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Preface

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

We are altogether uncertain concerning the time when this prophet prophesied; it is probable that it was about the same time Amos prophesied, not for the reason that the rabbin give, "Because Amos begins his prophecy with that wherewith Joel concludes his, *The Lord shall roar out of Zion,*" but for the reason Dr. Lightfoot gives, "Because he speaks of the same judgments of locusts, and drought, and fire, that Amos laments, which is an intimation that they appeared about the same time, Amos in Israel and Joel in Judah. Hosea and Obadiah prophesied about the same time; and it appears that Amos prophesied in the days of Jeroboam, the second king of Israel, Amos 7:10. God sent a variety of prophets, that they might strengthen the hands one of another, and that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established. In this prophecy, I. The desolations made by hosts of noxious insects is described, ch. 1 and part of ch. 2. II. The people are hereupon called to repentance, ch. 2. III. Promises are made of the return of mercy upon their repentance (ch. 2), and promises of the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days. IV. The cause of God's people is pleaded against their enemies, whom God would in due time reckon with (ch. 3); and glorious things are spoken of the gospel—Jerusalem and of the prosperity and perpetuity of it.

Chapter 1

This chapter is the description of a lamentable devastation made of the country of Judah by locusts and caterpillars. Some think that the prophet speaks of it as a thing to come and gives warning of it beforehand, as usually the prophets did of judgments coming. Others think that it was now present, and that his business was to affect the people with it and awaken them by it to repentance. I. It is spoken of as a judgment which there was no precedent of in former ages (v. 1-7). II. All sorts of people sharing in the calamity are called upon to lament it (v. 8-13). III. They are directed to look up to God in their lamentations, and to humble themselves before him (v. 14-20).

Verses 1-7

It is a foolish fancy which some of the Jews have, that this Joel the prophet was the same with that Joel who was the son of Samuel (1 Sa. 8:2); yet one of their rabbins very gravely undertakes to show why Samuel is here called *Pethuel*. This Joel was long after that. He here speaks of a sad and sore judgment which was now brought, or to be brought, upon Judah, for their sins. Observe,

I. The greatness of the judgment, expressed here in two things:—1. It was such as could not be paralleled in the ages that were past, in history, or in the memory of any living, v. 2. The *old men* are appealed to, who could remember what had happened long ago; nay, and *all the inhabitants of the land* are called on to testify, if they could any of them remember the like. Let them go further than any man's memory, and *prepare themselves for the search of their fathers* (Job 8:8), and they would not find an account of the like in any record. Note, Those that outdo their predecessors in sin may justly expect to fall under greater and sorer judgments than any of their predecessors knew. 2. It was such as would not be forgotten in the ages to come (v. 3): "*Tell you your children of it*; let them know what dismal tokens of the wrath of God you have been under, that they may take warning, and may learn obedience by the things which you have suffered, for it is designed for warning to them also. Yea, let *your children tell their children, and their children another generation*; let them tell it not only as a strange thing, which may serve for matter of talk" (as such uncommon accidents are records in our almanacs—It is so long since the plague, and fire—so long since the great frost, and the great wind), "but let them tell it to *teach their children* to stand in awe of God and of his judgments, and to tremble before him." Note, We ought to transmit to posterity the memorial of God's judgments as well as of his mercies.

II. The judgment itself; it is an invasion of the country of Judea by a great army. Many interpreters both ancient and modern understand it of armies of men, the forces of the Assyrians, which, under Sennacherib, *took all the defenced cities of Judah*, and then, no doubt, made havoc of the country and destroyed the products of it: nay, some make the four sorts of animals here named (v. 4) to signify the four monarchies which, in their turns, were oppressive to the people of the Jews, one destroying what had escaped the fury of the other. Many of the Jewish expositors think it is a parabolic expression of the coming of enemies, and their multitude, to lay all waste. So the Chaldee paraphrast mentions these animals (v. 4); but afterwards (ch. 2:25) puts instead of them, *Nations, peoples, tongues, potentates, and revenging kingdoms*. But it seems much

rather to be understood literally of armies of insects coming upon the land and eating up the fruits of it. Locusts were one of the plagues of Egypt. Of them it is said, There never were any like them, nor should be (Ex. 10:14), none such as those in Egypt, none such as these in Judah—none like those locusts for bigness, none like these for multitude and the mischief they did. The plague of locusts in Egypt lasted but for a few days; this seems to have continued for four years successively (as some think), because here are four sorts of insects mentioned (v. 4), one destroying what the other left; but others think they came all in one year. We are not told, in the history of the Old Testament, when this happened, but we are sure that no word of God fell to the ground; and, though a devastation by these insects is primarily intended here, yet it is expressed in such a language as is very applicable to the destruction of the country by a foreign enemy invading it, because, if the people were not humbled and reformed by that less judgment which devoured the land, God would send this greater upon them, which would devour the inhabitants; and by the description of that they are bidden to take it for a warning. If this nation of worms do not subdue them, another nation shall come to ruin them. Observe, 1. What these animals are that are sent against them—*locusts* and *caterpillars*, *palmer-worms* and *canker-worms*, v. 4. We cannot now describe how these differed one from another; they were all little insects, any one of them despicable, and which a man might easily crush with his foot or with his finger; but when they came in vast swarms, or shoals, they were very formidable and ate up all before them. Note, God is Lord of hosts, has all creatures at his command, and, when he pleases, can humble and mortify a proud and rebellious people by the weakest and most contemptible creatures. Man is said to be a worm; and by this it appears that he is *less than a worm*, for, when God pleases, worms are too hard for him, plunder his country, eat up that for which he laboured, destroy the forage, and cut off the subsistence of a potent nation. The weaker the instrument is that God employs the more is his power magnified. 2. What fury and force they came with. They are here called a *nation* (v. 6), because they are embodied, and act by consent, and as it were with a common design; for, though *the locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands* (Prov. 30:27), and it is there mentioned as an instance of their *wisdom*. It is prudence for those that are weak severally to unite and act jointly. They are *strong*, for they are *without number*. The *small dust of the balance* is light, and easily blown away, but a heap of dust is weighty; so a worm can do little (yet one worm served to destroy Jonah's gourd), but numbers of them can do wonders. They are said to have *teeth of a lion*, of a *great lion*, because of the great and terrible execution they do. Note, Locusts become as lions when they come armed with a divine commission. We read of the locusts out of the bottomless pit, that *their teeth were as the teeth of lions*, Rev. 9:8. 3. What mischief they do. They *eat up* all before them (v. 4); what one leaves the other devours; they destroy not only the grass and corn, but the trees (v. 7): *The vine is laid waste*. There vermin eat the leaves which should be a shelter to the fruit while it ripens, and so that also perishes and comes to nothing. They eat the very bark of the fig-tree, and so kill it. Thus the *fig-tree does not blossom*, nor is there *fruit in the vine*.

III. A call to the drunkards to lament this judgment (v. 5): *Awake and weep, all you drinkers of wine*. This intimates, 1. That they should suffer very sensibly by this calamity. It should touch them in a tender part; the *new wine* which they loved so well should be *cut off from their mouth*. Note, It is just with God to take away those comforts which are abused to luxury and excess, to *recover the corn and wine* which are *prepared* for Baal, which are made the food and fuel of a base lust. And to

them judgments of that kind are most grievous. The more men place their happiness in the gratification of sense the more pressing temporal afflictions are upon them. The drinkers of water need not to care when the vine was laid waste; they could live as well without it as they had done; it was no trouble to the Nazarites. But the *drinkers of wine* will *weep and howl*. The more delights we make necessary to our satisfaction the more we expose ourselves to trouble and disappointment. 2. It intimates that they had been very senseless and stupid under the former tokens of God's displeasure; and therefore they are here called to *awake and weep*. Those that will not be roused out of their security by the word of God shall be roused by his rod; those that will not be startled by judgments at a distance shall be themselves arrested by them; and when they are going to partake of the forbidden fruit a prohibition of another nature shall come *between the cup and the lip*, and *cut off the wine from their mouth*.

Verses 8-13

The judgment is here described as very lamentable, and such as all sorts of people should share in; it shall not only rob the drunkards of their pleasure (if that were the worst of it, it might be the better borne), but it shall deprive others of their necessary subsistence, who are therefore called to lament (v. 8), as a virgin laments the death of her lover to whom she was espoused, but not completely married, yet so that he was in effect her husband, or as a young woman lately married, from whom the *husband of her youth*, her young husband, or the husband to whom she was married when she was young, is suddenly taken away by death. Between a new-married couple that are young, that married for love, and that are every way amiable and agreeable to each other, there is great fondness, and consequently great grief if either be taken away. Such lamentation shall there be for the loss of their corn and wine. Note, The more we are wedded to our creature-comforts that harder it is to part with them. See that parallel place, Isa. 32:10–12. Two sorts of people are here brought in, as concerned to lament this devastation, countrymen and clergymen.

I. Let the husbandmen and vine-dressers lament, v. 11. Let them be ashamed of the care and pains they have taken about their vineyards, for it will be all labour lost, and they shall gain no advantage by it; they shall see the fruit of their labour eaten up before their eyes, and shall not be able to save any of it. Note, Those who labour only *for the meat that perishes* will, sooner or later, be ashamed of their labour. The *vine-dressers* will then express their extreme grief by *howling*, when they see their vineyards stripped of leaves and fruit, and the vines withered, so that nothing is to be had or hoped for from them, wherewith they might pay their rent and maintain their families. The destruction is particularly described here: *The field is laid waste* (v. 10); all is consumed that is produced; *the land mourns*; the ground has a melancholy aspect, and looks ruefully; all the inhabitants of the land are in tears for what they have lost, are in fear of perishing for want, Isa. 24:4; Jer. 4:28. "The *corn*, the bread-corn, which is the staff of life, is *wasted*; the *new wine*, which should be brought into the cellars for a supply when the old is drunk, is *dried up*, is *ashamed* of having promised so fair what it is not now able to perform; the oil *languishes*, or is *diminished*, because (as the Chaldee renders it) *the olives have fallen off*." The people were not thankful to God as they should have been for the *bread that strengthens man's heart*, the *wine that makes glad the heart*, and the *oil that makes the face to shine* (Ps. 104:14, 15); and therefore they are justly brought to lament the loss and want of them, of all the products of the

earth, which God had given either for necessity or for delight (this is repeated, v. 11, 12)—the *wheat and barley*, the two principal grains bread was then made of, wheat for the rich and barley for the poor, so that the rich and poor meet together in the calamity. The trees are destroyed, not only the *vine and the fig-tree* (as before, v. 7), which were more useful and necessary, but other trees also that were for delight—the *pomegranate, palm-tree, and apple-tree*, yea, all the *trees of the field*, as well as those of the orchard, timber-trees as well as fruit-trees. In short, all *the harvest of the field has perished*, v. 11. And by this means *joy has withered away from the children of men* (v. 11); the *joy of harvest*, which is used to express great and general joy, has come to nothing, is turned into shame, is turned into lamentation. Note, The perishing of the harvest is the withering of the joy of the children of men. Those that place their happiness in the delights of the sense, when they are deprived of them, or in any way disturbed in the enjoyment of them, lose all their joy; whereas the children of God, who look upon the pleasures of sense with holy indifference and contempt, and know what it is to make God their hearts' delight, can rejoice in him as the *God of their salvation* even when the *fig-tree does not blossom*; spiritual joy is so far from withering then, that it flourishes more than ever, Hab. 3:17, 18. Let us see here, 1. What perishing uncertain things all our creature-comforts are. We can never be sure of the continuance of them. Here the heavens had given their rains in due season, the earth had yielded her strength, and, when the appointed weeks of harvest were at hand, they saw no reason to doubt but that they should have a very plentiful crop; yet then they are invaded by these unthought-of enemies, that lay all waste, and not by fire and sword. It is our wisdom not to lay up our treasure in those things which are liable to so many untoward accidents. 2. See what need we have to live in continual dependence upon God and his providence, for our own hands are not sufficient for us. When we see the *full corn in the ear*, and think we are sure of it—nay, when we have *brought it home*, if *he blow upon it*, nay, if he do not bless it, we are not likely to have any good of it. 3. See what ruinous work sin makes. A paradise is turned into a wilderness, a fruitful land, the most fruitful land upon earth, *into barrenness*, for the *iniquity of those that dwelt therein*. II. Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, lament, for they share deeply in the calamity: *Gird yourselves with sackcloth* (v. 13); nay, they *do mourn*, v. 9. Observe, The priests are called the *ministers of the altar*, for on that they attended, and the *ministers of the Lord* (of *my God*, says the prophet), for in attending on the altar they served him, did his work, and did him honour. Note, Those that are employed in holy things are therein God's ministers, and on him they attend. The ministers of the altar used to rejoice before the Lord, and to spend their time very much in singing; but now they must *lament and howl*, for the *meat-offering and drink-offering were cut off from the house of the Lord* (v. 9), and the same again (v. 13), *from the house of your God*. "He is your God in a particular manner; you are in a nearer relation to him than other Israelites are; and therefore it is expected that you should be more concerned than others for that which is a hindrance to the service of his sanctuary." It is intimated, 1. That the people, as long as they had the fruits of the earth brought in in their season, presented to the Lord his dues out of them, and brought the offerings to the altar and tithes to those that served at the altar. Note, A people may be filling up the measure of their iniquity apace, and yet may keep up a course of external performances in religion. 2. That, when the meat and drink failed, the meat-offering and drink-offering failed of course; and this was the sorest instance of the calamity. Note, As far as any public trouble is an obstruction to the course of religion it is to be upon that account, more than any other,

sadly lamented, especially by the priests, the Lord's ministers. As far as poverty occasions the decay of piety and the neglect of divine offices, and starves the cause of religion among a people, it is indeed a sore judgment. When the famine prevailed God could not have his sacrifices, nor could the priests have their maintenance; and therefore let *the Lord's ministers mourn*.

Verses 14-20

We have observed abundance of tears shed for the destruction of the fruits of the earth by the locusts; now here we have those tears turned into the right channel, that of repentance and humiliation before God. The judgment was very heavy, and here they are directed to own the hand of God in it, his *mighty hand*, and to *humble themselves* under it. Here is,

I. A proclamation issued out for a general fast. The priests are ordered to appoint one; they must not only mourn themselves, but they must call upon others to mourn too: "*Sanctify a fast*; let some time be set apart from all worldly business to be spent in the exercises of religion, in the expressions of repentance and other extraordinary instances of devotion." Note, Under public judgments there ought to be public humiliations; for by them the *Lord God calls to weeping and mourning*. With all the marks of sorrow and shame sin must be confessed and bewailed, the righteous of God must be acknowledged, and his favour implored. Observe what is to be done by a nation at such a time. 1. A day is to be appointed for this purpose, a *day of restraint* (so the margin reads it), a day in which people must be restrained from their other ordinary business (that they may more closely attend God's service), and from all bodily refreshments; for, 2. It must be a *fast*, a religious abstaining from meat and drink, further than is of absolute necessity. The king of Nineveh appointed a fast, in which they were to *taste nothing*, Jonah 3:7. Hereby we own ourselves unworthy of our necessary food, and that we have forfeited it and deserve to be wholly deprived of it, we punish ourselves and mortify the body, which has been the occasion of sin, we keep it in a frame fit to serve the soul in serving God, and, by the appetite's craving food, the desires of the soul towards that which is better than life, and all the supports of it, are excited. This was in a special manner seasonable now that God was depriving them of their *meat and drink*; for hereby they accommodated themselves to the affliction they were under. When God says, *You shall fast*, it is time to say, *We will fast*. 3. There must be a solemn assembly. The *elders* and the *people*, magistrates and subjects, must be *gathered together, even all the inhabitants of the land*, that God might be honoured by their public humiliations, that they might thereby take the more shame to themselves, and that they might excite and stir up one another to the religious duties of the day. All had contributed to the national guilt, all shared in the national calamity, and therefore they must all join in the professions of repentance. 4. They must come together in the temple, *the house of the Lord their God*, because that was the house of prayer, and there they might be hope to meet with God because it was the place which he had *chosen to put his name there*, there they might hope to speed because it was a type of Christ and his mediation. Thus they interested themselves in Solomon's prayer for the acceptance of all the requests that should be put up in or towards this house, in which their present case was particularly mentioned. 1 Ki. 7:37, *If there be locust, if there be caterpillar*. 5. They must *sanctify* this fast, must observe it in a religious manner, with sincere devotion. What is a fast worth if it be not sanctified? 6. They must *cry unto the Lord*. To him they must make their complaint and offer up their supplication. When we cry in our affliction we must *cry to the Lord*; this is *fasting to him*, Zec. 7:5.

II. Some considerations suggested to induce them to proclaim this fast and to observe it strictly.

1. God was beginning a controversy with them. It is time to *cry unto the Lord, for the day of the Lord is at hand*, v. 15. Either they mean the continuance and consequences of this present judgment which they now saw but breaking in upon them, or some greater judgments which this was but a preface to. However it be, this they are taught to make the matter of their lamentation: *Alas, for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand. Therefore cry to God.* For, (1.) "The day of his judgment is very near, it is *at hand*; it *will not slumber*, and therefore you should not. It is time to fast and pray, for you have but a little time to turn yourselves in." (2.) It will be very terrible; there is no escaping it, no resisting it: *As a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.* See Isa. 13:6. It is not a correction, but a destruction; and it comes from the hand, not of a weak creature, but *of the Almighty*; and *who knows* (nay, who does not know) *the power of his anger*? Whither should we go with our cries but to him from whom the judgment we dread comes? There is no fleeing from him but by fleeing to him, no escaping destruction from the Almighty but by making our submission and supplication to the Almighty; this is *taking hold on his strength, that we may make peace*, Isa. 27:5.

2. They saw themselves already under the tokens of his displeasure. It is time to fast and pray, for their distress is very great, v. 16. (1.) Let them look into their own houses, and was no plenty there, as used to be. Those who kept a good table were now obliged to retrench: *Is not the meat cut off before our eyes?* If, when God's hand is lifted up, men *will not see*, when his hand is laid on *they shall see*. Is not the meat many a time cut off before our eyes? Let us then labour for that spiritual meat which is not before our eyes, and which cannot be cut off. (2.) Let them look into God's house, and see the effects of the judgment there; joy and gladness were *cut off from the house of God*. Note, The house of our God is the proper place of joy and gladness; when David goes to the *altar of God*, it is to God *my exceeding joy*; but when *joy and gladness* are *cut off from God's house*, either by corruption of holy things or the persecution of holy persons, when serious godly decays and love waxes cold, then it time to cry to the Lord, time to cry, *Alas!*

3. The prophet returns to describe the grievousness of the calamity, in some particulars of it. Corn and cattle are the husbandman's staple commodities; now here he is deprived of both. (1.) The caterpillars have devoured the corn, v. 17. The *garners*, which they used to fill with corn, *are laid desolate*, and *the barns broken down*, because *the corn has withered*, and the owners think it not worth while to be at the charge of repairing them when they have nothing to put in them, nor are likely to have any thing; for *the seed it rotten under the clods*, either through too much rain or (which was the more common case in Canaan) for want of rain, or perhaps some insects under ground ate it up. When one crop fails the husbandman hopes the next may make it up; but here they despair of that, the seedness being as bad as the harvest. (2.) The cattle perish too for want of grass (v. 18): *How do the beasts groan!* This the prophet takes notice of, that the people might be affected with it and lay to heart the judgment. The groans of the cattle should soften their hard and impenitent hearts. *The herds of cattle*, the large cattle (black cattle we call them), *are perplexed*; nay, even *the flocks of sheep*, which will live upon a common and be content with very short grass, *are made desolate*. See here the inferior creatures suffering for our transgression, and groaning under the double burden of being serviceable to the sin of man and subject to the curse of God for it. *Cursed is the ground for thy sake.*

III. The prophet stirs them up to cry to God, with the consideration of the examples given them for it.

1. His own example (v. 19): *O Lord! to thee will I cry*. He would not put them upon doing that which he would not resolve to do himself; nay, whether they would do it or no, he would. Note, If God's ministers cannot prevail to affect others with the discoveries of divine wrath, yet they ought to be themselves affected with them; if they cannot bring others to cry to God, yet they themselves be much in prayer. In time of trouble we must not only pray, but cry, must be fervent and importunate in prayer; and to God, from whom both the destruction is and the salvation must be, ought our cry to be always directed. That which engaged him *to cry to God* was, not so much any personal affliction, as the national calamity: *The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness*, which seems to be meant of some parching scorching heat of the sun, which was as fire to the fruits of the earth; it consumed them all. Note, When God *calls to contend by fire* it concerns those that have any interest in heaven to cry mightily to him for relief. See Num. 11:2; Amos 7:4, 5.

2. The example of the inferior creatures: *"The beasts of the field do not only groan, but cry unto thee*, v. 20. They appeal to thy pity, according to their capacity, and as if, though they are not capable of a rational and revealed religion, yet they had something of dependence upon God by natural instinct." At least, when they groan by reason of their calamity, he is pleased to interpret it as if they cried to him; much more will he put a favourable construction upon the groanings of his own children, though sometimes so feeble that they *cannot be uttered*, Rom. 8:26. The beasts are here said to *cry unto God*, as from him the *lions seek their meat* (Ps. 104:21) and the young *ravens*, Job 38:41. The complaints of the brute-creatures here are for want of water (*The rivers are dried up*, through the excessive heat), and for want of grass, for the *fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness*. And what better are those than beasts who never cry to God but for corn and wine, and complain of nothing but the want of delight of sense? Yet their crying to God in those cases shames the stupidity of those who cry not to God in any case.

Chapter 2

In this chapter we have, I. A further description of that terrible desolation which should be made in the land of Judah by the locusts and caterpillars (v. 1–11). II. A serious call to the people, when they are under this sore judgment, to return and repent, to fast and pray, and to seek unto God for mercy, with directions how to do this aright (v. 12–17). III. A promise that, upon their repentance, God would remove the judgment, would repair the breaches made upon them by it, and restore unto them plenty of all good things (v. 18–27). IV. A prediction of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah in the world, by the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days (v. 28–32). Thus the beginning of this chapter is made terrible with the tokens of God's wrath, but the latter end of it made comfortable with the assurances of his favour, and it is in the way of repentance that this blessed change is made; so that, though it is only the last paragraph of the chapter that points directly at gospel-times, yet the whole may be improved as a type and figure, representing the curses of the law invading men for their sins, and the comforts of the gospel flowing in to them upon their repentance.

Verses 1-11

Here we have God contending with his own professing people for their sins and executing upon them the judgment written in the law (Deu. 28:42), *The fruit of thy land shall the locust consume*, which was one of those diseases of Egypt that God would bring upon them, v. 60.

I. Here is the war proclaimed (v. 1): *Blow the trumpet in Zion*, either to call the invading army together, and then the trumpet sounds a charge, or rather to give notice to Judah and Jerusalem of the approach of the judgment, that they might *prepare to meet their God* in the way of his judgments and might endeavor by prayers and tears, the church's best artillery, to put by the stroke. It was the priests' business to sound the trumpet (Num. 10:8), both as an appeal to God in the day of their distress and a summons to the people to come together to seek his face. Note, It is the work of ministers to give warning from the word of God of the fatal consequences of sin, and to reveal his wrath from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. And though it is not the privilege of Zion and Jerusalem to be exempted from the judgments of God, if they provoke him, yet it is their privilege to be warned of them, that they might make their peace with him. Even in *the holy mountain* the *alarm* must be *sounded*, and then it sounds most dreadful, Amos 3:2. Now, *shall a trumpet be blown in the city*, in the holy city, *and the people not be afraid?* Surely they will. Amos 3:6. *Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble*; they shall be made to tremble by the judgment itself; let them therefore tremble at the alarm of it.

II. Here is a general idea given of the day of battle, which *cometh*, which is *nigh at hand*, and there is no avoiding it. It is the *day of the Lord*, the day of his judgment, in which he will both manifest and magnify himself. It is *a day of darkness and gloominess* (v. 2), literally so, the swarms of locusts and caterpillars being so large and so thick as to darken the sky (Ex. 10:15), or rather figuratively; it will be a melancholy time, a time of grievous affliction. And it will come *as the morning spread upon the mountains*; the darkness of this day will come as suddenly as the morning light, as irresistibly, will spread as far, and grow upon them as the morning light.

III. Here is the army drawn up in array (v. 2): They are a *great people, and a strong*. Any one sees the vast numbers that there shall be of locusts and caterpillars, destroying the land, will say (as we are all apt to be most affected with what is present), "Surely, never was the like before, nor ever will be the like again." Note, Extraordinary judgments are rare things, and seldom happen, which is an instance of God's patience. When God had drowned the world once he promised never to do it again. The army is here describe to be, 1. Very bold and daring: *They are as horses*, as war-horses, that rush into the battle and *are not affrighted* (Job 39:22); and *as horsemen*, carried on with martial fire and fury, *so they shall run*, v. 4. Some of the ancients have observed that the head of a locust is very like, in shape, to the head of a horse. 2. Very loud and noisy—*like the noise of chariots*, of many chariots, when driven furiously over rough ground, *on the tops of the mountains*, v. 5. Hence is borrowed part of the description of the locusts which St. John saw rise out of the bottomless pit. Rev. 9:7, 9, *The shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared to the battle; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses running to the battle*. Historians tell us that the noise made by swarms of locusts in those countries that are infested with them has sometimes been heard six miles off. The noise is likewise compared to that of a *roaring fire*; it is like the *noise of a flame that devours the stubble*, which noise is the more terrible because that which it is the indication of is devouring. Note, When God's judgments are abroad they make a great noise; and it is necessary for the awakening of a secure and stupid world that they should do so. (3.) They are very regular, and keep ranks in their march; though numerous and greedy of spoil, yet they are *as a strong people set in battle array* (v. 5.): *They shall march every one on his ways*, straight forward, as if they had been trained up by the discipline of war to keep their post and observe their right-hand man. *They shall not break their ranks, nor one thrust another*, v. 7, 8. Their number and swiftness shall breed no confusion. See how God can make creatures to act by rule that have no reason to act by, when he designs to serve his own purposes by them. And see how necessary it is that those who are employed in any service for God should observe order, and keep ranks, should diligently go on in their own work and stand in one another's way. 4. They are very *swift*; they *run like horsemen* (v. 4), *run like mighty men* (v. 7); they *run to and fro in the city*, and *run upon the wall*, v. 9. When God *sends forth his command on earth* his word *runs very swiftly*, Ps. 147:15. Angels have wings, and so have locusts, when God makes use of them.

IV. Here is the terrible execution done by this formidable army, 1. In the country, v. 3. View the army in the front, and you will see a *fire devouring before them*; they consume all as if they breathed fire. View it in the rear, and you will see those that come behind as furious as the foremost: *Behind them a flame burns*. When they are gone, then it will appear what destruction they have made. Look upon the fields that they have not yet invaded, and they are *as the garden of Eden*, pleasant to the eye, and full of good fruits; they are the pride and glory of the country. But look upon the fields that they have eaten up and they are *as a desolate wilderness*; one would not think that these had ever been like the former, and yet so they were perhaps but the day before, or that those should ever be made like these, and yet so they shall be perhaps by to-morrow night; yea, and *nothing shall escape them* than can possibly be made food for them. Let none be proud of the beauty of their grounds any more than of their bodies, for God can soon change the face of both. 2. In the city. They shall *climb the wall* (v. 7), they shall *run upon the houses*, and *enter in at the windows like a thief* (v. 9); when Egypt was plagued with *locusts*, they filled *Pharaoh's houses* and

the *houses of his servants*, Ex. 10:5, 6. The locusts out of the bottomless pit, Satan's emissaries, and missionaries of the man of sin, do as these locusts. God's judgments too, when they come with commission, cannot be kept out with bars and bolts; they will find or force their way.

V. The impressions that should hereby be made upon the people. They shall find it to no purpose to make opposition. These enemies are invulnerable and therefore irresistible: *When they fall upon the sword they shall not be wounded*, v. 8. And those that cannot be hurt cannot be stopped; and therefore *before their faces the people shall be much pained* (v. 6), as the merchants are in pain for their trading ships when they hear they are just in the mouth of a squadron of the enemies. "One is in pain for his field, another for his vineyard, *and all faces gather blackness*," which denotes the utmost consternation imaginable. Men in fear look pale, but men in despair look black; the whiteness of a sudden fright, when it is settled, turns into blackness. What is the matter of our pride and pleasure God can soon make the matter of our pain. The terror that the country should be in is described (v. 10) by figurative expressions: *The earth shall quake and the heavens tremble*; even the hearts that seemed undaunted, so firm that nothing would frighten them, as immovable as heaven or earth, shall be seized with astonishment. Or when the inhabitants of the land are made to quake it seems to them as if all about them trembled too. Through the prevalency of their fear, or for want of the supports of life which they used to have, their eye shall wax dim and their sight fail them, so that to them *the sun and moon shall seem to be dark*, and the stars to *withdraw their shining*. Note, When God frowns upon men the lights of heaven will be small joy to them; for man, by rebelling against his Creator, has forfeited the benefit of all the creatures. But, though this is to be understood figuratively, there is a day coming when it will be accomplished in the letter, when the *heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll*, and *the earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. Particular judgments should awaken us to think of the general judgment.

VI. We are here directed to look up both him who is the commander-in-chief of this formidable army, and that is God himself, v. 11. It is *his army*; it is *his camp*. He raised it; he gives it commission; he *utters his voice before it*, as the general gives orders to his army what to do and makes a speech to animate the soldiers; it is the Lord that gives the word of command to all these animals, which they exactly observe. Some think that with this cloud of locusts God sent terrible thunder, for that is called, *The voice of the Lord*, and was another of the plagues of Egypt, and this made the heavens and the earth tremble. It is the *day of the Lord* (as it was called, v. 1), for in this war we are sure he carries the day; it must needs be his, for *his camp is great* and numerous. Those whom he makes war upon he can, as here, overpower with numbers; and whoever he employs to *execute his word*, as the minister of his justice, is sure to be made *strong* and *par negotio—equal to what he undertakes*; whom God gives commission to he girds with strength for the executing of that commission. And this makes the *great day* of the Lord *very terrible* to all those who in that day are to be made the monuments of his justice; for *who can abide it?* None can escape the arrests of God's wrath, can make head against the force of it, or bear up under the weight of it, 1 Sa. 6:20; Ps. 76:7.

Verses 12-17

We have here an earnest exhortation to repentance, inferred from that desolating judgment described and threatened in the foregoing verses: *Therefore now turn you to the Lord*. 1. "Thus you must answer the end and intention of the judgment; for it

was sent for this end, to convince you of your sins, to humble you for them, to reduce you to your right minds and to your allegiance." God brings us into straits, that he may bring us to repentance and so bring us to himself. 2. "Thus you may stay the progress of the judgment. Things are bad with you, but thus you may prevent their growing worse; nay, if you take this course, they will soon grow better." Here is a gracious invitation,

I. To a personal repentance, exercised in the soul, *every family apart, and their wives apart*, Zec. 12:12. When the judgments of God are abroad, each person is concerned to contribute his *quota* to the common supplications, having contributed to the common guilt. Every one must mend one and mourn for one, and then we should all be mended and all found among God's mourners. Observe,

1. What we are here called to, which will teach us what it is to repent, for it is the same that the Lord our God still requires of us, we having all made work for repentance. (1.) We must be truly humbled for our sins, must be sorry we have by sin offended God, and ashamed we have by sin wronged ourselves, both wronged our judgments and wronged our interests. There must be outward expressions of sorrow and shame, *fasting*, and *weeping*, and *mourning*; tears for the sin that procured it. But what will the outward expressions of sorrow avail if the inward impressions be not agreeable, and not only accompany them, but be the root and spring of them, and give rise to them? And therefore it follows, *Rend your heart, and not your garments*; not but that, according to the custom of that age, it was proper for them to rend their garments, in token of great grief for their sins and a holy indignation against themselves for their folly; but, "Rest not in the doing of that, as if that were sufficient, but be more in care to accommodate your spirits than to accommodate your dress to a day of fasting and humiliation; nay, rend not your garments at all, unless withal you rend your hearts, for the sign without the thing signified is but a jest and a mockery, and an affront to God." Rending the heart is that which God looks for and requires; that is the *broken and contrite heart* which he *will not despise*, Ps. 51:17. When we are greatly grieved in soul for sin, so that it even *cuts us to the heart* to think how we have dishonoured God and disparaged ourselves by it, when we conceive an aversion to sin, and earnestly desire and endeavor to get clear of the principles of it and never to return to the practice of it, then we rend our hearts for it, and then will God *rend the heavens* and come down to us with mercy. (2.) We must be thoroughly converted to our God, and come home to him when we fall out with sin. *Turn you even to me, said the Lord* (v. 12), and again (v. 13), *Turn unto the Lord your God*. Our fasting and weeping are worth nothing if we do not with them turn to God as our God. When we are fully convinced that it is our duty and interest to keep in with him, and are heartily sorry we have ever turned the back upon him, and thereupon, by a firm and fixed resolution, make his glory our end, his will our rule, and his favour our felicity, then we *return to the Lord our God*, and this we are all commanded and invited to do, and to do it quickly.

2. What arguments are here used to persuade this people thus to turn to the Lord, and to turn to him *with all their hearts*. When the heart is rent for sin, and rent from it, then it is prepared to turn entirely to God, and to be devoted entirely to him, and he will have it all or none. Now, to bring ourselves to this, let us consider, (1.) We are sure that he is, in general, a good God. We must *turn to the Lord our God*, not only because he has been just and righteous in punishing us for our sins, the fear of which should drive us to him, but because he is *gracious and merciful*, in receiving upon us our repentance, the hope of which should

draw us to him. He is gracious and merciful, delights not in the death of sinners, but desires that they may turn and live. *He is slow to anger* against those that offend him, but of *great kindness* towards those that desire to please him. These very expressions are used in God's proclamation of his name when he caused *his goodness*, and with it all his glory, to *pass before Moses*, Ex. 34:6, 7. *He repents him of the evil*, not that he changes his mind, but, when the sinner's mind is changed, God's way towards him is changed; the sentence is reversed, and the curse of the law is taken off. Note, That is genuine, ingenuous, and evangelical repentance, which arises from a firm belief of the mercy of God, which we have sinned against, and yet are not in despair. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The goodness of God, if it be rightly understood, instead of emboldening us to go on in sin, will be the most powerful inducement to repentance, Ps. 130:4. The act of indemnity brings those to God whom the act of attainder frightened from him. (2.) We have reason to hope that he will, upon our repentance, give us that good which by sin we have forfeited and deprived ourselves of (v. 14), that he will *return and repent*, that he will not proceed against us as he has done, but will act in favour of us. *Therefore* let us repent of our sins against him, and return to him in a way of duty, because then we may hope that he will repent of his judgments against us and return to us in a way of mercy. Now observe, [1.] The manner of expectation is very humble and modest: *Who knows if he will?* Some think it is expressed thus doubtfully to check the presumption and security of the people, and to quicken them to a holy carefulness and liveliness in their repentance, as Jos. 24:19. Or, rather, it is expressed doubtfully because it is the removal of a temporal judgment that they here promise themselves, of which we cannot be so confident as we can that, in general, God is gracious and merciful. There is no question at all to be made but that if we truly repent of our sins God will forgive them, and be reconciled to us; but whether he will remove this or the other affliction which we are under may well be questioned, and yet the probability of it should encourage us to repent. Promises of temporal good things are often made with a peradventure. *It may be, you shall be hid*, Zep. 2:3. David's sin is pardoned, and yet the child shall die, and, when David prayed for its life, he said, as here, *Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me* in this matter likewise? 2 Sa. 12:22. The Ninevites repented and reformed upon such a consideration as this, Jonah 3:9. [2.] The matter of expectation is very pious. They hope God will return and repent, and *leave a blessing behind him*, not as if he were about to go from them, and they could be content with any blessing in lieu of his presence, but *behind him*, that is, "After he has ceased his controversy with us, he will bestow a blessing upon us;" and what is it? It is a *meat-offering and a drink-offering to the Lord our God*. The fruits of the earth are called *a blessing* (Isa. 45:8) because they depend upon God's blessing and are necessary blessings to us. They had been deprived of these, and that which grieved them most while they were so was that God's altar was deprived of its offerings and God's priests of their maintenance; that therefore which they comfort themselves with the prospect of in their return of plenty is that then there shall be meat-offerings and drink-offerings in abundance brought to God's altar, which they more desired than to see the wonted abundance of meat and drink brought to their own tables. Thus when Hezekiah was in hopes that he should recover of his sickness he asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up*, not to the thrones of judgment, or to the councilboard, but *to the house of the Lord?* Isa. 38:22. Note, The plentiful enjoyment of God's ordinances in their power and purity is the most valuable instance of a nation's prosperity and the greatest blessing that can be desired. If God give the blessing of meat-offering and the drink-

offering, that will bring along with it other blessings, will sanctify them, sweeten them, and secure them.

II. They are here called to a public national repentance, to be exercised in the solemn assembly, as a national act, for the glory of God and the excitement of one another, and that the neighbouring nations might know and observe what it was that qualified them for God's gracious returns in mercy to them, which they would be the admiring witnesses of. Let us see here, 1. How the congregation must be called together, v. 15, 16. The trumpet was blown (v. 1), to sound an *alarm of war*; but now it must be blown in order to a treaty of peace. God is willing to show mercy to his people if he do but find them in a frame fit for it; and therefore, Call them together; *sanctify a fast*. By the law many annual feasts were appointed, but only one day in the year was to be observed as a fast, the *day of atonement*, a day to *afflict the soul*; and, if they had kept close to God and their duty, there would have been no occasion to observe any more; but now that they had by sin brought the judgments of God upon them they are often called to fasting. What was said ch. 1:14 is here repeated: "*Call a solemn assembly; gather the people* (press them to come together upon this errand); *sanctify the congregation*; appoint a time for solemn preparation beforehand and put them in mind to prepare themselves. Let not the greatest be excused, but *assemble the elders*, the judges and magistrates. Let not the meanest be passed by, but *gather the children, and those that suck the breasts*." It is good to bring little children, as soon as they are capable of understanding any thing, to religious assemblies, that they may be trained up betimes in the way wherein they should go; but these were brought even when they were at the breast and were kept fasting, that by their cries for the breast the hearts of the parents might be moved to repent of sin, which God might justly so visit upon their children that the *tongue of the sucking child might cleave to the roof of his mouth* (Lam. 4:4), and that on them God might have compassion, as he had on the infants of Nineveh, Jonah 4:11. New-married people must not be exempted: *Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet*; let them not take state upon them as usual, not put on their ornaments, nor indulge themselves in mirth, but address themselves to the duties of the public fast with as much gravity and sadness as any of their neighbours. Note, Private joys must always give way to public sorrows, both those for affliction and those for sin. 2. How the work of the day must be carried on, v. 17. (1.) The priests, *the Lord's ministers*, must preside in the congregation, and be God's mouth to the people, and theirs to God; who should stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God but those whose business it was to make intercession upon ordinary occasions? (2.) They must officiate *between the porch and the altar*. There they used to attend about the sacrifices, and therefore now that they have no sacrifices to offer, or next to none, there they must offer up spiritual sacrifices. There the people must see them weeping and wrestling, like their father Jacob, and be helped into the same devout frame. Ministers must themselves be affected with those things wherewith they desire to affect others. It was *between the porch and the altar* that Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was put to death for his faithfulness; that precious blood God would require at their hands, and therefore, to turn away the judgment threatened for it, there they must *weep*. (3.) They must pray. Words here are put into their mouths, which they might in their prayers enlarge upon. Their petition must be, *Spare thy people, O Lord!* God's people, when they are in distress, can expect no relief against God's justice but what comes from his mercy. They cannot say, Lord, *right us*, but, Lord, *spare us*. We deserve the correction; we need it; but, Lord, mitigate it. The sinner's supplication is, *Spare us, good Lord*. Their plea must be taken from the relation wherein they stand to God ("They are *thy*

people, and thy heritage, therefore have compassion on them"), but especially from the concern of God's glory in their trouble—"Lord, *give not thy heritage to reproach*, to the reproach of famine; let not the land of Canaan, that has so long been celebrated as the glory of all lands, now be made the scorn of all lands; let not *the heathen rule over them*, as they will easily do when thy heritage is thus impoverished and disabled to subsist. Let not the heathen make them *a proverb*, or a *by-word*" (so some read it); "let it never be said, *As poor and beggarly as an Israelite.*" Note, The maintaining of the credit of the nation among its neighbours is a blessing to be desired and prayed for by all that wish well to it. But that reproach of the church is especially to be dreaded and deprecated which reflects upon God: "Let them not *say among the people, Where is their God*—that God who has promised to help them, whom they have boasted so much of and put such a confidence in?" If God's heritage be destroyed, the neighbours will say, "God was either weak and could not relieve them or unkind and would not." Deu. 32:37, *Where are now their gods in whom they trusted?* And Sennacherib thus triumphs over them. *Where are they gods of Hamath and Arpad?* But it must by no means be suffered that they should say of Israel, *Where is their God?* For we are sure that our God is in the heavens (Ps. 115:2, 3), is in his temple, Ps. 11:4.

Verses 18-27

See how ready God is to succour and relieve his people, how he *waits to be gracious*; as soon as ever they humble themselves under this hand, and pray, and seek his face, he immediately meets them with his favours. They prayed that God would *spare them*, and see here with what *good words and comfortable words* he answered them; for God's promises are real answers to the prayers of faith, because with him saying and doing are not two things. Now observe,

I. Whence this mercy promised shall take rise (v. 18): God will be *jealous for his land* and *pity his people*. He will have an eye, 1. To his own honour, and the reputation of his covenant with Israel, by which he had conveyed to them that good land and had given in the value of it very high; now he will not suffer it to be despised nor disparaged, but will be jealous for the credit of his land, and the inhabitants of it, who had been praised as a happy people and therefore must not lie open to reproach as a miserable people. 2. To their distress: He will *pity his people*, and, in pity to them, he will restore them their forfeited comforts. God's compassion is a great encouragement to those that come humbly to him as penitents and as petitioners.

II. What his mercy shall be, in several instances:—1. The destroying army shall be dispersed and defeated (v. 20): "*I will remove far off from you the northern army*, that army of locusts and caterpillars that invaded you from the north, brought in upon the wings of a north wind, an army which you could put no stop to the progress of; but, when you have made your peace with God, he will ease you of these soldiers that are quartered upon you and will *drive them into a land barren and desolate*, into that vast howling wilderness that Israel wandered in, where, after having surfeited upon the plenty of Canaan, they shall perish for want of sustenance. Those that have their *face to the east sea* (the Dead Sea, which lay east of Judea) shall perish in that, and the rear of the army shall be lost in the Great Sea," called here the *utmost sea*. They had made the land barren and desolate, and now God will cast them into a land barren and desolate. Thus those whom God employs for the correction of his people come afterwards to be themselves reckoned with; and the rod is thrown into the fire. Nothing shall remain of these swarms of insects but the ill savour of them. When Egypt was eased of the plague of locusts they were carried away to the Red

Sea, Ex. 10:19. Note, When an affliction has done its work it shall be removed in mercy, as the locusts of Canaan were from a penitent people, not as the locusts of Egypt were removed, in wrath, from an impenitent prince, only to make room for another plague. Many interpreters, by this northern army, understand that of Sennacherib, which was dispersed when God by it had *accomplished his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem*, Isa. 10:12. This enemy shall be driven away, because *he has done great things*, has done a great deal of mischief, and has *magnified* to do it, has done it in the pride of his heart; therefore it follows (v. 21), *The Lord will do great things for his people*, as the enemy has done great things against them, to convince them that wherein they deal proudly he is, and will be, above them, that, what great things soever they did, they did no more than God commissioned them to do; and as, when he said to them, Go, they went, so, when he said to them, Come, they came, to show that they were *soldiers under him*. 2. The destroyed land shall be watered and made fruitful. When the army is scattered, yet what shall we do if the desolation they have made continue? It is therefore promised (v. 22) that *the pastures of the wilderness*, the pastures which the locusts had left as bare as the wilderness, shall again *spring* and the *trees shall again bear their fruit*, particularly the *fig-tree and the vine*. But, when we see how the country is wasted, we are tempted to say, *Can these dry bones live? If the Lord should make windows in heaven*, it cannot be; but it shall be, for (v. 23) *the Lord has given* and will give you *the former rain and the latter rain*, and, if he give them in mercy, he will give them moderately, so that the rain shall not turn into a judgment, and he will give them in due season, the *latter rain in the first month*, when it was wanted and expected. It would make it comfortable to them to see it coming from the hand of God, and ordered by his wisdom, for then we are sure it is well ordered. *He has given you a teacher of righteousness*, (so the margin reads it, for the same word that signifies the *rain* signifies a *teacher*. and that which we translate *moderately* is *according to righteousness*), and this *teacher of righteousness*, says one of the rabbin, is the King Messias, and of him many others understand this; for he is a *teacher come from God*, and he shows us the way of *righteousness*. But others understand it of any prophet that *instructs unto righteousness*, and some of Hezekiah particularly, others of Isaiah. Note, It is a good sign that God has mercy in store for a people when he sends them teachers of righteousness, pastors after his own heart. 3. All their losses shall be repaired (v. 25): *"I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten; you shall be comforted according to the time that you have been afflicted, and shall have years of plenty to balance the years of famine."* Thus does it *repent the Lord concerning his servants*, when they repent, and, to show how perfectly he is reconciled to them, he makes good the damage they have sustained by his judgments, and, like the jailer, *washes their stripes*. Though, in justice, he distrained upon them, and did them no wrong, yet, in compassion, he makes restitution; as the father of the prodigal, upon his return, made up all he had lost by his sin and folly, and took him into his family, as in his former estate. The locusts and caterpillars are here called *God's great army which he sent among them*, and he will repair what they had devoured because they were his army. 4. They shall have great abundance of all good things. The earth shall yield her increase, and they shall enjoy it. Look into the stores where they lay up, and you shall find *the floors full of wheat, and the fats overflowing with wine and oil* (v. 24), whereas, in the day of their distress, the *wine and oil languished and the barns were broken down*, ch. 1:10, 17. Look upon their tables, where they lay out what they have laid up, and you shall find that they *eat in plenty and are satisfied*, v. 26. They do not eat to excess, nor are surfeited; we hope

the *drunkards* are cured by the late affliction of their inordinate love of wine and strong drink, for, though they were brought in howling for their scarcity (ch. 1:5), they are now brought in again here singing for the plenty of it; but now all shall have enough, and shall know when they have enough, for God will make their food nourishing and give them to be content with it. These are the mercies promised, and in these *God does great things* (v. 21), *He deals wondrously with his people*, v. 26. Herein he glorifies his power, and shows that he can relieve his people though their distress be ever so great, and glorifies his goodness, that he will do it upon their repentance though their provocations were ever so great. Note, When God deals graciously with poor sinners that return to him it must be acknowledged that he deals wondrously and does great things. Some expositors understand these promises figuratively, as pointing at gospel-grace, and having their accomplishment in the abundant comforts that are treasured up for believers in the covenant of grace and the satisfaction of soul they have therein. When God sends us his promises to be the matter of our comfort, his graces to be the grounds of it, and his Spirit to be the author of it, we may well own that he has sent us (according to his promise here, v. 19) *corn, and wine, and oil*, or that which is unspeakably better, and we have reason to be satisfied therewith.

III. What use shall be made of these returns of God's mercy to them and the good account they shall turn to.

1. God shall have the glory thereof, for they shall *rejoice in the Lord their God* (v. 23), and what is the matter of their rejoicing shall be the matter of their thanksgiving; they shall *praise the name of the Lord their God* (v. 26) and not praise their idols, nor call their corn and wine the *rewards that their lovers had given them*. Note, The plenty of our creature-comforts is a mercy indeed to us when by them our hearts are enlarged in love and thankfulness to God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy, though we serve him but poorly. When God restores to us plenty after we have known scarcity, as it is doubly pleasant to us, so it should make us the more thankful to God. When Israel comes out of a wilderness into a Canaan, and there eats and is full, surely he will then *bless the Lord*, with a very sensible pleasure, for *that good land which he has given him*, Deu. 8:10.

2. They shall have the credit, and comfort, and spiritual benefit, thereof. When God gives them plenty again, and gives them to be satisfied with it, (1.) Their reputation shall be retrieved; they and their God shall be no more reflected upon as unfaithful to one another when they have returned to him in a way of duty and he to them in a way of mercy (v. 19): *"I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen, that triumphed in your calamities and insulted over you;"* and v. 26, 27, *"My people shall never be ashamed, as they have been, of their good land which they used to boast of, but shall again and ever have the same occasion to boast of it."* Note, It redounds much to the honour of God when he does that which saves the honour of his people; and those that are his people indeed, though they may be for a time, shall not be always, a *reproach among the heathens*; if we be rightly ashamed of our sins against God, we shall never be ashamed of our glorying in God. (2.) Their joys shall be revived (v. 23): *Be glad and rejoice, O land!* and all the inhabitants of it. Times of plenty are commonly times of joy; yet the favour of God *puts gladness into the heart* more than those who have *corn, and wine, and oil increase*. But especially *be glad them, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God*, v. 23. They *mourned in Zion* (v. 15), and therefore there in a particular manner they shall rejoice; for those that sow in penitential tears shall certainly reap in thankful joys. The children of Zion, who led the rest in fasting, must lead the rest in rejoicing. But observe, They shall *rejoice in the Lord their God*, not so much in the

good themselves that are given them as in the good hand that gives them and in the return of his favour to them, as theirs in covenant, which these good things are the tokens and pledges of. The *joy of harvest* and the joy of a feast must both terminate in God, whose love we should taste in all the gifts of his bounty, that we may make him our chief joy, as he is our chief good, and the fountain of all good to us. (3.) Their faith in God shall be confirmed and increased. When temporal mercies are made by the grace of God to be of spiritual advantage to us, and plenty for the body is so far from being an enemy (as with many it proves) that it becomes a friend to the prosperity of the soul, then they are mercies indeed to us. This is promised here (v. 27): *You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, the Holy One in the midst of thee* (Hos. 11:9), *and that I am the Lord your God, and none else*. As it proves that the Lord is God, and there is none other, because he *wounds* and he *heals*, he *forms light and darkness*, he does *good and evil* (Isa. 45:7; Deu. 32:39), so it proves him to be *God of Israel*, a God in covenant with his people and a father to them, that as a father he both corrects them when they offend and comforts them when they repent. It was the burden of the threatenings in Ezekiel's prophecy, *Such and such evils I will bring upon you, and you shall know that I am the Lord*; and the same is here made the crown of the promises: *You shall eat, and be satisfied, and rejoice, and thus you shall know that I am the Lord*. Note, We should labour to grow in our acquaintance with God by all providences, both merciful and afflictive. When God gives to his people plenty, and peace, and joy, upon their return to him, he thereby gives them to understand that he is pleased with their repentance, that he has pardoned their sins, and that he is theirs as much as ever—that they are taken into the same covenant with him, for he is the Lord their God, and into the same communion, for he is in the midst of them, *nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for*, and, as the sun in the centre of the worlds, so in the midst of them as to diffuse his benign influences to all the parts of his land.

3. Even the inferior creatures shall share therein and be made easy thereby: *Fear not, O land!* v. 21. *Be not afraid, you beasts of the field*, v. 22. They had suffered for the sin of man, and for God's quarrel with him; and now they shall fare the better for man's repentance and God's reconciliation to him. Nay, the beasts were said to *cry unto God* (ch. 1:20); and now that cry is answered, and they are directed not to *be afraid*, for they shall have plenty of all that which their nature craves. God, in sparing Nineveh, had an eye to the cattle (Jonah 4:11), for the cattle had fasted, ch. 3:8. This may lead us to think of the restitution of all things, when the *creature*, that is now *made subject to vanity* and *groans* under it, *shall be brought*, though not into the glorious joy, yet *into the glorious liberty, of the children of God*, Rom. 8:21.

Verses 28-32

The promises of corn, and wine, and oil, in the foregoing verses, would be very acceptable to a wasted country; but here we are taught that we must not rest in those things. God has reserved some better things for us, and these verses have reference to those better things, both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory, with the happiness of true believers in both. We are here told,

I. How the kingdom of grace shall be introduced by a plentiful *effusion of the Spirit*, (v. 28, 29). We are not at a loss about the meaning of this promise, nor in doubt what it refers to and wherein it had its accomplishment, for the apostle Peter has given us an infallible explication and application of it, assuring us that when the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, on the day

of Pentecost (Acts 2:1, etc.), that was the very thing *which was spoken of here by the prophet Joel*, v. 16, 17. That was the gift of the Spirit, which, according to this prediction, was *to come*, and we are not to *look for any other*, any more than for another accomplishment of the promise of the Messiah. Now, 1. The blessing itself here promised is the *pouring out of the Spirit of God*, his gifts, graces, and comforts, which the blessed Spirit is the author of. We often read in the Old Testament of the Spirit of the Lord coming by drops, as it were, upon the judges and prophets whom God raised up for extraordinary services; but now the Spirit shall be poured out plentifully in a full stream, as was promised with an eye to gospel-times, Isa. 44:3. *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed*. 2. The time fixed for this is *afterwards*; after the fulfilling of the foregoing promises this shall be fulfilled. St. Peter expounds this of *the last days*, the days of the Messiah, by whom the world was to have its last revelation of the divine will and grace in the last days of the Jewish church, a little before its dissolution. 3. The extent of this blessing, in respect of the persons on whom it shall be bestowed. The Spirit shall be *poured out upon all flesh*, not as hitherto upon Jews only, but upon Gentiles also; for in Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, Rom. 10:11, 12. Hitherto divine revelation was confined to the seed of Abraham, none but those of the land of Israel had the Spirit of prophecy; but, in the last days, *all flesh shall see the glory of God* (Isa. 40:5) and shall come to *worship before him*, Isa. 66:23. The Jews understand it of all flesh in the land of Israel, and Peter himself did not fully understand it as speaking of the Gentiles till he saw it accomplished in the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Cornelius and his friends, who were Gentiles (Acts 10:44, 45), which was but a continuation of the same gift which was bestowed on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit shall be poured out *upon all flesh*, that is, upon all those whose hearts are made hearts of flesh, soft and tender, and so prepared to receive the impressions and influences of the Holy Ghost. *Upon all flesh*, that is, upon some of all sorts of men; the gifts of the Spirit shall not be so sparing, or so much confined, as they have been, but shall be more general and diffusive of themselves. (1.) The Spirit shall be poured out upon some of each sex. Not *your sons* only, but *your daughters*, shall prophesy; we read of four sisters in one family that were prophetesses, Acts 21:9. Not the parents only, but the children, shall be filled with the Spirit, which intimates the continuance of this gift for some ages successively in the church. (2.) Upon some of each age: "*Your old men*, who are past their vigour and whose spirits begin to decay, *your young men*, who have yet but little acquaintance with and experience of divine things, shall yet *dream dreams* and *see visions*;" God will reveal himself by dreams and visions both to the young and old. (3.) Upon those of the meanest rank and condition, even *upon the servants and the handmaids*. The Jewish doctors say, *Prophecy does not reside on any* but such as are *wise, valiant, and rich*, not upon the soul of a *poor man*, or a man *in sorrow*. But in Christ Jesus there is *neither bond nor free*, Gal. 3:28. There were many that *were called being servants* (1 Co. 7:21), but that was no obstruction to their receiving the Holy Ghost. (4.) The effect of this blessing: *They shall prophesy*; they shall receive new discoveries of divine things, and that not for their own use only, but for the benefit of the church. They shall interpret scripture, and speak of things secret, distant, and future, which by the utmost sagacities of reason, and their natural powers, they could not have any insight into nor foresight of. By these extraordinary gifts the Christian church was first founded and set up, and the scriptures were written, and the ministry settled, by which, with the ordinary operations and influences of the Spirit, it was to be afterwards maintained and kept up.

II. How the kingdom of glory shall be introduced by the universal change of nature, v. 30, 31. The pouring out of the Spirit will be very comfortable to the righteous; but let the unrighteous hear this, and tremble. There is a *great and terrible day of the Lord* coming, which shall be ushered in with *wonders in heaven and earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke*, the turning of *the sun into darkness and the moon into blood*. This is to have its full accomplishment (as the learned Dr. Pocock thinks) in the day of judgment, at the end of time, before which these signs will be performed in the letter of them, yet so that it was accomplished in part in the death of Christ (which is called the *judgment of this world*, when the earth quaked and the sun was darkened, and a *great and terrible day* it was), and more fully in the destruction of Jerusalem, which was a type and figure of the general judgment, and before which there were many amazing prodigies, besides the convulsions of states and kingdoms prophesied of under the figurative expressions of turning the *sun into darkness and the moon into blood*, and the *wars and rumours of wars*, and *distress of nations*, which our Saviour spoke of as the *beginning of these sorrows*, Mt. 24:6, 7. But before the last judgment there will be *wonders indeed in heaven and earth*, the dissolution of both, without a metaphor. The judgments of God upon a sinful world, and the frequent destruction of wicked kingdoms by fire and sword, are prefaces to and presages of the judgment of the world in the last day. Those on whom the Spirit is poured out shall foresee and foretel that *great and terrible day of the Lord*, and expound the *wonders in heaven and earth* that go before it; for, as to his first coming, so to his second, all the prophets did and do bear witness, Rev. 10:7.

III. The safety and happiness of all true believers both in the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, v. 32. This speaks of particular persons, for to them the New Testament has more respect, and less to kingdoms and nations, than the Old. Now observe here, 1. That there is a salvation wrought out. Though the day of the Lord will be great and terrible, yet *in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance* from the terror of it. It is the day of the Lord, the day of his judgment, who knows how to separate between the precious and the vile. In the everlasting gospel, which *went from Zion*, in the church of the first-born typified by Mount Zion, and which is the Jerusalem that is from above, there is *deliverance*; a way of escaping the *wrath to come* is found out and laid open. Christ is himself not only the *Saviour*, but *the salvation*; he is so *to the ends of the earth*. This deliverance, laid up for us in the covenant of grace, is in performance of the promises made to the fathers. *There shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said*. See Lu. 1:72. Note, This is ground of comfort and hope to sinners, that, whatever danger there is in their case, there is also deliverance, deliverance for them, if it be not their own fault. And, if we would share in this deliverance, we must ourselves apply to the gospel—Zion, to God's Jerusalem. 2. That there is a remnant interested in this salvation, and for whom the deliverance is wrought. It is *in that remnant* (that is, among them) that the deliverance is, or in their souls and spirits; there are the earnest and evidences of it. *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. They are called a *remnant*, because they are but a few in comparison with the multitudes that are left to perish; a little remnant but a chosen one, a *remnant according to the election of grace*. And here we are told who they are that shall be delivered in the great day. (1.) Those that sincerely call upon God: *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord*, whether Jew or Gentile (for the apostle so expounds it, Rom. 10:13, where he lays this down as the great rule of the gospel by which we must all be judged), *shall be delivered*. This calling on God supposes knowledge of him, faith in him, desire towards him, dependence on him, and, as an

evidence of the sincerity of all this, a conscientious obedience to him; for, without that, crying *Lord, Lord*, will not stand us in any stead. Note, It is the praying remnant that shall be the saved remnant. And it will aggravate the ruin of those who perish that they might have been saved on such easy terms. (2.) Those that are effectually called to God. The deliverance is sure to the *remnant whom the Lord shall call*, not only with the common call of the gospel, with which many are called that are not chosen, but with a special call into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, whom *the Lord predestinates, or prepares*, so the Chaldee. St. Peter borrows this phrase, Acts 2:39. Note, Those only shall be delivered in the great day that are now effectually called from sin to God, from self to Christ, from things below to things above

Chapter 3

In the close of the foregoing chapter we had a gracious promise of deliverance in Mount Zion and Jerusalem; now this whole chapter is a comment upon that promise, showing what that deliverance shall be, how it shall be wrought by the destruction of the church's enemies, and how it shall be perfected in the everlasting rest and joy of the church. This was in part accomplished in the deliverance of Jerusalem from the attempt that Sennacherib made upon it in Hezekiah's time, and afterwards in the return of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, and other deliverances wrought for the Jewish church between that and Christ's coming. But it has a further reference, to the great redemption wrought out for us by Jesus Christ, and the destruction of our spiritual enemies and all their agents, and will have its full accomplishment in the judgment of the great day. Here is a prediction, I. Of God's reckoning with the enemies of his people for all the injuries and indignities that they had done them, and returning them upon their own head (v. 1-8). II. Of God's judging all nations when the measure of their iniquity is full, and appearing publicly, to the everlasting confusion of all impenitent sinners and the everlasting comfort of all his faithful servants (v. 9-17). III. Of the provision God has made for the refreshment of his people, for their safety and purity, when their enemies shall be made desolate (v. 18-21). These promises were not of private interpretation only, but were written for our learning, "that we, through patience and comfort of this scripture, might have hope."

Verses 1-8

We have often heard of the *year of the redeemed*, and the *year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*; now here we have a description of the transactions of that year, and a prophecy of what shall be done when it comes, whenever it comes, for it comes often, and at the end of time it will come once for all.

I. It shall be the *year of the redeemed*, for God will *bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem*, v. 1. Though the bondage of God's people may be grievous and very long, yet it shall not be everlasting. That in Egypt ended at length in their deliverance into the glorious liberty of the children of God. *Let my son go, the he may serve me*. That in Babylon shall likewise end well. And the Lord Jesus will provide for the effectual redemption of poor enslaved souls from under the dominion of sin and Satan, and will proclaim that *acceptable year*, the year of jubilee, the release of debts and servants, and the *opening of the prison to those that were bound*. There is a day, there is a time, fixed for the *bringing again of the captivity* of God's children, for the redeeming of them *from the power of the grave*; and it shall be the *last day* and the end of all time.

II. It shall be the *year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*. Though God may suffer the enemies of his people to prevail against them very far and for a long time, yet he will call them to an account for it, and will lead captivity captive (Ps. 68:18), will lead those captive that led his people captive, Rev. 13:10. Observe,

1. Who those are that shall be reckoned with—*all nations*, v. 2. This intimates, (1.) That all the nations had made themselves liable to the judgment of God for wrong done to his people. Persecution is the reigning crying sin of the world; that *lying in wickedness* itself is set against godliness. The enmity that is in the old serpent, *the god of this world*, against the seed of the woman, appears more or less in the *children of this world*. *Marvel not if the world hate you*. (2.) That, whatsoever nation

injured God's nation, they should not go unpunished; for he that touches the Israel of God shall be made to know that he touches the apple of his eye. Jerusalem will be a *burdensome stone to all people*, Zec. 12:3. But the neighboring nations shall be particularly reckoned with—*Tyre, and Sidon, and all the coasts of Palestine*, or the Philistines, who have been troublesome neighbours to the Israel of God, v. 4. When the more remote and potent nations that laid Israel wastes are reckoned with the impotent malice of those that lay near them, and *helped forward the affliction*, (Zec. 1:15), and made a hand of it (Eze. 26:2), shall not be passed by. Note, Little persecutors shall be called to an account as well as great ones; and, though they could not do much mischief, shall be reckoned with according to the *wickedness of their endeavors* and the mischief they would have done.

2. The sitting of this court for judgment. They shall all be *gathered* (v. 2), that those who have combined together against God's people, *with one consent* (Ps. 83:5), may together receive their doom. They shall be *brought down into the valley of Jehoshaphat*, which lay near Jerusalem, and there *God will plead with them*, (1.) Because it is fit that criminals should be tried in the same country where they did the fact. (2.) For their greater confusion, when they shall see that Jerusalem which they have so long endeavored and hoped for the ruin of, in spite of all their rage, made a *praise in the earth*. (3.) For the greater comfort and honor of God's Jerusalem, which shall see God pleading their cause. (4.) Then shall be re-acted what God did for Jehoshaphat when he gave him victory over those that invaded him, and furnished him and his people with matter of joy and praise, in the *valley of Berachah*. See 2 Chr. 20:26. (5.) It was in this valley of Jehoshaphat (as Dr. Lightfoot suggests) that Sennacherib's army, or part of it, lay, when it was destroyed by an angel. They came together to ruin Jerusalem, but God brought them together for their own ruin, *as sheaves into the floor*, Mic. 4:12.

3. The plaintiff called, on whose behalf this prosecution is set on foot; it is for *my people*, and *for my heritage Israel*. It is their cause that God will now plead with jealousy. Note, God's people are *his heritage*, his *peculiar*, his *portion*, his *treasure*, above all people, Ex. 19:5; Deu. 32:9. They are his demesne, and therefore he has a good action against those that trespass upon them.

4. The charge exhibited against them, which is very particular. Many affronts they had put upon God by their idolatries, but that for which God has a quarrel with them is the affront they have put upon his people and upon the vessels of his sanctuary. (1.) They had been very abusive to the people of Israel, had *scattered them among the nations* and forced them to seek for shelter where they could find a place, or carried them captive into their respective countries and there industriously dispersed them, for fear of their incorporating for their common safety. They *parted their land*, and took every one his share of it as their own; nay, they have *cast lots for my people*, and *sold them*. When they had taken them prisoners, [1.] They made a jest of them, made a scorn of them as of no value. They would not release them and yet thought them not worth the keeping; they made nothing of playing them away at dice. Or they made a dividend of the prisoners *by lot*, as the soldiers did of Christ's garments. [2.] They made a gain of them. When they had them they *sold* them, yet with so much contempt that they did *not increase their wealth by their price*, but sold them for their pleasure rather than their profit; they *gave a boy* taken in war for the *hire of a harlot*, and a *girl* for so many bottles of wine as would serve them for one sitting, a *goodly price* at which they

valued them, and goodly preferment for a son and daughter of Israel to be a slave and a drudge in a tavern or a brothel. Observe, here, how that which is got by sin is commonly spent upon another. The spoil which these enemies of the Jews gathered by injustice and violence they scattered and threw away in drinking and whoring; such is frequently the character, and such the conversation, of the enemies and persecutors of the people of God. The Tyrians and Philistines, when they seized any of the children of Judah and Jerusalem, either took them prisoners in war or kidnapped them, they sold them to the Grecians (with whom the men of Tyre traded in the *persons of men*, Eze. 27:13), that they *might remove them far from their own border*, v. 6. It was a great reproach to Israel, God's first-born, his free-born, to be thus bought and sold among the heathen.

(2.) They had unjustly seized *God's silver and gold* (v. 5), by which some understand the wealth of Israel. The silver and gold which God's people had he calls his, because they had received it from him and devoted it to him; and whosoever robbed them God took it as if they had robbed him and would make reprisals accordingly. Those who take away the estates of good men for well-doing will be found guilty of sacrilege; they take God's *silver and gold*. But it seems rather to be meant of the *vessels and treasures of the temple*, which God here calls his *goodly pleasant things*, precious and desirable to him and all that are his. These they *carried into their temples* as trophies of their victory over God's Israel, thinking that therein they triumphed over Israel's God, nay, and that their idols triumphed over him. Thus the ark was put in Dagon's temple. Thus they did unjustly. *"What have you to do with me* (v. 4), with my people; what wrong have they done you? What provocation have they given you? You had nothing to do with them, and yet you do all this against them. Devices are devised against the *quiet in the land*, and those offended and harmed that are harmless and inoffensive: *Will you render me a recompence?"* Can they pretend that either God or his people have done them any injury, for which they may justify themselves by the law of retaliation in doing them these mischiefs? No; they have no colour for it. Note, It is no new thing for those who have been very civil and obliging to their neighbours to find them very unkind and unneighbourly and for those who do no injuries to suffer many.

5. The sentence passed upon them. In general (v. 4), *"If you recompense me*, if you pretend a quarrel with me, if you provoke me thus to jealousy, if you touch the apple of my eye, *I will swiftly and speedily return your recompence upon your own head."* Those that contend with God will find themselves unable to make their part good with him. He will recompense them *suddenly*, when they little think of it, and have not time to prevent it; if he take them to task, he will soon effect their ruin. Particularly, it is threatened, (1.) That they should not gain their end in the mischief they designed against God's people. They thought to *remove them so far from their border* that they should never return to it again, v. 6. But (says God) *"I will raise them out of the place whither you have sold them*, and they shall not, as you intended, be buried alive there." Men's selling the people of God will not deprive him of his property in them. (2.) That they shall be paid in their own coin, as Adonibezek was (v. 8): *"I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the children of Judah*; you shall lie as much at their mercy as they have been at yours," Isa. 60:14. Thus the Jews *had rule over those that hated them*, Esther 9:1. And then they shall justly be *sold to the Sabceans*, to a *people far off*. This (some think) had its accomplishment in the victories obtained by the Maccabees over the enemies of the Jews; others think it looks as far forward as the last day, when the *upright shall have dominion* (Ps. 49:14) and *the saints shall judge the world*. It is certain that none ever hardened his heart against God, or his

church, and prospered long; no, not Pharaoh himself, for *the Lord has spoken it*, for the comfort of all his suffering servants, that *vengeance is his and he will repay*.

Verses 9-17

What the psalmist had long before ordered to be *said among the heathen* (Ps. 96:10) the prophet here will have in like manner to be published to all nations, That *the Lord reigns*, and that *he comes, he comes to judge the earth*, as he had long been judging in the earth. The notice here given of God's judging the nations may have reference to the destruction of Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, and to the Antichrist especially, and all the proud enemies of the Christian church; but some of the best interpreters, ancient and modern (particularly the learned Dr. Pollock), think the scope of these verses is to set forth the day of the last judgment under the similitude of God's making war upon the enemies of his kingdom, and his gathering in the harvest of the earth, both which similitudes we find used in the Revelation, ch. 19:11; 14:18. Here we have,

I. A challenge given to all the enemies of God's kingdom to do their worst. To signify to them that God is preparing war against them, they are called upon to prepare war against him, v. 9–11. When the hour of God's judgment shall come effectual methods shall be taken to gather all nations *to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*, Rev. 16:14; 20:8. It seems to be here spoken ironically: "*Proclaim you this among the Gentiles; let all the forces of the nations be summoned to join in confederacy against God and his people.*" It is like that, Isa. 7:9, "*Associate yourselves, O you people! and gird yourselves, but you shall be broken to pieces. Prepare war; muster up all your strength; wake up the mighty men; call them into your service; excite them to vigilance and resolution; let all the men of war draw near. Let them come and enter the lists with Omnipotence if they dare; let them not complain for want of weapons, but let them beat their ploughshares into swords and their pruning-hooks into spears. Let them resolve, if they will, never to return to their husbandry again, but either to conquer or die; let none plead unfitness to bear arms, but let the weak say, I am strong and will venture into the field of battle.*" Thus does a God of almighty power bid defiance to all the opposition of the powers of darkness; let the *heathen rage*, and the *kings of the earth take counsel together, against the Lord and his Christ*; let them *assemble, and come, and gather themselves together*; but he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them, and, while he thus calls them, he has them in derision, Ps. 2:1, 4. The heathen must be wakened, must be raised from the dead, that they may *come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat*, to receive their doom (v. 12), may come up out of their graves, come up *into the air*, to meet the Lord there. Jehoshaphat signifies *the judgment of the Lord*. Let them come to the place of God's judgment, which perhaps is the chief reason for the using of this name here, but it is put together as a proper name for the sake of allusions to the place so called, which we observed before; let them come thither where God will *sit to judge the heathen*, to that *throne of glory* before which shall be *gathered all nations* (Mt. 25:32), for before the judgment-seat of Christ *we must all appear*. The challenge (v. 9) is turned into a summons, v. 12. It is not only, *Come if you dare*, but *You shall come* whether you will or no, for there is no escaping the judgments of God.

II. A charge given to the ministers of God's justice to appear and act against these daring enemies of his kingdom among men: And therefore *cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord!* v. 11. When they bring their forces into the field, let God bring his, let the archangel's trumpet sound a charge, to call together his *mighty ones*, that is, his angels. Perhaps it is with reference

to this that Christ's coming from heaven at the last day is said to be *with his mighty angels*, 2 Th. 1:7. These are the *hosts of the Lord*, that shall fight his battles when he shall put down all opposing rule, principality, and power when he shall *judge among the heathen*, Ps. 110:6. Some think these words (v. 9, 10), *Prepare war, wake up the mighty men*, are not a challenge to the enemies' hosts, but a charge to God's hosts; let them *draw near, and come up*. When God's cause is to be pleaded, either by the law or by the sword, he has those ready that shall please it effectually, witnesses ready to appear for him in the court of judgment, soldiers ready to appear for him in the field of battle. They shall *beat ploughshares into swords*, if need be. However, it is plain that to them the charge is given (v. 13), *Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; that is, their wickedness is great*, the measure of it is full, and they are ripe for ruin. Our Saviour has expounded this, Mt. 13:39. *The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels*. And they are commanded to *thrust in their sickle. their sharp sickle*, and gather in both the *harvest* and the *vintage*, Rev. 14:15, 18. Note, The greatness of men's wickedness makes them ripe for God's judgment.

III. The vast appearance that shall be in that great and solemn day (v. 14): *Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision*, the same which before was called the *valley of Jehoshaphat*, or *of the judgment of the Lord*, for the *day of the Lord is near* in that valley. Note, 1. The judgment-day, that day of the Lord, has all along been looked upon, and spoken of, as *nigh at hand*. Enoch said, *Behold, the Lord comes*, as if the Judge were then standing before the door, because it is certain that that day will come and will come according to the appointment, and a *thousand years with God are but as one day*; things are ripening apace for it; we ought always to be ready for it, because our judgment is at hand. 2. The day of judgment will be the *day of decision*, when every man's eternal state will be determined, and the controversy that has been long depending between the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan shall be finally decided, and an end put to the struggle. *The valley of the distribution of judgment* (so the Chaldee), when *every man shall receive according to the things done in the body*. *The valley of threshing* (so the margin), carrying on the metaphor of the *harvest*, v. 13. The proud enemies of God's people will then be crushed and broken to pieces, and made as the *dust of the summer threshing-floors*. 3. Innumerable multitudes will be gathered together to receive their final doom in that day, as in the destruction of Gog we read of the valley of *Hamon-Gog*, and the city of *Hamonah* (Eze. 39:15, 16), both signifying the *multitude* of the vanquished enemies; it is the word here used, *Hamonim, Hamonim*, expressed by the way of admiration—O what vast multitudes of sinners will divine justice be glorified in the ruin of at that day! *A multitude of living* (says one of the rabbin) *and a multitude of dead*, for Christ shall come *to judge both the quick and the dead*.

IV. The amazing change that shall then be made in the kingdom of nature (v. 15): *The sun and moon shall be darkened*, as before, ch. 2:31. Their glory and lustre shall be eclipsed by the far greater brightness of that glory in which the Judge shall then appear. Nay, they shall themselves be set aside in the dissolution of all things; for the damned sinners in hell shall not be allowed their light, for God himself will be *their everlasting light*, Isa. 60:19. Those that fall under the wrath of God in that day of wrath shall be cut off from all comfort and joy, signified by the darkening not only of sun and moon, but of the stars also.

V. The different impressions which that day will make upon the children of this world and the children of God, according as it will be to them. 1. To the wicked it will be a terrible day. *The Lord* shall then speak *from Zion and Jerusalem*, from the throne

of his glory, from heaven, where he manifests himself in a peculiar manner, as sometimes he has done in the *glorious high throne of his sanctuary*, which yet was but a faint resemblance of the glory of that day. He shall speak *from heaven*, from *the midst* of his saints and angels (so some understand it), the holy society of which may be called *Zion* and *Jerusalem*; for, when we come to the *heavenly Jerusalem*, we come to the *innumerable company of angels*; see Heb. 12:22, 25. Now is speaking in that day will be to the wicked as *roaring*, terrible as the roaring of a lion (for so the word signifies); he long kept silence, but now *our God shall come, and shall not keep silence*, Ps. 50:3, 21. Note, The judgment of the great day will make the ears of those to tingle that continue the implacable enemies of God's kingdom. God's voice will then *shake terribly both heaven and earth* (Isa. 2:21), yet *once more*, Hag. 2:6; Heb. 12:26. This denotes that the voice of God will in the great day speak such terror to the wicked as were enough to put even heaven and earth into a consternation. When God comes to pull down and destroy his enemies, and make them all his footstool, though heaven and earth should stand up in defence of them and undertake their protection, it shall be all in vain. Even they shall shake before him and be an insufficient shelter to those whom he comforts forth to contend with. Note, As blessings out of Zion are the sweetest blessings, and enough to make heaven and earth sing, so terrors out of Zion are the sorest terrors, and enough to make heaven and earth shake. 2. To the righteous it will be a joyful day. When the heaven and earth shall tremble, and be dissolved and burnt up, then will the Lord be the *hope of his people* and the *strength of the children of Israel* (v. 16), and *then shall Jerusalem be holy*, v. 17. The saints are the Israel of God; they are *his people*; the church is his Jerusalem. They are in covenant and communion with him; now in the great day, (1.) Their longings shall be satisfied: *The Lord will be the hope of his people*. As he always was the founder and foundation of their hopes, so he then will be the crown of their hopes. He will be the *harbour* of his people (so the word is), their receptacle, refuge, and home. The saints in the great day shall arrive at the desired haven, shall put to shore after a stormy voyage; they shall go to be for ever at home with God, to their Father's house, the house *not made with hands*. (2.) Their happiness shall be confirmed. God will be in that day the *strength of the children of Israel*, enabling them to bid that day welcome and to bear up under the weight of its glories and joys. In this world, when the judgments of God are abroad, and sinners are falling under them, God is and will be the hope and strength of his people, the strength of their heart, and their portion, when other men's hearts fail them for fear. (3.) Their holiness shall be completed (v. 17): *Then shall Jerusalem be holy*, the *holy city* indeed; such shall the heavenly Jerusalem be, such the glorious church, *without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Jerusalem shall be holiness* (so the word is); it shall be perfectly holy; there shall be no remainder of sin in it. The gospel-church is a holy society, even in its militant state, but will never be holiness itself till it comes to be triumphant. Then *no stranger shall pass through her any more*; there shall not enter into the New Jerusalem any thing that defiles or works iniquity; none shall be there but those who have a right to be there, none but its own citizens; for it shall be an unmixed society. (4.) God shall in all this be manifested and magnified: *So shall you know that I am the Lord your God*. By the sanctifying and glorifying of the church God will be known in his holiness and glory, as the God that dwells in his holy mountain and makes it holy by dwelling in it; and those that are sanctified and glorified are so *through the knowledge of him* that called them. The knowledge which true believers have of God is, [1.] An appropriating knowledge. They know that he is *the Lord their God*, yet not theirs only, but

theirs in common with the whole church, that he is their God, but *dwelling in Zion his holy mountain*; for, though faith appropriates, it does not engross or monopolize the privileges of the covenant. [2.] It is an experimental knowledge. They shall find him their *hope and strength* in the worst of times, and so they shall *know that he is the Lord their God*. Those know best the goodness of God who have tasted and seen it, and have found him good to them.

Verses 18-21

These promises with which this prophecy concludes have their accomplishments in part in the kingdom of grace, and the comforts and graces of all the faithful subjects of that kingdom, but will have their full accomplishment in the kingdom of glory; for, as to the Jewish church, we know not of any event concerning that which answers to the extent of these promises, and what instances of peace and prosperity they were blessed with, which they may be supposed to be a hyperbolical description of, they were but figures of *better things reserved for us, that they in their best estate without us might not be made perfect*.

I. It is promised that the enemies of the church shall be vanquished and brought down, v. 19. Egypt, that old enemy of Israel, and Edom, which had an inveterate enmity to Israel, derived from Esau, these *shall be a desolation, a desolate wilderness*, no more to be inhabited; they have become the *people of God's curse*; so the Idumeans were, Isa. 34:5. No strength nor wealth of a nation is a defence against the judgment of God. But what is the quarrel God has with these potent kingdoms? It is for their *violence against the children of Judah*, and the injuries they had done them; see Eze. 25:3, 8, 12, 15; 26:2. They had *shed the innocent blood* of the Jews that fled to them for shelter or were making their escape through their country. Note, The innocent blood of God's people is very precious to him, and not a drop of it shall be shed but it shall be reckoned for. In the last day this earth, which has been filled with violence against the people of God, shall be made a desolation, when it and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up. And, sooner or later, the oppressors and persecutors of God's Israel shall be brought down and laid in the dust, nay, they will at length be brought down and laid in the flames.

II. It is promised that the church shall be very happy; and truly happy it is in spiritual privileges, even during its militant state, but much more when it comes to be triumphant. Three things are here promised it:—

1. Purity. This is put last here, as a reason for the rest (v. 21); but we may consider it first, as the ground and foundation of the rest: *I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed*, that is, their bloody heinous sins, especially shedding innocent blood; that filth and guilt they had contracted by sin, which rendered them unfit for communion with God, and made them odious to his holiness and obnoxious to his justice; this they shall be washed from in the *fountain opened*, Zec. 13:1. That shall be cleansed by the blood of Christ which could not be cleansed by the sacrifices and purifications of the ceremonial law. Or, if we apply it to the happiness of a future state, it intimates the cleansing of the saints from all these corruptions from which they were not cleansed either by ordinances or providences in the world; there shall not be the least remains of sin in them there. Here, though they are washing daily, there is still something that is not cleansed; but in heaven, even that also shall be done away. And the reason is because *the Lord dwells in Zion*, dwells with his church, and much more gloriously with that in heaven, and *holiness becomes his house for ever*, for which reason, where he dwells there must be, there shall be, a perfection

of holiness. Note, Though the refining and reforming of the church is work that goes on slowly, and still there is something we complain of that is *not cleansed*, yet there is a day coming when every thing that is amiss shall be amended, and the church shall be all fair, and no spot, no stain in her; and we must wait for that day.

2. Plenty, v. 18. This is put first, because it is the reverse of the judgment threatened in the foregoing chapters. (1.) The streams of this plenty overflow the land and enrich it: *The mountains shall drop new wine* and *the hills shall flow with milk*, such great abundance shall they have of suitable provision, both for *babes* and for *strong men*. It intimates the abundance of vineyards, and all fruitful; and the abundance of cattle in the pastures that fill them with milk. And, to make the corn-land fruitful, the *rivers of Judah shall flow with water*, so that the country shall be like the garden of Eden, well-watered every where and greatly enriched, Ps. 65:9. But this seems to be meant spiritually; the graces and comforts of the new covenant are compared to *wine and milk* (Isa. 55:1), and the Spirit to *rivers of living water*, Jn. 7:38. And these gifts abound much more under the New Testament than they did under the Old; when believers receive *grace for grace* from Christ's fulness, when they are enriched with *everlasting consolations*, and *filled with joy and peace in believing*, then *the mountains drop new wine*, and *the hills flow with milk*. *Drink you, drink abundantly, O beloved!* When there is plentiful effusion of the Spirit of grace, then the *rivers of Judah flow with water*, and make glad, not only *the city of our God* (Ps. 46:4), but the whole land. (2.) The fountain of this plenty is in the *house of God*, whence the streams take their rise, as those *waters of the sanctuary* (Eze. 47:1) from *under the threshold of the house*, and the river of life *out of the throne of God and the Lamb*, Rev. 22:1. The psalmist, speaking of Zion, says, *All my springs are in thee*, Ps. 87:7. Those that take temporal blessings to be meant in the former part of the verse, yet by this *fountain* out of *the house of the Lord* understand the grace of God, which, if we abound in temporal blessings, we have so much more need of, that we may not abuse them. Christ himself is the fountain; his merit and grace cleanse us, refresh us, and make us fruitful. This is said to water *the valley of Shittim*, which lay a great way off from the temple at Jerusalem, on the other side of Jordan, and was a dry and barren valley, which intimates that gospel-grace, flowing from Christ, shall reach far, even to the Gentile world, to the most remote regions of it, and shall make those to abound in the fruits of righteousness who had long lain as the barren wilderness. This grace is a fountain overflowing, ever-flowing, from which we may be continually drawing, and yet need not fear its being drawn dry. This fountain comes *out of the house of the Lord* above, from his temple in heaven, flows all that good which here we are daily tasting the streams of, but hope to be shortly, hope to be eternally, drinking at the fountain-head of.

3. Perpetuity. This crowns all the rest (v. 20): *Judah shall dwell for ever* (when Egypt and Edom are made *a desolation*), and Jerusalem shall continue *from generation to generation*. This is a promise, and a precious promise it is, (1.) That the church of Christ shall continue in the world to the end of time. As one generation of professing Christians passes away, another shall come, in whom the *throne* of Christ *shall endure for ever*, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail* against it. (2.) That all the living members of that church (Judah and Jerusalem are put for the *inhabitants* of that city and country, Mt. 3:5) shall be established in their happiness to the utmost ages of eternity. This new Jerusalem shall be *from generation to generation*, for it is a city that has foundations, not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.