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Preface

Preface:

God's prophets were his witnesses to his church, each in his day, for several ages, witnesses for him and his authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, attesting the true intents of God's providences in his dealings with his people then and the kind intentions of his grace concerning his church in the days of the Messiah, to whom all the prophets bore witness, for they all agreed in their testimony; and now we have only one witness more to call, and we have done with our evidence; and though he be the last, and in him prophecy ceased, yet the Spirit of prophecy shines as clearly, as strongly, as brightly in him as in any that went before, and his testimony challenges an equal regard. The Jews say, Prophecy continued forty years under the second temple, and this prophet they call the *seal of prophecy*, because in him the series or succession of prophets broke off and came to a period. God wisely ordered it so that divine inspiration should cease for some ages before the coming of the Messiah, that that great prophet might appear the more conspicuous and distinguishable and be the more welcome. Let us consider, I. The person of the prophet. We have only his name, *Malachi*, and no account of his country or parentage. *Malachi* signifies *my angel*, which has given occasion for a conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man, as that Judges 2:1. But there is no just ground for the conjecture. Prophets were messengers, God's messengers; this prophet was so; his name is the very same with that which we find in the original (3:1) for *my messenger*; and perhaps from that word he might (though, probably, he had another name) be called *Malachi*. The Chaldee paraphrase, and some of the Jews, suggest that Malachi was the same with Ezra; but that also is groundless. Ezra was a scribe, but we never read that he was a prophet. Others, yet further from probability, make him to be Mordecai. But we have reason to conclude he was a person whose proper name was that by which he is here called; the tradition of some of the ancients is that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, and that he died young. II. The scope of the prophecy. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to reprove the people for delaying to build the temple; Malachi was sent to reprove them for the neglect of it when it was built, and for their profanation of the temple-service (for from idolatry and superstition they ran into the other extreme of impiety and irreligion), and the sins he witnesses against are the same that we find complained of in Nehemiah's time, with whom, it is probable, he was contemporary. And now that prophecy was to cease he speaks more clearly of the Messiah, as nigh at hand, than any other of the prophets had done, and concludes with a direction to the people of God to keep in remembrance the law of Moses, while they were in expectation of the gospel of Christ.

Chapter 1

Thus prophet is sent first to convince and then to comfort, first to discover sin and to reprove for that and then to promise the coming of him who shall take away sin. And this method the blessed Spirit takes in dealing with souls, Jn. 16:8. He first opens the wound and then applies the healing balm. God had provided (and one would think effectually) for the engaging of Israel to himself by providences and ordinances; but it seems, by the complaints here made of them, that they received the grace of God in both these in vain. I. They were very ungrateful to God for his favours to them, and rendered not again according to the benefit they received (v. 1-5). II. They were very careless and remiss in the observance of his institutions; the priests especially were so, who were in a particular manner charged with them (v. 6-14). And what shall we say of those whom neither providences nor ordinances work upon, and who affront God in those very things wherein they should honour him?

Verses 1-5

The prophecy of this book is entitled, *The burden of the word of the Lord* (v. 1), which intimates, 1. That it was of great weight and importance; what the false prophets said was light as the chaff, what the true prophets said was ponderous as the wheat, Jer. 23:28. 2. That it ought to be often repeated to them and by them, as the burden of a song. 3. That there were those to whom it was a burden and a reproach; they were weary of it, and found themselves so aggrieved by it that they were not able to bear it. 4. That to them it would prove a burden indeed, to sink them to the lowest hell, unless they repented. 5. That to those who loved it and embraced it, and bade it welcome, though it was a light burden, as our Saviour calls it (Mt. 11:30), yet it was a burden.

This *burden of the word of the Lord* was sent, 1. To Israel, for to them pertained the lively oracles of prophecy as well as those of the written word. Many prophets God had sent to Israel, and now he will try them with one more. 2. *By Malachi, by the hand of Malachi*, as if it were not a message by word of mouth, but a letter put into his hand, for the greater certainty.

In these verses, they are charged with ingratitude, in that they were not duly sensible of God's distinguishing goodness to them; and such a charge as this may well be called a burden, for it is a heavy one.

I. God asserts the great kindness he had, and had often expressed, for them (v. 2): *I have loved you, saith the Lord*. Thus abruptly does the sermon begin, as if God intended, whatever reproofs should be given them, to reconcile them to his love, and to take care that they should still have good thoughts of him. *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten*. Thus kindly does the sermon begin. God will have his people satisfied that he loves them and is ever mindful of his love. This is the same with what he said of old to the virgin of Israel, that he might engage her affections to himself (Jer. 31:3, 4): *Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love*. In this one word God sums up all his gracious dealings with them; love was the spring of all; he loved them because he would *love them* (Deu. 7:7, 8), loved them in their childhood, Hos. 11:1. His delight was in them, Isa. 62:4. *"I have loved you, but you have not loved me, nor made any suitable returns for my love."* Note, God's people need to be often reminded of his love to them.

II. They question his love, and diminish the instances of it, and seem to quarrel with him for telling them of it: *Yet you say,*

Wherein hast thou loved us? As God traces up all his favours to them to the fountain, which was his love, so he traces up all their sins against him to the fountain, which was their contempt of his love. Instead of acknowledging his kindness, and studying what they shall render, they scorn to own that they have been beholden to him, challenge him to produce proofs of his love that are material, and think and speak very slightly of the instances they have had of his kindness, as if they were so few, so small, as not to be worth taking notice of, and no more than what they had sufficiently made returns for, or at least than he had sufficiently balanced with instances of his wrath. "Have we not been wasted, impoverished, and carried captive; and wherein then *hast thou loved us?*" Note, God justly takes it very ill to have his favours slighted, as not worth speaking of; and it is very absurd for us to ask wherein he has loved us, when, which way soever we look, we meet with the proofs and instances of his love to us.

III. He makes it out, beyond contradiction, that he has loved them, loved them in a distinguishing way, which was in a special manner obliging. For proof of this he shows the difference he had made, and would still make, between Jacob and Esau, between Israelites and Edomites. Some read their question, *Wherefore hast thou loved us?* as if they did indeed own that he had loved them, but withal insinuate that there was a reason for it—that he loved them because their father Abraham had loved him, so that it was not a free love, but a love of debt, to which he replies, "*Was not Esau* as near akin to Abraham as you are? Was he not *Jacob's own brother*, his elder brother? And therefore, if there were any right to a recompence for Abraham's love, Esau had it, and yet *I hated Esau* and *loved Jacob.*"

1. Let them see what a difference God had made between Jacob and Esau. Esau was Jacob's brother, his twin-brother: "*Yet I loved Jacob* and *I hated Esau*, that is, took Jacob into covenant, and entailed the blessing on him and his, but refused and rejected Esau." Note, Those that are taken into covenant with God, that have the lively oracles and the means of grace committed to them, have reason to look upon these as tokens of his love. Jacob is loved, for he has these, Esau hated, for he has not. The apostle quotes this (Rom. 9:13), and compares it with what the oracle said to Rebecca concerning her twins (Gen. 25:23), *The elder shall serve the younger*, to illustrate the doctrine of God's sovereignty in dispensing his favours; for *may he not do what he will with his own?* Esau was justly hated, but Jacob freely loved; even so, Father, *because it seemed good in thy eyes*, and it is not for us to ask why or wherefore.

2. Let them see what he was now doing and would do with them, pursuant to this original difference.

(1.) The Edomites shall be made the monuments of God's justice, and he will be glorified in their utter destruction: For *Esau have I hated*; *I laid his mountains waste*, the mountains of Seir, which were *his heritage*. When all that part of the world was ravaged by the Chaldean army the country of Edom was, among the rest, laid in ruins, and became a habitation *for the dragons of the wilderness*, so perfectly desolate was it; as was foretold, Isa. 34:6, 11. The Edomites had triumphed in Jerusalem's overthrow (Ps. 137:7), and therefore it was just with God to put the same cup of trembling into their hands. And, though Edom's ruins were last, yet they were lasting, and the desolation perpetual; and in this the difference was made between Jacob and Esau, and is made between the righteous and the wicked, to whom otherwise all things come alike, and there seems to be one event. Jacob's cities are laid waste, but they are rebuilt; Edom's are laid waste, and never rebuilt. The sufferings of the

righteous will have an end and will end well; all their grievances will be redressed, and their sorrow turned into joy; but the sufferings of the wicked will be endless and remediless, as Edom's desolations, v. 4. Observe here, [1.] The vain hopes of the Edomites, that they shall have their ruins repaired as well as Israel, though they had no promise to build their hope upon. They say, "It is true, *we are impoverished*; it is the common chance, and there is no remedy; but *we will return and build the desolate places*; we are resolved we will" (not so much as asking God leave); "*we will* whether he will or no; nay, we will do it in defiance of God's curse, and that sentence pronounced upon Edom (Isa. 34:10), *From generation to generation it shall lie waste.*" They build presumptuously, as Hiel built Jericho in direct contradiction to the word of God (1 Ki. 16:34), and it shall speed accordingly. Note, It is common for those whose hearts are unhumiliated under humbling providences to think to make their part good against God himself, and to build, and plant, and flourish again as much as ever, though God has said that they shall be impoverished. But see, [2.] The dashing of these hopes and the disappointment of them: They say, *We will build*; but what says *the Lord of hosts*? For we are sure his word shall stand, and not theirs; and he says, *First*, Their attempts shall be baffled: *They shall build, but I will throw down*. Note, Those that walk contrary to God will find that he will walk contrary to them; for *who ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*? When the Jews had rejected Christ and his gospel they became Edomites, and this word was fulfilled in them; for when, in the time of the emperor Adrian, they attempted to rebuild Jerusalem, God by earthquakes and eruptions of fire threw down what they built, so that they were forced to quit the enterprise. *Secondly*, They shall be looked upon by all as abandoned to utter ruin. All that see them shall call them *the border of wickedness*, a sinful nation, incurably so, and therefore *the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever*. Since their wickedness is such as will never be reformed, their desolations shall be such as are never to be repaired. Against Israel God was a *little displeased* (Zec. 1:15), but against Edom he has indignation, and will have for ever, for they are *the people of his curse*, Isa. 34:5.

(2.) The Israelites shall be made the monuments of his mercy, and he will be glorified in their salvation, v. 5. "The Edomites shall be stigmatized as a people hated of God, *but your eyes shall see* your doubts concerning his love to you for ever silenced; for you shall say, and have cause to say, *The Lord is and will be magnified from the border of Israel*, from every part and border of the land of Israel." The border of Edom is a *border of wickedness*, and therefore the Lord will have *indignation against it for ever*; but the *border of Israel* is a *border of holiness*, the *border of the sanctuary* (Ps. 78:54), and therefore God will make it to appear (though it may for a time lie desolate) that he has mercy in store for it, and thence *he will be magnified*; he will give his people Israel both cause, and hearts, to praise him. When the border of Edom still remains desolate, and the border of Israel is repaired and replenished, then it will appear that God has loved Jacob. Note, [1.] Those who doubt of God's love to his people shall, sooner or later, have convincing and undeniable proofs given them of it: "*your own eyes shall see* what you will not believe." [2.] Deliverances out of trouble are to be reckoned proofs of God's good-will to his people, though they may be suffered to fall into trouble, Ps. 34:19. [3.] Distinguishing favours are very obliging. If God rear up again the border of Israel, but leave the border of Edom in ruins, let no Israelite ask, for shame, *Wherein hast thou loved us*? [4.] The dignifying of Israel is the magnifying of the God of Israel, and, one way or other, God will have honour from his professing people. [5.]

God's goodness being his glory, when he does us good we must proclaim him great, for that is magnifying him. It is an instance of his goodness that he has *pleasure in the prosperity of his servants*, and for this those that love his salvation say, *The Lord be magnified*, Ps. 35:27.

Verses 6-14

The prophet is here, by a special commission, calling the priests to account, though they were themselves appointed judges, to call the people to an account. Let the rulers in the house of God know that there is one above them, who will reckon with them for their mal-administrations. Thus *saith the Lord of hosts to you, O priests!* v. 6. God will have a saying to unfaithful ministers; and it concerns those who speak from God to his people to hear and heed what he says to them, that they may *save themselves* in the first place, otherwise how should they help to *save those that hear them*? It is a severe, and no doubt a just reproof, that is here given to the *priests*, for the profanation of the holy things of God, with which they were entrusted; and, if this was the crime of the priests, we have reason to fear the people also were guilty of it: so that what is said to *the priests* is *said to all*, nay, it is *said to us*, who, as Christians, profess ourselves, not only the people of God, but priests to him. Observe here,

I. What it was that God expected from them, and with what good reason he expected it (v. 6): *A son honours his father*, because he is his father; nature has written this law in the hearts of children, before God wrote it at Mount Sinai; nay, *a servant*, though his obligation to his master is not natural, but by voluntary compact, yet thinks it his duty to honour him, to be observant of his orders, and true to his interests. Children and servants pay respect to their parents and masters; every one cries out shame on them if they do not, and their own hearts cannot but reproach them too; the order of families is thus kept up, and it is their beauty and advantage. But the priests, who are God's children and his servants, do not fear and honour him. They were *fathers* and *masters* to the people, and expected to be called so (Judges 18:19, Mt. 22:7, 10) and to be revered and obeyed as such; but they forgot their Father and Master in heaven, and the duty they owed to him. We may each of us charge upon ourselves what is here charged upon the priests. Note, 1. We are every one of us to look upon God as our Father and Master, and upon ourselves as his children and servants. 2. Our relation to God as our Father and Master strongly obliges us to fear and honour him. If we honour and fear the fathers of our flesh, much more the Father and Master of our spirits, Heb. 12:9. 3. It is a thing to be justly complained of, and lamented, that God is so little feared and honoured even by those that own him for their Father and Master. *Where is his honour? Where is his fear?*

II. What the contempt was which the priests put upon God.

1. This is that, in general, which is charged upon them:—(1.) They despised God's name; their familiarity with it, as priests, bred contempt of it, and served them only to gain a veneration by it for themselves and their own name, while God's name was of small account with them. God's name is all that whereby he has made himself known—his word and ordinances; these they had low thoughts of, and vilified that which it was their business to magnify; and no wonder that when they despised it themselves they did that which made it despicable to others, causing even the *sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*, as Eli's sons did. (2.) They *profaned* God's name, v. 12. They *polluted* it, v. 7. They not only made no account of sacred things, but

they made an ill use of them, and perverted them to the service of the worst and vilest purposes—their own pride, covetousness, and luxury. There cannot be a greater provocation to God than the profanation of his name; for it is holy and reverend. His purity cannot be polluted by us, for he is unspotted, but his name may be profaned; and nothing profanes it more than the misconduct of priests, whose business it is to do honour to it. This is the general charge exhibited against them. To this they plead *Not guilty*, and challenge God to prove it upon them, and to make good the charge, which added daring impudence to their daring impiety: *You say, Wherein have we despised thy name?* (v. 6), and *wherein have we polluted thee?* v. 7. It is common with proud sinners, when they are reprov'd, to stand thus upon their own justification. These priests had most horridly profaned sacred things, and yet, like the *adulterous woman*, they said that they had *done no wickedness*; they were so inobservant of themselves that they remembered not or reflected not upon their own acts, or they were so ignorant of the divine law that they thought there was no harm in them, and that what they did could not be construed into despising God's name, or they were so atheistical as to imagine that though they knew their own guilt yet God did not, or they were so scornful in their conduct towards God and his prophets that they took a pride in bantering a serious and just reproof, and turning it off with a jest. They either laugh at the reproof, as those that despise it, and harden their hearts against it, or they laugh it off, as those that resolve they will not be touched by it, or will not seem to be so. Which way soever we take it, their defence was their offence, and, in justifying themselves, their own tongues condemned them, and their saying, *Wherein have we despised thy name?* proved them proud and perverse. Had they asked this question with a humble desire to be told more particularly wherein they had offended, it would have been an evidence of their repentance, and would have given hopes of their reformation; but to ask it thus in disdain and defiance of the word of God argues their hearts *fully set in them to do evil*. Note, Sinners ruin themselves by studying to baffle their own convictions; but they will find it *hard to kick against the pricks*.

2. Justly might they have been convicted and condemned upon the general charge, and their plea thrown out as frivolous; but God will not only overcome, but will be clear, will be justified when he judges, and therefore he shows them very particularly wherein they had despised his name, and what the contempt was that they cast upon him. As formerly, when he charged them with idolatry, so now, when he charges them with profaneness, he bids them *see their way in the valley* and *know what they have done*, Jer. 2:23.

(1.) They despised God's name in what they said, in the low opinion they had of his institutions: "*You say* in your hearts, and perhaps speak it out when you priests get together over your cups. out of the hearing of the people, *The table of the Lord is contemptible*" (v. 7), and again (v. 12), "*You say, The table of the Lord is polluted*; it is to be no more regarded than any other table." Either the table in the temple, on which the show-bread was placed, is that which they reflect upon (not understanding the mystery of it, they despised it as an insignificant thing), or rather the altar of burnt-offerings is here called the table, for there God, and his priests, and his people, did, as it were, feast together upon the sacrifices, in token of friendship. This they thought was contemptible. Formerly, in the days of superstition, it was thought contemptible in comparison with the idolatrous alters that the heathen had, and was set aside to make room for a new-fashioned one (2 Ki. 16:14, 15); now it is thought contemptible in comparison with their own tables, and those of their great men: *The fruit thereof, even his meat, is*

contemptible. Those who served at the altar were to live upon the altar; but they complained that they lived poorly and meanly, and that it was not worth while to attend the service of the altar for the fruit and meat of it, for it was very ordinary and always the same again; they had no dainties, no varieties, no nice dishes. Nay, that part of the sacrifices which was given to God, the blood and the fat, they looked upon with contempt, as not worthy the multitude of laws God had made about it; they asked, "What need is there of so much ado about burning the fat and pouring out the blood?" Note, Those greatly profane and pollute God's name who despise the business of religion, though it is very honourable, as not worth taking pains in, and the advantages of religion, though highly valuable, as not worth taking pains for. Those who live in a careless neglect of holy ordinances, who come to them and attend on them irreverently, and go away from them never the better and under no concern, do in effect say, "*The table of the Lord is contemptible; there is neither virtue nor value in it, neither credit nor comfort from it.*"

(2.) They despised God's name in what they did, which was of a piece with what they said, and flowed from it; corrupt principles and notions are roots of bitterness, which bear the gall and wormwood of corrupt practices. They looked upon the table and altar of the Lord as contemptible, and then, [1.] They thought any thing would serve for a sacrifice, though ever so coarse and mean, and were so far from bringing the best, as they ought to have done, that they picked out the worst they had, which was fit neither for the market nor for their own tables, and offered that at God's altar. With every sacrifice they were to bring a meat-offering of *fine flour mingled with oil*; but they brought *polluted bread* (v. 7), coarse bread, servants' bread, perhaps it was dry and mouldy, or made of the refuse of the wheat, which they thought good enough to be burnt upon the altar; for had it been better they would have said, *To what purpose is this waste?* And as to the beasts they offered, though the law was express that what was offered in sacrifice should not have a blemish, yet they brought *the blind, and the lame, and the sick* (v. 8), and again (v. 13), *the torn, and the lame, and the sick*, that was ready to die of itself. They looked no further than the burning of the sacrifice, and they pleaded that it was a pity to burn it if it was good for any thing else. The people were so far convinced of their duty that they would bring sacrifices; they durst not wholly omit the duty, but they brought vain oblations, mocked God, and deceived themselves, by bringing the worst they had; and the priests, who should have taught them better, accepted the gifts brought to the altar and offered them up there, because, if they should refuse them, the people would bring none at all, and then they would lose their perquisites; and therefore, having more regard to their own profit than to God's honour, they accepted that which they knew he would not accept. Some make v. 8 to be a continuation of what the priests profanely said v. 7, *You say to the people, If you offer the blind for sacrifice, it is not evil; or the lame and the sick, it is not evil.* Note, It is a very evil thing, whether men think so or no, to offer the blind and the lame, the torn and the sick, in sacrifice to God. If we worship God ignorantly, and without understanding, we bring the blind for sacrifice; if we do it carelessly, and without consideration, if we are cold, and dull, and dead, in it, we bring the sick; if we rest in the bodily exercise, and do not make heart-work of it, we bring the *lame*; and, if we suffer vain thoughts and distractions to lodge within us, we bring the *torn*. And *is not this evil?* Is it not a great affront to God and a great wrong and injury to our own souls? Do not our books tell us, nay, do not our own hearts tell us, that *this is evil?* for God, who is the best, ought to be served with the best we have. [2.] They would do no more of their work than what they were paid for. The priests would offer the sacrifices that were brought to the

altar, because they had their share of them; but as for any other service of the temple, that had not a particular fee belonging to it, they would not stir a step, nor lend a hand, to it; and this was the general temper of them, v. 10. There is not a man among the priests that would *shut the doors*, or *kindle a fire, for nought*. If he were required to do the smallest piece of service, he would ask, how shall I be paid for it? They would do nothing *gratis*, but were all for what they could get, *every one for his gain, from his quarter*, Isa. 56:11. Note, Though God has given order that his servants be well paid in this world, yet those are no acceptable servants to him who are mercenary, and would never do the work but for the wages. [3.] Their work was a perfect drudgery to them (v. 13): *You said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!* Both priests and people were of this mind, that they thought God imposed too hard a task upon them; the people grudged the charge of providing the sacrifice and the priests grudged the pains of offering it; they thought the feasts of the Lord came too thick, and they were forced to attend too often, and too long, in the courts of the Lord; the priests thought it a severe penance imposed upon them to purify themselves as was required when they attended the altar and ate of the holy things; they thought the duty of their office toilsome and troublesome, and *snuffed at it* as unreasonable, and bearing hard upon them; they did it, but it was grudgingly and with reluctance. God speaks of it, in justification of his law, that he had not *made them to serve with an offering, nor wearied them with incense*, Isa. 43:23. *Wherein have I wearied thee?* Mic. 6:3. But their own wicked hearts made it a weariness; and they were, as Doeg, *detained before the Lord*; they would rather have been any where else. Note, Those are highly injurious, both to God and themselves, who are weary of his service and worship, and snuff at it.

III. Observe how God expostulates and reasons the case with them, for their conviction and humiliation. 1. Would they, durst they, affront an earthly prince thus? "You offer to God *the lame and the sick*; offer it now unto thy governor (v. 8), either as tribute or as a present, when thou art entreating his favour, or in gratitude for some favour received; *will he be pleased with thee?* Or, rather, will he not take himself to be affronted by it?" Note, Those who are careless and irreverent in the duties of religious worship should consider what a shame it is to offer that to their God which they would scorn to offer to their governor, to be more observant of the laws of breeding and good manners than of the laws of religion, and more afraid of being rude than of being profane. 2. Could they imagine that such sacrifices as these would be pleasing to God, or answer the end of sacrifices? "*Should I accept this at your hand, saith the Lord?*" v. 13. Have you any reason to think I should either not discern or not resent the affront, that I should connive at the violation of my own laws? No (v. 10); *I have no pleasure in you*, and therefore, *I will not accept an offering*, such an offering, *at your hand.*" If God has no pleasure in the person, if the person be not in a justified state, if he be not sanctified, God will not accept the offering. God had respect to Abel first and then to his sacrifice. Note, In order to our acceptance with God it is not enough to do that which, for the matter of it, is good, but we must do it from a right principle, in a right manner, and for a right end. It was the ancient rule laid down (Gen. 4:7), *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* Now, if we be not accepted of God, in vain do we worship him; it is all lost labour; nay, we are all undone, for ever undone, if we come short of God's acceptance. Those therefore make a bad bargain for themselves who, to save charges in their religion, miss all the ends of it, and, by thinking to go the nearest way to work, bring nothing to pass. Those who make it the top of their ambition, as we all ought to do, *whether present or absent, to be accepted of the Lord*,

will not dare to bring the *torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice*. 3. How could they expect to prevail with God in their intercessions for the people when they thus affronted God in their sacrifices? So some understand v. 9, as spoken ironically, "*And now if you will do the duty of priests, and stand in the gap to turn away the judgments of God that you see ready to pour in upon us, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious to us, and to our land which is almost eaten up with locusts and caterpillars,*" as appears ch. 3:11. "Try now what interest you have at the throne of grace; improve it for the removing of this plague, for *it has been by your means*; you have provoked God to send it. But as you go on thus to profane his sacred things *will he regard your persons* or your prayers? No, you cannot prevail with him to command it away." For, *if we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear us*, either for ourselves or for others. 4. Had God deserved this at their hands? No, he had provided comfortably for them, and had given them such encouragement in their work as might have engaged them to do it cheerfully and well; so some understand v. 10, "*Who is there among you that shall shut a door, or kindle a fire, for nought?*" No, God does not expect you should serve him for nothing; you are well paid for it, and shall be so; not a cup of cold water, given for the honour of God, shall *lose its reward*." Note, The consideration of our constant receivings from God, and the present rewards of obedience in obedience, very much aggravates our slothfulness and niggardliness in our returns of duty to God.

IV. He calls them to repentance for their profanations of his holy name. So we may understand v. 9, "*Now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious to us*. Humble yourselves for your sin, cry mightily to God for pardon, and make up in the faith and fervency of your prayers what has been wanting in the worth and value of your sacrifices; for all the rebukes of Providence we are under *are by your means*." Note, Those who have by their sins helped to kindle a fire are highly concerned by their repentance, prayers, and the personal reformation, to help to quench it. We must see how much God's judgments are by our means, and be awakened thereby to be earnest with him to return in mercy; and, if we take not this course, how can we think he should regard our persons?

V. He declares his resolution both to secure the glory of his own name and to reckon with those who profane it. Those who put contempt upon God and religion, and think to run down sacred things, let them know,

1. That they shall not gain their point. God will magnify his law and make it honourable, though they vilify it and make it contemptible; for (v. 11) *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles*. It might be said, "If these are not the worshippers whom God will accept, then he has no worshippers." As if he must make the best of their service, or else he would have no service done him; and then *what will he do for his great name?* But let him alone for that; *though Israel be not faithful, be not gathered*, yet God will be *glorious*. Though these priests provoke him to take down the ceremonial economy, and to abolish that *law of commandments, which could not make the comers thereunto perfect*, yet he will be no loser by that, at the long run; for, (1.) Instead of those carnal ordinances, which they profaned, a spiritual way of worship shall be introduced and established: *Incense shall be offered to God's name* (which signifies prayer and praise, Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3), instead of the blood and fat of bulls and goats. And it shall be a *pure offering*, refined, not only from the corruptions that were in the priests' practice, but from the mere bodily exercise that was in the institutions themselves,

which are called *carnal ordinances, imposed till the time of reformation*, Heb. 9:10. When the hour came in which *the true worshippers worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth*, then this *incense was offered, even this pure offering*. (2.) Instead of his being worshipped and served among the Jews only, a small people in a corner of the world, he will be served and worshipped in all places, *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same; in every place*, in every part of the world, *incense shall be offered to his name*; nations shall be disciplined, and shall speak of the wonderful works of God, and have them spoken to them in their own language. This is a plain prediction of that great revolution in the kingdom of grace by which the Gentiles, who had been *strangers and foreigners*, came to be *fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God*, and as welcome to the throne of grace as ever the Jews had been. It is twice said (for the thing was certain), *My name shall be great among the Gentiles*, whereas hitherto in Judah only he was *known*, and *his name was great*, Ps. 76:1. God's name shall be declared to them, the declaration of it shall be received and believed, and there shall be those among the Gentiles who shall magnify and glorify the name of God better than ever the Jews had done, even the priests themselves.

2. That they shall not go unpunished, v. 14. Here is the doom of those who do like these priests, for the sentence on them is a sentence on all such. Observe, (1.) The description of profane and careless worshippers. They are such as *vow and sacrifice to the Lord a corrupt thing* when they have *in their flock a male*. They have of the best, wherewith to serve and honour him, so bountiful has been in his gifts to them, but they put him off with the worst, and think that good enough for him, so ungrateful are they in their returns to him. This was the fault of the people, but the priests connived at it, and indulged them in it. We find a distinction in the law which allowed *that* to be *offered for a free-will offering* which would *not be accepted for a vow*, Lev. 22:23. But the priests would accept it, though God would not, pretending to be more indulgent than he was, for which he will give them no thanks another day. (2.) The character given of such worshippers. They are *deceivers*; they deal falsely and fraudulently with God; they play the hypocrite with him; they pretend to honour him, in making the vow, but, when it comes to be performed, they put an affront upon him, to such a degree that it would have been *better not to have vowed than to vow and thus to pay*; but let not such be themselves deceived, for *God is not mocked*. Those who think to put a cheat upon God will prove, in the end, to have put a damning cheat upon their own souls. Hypocrites are deceivers, and they will prove self-deceivers, and so self-destroyers. (3.) The doom passed upon them: They are *cursed*; they expect a blessing, but will meet with a curse, the tokens of God's wrath, according to the judgment written. (4.) The reason of this doom: *"For I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and therefore will reckon with those who deal with me but as a man like themselves; my name is dreadful among the heathen, and therefore I will not bear that it should be contemptible among my own people."* The heathen paid more respect to their gods, though idols, than the Jews did to theirs, though the only true and living God. Note, The consideration of God's universal dominion, and the universal acknowledgment of it, should restrain us from all irreverence in his service.

Chapter 2

There are two great ordinances which divine wisdom has instituted, the wretched profanation of both of which is complained of and sharply reprov'd in this chapter. I. The ordinance of the ministry, which is peculiar to the church, and is designed for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned by those who were themselves dignified with the honour of it and entrusted with the business of it. The priests profaned the holy things of God; this they are here charged with; their sin is aggravated, and they are severely threatened for it (v. 1-9). II. The ordinance of marriage, which is common to the world of mankind, and was instituted for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned both by the priests and by the people, in marrying strangers (v. 11, 12), treating their wives unkindly (v. 13), putting them away (v. 16), and herein dealing treacherously (v. 10, 14, 15). And that which was at the bottom of this and other instances of profaneness and downright atheism, thinking God altogether such a one as themselves, which was, in effect, to say, There is no God (v. 17). And these reproofs to them are warnings to us.

Verses 1-9

What was said in the foregoing chapter was directed to the priests (ch. 1:6): *Thus saith the Lord of hosts to you, O priests! that despise my name.* But the crimes there charged upon them they were guilty of as sacrificers, and for those they might think it some excuse that they offered what the people brought, and therefore that, if they were not so good as they should be, it was not their fault, but the people's; and therefore here the corruptions there complained of are traced to the source and spring of them—the faults the priests were guilty of as teachers of the people, as expositors of the law and the lively oracles; and this is a part of their office which still remains in the hands of gospel-ministers (who are appointed to be pastors and teachers, like the priests under the law, though not sacrificers, like them), and therefore by them the admonition here is to be particularly regarded. If the priests had given the people better instructions, the people would have brought better offerings; and therefore the blame returns upon the priests: *"And now, O you priests! this commandment is purely for you* (v. 1), who should have taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord, and how to worship him aright." Note, The governors of the churches are under God's government, and to him they are accountable. Even for those who command God has commandments. Nay (v. 4), *you shall know that I have sent these commandments for you.* They should know it either, 1. By the power of the Spirit working with the word for their conviction and reformation: "You shall know its original by its efficacy, whence it comes by what it does." When the word of God to us brings about, and carries on, the work of God in us, then we cannot but know that he sent it to us, that it is not the word of *Malachi—God's messenger*, but it is indeed the word of God, and is sent, not only in general to all, but in particular to us. Or, 2. By the accomplishment of the threatenings denounced against them: *"You shall know, to your cost, that I have sent this commandment to you, and it shall not return void."*

Let us now see what this commandment is which is for the priests, which, they must know, was sent to them; and let us put into method the particulars of the charge.

I. Here is a recital of the covenant God made with that sacred tribe, which was their commission for their work and the patent

of their honour: The *Lord of hosts sent a commandment* to them, for the establishing of this covenant (v. 4), for his covenant is said to be the *word which he commanded* (Ps. 105:8); and he sent *this commandment* by the prophet at this time for the re-establishing of it, that it might not be cut off for their persisting in the violation of it. Let the sons of Levi know then (and particularly the sons of Aaron) what honour God put upon their family, and what a trust he reposed in them (v. 5): *My covenant was with him of life and peace*. Besides the covenant of peculiarity made with all the house of Israel, there was a covenant of priesthood made with one family, that they should do the services, and, upon condition of that, should enjoy all the privileges, of the priest's office—that, as Israel was a peculiar nation, a *kingdom of priests*, so the house of Aaron should be a family of priests, set apart for the service and honour of God, to bear up his name in that nation, as they were to bear up his name among the nations; both the one and the other, in different degrees, were to *give glory unto God's name*, v. 2. God covenanted with them as his menial servants, obliged them to do his work and promised to own and accept them in it. This is called *his covenant of life and peace*, because it was intended for the support of religion, which brings life and peace to the souls of men—life to the dead, peace to the distressed, or because life and peace were by this covenant promised to those priests that faithfully and conscientiously discharged their duty; they shall have peace, which implies security from all evil, and life, which comprises the summary of all good. What is here said of the covenant of priesthood is true of the covenant of grace made with all believers, as spiritual priests; it is a covenant of life and peace; it assures all believers of life and peace, everlasting peace, everlasting life, all happiness both in this world and in that to come. This covenant was made with the whole tribe of Levi when they were distinguished from the rest of the tribes, were not numbered with them, but were *taken from among them and appointed over the tabernacle of testimony* (Num. 1:49, 50), by virtue of which appointment God says (Num. 3:12), *The Levites shall be mine*. It was made with Aaron when he and his sons were taken to *minister unto the Lord in the priest's office*, Ex. 28:1. Aaron is therefore called *the saint of the Lord*, Ps. 106:16. It was made with Phinehas and his family, a branch of Aaron's, upon a particular occasion, Num. 25:12, 13. And there the covenant of priesthood is called, as here, the *covenant of peace*, because by it peace was made and kept between God and Israel. These great blessings of life and peace, contained in that covenant, God *gave to him*, to Levi, to Aaron, to Phinehas; he promised life and peace to them and their posterity, entrusted them with these benefits for the use and behoof of God's Israel; they received that they might give, as Christ himself did, Ps. 68:18. now, for the further opening of this covenant, observe, 1. The considerations upon which it was grounded: It was *for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name*. The tribe of Levi gave a signal proof of their holy fear of God, and their reverence for his name, when they appeared so bravely against the worshippers of the golden calf (Ex. 32:26); and for their zeal in that matter God bestowed this blessing upon them and invited them to consecrate themselves unto him. Phinehas also showed himself zealous in the fear of God and his judgments when, to stay the plague, he stabbed *Zimri and Cozbi*, Ps. 106:30, 31. Note, Those, and those only, who fear God's name, can expect the benefit of the *covenant of life and peace*; and those who give proofs of their zeal for God shall without fail be recompensed in the glorious privileges of the Christian priesthood. Some read this, not as the consideration of the grant, but as the condition of it: *I gave them to him, provided that he should fear before me*. If God grant us life and peace, he expects we should fear before him. 2.

The trust that was lodged in the priests by this covenant, v. 7. They were hereby made *the messengers of the Lord of hosts*, messengers of that covenant of life and peace, not mediators of it, but only messengers, or ambassadors, employed to treat of the terms of peace between God and Israel. The priests were *God's mouth* to his people, from whom they must receive instructions according to the lively oracles. This was the office to which Levi was advanced; because, in his zeal for God, he *did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children*, therefore *they shall teach Jacob God's judgments*, Deu. 33:9, 10. Note, It is an honour to God's servants to be employed as his messengers and to be sent on his errands. Angels have their name thence. Haggai was called *the Lord's messenger*. This being their office, observe, (1.) What is the duty of ministers: *The priests' lips should keep knowledge*, not keep it from the people, but keep it for them. Ministers must be men of knowledge; for how are those able to teach others the things of God who are themselves unacquainted with those things or unready in them? They must keep knowledge, must furnish themselves with it and retain what they have got, that they may be like the *good householder*, who *brings out of his treasury things new and old*. Not only their heads, but their lips, must keep knowledge; they must not only have it, but they must have it ready, must have it at hand, must have it (as we say) at their tongue's end, to be communicated to others as there is occasion. Thus we read of *wisdom in the lips of him that has understanding*, with which they *feed many*, Prov. 10:13, 21. (2.) What is the duty of the people: *They should seek the law at his mouth*; they should consult the priests as God's messengers, and not only hear the message, but ask questions upon it, that they may the better understand it and that mistakes concerning it may be prevented and rectified. We are all concerned fully to know *what the will of the Lord is*, to know it distinctly and certainly; we should be desirous to know it and therefore inquisitive concerning it. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* We must not only consult the written word (*to the law and to the testimony*), but must have recourse to God's messengers, and desire instruction and advice from them in the affairs of our souls as we do from physicians and lawyers concerning our bodies and estates. Not but that ministers ought to lay down the law of God to those who do not enquire concerning it, or desire the knowledge of it (they must *instruct those that oppose themselves*, 2 Tim. 2:25, as well as those that offer themselves), but it is people's duty to apply to them for instruction, not only to hear, but to ask questions. *Watchman, what of the night?* Thus *if you will enquire, enquire you*; see Isa. 21:8, 11, 12. People should not only seek comfort at the mouth of their ministers, but should seek the law there; for, if we found in the way of duty, we shall find it the way of comfort.

II. Here is a memorial of the fidelity and zeal of many of their predecessors in the priest's office, which are mentioned as an aggravation of their sin in degenerating from such honourable ancestors and deserting such illustrious examples, and as a justification of God in withdrawing from them those tokens of his presence which he had granted to those that kept close to him. See here (v. 6) how good the godly priest was, whose steps they should have trod in, and what good he did, God's grace working with him. 1. See how good he was. He was ready and mighty in the scriptures: *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for the use of those that *asked the law at his mouth*; and in all his discourses there appeared more or less of the law of truth. Every thing he said was under the government of that law, and with it he governed others. He spoke as one having authority (every word was *a law*), and as one that had both wisdom and integrity—it was a *law of truth*, and truth is a law, it has a commanding

power. It is by truth that Christ rules. *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for his resolutions of cases of conscience proposed to him were such as might be depended upon; his opinion was good law. *Iniquity was not found in his lips*; he did not *handle the word of God deceitfully*, to please men, to serve a turn, or to make an interest for himself, but told all that consulted him what the law was, whether it were pleasing or displeasing. He did not pronounce that unclean which was clean, nor that clean which was unclean, as one of the rabbin expounds it. And his conversation was of a piece with his doctrine. God himself gives him this honourable testimony: *He walked with me in peace and equity*. He did not think it enough to talk of God, but he walked with him. The temper of his mind, and the tenour of his life, were of a piece with his doctrine and profession; he lived a life of communion with God, and made it his constant care and business to please him; he lived like a priest that was chosen to *walk before God*, 1 Sa. 2:30. His conversation was quiet; he was meek and *gentle towards all men*, was a pattern and promoter of love; he walked with God in peace, was himself peaceable and a great peace-maker. His conversation was also honest; he did no wrong to any, but made conscience of rendering to all their due: *He walked with me in equity*, or rectitude. We must not, for peace-sake, transgress the rules of equity, but must keep the peace as far as is consistent with justice. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable*. Ministers, of all men, are concerned to *walk with God in peace and equity*, that they may be *examples to the flock*. 2. See what good he did; he answered the ends of his advancement to that office: *He did turn many away from iniquity*; he made it his business to do good, and God crowned his endeavours with wonderful success; he helped to save many a soul from death, and there are multitudes now in heaven blessing God that ever they knew him. Ministers must lay out themselves to the utmost for the conversion of sinners, and even among those that have the name of Israelites there is need of conversion-work, there are many to be turned from iniquity; and they must reckon it an honour, and a rich reward of their labour, if they may but be instrumental herein. It is God only that by his grace can turn men from iniquity, and yet it is here said of a pious laborious minister that he turned men from iniquity as a worker together with God, and an instrument in his hand; and *those that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars*, Dan. 12:3. Note, Those ministers, and those only, are likely to turn men from iniquity, that preach sound doctrine and live good lives, and both according to the scripture; for, as one of the rabbin observes here, *When the priest is upright many will be upright*.

III. Here is a high charge drawn up against the priests of the present age, who violated the covenant of the priesthood and went directly contrary both to the rules and to the examples that were set before them. Many particulars of their sins we had in the foregoing chapter, and we find (Neh. 13) that many corruptions had crept into the church of the Jews at this time, mixed marriages, admitting strangers into the house of God, profanation of the sabbath-day, which were all owing to the carelessness and unfaithfulness of the priests; here it is charged upon them in general, 1. That they transgressed the rule: *You have departed out of the way* (v. 8), out of the good way which God has prescribed to you, and which your godly ancestors walked before you in. It is ill with a people when those whose office it is to guide them in the way do themselves depart out of it: *"You have not kept my ways, not kept in them yourselves, nor done your part to keep others in them,"* v. 9. 2. That they betrayed their trust: *"You have corrupted the covenant of Levi*, have violated it, have contradicted the great intentions of it, and have done what in you lay to frustrate and defeat them; you have managed your office as if it were designed only to feed you fat and make you

great; and not for the glory of God and the good of the souls of men." This was a corrupting of the covenant of Levi; it was perverting the ends of the office, and making it subservient to those sensual secular things over which it ought always to have dominion. And thus they forfeited the benefit of that covenant, and corrupted it to themselves; they *made it void*, and lost the life and peace which were by it settled upon them. We have no reason to expect God should perform his part of the covenant if we do not make conscience of performing ours. Another instance of their betraying their trust was that they were *partial in the law*, v. 9. In the law given to them they would pick and choose their duty; this they would do and that they would not do, just as they pleased; this is the fashion of hypocrites, while those whose hearts are upright with God have a *respect to all his commandments*. Or, rather, in the law they were to lay down to the people; in this they *knew faces* (so the word is); they *accepted persons*; they wilfully misinterpreted and misapplied the law, either to cross those they had a spleen against or to countenance those they had a kindness for; they would wink at those sins in some which in others they would be sharp upon, according as their interest or inclination led them. God is *no respecter of persons* in making his law, nor will he in reckoning for the breach of it; he *regards not the rich more than the poor*, and therefore his priests, his ministers, misrepresent him, and do him a great deal of dishonour, if, in doctrine or discipline, they be respecters of persons. See 1 Tim. 5:21. 3. That they did a great deal of mischief to the souls of men, which they should have helped to save: *You have caused many to stumble at the law*, not only to *fall in the law* (as the margin reads it) by transgressing it, taught and encouraged to do so by the examples of the priests, but to *stumble at the law*, by contracting prejudices against it, as if the law were the minister of sin and gave countenance to it. Thus Hophni and Phinehas by their wickedness *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*, 1 Sa. 2:17. There are many to whom the law of God is a *stumbling-block*, the gospel of Christ a *savour of death unto death*, and Christ himself a *rock of offence*; and nothing contributes more to this than the vicious lives of those that make a profession of religion, by which men are tempted to say, "It is all a jest." This is properly a *scandal, a stone of stumbling*; there is no good reason why it should be so to any, but *woe to those by whom this offence comes*. 4. That, when they were under the rebukes both of the word and of the providence of God for it, they *would not hear*, that is, they would not heed, they *would not lay it to heart*; they were not at all grieved or shamed for their sin, nor affected with the tokens of God's displeasure which they were under. What we hear does us no good unless we lay it to heart and admit the impressions of it: *You will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name*, by repentance and reformation. *Therefore* we should lay to heart the things of God, that we may give glory to the name of God, may praise him in and for all that whereby he has made himself known. It is bad in any to rob God of his honour, but worst in ministers, whose office and business it is to bear up his name and to give him the glory due to it. IV. Here is a record of the judgments God had brought upon these priests for their profaneness, and their profanation of holy things. 1. They had lost their comfort (v. 2): *I have already cursed your blessings*. They had not the comfort of their work, which is the satisfaction of doing good; for the blessings with which they, as priests, blessed the people, God was so far from saying *Amen* to that he turned them into curses, as he did Balaam's curses into blessings. That profane people should not have the favour of receiving God's blessings, nor those profane priests the honour of conferring and conveying them, but both should lie under the tokens of his wrath. Nor had they the comfort of their wages, for the blessings with which God blessed

them were turned into a curse to them by their abuse of them; they could not receive them as the gifts of his favour when they had made themselves so obnoxious to his displeasure by not laying to heart the reproofs given them. 2. They had lost their credit (v. 9): *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people*. While they glorified God he dignified them and supported their reputation, and a great interest they had in the love and esteem of the people while they did their duty and *walked with God in peace and equity*; every one had a value and veneration for them; they were truly styled *the reverend, the priests*; but when they forsook the ways of God, and corrupted the covenant of Levi, they thereby made themselves not only mean, but vile, in the eyes even of the common people, who, the more they honoured the order, the more they hated the men that were a dishonour to it. Their conduct, their misconduct, had a direct tendency to this, and God owns his hand in it, and will have it looked upon as a just judgment of his upon them, and not only produced by their sin but answering to it; they put dishonour upon God, and made *his table and the fruit thereof contemptible* (ch. 1:12), and therefore God justly put dishonour upon them and made them contemptible; they exposed themselves, and therefore God exposed them. Note, As sin is a reproach to any people, so especially to priests; there is not a more despicable animal upon the face of the earth than a profane, wicked, scandalous minister.

V. Here is a sentence of wrath passed upon them; and this the prophet begins with, v. 2, 3. But it is conditional: *If you will not lay it to heart*, implying, "If you will, God's anger shall be turned away, and all shall be well; but, if you persist in these wicked courses, hear your doom—Your sin will be your ruin." 1. They shall fall and lie under the curse of God: *I will send a curse upon you*. The wrath of God shall be revealed against them, according to the threatenings of the written word. Note, Those who violate the commands of the law lay themselves under the curses of the law. 2. Neither their employments nor their enjoyments, as priests, shall be clean to them: *"I will curse your blessings*, so that you shall neither be blessed yourselves nor blessings to the people, but even your plenty shall be a plague to you and you shall be plagues to your generation." 3. The fruits of the earth, which they had the tithe of, should be no comfort to them: *"Behold, I will corrupt your seed*; the corn you sow shall rot under ground and never come up again, the consequence of which must needs be famine and scarcity of provisions; so that no meat-offerings shall be brought to the altar, which the priests will soon have a loss of." Or it may be understood of the seed of the word which they preached; God threatens to deny his blessing to the instructions they gave the people, so that their labour shall be lost, as that of the husbandman is when the seed is corrupt; and so it agrees with that threatening (Jer. 23:32), *They shall not profit this people at all*. 4. They and their services shall be rejected of God; he will be so far from taking any pleasure in them that he will loathe and detest them: *I will spread dung in your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts*. He refers to the sacrifices that were offered at those feasts. Instead of being himself pleased with the fat of their sacrifices, he will show himself displeased by throwing the dung of them in their faces, which he does, in effect, when he says, *Bring no more vain oblations*; your *incense is an abomination* to me. Note, Those who rest in their external performances of religion, which they should count but *dung, that they may win Christ*, shall not only come short of acceptance with God in them, but shall be filled with shame and confusion for their folly. 5. All will end, at last, in their utter ruin: *One shall take you away with it*. They shall be so overspread with the dung of their sacrifices that they shall be carried away with it to the dunghill, as a part of it.

Any one shall serve to take you away, the common scavenger. *Reprobate silver shall men call them*, and treat them accordingly, *because the Lord has rejected them*.

Verses 10-17

Corrupt practices are the genuine fruit and product of corrupt principles; and the badness of men's hearts and lives is owing to some loose atheistical notions which they have got and which they govern themselves by. Now, in these verses, we have an instance of this; we here find men dealing falsely with one another, and it is because they think falsely of their God. Observe, I. How corrupt their practices were. In general, they *dealt treacherously every man against his brother*, v. 10. It cannot be expected that he who is false to his God should be true to his friend. They had dealt treacherously with God in his tithes and offerings, and had defrauded him, and thus conscience was debauched, its bonds and cords were broken, a door was opened to all manner of injustice and dishonesty, and the bonds of relation and natural affection are broken through likewise and no difficulty made of it. Some think that the treacherous dealings here reprov'd are the same with those instances of oppression and extortion which we find complain'd of to Nehemiah about this time, Neh. 5:3-7. Therein they forgot the God of their fathers, and the covenant of their fathers, and rendered their offerings unacceptable, Isa. 1:11. But it seems rather to refer to what was amiss in their marriages, which was likewise complain'd of, Neh. 13:23. Two things they are here charged with, as very provoking to God in this matter—taking strange wives of heathen nations, and abusing and putting away the wives they had of their own nation; in both these they dealt treacherously and violated a sacred covenant; the former was in contempt of the covenant of peculiarity, the latter of the marriage-covenant.

1. In contempt of the covenant God made with Israel, as a peculiar people to himself, they married strange wives, which was expressly prohibited, and provided against, in that covenant, Deu. 7:3. Observe here, (1.) What good reason they had to deal faithfully with God and one another in this covenant, and not to make marriages with the heathen. [1.] They were expressly bound out from such marriages by covenant. God engaged to do them good upon this condition, that they should not mingle with the heathen; this was the *covenant of their fathers*, the covenant made with their fathers, denoting the antiquity and the authority of it, and its being the great charter by which that nation was incorporated. They lay under all possible obligations to observe it strictly, yet they profaned it, as if they were not bound by it. Those profane the covenant of their fathers who live in disobedience to the command of the God of their fathers. [2.] They were a peculiar people, united in one body, and therefore ought to have united for the preserving of the honour of their peculiarity: *Have we not all one Father?* Yes, we have, for *has not one God created us?* Are we not all *his offspring?* And are we not *made of one blood?* Yes, certainly we are. God is a common Father to all mankind, and, upon that account, *all we are brethren*, members one of another, and therefore ought to *put away lying* (Eph. 4:25), and not to *deal treacherously*, no, not *any man against his brother*. But here it seems to refer to the Jewish nation: *Have we not all one father*, Abraham, or Jacob? This they prided themselves in, *We have Abraham to our father*; but here it is turned upon them as an aggravation of their sin in betraying the honour of their nation by intermarrying with heathens: *"Has not one God created us*, that is, formed us into a people, made us a nation by ourselves, and put a life into us, distinct from that of other nations? And should not this oblige us to maintain the

dignity of our character?" Note, The consideration of the unity of the church in Christ, its founder and Father, should engage us carefully to preserve the purity of the church and to guard against all corruptions. [3.] They were dedicated to God, as well as distinguished from the neighbouring nations. *Israel was holiness to the Lord* (Jer. 2:3), taken into covenant with him, set apart by him for himself, to be to him for a name and a praise, and upon this account he *loved them* and delighted in them; the sanctuary set up among them was the *holiness of the Lord, which he loved*, of which he said, *It is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it*; but by marrying strange wives they profaned this holiness, and laid the honour of it in the dust. Note, Those who are devoted to God, and beloved of him, are concerned to preserve their integrity, that they may not throw themselves out of his love, nor lose the honour, or defeat the end, of their dedication to him.

(2.) How treacherously they dealt, notwithstanding, They profaned themselves in that very thing which was prescribed to them for the preserving of the honour of their singularity: *Judah has married the daughter of a strange god*. The harm was not so much that she was the daughter of a strange nation (God has made *all nations of men*, and is himself *King of nations*), but that she was the daughter of a strange god, trained up in the service and worship of false gods, at their disposal, as a daughter at her father's disposal, and having a dependence upon them; hence some of the rabbin (quoted by Dr. Pocock) say, *He that marries a heathen woman is as if he made himself son-in-law to an idol*. The corruption of the old world began with the intermarriages of the *sons of God* with the *daughters of men*, Gen. 6:2. It is the same thing that is here complained of, but as it is expressed it sounds worse: *The sons of God married the daughters of a strange god*. Herein Judah is said to have *dealt treacherously*, for they basely betrayed their own honour and *profaned that holiness of the Lord* which they *should have loved* (so some read it); and it is said to be *an abomination committed in Israel and in Jerusalem*; it was hateful to God, and very unbecoming those that were called by his name. Note, it is an abominable thing for those who profess the holiness of the Lord to profane it, particularly by yoking themselves unequally with unbelievers.

(3.) How severely God would reckon with them for it (v. 12): *The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this*, that marries the daughter of a strange god. He has, in effect, cut himself off from the holy nation, and joined in with foreigners and *aliens to the commonwealth of Israel*, and so shall his doom be; *God will cut him off, him and all that belongs to him*; so the original intimates. He shall be cut off from Israel and from Jerusalem, and not be *written among the living* there. The Lord will cut off both *the master and the scholar*, that are guilty of this sin, both the teachers and the taught. The blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch, *both him that wakeneth and him that answereth* (so it is in the margin), for the master calls up his scholar to his business, and stirs him up in it. They shall be cut off together *out of the tabernacles of Jacob*. God will no more own them as belonging to his nation; nay, and the priest that *offers an offering to the Lord*, if he marry a strange wife (as we find many of the priests did, Ezra 10:18), shall not escape; the offering he offers shall not atone for him, but he shall be cut off from the temple of the Lord, as others from the tabernacles of Jacob. *Nehemiah chased away from him*, and from the priesthood, one of the sons of the high priest, whom he found guilty of this sin, Neh. 13:28.

2. In contempt of the marriage-covenant, which God instituted for the common benefit of mankind, they abused and put away the wives they had of their own nation, probably to make room for those strange wives, when it was all the fashion to marry

such (v. 13): *This also have you done*; this is the second article of the charge. For the way of sin is down-hill, and one violation of the covenant is an inlet to another.

(1.) Let us see what it is that is here complained of. they did not behave as they ought to have done towards their wives. [1.] They were cross with them, froward and peevish, and made their lives bitter to them, so that when they came with their wives and families to worship God at the solemn feasts, which they should have done with rejoicing, they were all out of humour; the poor wives were ready to break their hearts, and, not daring to make their case known to any other, they complained to God, and *covered the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying*. This is illustrated by the instance of Hannah, who, upon the account of her husband's having another wife (though otherwise a kind husband), and the discontent thence arising, whenever they went up to the house of the Lord to worship *fretted and wept*, and was in *bitterness of soul*, and *would not eat*, 1 Sa. 1:6, 7, 10. So it was with these wives here; and this was so contrary to the cheerfulness which God requires in his worshippers that it spoiled the acceptableness of their devotions: God *regards not their offering any more*. See here what a good Master we serve, who will not have his altar covered with tears, but compassed with songs. This condemns those who left his worship for that of idols, among the rites of which we find *women weeping for Tammuz* (Eze. 8:14), and the blood of the worshippers gushing out upon the altar, 1 Ki. 18:28. See also what a wicked thing it is to put others out of frame for the cheerful worship of God; though it is their fault by their fretfulness to indispose themselves for their duty, yet it is much more the fault of those who *provoked them to make them to fret*. It is a reason given why yoke-fellows should live in holy love and joy—that *their prayers may not be hindered*, 1 Pt. 3:7. [2.] They dealt treacherously with them, v. 14–16. They did not perform their promises to them, but defrauded them of their maintenance or dower, or took in concubines, to share in the affection that was due to their wives only. [3.] They *put them away*, gave them a bill of divorce, and turned them off, nay, perhaps they did it without the ceremony that the law of Moses prescribed, v. 16. [4.] In all this *they covered violence with their garment*; they abused their wives, and were vexatious to them, and yet, in the sight of others, they pretended to be very loving to them and tender of them, and to cast a skirt over them. It is common for those who do violence to advance some specious pretence or other wherewith to cover it as with a garment.

(2.) Let us see the proof and aggravations of the charge. [1.] It is sufficiently proved by the testimony of God himself: "*The Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth* (v. 14), has been witness to the marriage-covenant between thee and her, for to him you appealed concerning your sincerity in it and fidelity to it; he has been a witness to all the violations of it, and all thy treacherous dealings in contempt of it, and is ready to judge between thee and her." Note, This should engage us to be faithful both to God and to all with whom we have to do, that God himself is a witness both to all our covenants and to all our covenant-breaches; and he is a witness against whom there lies no exception. [2.] It is highly aggravated by the consideration of the person wronged and abused. *First*, "She is *thy wife*; thy own, bone of thy bone and flesh of thy flesh, the nearest to thee of all the relations thou hast in the world, and to cleave to whom thou must quit the rest." *Secondly*, "She is *the wife of thy youth*, who had thy affections when they were at the strongest, was thy first choice, and with whom thou hast lived long. Let not the darling of thy youth be the scorn and loathing of thy age." *Thirdly*, "She is *thy companion*; she has long been

an equal sharer with thee in thy cares, and griefs, and joys." The wife is to be looked upon, not as a servant, but as a companion to the husband, with whom he should freely converse and *take sweet counsel*, as with a friend, and in whose company he should take delight more than in any other's; for *is she not* appointed to be *thy companion*? *Fourthly*, "She is *the wife of thy covenant*, to whom thou art so firmly bound that, while she continues faithful, thou canst not be loosed from her, for it was a covenant for life. It is the wife with whom thou hast covenanted, and who has covenanted with thee; there is an oath of God between you, which is not to be trifled with, is not to be played fast and loose with." Married people should often call to mind their marriage-vows, and review them with all seriousness, as those that make conscience of performing what they promised. (3.) Let us see the reasons given why man and wife should continue together, to their lives' end, in holy love and peace, and neither quarrel with each other nor separate from each other. [1.] Because god has joined them together (v. 15): *Did not he make one*, one Eve for one Adam, that Adam might never *take another to her to vex her* (Lev. 18:18), nor put her away to make room for another? It is great wickedness to complain of the law of marriage as a confinement, when Adam in innocency, in honour, in Eden, in the garden of pleasure, was confined to one. Yet *God had the residue of the Spirit*; he could have made another Eve, as amiable as that he did make, but, designing *Adam a help meet for him*, he made him *one wife*; had he made him more, he would not have had a *meet help*. And wherefore did he make but one woman for one man? It was *that he might seek a godly seed—a seed of God* (so the word is), a seed that should bear the image of God, be employed in the service of God, and be devoted to his glory and honour,—that *every man having his own wife*, and *but one*, according to the law, (1 Co. 7:2), they might live in chaste and holy love, under the directions and restraints of the divine law, and not, as brute beasts, under the dominion of lust, and thus might propagate the nature of man in such a way as might make it most likely to participate of a divine nature,—that the children, being born in holy matrimony, which is an ordinance of God, and by which the inclinations of nature are kept under the regulations of God's command, might thus be made a *seed to serve him*, and be bred, as they are born, under his direction and dominion. Note, The raising up of a godly seed, which shall be *accounted to the Lord for a generation*, is one great end of the institution of marriage; but that is a good reason why the marriage-bed should be kept undefiled and the marriage bond inviolable. Husbands and wives must *therefore* live in the fear of God, that their seed may be a godly seed, else were they *unclean*, but *now they are holy, as children of the covenant*, the marriage-covenant, which was a type of the covenant of grace, and the conjugal union, when thus preserved entire, of the mystical union between Christ and his church, in which he seeks and secures to himself a godly seed; see Eph. 5:25, 32. [2.] Because he is much displeased with those who go about to put asunder *what he has joined together* (v. 16): *The God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away*. He hath indeed permitted it to the Jews, *for the hardness of their hearts*, or, rather, limited and clogged it (Mt. 19:8); but *he hated* it, especially as those practised it who *put away their wives for every cause*, Mt. 19:3. Let those wives that elope from their husbands and put themselves away, those husbands that are cruel to their wives and turn them away, or take their affections off from their wives and place them upon others, yea, and those husbands and wives that live asunder by consent, for want of love to each other, let such as these know that the God of Israel hates such practices, however vain men may make a jest of them.

(4.) Let us see the caution inferred from all this. We have it twice (v. 15): *Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth*; and again, v. 16. Note, Those that would be kept from sin must *take heed to their spirits*, for there all sin begins; they must keep their hearts with all diligence, must keep a jealous eye upon them and a strict hand, and must watch against the first risings of sin there. We shall act as we are spirited; and therefore, that we may regulate our actions, we must consider *what manner of spirit we are of*; we must *take heed to our spirits* with reference to our particular relations, and see that we stand rightly affected to them and be of a good temper, for otherwise we shall be in danger of dealing treacherously. If our own hearts deal treacherously with us, whom will they not deal treacherously with?

II. Observe how corrupt their principles were, to which were owing all these corrupt practices. Let us trace up the streams to the fountain (v. 17): *You have wearied the Lord with your words*. They thought to evade the convictions of the word, and to justify themselves by cavilling with God's proceedings; but their defence was their offence, and their vindication of themselves was the aggravation of their crime; they affronted the Lord with their words, and repeated them so often, and persisted so long in their contradictions, that they even *wearied him*; see Isa. 7:13. They made him weary of doing them good as he had done, and stopped the current of his favours; or they represented him as weary of governing the world, and willing to quit it and lay aside the care of it. Note, It is a wearisome thing, even to God himself, to hear people insist upon their own justification in their corrupt and wicked practices, and plead their atheistical principles in vindication of them. But, as if God by his prophet had done them wrong, see how impudently they ask, *Wherein have we wearied him?* What are those vexatious words whereby we have wearied him? Note, Sinful words are more offensive to the God of heaven than they are commonly thought to be. But God has his proofs ready; two things they had said, at least in their hearts (and thoughts are words to God), with which they had wearied him:—1. They had denied him to be a holy God, and had asserted that concerning him which is directly contrary to the doctrine of his holiness. As he is a holy God, he hates sin, *is of purer eyes than to behold it, and cannot endure to look upon it*, Hab. 1:13. He *is not a God that has pleasure in wickedness*, Ps. 5:4. And yet they had the impudence to say, in direct contradiction to this, *Every one that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them*. This wicked inference they drew, without any reason, from the prosperity of sinners in their sinful courses (see ch. 3:15), as if God's love or hatred were to be known by that which is before us, and those must be concluded *good in the sight of the Lord* who are rich in the world. Or this they said because they wished it might be so; they were resolved to *do evil*, and yet to think themselves *good in the sight of the Lord*, and to believe that *he delighted in them*, notwithstanding; and therefore, under pretence of making God not so severe as he was commonly represented, they said as they would have it, and thought he was *altogether such a one as themselves*. Note, Those who think God a friend to sin affront him and deceive themselves. 2. They had denied him to be the righteous governor of the world. If he did not delight in sin and sinners, yet it would serve their turn to believe that he would never punish it or them. They said, *"Where is the God of judgment?"* That God who, we have been so often told, would call us to an account, and reckon with us for what we have said and done—where is he? He has forsaken the earth, and takes no notice of what is said and done there; he has said that he will *come to judgment*; but *where is the promise of his coming?* We may do what we please; he sees us not, nor will regard us." It is such a challenge to the Judge of the whole earth as bids defiance to his

justice, and, in effect, dares him to *do his worst*. Such scoffers as these there were in the latter days of the Jewish church, and such there shall be in the latter days of the Christian church; but their unbelief shall not make the promise of God of no effect; for the day of the Lord will come. *Behold, the Judge stands before the door; the God of judgment is at hand.*

Chapter 3

In this chapter we have, I. A promise of the coming of the Messiah, and of his forerunner; and the errand he comes upon is here particularly described, both the comfort which his coming brings to his church and people and the terror which it will bring to the wicked (v. 1-6). II. A reproof of the Jews for their corrupting God's ordinances and sacrilegiously robbing him of his dues, with a charge to them to amend this matter, and a promise that, if they did, God would return in mercy to them (v. 7-12). III. A description of the wickedness of the wicked that speak against God (v. 13-15), and of the righteousness of the righteous that speak for him, with the precious promises made to them (v. 16-18).

Verses 1-6

The first words of this chapter seem a direct answer to the profane atheistical demand of the scoffers of those days which closed the foregoing chapter: *Where is the God of judgment?* To which it is readily answered, "Here he is; he is just at the door; the long-expected Messiah is ready to appear; and he says, *For judgment have I come into this world*, for that judgment which you have so impudently bid defiance to." One of the rabbins says that the meaning of this is, That God will raise up a righteous King, to set things in order, even *the king Messiah*. And the *beginning of the gospel of Christ* is expressly said to be the accomplishment of this promise, with which the Old Testament concludes, Mk. 1:1, 2. So that by this the two Testaments are, as it were, tacked together, and made to answer one another. Now here we have,

I. A prophecy of the appearing of his forerunner John the Baptist, which the prophet Isaiah had foretold (ch. 40:3), as the *preparing of the way of the Lord*, to which this seems to have a reference, for the words of the latter prophets confirmed those of the former: *Behold, I will send my messenger, or I do send him, or I am sending him.* "I am determined to send him; he will now shortly come, and will not come unsent, though to a careless generation he comes unsent for." Observe, 1. He is *God's messenger*; that is his office; he is *Malachi* (so the word is), the same with the name of this prophet; he is *my angel*, my *ambassador*. John Baptist had his commission *from heaven, and not of men*. All held John Baptist for a prophet, for he was God's messenger, as the prophets were, and came on the same errand to the world that they were sent upon—to call men to repentance and reformation. 2. He is Christ's harbinger: He *shall prepare the way before me*, by calling men to those duties which qualify them to receive the comforts of the Messiah and his coming, and by taking them off from a confidence in their relation to Abraham *as their father* (which, they thought, would serve their turn without a saviour), and by giving notice that the Messiah was now at hand, and so raising men's expectations of him, and making them readily to go into the measures he would take for the setting up of his kingdom in the world. Note, God observes a method in his work, and, before he comes, takes care to have his way prepared. This is like the giving of a sign. The church was told, long before, that the Messiah would come; and here it is added that, a little before he appears, there shall be a signal given; a great prophet shall arise, that shall give notice of his approach, and call to the everlasting gates and doors to *lift up their heads* and give him admission. The accomplishment of this is a proof that *Jesus is the Christ*, is he that *should come*, and we are to *look for no other*; for there was such a messenger sent before him, who *made ready a people prepared for the Lord*, Lu. 1:17. The Jewish writers run into gross

absurdities to evade the conviction of this evidence; some of them say that this messenger is the *angel of death*, who shall take the wicked out of this life, to be sent into hell torments; others of them say that it is Messiah the son of Joseph, who shall appear before Messiah the son of David; others, this prophet himself; others, an angel from heaven: such mistakes do those run into that will not receive the truth.

II. A prophecy of the appearing of the Messiah himself: "*The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the God of judgment*, who, you think, has forsaken the earth, and you wot not what has become of him. The Messiah has been long called *he that should come*, and you may assure yourselves that now shortly he will come." 1. He is *the Lord—Adonai*, the basis and foundation on which the world is founded and fastened, the ruler and governor of all, that one *Lord over all* (Acts 10:36) that has all power committed to him (Mt. 28:18) and is to *reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, Lu. 1:33. 2. He is the *Messenger of the covenant*, or the *angel of the covenant*, that *blessed one* that was *sent* from heaven to negotiate a peace, and settle a correspondence, between God and man. He is the *angel*, the *archangel*, the Lord of the angels, who received commission from the Father to bring man home to God by a covenant of grace, who had revolted from him by the violation of the covenant of innocency. Christ is the *angel of this covenant*, by whose mediation it is brought about and established as God's covenant with Israel was made by the *disposition of angels*, Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19. Christ, as a prophet, is the *messenger* and *mediator* of the covenant; nay, he is *given for a covenant*, Isa. 49:8. That covenant which is all our *salvation began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. 2:3. Though he is the *prince of the covenant* (as some read this) yet he condescended to be the *messenger of it*, that we might have full assurance of God's good-will towards man, upon his word. 3. He it is *whom you seek, whom you delight in*, whom the pious Jews expect and desire, and whose coming they think of with a great deal of pleasure. In looking and waiting for him, they *looked for redemption in Jerusalem and waited for the consolation of Israel*, Lu. 2:25, 38. Christ was to be the *desire of all nations*, desirable to all (Hag. 2:7); but he was *the desire* of the Jewish nation actually, because they had the promise of his coming made to them. Note, Those that seek Jesus shall find pleasure in him. If he be our heart's desire he will be our heart's delight; and we have reason to delight in him who is the *messenger of the covenant*, and to bid him welcome who came to us on so kind an errand. 4. He *shall suddenly come*; his coming draws nigh, and we see it not at so great a distance as the patriarchs saw it at. Or, He shall come immediately after the appearing of John Baptist, shall even tread on the heels of his forerunner; when that *morning-star* appears, believe that the *Sun of righteousness* is not far off. Or, He *shall come suddenly*, that is, he shall come when by many he is not looked for; as his second coming will be, so his first coming was, *at midnight*, when some had done looking for him, for *shall he find faith on the earth?* Lu. 18:8. The Jews reckon the Messiah among the things that come *unawares*; so Dr. Pocock. And the coming of the Son of man in his day is said to be *as the lightning*, which is very surprising, Lu. 17:24. 5. He *shall come to his temple*, this temple at Jerusalem, which was lately built, that *latter house* which he was to be the glory of. It is his temple, for it is *his Father's house*, Jn. 2:16. Christ, at forty days old, was presented in the temple, and thither Simeon went *by the Spirit*, according to the direction of this prophecy, to see him, Lu. 2:27. At twelve years old he was in the temple *about his Father's business*, Lu. 2:49. When he rode in triumph into Jerusalem, it should seem that he went directly *to the temple* (Mt. 21:12), and (v. 14) thither the *blind and the lame came to*

him to be healed; there he often preached, and often disputed, and often wrought miracles. By this it appears that the Messiah was to come while *that temple* was standing; that, therefore, being long since destroyed, we must conclude that he has come, and we are to look for no other. Note, Those that would be acquainted with Christ and obtain his favour must meet him in his temple, for there he *records his name* and there he will bless his people. There we must receive his oracles and there we must pay our homage. 6. The promise of this coming is repeated and ratified: *Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts*; you may depend upon his word, who cannot lie, he *shall come*, he *will come*, he *will not tarry*.

III. An account given of the great ends and intentions of his coming, v. 2. He is one whom they seek, and one whom they delight in; and yet *who may abide the day of his coming*? It is a thing to be thought of with great seriousness, and with a holy awe and reverence; for *who shall stand when he appears*, though he comes not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life? This may refer,

1. To the terrors of his appearance. Even in the days of his flesh there were some emanations of his glory and power, such as none could stand before, witness his transfiguration, and the prodigies that attended his death; and we read of some that trembled before him, as Mk. 5:33.

2. To the troublous times that should follow soon after. The Jewish doctors speak of the *pangs* or *griefs* of the Messiah, meaning (they say) the great afflictions that should be to Israel at the time of his coming; he himself speaks of great tribulation then approaching, *such as was not since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be*, Mt. 24:21.

3. To the trial which his coming would make of the children of men. *He shall be like a refiner's fire*, which separates between the gold and the dross by melting the ore, or *like fuller's soap*, which with much rubbing fetches the spots out of the cloth. Christ came to discover men, *that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed* (Lu. 2:35), to distinguish men, to separate between the precious and the vile, for *his fan in his hand* (Mt. 3:12), to *send fire on the earth, not peace, but rather division* (Lu. 12:49, 51), to *shake heaven and earth*, that the *wicked* might be *shaken out* (Job 38:13) and *that the things which cannot be shaken might remain*, Heb. 12:27. See what the effect of the trial will be that shall be made by the gospel.

(1.) The gospel shall work good upon those that are disposed to be good, to them it shall be a savour of life unto life (v. 3): *He shall sit as a refiner*. Christ by his gospel shall purify and reform his church, and by his Spirit working with it shall regenerate and cleanse particular souls; for to this end he gave himself for the church, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word* (Eph. 5:26) and *purify to himself a peculiar people*, Tit. 2:14. Christ is the great refiner. Observe, [1.] Who they are that he will purify—*the sons of Levi*, all those that are devoted to his praise and employed in his service, as the tribe of Levi was, and whom he designs to make unto our God spiritual priests (Rev. 1:6), a *holy priesthood*, 1 Pt. 2:5.

Note, All true Christians are sons of Levi, set apart for God, to do the service of his sanctuary, and to *war the good warfare*. [2.] How he will purify them; he will *purge them as gold and silver*, that is, he will sanctify them inwardly; he will not only wash away the spots they have contracted from without, but will take away the dross that is found in them; he will separate from them their indwelling corruptions, which rendered their faculties worthless and useless, and so make them like gold refined, both valuable and serviceable. *He will purge them* with fire, *as gold and silver are purged*, for *he baptizes with the*

Holy Ghost and with fire (Mt. 3:11), with the Holy Ghost working like fire. He will purge them by *afflictions and manifold temptations*, that the *trial of their faith* may be *found to praise and honour*, 1 Pt. 1:6, 7. He will purge them so as to make them a precious people to himself. [3.] What will be the effect of it: *That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness*, that is, that they may be in sincerity converted to God and consecrated to his praise (hence we read of the *offering up*, or *sacrificing, of the Gentiles* to God, when they were *sanctified by the holy Ghost*, Rom. 15:16), and that they may in a spiritual manner worship God according to his will, may *offer the sacrifices of righteousness*, (Ps. 4:5), the offering of prayer, and praise, and holy love, that they may be the *true worshippers*, who *worship the Father in spirit and in truth*, Jn. 4:23, 24. Note, We cannot offer unto the Lord any right performances in religion unless our persons be justified and sanctified. Till we ourselves be refined and purified by the grace of God, we cannot do any thing that will redound to the glory of God. God had respect to Abel first, and then to his offering; and *therefore* God purges his people, that they may offer their offerings to him in righteousness, Zep. 3:9. He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good. And then it follows (v. 4), *The offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord*. It shall no longer be offensive, as it has been, when, in the former days, they worshipped other gods with the God of Israel, or when, in the present days, they brought the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice; but it shall be *acceptable*; he will be pleased with the offerers, and their offerings, *as in the days of old and as in former years*, as in the primitive times of the church, as when God had respect to Abel's sacrifice and smelled a savour of rest from Noah's, and when he kindled Aaron's sacrifice with fire from heaven. When the Messiah comes, *First*, He will, by his grace in them, make them acceptable; when he has purified and refined them, then they shall offer such sacrifices as God requires and will accept. *Secondly*, He will, by his intercession for them, make them accepted; he will recommend them and their performances to God, so that their prayers, being perfumed with the incense of his intercession, shall be pleasant unto the Lord; for he has *made us accepted in the Beloved*, and in him is well pleased with those that are in him (Mt. 3:17) and bring forth fruit in him.

(2.) It shall turn for a testimony against those that are resolved to go on in their wickedness, v. 5. This is the direct answer to their challenge, *"Where is the God of judgment? You shall know where he is, and shall know it to your terror and confusion, for I will come near to you to judgment; to you that set divine justice at defiance."* To them the gospel of Christ will be a *savour of death unto death*; it will bind them over to condemnation and will judge them in the great day, Jn. 12:48. Let us see here, [1.] Who the sinners are that must appear to be judged by the gospel of Christ. They are the *sorcerers*, who died in spiritual wickedness, that forsake the oracles of the God of truth to consult the father of lies; and the *adulterers*, who wallow in the lusts of the flesh, those adulterers who were charged with *dealing treacherously* (ch. 2:15); and the *false swearers*, who profane God's name and affront his justice, by calling him to witness to a lie; and the oppressors, who barbarously injure and trample upon those who lie at their mercy, and are not able to help themselves: they *defraud the hireling in his wages* and will not give him what he agreed for; they crush *the widow and fatherless*, and will not pay them their just debts, because they cannot prove them, or have not wherewithal to sue for them; the poor *stranger* too, who has no friend to stand by him and is ignorant of the laws of the country, they *turn aside from his right*, so that he cannot keep or cannot recover his own. That

which is at the bottom of all this is, *They fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts*. The *transgression of the wicked* plainly declares that there is no fear of God before his eyes. Where no fear of God is no good is to be expected. [2.] Who will appear against them: *I will come near*, says God, *and will be a swift witness against them*. They justify themselves, and, their sins having been artfully concealed, hope to escape punishment for want of proof; but God, who sees and knows all things, will himself be witness against them, and his omniscience is instead of a thousand witnesses, for to it the sinner's own conscience shall be made to subscribe, and so *every mouth shall be stopped*. He will be a swift witness; though they reflect upon him as slow and dilatory, and ask, *Where is the God of judgment*, and where the promise of his coming? they will find that *he is not slack* concerning his threatenings any more than he is concerning his promises. Judgment against those sinners shall not be put off for want of evidence, for he will be a swift witness. His judgment shall overtake them, and it shall be impossible for them to outrun it. *Evil pursues sinners*.

IV. The ratification of all this (v. 6): *For I am the Lord; I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed*. Here we have, 1. God's immutability asserted by Himself, and glorified in: *"I am the Lord; I change not;* and therefore no word that I have spoken shall fall to the ground." Is God a just revenger of those that rebel against him? Is he the bountiful rewarder of those that diligently seek him? In both these he is unchangeable. Though the sentence passed against evil works (v. 5) be not executed speedily, yet it will be executed, for he is *the Lord*; he *changes not*; he is as much an enemy to sin as ever he was, and impenitent sinners will find him so. There needs no *scire facias*—*a writ calling one to show cause*, to revive God's judgment, for it is never antiquated, or out of date, but against those that go on still in their trespasses the curse of his law still remains *in full force, power, and virtue*. 2. A particular proof of it, from the comfortable experience which the people of Israel had had of it. They had reason to say that he was an unchangeable God, for he had been faithful to his covenant with them and their fathers; if he had not adhered to that, they would have been consumed long ago and cut off from being a people; they had been false and fickle in their conduct to him, and he might justly have abandoned them, and then they would soon have been consumed and ruined; but because he *remembered his covenant*, and would not violate that, nor alter the thing that had gone forth out of his lips, they were preserved from ruin and recovered from the brink of it. It was purely because he would be as good as his word, Deu. 7:8; Lev. 26:42. Now as God had kept them from ruin, while the covenant of peculiarity remained in force, purely because he would be faithful to that covenant, and would show that *he is not a man that he should lie* (Num. 23:19), so, when that covenant should be superseded and set aside by the New Testament, and they, by rejecting the blessings of it, lay themselves open to the curses, he will show that in the determinations of his wrath, as well as in those of his mercy, *he is not a man, that he should repent*, but will then be as true to his threatenings as hitherto he had been to his promises; see 1 Sa. 15:29. We may all apply this very sensibly to ourselves; because we have to do with a God that *changes not*, therefore it is that *we are not consumed*, even *because his compassions fail not; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness*, Lam. 3:22, 23.

Verses 7-12

We have here God's controversy with the men of that generation, for deserting his service and robbing him—wicked servants

indeed, that not only run away from their Master, but run away with their Master's goods.

I. They had run away from their Master, and quitted the work he gave them to do (v. 7): *You have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them*. The ordinances of God's worship were the business which as servants they must mind, the talents which they must trade with, and the trust which was committed to them to keep; but they went away from them, grew weary of them, and withdrew their neck from that yoke; they deviated from the rule that God had prescribed to them, and betrayed the trust lodged with them. They had revolted from God, not only in worship, but in conversation; they had not *kept his ordinances*. This disobedience they were chargeable with, and had been guilty of, even *from the days of their fathers*; either as in the days of their fathers of old, who were sent into captivity for their disobedience, or, "Now, for some generations past, you have fallen off from what you were, when first you came back out of captivity." Ezra owns it in one particular instance: *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day*, Ezra 9:7. Now observe, 1. What a gracious invitation God gives them to return and repent: *"Return unto me*, and to your duty, return to your service, return to your allegiance, return as a traveller that has missed his way, as a soldier that has run his colours, as a treacherous wife that has gone away from her husband; return, thou backsliding Israel, return to me; and then *I will return unto you* and be reconciled, will remove the judgments you are under and prevent those you fear." This had been of old the burden of the song (Zec. 1:3), and is still. 2. What a peevish answer they return to this gracious invitation: *"But you said* with disdain, said it to the prophets that called you, said it to one another, said it to your own hearts, to stifle the convictions you were under; you said, *Wherein shall we return?"* Note, God takes notice what returns our hearts make to the calls of his word, what we say and what we think when we have heard a sermon, what answer we give to the message sent us. When God calls us to *return*, we should answer as those did Jer. 3:22, *Behold, we come*. But not as these here, *Wherein shall we return?* (1.) They take it as an affront to be *told of their faults*, and called upon to amend them; they are ready to say, "What ado do these prophets make about returning and repenting; why are we disgraced and disturbed thus, our own consciences and our neighbours stirred up against us?" It is ill with those who thus count reproofs reproaches, and *kick against the pricks*. (2.) They are so ignorant of themselves, and of the strictness, extent, and spiritual nature, of the divine law, that they see nothing in themselves to be repented of, or reformed; they are pure in their own eyes, and think they need no repentance. (3.) They are so firmly resolved to go on in sin that they will find a thousand foolish frivolous excuses to shift off their repentance, and turn away the calls that are given them to repent. They seem to speak only as those that wanted something to say; it is a mere evasion, a banter upon the prophet, and a challenge to him to descend to particulars. Note, Many ruin their own souls by baffling the calls that are given them to repent of their sins.

II. They had robbed their Master, and embezzled his goods. They had asked, *"Wherein shall we return?"* What have we done amiss?" And he soon tells them. Observe, 1. The prophet's high charge exhibited, in God's name, against the people. They stand indicted for robbery, for sacrilege, the worst of robberies: *You have robbed me*. He expostulates with them upon it: *Will a man* be so daringly impudent as to *rob God?* Man, who is a weak creature, and cannot contend with God's power, will he think to rob him *vi et armis—forcibly?* Man, who lies open to God's knowledge, and cannot conceal himself from that, will he think to rob him *clam et secreto—privily?* Man, who depends upon God, and derives his all from him, will he rob him that is his

benefactor? This is ungrateful, unjust, and unkind, indeed; and it is very unwise thus to provoke him from whom our judgment proceeds. *Will a man do violence to God?* so some read it. *Will a man do violence to God?* so some read it. *Will a man stint or straiten him?* so others read it. Robbing God is a heinous crime. 2. The people's high challenge in answer to that charge: *But you say, Wherein have we robbed thee?* They plead *Not guilty*, and put God upon the proof of it. Note, Robbing God is such a heinous crime that those who are guilty of it are not willing to own themselves guilty. They rob God, and know not what they do. They rob him of his honour, rob him of that which is devoted to him, to be employed in his service, rob him of themselves, rob him of sabbath-time, rob him of that which is given for the support of religion, and give him not his dues out of their estates; and yet they ask, *Wherein have we robbed thee?* 3. The plain proof of the charge, in answer to this challenge; it is *in tithes and offerings*. Out of these the priests and Levites had maintenance for themselves and their families; but they detained them, defrauded the priests of them, would not pay their tithes, or not in full, or not of the best; they brought not the offerings which God required, or brought the torn, and lame, and sick, which were not fit for use. They were all guilty of this sin, even *the whole nation*, as if they were in confederacy against God, and all combined to rob him of his dues and to stand by one another in it when they had done. For this they were *cursed with a curse*, v. 9. God punished them with famine and scarcity, through unseasonable weather, or insects that ate up the fruits of the earth. God had thus punished them for neglecting to build the temple (Hag. 1:10, 11), and now for not maintaining the temple-service. Note, Those that deny God his part of their estates may justly expect a curse upon their own part of them: *"You are cursed with a curse for robbing me, and yet you go on to do it."* Note, It is a great aggravation of sin when men persist in it notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence which they are under for it. Nay, it should seem, because God had punished them with scarcity of bread, they made that a pretence for robbing him—that now, being impoverished, they could not afford to bring their tithes and offerings, but must save them, that they might have bread for their families. Note, It argues great perverseness in sin when men make those afflictions excuses for sin which are sent to part between them and their sins. When they had but little they should have done the more good with that little, and that would have been the way to make it more; but it is ill with the patient when that which should cure the disease serves only to palliate it, and prevent its being searched into. 4. An earnest exhortation to reform in this matter, with a promise that if they did the judgments they were under should be quickly removed. (1.) Let them take care to do their duty (v. 10): *Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse*. They had brought some; but, like Ananias and Sapphira, had *kept back part of the price*, pretending they could not spare so much as was required, and *necessity has no law*; but even necessity must have this law, and it would redress the grievance of their necessity: *"Bring in the full tithes to the utmost that the law requires, that there may be meat in God's house for those that serve at the altar, whether there be meat in your houses or no."* Note, God must be served in the first place, and our quota must be contributed for the support of religion in the place where we live, that God's name may be sanctified, and his kingdom may come, and his will be done, even before we provide our daily bread; for the interests of our souls ought to be preferred before those of our bodies. (2.) Let them then trust God to provide for them and their comfort "Let God be first served, and then *prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, whether I will not open the windows of heaven.*" They said, "Let God give us our plenty again, as formerly, and try us whether we will not then bring him his tithes and offerings, as

we did formerly." "No," says God, "do you first bring in all your tithes as they become due, and all the arrears of what is past, and try me, whether I will not then restore you your plenty." Note, Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust; and we may all venture to do so, for, though many have been losers for him, never any were losers by him in the end. It is fit that we should venture first, for *his reward is with him*, but *his work is before him*; we must first do the work which is our part, and then try him and trust him for the reward. Elijah put the widow of Zarephath into this method when he said (1 Ki. 17:13), "*Make me a little cake first*, and then prove me whether there shall not be enough afterwards *for thee and thy son*." That which discourages people from the expenses of charity is the weakness of their faith concerning the gains and advantages of charity; they cannot think that they shall get by it. But it is a reasonable demand that God here makes: "*Prove me now*; is any thing to be got by charity? *Come and see*;" Nothing venture, nothing win. Trust upon honour, "And you shall find," [1.] "That, whereas the heavens have been shut up, and there has been no rain, now God will *open* to you *the windows of heaven*, for in his hand the key of the clouds is, and you shall have seasonable rain." Or the expression is figurative; every good gift coming from above, thence God will plentifully pour out upon them the bounties of his providence. Very sudden plenty is expressed by *opening the windows of heaven*, 2 Ki. 7:2. We find the *windows of heaven opened*, to pour down a deluge of wrath, in Noah's flood, Gen. 7:11. But here they are opened to *pour down blessings*, to such a degree that there should not be *room enough to receive* them. So plentifully shall their ground bring forth that they shall be tempted to *pull down their barns and build greater*, for want of room, Lu. 12:18. Or, as Dr. Pocock explains it, "I will pour out on you such a blessing as shall be not *enough only*, and such as shall be sufficient, but *more and more than enough*;" that is, a great addition. The oil that is multiplied shall not be stayed as long as there are vessels to receive it, 2 Ki. 4:6. Note, God will not only be reconciled to sinners that repent and reform, but he will be a benefactor, a bountiful benefactor, to them. We are never straitened in him, but often straitened in our own bosoms. God has blessings ready to bestow upon us, but, through the weakness of our faith and narrowness of our desires, we have not room to receive them. [2.] That, whereas the fruits of their ground had been eaten up by locusts and caterpillars God would now remove that judgment (v. 11): "*I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes*, and will check the progress of those destroying animals, that they shall no more destroy the products of the earth and the fruits of the trees." God has all creatures at his beck, can command them and remand them at his pleasure. *Neither shall the vine cast her fruit before the time*; it shall not be blasted or blown off. Or, as some read it, *Neither shall the devourer make your vine barren*, as the locusts did, Joel 1:7. [3.] That, whereas their neighbours had upbraided them with their scarcity, and they had lain under the *reproach of famine*, which was the more grievous because their country used to be boasted of for its plenty, now *all nations shall call them blessed*, shall speak honourably of them, and own them to be a happy people. [4.] That whereas their sin had made their land unpleasing to God (even their temple, and altars, and offerings were so, ch. 2:13), and whereas his judgments had made their land unpleasant to them, and very melancholy, "Now *you shall be a delightsome land*, your country shall be acceptable to God and comfortable to yourselves." Note, The reviving of religion in a land will make it indeed a delightsome land both to God and to all good people; he will say, It is *my rest for ever; here will I dwell*; and they will say the same, Isa. 62:4; Deu. 11:12. It should seem that this charge to bring in the tithes had its good effect, for we find (Neh. 13:12) that *all Judah did bring in their tithe into the*

treasuries, and, no doubt, they had the benefit of these promises, in the return of their plenty, immediately upon their return to their duty, that they might plainly discern for what cause the evil had been upon them (for when the cause was removed the evil was removed), and that they might see how perfectly reconciled God was to them upon their repentance, and how their transgression was remembered no more, for the curse was not only taken away, but turned into an abundant blessing.

Verses 13-18

Among the people of the Jews at this time, though they all enjoyed the same privileges and advantages, there were men of very different characters (as ever were, and ever will be, in the world and in the church), like Jeremiah's figs, some very good and others very bad, some that plainly appeared to be the children of God and others that as plainly discovered themselves to be the children of the wicked one. There are tares and wheat in the same field, chaff and corn in the same floor; and here we have an account of both.

I. Here is the angry notice God takes of the impudent blasphemous talk of the sinners in Zion and his just resentments of it. Probably there was a club of them that were in league against religion, that set up for wits, and set their wits on work to run it down and ridicule it, and herein strengthened one another's hands. Here is,

1. An indictment found against them, for treasonable words spoken against the King of kings: *Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. They spoke against God*, in reflection upon him, in contradiction to him, as their fathers *in the wilderness* (Ps. 70:19); *yea, they spoke against God*. What he said, and what he designed, they opposed, as if they had been retained of counsel against him and his cause. Their words against God were *stout*; they came from their pride, and haughtiness, and contempt of God. What they said against God they spoke loudly, as if they cared not who heard them; they were not themselves ashamed to say it, and they desired to propagate their atheistical notions and to infect the minds of others with them. They spoke it boldly, as those that were resolved to stand to it, and were in no fear of being called to an account. They spoke it proudly, and with insolence and disdain, scorning to be under the divine check and government. They *strengthened themselves*; they would be valiant *against the Almighty*, Job 15:25.

2. Their plea to this indictment. They said, *What have we spoken so much against thee?* They deny the words, and put the prophet to prove them; or, if they spoke the words, they did not design them against God, and therefore will not own there was any harm in them; at least they extenuate the matter: *What have we spoken so much against thee*, so much that there needs all this ado about it? They cannot deny that they have spoken against God, but they make a light matter of it, and wonder it should be taken notice of: *"Words"* (say they) *"are but wind"*; others have said more and done worse; if we are not so good as we should be, yet we hope we are not so bad as we are represented to be." Note, It is common for sinners that are unconvinced and unhumiliated to deny or extenuate the faults they are justly charged with, and to insist upon their own justification, against the reproofs of the word and of their own consciences. But it will be to no purpose.

3. The words themselves which they are charged with. God keeps an account of what men say, as well as of what they do, and will let them know that he does so. We quickly forget what we have said, and are ready to deny what we have said amiss; but God can say, *You have said* so and so. They had said it as their deliberate judgment.

(1.) That there is nothing to be got in the service of God, thought it is a service that subjects men to labour and sorrow. They said, *It is vain to serve God*, or, *"He is vain that serves God*, that is, he labours in vain and to no purpose; he has his labour for his pains, and therefore is a fool for his labour. *What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, or his observation*, that we have observed what he has appointed us to observe?" *What mammon, or wealth*, have we gained, says the Chaldee, intimating (says Dr. Pocock) that it was for mammon's sake only that they served God, and so indeed not God at all, but mammon. "We have walked *mournfully*, or *in black*, with great gravity and great grief, *before the Lord of hosts*, have afflicted our souls at the times appointed for that purpose, and yet we are never the better." Perhaps this comes in as a reason why they would not trust God to prosper them upon their *bringing in the tithes* (v. 10); "For," say they, "we have tried him in other things, and have lost by him." This is a very unjust and unreasonable reflection upon the service of God, and we can call witnesses enough to confront the slander. [1.] They would have it thought that they had served God and had kept his ordinances, whereas it was only the external observance of them that they had kept up, while they were perfect strangers to the inward part of the duty, and therefore might say, It is *in vain*. God says so (Mt. 15:9), *In vain do those worship me whose hearts are far from me while they draw near with their mouth*; but whose fault is that? Not God's, who is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently, but theirs who seek him carelessly. [2.] They insisted much upon it that they had *walked mournfully* before God, whereas God had required them to serve him with gladness, and to walk cheerfully before him. They by their own superstitions made the service of God a task and drudgery to themselves, and then complained of it as a hard service. The yoke of Christ is easy; it is the yoke of antichrist that is heavy. [3.] They complained that they had got nothing by their religion; they were still in poverty and affliction, and behindhand in the world. This is an old piece of impiety. Job 21:14, 15, *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* Elihu charges Job with saying something like this. Job 34:9, *It profits a man nothing that he should delight himself with God*. The enemies of religion do but set up against it the old cavils that have been long since answered and exploded. Perhaps this refers to the errors of the sect of the Sadducees, which was the scandal of the Jewish church in its latter days; they denied a future state, and then said, It is *vain to serve God*, which has indeed some colour in it, for, *if in this life only we had hope in Christ, we were of all men most miserable*, 1 Co. 15:19. Note, Those do a great deal of wrong to God's honour who say that religion is either an unprofitable or an unpleasant thing; for the matter is not so: wisdom's *ways are pleasantness*, and wisdom's gains better than that of *fine gold*.

(2.) They maintained that wickedness was the way to prosperity, for they had observed that the *workers of wickedness* were set up in the world, and those that *tempted God* were *delivered*, v. 15. The outward prosperity of sinners in their sins, as it has weakened the hands of the godly in their godliness (Ps. 73:13), so it has strengthened the hands of the wicked in their wickedness. Note, [1.] Those that work wickedness tempt God by presumptuous sins; they do, as it were, try God, whether he can and will punish them as he has said in his word, and, in effect, challenge him to do his worst, by provoking him in the highest degree. [2.] Those that tempt God by their wicked works are many times both delivered out of the adversity into which they were justly brought and advanced to the prosperity which they were utterly unworthy of. They are not only set up once, but when we thought their day had come to fall, and they were in trouble, they were delivered and set up again; so strangely

did Providence seem to smile upon them. [3.] Though it be thus, yet it will not warrant us to *call the proud happy*. For they may be delivered and set up for a while, but it will appear that God resists them, and that their pride is a preface to their fall; and, if so, they are truly miserable, and it is folly to call them happy, and to bless those whom the Lord abhors. Wait awhile, and you shall see *those that work wickedness set up* as a mark to the arrows of God's vengeance, and *those that tempt God delivered* to the tormentors. Judge of things as they will appear shortly, when the doom of these proud sinners (which follows here, ch. 4:1) comes to be executed to the utmost.

II. Here is the gracious notice God takes of the pious talk of the saints in Zion, and the gracious recompence of it. Even in this corrupt and degenerate age, when there was so great a decay, nay, so great a contempt, of serious godliness, there were yet some that retained their integrity and zeal for God; and let us see,

1. How they distinguished themselves, and what their character was; it was the reverse of theirs that spoke so much against God; for, (1.) They *feared the Lord*—that is the beginning of wisdom and the root of all religion; they revered the majesty of God, submitted to his authority, and had a dread of his wrath in all they thought and said; they humbly complied with God, and never spoke any stout words against him. In every age there has been a remnant that feared the Lord, though sometimes but a little remnant. (2.) They *thought upon his name*; they seriously considered and frequently mediated upon the discoveries God has made of himself in his word and by his providences, and their *mediation of him* was *sweet* to them and influenced them. They *thought on his name*; they consulted the honour of God and aimed at that as their ultimate end in all they did. Note, Those that know the name of God should often think of it and dwell upon it in their thoughts; it is a copious curious subject, and frequent thoughts of it will contribute very much to our communion with God and the stirring up of our devout affections to him. (3.) They *spoke often one to another* concerning the God they feared, and that name of his which they thought so much of; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and a good man, out of a *good treasure* there, will *bring forth good things*. *Those that feared the Lord* kept together as those that were company for each other; they spoke kindly and endearingly one to another, for the preserving and promoting of mutual love, that that might not *wax cold* when *iniquity* did thus *abound*. They spoke intelligently and edifyingly to one another, for the increasing and improving of faith and holiness; they *spoke one to another* in the language of those that fear the Lord and think on his name—the language of Canaan. When profaneness had come to so great a height as to trample upon all that is sacred, *then* those that feared the Lord *spoke often one to another*. [1.] Then, when iniquity was bold and barefaced, the people of God took courage, and stirred up themselves, *the innocent against the hypocrite*, Job 17:8. The worse others are the better we should be; when vice is daring, let not virtue be sneaking. [2.] Then, when religion was reproached and misrepresented, its friends did all they could to support the credit of it and to keep it in countenance. It had been suggested that the ways of God are melancholy unpleasant ways, solitary and sorrowful; and therefore then those that feared God studied to evince the contrary by their cheerfulness in mutual love and converse, that they might *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*. [3.] Then, when seducers were busy to deceive and to possess unwary souls with prejudices against religion, those that feared God were industrious to arm themselves and one another against the contagion by mutual instructions, excitements, and encouragements, and to strengthen one another's hands.

As evil communication corrupts good minds and manners, so good communication confirms them.

2. How God dignified them, and what further honour and favour he intended for them. Those who spoke stoutly against God, no doubt looked with disdain and displeasure upon those that feared him, hectoring and bantering them; but they had little reason to regard that, or be disturbed at it, when God countenanced them.

(1.) He took notice of their pious discourses, and was graciously present at their conferences: *The Lord hearkened and heard it*, and was well pleased with it. God says (Jer. 8:6) that he *hearkened and heard* what bad men would say, and they *spoke not aright*; here he hearkened and heard what good men did say, for they spoke aright. Note, The gracious God observes all the gracious words that proceed out of the mouths of his people; they need not desire that men may hear them, and commend them; let them not seek praise from men by them, nor affect to be taken notice of by them; but let it satisfy them that, be the conference ever so private, God sees and hears in secret and will *reward openly*. When the two disciples, going to Emmaus, were discoursing concerning Christ, he hearkened and heard, and joined himself to them, and made a third, Lu. 24:15.

(2.) He kept an account of them: *A book of remembrance was written before him*. Not that the Eternal Mind needs to be reminded of things by books and writings, but it is an expression after the manner of men, intimating that their pious affections and performances are kept in remembrance as punctually and particularly as if they were written in a book, as if journals were kept of all their conferences. Great kings had books of remembrance written, and read before them, in which were entered all the services done them, when, and by whom, as Esther 2:23. God, in like manner, remembers the services of his people, that, in the review of them, he may say, *Well done; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. God has a book for the sighs and tears of his mourners (Ps. 56:8), much more for the pleadings of his advocates. Never was any good word spoken of God, or for God, from an honest heart, but it was registered, that it might be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, and in no wise lose its reward.

(3.) He promises them a share in his glory hereafter (v. 17): *They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels*. When God utterly cuts off the Jewish church and nation for their infidelity, the remnant among them, that believed his word, and, having waited for the consolation of Israel, welcome him when he comes, shall be admitted into the Christian church, and shall become a peculiar people to God; God will take care of them, that they *perish not with those that believe not*; but that they be *hidden in the day of the Lord's anger* against that nation. *They shall be my segullah—my peculiar treasure* (it is the word used, Ex. 19:5), *in the day when I make or do what I have said and designed to do*; so some read it. These pious ones shall have all the glorious privileges of God's Israel appropriated to them and centering in them; they shall now be his peculiar treasure, when the rest are rejected; they shall now be the vessels of mercy and honour, when the rest are made vessels of wrath and dishonour, vessels in which is no pleasure. This may be applied to all the faithful people of God, and the distinction he will put between them and others in the great day. Note, [1.] The saints are God's jewels; they are highly esteemed by him and are dear to him; they are comely with the comeliness that he puts upon them, and he is pleased to glory in them; they are a *royal diadem* in his hand, Isa. 62:3. He looks upon them as his own proper goods, his choice goods, his treasure, laid up in his cabinet, and the furniture of his closet, Ps. 135:4. The rest of the world is but lumber, in comparison

with them. [2.] There is a day coming when God will *make up his jewels*. They shall be gathered up out of the dirt into which they are now thrown, and gathered together from all places to which they are now scattered; he shall *send forth his angels* to *gather his elect*, who are his jewels, *from the four winds of heaven* (Mt. 24:31), to gather his jewels into his jewel-house, as the wheat from several fields into the barn. All the saints will then be gathered to Christ, and none but saints, and saints made perfect; then God's jewels will be made up, as stones into a crown, as stars into a constellation. [3.] Those who now own God for theirs, he will then own for his, will publicly confess them before angels and men: "*They shall be mine*; their sanctification shall be completed, and so they shall be perfectly and entirely mine, without any remaining interests of the world and the flesh." Their relation to God shall be acknowledged, and his property in them. He will separate them from those that are not his, and give them their portion with those that are his; for to them it shall be said, *Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*. They were in doubt, sometimes, whether they were belonging to God or no; but the matter shall then be put out of doubt. God himself will say unto them, *You are mine*. Now their relation to God is what they are reproached with, but it will then be gloried in; God himself will glory in it.

(4.) He promises them a share in his grace now: *I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him*. God had promised to own them as his and take them to be with him; but it might be a discouragement to them to think that they had offended God, and that he might justly disown them, and cast them off; but, as to that, he says, "*I will spare them*; I will not deal with them as they deserve. *I will rejoice over them*" (so some expound it) "as the bridegroom over his bride," Isa. 62:5; Zep. 3:17. But the word usually signifies to spare with commiseration and compassion, *as a father pities his children*, Ps. 103:13. Note, [1.] It is our duty to serve God with the disposition of children. We must be his sons, must by a new birth partake of a divine nature, must consent to the covenant of adoption and partake of the spirit of adoption. And we must be his servants; God will not have his children trained up in idleness; they must do him service, and they must do it from a principle of love, with cheerfulness and delight, and as those that are therein serving their own true interest, and this is serving as *a son with the father*, Phil. 2:22. [2.] If we serve God with the disposition of children, he will spare us with the tenderness and compassion of a Father. Even God's children that serve him stand in need of sparing mercy, that mercy to which we owe it that we are not consumed, that mercy which keeps us out of hell. Nehemiah, when he had done much good, yet, knowing there is not a *just man on earth*, that *does good and sins not*, and that every sin deserves God's wrath, prays, *Lord, spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy*; see Neh. 13:22. And God, as a Father, will show them this mercy. He will not be extreme to mark what we do amiss, but will make the best of us and our poor performances; he will mitigate the afflictions his children are exercised with, and save them from the ruin they deserve. The father continues to spare the son, and does it with complacency, because he is his own; thus God will spare humble penitents and petitioners, *as a man spares his son that serves him*, though we do him so little service, nay, though we do him so much disservice.

3. How they will thus be distinguished from the children of this world (v. 18): "*Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked*, between sinners and saints, between those that *serve God* and make conscience of their duty to him and those that *serve him not*, but put contempt upon his service. You that now speak against God as making no difference

between good and bad, and therefore say, *It is in vain to serve him* (v. 14), you shall be made to see your error; you that would speak for God, but know not what to say as to this, that there seems to be *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, and *all things come alike to all*, will then have the matter set in a true light, and will see, to your everlasting satisfaction, the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Then *you shall return*, that is, you shall *change you mind*, and come to a right understanding of the thing." This primarily respects the manifest difference that was made by the divine Providence between the believing Jews and those that persisted in their infidelity, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish church and nation, by the Romans. But it is to have its full accomplishment at the second coming of Jesus Christ, and on that great discriminating day when it shall be easy enough to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*. Note, (1.) All the children of men are either righteous or wicked, either such as serve God or such as serve him not. This is that division of the children of men which will last for ever, and by which their eternal state will be determined; all are going either to heaven or to hell. (2.) In this world it is often hard to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*. They are mingled together, good fish and bad in the same net. The righteous are so distempered, and the wicked so disguised, that we are often deceived in our opinions concerning both the one and the other. There are many who, we think, serve God, who, having not their hearts right with him, will be found none of his servants; and, on the other hand, many will be found his faithful servants, who, because they followed not with us, did not, as we thought, serve him. But that which especially raised the difficulty here was that the divine Providence seemed to make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; you could not know wicked men by God's frowning upon them, for they commonly prospered in the world, nor righteous men by his smiling upon them, for they were involved with others in the same common calamity. None now knows God's *love or hatred by all that is before him*, Eccl. 9:1. (3.) At the bar of Christ, in the last judgment, it will be easy to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*; for then every man's character will be both perfected and perfectly discovered, every man will then appear in his true colours, and his disguises will be taken off. Some men's sins indeed go beforehand, and you may now tell who is wicked, but others follow after; however, in the great day, we shall see who was righteous and who wicked. Every man's condition likewise will be both perfected and everlastingly determined; the righteous will then be perfectly happy and the wicked perfectly miserable, without mixture or alloy. When the righteous are all set on the right hand of Christ, and invited to come for a blessing, and all the wicked on his left hand, and are told to depart with a curse, then it will be easy to discern between them. As to ourselves, therefore, we are concerned to think among which we shall have our lot, and, as to others, we must *judge nothing before the time*

Chapter 4

We have here proper instructions given us (very proper to close the canon of the Old Testament with), I. Concerning the state of recompence and retribution that is before us, the misery of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous in that state (v. 1-3). And this is represented to us under a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unbelieving Jews with it, and of the comforts and triumphs of those among them that received the gospel. II. Concerning the state of trial and preparation we are now in, in which we are directed to have an eye to divine revelation, and to follow that; they then must keep to the law of Moses (v. 4) and expect a further discovery of God's will by Elijah the prophet, that is, by John Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah (v. 5, 6). The last chapter of the New Testament is much to the same purport, setting before us heaven and hell in the other world, and obliging us to adhere to the word of God in this world.

Verses 1-3

The great and terrible day of the Lord is here prophesied of. This, like the pillar of cloud and fire, shall have a dark side turned towards the Egyptians that fight against God, and a bright side towards the faithful Israelites that follow him: *The day cometh*, that is, the Lord cometh, the day of the Lord; and it has reference both to the first and to the second coming of Jesus Christ; the day of both was fixed, and should answer the character here given of it.

I. In both Christ is a consuming fire to those that rebel against him. The day of his coming *shall burn as an oven*; it shall be a day of wrath, of *fiery indignation*. This was foretold concerning the Messiah, Ps. 21:9, *Thy hand shall find out all thy enemies, and shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of thy anger*. It will be a day of terror and destruction like the burning of a city, or rather of a wood, the trees whereof are withered and dried, for to that the allusion seems to be, as Isa. 10:17, 18, *The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field*. Now observe here, 1. Who shall be fuel to this fire—all *the proud* in heart, whose words have been stout against God, and their necks stiff and unapt to yield to the yoke of his commandments (all those that *in the pride of their countenances will not seek after God*, nor submit to the grace and government of Jesus Christ—all that proudly say they *will not have Christ to reign over them*), and all those that *do wickedly* in their affections and conversations, that wilfully persist in sin, in contempt of and contradiction to the law of God; they are such as *do wickedly against the covenant*, as another prophet had lately expressed it, Dan. 11:32. God, that has perfect knowledge of every one's character, knows who are *the proud*, and of every one's actions, knows who they are that *do wickedly*; and they shall be as *stubble* to this fire; they shall be consumed by it, easily consumed, utterly consumed, and it is wholly owing to themselves that they shall be so, for they make themselves stubble, that is, combustible matter, to this fire. If they were not stubble, it would not burn them; for the fire will be to every man according as he and his works are found; if they be *wood, hay, and stubble*, they will be *consumed*; but if they be *gold, silver, and precious stones*, they will *abide the fire* and be purified by it, 1 Co. 3:13–15. Those that by their unbelief oppose Christ thereby set themselves as *briers and thorns* before a *devouring fire*, Isa. 27:4, 5. 2. What shall be the force and what the fruit of this fire: *The day that cometh shall burn them up*, shall both terrify and ruin them, and shall *leave them neither root nor branch*, neither

son nor *nephew* (so the Chaldee paraphrase): neither they nor their posterity shall be spared; they shall be wholly extirpated and cut off. *Who knows the power of God's anger? The proud and those that do wickedly* will not fear it, but they shall be made to feel it. Where are those now that *called the proud happy*, when thus they are made completely miserable, when there remains no branch of their happiness to be enjoyed for the present, nor any root of it out of which it might again spring up? Now this was fulfilled, (1.) When Christ, in his doctrine, spoke terror and condemnation to the proud Pharisees and the other Jews that did wickedly, when he sent that fire on the earth which burnt up the chaff of the traditions of the elders and the corrupt glosses they had put upon the law of God. (2.) When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the nation of the Jews, as a nation, quite blotted out from under heaven, and neither root nor branch left them. This seems to be principally intended here; our Saviour says that those should be the *days of vengeance*, when all the things that were written to that purport should be fulfilled, Lu. 21:22. Then the unbelieving Jews were as stubble to the devouring fire of God's judgments, which gathered together to them as the eagles to the carcase. (3.) It is certainly applicable, and is to be applied, to the day of judgment, to the particular judgment at death (some of the Jewish doctors refer it the *punishment that seizes on the souls of the wicked immediately after they go out of the body*), but especially to the general judgment, at the end of time, when Christ shall be *revealed in flaming fire*, to execute judgment on *the proud, and all that do wickedly*. The whole world shall then *burn as an oven*, and all the children of this world, that set their hearts upon it and choose their portion in it, shall take their ruin with it, and the fire then kindled shall never be quenched.

II. In both Christ is a rejoicing light to those who serve him faithfully, to those who fear his name and give him the glory due to it (v. 2), who stand in awe of that name of his which the wicked profane and trample upon. Here are mercy and comfort kept in store for all those who fear the Lord and think on his name. Observe,

1. Whence this mercy and comfort shall flow to them: *To you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings*. The day that comes, as it will be a stormy day to the wicked, a day in which God will rain upon them *fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest*, as he did on Sodom (Ps. 11:6), a *day of clouds and thick darkness* (Amos 5:18, 20), so it will be a fair and bright day to those who fear God, and reviving as the rising sun is to the earth; and particular notice is taken of the rising of the sun upon Zoar when that was mercifully distinguished from the cities of the plain, which the fire *consumed*; see Gen. 19:23. So to those that fear God is comfort spoken. When the hearts of others *fail for fear* let them *lift up their heads for joy, for their redemption draws nigh*, Lu. 21:28. But by the *Sun of righteousness* here we are certainly to understand Jesus Christ, who would undertake to secure the believing remnant, in the day of the general destruction of the Jews, from falling with the rest, and to comfort them in that day of distress and perplexity with his consolations; he directed those that were in Judea to *flee to the mountains* (Mt. 24:16), and they did so, and were all safe and easy in Pella. But it is to be applied more generally, (1.) To the coming of Christ in the flesh to seek and save those that were lost; then the *Sun of righteousness* arose upon this dark world. Christ is the *light of the world*, the true light, the great light that makes day and rules the day (Jn. 8:12), as the sun. He is the *light of men* (Jn. 1:4), is to men's souls as the sun is to the visible world, which without the sun would be a dungeon; so would mankind be darkness itself without the *light of the glory of God shining in the face of*

Christ. Christ is the Sun that has light in himself, and is the fountain of light (Ps. 19:4-6); he is the *Sun of righteousness*, for he is himself a righteous Saviour. Righteousness is both the light and the heat of this Sun; the word of his righteousness is so; it guides, instructs, and quickens; so is the *everlasting righteousness* he has brought in. He is *made of God to us righteousness*; he is the *Lord our righteousness*, and therefore is fitly called *the Sun of righteousness*. Through him we are justified and sanctified, and so are brought to see light. This Sun of righteousness, in the fulness of time, arose upon the world, and with him *light came into the world* (Jn. 3:19), a *great light*, Mt. 4:16. In him *the day-spring from on high visited us, to give light to those that sit in darkness*, Lu. 1:78, 79. Righteousness sometimes signifies mercy or benignity, and it was in Christ that the *tender mercy of our God* visited us. (2.) It is applicable to the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, brought into the souls of men. Grotius understands it of Christ's giving the Spirit to those that are his, to shine in their hearts, and to be a *comforter* to them, a *sun and a shield*. Those that are possessed and governed by a holy fear of God and a dread of his majesty shall have his *love* also *shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*; and then the sun may be said to arise there, and to bring both a delightful day and a fruitful spring along with it. (3.) Christ's second coming will be a glorious and welcome sun-rising to all that *fear his name*; it will be that morning of the resurrection in which *the upright shall have dominion*, Ps. 49:14. That day which to the wicked will *burn as an oven* will to the righteous be bright as the morning; and it is what they wait for, *more than those that wait for the morning*.

2. What this mercy and comfort shall bring to them: He *shall arise with healing under his wings*, or in his *rays* or *beams*, which are as the wings of the sun. Christ came, as *the sun*, to bring not only light to a dark world, but health to a diseased distempered world. The Jews (says Dr. Pocock) have a proverbial saying, *As the sun riseth, infirmities decrease*; the flowers which drooped and languished all night revive in the morning. Christ came into the world to be the great physician, yea, and the great medicine too, both the balm in Gilead and the physician there. When he was upon earth, he went about as the sun in his circuit, doing this good; he *healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people*; he healed by wholesale, as the sun does. He shall arise *with healing in his skirts*; so some read it, and they apply it to the story of the woman's touching *the hem of his garment*, and being thereby *made whole*, and his finding that *virtue went out of him*, Mk. 5:28–30. But his healing bodily diseases was a specimen of his great design in coming into the world to heal the diseases of men's souls, and to put them into a good state of health, that they may serve and enjoy both God and themselves.

3. What good effect it shall have upon them. (1.) It shall make them vigorous in themselves: *"You shall go forth*, as those that are healed go abroad and return to their business." The souls shall go forth out of their bodies at death, and the bodies out of their graves at the resurrection, as prisoners out of their dungeons, and both to see the light and be set at liberty. *"You shall go forth* as plants out of the earth, when in the spring the sun returns." Some make it to mean the going forth of the Christians from Jerusalem, and the escape they thereby made from its destruction. And thus the souls on whom the Sun of righteousness arises go forth out of the world, go forth out of Babylon, as those that are made *free indeed*. *"You shall likewise grow up*; being restored to health and liberty, you shall increase in knowledge, and grace, and spiritual strength." The souls on which the Sun of righteousness arises are growing up towards *the perfect man*; those that by the grace of God are made wise and good

are by the same grace made wiser and better; and their path, like that of the rising sun, *shines more and more to the perfect day*, Prov. 4:18. Their growth is compared to that of *the calves of the stall*, which is a quick, strong, and useful growth. "You shall grow up, not as the *flower of the field*, which is slender, and weak, and of little use, and withers soon after it has grown up, but as the *calves of the stall*," that, as one of the rabbin expounds it, *grow great in flesh and fatness*, with which both God's altars and men's tables are replenished; so the growth of the saints, on whom the Sun of righteousness arises, honours both God and man. Some read it, instead of *You shall grow up*, You shall *move yourselves*, or *leap for joy*, shall be as frolicsome as calves of the stall, when they are let loose in the open field; it denotes the joy of the saints, who rejoice in Christ Jesus; they shall even leap for joy; they are *always caused to triumph*.

(2.) It shall make them victorious over their enemies (v. 3): *You shall tread down the wicked*. Time was when the wicked trod them down, said to their souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*; but the day will come when they shall *tread down the wicked*. The wicked, being made Christ's footstool, are made theirs also (Ps. 110:1), and come and *worship before the feet* of the church, Rev. 3:9. *The elder shall serve the younger*. When believers by faith *overcome the world*, when they suppress their own corrupt appetites and passions, when the God of peace bruises Satan under their feet, then they *tread down the wicked*. When it came to the turn of the Christians to triumph over the Jews that had insulted over them, then this promise was fulfilled: *They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet*; they shall not only be *trodden down*, but *trodden to dirt*. When the day that comes shall have *burnt them up*, they shall trample upon them as ashes. When the righteous shall rise to *everlasting life*, the wicked shall rise to *everlasting contempt*; and, though they shall not triumph over them, they shall triumph in that God whose justice is glorified in their destruction. The saints in glory are said to have power given them over the nations, to *rule them with a rod of iron*, Rev. 2:26, 27. This *you shall do, in the day that I shall do this*. Note, The saints' triumphs are all owing to God's victories; it is not they that do this, but God that does it for them, that says, *Come set your feet on the necks of these kings*. Some read it, "*In the day that I make, or shall make, the great day that I shall make remarkable, of which you will say with joy, This is the day which the Lord has made.*" The day of the destruction of Jerusalem is called the *great and notable day of the Lord* (Acts 2:20), and our Saviour in foretelling that destruction made use of such expressions as, like these, might be applied likewise to the *end of the world* and the *last judgment*; for it was such a terrible revelation of the wrath of God from heaven, and caused such a scene of horror upon this earth, that it might fitly serve for a type of that glorious transaction which will be an outlet to the days of time and an inlet to the days of eternity. By the accomplishment of these prophecies in the ruin of the Jewish nation, we should have our faith confirmed in the assurances Christ has given us concerning the dissolution of all things. *Surely I come quickly*; so says Christ, *the Lord of hosts*, to whom all power in heaven and earth is committed.

Verses 4-6

This is doubtless intended for a solemn conclusion, not only of this prophecy, but of the canon of the Old Testament, and is a plain information that they were not to expect any more sayings nor writing by divine inspiration, any more of the dictates of the Spirit of prophecy, till the beginning of the gospel of the Messiah, which sets aside the Apocrypha as no part of holy writ, and which therefore the Jews never received.

Now that prophecy ceases, and is about to be sealed up, there are two things required of the people of God, that lived then:—

I. They must keep up an obedient veneration for the law of Moses (v. 4): *Remember the law of Moses my servant*, and observe to do according to it, even that law which *I commanded unto him in Horeb*, that fiery law which was intended *for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments*, not only the law of the ten commandments, but all the other appointments, ceremonial and judicial, then and there given. Observe here, 1. The honourable mention that is made of *Moses*, the first writer of the Old Testament, in *Malachi*, the last writer. God by him calls him *Moses my servant*; for the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. See how the penmen of scripture, though they lived in several ages at a great distance from each other (it was above 1200 years from Moses to Malachi), all concurred in the same thing, and supported one another, being all actuated and guided by one and the same Spirit. 2. The honourable mention that is made of the *law of Moses*; it was what God himself *commanded*; he owns it for his law, and he commanded it *for all Israel*, as the municipal law of their kingdom. Thus will God *magnify his law and make it honourable*. Note, We are concerned to keep the law because God has commanded it and commanded it for us, for we are the spiritual Israel; and, if we expect the benefit of the covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:10), we must observe the commands given to Israel, those of them that were intended to be of perpetual obligation. 3. The summary of our duty, with reference to the law. We must remember it. Forgetfulness of the law is at the bottom of all our transgressions of it; if we would rightly remember it, we could not but conform to it. We should remember it when we have occasion to use it, remember both the commands themselves and the sanctions wherewith they are enforced. The office of conscience is to bid us *remember the law*. But how does this charge to remember the law of Moses come in here? (1.) This prophet had reprov'd them for many gross corruptions and irregularities both in worship and conversation, and now, for the reforming and amending of what was amiss, he only charges them to *remember the law of Moses*: "Keep to that rule, and you will do all you should do." He will *lay upon them no other burden* than what they *have received*; *hold that fast*, Rev. 2:24, 25. Note, Corrupt churches are to be reformed by the written word, and reduced into order by being reduced to the standard of *the law and the testimony*, see 1 Co. 11:23. (2.) The church had long enjoyed the benefit of prophets, extraordinary messengers from God, and now they had a whole book of their prophecies put together, and it was a finished piece; but they must not think that hereby the *law of Moses* was superseded, and had become as an almanac out of date, as if now they were advanced to a higher form and might forget that. No; the prophets do but confirm and apply the law, and press the observance of that; and therefore still *Remember the law*. Note, Even when we have made considerable advances in knowledge we must still retain the first principles of practical religion and resolve to abide by them. Those that study the writings of the prophets, and the apocalypse, must still remember the law of Moses and the four gospels. (3.) Prophecy was now to cease in the church for some ages, and the Spirit of prophecy not to return till the *beginning of the gospel*, and now they are told to *remember the law of Moses*; let them live by the rules of that, and live upon the promises of that. Note, We need not complain for want of visions and revelations as long as we have the written word, and the canon of scripture complete, to be our guide; for that is the most *sure word of prophecy*, and the touchstone by which we are to *try the spirits*. Though we have not prophets, yet, as long as we have Bibles, we may keep our communion with God, and keep ourselves in his way. (4.) They were to expect the coming of the Messiah, the preaching of his

gospel, and the setting up of his kingdom, and in that expectation they must *remember the law of Moses*, and live in obedience to that, and then they might expect the comforts that the Messiah would bring to *the willing and obedient*. Let them observe the law of Moses, and live up to the light which that gave them, and then they might expect the benefit of the gospel of Christ, for *to him that has*, and uses what he has well, *more shall be given, and he shall have abundance*.

II. They must keep up a believing expectation of the gospel of Christ, and must look for the beginning of it in the appearing of Elijah the prophet (v. 5, 6): "*Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet*. Though the Spirit of prophecy cease for a time, and you will have only the law to consult, yet it shall revive again in one that shall be sent *in the spirit and power of Elias*," Lu. 1:17. *The law and the prophets were until John* (Lu. 16:16); they continued to be the only lights of the church till that morning-star appeared. Note, As God never *left himself without witness* in the world, so neither in the church, but, as there was occasion, carried the light of divine revelation further and further to the perfect day. They had now Moses and the prophets, and might hear them; but God will go further: he will send them Elijah. Observe,

1. Who this prophet is that shall be sent; it is *Elijah*. The Jewish doctors will have it to be the same Elijah that prophesied in Israel in the days of Ahab—that he shall come again to be the forerunner of the Messiah; yet others of them say not the same person, but another of the same spirit. It should seem, those different sentiments they had when they asked John, "*Art thou Elias, or that prophet that should bear his name?*" Jn. 1:19–21. But we Christians know very well that John Baptist was the Elias that was to come, Mt. 17:10–13; and very expressly, Mt. 11:14, *This is Elias that was to come*; and v. 10, the same of whom it is written, *Behold, I send my messenger*, ch. 3:1. Elijah was a man of great austerity and mortification, zealous for God, bold in reproofing sin, and active to reduce an apostate people to God and their duty; John Baptist was animated by the same spirit and power, and preached repentance and reformation, as Elias had done; and all held him for a prophet, as they did Elijah in his day, and that his baptism was *from heaven*, and not *of men*. Note, When God has such work to do as was formerly to be done he can raise up such men to do it as he formerly raised up, and can put into a John Baptist the spirit of an Elias.

2. When he shall be sent—before the appearing of the Messiah, which, because it was the judgment of this world, and introduced the ruin of the Jewish church and nation, is here called the *coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*. John Baptist gave them fair warning of this when he told them of the *wrath to come* (that *wrath to the uttermost* which was hastening upon them) and put them into a way of escape from it, and when he told them of the *fan in Christ's hand*, with which Christ would thoroughly purge his floor; see Mt. 3:7, 10, 12. That day of Christ, when he came first, was as that day will be when he comes again—though a great and joyful day to those that embrace him, yet a *great and dreadful day* to those that oppose him. John Baptist was sent before the coming of this day, to give people notice of it, that they might get ready for it, and go forth to meet it.

3. On what errand he shall be sent: *He shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*; that is, "he shall be employed in this work; he shall attempt it; his doctrine and baptism shall have a direct tendency to it, and with many shall be successful: he shall be an instrument in God's hand of *turning many to righteousness*, to *the Lord their God*, and so *making ready a people prepared for him*," Lu. 1:16, 17. Note, The turning of souls to God and their duty is

the best preparation of them for the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It is promised concerning John, (1.) That he shall give a turn to things, shall make a bold stand against the strong torrent of sin and impiety which he found in full force among the children of his people, and beating down all before it. This is called his *coming to restore all things* (Mt. 17:11), to set them to rights, that they may again go in the right channel. (2.) That he shall preach a doctrine that shall reach men's hearts, and have an influence upon them, and work a change in them. God's word, in his mouth, shall be *quick and powerful*, and a *discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. Many had their consciences awakened by his ministry who yet were not thoroughly wrought upon, such a spirit and power was there in it. (3.) That he shall turn the hearts of the fathers with the children, and of the children with the fathers (for so some read it), to God and to their duty. He shall call upon young and old to repent, and shall not labour in vain, for many of the fathers that are going off, and many of the children that are growing up, shall be wrought upon by his ministry. (4.) That thus he shall be an instrument to revive and confirm love and unity among relations, and shall bring them closer and bind them faster to each other, by bringing and binding them all to their God. He shall prepare the way for that kingdom of heaven which will make all its faithful subjects of *one heart and one soul* (Acts 4:32), which will be a kingdom of love, and will slay all enmities.

4. With what view he shall be sent on this errand: *Lest I come and smite the earth*, that is, the land of Israel, the body of the Jewish nation (that were of the earth earthy), *with a curse*. They by their impiety and impenitence in it had laid themselves open to the curse of God, which is a separation to all evil. God was ready to smite them with that curse, to bring utter ruin upon them, to strike home, to strike dead, with the curse; but he will yet once more try them, whether they will repent and return, and so prevent it; and therefore he sends John Baptist to preach repentance to them, that their conversion might prevent their confusion; so unwilling is God that any should perish, so willing to have his anger turned away. Had they universally repented and reformed, their repentance would have had this desired effect; but, they generally rejecting the counsel of God in John's baptism, it proved against themselves (Lu. 7:30) and their land was smitten with the curse which both it and they lie under to this day. Note, Those must expect to be smitten with a sword, with a curse, who *turn not to him that smites them* with a rod, with a cross, Isa. 9:13. Now the *axe is laid to the root of the tree*, says John Baptist, and it is ready to be smitten, to be cut down, *with a curse*; therefore *bring forth fruit meet for repentance*. Some observe that the last word of the Old Testament is a curse, which threatens the earth (Zec. 5:3), our desert of which we must be made sensible of, that we may bid Christ welcome, who comes with a blessing; and it is with a blessing, with the choicest of blessings, that the New Testament ends, and with it let us arm ourselves, or rather let God arm us, against this curse. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Amen.*