwise rational enough, can be drawn to that which besides the offence it gives to God, and the damage it does to their spiritual and eternal welfare, is a present disorder and distemper to their own bodies. (2.) In his honour; for, when he was thus intoxicated, he *stretched out his hand with scorers*; then he that was entrusted with the government of a kingdom lost the government of himself, and so far forgot, [1.] The dignity of a king that he made himself familiar with players and buffoons, and those whose company was a scandal. [2.] The duty of a king that he joined in confederacy with atheists, and the profane scoffers at religion, whom he ought to have silenced and put to shame; he *sat in the seat of the scornful*, of those that had arrived at the highest pitch of impiety; he struck in with them, said as they said, did as they did, and exerted his power, and *stretched forth the hand* of his government, in concurrence with them. Goodness and good men are often made *the song of the drunkards* (Ps. 69:12; 35:16); but *woe unto thee, O land!* when *thy king is such a child* as to stretch

forth his hand with those that make them so, Eccl. 10:16.

3. Adultery and uncleanness prevailed much among the courtiers. This is spoken of v. 4, 6, 7, and the charge of drunkenness comes in in the midst of this article; for wine is oil to the fire of lust, Prov. 23:33. Those that are inflamed with fleshly lusts, that are *adulterers* (v. 4), are here again and again compared to an oven heated by the baker (v. 4): *They have made ready their heart like an oven* (v. 6); *they are all hot as an oven*, v. 7. Note, [1.] An unclean heart is like an oven heated; and the unclean lusts and affections of it are as the fuel that makes it hot. It is an inward fire, it keeps the heat within itself; so adulterers and fornicators secretly *burn in lust*, as the expression is, Rom. 1:27. The heat of the oven is an intense heat, especially as it is here described; he that heats it *stirs up* the fire, and *ceases not from raising* it up, till the bread is ready to be put in, being *kneaded* and *leavened*, all which only signifies that they are like an oven when it is at the hottest; nay, when it is *too hot for the baker* (so the learned Dr. Pocock), when it is *hotter than he would have it*, so that the raiser up of the fire ceases as long as while the dough that is kneaded is in the fermenting, that the heat may abate a little. Thus fiery hot are the lusts of an unclean heart. (2.) The unclean wait for an opportunity to compass their wicked desires; having made ready their heart like an oven, they lie in wait to catch their prey. *The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, Job 24:15. *Their baker sleeps all the night, but in the morning it burns as a flaming fire*. As the baker, having kindled a fire in his oven and laid sufficient fuel to it, goes to bed, and sleeps all night, and in the morning finds his oven well heated, and ready for his purpose, so these wicked people, when they have laid some wicked plot, and formed a design for the gratifying of some covetous, ambitious, revengeful, or unclean lusts, have their hearts so fully set in them to do evil that, though they may stifle them for a while, yet the fire of corrupt affections is still glowing within, and, as soon as ever there is an opportunity for it, their purposes which they have compassed and imagined break out into overt acts, as a fire flames out when it has vent given it. Thus *they are all hot as an oven*. Note, Lust in the heart is like fire in an oven, puts it into a heat; but the day is coming when those who thus make themselves like a fiery oven with their own vile affections, if that fire be not extinguished by divine grace, shall be made as a fiery oven by divine wrath (Ps. 21:9), when *the day comes* that shall *burn as an oven*, Mal. 4:1.

4. They resist the proper methods of reformation and redress: *They have devoured their judges*, those few good judges that were among them, that would have put out these fires with which they were heated; they fell foul upon them, and would not suffer them to do justice, but were ready to stone them, and perhaps did so; or, as some think, they provoked God to deprive them of the blessing of magistracy and to leave all in confusion: *All their kings have fallen* one after another, and their families with them, which could not but put the kingdom into confusion, crumble it into contending parties, and occasion a great deal of bloodshed. There are heart-burnings among them; they are *hot as an oven* with rage and malice at one another, and this occasions the *devouring of their judges*, the *falling of their kings*. *For the transgressions of a land many are the princes thereof*, Prov. 28:2. But in the midst of all this trouble and disorder *there is none among them that calls unto God*, that sees his hand stretched out against them in these judgments, and deprecates the strokes of it, none, or next to none, that stir up themselves to take hold on God, Isa. 64:7. Note, Those are not only heated with sin, but hardened in sin, that continue to live without prayer even when they are in trouble and distress.

Verses 8-16

Having seen how vicious and corrupt the court was, we now come to enquire how it is with the country, and we find that to be no better; and no marvel if the distemper that has so seized the head affect the whole body, so that there is *no soundness* in it; the *iniquity of Ephraim is discovered*, as well as *the sin of Samaria*, of the people as well as the princes, of which here are divers instances.

I. They were not peculiar and entire for God, as they should have been, v. 8. 1. They did not distinguish themselves from the heathen, as God had distinguished them: *Ephraim, he has mingled himself among the people*, has associated with them, and conformed himself to them, and has in a manner confounded himself with them and lost his character among them. God had said, *The people shall dwell alone*; but they *mingled themselves with the heathen and learned their works*, Ps. 16:35. They went up and down among the heathen, to beg help of one of them against another (so some); whereas, if they had kept close to God, they would not have needed the help of any of them. 2. They were not entirely devoted to God: *Ephraim is a cake not turned*, and so is burnt on one side and dough on the other side, but good for nothing on either side. As in Ahab's time, so now, they *halted between God and Baal*; sometimes they seemed zealous for God, but at other times as hot for Baal. Note, It is sad to think how many, who, after a sort, profess religion, are made up of contraries and inconsistencies, *as a cake not turned*, a constant self-contradiction, and always in one extreme or the other.

II. They were strangely insensible of the judgments of God, which they were under, and which threatened their ruin, v. 9. Observe, 1. The condition they were in. God was not to them, in his judgments, as *a moth* and as *rottenness*; they were silently and slowly drawing towards the ruin of their state partly by the encroachments of foreigners upon them: *Strangers have devoured his strength*, and eaten him up; they have wasted his wealth and treasure, lessened his numbers, and consumed the fruits of the earth. Some devoured them by open wars (as 2 Ki. 13:7, when the king of Syria made them *like the dust by threshing*), others by pretending treaties of peace and amity, in which they extorted abundance of wealth from them, and made them pay dearly for that which did them no good, but which afterwards they paid more dearly for, as 2 Ki. 16:9. This Ephraim got by mingling with the heathen, and suffering them to mingle with him; they devoured that which he rested upon and supported himself with. Note, Those that make not God their strength (Ps. 52:7) make that their strength which will soon be devoured by strangers. They were thus reduced partly by their own mal-administrations among themselves: *Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him* (are *sprinkled* upon him, so the word is), that is, the sad symptoms of a decaying declining state, which is *waxing old* and *ready to vanish away*, and the effects of trouble and vexation. *Cura facit canos—Care turns gray*. The *almond-tree* does not as yet *flourish*, but it begins to turn colour, which speaks aloud to him that the *evil days* are coming, and the *years of which he shall say, I have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. 12:1, 5. 2. Their regardlessness of these warnings: *He knows it not*; he is not aware of the hand of God gone out against him; it is lifted up, but he *will not see*, Isa. 26:11. He does not know how near his ruin is, and takes no care to prevent it. Note, Stupidity under less judgments is a presage of greater coming.

III. They went on frowardly in their wicked ways, and were not reclaimed by the rebukes they were under (v. 10): *The pride of Israel still testifies to his face*, as it had done before (ch. 5:5); under humbling providences their hearts were still unhumbled,

their lusts unmortified; and it is *through the pride of their countenance* that they *will not seek after God* (Ps. 10:4); they *do not return to the Lord their God* by repentance and reformation, *nor do they seek him* by faith and prayer *for all this*; though they suffer for going astray from him, though it can never be well with them till they come back to him, and though they have in vain sought to others for relief, yet they think not of applying to God.

IV. They were infatuated in their counsels, and took very wrong methods when they were in distress (v. 11, 12): *Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart*. To be harmless as a dove, without gall, and not to hurt or injure others, is commendable; but to be sottish as a dove, without heart, that knows not how to defend herself and provide for her own safety, is a shame.

1. The silliness of this dove is, (1.) That she laments not the loss of her young that are taken from her, but will make her nest again in the same place; so they have their people carried away by the enemy, and are not affected with it, but continue their dealings with those that deal barbarously with them. (2.) That she is easily enticed by the bait into the net, and has *no heart*, no understanding, to discern her danger, as many other fowls do, Prov. 1:17. She *hastes to the snare, and knows not that it is for her life* (Prov. 7:23); so they were drawn into leagues with neighbouring nations that were their ruin. (3.) That, when she is frightened, she has not courage to stay in the dove-house, where she is safe, and under the careful protection of her owner, but flutters and hovers, seeking shelter first in one place, then in another, and thereby exposes herself so much the more; so this people, when they were in distress, sought not to God, did not fly *like the doves to their windows* where they might have been secured from all the birds of prey that struck at them, but threw themselves out of God's protection, and then *called to Egypt* to help them, and went in all haste *to Assyria*, to seek for that aid in vain which they might, by repentance and prayer, have found nearer home, in their God. Note, It is a silly senseless thing for those who have a God in heaven to trust to creatures for the refuge and relief which are to be had in him only; and those that do so are a *people of no understanding*, they are *without heart*. Now,

2. See what becomes of this *silly dove* (v. 12): *When they shall go to Egypt and Assyria, I will spread my net upon them*. Note, Those that will not abide by the mercy of God must expect to be pursued by the justice of God. Here, (1.) They are ensnared: *"I will spread my net upon them, bring them into straits, that they may see their folly and think of returning."* Note, It is common for those that go away from God to find snares where they expected shelters. (2.) They are humbled; they soar upward, proud of their foreign alliances and confiding in them; but *I will bring them down*, let them fly ever so high, *as the fowls of heaven*, that are shot flying. Note, God can and will *bring those down that exalt themselves as the eagle*, Obad. 3, 4. (3.) They are made to smart for their folly: *I will chastise them*. Note, The disappointments we meet with in the creature, when we put a confidence in it, are a necessary chastisement, or discipline, that we may learn to be wiser another time. (4.) In all this the scripture is fulfilled. It is *as their congregation has heard*; they have been many a time told by the word of God, read, and preached, and sung, in their religious assemblies, that *"vain is the help of man, that in the son of man there is no help*; they have heard both from the law and from the prophets what judgments God would bring upon them for their wickedness; and *as they have heard now they shall see, they shall feel."* Note, It concerns us to take notice of the word of God which we hear from time to time *in the congregation*, and to be governed by it, for we must shortly be judged by it; and it will justify God in the

condemnation of sinners, and aggravate it to them, that they have had plain public warning given them of it; it is what their congregation has heard many a time, but they would not take warning. "*Son, remember* thou wast told what would come of it; and now thou seest they were not vain words." See Zec. 1:6.

V. They revolted from God and rebelled against him, notwithstanding the various methods he took to retain them in their allegiance, v. 13–15. Here observe,

1. How kindly and tenderly God had dealt with them, as a gracious sovereign towards a people dear unto him, and whose prosperity he had much at heart. He had *redeemed them* (v. 13), brought them, at first, out of the land of Egypt, and, since, delivered them out of many a distress. He had *bound and strengthened their arms*, v. 15. When their power was weakened, like an arm broken or out of joint, God set it again, and bound it, as a surgeon does a broken bone, to make it knit. God had given Israel victories over the Syrians (2 Ki. 13:16, 17), had *restored their coast* (2 Ki. 14:25, 26), had *girded them with strength for battle*. "Though *I have chastened them*" (so the margin reads it), "sometimes corrected them for their faults and thereby taught them, at other times *strengthened their arms* and relieved them, though I have used both fair means and foul to work upon them, it was all to no purpose; they were mercy-proof and judgment-proof."

2. How impudent their conduct had been towards him notwithstanding, which is described here for the conviction and humiliation of all those who have gone on in any way of wickedness, that they may see how exceedingly sinful their sin is, how heinous, how the God of heaven interprets it, how he resents it. (1.) He had courted them to him, and taken them into covenant with himself; but *they fled from him*, as if he had been their dangerous enemy who had always approved himself their faithful friend. They wandered from him, as the silly dove from her nest, for those who forsake God will find no rest nor settlement in the creature, but wander endlessly. They fled from God when they forsook the worship of him, and ran away from his service, and withdrew themselves from their allegiance to him. (2.) He had given them his laws, which were all holy, just, and good, by which he designed to keep them in the right way; but they *transgressed against him*; they sinned with a high hand and a stiff neck, wilfully and presumptuously (so the words signifies); they broke through the fence of the divine law, and therein thwarted the design of the divine love. (3.) He had made known his truths to them, and given them all possible proofs of the sincerity of his good-will to them; and yet they *spoke lies against him*. They set up false gods in competition with him; they denied his providence and power; thus they *belied the Lord*, Jer. 5:12. They rejected his messages sent them by his prophets, and said that they should have peace, though they went on in sin, directly against what he said. In their hypocritical professions of religion, shows of devotion, and promises of amendment, they lied to the Lord, which he took as lying against him. (4.) He was their rightful Lord and King, and had always ruled in Jacob with equity, and for the public good; and yet they *rebelled against him*, v. 14. They not only went off from him, but took up arms against him, would have deposed him if they could and set up another. (5.) He designed well for them, but they *imagined mischief against him*, v. 15. Sin is a mischievous thin; it is mischief against God, for it is treason against his crown and dignity; not that the sinners can do any thing to hurt their Creator (as one of the ancients observes on these words), but *what they can they do*; and it is so much the worse when it is not done by surprise, or through inadvertency, but designedly and with contrivance. The Jews have a saying, which Dr. Pocock

quotes here, *The thoughts of transgression are worse than the transgression*. The designing of mischief is doing it, in God's account. *Compassing and imagining* the death of the king is treason by our law. Those that imagine an evil thing, though it prove a vain thing (Ps. 2:1), will be reckoned with for the imagination.

3. How they shall be punished for this (v. 13): *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me*. Note, Those who flee from God have woes sent after them, and are, without doubt, in a woeful case. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them; the word of God says, *Woe to them!* And observe what follows immediately, *Destruction unto them!* Note, The woes of God's word have real effects; destruction makes them good. The judgments of his hand shall verify the judgments of his mouth. Those whom he curses, and pronounces woeful, they are cursed, they are woeful indeed.

VI. Their shows of devotion and reformation were but shows, and in them they did but mock God.

1. They pretended devotion, but it was not sincere, v. 14. When the hand of God had gone forth against them they made some sort of application to him. *When he slew them, then they sought him. Lord, in trouble have they visited thee*. But it was all in hypocrisy. (1.) When they were under personal troubles, and called upon God in secret, they were not sincere in that: *They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds*. When they were *chastened with pain upon their beds*, and the *multitude of their bones with strong pains*, perhaps ill of the wounds they received in war, they cried, and groaned, and complained in the forms of devotion, and, it may be, they used many good words, proper enough for the circumstances they were in; they cried, *God help us*, and, *Lord, look upon us*. But they did not *cry with their heart*, and therefore God reckons it as no crying to him. Moses is said to *cry unto God* when he spoke not a word, only his heart prayed with faith and fervency, Ex. 14:15. These made a great noise, and said a great deal, and yet did not *cry to God*, because their hearts were not *right with him*, not subjected to his will, devoted to his honour, nor employed in his service. To pray is to *lift up the soul* to God, this is the essence of prayer. If this be not done, *words*, though ever so well chosen, *are but wind*; but, if it be, it is an acceptable prayer, though the *groanings cannot be uttered*. Note, Those do not pray to God at all that do not pray *in the spirit*. Nay, God is so far from approving their prayer and accepting it that he calls it *howling*. Some think it intimates the *noisiness* of their prayers (they cried to God as they used to cry to Baal, when they thought he must be awakened), or the brutish violent passions which they vented in their prayers; they snarled at the stone, and howled under the whip, but regarded not the hand. Or it denotes that their hypocritical prayers were so far from being pleasing to God that they were offensive to him; he *was angry at their prayers*. *The songs of the temple shall be howlings*, Amos 8:3. God will be so far from pitying them that he will justly *laugh at their calamity*, who have so often laughed at his authority. (2.) When they were under public troubles, and met together to implore God's favour, in that also they were hypocritical; they *assembled themselves*, for fashion-sake, because it was usual to *call a solemn assembly* in times of general mourning, Zep. 2:1. But it was only to pray *for corn and wine* that they came together, which were the things they wanted, and feared being deprived of by the want of rain, the judgment they now laboured under. They did not pray for the favour or grace of God, that God would give them repentance, pardon their sins, and turn away his wrath, but only that he would not take away from them *their corn and wine*. Note, Carnal hearts, in their prayers to God, covet temporal mercies only, and dread and deprecate no other but temporal judgments, for they

have no sense of any other.

2. They pretended reformation, but neither was that sincere, v. 16. Here is, (1.) The sin of Israel: *They return*, that is, they make as if they would return; they pretend to repent and amend their doings, but they make nothing of it; they do not come home to God nor return to their allegiance, whereas God says (Jer. 4:1), *If thou wilt return, O Israel! return to me; do not only turn towards me, but return to me.* This dissimulation of theirs makes them like a *deceitful bow*, which looks as if it were fit for business, and is bent and drawn accordingly, but, when strength comes to be laid to it, either the bow or the string breaks, and the arrow, instead of flying to the mark, drops at the archer's foot. Such were their essays towards repentance and reformation. (2.) The sin of the princes of Israel. That which is charged upon them is *the rage of their tongue*, quarrelling with God and his providence and with all about them when they are crossed. Princes think they may say what they will, and that it is their prerogative to huff and bluster, to curse and rail, and to call names at their pleasure, but let them know there is a God above them that will call them to an account for the *rage of their tongues* and make *their own tongues to fall upon them.* (3.) The punishment of Israel and their princes for their sin. As for the princes, they shall *fall by the sword* either of their enemies or of their own people, some by one and some by the other; and *this shall be their derision*, this is that for which they shall be derided *in the land of Egypt*, when they flee to the Egyptians for succour, v. 11. Their sin and punishment shall make them a laughing-stock to all about them. Note, Those that are treacherous and deceitful in their dealings with God, and passionate and outrageous in their conduct towards men, will justly be made a derision to their neighbours, for they make themselves ridiculous.

Chapter 8

This chapter, as that before, divides itself into the sins and punishments of Israel; every verse almost declares both, and all to bring them to repentance. When they saw the malignant nature of their sin, in the descriptions of that, they could not but be convinced now much it was their duty to repent of what was so bad in itself; and when they saw the mischievous consequences of their sin, in the predictions of them, they could not but see how much it was their interest to repent for the preventing of them. I. The sin of Israel is here set forth, 1. In many general expressions (v. 1, 3, 12, 14). 2. In many particular instances; setting up kings without God (v. 4), setting up idols against God (v. 4–6, 11), and courting alliances with the neighbouring nations, (v. 8–10). 3. In this aggravation of it, that they still kept up a profession of religion and relation to God (v. 2, 13, 14). II. The punishment of Israel is here set forth as answering to the sin. God would bring an enemy upon them (v. 1, 3). All their projects should be blasted (v. 7). Their confidence both in their idols and in their foreign alliances should disappoint them (v. 6, 8, 10). Their strength at home should fail them (v. 14). Their sacrifices should have no reckoning made of them, and their sins should have a reckoning made for them (v. 13).

Verses 1-7

The reproofs and threatenings here are introduced with an order to the prophet to *set the trumpet to his mouth* (v. 1), thus to call a solemn assembly, that all might take notice of what he had to deliver and take warning by it. He must sound an alarm, must, in God's name, proclaim war with this rebellious nation. An enemy is coming with speed and fury to seize their land, and he must awaken them to expect it. Thus the prophet must do the part of a watchman, that was by sound of trumpet to call the besieged to stand to their arms, when he saw the besiegers making their attack, Eze. 33:3. The prophet must *lift up his voice like a trumpet* (Isa. 58:1), and the people must hearken to the sound of the trumpet, Jer. 6:17. Now,

I. Here is a general charge drawn up against them as sinners, as rebels and traitors against their sovereign Lord. 1. They have *transgressed my covenant*, v. 1. They have not only transgressed the command (every sin does that), but they have *transgressed the covenant*; they have been guilty of such sins as break the original contract; they have revolted from their allegiance, and violated the marriage-covenant by their spiritual whoredom; they have, in effect, declared that they will be no longer God's people, nor take him for their God; that is *transgressing the covenant*. They have not only done foolishly, but have dealt deceitfully. 2. They have *trespassed against my law* in many particular instances. God's law is the rule by which we are to walk; and this is the malignity of sin, that it trespasses upon the bounds set us by that law. 3. They have *cast off the thing that is good*. They have *put away and rejected good*, that is, God himself; so some understand it, and very fitly. He is good, and does good, and is our goodness. *There is none good but one, that is God*, the fountain of all good. They have *cast him off*, as not desiring to have any thing more to do with him. God was abandoning them to ruin, and here gives the reason for it. Note, God never casts off any till they first cast him off. Or, as we read it, They have cast off *the thing that is good*; they have cast off the service and worship of God, which is, in effect, *casting God off*. They have cast off that which denominates men good; they have cast off the fear of God, and the regard of man, and all sense of virtue and honesty. Observe, *They have transgressed*

my covenant; it has come to this at last; for *they trespassed against my law*. Breaking the command made way for breaking the covenant; and they did that, for they *cast off that which was good*; there it began first. They *left off to be wise and to do good*, and then they went all to naught, Ps. 36:3. See the method of apostasy; men first cast off that which is good; then those omissions make way for commissions; and frequent actual transgressions of God's law bring men at length to an habitual renunciation of his covenant. When men cast off praying, and hearing, and sabbath-sanctification, and other things that are good, they are in the high road to a total forsaking of God.

II. Here are general threatenings of wrath and ruin for their sin: *The enemy shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord*, and (v. 3) *shall pursue him*. If by *the house of the Lord* we understand the temple at Jerusalem, by the eagle that comes against it we must suppose to be meant either Sennacherib, who had taken all the fenced cities of Judah, laid siege to Jerusalem (and, no doubt, aimed at the house of the Lord, to lay that waste, as he had done the temples of the gods of other nations), or Nebuchadnezzar, who burnt the temple and made a prey of the vessels of the temple. But, if we make it to point at the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria, we must reckon it is the body of that people which as Israelites, to whom *pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants*, is here called the *house of the Lord*. They thought their being so would be their protection; but the prophet is directed to tell them that now they had lost the life and spirit of their religion, though they still retained the name and form of it, they were but as a carcase to which the eagles and other birds of prey should be gathered together. The enemy shall pursue them *as an eagle*, so swiftly, so strongly, so furiously. Note, Those who break their covenant of friendship with God expose themselves to the enmity of all about them, to whom they make themselves a cheap and easy prey; and their having been *the house of the Lord*, and his living temples, will be no excuse nor refuge to them. See Amos 3:2.

III. Here is the people's hypocritical claim of relation to God, when they were in trouble and distress (v. 2): *Israel shall cry unto me*; when either they are threatened with these judgments, and would plead an exemption, or when the judgments are inflicted on them and they apply to God for relief, *pouring out a prayer when God's chastening is upon them*, they will plead that among them *God is known* and his *name is great* (Ps. 76:1) and in their distress will pretend to that knowledge of God's ways which in their prosperity they *desired not*, but *despised*. They will then cry unto God, will call him their God, and (as impudent beggars) will tell him they are well acquainted with him, and have known him long. Note, There are many who in works deny God, and disown him, yet, to serve a turn, will profess that they *know him*, that they know more of him than some of their neighbours do. But what stead will it stand a man in to be able to say, *My God, I know thee*, when he cannot say, "My God, I love thee," and "My God, I serve thee, and cleave to thee only?"

IV. Here is the prophet's expostulation with them, in God's name (v. 5): *How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?* It is not meant of absolute innocency (that is what the guilty can never attain to); but how long will it be ere they repent and reform, ere they become innocent in this matter, and free from the sin of idolatry? They are wedded to their idols; how long will it be ere they are weaned from them, ere *they are able to get clear of them?* so it might be rendered. This intimates that custom in sin makes it very difficult for men to part with it. It is hard to cleanse from that filthiness, either of flesh or spirit, which has

been long wallowed in. But God speaks as if he thought the time long till sinners cast away their iniquities and come to live a new life. He complains of their obstinacy; it is that which keeps his anger against them burning, which would soon be turned away if they did but *attain to innocency* from those sins that kindled it. They in trouble cry, *How long* will it be ere God return to us in a way of mercy? but they do not hear him ask, *How long* will it be ere they return to God in a way of duty?

V. Here are some particular sins which they are charged with, are convicted of the folly of, and warned of the fatal consequences of, and for which God's *anger is kindled against them*.

1. In their civil affairs. They set *up kings without God*, and in contempt of him, v. 4. So they did when they rejected Samuel, in whom the Lord was their king, and chose Saul, that they might be *like the nations*. So they did when they revolted from their allegiance to the house of David, and set up Jeroboam, wherein, though they fulfilled God's secret counsel, yet they aimed not at his glory, nor consulted his oracle, nor applied to him by prayer for direction, nor had any regard to his providence, but were led by their own humour and hurried on by the impetus of their own passions. So they did now about the time when Hosea prophesied, when it seems to have grown fashionable to *set up kings*, and depose them again, according as the contenders for the crown could make an interest, 2 Ki. 15:8, etc. Note, We cannot expect comfort and success in our affairs when we go about them, and go on in them, without consulting God and acknowledge not him in all our ways: "They *set up kings*, and *I knew it not*, that is, I did not know it from them, they did not ask *counsel at my mouth*, whether they might lawfully do it or whether it would be best for them to do it, though they had prophets and oracles with whom they might have advised." They *looked not to the Holy One of Israel*, Isa. 31:1. Nor did the princes do as Jephthah, who, before he took upon him the government, *uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*, Jdg. 11:11. Note, Those that are entrusted with public concerns, and particularly with the election and nomination of magistrates, ought to take God along with them therein, by desiring his direction and designing his honour.

2. In their religious matters they did much worse; for they *set up calves against God*, in competition with him and contradiction to him. "Of *their silver and their gold* which God gave them, and *multiplied* to them, that they might serve and honour him with them, they have *made them idols*." They called them *gods* (1 Ki. 12:28, *Behold thy gods, O Israel!*) but God calls them *idols*; the word signifies *griefs*, or *troubles*, because they are offensive to God and will be ruining to those that worship them. *Their silver and their gold they have made to them idols*; so the words are, referring primarily to the images of their gods, which they made of gold and silver, especially the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Idolaters spare no cost in worshipping their idols. But they are very applicable to the spiritual idolatry of the covetous: *Their silver and their gold* are the gods they place their happiness in, set their hearts upon, to which they pay their homage, and in which they put their confidence. Now, to show them the folly of their idolatry, he tells them,

(1.) Whence their gods came. Trace them to their original, and they will be found the creatures of their own fancies and the work of their own hands, v. 6. The calf they worshipped is here called *the calf of Samaria*, because it is probable that when Samaria, in Ahab's time, became the metropolis of the kingdom, a calf was set up there to be near the court, besides those at Dan and Bethel, or perhaps one of those was removed thither; for those that are for new gods will still be for newer. Now let

them consider what this god of theirs owed its rise and being to. [1.] To their own invention and institution: *From Israel was it also*, not from the God of Israel (he expressly forbade it), but from Israel; it was a device of their own (some think), not borrowed from any of their neighbours, no, not from the Egyptians, for, though they worshipped Apis in a living cow, they never worshipped a *golden calf*; that was from Israel; it was *their own iniquity*. Now could that be worthy of their worship which was a contrivance of their own? It was *from Israel*, that is, the gold and silver of which it was made were collected from the people of Israel by a bribe: it was a poor god that was framed by contribution. [2.] It was owing to the skill and labour of the craftsman, Deu. 27:15. *The workmen made it, therefore it is not God*, v. 6. This is a very cogent conclusive argument, and the inference so very plain that one would think their own thoughts should have suggested it to them, so as to make them ashamed of their idolatry. What can be more absurd than for men to worship that as a god, giving being and good to them, which they themselves gave being to (both matter and form), but could not give life to? A made god is no God. This is a self-evident truth; and yet St. Paul was accused as a criminal for preaching that *those are no gods which are made with hands*, Acts 19:26. And, here, this which should have turned them from their idols comes in as a reason why they were inseparably wedded to them; therefore they could not attain to innocency because it was *from themselves*; they were willing to have gods of their own to do what they pleased with, that they themselves might do what they pleased.

(2.) What their gods would come to. If they are not gods, they will not last; nay, if they pretend to be gods, they will be reckoned with: *The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces*, and those that would not yield to the force of the former argument shall be convinced by this that it is not God, but an *unprofitable idol*, as the Chaldee calls it. It shall be *broken to shivers*, like a potter's vessel, though it be a golden calf. It shall be *chips* or *saw-dust*; it shall be a *spider's web*; so St. Jerome. It seems to allude to Moses's grinding to powder the golden calf that was in his time. This shall be served as that was. Sennacherib boasted what he had done to *Samaria and her idols*, Isa. 10:11. Note, Deifying any creature makes way for the destruction of it. If they had made vessels and ornaments for themselves of their silver and gold, they might have remained; but, if they make gods of them, they shall be *broken to pieces*.

(3.) What their gods would bring them to. The breaking of them to pieces would be a disappointment to those who trusted in them. But that was not all: *They have made to themselves idols, that they may be cut off* (v. 4), that their gold and silver, which they so abused, may be cut off (so some take it), nay, that they may themselves be cut off from God, from their own land, from the land of the living. Their idolatry will as certainly end in their extirpation as if they had purposely designed it. And, when this proves to be the effect of their sin, what relief will they have from the gods wherein they trusted? None at all: *"Thy calf, O Samaria! has cast thee off*; it cannot give thee any help in thy distress, and the pleasure thou now takest in it will vanish, and be no pleasure to thee." Those that were justly sent to the gods whom they had chosen found them *miserable comforters*, Jdg. 10:14. If men will not quit the love and service of sin, yet they shall certainly lose all the delights and profits of it. If Samaria had continued firm and faithful to the God of Israel, he would have been a present powerful help to her; but the calf she preferred before him was a broken reed. The case will be the same with those that make their silver and their gold their god. It will *cast them off*, and not *profit them in the day of wrath*, Eze. 7:12. Note, Those that suffer themselves to be deceived into

any idolatries will certainly find themselves deceived in them. Cardinal Wolsey owned that if he had served his God as faithfully as he had served his prince he would not have *cast him off*, as his prince did, in his old age. Their disappointment in their idols is illustrated (v. 7) by a similitude which intimates both that and the destruction which God brought upon them for their idolatry. [1.] They got no good to themselves by worshipping idols: *They have sown the wind*. They have put themselves to a great deal of trouble and expense to make and worship their idols, have made a business of it as much as the husbandman does of sowing his corn, in expectation of reaping some mighty advantage from it, and that they should be as prosperous and victorious as the neighbouring nations were, that worshipped idols. But it is all a cheat; it is like *sowing the wind*, which can yield no increase; they *labour in vain, labour for the wind*, Eccl. 5:16. They take great pains to no purpose, and *wear themselves for very vanity*, Hab. 2:13. Those that make an idol of this world do so; they *set their eyes on that which is not*, which, like the wind, makes a great noise, but has nothing substantial in it. [2.] They brought ruin upon themselves by it: They shall *reap the whirlwind, a great whirlwind* (so the word signifies), which shall hurry them away and dash them to pieces. They not only have not their false gods for them but they set the true God against them; their favour will stand them in no more stead than the wind, but his wrath will do them more mischief than a whirlwind. As a man sows, so shall he reap. "If it may be supposed that a man should sow the wind, and cover it with earth, or keep it there for a while penned up, what could he expect but that it should be forced by its being shut up, and the accession of what might increase its strength, to break forth again in greater quantities with greater violence?" So Dr. Pocock. They promise themselves plenty, peace, and victory, by worshipping idols, but their expectations come to nothing. What they sow never comes up; it has *no stalk*, no blade, or, if it have, *the bud shall yield no meal*; it shall be as the thin ears in Pharaoh's dream, that were blasted with the *east wind*, and there was nothing in them. Or *if it yield*, if they do prosper for a while in their idolatrous courses, *the strangers shall swallow it up*; it shall be so far from doing them any service that it shall be but as a bait to invite strangers to invade them, and as a spoil to enrich those strangers and enable them to do so much the more mischief. Note, The service of idols is an unprofitable service, and the works of darkness are unfruitful; nay, in the end they will be pernicious. Rom. 6:21, *The end of those things is death*. Those that *sow iniquity reap vanity*: nay, those that *sow to the flesh, reap corruption*. The hopes of sinners will be cheats, and their gains will be snares.

Verses 8-14

It was the honour and happiness of Israel that they had but one God to trust to and he all-sufficient in every strait, and but one God to serve, and he well worthy of all their devotions. But it was their sin, and folly, and shame, that they knew not when they were well off, that they forsook their own mercies for lying vanities; for,

I. They multiplied their alliances (v. 9): *They have hired lovers*, or (as the margin reads it) *they have hired loves*. They were at great expense to purchase the friendship of the nations about them, that otherwise had no value nor affection at all for them, nor cared for having any thing to do with them but only upon the Shechemites' principles—*Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours?* Gen. 34:23. Had Israel maintained the honour of their peculiarity, the surrounding nations would have continued to admire them *as a wise and understanding people*; but, when they profaned their own crown, their neighbours

despised them, and they had no interest in them further than they paid dearly for it. But those surely have behaved ill among their neighbours who have no loves, no lovers, but what they hire. See here, 1. The contempt that Israel lay under among the nations (v. 8): *Israel is swallowed up*, devoured by strangers, their land eaten up (v. 7), and themselves too, and, being impoverished, they have quite lost their credit and reputation, like a merchant that has become a bankrupt, so that they are *among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure*, a vessel of *dishonour* (2 Tim. 2:20), a *despised broken vessel*, Jer. 22:28. None of their neighbours have any value for them, nor care to have any thing to do with them. Note, Those that have professed religion, if they degenerate and grow profane, are of all men the most contemptible. *If the salt have lost its savour*, it is fit for nothing but to be *trodden under foot of men*. Or it denotes their dispersion and captivity *among the Gentiles*; they shall be among them poor and prisoners; and who has pleasure in such? 2. The court that Israel made to the nations notwithstanding (v. 9): They have *gone to Assyria*, to engage the king of Assyria to help them; and herein they are as a *wild ass alone by himself*, foolish, headstrong, and unruly; they will have their way, and nothing shall *hold them in*, no, not the bridle of God's laws, nothing shall *turn them back*, no, not the sword of God's wrath. They take a course by themselves, and the effect will be that, like a *wild ass by himself*, they will be the easier and surer prey to the lion. See Job 11:12; Jer. 2:24. Note, Man is in nothing more like the wild ass's colt than in seeking for that succour and that satisfaction in the creature which are to be had in God only. 3. The crosses that they were likely to meet with in their alliances with the neighbouring nations (v. 10): *Though they have hired among the nations*, and hoped thereby to prevent their own ruin, yet *now will I gather them*, as *the sheaves in the floor* (Mic. 4:12); so that what they provided for their own safety shall but make them the easier prey to their enemies. Note, There is no fence against the judgments of God, when they come with commission; nay, that which men hire for their own preservation often contributes to their own destruction. See Isa. 7:20. The king of Assyria, whose friendship they courted, called himself a *king of princes*, Isa. 10:8. *Are not my princes altogether kings?* He laid *burdens* upon Israel, levied taxes upon them, 2 Ki. 15:19, 20. And for these *they shall sorrow a little*; this shall be but a little burden to them in comparison of what they may further expect; or they will be but little sensible of this grievance, will not lay it to heart, and therefore may expect heavier judgments. *They have begun to be diminished* (so some read it), *by the burden of the king of princes*; but this is only the *beginning of sorrows* (Mt. 24:8), *the beginning of revenges*, Deu. 32:42. Note, God often comes gradually with his judgments upon a provoking people, that he may show how slow he is to wrath, and may awaken them to repentance; but those that are made to *sorrow a little*, if they are not thereby brought to sorrow after a godly sort, will, another day, be made to sorrow a great deal, to sorrow everlastingly.

II. They multiplied their altars and temples. Observe,

1. How they denied *the power of godliness*, and wholly cast that off (v. 12): *I have written to him the great things of my law*; this intimates the privilege they enjoyed, as having God's statutes and judgments made known to them, and being entrusted with the lively oracles. Note, (1.) The things of God's law are *magnalia Dei—the great things of God*. They are things that proclaim the greatness of the Law-maker, and things of great use and great importance to us; they are our life, and our eternal welfare depends upon our observance of them and obedience to them; they will make us great if we make a right use of them;

and they are things which God will magnify and make honourable. (2.) It is a great privilege to have the things of God's law written; thus they are reduced to a greater certainty, spread the further, and last the longer, with much less danger of being embezzled and corrupted than if they were transmitted by word of mouth only. (3.) The things of God's law are of his own writing; for Moses and the prophets were his amanuenses, and holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (4.) It is the advantage of those that are members of the visible church that these great things are written *to them*, are intended for their direction, and so they must receive them; what things were written in former ages *were written for our learning*, and are profitable for us. And, if those were happy who had the *great things of God's law* written to them, how much happier are we who have the gospel written to us! But see how this privilege was slighted; these great things of the law were *counted as a strange thing*, as unintelligible and unreasonable (which might *therefore* be slighted, because not to be fathomed, not to be accounted for), or as foreign, and things of no concernment to them, things that they had nothing to do with nor were to be governed by; they used those things as strangers, which they were shy of, and knew not how to bid welcome. *We desire not the knowledge of thy ways*. Note, [1.] God having written to us the great things of his law, we ought to make them familiar to us, as our nearest relations (Prov. 7:3, 4); for *therefore* we have them written, that they may *talk with us*, Prov. 6:22. [2.] We make nothing of the things of God's law if we make strange of them, as if they did not affect us and therefore we need not be affected with them.

2. How they kept up the form of godliness notwithstanding, and to what little purpose they did so.

(1.) They multiplied their altars (v. 11): *Ephraim made many altars to sin*. God appointed that there should be but one altar for sacrifice (Deu. 12:3, 5); but the ten tribes, having forsaken that, would still be thought very devout, and zealous for the honour of God, and, as if they would make amends for the affront they put on God's altar, they made *many altars*, dedicated to the God of Israel, whom hereby they intended, or at least pretended, to give glory to; but that would not justify their violation of God's express command, nor would the example of the patriarchs, who before the law of Moses had many altars. No, they *made many altars to sin* (that is, they did that which turned into sin to them), and therefore these *altars shall be unto them to sin*, that is, God will charge it upon them as a heinous sin, and put that upon the score of their crimes which they designed to be for the expiation of their crimes. Or they shall be to them an occasion of further sin. Their multiplying of altars dedicated to the God of Israel would introduce altars dedicated to other gods. Note, It is a great sin to corrupt the worship of God, and it will be charged as sin upon those that do it, how plausible soever their pretensions may be. And the way of this, as other sins, is downhill; those that once deviate from the fixed rule of God's commands will wander endlessly.

(2.) They multiplied their sacrifices, v. 13. Their altars were smoking altars: They *sacrificed flesh for the sacrifices of God's offerings*, and they celebrated their feasts upon their sacrifices; they were at a great expense upon their devotions, and (as those commonly are who set up their own inventions in the room of divine institutions) were very zealous in their way; as if they hoped by their impositions on themselves to atone for the contempt of the great atonement, and by their observing a ceremonial law of their own to excuse themselves from the obligation of all God's moral precepts. But how did they speed? [1.] God makes no reckoning of their services: *The Lord accepts them not*. How should he, when they did not offer their

sacrifice upon that altar which alone *sanctified the gift*, and when they only sacrificed flesh, but not the spiritual sacrifice of a penitent believing heart? Note, Those services only are acceptable to God which are performed according to the rule of his word, and *through Jesus Christ*, 1 Pt. 2:5. [2.] He takes that occasion to reckon with them for their sins; now will he, instead of pardoning their iniquity and blotting out their sins, as they expected, *remember their iniquity* and *visit their sins*. Such an *abomination to the Lord* are the *sacrifices of the wicked* that they provoke him to call them to an account for all their other abominations. When they think by their sacrifices to bribe the Judge of heaven and earth into a connivance at their wickedness he will resent that as the highest affront they can put upon him, and it shall be the measure-filling sin. Note, A petition for leave to sin amounts to an imprecation of the curse for sin, and so it shall be answered, *according to the multitude of the idols*. "I will punish their sins, *for they shall return to Egypt*;" they shall be carried captive into Assyria, which shall be to them a house of bondage, as Egypt was to their fathers. Or it refers to Deu. 28:68, where returning to Egypt is made to close and complete the miseries of that sinful nation.

(3.) They multiplied their temples, and these also in honour of the true God, as they pretended, but really in contempt of the choice he had made of Jerusalem to *put his name there*. *Israel has forgotten his Maker*, v. 14. They pretended to know him, and yet forgot him, for they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, when the remembrance of him would give check to their lusts. It was an aggravation of their sin in forgetting God that he was *their Maker* (Deu. 32:15, 18; Job 35:10), as nothing obliges us more to remember him than that he is *our Creator*, Eccl. 12:1. "He has *forgotten his Maker, and builds temples*; he seems by the temples he builds to me mindful of his Maker, and to be desirous still to keep him in mind, and yet really he has forgotten him, because he has cast off the fear of him." Some by temples here understand *palaces*, for so the word sometimes signifies. "*He has forgotten his Maker*, and yet is so secure and haughty that he sets his judgments at defiance, as Nebuchadnezzar did when he said, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built?*" Judah is likewise charged with *multiplying fenced cities*, and trusting in them for safety, when the judgments of God were abroad. To fortify their cities in subjection and subordination to God was well enough; but to fortify them in opposition to God, and without any regard to him or his providence (Isa. 22:11), shows their hearts to be desperately *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. But *none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*, nor shall they. *God will send a fire upon his cities*, upon the cities both of Judah and Israel, not only the head-cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, but all the other cities of those two kingdoms, and it shall devour not only the cottages, but *the palaces thereof*; though ever so strong, the fire shall master them; though ever so stately and sumptuous, the fire shall not spare them. This was fulfilled when all the cities of Israel were laid in ashes by the king of Assyria, and all the cities of Judah by the king of Babylon. The fires they both kindled were of his sending; and when he judges he will overcome.

Chapter 9

In this chapter, I. God threatens to deprive this degenerate seed of Israel of all their worldly enjoyments, because by sin they had forfeited their title to them; so that they should have no comfort either in receiving them themselves or in offering them to God (v. 1-5). II. He dooms them to utter ruin, for their own sins and the sins of their prophets (v. 6-8). III. He upbraids them with the wickedness of their fathers before them, whose steps they trod in (v. 9, 10). IV. He threatens them with the destruction of their children and the rooting out of their posterity (v. 11-17).

Verses 1-6

Here, I. The people of Israel are charged with spiritual adultery: *O Israel! thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, v. 1. Their covenant with God was a marriage-covenant, by which they were joined to him as their God, renouncing all others. But when they set up idols and worshipped them, when they fled to creatures for succour and put a confidence in them, they *went a whoring from God* as their God, and honoured the pretenders and rivals with the affection, adoration, and confidence, which were due to God only. Other people were idolaters, but that sin was not, in them, going a whoring from God, as it was in Israel that had been married to him. Note, The sins of those who have made a profession of religion and relation to God are more provoking to him than the sins of others. As a proof of their going a whoring from God, it is charged upon them that *they loved a reward upon every corn-floor*. 1. They loved to give rewards to their idols, in the offerings and first-fruits they presented to them out of every corn-floor. They took a strange pleasure in serving their idols with that which they would have grudged to consecrate to God and employ in his service. Note, It is common for those that are niggardly in the expenses of their religion to be very prodigal in spending upon their lusts. Or, 2. They loved to receive rewards from their idols; and such they reckoned the fruits of the earth to be: *These are my rewards, which my lovers have given me*, ch. 2:12. Note, Those are directly disposed to spiritual idolatry that love a reward in the corn-floor better than a reward in the favour of God and eternal life.

II. They are forbidden to rejoice as other people do: *"Rejoice not, O Israel! for joy. Do not expect to rejoice. What peace, what joy, what hast thou to do with either, while thy whoredoms and witchcrafts are so many?"* 2 Ki. 9:19-22. Be not disposed to rejoice, for it does not become thee, but rather to *be afflicted, and mourn, and weep*, Jam. 4:9. Judah, that keeps close to the true God, nay, and other people that never knew him nor could ever be charged with revolting from him, may be allowed to rejoice, as not having so much cause to be ashamed as Israel has, that has gone a whoring from him. Some think that they had at this time particular occasions for joy, probably upon the account of some losses recovered, or some advantages gained, or some league made with a potent ally, for which they had public rejoicings, as other people used to have upon such occasions; but God sends to them not to rejoice. Note, Joy is forbidden fruit to wicked people. They must not rejoice, because they have gone a whoring from their God; and therefore, 1. Whatever it was that they rejoiced in, it would be no security nor advantage to them, so long as they were at a distance from God and at war with him. Note, We are likely to have small joy of any of our creature-comforts if we make not God our chief joy. 2. The sense of sin and dread of wrath ought to be a damp upon their joy and a strong alloy to all their comforts. Note, Those who by departing from God have made work for repentance have thereby

marred their own mirth, till they return and make their peace with God.

III. They are threatened with destroying judgments for their spiritual whoredoms, according to what was said long before. Ps. 72:27, *Thou hast destroyed all those that go a whoring from thee.* It is here threatened,

1. That their land shall not yield its wonted increase. Canaan, that *fruitful land*, shall be *turned into barrenness for the wickedness of those that dwell therein.* They *love the reward in the corn-floor*, and are so full of the *joy of harvest* that they have no disposition at all to mourn for their sins; and therefore God will, for their effectual humiliation, take away from them, not only their delights and dainties, but even their necessary food (v. 2): *The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them*, much less feast them; they shall either be blasted by the hand of God or plundered by the hand of man. The *new wine* with which they used to make merry shall *fail in her.* Note, When we make the world, and the things of it, our idol and portion, above what they were designed for, it is just with God to deny us even support and nourishment from them, according to that which they were designed for, to show us our folly and correct us for it. Let those miss of their food in the corn-floor that look for their reward in the corn-floor. We forfeit the good things of this world if we love them as the best things.

2. That their land shall not only cease to feed them, but cease to lodge them and to be a habitation for them; it shall *spue them out*, as it had done the Canaanites before them (v. 3): *They shall not dwell any longer in the Lord's land.* The land of Canaan was in a peculiar manner *the Lord's land, the land of the Shechinah* (so the Chaldee), *the land of the Lord of the world* (so the Arabic); he whose all the earth is (Ps. 24:1) took that for his demesne. *The land is mine*, says God, Lev. 25:23. They had used it, or abused it rather, as if it had been their own, had not paid the rent, nor done the services, due to God as their landlord, and therefore God justly *enters*, and takes possession of it, they having forfeited their lease. "It is *my land*" (says God) "and I will make it appear, for they shall be turned off, as bad tenants, and be made to know that, though they thought themselves freeholders, they were but tenants at will." Note, It is for the honour of God's justice and holiness that those who go a whoring from God should not be suffered to dwell upon his land; and therefore, sooner or later, the wicked shall be *chased out of the world.* Or it is called the Lord's land because it was the holy land, *Immanuel's land*, the land that had peculiar tokens of God's favour to it, and presence in it, where God was known and his name was great, where God's prophets and oracles were; it was a kind of copy of the earthly paradise, and a type of the heavenly one. It was a great privilege to have a lot in such a land as this. It was a great sin and folly to rebel against God, and go a whoring from him, in such a land as this, to *deal unjustly in a land of uprightness*, Isa. 26:10. And it was a sad and sore judgment to be driven out from such a land as this; it was like driving our first parents out of the garden of Eden, and almost amounted to an exclusion out of the heavenly Canaan. Note, Those cannot expect to dwell in the Lord's land that will not be subject to the Lord's laws, nor be influenced by his love. Those have forfeited the privileges of the church that conform not to the rules of it.

3. That, when they are turned out from the Lord's land, they shall have no rest nor satisfaction in any other land. When Cain was *driven out from the presence of the Lord* he was *a fugitive and a vagabond* ever after, and dwelt in the land of *trembling.* So Israel here. Some shall *return into Egypt*, the old house of bondage; thither they shall flee from the Assyrian (ch. 8:13) and they shall lose and ruin themselves where they thought to hide and help themselves. Others shall be carried captives to Assyria

and there shall be forced to *eat unclean things*, either (1.) Such things as were not fit for men to eat, that which is rotten and putrefied, intimating that they shall be reduced to the utmost poverty, as the prodigal that would fain have filled his belly *with the husks*. Or, (2.) Such things as were not fit for Jews to eat, being prohibited by their law. It is probable that while they were in their own land, however disobedient in other things, they kept up the distinction of meats, and prided themselves in that; but, since they would not keep the law of God in other things, they should not be suffered to keep it in that, and it was a just punishment of their sin in eating things offered to idols. Note, When at any time we suffer in our food, and either through want or for our health are forced to eat or drink that which is unpleasing, we must acknowledge that God is righteous, because we have sinned about our food, and have indulged ourselves too much in that which is pleasing.

4. That in the land of their enemies, to which they shall be driven, they shall have no opportunity either of giving honour to God or obtaining favour with God, by offering any acceptable sacrifice to him; they should not be in a capacity of keeping up any face or show of religion among them; "and so" (as Dr. Pocock expresses it) "should be as it were quite cut off from any expression of relation to him, from all signs of grace, and means of reconciliation with him, which would be to them a token of their being rejected of God, estranged from him, and no more owned by him as his people." (1.) They shall have no sacrifices to offer, nor any altar to offer them on, nor priests to offer them; they shall not so much as *offer drink-offerings* to the Lord, much less any other sacrifices. (2.) If they should offer them, neither they nor their sacrifices shall be pleasing to him, for they cannot have any legal offerings, nor are their hearts humbled. (3.) Instead of their sacrifices of joy and praise, they shall *eat the bread of mourners*; they shall live desolate, and disconsolate, mourning for the death of their relations and their own miseries, so that if they had opportunity of sacrificing they should never be themselves in a frame fit for it; for they were forbidden to eat of the holy things in *their mourning*, Deu. 26:14. *All that eat of the bread of mourners are polluted*, and incapacitated to *partake of the altar*. (4.) Their *bread for their soul*, the bread which they must either eat or starve, the bread which they shall have for the support of their lives, *shall not come into the house of the Lord*; they shall have no house of the Lord to bring it to, or, if they had, it is such as is not fit to be brought, nor are they rightly disposed to bring it. (5.) The return of the days of their sacred and solemn feasts would therefore be very melancholy and uncomfortable to them (v. 5): *What will you do in the solemn day*, in the sabbath, *the solemn day* of every week, in the *new moons*, the solemn days of every month, at the return of the times for keeping the passover, pentecost, and feast of the tabernacles, the solemn days of every year, the *days of the feasts of the Lord*? Note, The feasts of the Lord are solemn days; and, when we are invited to those feasts, we ought to consider seriously what we shall do. But the question is here put to those who were to be deprived of the benefit and comfort of those solemn feasts, "*What will you do then?* You will then spend those days in sorrow and lamentation which, if it had not been your own fault, you might have been spending in joy and praise. You will then be made to know the worth of mercies by the want of them and to prize spiritual bread by being made to feel a famine of it." Note, When we enjoy the means of grace we ought to consider what we shall do if ever we should know the want of them, if either they should be taken from us or we be disabled to attend upon them.

5. That they should perish in the land of their dispersion (v. 6): *For, lo, they have gone out of the Lord's land*, where they might

have spent both their sabbath days and other days with comfort, *gone because of destruction*, gone to Egypt because of the destruction of their own country by the Assyrians, flattering themselves with hopes that they shall return when the storm is over; but those hopes also shall fail them; they shall find there are *graves in Egypt*, as their murmuring ancestors said (Ex. 14:11), graves for them; for *Egypt shall gather them up*, as dead men are gathered up and carried forth to the grave, and Memphis (one of the chief cities of Egypt) *shall bury them*. *Gathering* and *burying* are put together, Jer. 8:2; Job 27:19. Note, Those that think presumptuously to flee from the judgments of God are likely enough to meet their death where they hoped to save their lives.

6. That their land, which they left behind and to which they hoped to return, should become a desolation: As for *their tabernacles*, where they formerly dwelt and where they kept their stores, *the pleasant places for their silver*, they shall be demolished and laid in ruins, to such a degree that they shall be overgrown with *nettles*; so that if they should survive the trouble, and return to their own land again, they would find it neither fruitful nor habitable; it would afford them neither food nor lodging. Note, Those that make their money their god reckon the *places of their silver* their *pleasant places*, as those that make the Lord their God reckon his tabernacles amiable and his ordinances their pleasant things, Isa. 64:11. But, while the pleasures of communion with God are out of the reach of chance and change, the *pleasant places of men's silver*, which were purchased with silver, or in which they deposited their silver, or which were beautified and adorned with silver, are liable to be laid in ruins, in nettles, and therewith all the pleasure men took in them.

Verses 7-10

For their further awakening, it is here threatened,

I. That the destruction spoken of shall come speedily. They shall have no reason to hope for a long reprieve, for the judgment slumbers not; it is at the door (v. 7): *The days of visitation have come*, and there shall be no more delay; *the days of recompence have come*, which they have been so often warned to expect; their prophets have told them that destruction *would come*, and now *it has come*, and the time of the divine patience has expired. Note, 1. The day of God's judgments is both a *day of visitation*, in which men's sins are enquired into and brought to light, and a *day of recompence*, in which men's doom will be passed, and a reward given to every man according to his work; the strict visitation is in order to a just retribution. 2. This day of visitation and recompence is hastening on apace. It is sure; it is near; as if it had already come.

II. That hereby they shall be made ashamed of their sentiments concerning their prophets. When the day of visitation comes *Israel shall know it*, shall be made to know that by sad experience which they would not know by instruction. *Israel shall know* then what an *evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God*, and what a *fearful thing it is to fall into his hands*. *When thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see*. Israel shall know the difference between true prophets and false. 1. They shall know then that the pretenders to prophecy, who flattered them in their sins, and rocked them asleep in their security, and told them that they should have peace though they went on, however they pretended to be *spiritual men* (as Ahab's prophets did, 1 Ki. 22:24) were *fools* and *madmen*, and not true prophets; they deceived themselves and those to whom they prophesied. But why would God suffer his people Israel to be imposed upon by those false prophets? He answers, *"It is for the multitude of thy*

iniquity which, in contempt of the divine law, thou hast persisted in, *and, for the great hatred of the true prophets, that reproved thee, in God's name, for it.*" Note, Because men receive not the love of the truth, but conceive a hatred of it, and by the multitude of their iniquities bid defiance to it, therefore God shall *send them strong delusions, to believe a lie*, so strong that they shall not be undeceived till the day of visitation and recompence comes, which will convince them of the folly and madness of those that seduced them and of their own folly and madness in suffering themselves to be seduced by them. 2. They shall know then whether the *true prophets*, that were really *spiritual men*, guided by the Spirit of God, were such as they called and counted them, *fools and madmen*; and they shall be convinced that they were so far from being so that they were the wise men of their times, and God's faithful ambassadors to them. When Israel saw that none of Samuel's words *fell to the ground* they knew he was *established to be a prophet* (1 Sa. 3:20); and so here, when God fulfils the word of his messengers, by bringing the days of recompence they foretold, then those that despised and ridiculed them, and thought Bedlam the fittest place for them, will be ashamed of *the multitude of their iniquities* of that kind, and of *their great hatred*, for which God brings upon them this swift destruction. Mocking the messengers of the Lord was the sin they were punished for, and so made ashamed of.

III. That hereby the wickedness of the false prophets themselves shall be manifested to their shame (v. 8): "*The watchman of Ephraim was with my God*; he had been formerly. They had a set of worthy good ministers, that kept close to God and maintained communion with him; but now they have a race of corrupt, malignant, persecuting prophets, that are the ring-leaders of all mischief." Or, "*The watchman of Ephraim* now pretends to have been *with my God*, and prefaces his lies with, *Thus saith the Lord*; but he is *a snare of a fowler in all his ways*, and is cunning to draw the simple into sin and the upright into trouble; and he is so full of hatred and enmity to goodness and good men that he has become *hatred itself in the house of his God, or against the house of his God.*" Note, Wicked prophets are the worst of men; their sins against God are most heinous, and their plots against religion most dangerous. They may boast that they are *watchmen, speculators*, and, as far as speculation goes, they may be right, and *with my God*, may have their heads full of good notions; but look into their lives, and they are *the snare of a fowler in all their ways*, catching for themselves and making a prey of others; look into *their hearts*, and they are *hatred in the house of my God*, very malicious and spiteful against good ministers and good people. Woe unto thee, O land! unto thee, O church! that hast such watchmen, such prophets, that are seers, but not doers! *Corruptio optimi est pessima—The best things, when corrupted, become the worst.*

IV. That God will now reckon with them for the sins of their fathers, which they have trod in the steps of, v. 9, 10. 1. They were as bad as their fathers: *They have deeply corrupted themselves*; they are rooted and riveted in sin; they are far gone in the *depths of Satan* (Isa. 31:6), so that it is next to impossible that they should be recovered; the stain of their corruption is deep, not to be got out; it is as scarlet and crimson, or as the spots of the leopard: and it is their own fault; they have *corrupted themselves*, have polluted and hardened their own hearts, as *in the days of Gibeah*, when the Levite's concubine was abused to death by the men of Gibeah and the whole tribe of Benjamin patronised the villany; that was a time of deep corruption indeed, and such were the present days. Lewdness and wickedness were as impudent and daring now as in the days of Gibeah; and

therefore what can be expected but such a vengeance as was then taken on Gibeah? Every tribe is now as bad as the tribe of Benjamin then was, and therefore may expect to be brought as low as that tribe then was. 2. They shall therefore be reckoned with for their fathers' sins: *He will remember their iniquity and visit their sins*, the iniquity they have by kind and by entail, the sin that runs in the blood; the *sin of the father* shall now be *visited upon the children*. Hence God takes occasion to upbraid them with the degeneracy and apostasy of their ancestors, their perfidiousness and base ingratitude, v. 10. Here observe, (1.) The great honour God put upon Israel when he first formed them into a people: *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness*. He took as much delight and pleasure in them as a poor traveller would do if he found grapes in a wilderness, where he most needed them and least expected them. Or when they were *in the wilderness* he *found them as grapes*, not precious in themselves, but precious to him, and pleasant as the first-ripe grapes to the lord of the vineyard. They were *precious in his sight, and honourable* (Isa. 43:4); he planted them a *choice vine, a right seed* (Jer. 2:21), and found them no better than he himself made them, good grapes at first. *I saw them with pleasure, as the first-ripe in the fig-tree at the first time*. Good people are compared to the *good things that are first ripe*, Jer. 24:2. One then is worth more than many afterwards. This intimates the delight God took in them and in doing them good, not for their sakes, but because he loved their fathers. He preserved them carefully, as a man does the first and choicest fruits of his vineyard. Now when he put all this honour upon them, and they stood so fair for preferment, one would think they should have maintained their excellency; but, (2.) See the great disgrace they put upon themselves. God set them apart for himself as a peculiar people, but they went to Baal-peor, joined with the Moabites in sacrificing to that dirty dunghill deity (Num. 25:2, 3), and they *separated themselves unto that shame*, that shameful idol, so Baal-peor was in a particular manner, if (as should seem) the *whoredom* which the people *committed with the daughters of Moab* was a part of the service done to Baal-peor. Note, Whatever those separate themselves to that forsake God it will certainly be a shame to them, first or last. *Their abominations* are here said to be *as they loved*; their practices which were an abomination to God were as the best-beloved of their souls. Or when they had once forsaken God they multiplied *their abominations*, their idols and abominable idolatries, at their pleasure. This was the way of their fathers; God had done well for them, but they had acted ungratefully towards him, and in the same manner had the present generation *deeply corrupted themselves*.

Verses 11-17

In the foregoing verses we saw the sin of Israel derived from their fathers; here we see the punishment of Israel derived to their children; for, as death entered by sin at first, so it is still entailed with it. We may observe, in these verses,

I. The sin of Ephraim. Some expressions are here which describe that. 1. *They did not hearken to God* (v. 17); they did not give attention to the voice either of his word or of his rod; they did not believe what he said, nor would they be ruled by him. He told them their duty, their interest, their danger, but they regarded him not; all he said to them by his words and by his prophets was to them as a tale that is told; and then no wonder that we hear, 2. Of the *wickedness of their doings* (v. 15), the downright malice that was in their sins; they were not infirmities, but daring presumptions. How can those but do wickedly who will not hearken to the word of God, that would teach and persuade them to do well? And no wonder that there were wicked doings

among them when, 3. Their worship was corrupt (v. 15): *All their wickedness is in Gilgal*, which was a place infamous for idolatry, as appears, ch. 4:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5. It is probable that the idolaters chose that place for their head-quarters because it had been famous in other ages for solemn transactions between God and Israel, as Jos. 5:2, 10; 1 Sa. 10:8; 11:15. There, where the source of idolatry was, whence it spread through the kingdom, there it might be said that *all their wickedness* was, for all other wickedness owed its origin to that. Corruptions in worship make way for corruptions in morals. The *mother of harlots* is the *mother of all other abominations*, Rev. 17:5. The learned Grotius conjectures that there is a mystical sense here. Golgotha in Syriac is the same with Gilgal in Hebrew, and therefore he thinks this may have reference to the putting of Christ to death at Golgotha, which was the greatest sin of the Jewish nation, and of which it might truly be said, *All their wickedness* was summed up in that. And no wonder that the people did wickedly, both in worship and conversation, when 4. *All their princes were revolters*; the whole succession of the kings of the ten tribes did evil in the sight of the Lord, or all the set of judges and magistrates at this time were wicked; they turned aside to sinful ways and persisted in those ways.

II. The displeasure of God against Ephraim for sin. This is variously expressed here, to show what a provocation sin is to the pure eyes of his glory, and how odious it makes the sinner to him. 1. He *departs from them*, v. 12. When they revolt from him, and withdraw from their allegiance to him, how can they expect but that he should depart from them and withdraw both his protection and his bounty? And well may his threatening be enforced as it is, and made terrible: *Woe also unto them when I depart from them!* Note, Those are in a woeful condition indeed whom God has forsaken. Our weal or woe depends upon the gracious presence of God with us; and, if he goes, all weal goes with him and all woes come upon us. *God has forsaken him; persecute and take him.* Saul knew this when he laid such an emphasis upon this part of his complaint, *The Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me.* Nay, he does not only depart from them, but, 2. He hates them. *In Gilgal, where all their wickedness is, there I hated them.* There, where the abominations of sin are committed, there God abominates the sinners. In Gilgal he had bestowed many tokens of his favour upon their ancestors, but now that is the place where he hates them for their base ingratitude. Nay, he not only hates them, but, 3. He *will love them no more*, will never take them into his favour again; the breach between God and Israel is wide as the sea, which cannot be healed. This agrees with what he had said, (ch. 1:6, 7), *I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel*, the ten tribes. 4. He will discard them, and have no more to do with them: *For the wickedness of their doings, I will drive them out of my house.* He will no longer own them as his, or as belonging to his family in the world; he will turn them out of doors as unfaithful tenants that pay him no rent, as unprofitable servants that do him neither credit nor work. Note, Those that profane God's house can expect no other than to be expelled his house, and no longer suffered to be either lodgers in it or retainers to it. Nay, he will not only drive them out of his house, but, 5. He will drive them far enough (v. 17): *My God will cast them away*, not only out of his house, but out of his sight; he will quite abandon and reject them; they shall be *cast-aways*. God said that he would *drive them out of his house*, and here the prophet seconds it, as one that knew his Master's mind very well: *My God will cast them away.* See with what comfort and pleasure he calls God his God. Note, When others disown God, and are disowned by him, it is a very great satisfaction to good people that they can call God their God, can cheerfully own him and see themselves owned by him—all revolters, all ruined,

yet God is *my God*.

III. The fruit of this displeasure, in the cutting off and abandoning of their posterity, which is the judgment here threatened again and again. Observe here,

1. How numerous Ephraim seemed likely to be. The name *Ephraim* is derived from *fruitfulness*, Gen. 41:51. Joseph is a *fruitful bough*, Gen. 49:22. And Moses's blessing foretold the *ten thousands of Ephraim*, Deu. 33:17. This was his glory, v. 11. For this he seemed designed by him that appoints the bounds of men's habitation; for *Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place*, to encourage his increase, which one may expect as from a tree planted by the river's side. Ephraim is as strong and rich as ever Tyre was, and as proud and secure. The Chaldee paraphrase gives this sense of it, *The congregation of Israel, while they observed the law, was like to Tyrus in prosperity and security*.

2. How few Ephraim should be (v. 11): *Their glory shall fly away like a bird*; their children shall be taken away and the hopes of their families cut off. All their glory shall fly *as an eagle towards heaven*, swiftly and irrecoverably. Note, Worldly glory is glory that will *fly away*; but those that have their God their glory have in him an unfading everlasting glory. Ephraim has been as a fruitful tree. But now *Ephraim is smitten*, is blasted; *their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit*, v. 16. If the root be dried, the branch must wither of course. Observe,

(1.) God's threatening this judgment of the destroying of their children. [1.] They shall perish of themselves by the immediate hand of God (v. 11): They shall *fly away from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception*. Some of their children shall die as soon as they are born; the cradle shall be presently turned into a coffin. Others of them shall be *still-born*, or the womb shall be their grave, and their death there their mothers' death too. Of others their mothers shall miscarry almost as soon as they have conceived, and they shall be as untimely fruit. See how easily God can, and how justly we are sure he might, root out the whole race of mankind, that degenerate, guilty, obnoxious race, and blot out the name of it from under heaven; it is but doing as he does by Ephraim here, writing them all childless, making all their glory to *fly away from the birth, the womb, and the conception*, drying up their root, that they bear no fruit, and their business is done in a few years. [2.] They shall perish by the hand of their enemies; they shall die violent deaths (v. 12): *"Though they bring up their children to some maturity, though they escape the diseases and deaths which the infant age is liable to, and are thought to be reared past danger, yet will I bereave them"* (v. 12), by one judgment or other, so that *there shall not be a man left* to build up their families and bear up their name." Again (v. 13), *Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer*. The mothers shall travail with pain to bear their children, and a great deal of care, and pains, and cost shall be bestowed upon the nursing of them, and when a cruel enemy comes and puts all to the word, young and old, without mercy, then they seem but as lambs that were all this while fed for the slaughter. Note, It is a great alloy to the comfort parents have in their children that they know not what they have brought them forth and brought them up for, perhaps *for the murderer*, or, which is worse, to be themselves the plagues of their generation. It is threatened again (v. 16), *Though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb*, those children that they are most fond of. Note, The parents' love is no security to the children's lives; nay, sometimes death is commissioned to take the darlings of the family and leave the burdens of it. When sentence was passed upon Israel in the wilderness, that they should

all perish there, this mercy was mixed with the wrath, that their children should nevertheless enter into that rest which they through unbelief could not enter into. But this is a total and final rejection; even their children shall be cut off, and the land shall escheat to the crown, *ob defectum sanguinis—shall be lost for want of heirs*. The Chaldee-paraphrase, and many of the rabbin, by the *murderers* to whom the children were brought forth, understand those that sacrificed their children to Moloch, a sin which was its own punishment, which showed the parents void of bowels and justly left them void of blessings. [3.] Those few that escape and remain shall be dispersed (v. 17): They shall be *wanderers among the nations*; so the remains of the Jews are at this day, and there is no place in the world where they are a distinct nation.

(2.) The prophet's prayer relating to it (v. 14): *Give them, O Lord! what wilt thou give?* What shall I ask for a people thus doomed to destruction? It is this; since the decree has gone forth, that they must either die from the womb or be brought forth for the murderer, of the two let them rather *die from the womb*. Rather let them have no children than have them to be made miserable; for the same reason, when a total ruin was coming on the Jewish nation, Christ said, *Blessed is the womb that never bore and the paps that never gave suck*, Lu. 23:29. "Give therefore *a miscarrying womb and dry breasts*; for it is better to fall into the hands of the Lord, whose mercies are great, than into the hands of man." Note, Those that are childless may with this reconcile themselves to the will of God herein, that the time may come when, if they were not so, they would wish they had been so.

Chapter 10

In this chapter, I. The people of Israel are charged with gross corruptions in the worship of God and are threatened with the destruction of their images and altars (v. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8). II. They are charged with corruptions in the administration of the civil government and are threatened with the ruin of that (v. 3, 4, 7). III. They are charged with imitating the sins of their fathers, and with security in their own sins, and are threatened with smarting humbling judgments (v. 9–11). IV. They are earnestly invited to repent and reform, and are threatened with ruin if they did not (v. 12–15).

Verses 1-8

Observe, I. What the sins are which are here laid to Israel's charge, the national sins which bring down national judgment. The prophet deals plainly with them; for what good would it do them to be flattered?

1. They were not fruitful in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. Here all their other wickedness began (v. 1): *Israel is an empty vine*. The church of God is fitly compared to a *vine*, weak, and of an unpromising outside, yet spreading and fruitful; believers are branches of that vine, and partake of its root and fatness. But this was the character of Israel, they were as *an empty vine*, a vine that had no sap or virtue in it, and therefore none of those good fruits produced by it that were expected from it, with which God and man should be honoured. Note, There are many who, though they have not become *degenerate* vines, are yet *empty vines*, have no good in them. A vine is of all trees least serviceable if it do not bear fruit. It is thenceforth good for nothing, Eze. 15:3, 5. And those that bring forth no grapes will soon come to bring forth wild grapes; those that do no good will do hurt. He is an *empty vine*, for *he brings forth fruit to himself*. What good there is in him is not directed to the glory of God, but he takes the praise of it to himself, and prides himself in it. Christians live not to themselves (Rom. 14:6), but hypocrites make self their centre; they *eat and drink to themselves*, Zec. 7:5, 6. Or Israel is by the judgments of God *emptied* and *spoiled* of all his wealth, because he made use of it in the service of his lusts, and not to the honour of God who gave it to him. Note, What we do not rightly employ we may justly expect to be emptied of.

2. They multiplied their altars and images, and the more bountiful God's providence was to them the more prodigal they were in serving their idols: *According to the multitude of his fruit* which his land brought forth *he has increased the altars*, and *according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images*. Note, It is a great affront to God, and an abuse of his goodness, when the more mercies we receive from him the more sins we commit against him, and when the more wealth men have the more mischief they do. Should not we be thus abundant in the service of our God, as they were in the service of their idols? As we find our estates increasing, we should proportionably abound the more in works of piety and charity.

3. Their hearts were divided, v. 2. (1.) They were divided among themselves. They were at variance about their idols, some for one, some for another, at variance about their kings, whose separate interests made parties in the kingdom, and in them their very hearts were divided, and alienated one from another, and there was no such thing as cordial friendship to be found among them; it follows therefore, *Now shall they be found faulty*. Note, The divisions and animosities of a people are the causes of much sin and the presages of ruin. (2.) They were divided between God and their idols. They had a remaining affection in their

hearts for God, but a reigning affection for their idols. They *halted between God and Baal*, that was the dividing of their heart. But God is the sovereign of the heart and he will by no means endure a rival; he will either have all or none. Satan, like the pretended mother, says, *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it*; but, if this be yielded to, God says, Nay, *let him take it all*. A heart thus divided will be *found faulty*, and be rejected as treacherous in covenanting with God. Note, A heart divided between God and mammon, though it may trim the matter so as to appear plausible, will, in the day of discovery, be *found faulty*.

4. They made no conscience of what they said and what they did in the most solemn manner, v. 4. (1.) Not of what they said in swearing, which is the most solemn speaking: *They have spoken words*, and words only, for they meant not as they said; they did *verba dare*—*give words*. They *swore falsely in making a covenant*; they were deceitful in their covenanting with God, the covenant of circumcision, the fair promises they made of reformation when they were in distress; and no marvel if those that were false to their God were false to all mankind. They contracted such a habit of treachery that they broke through the most sacred bonds, and made nothing of them; subjects violated their oaths of allegiance and their kings their coronation-oaths; they broke their leagues with the nations they were in alliance with, nor was any conscience made of contracts between private persons. (2.) Nor of what they did in judgment, which is the most solemn acting. Justice could not take place when men made nothing of forswearing themselves; for thus *judgment*, which should have been a healing medicinal plant and of a sweet smell, *sprang up as hemlock*, which is both nauseous and noxious, *in the furrows of the field*, in the field that was ploughed and furrowed for good corn. Note, God is greatly offended with corruptions, not only in his own worship, but in the administration of justice between man and man, and the dishonesty of a people shall be the ground of his controversy with them as well as their idolatry and impiety; for God's laws are intended for man's benefit and the good of the community, as well as for God's honour, and the profanation of courts of justice shall be avenged as surely as the profanation of temples.

II. What the judgments are with which Israel should be punished for these sins; they sinned both in civil and religious matters, and in both they shall be punished. 1. They shall have no joy of their kings and of their government. Because justice is turned into oppression, therefore those who are entrusted with the administration of it, and should be blessings to the state, shall be complained of as the burdens of it (v. 3), and those that would not rule their people well shall not be able to protect them: *Now they shall say, "We have no king*, that is, we are as if we had none, we have none to do us any good nor stand us in any stead, none to keep us from destroying ourselves or being destroyed by our enemies, none to preserve the public peace nor to fight our battles; and justly has this come to us. *Because we feared not the Lord*, when we were safe under the protection of our kings, therefore we are rejected by him, and then *what shall a king do for us?* What good can we expect from a king when we have forfeited the favour of our God?" Note, Those that cast off the fear of God are not likely to have joy of any of their creature-comforts; nor will men's loyalty to their prince befriend them without religion, for, though that may engage him to be for them, what good will that do them if God be against them? Those that keep themselves in the fear and favour of God may say, with triumph, "What can the greatest of men do against us?" But those that throw themselves out of his protection must say, with despair, "What can the greatest of men do for us?" He was a king that said, *If the Lord do not help thee, whence*

should I help thee? Yet he is a fool that says, If a king cannot help us, we must perish (as these intimate here), for God can do that for us which kings cannot. Time was when they doted upon having a king; but now what can a king (who, they thought, could do any thing) do for them? God can make people sick of those creature-confidences which they were most fond of. This is their complaint when their king is disabled to help them, yet this is not the worst; their civil government shall not only be weakened, but quite destroyed (v. 7): *As for Samaria*, the royal city, which is now almost all that is left, *her king is cut off as the foam from the water*. The foam swims uppermost, and makes a great show upon the face of the water, yet it is but a heap of bubbles raised by the troubling of the water. Such were the kings of Israel, after their revolt from the house of David, a mere scum; their government had no foundation. No better are the greatest of kings when they set up in opposition to God; when God comes to contend with them by his judgments he can as easily disperse and dissolve them, and bring them to nothing, as the froth upon the water. 2. They shall have no joy of their idols and of their worship of them. And miserable is the case of that people whose gods fail them when their kings do. (1.) The idols they had made, and the altars they had set up in honour of them, should be broken down, and spoiled, and carried away, as common plunder, by the victorious enemy: *He shall break down their altars*. God shall do it by the hand of the Assyrians: the Assyrians shall do it by order from God. *He shall spoil their images*, v. 2. Note, What men make idols of it is just with God to *break down* and *spoil*. But the calf at Bethel was the sovereign idol; it was this that the inhabitants of Samaria doted most upon; now it is here foretold that this should be destroyed: *The glory of it has departed from it* (v. 5) when it is thrown down and defaced, no more to be worshipped; but this is not all: *It shall also be carried to Assyria* (as some think that the calf at Dan was some time before) *for a present to king Jareb*. It was carried to him as a rich booty (for it was a golden calf, and probably adorned with the gifts and offerings of its worshippers) and as a trophy of victory over their enemies: and what more glorious trophy could they bring than this, or more incontestable proof of an absolute conquest? Thus it is said, *The sin of Israel shall be destroyed* (v. 8), that is, the idols which they made the matter of their sin; it is said of them, *They became a sin to all Israel*, 1 Ki. 12:30. Note, If the grace of God prevail not to destroy the love of sin in us, it is just that the providence of God should destroy the food and fuel of sin about us. With the idols, *the high places* shall be destroyed, the *high places of Aven*, that is, of *Bethaven* (v. 5) or *Bethel*; it was called *the house of God* (so Bethel signifies), but now it is called *the house of iniquity*, nay, *iniquity* itself. The kings did not, as they ought to have done, *take away the high places* by the sword of justice, and therefore God will take them away by the sword of war; so that *the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars*, that is, they shall lie in ruins. Their altars, while they stood, were as thorns and thistles, offensive to God and good men, and fruits of sin and the curse; justly therefore are they buried in thorns and thistles. (2.) The destruction of their idols, their altars, and their high places, shall be the occasion of sorrow, and shame, and terror to them. [1.] It shall be an occasion of sorrow to them. When the calf at Bethel is broken *the people thereof shall mourn over it*. They looked upon the calf to be the protector of their nation, and, when that was gone, thought they must all be undone, which made the poor ignorant people that were deluded into the love of it lament bitterly, as Micah did (Jdg. 18:24), *You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* The priests that had rejoiced in it shall now mourn for it with the people. Note, Whatever men make a god of they will mourn for the loss of; and an inordinate sorrow for the loss of any

worldly good is a sign we made an idol of it. They used to be very merry in the worship of their idols, but now they shall mourn over them; for sinful mirth shall, sooner or later, be turned into mourning. [2.] It shall be an occasion of shame to them (v. 6): *Ephraim shall receive shame* when he sees the gods he trusted to carried into captivity, and *Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel*, in putting such confidence in them and paying such adoration to them. God's ark and altars were never thrown down till the people rejected them; but the idolatrous altars were thrown down when the people were doting on them, which shows that the contempt of the former, and the veneration for the latter, were the sins for which God visited them. [3.] It shall be an occasion of fear to them (v. 5): *The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear*; they shall be in pain for their gods and afraid of losing them; or, rather, they shall be in pain for themselves and their children and families, when they see the judgments of God breaking in upon them and beginning with their idols, as he *executed judgment against the gods of Egypt*, Ex. 12:12. Thus idolaters are brought in trembling when God arises to *shake terribly the earth*, Isa. 2:21. And here (v. 8), *They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us*. The supporters of idolatry (Rev. 6:15, 16) are brought in calling thus in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from God's wrath.

Verses 9-15

Here, I. They are put in mind of the sins of their fathers and predecessors, for which God would now reckon with them. It was told them (ch. 9:9) that they had *corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah*, and here (v. 9), *O Israel! thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah*. Not only the wickedness that was committed in that age is revived in this, and reacted, a copy from that original, but the wickedness that was committed in that age has been continued in a constant series and succession through all the intervening ages down to this; so that the measure of iniquity had been long in filling; and still there had been made additions to it. Or, *"Thou has sinned more than in the days of Gibeah"* (so it may be read); "the sins of this age exceed those of the worst of former ages. The case was bad then, for *there they stood*; the criminals stood in their own defence, and the tribes of Israel, who undertook to chastise them for their wickedness, were *at a stand*, when both in the first and in the second battle the malefactors were the victors; and *the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them* till the third engagement, and then did not overtake them all, for 600 made their escape. But thy sin is worse than theirs, and therefore thou canst not expect but that the battle against the children of iniquity should overtake thee, and overcome thee."

II. They have warning given them, fair warning, of the judgments of God that were coming upon them, v. 10. God had hitherto pitied and spared them. Though they had been very provoking, he had a mind to try whether they would be wrought upon by patience and forbearance; but now, *"It is in my desire that I should chastise them*; it is what I have a purpose of and will take pleasure in." He will *rejoice over them to do them hurt*, Deu. 28:63. Note, Because God does not desire the death and ruin of sinners, therefore he does desire their chastisement. And see what the chastisement is: *The people shall be gathered against them*, as all the other tribes were against Benjamin in the battle of Gibeah. One of the rabbins thus descants upon it: "Because they receive not chastisement from me by my prophets, who in my name rebuke them, I will chastise them by the hands of the people who shall be *gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows*," that is, when they shall think to fortify themselves, as it were, within a double entrenchment. or, *When I shall bind them for their two transgressions*

(so the margin reads it), meaning their corporal and spiritual whoredom, which they are so often charged with, or the *two calves* at Dan and Bethel, or those two great evils mentioned Jer. 2:13. Or, *When I shall bind them to their two furrows*, that is, bring them into servitude to the Assyrians, who shall keep them under the yoke as oxen in the plough, who are bound to the two furrows up the field and down it, and dare not, for fear of the goad, stir a step out of them. The Chaldee says, *Those that are gathered against them shall exercise dominion over them, in like manner as a pair of heifers are tied to their two furrows*. Thus those that would not be God's freemen shall be their enemies' slaves, and shall be made to know the difference between *God's service* and *the service of the kingdoms of the countries*, 2 Chr. 12:8.

III. They are made to know that their unacquaintedness with sufferings and hardships should not excuse them from a very miserable captivity, v. 11. See how nice, and tender, and delicate, Ephraim is; he is *as a heifer that is taught to tread out the corn, and loves that work*, because, being not allowed to be muzzled, she has liberty to eat at pleasure, and the work itself was dry and easy, and both its own diversion and its own wages. "But," says God, "I have a yoke to put upon *her fair neck*, fair as it is. *I will make Ephraim to ride*, that is, I will tame them, or cause them to be ridden by the Assyrians and other conquerors that shall rule them with rigour, as men do the beasts they ride upon (Ps. 66:12); and *Judah* too shall be made to *plough*, and *Jacob* to *break the clods*," that is, they shall be used hardly, but not so hardly as Ephraim. Note, It is just with God to make those know what hardships mean that indulge themselves too much in their own ease and pleasure. The learned Dr. Pocock inclines to another sense of these words, as intimating the tender gentle methods God took with this people, to bring them into obedience to his law, as a reason why they should return to that obedience; he had managed them as the husbandman does his cattle that he trains up for service. Ephraim being as a docile heifer, fit to be employed, God took hold of *her fair neck*, to accustom her to the hand, *harnessed her*, or put the yoke of his commandments upon her, gave his people Israel a law, that, being trained up in his institutions, they might not be tempted by the usages of the heathen; he had used all fair and likely means with them to keep them in their obedience, had set *Judah* to *plough* and *Jacob* to *break the clods*, had employed them in the observance of precepts proper for them; and yet they would not be retained in their obedience, but started aside.

IV. They are invited and encouraged to return to God by prayer, repentance, and reformation, v. 12, 13. See here,

1. The duties they are called to. They are *God's husbandry* (1 Co. 3:9), and the duties are expressed in language borrowed from the husbandman's calling. If they would not be brought into bondage by their oppressors, let them return to God's service. (1.) Let them *break up the fallow ground*; let them cleanse their hearts from all corrupt affections and lusts, which are as weeds and thorns, and let them be humbled for their sins, and be of a broken and contrite spirit in the sense of them; let them be full of sorrow and shame at the remembrance of them, and prepare to receive the divine precepts, as the ground that is ploughed is to receive the seed, that it may take root. See Jer. 4:3. (2.) Let them *sow to themselves in righteousness*; let them return to the practice of good works, according to the law of God, which is the rule of righteousness; let them abound in works of piety towards God, and of justice and charity towards one another, and herein let them *sow to the Spirit*, as the apostle speaks, Gal. 6:7, 8. Every action is seed sown. Let them *sow in righteousness*; let them sow what they should sow, do what they should do, and they themselves shall have the benefit of it. (3.) Let them *seek the Lord*; let them look up to him for his grace, and beg of

him to bless the *seed sown*. The husbandman must plough and sow with an eye to God, asking of him rain in the season thereof.

2. The arguments used for the pressing of these duties. Consider, (1.) It is time to do it; it is *high time*. The husbandman sows in seed-time, and, if that time be far spent, he applies to the work with the more diligence. Note, Seeking the Lord is to be every day's work, but there are some special occasions given by the providence and grace of God when it is, in a particular manner, time to seek him. (2.) If we do our part, God will do his. If we *sow to ourselves in righteousness*—if we be careful and diligent to do our duty, in a dependence upon his grace—he will shower down his grace upon us, will *rain righteousness*, the very thing that those need most who are to sow *in righteousness*; for *by the grace of God we are what we are*. Some apply it to Christ, who should come in the fulness of time, and for whose coming they must prepare themselves; he shall come as *the Lord our righteousness*, and shall *rain righteousness upon us*, that everlasting righteousness which he has brought in; he will grant us of it abundantly. It is foretold (Ps. 72:6) that *he shall come down like rain*. (3.) If we *sow in righteousness*, we shall *reap in mercy*, which agrees with that promise, If we *sow to the Spirit*, we shall *of the Spirit reap life everlasting*. We shall reap *according to the measure of mercy* (so the word is); it shall be a great reward, according to the *riches of mercy*, such a reward, not as becomes such mean creatures as we are to receive, but as becomes a God of infinite mercy to give, a reward, *not of debt*, but *of grace*. We reap not in merit, but in mercy. It is what is sown; God gives a body as it has pleased him. (4.) We have *ploughed wickedness and reaped iniquity*; and the time *past of our life may suffice* that we have done so, v. 13. "You have taken a great deal of pains in the service of sin, have laboured at it in the very fire; and will you grudge to bear the burden and heat of the day in God's service and in doing that which will be for your own advantage? You have done much to damn your souls; will you not undo it again, and do something to save them?" (5.) We never got any thing in the service of sin. They have *ploughed wickedness* (that is, they have done the drudgery of sin), and they have *reaped iniquity*, that is, they have got all that is to be got by it; they have carried it on to the *harvest*, and what the better? It is all a cheat. *They have eaten the fruit of lies*, fruit that is but a lie, which looks fair, but is rotten within; the *works of darkness* are *unfruitful works*, Eph. 5:11; Rom. 6:21. Even the gains of sin yield the sinner no satisfaction. (6.) As our comforts, so our confidences, in the service of sin will certainly fail us: "*Thou didst trust in thy ways, in the multitude of thy mighty men*; thou has stayed thyself upon creatures, thy own power and policy, and therefore hast ventured to plough wickedness, and thy hopes have deceived thee; come therefore, and seek the Lord, and thy hope in him shall not deceive thee."

V. They are threatened with utter destruction, both for their carnal practices and for their carnal confidences, v. 14, 15.

Therefore, because thou has sown wickedness, and trusted in thy own way, *a tumult shall arise among thy people*, either by insurrections at home or invasions from abroad, either of which will put a kingdom into confusion and make a noise, much more both together. 1. Their cities and strongholds shall be a prey to the enemy: The *fortresses* which they confided in, and in which they had laid up their effects, shall be seized and rifled, as *Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle*. This refers to some event that had lately happened, not elsewhere recorded; and probably Shalman is the same with Shalmaneser king of Assyria, who had lately put some town, or castle, or house (*Beth-arbel is the house of Arbel*), under *military execution*, which

perhaps he used with severity in the beginning of his conquests, to terrify other garrisons into a speedy surrender at the first summons. God tells them that thus Samaria should be *spoiled*. 2. The inhabitants shall be put to the *sword*, as it was at *Beth-arbel*; when it was taken *the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children*, that is, they were both dashed in pieces together by the fury of the soldiers. See what cruel work war makes. *Jusque datum sceleri—Wickedness has free course*. It is strange that any of the human race could be so inhuman; but see what comes of sin. *Homo homini lupus—Man is a wolf to man*, and then, *Homo homini agnus—Man is a lamb to man*. 3. Even royal blood shall be mingled with common gore: *In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off*, v. 15. Hoshea was the last king of Israel; in him the whole kingdom was *cut off* and came to a period; it may refer either to him or to some of his predecessors that were cut off by treachery. It shall be done *in a morning*, in a very little time, as suddenly as the dawning of the morning, or at the time appointed, for so the morning comes, punctually at its time. Or *in the morning*, when they think the night of calamity is over, and expect a returning day, then shall all their hopes be dashed by the sudden cutting off of their king, v. 7. Kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall die like men. And (*lastly*) what does all this desolation owe its rise to? What is the spring of this bloodshed? He tells us (v. 15): *So shall Bethel do unto you*. Bethel was the place where one of the calves was; Gilgal, where *all their wickedness* is said to have been, was hard by; there was their *great wickedness*, the *evil of their evil* (so the word is), the sum and quintessence of their sin; and that was it that *did this to them*, that made all this havoc, for that was it that provoked God to bring it upon them. He does not say, "So shall the *king of Assyria* do to you;" but, "So shall *Bethel* do to you." Note, Whatever mischief is done to us it is sin that does it. Are the fortresses spoiled? Are the women and children murdered? Is the king cut off? It is sin that does all this. It is sin that ruins soul, body, estate, all. *So shall Bethel do unto you*. It is *thy own wickedness* that *corrects thee* and *thy backslidings* that *reprove thee*.

Chapter 11

In this chapter we have, I. The great goodness of God towards his people Israel, and the great things he had done for them (v. 1, 3, 4). II. Their ungrateful conduct towards him, notwithstanding his favours towards them (v. 2–4, 7, 12). III. Threatenings of wrath against them for their ingratitude and treachery (v. 5, 6). IV. Mercy remembered in the midst of wrath (v. 8, 9). V. Promises of what God would yet do for them (v. 10, 11). VI. An honourable character given of Judah (v. 12).

Verses 1-7

Here we find,

I. God very gracious to Israel. They were a people for whom he had done more than for any people under heaven, and to whom he had given more, which they are here, I will not say upbraided with (for God gives, and upbraids not), but put in mind of, as an aggravation of their sin and an encouragement to repentance. 1. He had a kindness for them when they were young (v. 1): *When Israel was a child then I loved him*; when they first began to multiply into a nation in Egypt God then *set his love upon them*, and *chose them because he loved them*, because he would love them, Deu. 7:7, 8. When they were weak and helpless as children, foolish and froward as children, when they were outcasts, and children exposed, then God *loved them*; he pitied them, and testified his goodwill to them; he bore them as the nurse does the sucking child, nourished them, and suffered their manners. Note, Those that have grown up, nay, those that have grown old, ought often to reflect upon the goodness of God to them in their childhood. 2. He delivered them out of the house of bondage: *I called my son out of Egypt*, because a son, because a beloved son. When God demanded Israel's discharge from Pharaoh he called them *his son*, his *first-born*. Note, Those whom God loves he calls out of the bondage of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of his children. These words are said to have been fulfilled in Christ, when, upon the death of Herod, he and his parents were *called out of Egypt* (Mt. 2:15), so that the words have a double aspect, speaking historically of the calling of Israel out of Egypt and prophetically of the bringing of Christ thence; and the former was a type of the latter, and a pledge and earnest of the many and great favours God had in reserve for that people, especially the sending of his Son into the world, and the bringing him again into the land of Israel when they had unkindly driven him out, and he might justly never have returned. The calling of Christ out of Egypt was a figure of the calling of all that are his, through him, out of spiritual slavery. 3. He gave them a good education, took care of them, took pains with them, not only as a father or tutor, but, such is the condescension of divine grace, as a mother or nurse (v. 3): *I taught Ephraim also to go*, as a child in leading-strings is taught. When they were in the wilderness God led them by the pillar of cloud and fire, showed them the way in which they should go, and bore them up, *taking them by the arms*. *He taught them to go* in the way of his commandments, by the institutions of the ceremonial law, which were as tutors and governors to that people under age. He took them by the arms, to guide them, that they might not stray, and to hold them up, that they might not stumble and fall. God's spiritual Israel are thus supported. *Thou has holden me by my right hand*, Ps. 73:23. 4. When any thing was amiss with them, or they were ever so little out of order, he was their physician: *"I healed them*; I not only took a tender care of them (a friend may do that), but wrought an effectual cure: it is a God only that can do that. *I am the Lord that healeth*

thee (Ex. 15:26), that redresseth all thy grievances." 5. He brought them into his service by mild and gentle methods (v. 4): *I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love*. Note, It is God's work to draw poor souls to himself; and none can come to him except he draw them, Jn. 6:44. He draws, (1.) *With the cords of a man*, with such cords as men draw with that have a principle of humanity, or such cords as men are drawn with; he dealt with them *as men*, in an equitable rational way, in an easy gentle way, *with the cords of Adam*. He dealt with them as with Adam in innocency, bringing them at once into a paradise, and into covenant with himself. (2.) *With bands of love*, or *cartropes* of love. This word signifies stronger cords than the former. He did not drive them by force into his service, whether they would or no, nor rule them with rigour, nor detain them by violence, but his attractives were all loving and endearing, all sweet and gentle, that he might overcome them with kindness. Moses, whom he made their guide, was the meekest man in the world. *Kindnesses* among men we commonly call *obligations*, or *bonds*, bonds of love. Thus God *draws with the savour of his good ointments* (Cant. 1:4), draws *with lovingkindness*, Jer. 31:3. Thus God deals with us, and we must deal in like manner with those that are under our instruction and government, deal rationally and mildly with them. 6. He eased them of the burdens they had been long groaning under: *I was to them as those that take off the yoke on their jaws*, alluding to the care of the good husbandman, who is merciful to his beast, and will not tire him with hard and constant labour. Probably, in those times, the yoke on the neck of the oxen was fastened with some bridle, or headstall, over the jaws, which *muzzled the mouth of the ox*. Israel in Egypt were thus restrained from the enjoyments of their comforts and constrained to hard labour; but God eased them, *removed their shoulder from the burden*, Ps. 81:6. Note, Liberty is a great mercy, especially out of bondage. 7. He supplied them with food convenient. In Egypt they fared hard, but, when God brought them out, he *laid meat unto them*, as the husbandman, when he has unyoked his cattle, foddens them. God rained manna about their camp, bread from heaven, angels' food; other creatures *seek their meat*, but God laid meat to his own people, as we do to our children, was himself their caterer and carver, anticipated *them with the blessings of goodness*.

II. Here is Israel very ungrateful to God.

1. They were deaf and disobedient to his voice. He spoke to them by his messengers, Moses and his other prophets, called them from their sins, called them to himself, to their work and duty; but *as they called them so they went from them*; they rebelled in those particular instances wherein they were admonished; the more pressing and importunate the prophets were with them, to persuade them to that which was good, the more refractory they were, and the more resolute in their evil ways, disobeying for disobedience-sake. This foolishness is bound in the hearts of children, who, as soon as they are taught to go, will go from those that call them.
2. They were fond of idols, and worshipped them: They *sacrificed to Baalim*, first one Baal and then another, and *burnt incense to graven images*, though they were called to by the prophets of the Lord again and again not to do this abominable thing which he hated. Idolatry was the sin which from the beginning, and all along, had most easily beset them.
3. They were regardless of God, and of his favours to them: *They knew not that I healed them*. They looked only at Moses and Aaron, the instruments of their relief, and, when any thing was amiss, quarrelled with them, but looked not through them to God who employed them. Or, When God corrected them, and kept them under a severe discipline, they understood not that it

was for their good, and that God thereby *healed them*, and it was necessary for the perfecting of their cure, else they would have been better reconciled to the methods God took. Note, Ignorance is at the bottom of ingratitude, ch. 2:8.

4. They were strongly inclined to apostasy. This is the blackest article in the charge (v. 7): *My people are bent to backsliding from me*. Every word here is aggravating. (1.) They *backslide*. There is no hold of them, no steadfastness in them; they seem to come forward, towards God, but they quickly slide back again, and are as a deceitful bow. (2.) They backslide *from me*, from God, the chief good, the fountain of life and living waters, from their God who never turned from them, nor war as a wilderness to them. (3.) They are *bent to backslide*; they are ready to sin; there is in their natures a propensity to that which is evil; at the best they hang in suspense between God and the world, so that a little thing serves to draw them the wrong way; they are forward to close with every temptation. It also intimates that they are resolute in sin; their hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* the bias is strong that way; and they persist in their backslidings, whatever is said or done to stop them; and yet, (4.) "They are, in profession, *my people*. They are *called by my name*, and profess relation to me; they are mine, whom I have done much for and expect much from, whom I have *nourished* and *brought up, as children*, and yet they backslide *from me*." Note, In our repentance we ought to lament not only our backslidings, but our *bent to backslide*, not only our actual transgressions, but our original corruption, the sin that dwells in us, the carnal mind.

5. They were strangely averse to repentance and reformation. Here are two expressions of their obstinacy:—(1.) *They refused to return*, v. 5. So much were they bent to backslide that, though they could not but find, upon trial, the folly of their backslidings, and that when they forsook God they changed for the worse, yet they went on frowardly. *I have loved strangers, and after them I will go*. They were commanded to return, were courted and entreated to return, were promised that if they would they should be kindly received, but they refused. (2.) Though *they called them to the Most High*. God's prophets and ministers called them to return to the God from whom they had revolted, to the most high God, from whom they had sunk into this wretched degeneracy; they called them from the worship of the idols, which were so much below them, and the worship of which was therefore their disparagement, to the true God, who was so much above them, and the worship of whom was therefore their preferment; they called them from this earth to high and heavenly things; but they called in vain. *None at all would exalt him*. Though he is the most high God they would not acknowledge him to be so, would do nothing to honour him nor give him the glory due to his name. Or, They would not *exalt themselves*, would not rise out of that state of apostasy and misery into which they had precipitated themselves; but there they contentedly lay still, would not lift up their heads nor lift up their souls. Note, God's faithful ministers have taken a great deal of pains, to no purpose, with backsliding children, have called them to the Most High; but none would stir, *none at all would exalt him*.

III. Here is God very angry, and justly so, with Israel; see what are the tokens of God's displeasure with which they are here threatened. 1. God, who brought them out of Egypt, to take them for a people to himself, since they would not be faithful to him, shall bring them into a worse condition than he at first found them in (v. 5): *"He shall not return into the land of Egypt, though that was a house of bondage grievous enough; but he shall go into a harder service, for the Assyrian shall be his king, who will use him worse than ever Pharaoh did."* They shall not return into Egypt, which lies near, where they may hear often

from their own country, and whence they may hope shortly to return to it again; but they shall be carried into Assyria, which lies much more remote, and where they shall be cut off from all correspondence with their own land and from all hopes of returning to it, and justly, because *they refused to return*. Note, Those that will not return to the duties they have left cannot expect to return to the comforts they have lost. 2. God, who gave them Canaan, that good land, and a very safe and comfortable settlement in it, shall bring his judgments upon them there, which shall make their habitation unsafe and uncomfortable (v. 6): *The sword* shall come upon them, the sword of war, the sword of a foreign enemy, prevailing against them and triumphing over them. (1.) This judgment shall spread far. The sword shall fasten upon their *cities*, those nests of people and store-houses of wealth; it shall likewise reach to their *branches*, the country villages (so some), the citizens themselves (so others), or the *bars* (so the word signifies) and gates of their city, or all the branches of their revenue and wealth, or their children, the branches of their families. (2.) It shall last long: It shall *abide on their cities*. David thought *three months* flying before his enemies was the only judgment of the three that was to be excepted against; but this *sword* shall abide much longer than three months on the cities of Israel. They continued their rebellions against God, and therefore God continued his judgments on them. (3.) It shall *make a full end*: It shall *consume their branches, and devour them*, and lay all waste, and this *because of their own counsels*, that is, because they would have their own projects, which God therefore, in a way of righteous judgment, gave them up to. Note, The confusion of sinners is owing to their contrivance. God's counsels would have saved them, but their own counsels ruined them.

Verses 8-12

In these verses we have,

I. God's wonderful backwardness to destroy Israel (v. 8, 9): *How shall I give thee up?* Here observe,

1. God's gracious debate within himself concerning Israel's case, a debate between justice and mercy, in which victory plainly inclines to mercy's side. Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth! at the glory of God's goodness. Not that there are any such struggles in God as there are in us, or that he is ever fluctuating or unresolved; no, he is in one mind, and knows it; but they are expressions after the manner of men, designed to show what severity the sin of Israel had deserved, and yet how divine grace would be glorified in sparing them notwithstanding. The connexion of this with what goes before is very surprising; it was said of Israel (v. 7) that they were *bent to backslide from God*, that though they were called to him they *would not exalt him*, upon which, one would think, it should have followed, "Now I am determined to destroy them, and never show them mercy any more." No, such is the sovereignty of mercy, such the freeness, the fulness, of divine grace, that it follows immediately, *How shall I give thee up?* See here, (1.) The proposals that justice makes concerning Israel, the suggestion of which is here implied. Let Ephraim be given up, as an incorrigible son is given up to be disinherited, as an incurable patient is given over by his physician. Let him be given up to ruin. Let Israel be delivered into the enemy's hand, as a lamb to the lion to be torn in pieces; let them be made as Admah and set as Zeboim, the two cities that with Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone rained from heaven upon them; let them be utterly and irreparably ruined, and be made as like these cities in desolation as they have been in sin. Let that curse which is written in the law be executed upon

them, that the *whole land* shall be *brimstone and salt, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim*, Deu. 29:23. Ephraim and Israel deserve to be thus abandoned, and God will do them no wrong if he deal thus with them. (2.) The opposition that mercy makes to these proposals: *How shall I do it?* As the tender father reasons with himself, "How can I cast off my untoward son? for he is my son, though he be untoward; how can I find in my heart to do it?" Thus, "Ephraim has been a dear son, a pleasant child: *How can I do it?* He is ripe for ruin; judgments stand ready to seize him; there wants nothing but *giving him up*, but I cannot do it. They have been a people near unto me; there are yet some good among them; theirs are the children of the covenant; if they be ruined, the enemy will triumph; it may be they will yet repent and reform; and therefore how can I do it?" Note, The God of heaven is slow to anger, and is especially loth to abandon a people to utter ruin that have been in special relation to him. See how mercy works upon the mention of those severe proceedings: *My heart is turned within me*, as we say, Our heart fails us, when we come to do a thing that is against the grain with us. God speaks as if he were conscious to himself of a strange striving of affections in compassion to Israel: as Lam. 1:20, *My bowels are troubled; my heart is turned within me*. As it follows here, *My repentings are kindled together*. His bowels yearned towards them, and *his soul was grieved* for their sin and *misery*, Jdg. 10:16. Compare Jer. 31:20. *Since I spoke against him my bowels are troubled for him*. When God was to give up his Son to be a sacrifice for sin, and a Saviour for sinners, he did not say, How shall I give him up? No, he *spared not his own Son; it pleased the Lord to bruise him; and therefore* God spared not him, that he might spare us. But this is only the language of the day of his patience; when men have sinned that away, and the great day of his wrath comes, then no difficulty is made of it; nay, *I will laugh at their calamity*.

2. His gracious determination of this debate. After a long contest mercy in the issue rejoices against judgment, has the last word, and carries the day, v. 9. It is decreed that the reprieve shall be lengthened out yet longer, and *I will not now execute the fierceness of my anger*, though I am angry; though they shall not go altogether unpunished, yet he will mitigate the sentence and abate the rigour of it. He will show himself to be justly angry, but not implacably so; they shall be corrected, but not consumed. *I will not return to destroy Ephraim*; the judgments that have been inflicted shall not be repeated, shall not go so deep as they have deserved. He will not *return to destroy*, as soldiers, when they have pillaged a town once, return a second time, to take more, as when *what the palmer-worm has left the locust has eaten*. It is added, in the close of the verse, *"I will not enter into the city, into Samaria, or any other of their cities; I will not enter into them as an enemy, utterly to destroy them, and lay them waste, as I did the cities of Admah and Zeboim."*

3. The ground and reason of this determination: *For I am God and not man, the Holy One of Israel*. To encourage them, to hope that they shall find mercy, consider, (1.) What he is in himself: *He is God, and not man*, as in other things, so in pardoning sin and sparing sinners. If they had offended a man like themselves, he would not, he could not have borne it; his passion would have overpowered his compassion, and he would have executed the fierceness of his anger; but *I am God, and not man*. He is *Lord of his anger*, whereas men's anger commonly lords it over them. If an earthly prince were in such a strait between justice and mercy, he would be at a loss how to compromise the matter between them; but he who is God, and not man, knows how to find out an expedient to secure the honour of his justice and yet advance the honour of his mercy. Man's

compassions are nothing in comparison with the tender mercies of our God, whose thoughts and ways, in receiving returning sinners, are as much above ours as heaven is above the earth, Isa. 55:9. Note, It is a great encouragement to our hope in God's mercies to remember that he is *God, and not man*. He is *the Holy One*. One would think this were a reason why he should reject such a provoking people. No; God knows how to spare and pardon poor sinners, not only without any reproach to his holiness, but very much to the honour of it, as he is *faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, and therein *declares his righteousness*, now Christ has purchased the pardon and he has promised it. (2.) What he is to them; he is the *Holy One in the midst of thee*; his holiness is engaged for the good of his church, and even in this corrupt and degenerate land and age there were some that gave thanks at the remembrance of his holiness, and he required of them all to be *holy as he is*, Lev. 19:2. As long as we have the *Holy One in the midst of us* we are safe and well; but woe to us when he leaves us! Note, Those who submit to the influence may take the comfort of God's holiness.

II. Here is his wonderful forwardness to do good for Israel, which appears in this, that he will qualify them to receive the good he designs for them (v. 10, 11): *They shall walk after the Lord*. This respects the same favour with that (ch. 3:5), *They shall return, and seek the Lord their God*; it is spoken of the ten tribes, and had its accomplishment, in part, in the return of some of them with those of the two tribes in Ezra's time; but it had its more full accomplishment in God's spiritual Israel, the gospel-church, brought together and incorporated by the gospel of Christ. The ancient Jews referred it to the time of the Messiah; the learned Dr. Pocock looks upon it as a prophecy of Christ's coming to preach the gospel to the dispersed children of Israel, the children of God that were scattered abroad. And then observe, 1. How they were to be called and brought together: *The Lord shall roar like a lion*. The *word of the Lord* (so says the Chaldee) *shall be as a lion that roars*. Christ is called *the lion of the tribe of Judah*, and his gospel, in the beginning of it, was *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*. When Christ cried with a loud voice it was as *when a lion roared*, Rev. 10:3. The voice of the gospel was heard afar, as the *roaring of a lion*, and it was a *mighty voice*. See Joel 3:16. 2. What impression this call should make upon them, such an impression as the roaring of a lion makes upon all the beasts of the forest: *When he shall roar then the children shall tremble*. See Amos 3:8, *The lion has roared; the Lord God has spoken; and then who will not fear?* When those whose hearts the gospel reached trembled, and were astonished, and cried out, *What shall we do?*—when they were by it put upon working out their salvation, and worshipping God with fear and trembling, then this promise was fulfilled. *The children shall tremble from the west*. The dispersed Jews were carried eastward, to Assyria and Babylon, and those that returned came from the east; therefore this seems to have reference to the calling of the Gentiles that lay westward from Canaan, for that way especially the gospel spread. They shall *tremble*; they shall move and come with trembling, with care and haste, *from the west*, from the nations that lay that way, to the mountain of the Lord (Isa. 2:3), to the gospel-Jerusalem, upon hearing the alarm of the gospel. The apostle speaks of *mighty signs and wonders* that were wrought by the preaching of the gospel from *Jerusalem round about to Illyricum*, Rom. 15:19. Then the children trembled from the west. And, whereas Israel after the flesh was dispersed in Egypt and Assyria, it is promised that they shall be effectually summoned thence (v. 11): *They shall tremble*; they shall come trembling, and with all haste, *as a bird upon the wing, out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria*; a dove is noted for swift and constant

flight, especially when she flies *to her windows*, which the flocking of Jews and Gentiles to the church is here compared to, as it is Isa. 60:8. Wherever those are that belong to the election of grace—east, west, north, or south—they shall *hear the joyful sound*, and be wrought upon by it; those of Egypt and Assyria shall come together; those that lay most remote from each other shall meet in Christ, and be incorporated in the church. Of the uniting of Egypt and Assyria, it was prophesied, Isa. 19:23. 3. What effect these impressions should have upon them. Being *moved with fear*, they shall flee to the ark: *They shall walk after the Lord*, after *the service of the Lord* (so the Chaldee); they shall take the Lord Christ for their *leader and commander*; they shall enlist themselves under him as the captain of their salvation, and give up themselves to the direction of the Spirit as their guide by the word; they shall *leave all to follow Christ*, as becomes *disciples*. Note, Our holy trembling at the word of Christ will draw us to him, not drive us from him. When he *roars like a lion* the slaves tremble and flee from him, the children tremble and flee to him. 4. What entertainment they shall meet with at their return (v. 11): *I will place them in their houses* (all those that come at the gospel-call shall have a place and a name in the gospel-church, in the particular churches which are their houses, to which they pertain; they shall dwell in God, and be at home in him, both easy and safe, as a man in his own house; they shall have mansions, for there are many in *our Father's house*), in his tabernacle on earth and his temple in heaven, in *everlasting habitations*, which may be called *their houses*, for they are *the lot* they shall stand in *at the end of the days*.

III. Here is a sad complaint of the treachery of Ephraim and Israel, which may be an intimation that it is not Israel after the flesh, but the spiritual Israel, to whom the foregoing promises belong, for as for this Ephraim, this Israel, they *compass God about with lies and deceit*; all their services of him, when they pretended to compass his altar, were feigned and hypocritical; when they surrounded him with their prayers and praises, every one having a petition to present to him, they *lied to him with their mouth and flattered him with their tongue*; their pretensions were so fair, and yet their intentions so foul, that they would, if possible, have imposed upon God himself. Their professions and promises were all a cheat, and yet with these they thought to compass God about, to enclose him as it were, to keep him among them, and prevent his leaving them.

IV. Here is a pleasant commendation of the integrity of the two tribes, which they held fast, and this comes in as an aggravation of the perfidiousness of the ten tribes, and a reason why God had that mercy in store for Judah which he had not for Israel (ch. 1:6, 7), for *Judah yet rules with God and is faithful with the saints*, or *with the Most Holy*. 1. *Judah rules with God*, that is, he serves God, and the service of God is not only true liberty and freedom, but it is dignity and dominion. *Judah rules*, that is, the princes and governors of Judah *rule with God*; they use their power for him, for his honour, and the support of his interest. Those *rule with God* that *rule in the fear of God* (2 Sa. 23:3), and it is their honour to do so, and their praise shall be *of God*, as Judah's here is. Judah is *Israel—a prince with God*. 2. He is *faithful with the holy God*, keeps close to his worship and *to his saints*, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose steps they faithfully tread in. They *walk in the way of good men*; and those that do so *rule with God*, they have a mighty interest in Heaven. Judah *yet* does thus, which intimates that the time would come when Judah also would revolt and degenerate. Note, When we see how many there are that compass God about *with lies and deceit* it may be a comfort to us to think that God has his remnant that cleave to him with purpose of heart, and are faithful to his saints; and for those who are thus faithful unto death is reserved a crown of life, when hypocrites and all

liars shall have their portion without.

Chapter 12

In this chapter we have, I. A high charge drawn up against both Israel and Judah for their sins, which were the ground of God's controversy with them (v. 1, 2). Particularly the sin of fraud and injustice, which Ephraim is charged with (v. 7), and justifies himself in (v. 8). And the sin of idolatry (v. 11), by which God is provoked to contend with them (v. 14). II. The aggravations of the sins they are charged with, taken from the honour God put upon their father Jacob (v. 3-5), the advancement of them into a people from low and mean beginnings (v. 12, 13), and the provision he had made them of helps for their souls by the prophets he sent them (v. 10). III. A call to the unconverted to turn to God (v. 6). IV. An intimation of mercy that God had in store for them (v. 9).

Verses 1-6

In these verses,

I. Ephraim is convicted of folly, in staying himself upon Egypt and Assyria, when he was in straits (v. 1): *Ephraim feeds on wind*, that is, feeds himself with vain hopes of assistance from man, when he is at variance with God; and, when he meets with disappointments, he still pursues the same game, and greedily pants and *follows after the east wind*, which he cannot catch hold of, nor, if he could, would it be nourishing, nay, would be noxious. We say of the *wind in the east*, It is *good neither for man nor beast*. It was said (ch. 8:7), He *sows the wind*; and as he sows so he reaps (He *reaps the whirlwind*); and as he reaps so he feeds—He feeds on the wind, the *east wind*. Note, Those that make creatures their confidence make fools of themselves, and take a great deal of pains to put a cheat upon their own souls and to prepare vexation for themselves: *He daily increaseth lies*, that is, multiplies his correspondences and leagues with his neighbours, which will all prove deceitful to him; nay, they will prove desolation to him. Those very nations that he makes his refuge will prove his ruin. Those that stay themselves upon lies will be still coveting to increase them, that they may build their hopes firmly upon them; as if many lies twisted together would make one truth, or many broken reeds and rotten supports one sound one, which is a great delusion and will prove to them a great desolation; for those that *observe lying vanities* the more they increase them the more disappointments they prepare for themselves and the further they run from *their own mercies*. The men of Ephraim did so when they thought to secure the Assyrians in their interests by a *solemn league*, signed, sealed, and sworn to: *They make a covenant with the Assyrians*, but they will find there is no hold of them; that potent prince will be a slave to his word no longer than he pleases. They thought to secure the Egyptians for their confederates by a rich present of the commodities of their country, not only to purchase their favour, but to show that their friendship was worth having: *Oil is carried into Egypt*. But the Egyptians, when they had got the bribe, dropped the cause, and Ephraim was never the better for them. *Oleum perdidit et operam—The oil and the labour are both lost*. This was *feeding on wind*; this was *increasing lies and desolation*.

II. Judah is contended with too, and Jacob, which includes both Ephraim and Judah (v. 2): *The Lord has also a controversy with Judah*; for though he had a while ago *ruled with God*, and been *faithful with the saints*, yet now he begins to degenerate. Or though, in keeping close to the house of David and the house of Aaron, and in them to the covenants of royalty and

priesthood, they were so far *in the right*, in the former they *ruled with God* and in the latter were *faithful to the saints*, yet upon other accounts God *had a controversy* with them, and would punish them. Note, *Mens being in the right in some things, in the main things, will not exempt them from correction, and therefore should not exempt them from reproof, for those things wherein they are in the wrong. There were those of the seven churches of Asia whom Christ approved and commended, and yet he adds, Nevertheless I have something against thee.* So here; though the seed of Jacob are a people near to God, yet God will punish them according to the evil ways they are found in and the evil doings they are found guilty of; for God sees sin even in his own people, and will reckon with them for it.

III. Both Ephraim and Judah are put in mind of their father Jacob, whose seed they were and whose name they bore (and it was their honour), of the extraordinary things which he did and which God did for him, that they might be the more ashamed of themselves for degenerating from so illustrious a progenitor and staining the lustre of so great a name, and yet that they might be engaged and encouraged to return to God, the God of their father Jacob, in hopes for his sake to find favour with him. He had called this people Jacob (v. 2), threatening to punish them; but *how shall I give them up?* How shall that dear name be forgotten?

1. Three glorious things concerning Jacob the person Jacob the people are here put in mind of; but by brief hints only, for it is presumed that they knew the story:—(1.) His struggling with Esau in the womb: There *he took his brother by the heel*, v. 3. We have the story Gen. 25:26. It was an early act of bravery, and an effort for the best precedency, a pious ambition for that birthright in the covenant which Esau is justly branded as profane for despising. But his degenerate seed, by mingling with the nations, and making leagues with them, profaned that crown, and laid that honour in the dust, which he so gloriously put in for. Then it was that the dominion was given to him: *The elder shall serve the younger*. Then he was owned of God as his beloved: *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*. But they had by their sin forfeited both the love of God and dominion over their neighbours. (2.) His wrestling with the angel. "Remember how your father Jacob had *power with God by his own strength*, the strength he had by the gift of God, who *pleaded not against him by his great power, but put strength into him*," Job 22:6. The angel he wrestled with is called *God*, and therefore is supposed to be the *Son of God*, the angel of the covenant. "God was both a combatant with Jacob and an assistant of him, showing, in the latter respect, greater strength than in the former, fighting as it were against him with his left hand and for him with his right, and to that putting greater force." So, Dr. Pocock. The providence of God fought against him when he met with one danger after another, in his return homewards; but the grace of God enabled him to go on cheerfully in his way, and, when his faith acted upon the divine promise that was for him prevailed above his fears that arose from the divine providences that were against him, then *by his strength he had power with God*. But it refers especially to his prayer for deliverance from Esau, and for a blessing: *He had power over the angel and prevailed*, for he *wept and made supplication*. Here was a mixture of the greatest courage and the greatest tenderness, Jacob wrestling like a champion and yet weeping like a child. Note, Prayers and tears are the weapons with which the saints have obtained the most glorious victories. Thus Jacob commenced *Israel—a prince with God*; his posterity was called *Israel*, but they were unworthy the name, for they had forfeited and lost their communion with God, and their interest in him, by revolting from their duty to

him. (3.) His meeting with God at Bethel: God *found him* in Bethel, *and there he spoke with us*. God found him the first time in Bethel, as he went to Padanaram (Gen. 28:10), and a second time after his return, Gen. 35:9, etc. It is probable that this refers to both; for in both God spoke to Jacob, and renewed the covenant with him, and the prophet might very well say, *There he spoke with us* who are the seed of Jacob, for both times that God spoke with Jacob at Bethel he spoke with him concerning his seed. Gen. 28:14, *Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth*; and Gen. 35:12, *This land I will give unto thy seed*. Thus God then covenanted with him and his seed after him. Now justly are they upbraided with this; for in that very place which their father Jacob called *Bethel—the house of God*, in remembrance of the communion he there had with God, did they set up one of the calves, and worship it; thus they turned that Bethel into a *Beth-aven—a house of iniquity*. There God *spoke with them* exceedingly great and precious promises, which they had despised and lost the benefit of.

2. Two inferences are here drawn from these stories concerning Jacob, for instruction to his seed:—

(1.) Here is a use of information. From what passed between God and Jacob we may learn that *Jehovah, the Lord God of hosts, is the God of Israel*; he was the God of Jacob, and this is *his memorial* throughout all the generations of the seed of Jacob (v. 5)—the more shame for those who forgot the memorial of their church, deserted the God of their fathers, and exchanged a *Lord of hosts* for Baalim. Note, Those only are accounted the people of God that keep up a memorial of God, such a memorial of him as he himself has instituted, by which he makes himself known and will have us to remember him. Here are two memorials of his, by which he is distinguished from all others, and is to be acknowledged and adored by us. [1.] The former denotes his *existence of himself*. He is Jehovah, much the same with *I AM*, the same that *was, and is, and is to come*, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Jehovah is *his memorial*, his peculiar name. [2.] The latter denotes his dominion over all: He is the *God of hosts*, that has all the hosts of heaven and earth at his beck and command, and makes what use he pleases of them. Jacob saw *Mahanaim*—God's *two hosts*, about the time that he *wrestled with the angel* (Gen. 32:1, 2), and so learned to call God the *God of hosts*, and transmitted it to us as his memorial. God's names, titles, and attributes, are the memorials of him; there is no need for images to be such. And that which was a revelation of God to one is his memorial to many, to all generations.

(2.) Here is a use of exhortation, v. 6. "Is this so, that Jacob thy father had this communion with the Lord God of hosts, and is this still his memorial?" Then, [1.] Let those that have gone astray from God be converted to him: *Therefore turn thou to thy God*. He that was the God of Jacob is the God of Israel, *is thy God*; from him thou hast unjustly and unkindly revolted; therefore turn thou to him by repentance and faith, turn to him as thine, to love him, obey him, and depend upon him. [2.] Let those that are converted to him walk with him in all holy conversation and godliness: *"Keep mercy and judgment, mercy in relieving and succouring the poor and distressed, judgment in rendering to all their due; be kind to all; do wrong to none. Keep piety and judgment"* (so it may be read); *"live righteously and godly in this present world; be devout and be honest. Do not only practise these occasionally, but be careful, and constant, and conscientious in the practice of them."* [3.] Let those that walk with God be encouraged to live a life of dependence upon him: *"Wait on thy God continually, with a believing expectation to receive from him all the succours and supplies thou standest in need of."* Those that live a life of conformity to

God may live a life of confidence and comfort in him, if it be not their own fault. Let our *eyes be ever towards the Lord*, and let us preserve a holy security and serenity of mind under the protection of the divine power and the influence of the divine favour, looking, without anxiety, for a dubious event, and by faith keeping our spirits sedate and even; this is waiting on God as our God in covenant, and this we must do continually.

Verses 7-14

Here are intermixed, in these verses,

I. Reproofs for sin. When God is coming forth to contend with a people, that he may demonstrate his own righteousness, he will demonstrate their unrighteousness. Ephraim was called to turn to his God and *keep judgment* (v. 6); now, to show that he had need of that call, he is charged with turning from his God by idolatry, and breaking the laws of justice and judgment.

1. He is here charged with injustice against the precepts of the second table, v. 7, 8. Here observe,

(1.) What the sin is wherewith he is charged: *He is a merchant*. The margin reads it as a proper name, *He is Canaan*, or a Canaanite, unworthy to be denominated from Jacob and Israel, and worthy to be cast out with a curse from this good land, as the Canaanites were. See Amos 9:7. But Canaan sometimes signifies *a merchant*, and therefore is most likely to do so here, where Ephraim is charged with deceit in trade. Though God had given his people a land flowing with milk and honey, yet he did not forbid them to enrich themselves by merchandise, and they succeeded the Canaanites in that as well as in their husbandry; they sucked *the abundance of the seas and the treasures hidden in the sand*, Deu. 33:19. And, if they had been fair merchants, it would have been no reproach at all to them, but an honour and a blessing. But he is such a merchant as the Canaanites were, who were honest only with good looking to, and, if they could, cheated all they dealt with. Ephraim does so; he deceives and thereby oppresses. Note, There is oppression by fraud as well as oppression by force. It is not only princes, lords, and masters, that oppress their subjects, tenants, and servants, but merchants and traders are often guilty of oppressing those they deal with, when they impose upon their ignorance, or take advantage of their necessity, to make hard bargains with them, or are rigorous and severe in exacting their debts. Ephraim cheated, [1.] With a great deal of art and cunning: *The balances of deceit are in his hand*. He uses balances, and delivers his goods by weight and measure, as if he would be very exact, but they are balances of deceit, false weights and false measures, and thus, under colour of doing right, he does the greatest wrong. Note, God has his eye upon merchants and traders, when they are weighing their goods and paying their money, whether they do honestly or deceitfully. He observes what balances they have in their hand, and how they hold them; and, though those they deal with may not be aware of that sleight of hand with which they make them balances of deceit, God sees it, and knows it. Trades by the wit of man are made *mysterics*, but it is a pity that by the sin of man they should ever be made *mysterics of iniquity*. [2.] With a great deal of pleasure and pride: *He loves to oppress*. To oppress is bad enough, but to love to do so is much worse. His conscience does not check and reprove him for it, as it ought to do; if it did, though he committed the sin, he could not delight in it; but his corruptions are so strong, and have so triumphed over his convictions, that he not only loves the gain of oppression, but he loves to oppress, sins for sinning-sake, and takes a pleasure in out-witting and over-reaching those that suspect him not.

(2.) How he justifies himself in this sin, v. 8. Wicked men will have something to say for themselves now when they are told of their faults, some frivolous turn-off or other wherewith to evade the convictions of the word. Ephraim stands indicted for a common cheat. Now see what he pleads to the indictment. He does not deny the charge, nor plead, Not guilty, yet does not make a penitent confession of it and ask pardon, but insists upon his own justification. Suppose it were so that he did use balances of deceit, yet, [1.] He pleads that he had got a good estate. Let the prophet say what he pleased of his deceit, of the sin of it and the curse of God that attended it, he could not be convinced there was any harm or danger in it, for this he was sure of that he had thriven in it: "*Yet I have become rich, I have found me out substance.* Whatever you make of it, I have made a good hand of it." Note, Carnal hearts are often confirmed in a good opinion of their evil ways by their worldly prosperity and success in those ways. But it is a great mistake. Every word in what Ephraim says here proclaims his folly. *First*, It is folly to call the riches of this world substance, for they are things that are not, Prov. 23:5. *Secondly*, It is folly to think that we have them of ourselves, to say (as some read it), *I have made myself rich*; what *substance* I have is owing purely to my ingenuity and industry—*I have found it; my might and the power of my hand have gotten me this wealth.* *Thirdly*, It is folly to think that what we have is for ourselves. *I have found me out substance*, as if we had it for our own proper use and behoof, whereas we hold it in trust, only as stewards. *Fourthly*, It is folly to think that riches are things to be gloried in, and to say with exultation, *I have become rich.* Riches are not the honours of the soul, are not peculiar to the best men, nor sure to us; and therefore *let not the rich man glory in his riches*, Jam. 1:9, 10. *Fifthly*, It is folly to think that growing rich in a sinful way makes us innocent, or will make us safe, or may make us easy, in that way; for the prosperity of fools deceives and destroys them. See Isa. 47:10; Prov. 1:32. [2.] He pleads that he had kept a good reputation. It is common for sinners, when they are justly reprov'd by their ministers, to appeal to their neighbours, and because they know no ill of them, or will say none, or think well of what the prophets charge them with as bad, fly in the face of their reprovers: *In all my labours* (says Ephraim) *they shall find no iniquity in me that were sin.* Note, Carnal hearts are apt to build a good opinion of themselves upon the fair character they have among their neighbours. Ephraim was very secure; for, *First*, All his neighbours knew him to be diligent in his business; they had an eye upon *all his labours*, and commended him for them. *Men will praise thee when thou doest well for thyself.* *Secondly*, None of them knew him to be deceitful in his business. He acted with so much policy that nobody could say to the contrary but that he acted with integrity. For either, 1. He concealed the fraud, so that none discovered it: "Whatever iniquity there is, *they shall find none*;" as if no iniquity were displeasing to God, and damning to the soul, but that which is open and scandalous before men. What will it avail us that men shall find no iniquity in us, when God finds a great deal, and will bring every secret work, even secret frauds, into judgment? Or, 2. He excused the fraud, so that none condemned it: "*They shall find no iniquity in me that were sin*, nothing very bad, nothing but what is very excusable, only some venial sins, sins not worth speaking of," which they think God will make nothing of because they do not. It is a fashionable iniquity; it is customary; it is what every body does; it is pleasant; it is gainful; and this, they think, is no iniquity that is sin; nobody will think the worse of them for it. But God sees not as man sees; he judges not as man judges.

2. He is here charged with idolatry, against the precepts of the first table, with that iniquity which is in a special manner vanity,

the making and worshipping of images, which are vanities (v. 11): *Surely they are vanity*; they do not profit, but deceive. Now the prophet mentions two places notorious for idolatry:—(1.) Gilead on the other side Jordan, which had been branded for it before (ch. 6:8): *Is there iniquity in Gilead?* It is a thing to be wondered at; it is a thing to be sadly lamented. What! iniquity in Gilead? idolatry there? Gilead was a fruitful pleasant country (pleasant to a proverb, Jer. 22:6), and does it so ill requite the Lord? It was a frontier-country, and lay much exposed to the insults of enemies, and therefore stood in special need of the divine protection; what! and yet by iniquity throw itself out of that protection? *Is there iniquity in Gilead?* Yea, (2.) And in Gilgal too; there they *sacrifice bullocks* (ch. 9:15), and there *their altars* which they have set up, either to strange gods in opposition to his own appointed altar, are as thick as *heaps of manure in the furrows of the field* that is to be sown, ch. 8:11. *Is there iniquity in Gilead* only? so some. Is it only in those remote parts of the nation that people are so superstitious, where they border upon other nations? No; they are as bad at Gilgal. In Gilead God protected Jacob their father (of whom he had been speaking) from the rage of Laban; and will you there commit iniquity?

II. Here are threatenings of wrath for sin. Some make that to be so (v. 9), *I will make thee to dwell in tabernacles as in the days of the appointed time*, that is, I will bring thee into such a condition as the Israelites were in when they dwelt in tents and wandered for forty years; that was the *time appointed in the wilderness*. Ephraim forgot that God brought him out of Egypt and brought him up to be what he was, and was proud of his wealth, and took sinful courses to increase it; and therefore God threatens to bring him to a tabernacle-state again, to a poor, mean, desolate, unsettled condition. Note, It is just with God, when men have by their sins turned their tents into houses, by his judgments to turn their houses into tents again. However, that is certainly a threatening (v. 14), *Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly*. See how men are deceived in their opinion of themselves, and how they will one day be undeceived. Ephraim thought that there was no iniquity in him that deserved to be called sin (v. 8); but God told him that there was that in him which was sin, and would be found so if he did not repent and reform; for, 1. It was extremely offensive to his God: *Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly* with his iniquities, which were so distasteful to God, and to him too would be *bitterness in the latter end*. He was so wilful in sinning against his knowledge and convictions that any one might see, and say, that he designed no other than to provoke God in the highest degree. 2. It would certainly be destructive to himself; that cannot be otherwise which provokes God against him, and kindles the fire of his wrath. Therefore, (1.) He shall take away his forfeited life: *He shall leave his blood upon him*, that is, he shall not hold him guiltless, but bring upon him that death which is the wages of sin. *His blood shall be upon his own head* (2 Sa. 1:16), for his own iniquity has testified against him and he alone shall bear it. Note, When sinners perish their blood is left upon them. (2.) He shall take away his forfeited honour: *His reproach shall his Lord return upon him*. God is *his Lord*; he had by idolatry and other sins reproached the Lord, and done dishonour to him, and to his name and family, and had given occasion to others to reproach him; and now God will return the reproach upon him, according to the word he has spoken, that *those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. Note, Shameful sins shall have shameful punishments. If Ephraim put contempt on his God, he shall be so reduced that all his neighbours shall look with contempt upon him.

III. Here are memorials of former mercy, which come in to convict them of base ingratitude in revolting from God. Let them

blush to remember,

1. That God had raised them from meanness. When Ephraim had become rich, and was proud of that, he forgot that which God (that he might not forget it) obliged them every year to acknowledge (Deu. 26:5), *A Syrian ready to perish was my father*. But God here puts them in mind of it, v. 12. Let them remember, not only the honours of their father Jacob, what a *mighty prince* he was with God, v. 3 (an honour which they had no share in while they were in rebellion against God), but what a poor servant he was to Laban, which was sufficient to mortify those that were puffed up with the estates they had raised. *Jacob fled into Syria* from a malicious brother, and there served a covetous uncle *for a wife*, and *for a wife he kept sheep*, because he had not estate to endow a wife with. Jacob was poor, and low, and a fugitive; therefore his posterity ought not to be proud. He was a plain man, dwelling in tents, and keeping sheep; therefore *balances of deceit* ill became them. He *served for a wife* that was not a Canaanitess, as Esau's wives were; therefore it was a shame for them to degenerate into Canaanites, and mingle with the nations. God wonderfully preserved him in his flight and preserved him in his service, so that he multiplied exceedingly, and from that *root* in a dry ground sprang an illustrious nation, that bore his name, which magnifies the goodness of God both to him and them and leaves them under the stain of base ingratitude to that God who was their founder and benefactor.

2. That God had rescued them from misery, had raised them to what they were, not only out of poverty, but out of slavery (v. 13), which laid them under much stronger obligations to serve him and under a yet deeper guilt in serving other gods. (1.) God *brought Israel out of Egypt* on purpose that they might serve him, and by redeeming them out of bondage acquired a special title to them and to their service. (2.) He preserved them, as sheep are kept by the shepherd's care. He preserved them from Pharaoh's rage at the sea, even at the Red Sea, protected them from all the perils of the wilderness, and provided for them. (3.) He did this *by a prophet*, Moses, who, though he is called *king in Jeshurun* (Deu. 33:5), yet did what he did for Israel *as a prophet*, by direction from God and by the power of his word. The ensign of his authority was not a royal sceptre, but the *rod of God*; with that he summoned both Egypt's plagues and Israel's blessings. Moses, as a prophet, was a type of Christ (Acts 3:22), and it is by Christ as a prophet that we are brought out of the Egypt of sin and Satan by the power of his truth. Now this shows how very unworthy and ungrateful this people were, [1.] In rejecting their God, who had brought them out of Egypt, which, in the preface to the commandments, is particularly mentioned as a reason for the first, why they should have no other gods before him. [2.] In despising and persecuting his prophets, whom they should have loved and valued, and have studied to answer God's end in sending them, for the sake of that prophet by whom God had brought them out of Egypt and preserved them in the wilderness. Note, The benefit we have had by the word of God greatly aggravates our sin and folly if we put any slight upon the word of God.

3. That God had taken care of their education as they grew up. This instance of God's goodness we have, v. 10. As by a prophet he delivered them, so *by prophets* he still continued to speak to them. Man, who is formed out of the earth, is fed out of the earth; so that nation, that was formed by prophecy, by prophecy was fed and taught; *beginning at Moses*, and so going on *to all the prophets* through the several ages of that church, we find that divine revelation was all along their tuition. (1.) They had prophets raised up among themselves (Amos 2:11), a succession of them, were scarcely ever without a Spirit of prophecy

among them more or less, from Moses to Malachi. (2.) These prophets were *seers*; they had *visions*, and *dreams*, in which God discovered his mind to them immediately, with a full assurance that it was his mind, Num. 12:6. (3.) These visions were multiplied; God spoke not only *once*, *yea*, *twice*, but many a time; if one vision was not regarded, he sent another. The prophets had variety of visions, and frequent repetitions of the same. (4.) God *spoke* to them *by the prophets*. What the prophets *received from the Lord* they plainly and faithfully delivered to them. The people at Mount Sinai begged that God would speak to them by men like themselves, and he did so. (5.) In speaking to them by the prophets he *used similitudes*, to make the messages he sent by them intelligible, more affecting, and more likely to be remembered. The visions they saw were often similitudes, and their discourses were embellished with very apt comparisons. And, as God by his prophets, so by his Son, he *used similitudes*, for *he opened his mouth in parables*. Note, God keeps an account, whether we do or no, of the sermons we hear; and those that have long enjoyed the means of grace in purity, plenty, and power, that have been frequently, faithfully, and familiarly, told the mind of God, will have a great deal to answer for another day if they persist in a course of iniquity.

IV. Here are intimations of further mercy, and this remembered too in the midst of sin and wrath (as some understand v. 9): "*I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt*, who then and there took thee to be my people, and have approved myself thy God ever since, in a constant series of merciful providences, have yet a kindness for thee, bad as thou art; and I will *make thee to dwell in tabernacles*, not as in the wilderness, but *as in the days of the solemn feast*," the feast of tabernacles, which was celebrated with great joy, Lev. 23:40. 1. They shall be made to see, by the grace of God, that though they are rich, and have found out substance, yet they are but in a tabernacle-state, and have in their worldly wealth *no continuing city*. 2. They shall yet have cause to rejoice in God, and have opportunity to do it in public ordinances. The feast of tabernacles was the first solemn feast the Jews kept after their return out of Babylon, Ezra 3:4. 3. This, as other promises, was to have its full accomplishment in the grace of the gospel, which provides tabernacles for believers in their way to heaven, and furnishes them with matter of joy, holy joy, joy in God, such as was in the feast of tabernacles, Zec. 14:18, 19.

Chapter 13

The same strings, though generally unpleasing ones, are harped upon in this chapter that were in those before. People care not to be told either of their sin or of their danger by sin; and yet it is necessary, and for their good, that they should be told of both, nor can they better hear of either than from the word of God and from their faithful ministers, while the sin may be repented of and the danger prevented. Here, I. The people of Israel are reprov'd and threaten'd for their idolatry (v. 1-4). II. They are reprov'd and threaten'd for their wantonness, pride, and luxury, and other abuses of their wealth and prosperity (v. 5-8). III. The ruin that is coming upon them for these and all their other sins is foretold as very terrible (v. 12, 13, 15, 16). IV. Those among them that yet retain a respect for their God are here encouraged to hope that he will yet appear for their relief, though their kings and princes, and all their other supports and succours, fail them (v. 9-11, 14).

Verses 1-4

Idolatry was the sin that did most easily beset the Jewish nation till after the captivity; the ten tribes from the first were guilty of it, but especially after the days of Ahab; and this is the sin which, in these verses, they are charg'd with. Observe,

I. The provision that God made to prevent their falling into idolatry. This we have, v. 4. God did what was fit to be done to keep them close to himself; what could have been done more? 1. He made known himself to them as *the Lord their God*, and took them to be his people in a peculiar manner. Both by his word and by his works all along *from the land of Egypt* he declared, *I am the Lord thy God*; he told them so from heaven at Mount Sinai, that he was *the Lord and their God*, who *brought them out of the land of Egypt*. This he continued both to declare and to prove to them by his prophets and by his providences. 2. He gave them a law forbidding them to worship any other: "*Thou shalt know no God but me*; not only shalt not own and worship any other, but shalt not acquaint thyself with any other, nor make the rites and usages of the Gentiles familiar to thee." Note, It is a happy ignorance not to know that which we ought not to meddle with. We find those commended who *have not known the depths of Satan*. 3. He gave them a good reason for it: *There is no saviour besides me*. Whatever we take for our God we expect to have for our saviour, to make us happy here and hereafter; as, where we have protection, we owe allegiance, so where we have salvation, and hope for it, we owe adoration.

II. The honour that Ephraim had, while he kept himself clear from idolatry (v. 1): *While Ephraim spoke trembling*, or *with trembling* (that is, as Dr. Pocock understands it, while he behaved himself towards God as his father Jacob did, with *weeping and supplications*, and spoke not proudly and insolently against God and his prophets, while he kept up a holy fear of God, and worshipp'd him in that fear) so long *he exalted himself in Israel*, that is, he was very considerable among the tribes and made a figure. Jeroboam, who was of that tribe, exalted himself and his family. *When he spoke there was trembling*, that is, all about him stood in awe of him; so some understand it. Note, *Those that humble themselves*, especially that humble themselves before God, *shall be exalted*. When people speak with modesty and jealousy of themselves, with a diffidence of their own judgment and a deference to others, they exalt themselves, they gain a reputation. But as for Ephraim he soon lost himself: *When he offended in Baal he died*, that is, he lost his reputation, his honour soon dwindled and sunk, and was laid in the dust. Baal is

here put for all idolatry; when Ephraim forsook God, and took to worship images, the state received its death's wound and was never good for any thing afterwards. Note, Deserting God is the death of any person or persons.

III. The lamentable growth of idolatry among them (v. 2): *Now they sin more and more*. When once he began to *offend in Baal* the ice was broken, and he grew worse and worse, coveted more idols, doted more upon those he had, and grew more ridiculous in the worship of them. Note, The way of idolatry, as of other sins, is down-hill, and men cannot easily stop themselves. It is the sad case of all those who have forsaken God that they sin yet more and more. Let us trace them in their apostasy. 1. They made themselves *molten images*, proud to have gods that they could cast into what mould they pleased; probably these were the calves in miniature like the silver shrines for Diana; the zealots for the calf-worship carried about with them, it may be, images of the gods they worshipped, made on purpose *for themselves*. 2. They made them of *their silver*, and then doubted not of their property in them, when they purchased them with their own money or made them of their own plate melted down for that purpose. See what cost they put themselves to in the service of their idols, which they honoured with the best they had, and therefore made their molten images of silver. 3. They made them *according to their own understanding*, according to their own fancy. They consulted with themselves what shape they should make their idol in, and made it accordingly, *a god according to the best of their judgment*. Or *according to their own likeness*, in the form of a man. And, when they made their idols men like themselves in shape, they made themselves stocks and stones like them in reality; for *those that make them are like unto them, and so is every one that trusts in them*. 4. It was *all the work of the craftsmen*. Their images did not pretend, like that of Diana, to have come down from Jupiter (Acts 19:35); no, perhaps the workmen stamped their names upon them, such an idol was such a man's work. See ch. 8:6; Isa. 44:9, etc. 5. Though they were thus the work of their hands, yet they were the beloved of their souls; for they say of them, *Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves*. Either the priests called upon the people thus to pay their homage, or the people, who were not allowed to come so near themselves, called upon the *men that sacrificed*, the priests that attended for them, to *kiss the calves* in their name and stead, because they could not reach to do it, so very fond were they of paying their utmost respects to such an idol as they were taught to have a veneration for. Though they were calves, yet, if they were gods, the worshippers, by themselves or their proxies, thus made their honours to them. They *kissed the calves*, in token of the adoration of them, affection for them, and allegiance to them, as theirs. Thus we are directed to *kiss the Son*, to take him for our Lord and our God.

IV. Threatenings of wrath for their idolatry. The Lord, whose name is *Jealous*, is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another; and therefore all those that *worship images* shall be *confounded*, especially if Ephraim do it, Ps. 97:7. Because they are so fond of kissing their calves, therefore God will give them sensible convictions of their folly, v. 3. They promise themselves a great deal of safety and satisfaction in the worship of their idols, and that their prosperity will thereby be established; but God tells them that they shall be disappointed, and *driven away in their wickedness*. This is illustrated by four similitudes:—They shall be, 1. As the *morning cloud*, which promises showers of rain to the parched ground. 2. As the *early dew*, which seems to be an earnest of such showers. But both *pass away*, and the day proves as dry and hot as ever; so fleet and transitory their profession of piety was (ch. 6:4), and so had they disappointed God's expectation from them, and therefore it is

just that so their prosperity should be, and so their expectations from their idols should be disappointed, and so will all theirs be that make an idol of this world. 3. They are *as the chaff*, light and worthless; and they shall be driven *as the chaff is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor*, Ps. 1:4; 25:5; Job 21:18. Nay, 4. They are *as the smoke*, noisome and offensive (see Isa. 65:5), and they shall be driven away *as the smoke out of the chimneys*, that is soon dissipated and disappears, Ps. 68:2. Note, No solid lasting comfort is to be expected any where but in God.

Verses 5-8

We may observe here, 1. The plentiful provision God had made for Israel and the seasonable supplies he had blessed them with (v. 5): *"I did know thee in the wilderness, took cognizance of thy case and made provision for thee, even in a land of great drought, when thou wast in extreme distress, and when no relief was to be had in an ordinary way."* See a description of this wilderness, Deu. 8:15, Jer. 2:6, and say, The God that knew them, and owned them, and fed them there, was a *friend indeed*, for he was a *friend at need* and an all-sufficient friend, that could victual so vast an army when all ordinary ways of provision were cut off, and where, if miracles had not been their daily bread, they must all have perished. Note, Help at an exigency lays under peculiar obligations and must never be forgotten. 2. Their unworthy ungrateful abuse of God's favour to them. God not only took care of them in the wilderness, but put them in possession of Canaan, a good land, a large and fat pasture. And (v. 6) *according to their pasture so were they filled*. God gave them both plenty and dainties, and they did not spare it, but, having been long confined to manna, when they came into Canaan they fed themselves *to the full*. And this was no hopeful presage; it would have looked better, and promised better, if they had been more modest and moderate in the use of their plenty, and had learned to deny themselves; but what was the effect of it? *They were filled, and their heart was exalted*. Their luxury and sensuality made them proud, insolent, and secure. The best comment upon this is that of Moses, Deu. 32:13–15. But *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked*. When the body was stuffed up with plenty the soul was puffed up with pride. Then they began to think their religion a thing below them, and they could not persuade themselves to stoop to the services of it. *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God*. When they were poor and lame in the wilderness they thought it was necessary for them to keep in with God; but when they were replenished and established in Canaan they began to think they had no further need of him: *Their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me*. Note, Worldly prosperity, when it feeds men's pride, makes them forgetful of God; for they remember him only when they want him. When Israel was filled, what more could the Almighty do for them? And therefore they said to him, *Depart from us*, Job 22:17. It is sad that those favours which ought to make us mindful of God, and studious what we shall render to him, should make us unmindful of him, and regardless what we do against him. We ought to know that we live upon God when we live upon common providence, though we do not, as Israel in the wilderness, live upon miracles. 3. God's just resentment of their base ingratitude, v. 7, 8. The judgments threatened (v. 3) intimated the departure of all good from them. The threatenings here go further, and intimate the breaking in of all evils upon them; for God, who had so much befriended them, now *turns to be their enemy and fights against them*, which is expressed here very terribly: *I will be unto them as a lion and as a leopard*. The lion is strong, and there is no resisting him. The leopard is here taken notice of to be crafty and vigilant: *As a leopard by the way will I observe them*. As that

beast of prey lies in wait by the road-side to catch travellers, and devour them, so will God by his judgments *watch over them* to do them hurt, as he had watched over them to do them good, Jer. 44:27. No opportunity shall be let slip that may accelerate or aggravate their ruin (Jer. 5:6): *A leopard shall watch over their cities*. A lynx, or spotted beast (and such the leopard is), is noted for quicksightedness above any creature (*lynx visu—the eyes of a lynx*), and so it intimates that not only the power, but the wisdom of God is engaged against those whom he has a controversy with. Some read it (and the original will bear it), *I will be as a leopard in the way of Assyria*. The judgments of God shall surprise them just when they are going to the Assyrians to seek for protection and help from them. It is added, *I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved*, and thereby exasperated and made more cruel (2 Sa. 17:8, Prov. 28:15), which intimates how highly God was provoked, and he would make them feel it: He will *rend the caul of their heart*. The lion is observed to aim at the heart of the beasts he preys upon, and thus will God *devour them like a lion*. He will send such judgments upon them as shall prey upon their spirits and consume their vitals. Their heart was exalted (v. 6), but God will take an effectual course to bring it down: *The wild beast shall tear them*; not only God will be as a lion and leopard to them, but the metaphor shall be fulfilled in the letter, for *noisome beasts* are one of the *four sore judgments* with which God will destroy a provoking people, Eze. 14:15.

Now all this teaches us, 1. That abused goodness turns into the greater severity. Those who despise God and affront him, when he is to them as a careful tender shepherd, shall find he will be even to his own flock as the beasts of prey are. Those whom God has in vain *endured with much long-suffering*, and invited with much affection, in them he will *show his wrath* and make them *vessels* of it, Rom. 9:22. *Patientia laesa fit furor—Despised patience will turn into fury*. 2. That the judgments of God, when they come with commission against impenitent sinners, will be irresistible and very terrible. They will *rend the caul of the heart*, will fill the soul with confusion, and tear that in pieces; and we are as unable to grapple with them as a lamb is to make his part good against a roaring lion, for *who knows the power of God's anger? Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord*, let us be persuaded to make peace with him; for are we stronger than he?

Verses 9-16

The first of these verses is the summary, or contents, of all the rest (v. 9), where we have, 1. All the blame of Israel's ruin laid upon themselves: *O Israel! thy perdition is thence*; it is of and from thyself; or, *"It has destroyed thee, O Israel!* that is, all that sin and folly of thine which thou art before charged with. *As thy own wickedness* has many a time *corrected thee*, so that has now at length destroyed thee." Note, Wilful sinners are self-destroyers. Obstinate impenitence is the grossest self-murder. Those that are *destroyed of the destroyer* have their blood upon their own head; they have *destroyed themselves*. 2. All the glory of Israel's relief ascribed to God: *But in me is thy help*. That is, (1.) It might have been: "I would have helped thee and healed thee, but thou wouldst not be healed and helped, but wast resolutely set upon thy own destruction." This will aggravate the condemnation of sinners, not only that they did that which tended to their own ruin, but that they opposed the offers God made them and the methods he took with them to prevent it: *I would have gathered them*, and they *would not*. They might have been easily and effectually helped, but they put the help away from them. Nay, (2.) It may be: "Thy case is bad, but it is not desperate. *Thou hast destroyed thyself*; but come to me, and I will help thee." This is a plank thrown out after shipwreck, and

greatly magnifies not only the power of God, that he can help when things are at the worst, can help those that cannot help themselves, but the riches of his grace, that he will help those that have destroyed themselves and therefore might justly be left to perish, that he will help those that have long refused his help. Dr. Pocock gives a different reading and sense of this verse: "*O Israel! this has destroyed thee, that in me is thy help.* Presuming upon God and his favour has emboldened thee in those wicked ways which have been thy ruin."

Now, in the rest of these verses, we may see,

I. How Israel destroyed themselves. It is said (v. 16), *They rebelled against God*, revolted from their allegiance to him, entered into a confederacy with his enemies, and took up arms against him; and this was the thing that ruined them, for never any hardened themselves against God and prospered. Note, Those that rebel against their God destroy themselves, for they make him their enemy for whom they are an unequal match.

1. They treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and so they destroy themselves. They are doing that, every day, which will be remembered against them another day (v. 12): *The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, and his sin is hid*; God took notice of it, kept it upon record, and will produce it against him and reckon with him for it afterwards. Their former sins contributed to their present destruction; for they were *laid up in store with God*, Deu. 32:34, 35; Job 14:17. It is laid up in safety, and will not be forgotten, nor the evidence against him lost; but it is laid up in secret; it is hid; the sinner himself is not aware of it. It is bound up in God's omniscience, in the sinner's own conscience. Note, The sin of sinners is not forgotten till it is pardoned, but an exact account is kept of it, which will be opened in proper time.

2. They make no haste to repent and help themselves when they are under divine rebukes; they are their own ruin because they will not do what they should do towards their own salvation, v. 13. (1.) They are brought into trouble and distress by sin: *The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him*. They shall smart for sin, and so be made sensible of it; they shall be thrown into pangs and agonies by it, very sharp and severe, and yet, like the pains of a woman in labour, hopeful and promising, and in order to deliverance; and by these, though God corrects them, yet he designs their good. They are chastened, that they may not be destroyed. But, (2.) They are not by these forwarded as they ought to be towards repentance and reformation, which would cause their sorrows to issue in true joy: *He is an unwise son, for he should not stay long*, as he does, *in the place of the breaking forth of children*, but, being *brought to the birth*, should struggle to *get forth*, lest he be stifled and *still-born at last*. Were the child which the mother is in travail of capable of understanding its own case, we should reckon it an unwise child that would choose to stay long in the birth; for the *captive exile hasteth to be loosed, lest he die in the pit*, Isa. 51:14. Note, Those may justly be reckoned their own destroyers who defer and put off their repentance, by which alone they might help themselves. Those are in danger of miscarrying in conversion who delay it, and will not put forth themselves to speed the work and bring it to an issue.

3. *Therefore* they are destroyed because they have done that which will be their certain ruin and neglected that which would have been their only relief. Here is a sad description of the desolation they are doomed to, v. 15, 16. It is here taken for granted that *Ephraim is fruitful among his children*; his name signifies *fruitfulness*. He is fruitful in respect of the plentiful products of

his country and the great numbers of its inhabitants; it was both a rich and a populous tribe, as was foretold concerning it; but sin turns this fruitful tribe into barrenness. *Joseph was a fruitful bough*, but for sin it was blasted. The instrument is an *east wind*, representing a foreign enemy that should invade it. It is called the *wind of the Lord*, not only because it shall be a very great and strong wind, but because it shall be sent by divine direction; it shall come *from the Lord*, and do whatever he appoints; and see what effect it shall have upon that flourishing tribe, what desolations war shall make. (1.) Was it a rich tribe? The foreign enemy shall make it poor enough. This *wind of the Lord* shall come up *from the wilderness*, a freezing blasting wind, and shall *dry up* the *springs* and *fountains* with which this tree is watered, shall exhaust the sources of its wealth. The invader shall waste the country and so impoverish the husbandman, shall intercept trade and commerce and so impoverish the merchant; and let not the great men, whose wealth lies in their rich furniture, think that they shall be exempted from the judgment, for he shall *spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels*. See the folly of those that lay up their treasure on earth, that lay it up in *pleasant vessels* (*vessels of desire*, so the word is), on which they set their affections, and in which they place their comfort and satisfaction. This is treasure that may be spoiled and that they may be spoiled of; it is what either moth or rust may corrupt, or what thieves and soldiers may steal and carry away. But wise and happy are those who have laid up their treasures in heaven, and in the pleasant things of that world, which cannot be spoiled, which they cannot be stripped of; ever happy are they, and therefore truly wise. (2.) Was it a populous tribe, and numerous? The enemy shall depopulate it and make its men few: *Samaria shall become desolate*, without inhabitants. [1.] Those shall be cut off who are the guard and joy of the present generation; the men who bear arms shall bear them to no purpose, for *they shall fall by the sword*, so that there shall be none to make head against the fury of the conqueror nor to take care of the concerns either of the public or of private families. [2.] Those shall be cut off who are the seed and hope of the next generation, who should rise up in the places of those who fell by the sword; the whole nation must be rooted out, and therefore *the infants shall be dashed to pieces*, in the most cruel and barbarous manner, and, which is if possible yet more inhuman, *the women with child shall be ripped up*. Thus shall the glory of *Samaria flee away from the birth, and from the womb*, ch. 9:11; 10:14. See instances of this cruelty, 2 Ki. 8:12; 15:16; Amos 1:13.

II. Let us now see how God was the help of this self-destroying people, how he was their only help (v. 10): *I will be thy King*, to rule and save thee. Though they had refused to be his subjects and had rebelled against him, yet he would still be their King and would not abandon them. The business and care of a good king is to keep his people, not only from ruined by foreign enemies, but from ruining themselves and one another. Thus will God yet be Israel's King, as he was *their King of old*. Note, Our case would be sad indeed if God were not better to us than we are to ourselves.

1. God will be their King when they have no other king; he will protect and save them when those are cut off and gone who should have been their protectors and saviours: *I will be he* (so v. 10 may be read), he that shall help thee. "*Where is the king that may save thee in all thy cities*, that may go in and out before thee, and fight thy battles, when thy cities are invaded by a foreign power, and suppress the more dangerous quarrels of thy citizens among themselves? *Where are thy judges*, who by administering public justice should preserve the public peace? For it is *righteousness* and *peace* that *kiss each other*. *Where are*

thy judges that thou hadst such a desire of and such a dependence upon, of whom thou saidst, *Give me a king and princes?* This refers, (1.) To the foolish wicked desire which the whole nation had of a kingly government, being weary of the theocracy, or divine government, which they had been under during the time of the *Judges*, because it looked too mean for them. They rejected Samuel, and in him *the Lord*, when they said, *Give us a king* like the nations, whereas the *Lord was their King*. (2.) To the desire which the ten tribes had of a kingly government different from that of the house of David, because they thought that was too absolute and bore too hard upon them, and they hoped to better themselves by setting up Jeroboam. Both these are instances, [1.] Of men's improvidence for themselves. When they are uneasy with their present lot they are fond of novelty, and think to better themselves by a change; but they are commonly disappointed, and do not find that advantage in the alteration which they promised themselves. [2.] Of men's impiety towards God, in thinking to refine upon his appointments and amend them. God gave Israel judges and prophets for their guidance; but they were weary of them, and cried, *Give us a king and princes*. God gave them the house of David, established it by a covenant of royalty; but they were soon weary of that too, and cried, *We have no part in David*. Those destroy themselves who are not pleased with what God does for them, but think they can do better for themselves. Well, in both these requests, Providence humoured them, gave them Saul first, and afterwards Jeroboam. And what the better were they for them? Saul was *given in anger* (given in *thunder*, 1 Sa. 12:18, 19) and soon after was *taken away in wrath*, upon Mount Gilboa. The kingly government of the ten tribes was given in anger, not only against Solomon for his defection, but against the ten tribes that desired it, for their discontent and disaffection to the house of David; and God was now about to take that away in wrath by the power of the king of Assyria. And then, *where is thy King?* He is gone, and thou shalt abide many days *without a king, and without a prince* (ch. 3:4), shalt have none to save thee, none to rule thee. Note, *First*, God often gives in anger what we sinfully and inordinately desire, gives it with a curse, and with it gives us up to our own hearts' lusts. Thus he gave Israel quails. *Secondly*, What we inordinately desire we are commonly disappointed in, and it cannot save us, as we expected it should. *Thirdly*, What God gives in anger he takes away in wrath; what he gives because we did not desire it well he takes away because we did not use it well. It is the happiness of the saints that, whether God gives or takes, it is all in love, and furnishes them with matter for praise. *To the pure all things are pure*. It is the misery of the wicked that, whether God gives or takes, it is all in wrath; to them nothing is pure, nothing is comfortable.

2. God will do that for them which no other king could do if they had one (v. 14): *I will ransom them from the power of the grave*. Though Israel, according to the flesh, be abandoned to destruction, God has mercy in store for his spiritual Israel, in whom all the promises were to have their accomplishment, and this among the rest, for to them the apostle applies it (1 Co. 15:55), and particularly to the blessed resurrection of believers at the great day, yet not excluding their spiritual resurrection from the death of sin to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life. It is promised, (1.) That the captives shall be delivered, *shall be ransomed, from the power of the grave*. Their deliverance shall be by ransom; and we know who it was that paid their ransom, and what the ransom was, for it was the Son of man that *gave his life a ransom for many*, Mt. 20:28. It is he that thus redeemed them. Those who, upon their repenting and believing, are, for the sake of Christ's righteousness, acquitted from the guilt of sin and saved from death and hell, which are the *wages of sin*, are those *ransomed of the Lord* that shall, in the great

day, be brought out of the grave in triumph, and it shall be as impossible for the banks of death to hold them as it was to hold their Master. (2.) That the conqueror shall be destroyed: *O death! I will be thy plagues.* Jesus Christ was the plague and destruction of death and the grave when by death he *destroyed him that had the power of death*, and when in his own resurrection he triumphed over the grave. But the complete destruction of them will be in the resurrection of believers at the great day, when death shall for ever be swallowed up in victory, and it is the last enemy that shall be destroyed. But the word which we translate *I will* may as well be rendered *Ubi nunc*—*Where now* are thy plagues? And so the apostle took it: *'O death! where is thy plague, or sting, with which thou hast so long pestered the world? O grave! where is thy victory, or thy destruction, wherewith thou has destroyed mankind?'* Christ has abolished death, has broken the power of it and altered the property of it, and so enabled us to triumph over it. This promise he has made, and it shall be made good to all that are his; for *repentance shall be hidden from his eyes*; he will never recall this sentence passed on death and the grave, for he is not a man that he should repent. Thanks be to God therefore who gives us the victory.

Chapter 14

The strain of this chapter differs from that of the foregoing chapters. Those were generally made up of reproofs for sin and threatenings of wrath; but this is made up of exhortations to repentance and promises of mercy, and with these the prophet closes; for all the foregoing convictions and terrors he had spoken were designed to prepare and make way for these. He wounds that he may heal. The Spirit convinces that he may comfort. This chapter is a lesson for penitents; and some such there were in Israel at this day, bad as things were. We have here, I. Directions in repenting, what to do and what to say (v. 1-3). II. Encouragements to repent taken from God's readiness to receive returning sinners (v. 4, 8) and the comforts he has treasured up for them (v. 5-7). III. A solemn recommendation of these things to our serious thoughts (v. 9).

Verses 1-3

Here we have,

I. A kind invitation given to sinners to repent, v. 1. It is directed to Israel, God's professing people. They are called to *return*. Note, Conversion must be preached even to those that are within the pale of the church as well as to heathen. "Thou art Israel, and therefore art bound to thy God in duty, gratitude, and interest; thy revolt from him is so much the more heinous, and thy return to him so much the more necessary." Let Israel see, 1. What work he has made for repentance: "*Thou has fallen by thy iniquity. Thou has stumbled*"; so some read it. Their idols were their *stumbling-blocks*. "Thou has fallen from God into sin, fallen off from all good, fallen down under the load of guilt and the curse." Note, Sin is a fall; and it concerns those that have fallen by sin to get up again by repentance. 2. What work he has to do in his repentance: "*Return to the Lord thy God*"; return to him as *the Lord* whom thou has a dependence upon, as *thy God*, thine in covenant, whom thou has an interest in." Note, It is the great concern of those that have revolted from God to *return to God*, and so to do their *first works*. "Return to him from whom thou has fallen, and who alone is able to raise thee up. Return *even to the Lord*, or *quite home* to the Lord; do not only look to him, or take some steps towards him, but make thorough work of it." The ancient Jews had a saying grounded on this, *Repentance is a great thing, for it brings men quite up to the throne of glory*.

II. Necessary instructions given them how to repent. 1. They must bethink themselves what to say to God when they come to him: *Take with you words*. They are required to bring, not sacrifices and offerings, but penitential prayers and supplications, the *fruit of thy lips*, yet not of the lips only, but of the heart, else words are but wind. One of the rabbins says, They must be such words as proceed *from what is spoken first in the inner man*; the heart must dictate to the tongue. We must take good words with us, by taking good thoughts and good affections with us. *Verbaque praevisam rem non invita sequuntur—Those who master a subject are seldom at a loss for language*. Note, When we come to God we should consider what we have to say to him; for, if we come without an errand, we are likely to go without an answer. Ezra 9:10, *What shall we say?* We must take with us words from the scripture, take them from the Spirit of grace and supplication, who teaches us to cry, Abba, Father, and makes intercession in us. 2. They must bethink themselves what to do. They must not only take with them words, but must *turn to the Lord*; inwardly in their hearts, outwardly in their lives.

III. For their assistance herein, and encouragement, God is pleased to put words into their mouths, to teach them what they shall say. Surely we may hope to speed with God, when he himself has ordered our address to be drawn up ready to our hands, and his own Spirit has indited it for us; and no doubt we shall speed if the workings of our souls agree with the words here recommended to us. They are,

1. Petitioning words. Two things we are here directed to petition for:—(1.) To be acquitted from guilt. When we return to the Lord we must say to him, Lord, *take away all iniquity*. They were now smarting for sin, under the load of affliction, but are taught to pray, not as Pharaoh, Take away *this death*, but, *Take away this sin*. Note, When we are in affliction we should be more concerned for the forgiveness of our sins than for the removal of our trouble. "*Take away iniquity*, lift it off as a *burden* we are ready to sink under or as the stumbling-block which we have often fallen over. Lord, take it away, that it may not appear against us, to our confusion and condemnation. Take it all away by a free and full remission, for we cannot pretend to strike any of it off by a satisfaction of our own." When God pardons sin he pardons *all*, that *great debt*; and when we pray against sin we must pray against it all and not except any. (2.) To be accepted as righteous in God's sight: "*Receive us graciously*. Let us have thy favour and love, and have thou respect to us and to our performances. Receive our prayer graciously; be well pleased with that good which by thy grace we are enabled to do." *Take good* (so the word is); take it to bestow upon us, so the margin reads it—*Give good*. This follows upon the petition for the taking away of iniquity; for, till iniquity is taken away, we have no reason to expect any good from God, but the taking away of iniquity makes way for the conferring of good *removendo prohibens—by taking that out of the way which hindered*. *Give good*; they do not say what good, but refer themselves to God; it is not good of the world's showing (Ps. 4:6), but good of God's giving. "*Give good*, that good which we have forfeited, and which thou has promised, and which the necessity of our case calls for." Note, God's gracious acceptance, and the blessed fruits and tokens of that acceptance, are to be earnestly desired and prayed for by us in our returning to God. "*Give good*, that good which will make us good and keep us from returning to iniquity again."

2. Promising words. These also are put into their mouths, not to move God, or to oblige him to show them mercy, but to move themselves, and oblige themselves to returns of duty. Note, Our prayers for pardon and acceptance with God should be always accompanied with sincere purposes and vows of new obedience. Two things they are to promise and vow:—(1.) Thanksgiving. "Pardon our sins, and accept of us, so *will we render the calves of our lips*." The *fruit of our lips* (so the Septuagint), a word they used for *burnt-offerings*, and so it agrees with the Hebrew. The apostle quotes this phrase (Heb. 13:15), and by the *fruit of our lips* understands the *sacrifice of praise to God, giving thanks to his name*. Note, Praise and thanksgiving are our spiritual sacrifice, and, if they come from an upright heart, shall please the Lord *better than an ox or bullock*, Ps. 69:30, 32. And the sense of our pardon and acceptance with God will enlarge our hearts in praise and thankfulness. Those that are *received graciously* may, and must, *render the calves of their lips*—poor returns for rich receivings, yet, if sincere, more acceptable than the calves of the stall. (2.) Amendment of life. They are taught to promise, not only verbal acknowledgements, but a real reformation. And we are taught here, [1.] In our returns to God to covenant against sin. We cannot expect that God should take it away by forgiving it if we do not put it away by forsaking it. [2.] To be particular in our covenants and resolutions against

sin, as we ought to be in our confession, because deceit lies in generals. [3.] To covenant especially and expressly against those sins which we have been most subject to, which have most easily beset us, and which we have been most frequently overcome by. We must keep ourselves from, and therefore must thus fortify ourselves against, *our own iniquity*, Ps. 18:23. The sin they here covenant against, owning thereby that they had been guilty of it, is giving that glory to another which is due to God only; this they promise they will never do, *First*, By putting that confidence in creatures which should be put in God only. They will not trust to their alliances abroad: *Asshur* (that is, Assyria) *shall not save us*. "We will not court the help of the Assyrians when we are in distress, as we have done (ch. 5:13; 7:11; 8:9); we will not contract for it, nor will we confide in it, or depend upon it. Having a God to go to, a God all-sufficient to trust to, we scorn to be beholden to the Assyrians for help." They will not trust to their warlike preparations at home, especially not those which they were forbidden to multiply: "*We will not ride upon horses*, that is, we will not make court to Egypt," for thence they fetched their horses, Deu. 17:16; Isa. 30:16; 31:1, 3. "When our enemies invade us we will depend upon our God to succour our infantry, and will be in no care to remount our cavalry." Or, "We will not *post on horseback*, for haste, from one creature to another, to seek relief, but will take the nearest way, and the only sure way, by addressing ourselves to God," Isa. 20:5. Note, True repentance takes us off from trusting to an arm of flesh, and brings us to rely on God only for all the good we stand in need of. *Secondly*, Nor will they do it by paying that homage to creatures which is due to God only. *We will not say any more to the works of our hands, You are our gods*. They must promise never to worship idols again, and for a good reason, because it is the most absurd and senseless thing in the world to pray to that as a god which is the work of our hands. We must promise that we will not set our hearts upon the gains of this world, nor pride ourselves in our external performances in religion, for that is, in effect, to say to the work of our hands, *You are our gods*. 3. Pleading words are here put into their mouths: *For in thee the fatherless find mercy*. We must take our encouragement in prayer, not from any merit God finds in us, but purely from the mercy we hope to find in God. This contains in itself a great truth, that God takes special care of fatherless children, Ps. 68:4, 5. So he did in his law, Ex. 22:22. So he does in his providence, Ps. 27:10. It is God's prerogative to help the helpless. In him there is mercy for such, for they are proper objects of mercy. In him they find it; there it is laid up for them, and there they must seek it; *seek and you shall find*. It comes in here as a good plea for mercy and grace and an encouraging one to their faith. (1.) They plead the distress of their state and condition: "We are fatherless orphans, destitute of help." Those may expect to find help in God that are truly sensible of their helplessness in themselves and are willing to acknowledge it. This is a good step towards comfort. "If we have not yet boldness to call God *Father*, yet we look upon ourselves as fatherless without him, and therefore lay ourselves at his feet, to be looked upon by him with compassion." (2.) They plead God's wonted lovingkindness to such as were in that condition: *With thee the fatherless not only may find, but does find, and shall find, mercy*. It is a great encouragement to our faith and hope, in returning to God, that it is his glory to father the fatherless and help the helpless.

Verses 4-7

We have here an answer of peace to the prayers of returning Israel. They seek God's face, and they shall not *seek in vain*. God will be sure to meet those in a way of mercy who return to him in a way of duty. If we speak to God in good prayers, God will

speak to us in good promises, as he *answered the angel with good words and comfortable words*, Zec. 1:13. If we take with us the foregoing words in our coming to God, we may take home with us these following words for our faith to feast upon; and see how these answer those.

I. Do they dread and deprecate God's displeasure, and therefore return to him? He assures them that, upon their submission, his *anger is turned away from them*. This is laid as the ground of all the other favours here promised. I will do so and so, for my *anger is turned away*, and thereby a door is opened for all good to flow to them, Isa. 12:1. Note, Though God is justly and greatly angry with sinners, yet he is not implacable in his anger; it may be turned away; it shall be turned away, from those that turn away from their iniquity. God will be reconciled to those that are reconciled to him and to his whole will.

II. Do they pray for the *taking away of iniquity*? He assures them that he will *heal their backslidings*; so he promised, Jer. 3:22. Note, Though backslidings from God are the dangerous diseases and wounds of the soul, yet they are not incurable, for God has graciously promised that if backsliding sinners will apply to him as their physician, and comply with his methods, he will heal their backslidings. He will heal the guilt of their backslidings by pardoning mercy and their *bent to backslide* by renewing grace. Their *iniquity shall not be their ruin*.

III. Do they pray that God will receive them graciously? In answer to that, behold, it is promised, *I will love them freely*. God had hated them while they went on sin (ch. 9:15); but now that they return and repent he loves them, not only ceases to be *angry* with them, but takes complacency in them and designs their good. He *loves them freely*, with an *absolute entire* love (so some), so that there are no remains of his former displeasure, with a *liberal bountiful* love (so others); he will be open-handed in his love to them, and will think nothing too much to bestow upon them or to do for them. Or with a *cheerful willing* love; he will love them without reluctancy or renitency. He will not say in the day of thy repentance, *How shall I receive thee again?* as he said in the day of thy apostasy, *How shall I give thee up?* Or with an *unmerited preventing* love. Whom God loves he loves *freely*, not because they deserve it, but of his own good pleasure. He loves because he *will* love, Deut, 7:7, 8.

IV. Do they pray that God will *give good*, will make them good? In answer to that, behold, it is promised, *I will be as the dew unto Israel*, v. 5. Observe,

1. What shall be the favour God will bestow upon them. It is the blessing of their father Jacob, *God give thee the dew of heaven*, Gen. 27:28. Nay, what they need God will not only give them, but he will himself be *that* to them, all that which they need: *I will be as the dew unto Israel*. This ensures *spiritual blessings in heavenly things*; and it follows upon the healing of their backslidings, for pardoning mercy is always accompanied with renewing grace. Note, To Israelites indeed God himself will be *as the dew*. He will instruct them; his doctrine shall drop upon them as the dew, Deu. 32:2. They shall know more and more of him, for he will come to them *as the rain*, Hos. 6:3. He will refresh them with his comforts, so that their souls shall be as a *watered garden*, Isa. 58:11. He will be to true penitents *as the dew to Israel* when they were in the wilderness, dew that had manna in it, Ex. 16:14; Num. 11:9. The graces of the Spirit are the hidden manna, hidden in the dew; God will give them bread from heaven, as he did to Israel in the dew in abundance, Jn. 1:16.

2. What shall be the fruit of that favour which shall be produced in them. The grace thus freely bestowed on them *shall not be*

in vain. Those souls, those Israelites, to whom God is as the dew, on whom his grace distils,

(1.) Shall be growing. The bad being by the grace of God made good, they shall by the same grace be made better; for grace, wherever it is true, is growing. [1.] They shall grow upwards, and be more flourishing, *shall grow as the lily*, or (as some read it) shall *blossom as the rose*. The growth of the lily, as that of all bulbous roots, is very quick and speedy. The root of the lily seems lost in the ground all winter, but, when it is refreshed with the dews of the spring, it starts up in a little time; so the grace of God improves young converts sometimes very fast. The lily, when it has come to its height, is a lovely flower (Mt. 6:29), so grace is the comeliness of the soul, Eze. 16:14. it is the *beauty of holiness* that is produced by the *dew of the morning*, Ps.

110:3. [2.] They shall grow downwards, and be more firm. The lily indeed grows fast, and grows fine, but it soon fades and is easily plucked up; and therefore it is here promised to Israel that with the flower of the lily he shall have the root of the cedar: He shall *cast forth his roots as Lebanon*, as the *trees of Lebanon*, which, having taken deep root, cannot be plucked up, Amos 9:15. Note, Spiritual growth consists most in the growth of the root, which is out of sight. The more we depend upon Christ and draw sap and virtue from him, the more we act in religion from a principle and the more steadfast and resolved we are in it, the more we *cast forth our roots*. [3.] They shall grow round about (v. 6): *His branches shall spread* on all sides. And (v. 7) he shall *grow as the vine*, whose branches extend furthest of any tree. Joseph was to be *a fruitful bough*, Gen. 49:22. When many are added to the church from without, when a hopeful generation rises up, then Israel's branches spread. When particular believers abound in good works, and increase in the knowledge of God and in every good gift, then their branches may be said to spread. The *inward man is renewed day by day*.

(2.) They shall be graceful and acceptable both to God and man. Grace is the amiable thing, and makes those that have it truly amiable. They are here compared to such trees as are pleasant, [1.] To the sight: *His beauty shall be as the olive-tree*, which is always green. *The Lord called thy name a green olive-tree*, Jer. 11:16. Ordinances are the beauty of the church, and in them it is, and shall be, ever green. Holiness is the beauty of a soul; when those that believe with the heart make profession with the mouth, and justify and adorn that profession with an agreeable conversation, then their beauty is as the olive-tree, Ps. 52:8. It is a promise to the trees of righteousness that their leaf shall not wither. [2.] To the smell: *His smell shall be as Lebanon* (v. 6) and his *scent as the wine of Lebanon*, v. 7. This was the praise of their father Jacob, *The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed*, Gen. 27:27. The church is compared to a *garden of spices* (Cant. 4:12, 14), which *all her garments smell of*. True believers are *acceptable to God* and *approved of men*. God *smells a sweet savour* from their *spiritual sacrifices* (Gen. 8:21), and they are *accepted of the multitude of the brethren*. Grace is the perfume of the soul, the perfume of the name, makes it like a precious ointment, Eccl. 7:1. *The memorial thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon* (so the margin reads it), not only their reviving comforts now, but their surviving honours when they are gone, shall be as *the wine of Lebanon*, that has a delicate flavour. Flourishing churches have *their faith spoken of throughout the world* (Rom. 1:8) and *leave their name to be remembered* (Ps. 45:17); and *the memory of flourishing saints is blessed*, and shall be so, as theirs who *by faith obtained a good report*.

(3.) They shall be fruitful and useful. The church is compared here to the vine and the olive, which brings forth useful fruits, to

the honour of God and man. Nay, the very shadow of the church shall be agreeable (v. 7): *Those that dwell under his shadow shall return*—under God's *shadow* (so some), under the shadow of the Messias, so the Chaldee. Believers *dwell under God's shadow* (Ps. 91:1), and there they are and may be safe and easy. But it is rather *under the shadow of Israel*, under the shadow of the church. Note, God's promises pertain to those, and those only, that dwell under the church's shadow, that attend on God's ordinances and adhere to his people, not those that flee to that shadow only for shelter in a hot gleam, but those that *dwell under it*. Ps. 27:4. We may apply it to particular believers; when a man is effectually brought home to God all that *dwell under his shadow*—children, servants, subjects, friends. *This day has salvation come to this house*. Those that dwell under the shadow of the church shall return; their drooping spirits shall return, and they shall be refreshed and comforted. He *restores my soul*, Ps. 23:3. *They shall revive as the corn*, which, when it is sown, dies first, and then revives, and *brings forth much fruit*, Jn. 12:24. It is promised that God's people shall be blessings to the world, as corn and wine are. And a very great and valuable mercy it is to be serviceable to our generation. Comfort and honour attend it.

Verses 8-9

Let us now hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

I. Concerning Ephraim; he is spoken of and spoken to, v. 8. Here we have,

1. His repentance and reformation: *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?* As some read it, God here reasons and argues with him, why he should renounce idolatry: "*O Ephraim! what to me and idols? What concord or agreement can there be between me and idols? What communion between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial?*" 2 Co. 6:14, 15. Therefore thou must break off thy league with them if thou wilt come into covenant with me." As we read it, God promises to bring Ephraim and keep him to this: *Ephraim shall say, God will put it into his heart to say it, What have I to do any more with idols?* He has promised (v. 3) not to *say any more to the works of his hands, You are my gods*. But God's promises to us are much more our security and our strength for the mortifying of sin than our promises to God; and therefore God himself is here *surety for his servant to good*, will put in into his heart and into his mouth. And, whatever good we say or do at any time, it is he that works it in us. Ephraim had solemnly engaged not to call his idols *his gods*; but God here engages further for him that he shall resolve to have *no more to do with them*. He shall abolish them, he shall abandon them, and that with the utmost detestation; for it is necessary not only that in our lives we be turned from sin, but that in our hearts we be turned against sin. See here, (1.) The power of divine grace. Ephraim had been *joined to his idols* (ch. 4:17), was so fond of them that one would have thought he could never fall out with them; and yet God will work such a change in him that he shall loathe them as much as ever he loved them. (2.) See the benefit of sanctified afflictions. Ephraim had smarted for his idolatry; it had brought one judgment after another upon him, and this at length is the fruit, even the *taking away of his sin*, Isa. 27:9. (3.) See the nature of repentance; it is a firm and fixed resolution to have no more to do with sin. This is the language of the penitent: "I am ashamed that ever I had to do with sin; but I have had enough of it; I hate it, and by the grace of God I will never have any thing to do with it again, no, not with the occasions of it." Thou shalt say to thy idol, *Get thee hence* (Isa. 30:22), shalt say to the tempter, *Get thee behind me, Satan*.

2. The gracious notice God is pleased to take of it: *I have heard him, and observed him. I have heard, and will look upon him;* so some read it. Note, The God of heaven takes cognizance of the penitent reflections and resolutions of returning sinners. He expects and desires the repentance of sinners, because he has no pleasure in their ruin. *He looks upon men* (Job 33:27), *hearkens and hears*, Jer. 8:6. And, if there be any disposition to repent, he is well pleased with it. When *Ephraim bemoans himself* before God, he is a *dear son*, he is a *pleasant child*, Jer. 31:20. He meets penitents with mercy, as the father of the prodigal met his returning son. God *observed* Ephraim, to see whether he would bring forth fruits meet for this profession of repentance that he made, and whether he would continue in this good mind. He observed him to do him good, and comfort him, according to the exigencies of his case.

3. The mercy of God designed for him, in order to his comfort and perseverance in his resolutions; still God will be all in all to him. Before, Israel was compared to a tree, now God compares himself to one. He will be to his people, (1.) As the branches of a tree: *"I am like a green fir-tree, and will be so to thee."* The fir-trees, in those countries, were exceedingly large and thick, and a shelter against sun and rain. God will be to all true converts both a delight and a defence; under his protection and influence they shall both dwell in safety and dwell in ease. He will be either *a sun and a shield* or a *shade and a shield*, according as their case requires. They shall sit down *under his shadow with delight*, Cant. 2:3. He will be so all weathers, Isa. 4:6. (2.) As the root of a tree: *From me is thy fruit found*, which may be understood either of the fruit brought forth to us (to him we owe all our comforts) or of the fruit brought forth by us—from him we receive grace and strength to enable us to do our duty. Whatever fruits of righteousness we brought forth, all the praise of them is due to God; for he works in us both to will and to do that which is good.

II. Concerning every one that hears and reads the words of the prophecy of this book (v. 9): *Who is wise? and he shall understand these things*. Perhaps the prophet was wont to conclude that sermons he preached with these words, and now he closes with them the whole book, in which he has committed to writing some fragments of the many sermons he had preached. Observe, 1. The character of those that do profit by the truths he delivered: *Who is wise and prudent? He shall understand these things, he shall know them*. Those that set themselves to understand and know these things thereby make it to appear that they are truly wise and prudent, and will thereby be made more so; and, if any do not understand and know them, it is because they are foolish and unwise. Those that are wise in the doing of their duty, that are prudent in practical religion, are most likely to know and understand both the truths and providences of God, which are a mystery to others, Jn. 7:17. *The secret of the Lord is with those that fear him*, Ps. 25:14. *Who is wise?* This intimates a desire that those who read and hear these things would understand them (*O that they were wise!*) and a complaint that few were so—*Who has believed our report?* 2. The excellency of these things concerning which we are here instructed: *The ways of the Lord are right*; and therefore it is our wisdom and duty to know and understand them. The way of God's precepts, in which he requires us to walk, is right, agreeing with the rules of eternal reason and equity and having a direct tendency to our eternal felicity. The ways of God's providence, in which he walks toward us, are all right; no fault is to be found with any thing that God does, for it is all well done. His judgments upon the impenitent, his favours to the penitent, are all right; however they may be perverted and misinterpreted, God will at last be

justified and glorified in them all. His *ways are equal*. 3. The different use which men make of them. (1.) The right ways of God to those that are good are, and will be, a savour of life unto life: *The just shall walk in them*; they shall conform to the will of God both in his precepts and in his providences, and shall have the comfort of so doing. They shall well understand the mind of God both in his word and in his works; they shall be well reconciled to both, and shall accommodate themselves to God's intention in both. *The just shall walk in those ways* towards their great end, and shall not come short of it. (2.) The right ways of God will be to those that are wicked a savour of death unto death: *The transgressors shall fall* not only in their own wrong ways, but even *in the right ways of the Lord*. Christ, who is a foundation stone to some, is to others a *stone of stumbling* and a *rock of offence*. That which was *ordained to life* becomes through their abuse of it, death to them. God's providences, being not duly improved by them, harden them in sin and contribute to their ruin. God's discovery of himself both in the judgments of his mouth and in the judgments of his hand is to us according as we are affected under it. *Recipitur ad modum recipientis—What is received influences according to the qualities of the receiver*. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay. But of all transgressors those certainly have the most dangerous fatal falls that fall *in the ways of God*, that split on the rock of ages, and suck poison out of the balm of Gilead. *Let the sinners in Zion be afraid* of this.