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Preface

We shall have some account of this prophet in the first verse of the book of his prophecy; and therefore shall here only observe that, being contemporary with the prophet Isaiah (only that he began to prophesy a little after him), there is a near resemblance between that prophet's prophecy and this; and there is a prediction of the advancement and establishment of the gospel-church, which both of them have, almost in the same words, that out of the mouth of two such witnesses so great a word might be established. Compare Isa. 2:2, 3, with Mic. 4:1, 2. Isaiah's prophecy is said to be concerning *Judah and Jerusalem*, but Micah's concerning *Samaria and Jerusalem*; for, though this prophecy be dated only by the reigns of the kings of Judah, yet it refers to the kingdom of Israel, the approaching ruin of which, in the captivity of the ten tribes, he plainly foretels and sadly laments. What we find here in writing was but an abstract of the sermons he preached during the reigns of three kings. The scope of the whole is, I. To convince sinners of their sins, by setting them in order before them, charging both Israel and Judah with idolatry, covetousness, oppression, contempt of the word of God, and their rulers especially, both in church and state, with the abuse of their power; and also by showing them the judgments of God ready to break in upon them for their sins. II. To comfort God's people with promises of mercy and deliverance, especially with an assurance of the coming of the Messiah and of the grace of the gospel through him. It is remarkable concerning this prophecy, and confirms its authority, that we find two quotations out of it made publicly upon very solemn occasions, and both referring to very great events. 1. One is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (3:12), which we find quoted in the Old Testament, by *the elders of the land* (Jer. 26:17, 18), in justification of Jeremiah, when he foretold the judgments of God coming upon Jerusalem, and to stay the proceedings of the court against him. "Micah (say they) foretold that *Zion should be ploughed as a field*, and Hezekiah did not put him to death; why then should we punish Jeremiah for saying the same?" 2. Another is a prediction of the birth of Christ (5:2) which we find quoted in the New Testament, by the *chief priests and scribes of the people*, in answer to Herod's enquiry, *where Christ should be born* (Mt. 2:5, 6); for still we find that to him bear all the prophets witness.

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

In this chapter we have, I. The title of the book (v. 1) and a preface demanding attention (v. 2). II. Warning given of desolating judgments hastening upon the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (v. 3, 4), and all for sin (v. 5). III. The particulars of the destruction specified (v. 6, 7). IV. The greatness of the destruction illustrated, 1. By the prophet's sorrow for it (v. 8, 9). 2. By the general sorrow that should be for it, in the several places that must expect to share in it (v. 10–16). These prophecies of Micah might well be called his lamentations.

Verses 1-7

Here is, I. A general account of this prophet and his prophecy, v. 1. This is prefixed for the satisfaction of all that read and hear the prophecy of this book, who will give the more credit to it when they know the author and his authority. 1. The prophecy is the *word of the Lord*; it is a divine revelation. Note, What is written in the Bible, and what is preached by the ministers of Christ according to what is written there, must be heard and received, not as the word of dying men, which we may be judges of, but as the word of the living God, which we must be judged by, for so it is. This word of the Lord came to the prophet, came plainly, came powerfully, came in a preventing way, and he saw it, saw the vision in which it was conveyed to him, saw the things themselves which he foretold, with as much clearness and certainty as if they had been already accomplished. 2. The prophet is Micah the Morasthite; his name *Micah* is a contraction of Micaiah, the name of a prophet some ages before (in Ahab's time, 1 Ki. 22:8); his surname, the *Morasthite*, signifies that he was born, or lived, at Moresheth, which is mentioned here (v. 14), or Mareshah, which is mentioned v. 15, and Jos. 15:44. The place of his abode is mentioned, that any one might enquire in that place, at that time, and might find there was, or had been, such a one there, who was generally reputed to be a prophet. 3. The date of his prophecy is in the reigns of three kings of Judah—Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Ahaz was one of the worst of Judah's kings, and Hezekiah one of the best; such variety of times pass over God's ministers, times that frown and times that smile, to each of which they must study to accommodate themselves, and to arm themselves against the temptations of both. The promises and threatenings of this book are interwoven, by which it appears that even in the wicked reign he preached comfort, and said *to the righteous* then that it should be *well with them*; and that in the pious reign he preached conviction, and said to the wicked then that it should be *ill with them*; for, however the times change, the word of the Lord is still the same. 4. The parties concerned in this prophecy; it is *concerning Samaria and Jerusalem*, the head cities of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, under the influence of which the kingdoms themselves were. Though the ten tribes have deserted the houses both of David and Aaron, yet God is pleased to send prophets to them.

II. A very solemn introduction to the following prophecy (v. 2), in which, 1. The people are summoned to draw near and give their attendance, as upon a court of judicature: *Hear, all you people*, Note, Where God has a mouth to speak we must have an ear to hear; we all must, for we are all concerned in what is delivered. "*Hear, you people*" (*all of them*, so the margin reads it), "all you that are now within hearing, and all others that hear it at second hand." It is an unusual construction; but those words with which Micah begins his prophecy are the very same in the original with those wherewith Micaiah ended his, 1 Ki. 22:28.

2. The earth is called upon, with *all that therein is*, to hear what the prophet has to say: *Hearken, O earth!* The earth shall be made to shake under the stroke and weight of the judgments coming; sooner will the earth hear than this stupid senseless people; but God will be heard when he pleads. If the church, and those in it, will not hear, the earth, and those in it, shall, and shame them. 3. God himself is appealed to, and his omniscience, power, and justice, are vouched in testimony against this people: "*Let the Lord God be witness against you*, a witness that you had fair warning given you, that your prophets did their duty faithfully as watchmen, but you would not take the warning; let the accomplishment of the prophecy be a witness against your contempt and disbelief of it, and prove, to your conviction and confusion, that it was the word of God, and no word of his shall fall to the ground." Note, God himself will be a witness, by the judgments of his hand, against those that would not receive his testimony in the judgments of his mouth. He will be a witness *from his holy temple* in heaven, when he comes down to execute judgment (v. 3) against those that turned a deaf ear to his oracles, wherein he witnessed to them, out of his holy temple at Jerusalem.

III. A terrible prediction of destroying judgments which should come upon Judah and Israel, which had its accomplishment soon after in Israel, and at length in Judah; for it is foretold, 1. That God himself will appear against them, v. 3. They boasted of themselves and their relation to God, as if that would secure them; but, though God never deceives the faith of the upright, he will disappoint the presumption of the hypocrites, for, *behold, the Lord comes forth out of his place*, quits his mercy-seat, where they thought they had him fast, and prepares his throne for judgment; his glory departs, for they drive it from them. God's way towards this people had long been a way of mercy, but now he changes his way, he *comes out of his place*, and will come down. He had seemed to retire, as one regardless of what was done, but now he will show himself, he will *rend the heavens*, and will *come down*, not as sometimes, in surprising mercies, but in surprising judgments, to do things not for them, but against them, which they *looked not for*, Isa. 64:1; 26:21. 2. That when the Creator appears against them it shall be in vain for any creature to appear for them. He will *tread* with contempt and disdain *upon the high places of the earth*, upon all the powers that are advanced in competition with him or in opposition to him; and he will so tread upon them as to tread them down and level them. High places, set up for the worship of idols or for military fortifications, shall all be trodden down and trampled into the dust. Do men trust to the height and strength of the mountains and rocks, as if they were sufficient to bear up their hopes and bear off their fears? They shall be *molten under him*, melted down *as wax before the fire*, Ps. 68:2. Do they trust to the fruitfulness of the valleys, and their products? They *shall be cleft*, or rent, with those *fiery streams* that shall come pouring down from the mountains when they are melted. They shall be ploughed and washed away as the ground is by *the waters that are poured down a steep place*. God is said to *cleave the earth with rivers*, Hab. 3:9. Neither men of *high degree*, as the mountains, nor *men of low degree*, as the valleys, shall be able to secure either themselves or the land from judgments of God, when they are sent with commission to lay all waste, and, like *a sweeping rain*, to *leave no food*, Prov. 28:3. This is applied particularly to the head city of Israel, which they hoped would be a protection to the kingdom (v. 6.) *I will make Samaria*, that is now a rich and populous city, as *a heap of the field*, as a heap of dung laid there to be spread, or as a heap of stones gathered together to be carried away, and *as plantings of a vineyard*, as hillocks of earth raised to plant vines in. God

will make of that *city a heap*, of that *defenced city a ruin*, Isa. 25:2. Their *altars* had been as *heaps in the furrows of the fields* (Hos. 12:11) and now their houses shall be so, as ruinous heaps. The *stones of the city* are *poured down into the valley* by the fury of the conqueror, who will thus be revenged on those walls that so long held out against him. They shall be quite pulled down, so that the very *foundations* shall be *discovered*, that had been covered by the superstructure; and not one stone shall be left upon another.

IV. A charge of sin upon them, as the procuring cause of these desolating judgments (v. 5): *For the transgression of Jacob is all this*. If it be asked, "Why is God so angry, and why are Jacob and Israel thus brought to ruin by his anger?" the answer is ready: Sin has done all the mischief; sin has laid all waste; all the calamities of Jacob and Israel are owing to their transgressions; if they had not gone away from God, he would never have appeared thus against them. Note, External privileges and professions will not secure a sinful people from the judgments of God. If sin be found in the *house of Israel*, if Jacob be guilty of transgression and rebellion, God will not spare them; no, he will punish them first, for their sins are of all others most provoking to him, for they are most reproaching. But it is asked, *What is the transgression of Jacob?* Note, When we feel the smart of sin it concerns us to enquire what the sin is which we smart for, that we may particularly war against that which wars against us. And what is it? 1. It is idolatry; it is the *high places*; that is the transgression, the great transgression which reigns in Israel; that is spiritual whoredom, the violation of the marriage-covenant, which merits a divorce. Even the *high places of Judah*, though not so bad as the transgression of Jacob, were yet offensive enough to God, and a remaining blemish upon some of the good reigns. *Howbeit the high places were not taken away*. 2. It is the idolatry of Samaria and Jerusalem, the royal cities of those two kingdoms. These were the most populous places, and where there were most people there was most wickedness, and they made one another worse. These were the most pompous places; there men lived most in wealth and pleasure, and they forgot God. These were the places that had the greatest influence upon the country, by authority and example; so that from them idolatry and *profaneness went forth throughout all the land*, Jer. 23:15. Note, Spiritual distempers are most contagious in persons and places that are most conspicuous. If the head city of a kingdom, or the chief family in a parish, be vicious and profane, *many will follow their pernicious ways*, and write after a bad copy when great ones set it for them. The vices of leaders and rulers are leading ruling vices, and therefore shall be surely and sorely punished. Those have a great deal to answer for indeed that not only sin, but *make Israel to sin*. Those must expect to be made examples that have been examples of wickedness. If the transgression of Jacob is Samaria, therefore shall *Samaria become a heap*. Let the ringleaders in sin hear this and fear.

V. The punishment made to answer the sin, in the particular destruction of the idols, v. 7. 1. The gods they worshipped shall be destroyed: *The graven images shall be beaten to pieces* by the army of the Assyrians, *and all the idols shall be laid desolate*. *Samaria and her idols* were ruined together by Sennacherib (Isa. 10:11), and *their gods cast into the fire*, for *they were no gods* (Isa. 37:19); and this was the Lord's doing: *I will lay the idols desolate*. Note, If the law of God prevail not to make men in authority destroy idols, God will take the work into his own hands, and will do it himself. 2. The gifts that passed between them and their gods shall be destroyed; for *all the hires thereof shall be burnt with fire*, which may be meant either of the

presents they made to their idols for the replenishing of their altars, and the adorning of their statues and temples (these shall become a prey to the victorious army, which shall rifle not only private houses, but the houses of their gods), or of the corn, and wine, and oil, which they called the *rewards*, or *hires*, which *their idols*, their *lovers*, gave them (Hos. 2:12); these shall be taken from them by him whom (by ascribing them to their dear idols) they had defrauded of the honour due to him. Note, That cannot prosper by which men either are hired to sin or hire others to sin; for *the wages of sin* will be *death*. *She gathered it of the hire of the harlot*, and *it shall return to the hire of a harlot*. They enriched themselves by their leagues with the idolatrous nations, who gave them advantages, to court them into the service of their idols, and their idols' temples were enriched with gifts by those who went a whoring after them. And all this wealth shall become a prey to the idolatrous nations, and so be the *hire of a harlot* again, wages to an army of idolaters, who shall take it as a reward given them by their gods. *It shall be a present to king Jareb*, Hos. 10:6. What they gave to their idols, and what they thought they got by them, shall be as the hire of a harlot; the curse of God shall be upon it, and it shall never prosper, nor do them any good. It is common that what is squeezed out by one lust is squandered away upon another.

Verses 8-16

We have here a long train of mourners attending the funeral of a ruined kingdom.

I. The prophet is himself chief mourner (v. 8, 9): *I will wail and howl; I will go stripped and naked*, as a man distracted with grief. The prophets usually expressed their own grief for the public grievances, partly to mollify the predictions of them, and to make it appear that it was not out of ill-will that they denounced the judgments of God (so far were they from desiring the woeful day that they dreaded it more than any thing), partly to show how very dreadful and mournful the calamities would be, and to stir up in the people a holy fear of them, that by repentance they might turn away the wrath of God. Note, We ought to lament the punishments of sinners as well as the sufferings of saints in this world; the weeping prophet did so (Jer. 9:1); so did this prophet. He *makes a wailing like the dragons*, or rather the *jackals*, ravenous beasts that in those countries used to meet in the night, and *howl*, and make *hideous noises*; he mourns *as the owls*, the *screech-owls*, or *ostriches*, as some read it. Two things the prophet here thus dolefully laments:—1. That Israel's case is desperate: *Her wound is incurable*; it is ruin without remedy; man cannot help her; God will not, because she will not by repentance and reformation help herself. There is indeed balm in Gilead and a physician there; but they will not apply to the physician, nor apply the balm to themselves, and therefore *the wound is incurable*. 2. That Judah likewise is in danger. The cup is going round, and is now put into Judah's hand: *The enemy has come to the gate of Jerusalem*. Soon after the destruction of Samaria and the ten tribes, the Assyrian army, under Sennacherib, laid siege to Jerusalem, came to the gate, but could not force their way any further; however, it was with great concern and trouble that the prophet foresaw the fright, so dearly did he love the peace of Jerusalem.

II. Several places are here brought in mourning, and are called upon to mourn; but with this proviso, that they should not let the Philistines hear them (v. 10): *Declare it not in Gath*; this is borrowed from David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sa. 1:20), *Tell it not in Gath*, for the uncircumcised will triumph in Israel's tears. Note, One would not, if it could be helped, gratify those that make themselves and their companions merry with the sins or with the sorrows of God's Israel. David was silent, and

stifled his griefs, when *the wicked were before him*, Ps. 39:1. But, though it may be prudent not to give way to a noisy sorrow, yet it is duty to admit a silent one when the church of God is in distress. "*Roll thyself in the dust*" (as great mourners used to do) "and so let the house of Judah and every house in Jerusalem become a *house of Aphrah*, a *house of dust*, covered with dust, crumbled into dust." When God makes the house dust it becomes us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and to put our mouths in the dust, thus accommodating ourselves to the providences that concern us. Dust we are; God brings us to the dust, that we may know it, and own it. Divers other places are here named that should be sharers in this universal mourning, the names of some of which we do not find elsewhere, whence it is conjectured that they are names put upon them by the prophet, the signification of which might either indicate or aggravate the miseries coming upon them, thereby to awaken this secure and stupid people to a holy fear of divine wrath. We find Sennacherib's invasion thus described, in the prediction of it, by the impressions of terror it should make upon the several cities that fell in his way, Isa. 10:28, 29, etc. Let us observe the particulars here, 1. *The inhabitants of Saphir*, which signifies *neat and beautiful (thou that dwellest fairly*, so the margin reads it), shall *pass away* into captivity, or be forced to flee, stripped of all their ornaments *and having their shame naked*. Note, Those who appear ever so fine and delicate know not what contempt they may be exposed to; and the more grievous will the shame be to those who have been inhabitants of Saphir. 2. *The inhabitants of Zaanan*, which signifies the *country of flocks*, a populous country, where the people are as numerous and thick as flocks of sheep, shall yet be so taken up with their own calamities, felt or feared, that they shall *not come forth in the mourning of Bethel*, which signifies a *place near*, shall not condole with, nor bring any succour to, their next neighbours in distress; for *he shall receive of you his standing*; the enemy shall encamp among you, O inhabitants of Zaanan! shall take up a station there, shall find footing among you. Those may well think themselves excused from helping their neighbours who find they have enough to do to help themselves and to hold their own. 3. As for *the inhabitants of Maroth* (which, some think, is put for Ramoth, others that it signifies the *rough places*), they *waited carefully for good*, and were grieved for the want of it, but were disappointed; for *evil came from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem*, when the Assyrian army besieged it, v. 12. The inhabitants of Maroth might well overlook their own particular grievances when they saw the holy city itself in danger, and might well overlook the Assyrian, that was the instrument, when they saw the evil coming *from the Lord*. 4. Lachish was a city of Judah, which Sennacherib laid siege to, Isa. 36:1,2. The inhabitants of that city are called to *bind the chariot to the swift beast*, to prepare for a speedy flight, as having no other way left to secure themselves and their families; or it is spoken ironically: "You have had your chariots and your swift beasts, but where are they now?" God's quarrel with Lachish is that she is *the beginning of sin*, probably the sin of idolatry, *to the daughter of Zion* (v. 13); they had learned it from the ten tribes, their near neighbours, and so infected the two tribes with it. Note, Those that help to bring sin into a country do but thereby prepare for the throwing of themselves out of it. Those must expect to be first in the punishment who have been ringleaders in sin. *The transgressions of Israel were found in thee*; when they came to be traced up to their original they were found to take rise very much from that city. God knows at whose door to lay the blame of the transgressions of Israel, and whom to find guilty. Lachish, having been so much accessory to the sin of Israel, shall certainly be reckoned with: *Thou shalt give presents to Moresheth-gath*, a city of the Philistines, which perhaps

had a dependence upon Gath, that famous Philistine city; thou shalt send to court those of that city to assist thee, but it shall be in vain, for (v. 14) *the houses of Achzib* (a city which joined to Mareshah, or Moresheth, and is mentioned with it, Jos. 15:44) *shall be a lie to the kings of Israel*; though they depend upon their strength, yet they shall fail them. Here there is an allusion to the name. *Achzib* signifies *a lie*, and so it shall prove to those that trust in it. 5. Mareshah, that could not, or would not, help Israel, shall herself be made a prey (v. 15): *"I will bring a heir* (that is, an enemy) *that shall take possession of thy lands, with as much assurance as if he were heir at law to them, and he shall come to Adullam, and to the glory of Israel, that is, to Jerusalem the head city;"* or *"The glory of Israel shall come to be as Adullam, a poor despicable place;"* or, "The king of Assyria, whom Israel had gloried in, shall come to Adullam, in laying the country waste." 6. The whole land of Judah seems to be spoken to (v. 16) and called to weeping and mourning: *"Make thee bald, by tearing thy hair and shaving thy head; poll thee for thy delicate children, that had been tenderly and nicely brought up; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle when she casts her feathers and is all over bald; for they have gone into captivity from thee, and are not likely to return; and their captivity will be the more grievous to them because they have been brought up delicately and have not been inured to hardship."* Or this is directed particularly to the inhabitants of *Mareshah*, as v. 15. That was the prophet's own city, and yet he denounces the judgments of God against it; for it shall be an aggravation of its sin that it had such a prophet, and knew not the day of its visitation. Its being thus privileged, since it improved not the privilege, shall not procure favour for it either with God or with his prophet.

Chapter 3

What the apostle says of another of the prophets is true of this, who was also his contemporary—"Esaias is very bold," Rom. 10:20. So, in this chapter, Micah is very bold in reproof and threatening the great men that were the ringleaders in sin; and he gives the reason (v. 8) why he was so bold, because he had commission and instruction from God to say what he said, and was carried out in it by a higher spirit and power than his own. Magistracy and ministry are two great ordinances of God, for good to his church, but these were both corrupted and the intentions of them perverted; and upon those that abused them, and so abused the church with them, the prophet is very severe, and justly so. I. He gives them their lesson severally, reproof and threatening princes (v. 1-4) and false flattering prophets (v. 5-7). II. He gives them their lesson jointly, putting them together, as acting in conjunction for the ruin of the kingdom, which they should see the ruins of (v. 9-12).

Verses 1-7

Princes and prophets, when they faithfully discharge the duty of their office, are to be highly honoured above other men; but when they betray their trust, and act contrary to it, they should hear of their faults as well as others, and shall be made to know that there is a God above them, to whom they are accountable; at his bar the prophet here, in his name, arraigns them.

I. Let the princes hear their charge and their doom. The *heads of Jacob*, and the *princes of the house of Israel*, are called upon to *hear* what the prophet has to say to them, v. 1. The word of God has reproofs for the greatest of men, which the ministers of that word ought to apply as there is occasion. The prophet here has comfort in the reflection upon it, that, whatever the success was, he had faithfully discharged his trust: *And I said, Hear, O princes!* He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had not shrunk from his duty for fear of the face of men. He tells them,

1. What was expected from them: *Is it not for you to know judgment?* He means to *do* judgment, for otherwise the knowledge of it is of no avail. "Is it not your business to administer justice impartially, and not to *know faces*" (as the Hebrew phrase for partiality and respect of persons is), "but to *know judgment*, and the merits of every cause?" Or it may be taken for granted that the heads and rulers are well acquainted with the rules of justice, whatever others are; for they have those means of knowledge, and have not those excuses for ignorance, which some others have, that are poor and foolish (Jer. 5:4); and, if so, their transgression of the laws of justice is the more provoking to God, for they sin against knowledge. "Is it not for you to know judgment? Yes, it is; therefore stand still, and hear your own judgment, and judge if it be not right, whether any thing can be objected against it."

2. How wretchedly they had transgressed the rules of judgment, though they knew what they were. Their principle and disposition are bad: They *hate the good and love the evil*; they hate good in others, and hate it should have any influence on themselves; they hate to do good, hate to have any good done, and hate those that are good and do good; and they *love the evil*, delight in mischief. This being their principle, their practice is according to it; they are very cruel and severe towards those that are under their power, and whoever lies at their mercy will find that they have none. They barbarously devour those whom they should protect, and, as unfaithful shepherds, fleece the flock they should feed; nay, instead of feeding it, they feed upon it,

Eze. 34:2. It is fit indeed that he who feeds a flock should *eat of the milk of the flock* (1 Co. 9:7), but that will not content them: They *eat the flesh of my people*. It is fit that they should be clothed with the wool, but that will not serve: They *flay the skin from off them*, v. 3. By imposing heavier taxes upon them than they can bear, and exacting them with rigour, by mulcts, and fines, and corporal punishments, for pretended crimes, they ruined the estates and families of their subjects, took away from some their lives, from others their livelihoods, and were to their subjects as beasts of prey, rather than shepherds. "They *break their bones* to come at the marrow, and *chop the flesh in pieces as for the pot*." This intimates that they were, (1.) Very ravenous and greedy for themselves, indulging themselves in luxury and sensuality. (2.) Very barbarous and cruel to those that were under them, not caring whom they beggared, so they could but enrich themselves; such evil is the love of money the root of.

3. How they might expect that God should deal with them, since they had been thus cruel to his subjects. The rule is fixed, Those shall have judgment without mercy that have shown no mercy (v. 4): "*They shall cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them*, in the day of their distress, as the poor cried to them in the day of their prosperity and they would not hear them." There will come a time when the most proud and scornful sinners will *cry to the Lord*, and sue for that mercy which they once neither valued nor copied out. But it will then be in vain; God will even hide his face from them at that time, that time when they need his favour, and see themselves undone without it. At another time they would have turned their back upon him; but at that time he will turn his back upon them, *as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings*. Note, Men cannot expect to do ill and fare well, but may expect to find, as Adoni-bezek did, that done to them which they did to others; for *he is righteous who takes vengeance*. *With the froward God will show himself froward*, and he often gives up cruel and unmerciful men into the hands of those who are cruel and unmerciful to them, as they themselves have formerly been to others. This agrees with Prov. 21:13, *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself and shall not be heard*; but the merciful have reason to hope that they shall obtain mercy.

II. Let the prophets hear their charge too, and their doom; they were such as prophesied falsely, and the princes bore rule by their means. Observe,

1. What was their sin. (1.) They made it their business to flatter and deceive the people: *They make my people err*, lead them into mistakes, both concerning what they should do and concerning what God would do with them. It is ill with a people when their leaders cause them to err, and those draw them out of the way that should guide them and go before them in it. "They make them to err by crying peace, by telling them that they do well, and that all shall be well with them; whereas they are in the paths of sin, and within a step of ruin. They *cry peace*, but they *bite with their teeth*," which perhaps is meant of their biting their own lips, as we are apt to do when we would suppress something which we are ready to speak. When they cried *peace* their own hearts gave them the lie, and they were just ready to eat their own words and to contradict themselves, but they bit with their teeth, and kept it in. They were not blind leaders of the blind, for they saw the ditch before them, and yet led their followers into it. (2.) They made it all their aim to glut themselves, and serve their own belly, as the seducers in St. Paul's time (Rom. 16:18), for *their god is their belly*, Phil. 3:19. They *bite with their teeth, and cry peace*; that is, they will flatter and

compliment those that will feed them with good bits, will give them something to eat; but as for those that *put not into their mouths*, that are not continually cramming them, they look upon them as their enemies; to them they do not *cry peace*, as they do to those whom they look upon as their benefactors, but they *even prepare war against them*; against them they denounce the judgments of God, but as they are to them, as the crafty priests of the church of Rome, in some places, make their image either to smile or frown upon the offerer according as his offering is. Justly is it insisted on as a necessary qualification of a minister (1 Tim. 3:3, and again Tit. 1:7) that he be not *greedy of filthy lucre*.

2. What is the sentence passed upon them for this sin, v. 6, 7. It is threatened, (1.) That they shall be involved in troubles and miseries with those to whom they had cried peace: *Night shall be upon them*, a dark cold night of calamity, such as they, in their flattery, led the people to hope would never come. *It shall be dark unto you*, darker to you than to others; *the sun shall go down over the prophets*, shall go down at noon; all comfort shall depart from them, and they shall be deprived of all hope of it. *The day shall be dark over them*, in which they promised themselves light. Nor shall they be surrounded with outward troubles only, but their mind shall be full of confusion, and they shall be brought to their wits' end; their heads shall be clouded, and their own thoughts shall trouble them; and that is trouble enough. They kept others in the dark, and now God will bring them into the dark. (2.) That thereby they shall be silenced, and all their pretensions to prophecy for ever shamed. They never had any true vision; and now, the event disproving their predictions of peace, it shall be made to appear that they never had any, that there never was an answer of God to them, but it was all a sham, and they were cheats and impostors. Their reputation being thus quite sunk, their confidence would of course fail them. And, their spirits being ruffled and confused, their invention would fail them too; and by reason of this darkness, both without and within too, *they shall not divine*, they shall not have so much as a counterfeit vision to produce, they shall be *ashamed*, and *confounded*, and *cover their lips*, as men that are quite baffled and have nothing to say for themselves. Note, Those who deceive others are but preparing confusion for their own faces.

Verses 8-12

Here, I. The prophet experiences a divine power going along with him in his work, and he makes a solemn profession and protestation of it, as that which would justify him, and bear him out, in his plain dealing with the princes and rulers. He would not, he durst not, make thus bold with the great men, but that he was carried out to do it by a prophetic impulse and impression. It was not he that said it, but God by him, and he could not but speak the word that God put into his mouth. It comes in likewise by way of opposition to the false prophets, who were full of shame when they lived to see themselves proved liars, and who never had courage to deal faithfully with the people, but flattered them in their sins; they were *sensual*, *not having the Spirit*, but truly (says Micah) *I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*, v. 8. Having in himself an assurance of the truth of what he said, he said it with assurance. Compare him with those false prophets, and you will say, There is no comparison between them. *What is the chaff to the wheat?* Jer. 23:28. *What is painted fire to real fire?* Observe here, 1. What the qualifications were with which this prophet was endured: He was *full of power, and of judgment, and of might*; he had an ardent love to God and to the souls of men, a deep concern for his glory and their salvation, and a flaming zeal against sin. He

had likewise courage to reprove it and witness against it, not fearing the wrath either of great men or of great multitudes; whatever difficulties or discouragements he met with, they did not deter him nor drive him from his work; *none of these things moved him*. And all this was guided by judgment and discretion; he was a man of wisdom as well as courage; in all his preaching there was light as well as heat, and a spirit of wisdom as well as of zeal. Thus was this man of God *thoroughly furnished* for every good word he had to say, and every good work he had to do. Those he preached to could not but perceive him to be full both of *power* and *judgment*, for they found both their *understandings opened* and their *hearts made to burn within them*, with such evidence and demonstration, and with such power, did the word come from him. 2. Whence he had these qualifications, not from and of himself, but he was *full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*. Knowing that it was indeed the *Spirit of the Lord* that was in him, and spoke by him, that it was a divine revelation that he delivered, he spoke it boldly, and as one having authority, *set his face as a flint*, knowing he should be justified and borne out in what he said, Isa. 50:7, 8. Note, Those who act honestly may act boldly; and those who are sure that they have a commission from God need not be afraid of opposition from men. Nay, he had not only a Spirit of prophecy, which was the ground of his boldness, but the Spirit of sanctification endued him with the boldness and wisdom which were requisite for him. It was not in any strength of his own that he was strong; *for who is sufficient for these things?* but in *the Lord, and in the power of his might*; for *from him all our sufficiency* is. Are we full of power at any time, for that which is good? It is purely by *the Spirit of the Lord*, for of ourselves we are weak as water; it is the God of Israel that gives strength and power both to his people and to his ministers. 3. What use he made of these qualifications—this judgment and this power; he *declared to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin*. If transgression be found in Jacob and Israel, they must be told of it, and it is the business of God's prophets to tell them of it, to *cry aloud* and *not to spare*, Isa. 58:1. Those who come to hear the word of God must be willing to be told of their faults, and must not only give their ministers leave to deal plainly and faithfully with them, but take it kindly, and be thankful; but, since few have meekness enough to receive reproof, those have need of a great deal of boldness who are to give reproofs, and must pray for a spirit both of wisdom and might.

II. The prophet exerts this power in dealing with the *heads of the house of Jacob*, both the princes and the prophets, whom he had drawn up a high charge against in the former part of the chapter. He repeats the summons of their attendance and attention (v. 9), the same that we had v. 1, directing himself to *the princes of the house of Israel*, yet he means those of *Judah*; for it appears (Jer. 26:18, 19, where v. 12 is quoted) that this was spoken in Hezekiah's kingdom; but, the ten tribes being gone into captivity, Judah is all that is now left of Jacob and Israel. The prophet speaks respectfully to them (*hear, I pray you*) and gives them their titles of *heads* and *princes*. Ministers must be faithful to great men in reproofing them for their sins, but they must not be rude and uncivil to them. Now observe here,

1. The great wickedness that these heads of the house of Jacob were guilty of, *princes, priest, and prophets*; in short, they were covetous and prostituted their offices to their love of money. (1.) *The princes abhorred all judgment*; they would not be governed by any of its laws, either in their own practice or in passing sentence upon appeals made to them; *they perverted all equity*, and scorned to be under the direction or correction of justice, when it could not be made pliable to their secular

interests. When, under pretence of doing right, they did the most palpable wrongs, then they perverted equity, and made it serve a purpose contrary to the intention of the founder of magistracy and fountain of power. It is laid to their charge (v. 10) that *they build up Zion with blood*. "They pretend, in justification of their extortion and oppressions, that they build up Zion and Jerusalem; they add new streets and squares to the holy cities, and adorn them; they establish and advance the public interests both in church and state, and think that therein they do God and Israel good service. But it is *with blood* and *with iniquity*, and therefore it cannot prosper; nor will their intentions of good to the city of God justify their contradictions to the law of God." Those mistake who think that a burning zeal for holy church, and the propagating of the faith, will serve to consecrate robberies and murders, massacres and depredations; no, Zion's walls owe those no thanks that build them up with blood and iniquity. The sin of man works not the righteousness of God. "The office of the princes is to judge upon appeals made to them; but *they judge for reward* (v. 11); they give judgment on the side of those that give the bribe; the most righteous cause shall not be carried without a fee, and for a fee the most unrighteous cause shall be carried." Miserable is the people's case when the judge's enquiry upon a cause is not, "What is to be done in it?" but, "What is to be got by it?" (2.) The priests' work was to teach the people, and for that the law had provided them a very honourable comfortable maintenance; but that will not content them, they *teach for hire* over and above, and will be hired to teach any thing, as an oracle of God, which they know will please and gain them an interest. (3.) The prophets, it should seem, had honorary fees given them by way of gratuity (1 Sa. 9:7, 8); but these prophets governed themselves in their prophesying by the prospect of temporal advantage and that was the main thing they had in their eye: They *divine for money*. Their tongues were mercenary; they would either prophesy or let it alone, according as they found it most for their advantage; and a man might have what oracle he would from them if he would but pay them for it. Thus they were fit successors of Balaam, who *loved the wages of unrighteousness*. Note, Though that which is wicked can never be consecrated by a zeal for the church, yet that which is sacred may be, and often is, desecrated, by the love of the world. When men do that which in itself is good, but do it for filthy lucre, it loses its excellency, and becomes an abomination both to God and man.

2. Their vain presumption and carnal confidence, notwithstanding: They *lean upon the Lord*, and because they are, in profession, his people, they think there is neither harm nor danger in these their wicked practices. Faith builds upon the Lord, rests in him, and relies upon him, as the soul's foundation; presumption only *leans upon the Lord* as a prop, makes use of him to serve a turn, while still the world is the foundation that is built upon. They speak with a great deal of confidence, (1.) Of their honour: "*Is not the Lord among us? Have we not the tokens of his presence with us, his temple, his ark, his lively oracles?*" They are *haughty because of the holy mountain* and its dignities (Zep. 3:11), as if their church-privileges would palliate the worst of practices, or as if God's presence with them were intended to make the priests and people rich with the sale of their performances. It was true that the Lord was among them by his ordinances, and this puffed them up with pride; but, if they imagined that he was among them by his favour and love, they were mistaken: but it is a cheat the children of men often put upon themselves to think they have God with them, when they have by their sin provoked him to depart from them. (2.) They are confident of their own safety: *No evil can come upon us*. Many are rocked asleep; in a fatal security by their church-

privileges, as if those would protect them in sin, and shelter them from punishment, which are really, and will be, the greatest aggravations both of their sin and of their punishment. If men's having the Lord among them will not restrain them from doing evil, it can never secure them from suffering evil for so doing; and it is very absurd for sinners to think that their impudence will be their impunity.

3. The doom passed upon them for their real wickedness, notwithstanding their imaginary protection (v. 12): *Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field.* This is that passage which is quoted as a bold word spoken by Micah (Jer. 26:18), which yet Hezekiah and his princes took well, though in another reign it might have gone near to cost him his head; nay, they repented and reformed, and so the execution of this threatening was prevented, and did not come in those days. (1.) It is the ruin of holy places that is here foretold, places that had been highly honoured with the tokens of God's presence and the performances of his worship; it is Zion that shall be ploughed as a field, the building burnt to the ground and levelled with it. Some observe that this was literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the ground on which the city stood was ploughed up in token of its utter desolation, and that no city should be built upon that ground without the emperor's leave. Even *Jerusalem*, the holy city, shall *become heaps* of ruins, and the *mountain of the house*, on which the temple is built, shall be overgrown with briars and thorns, *as the high places of the forest.* If sacred places be polluted by sin, they must expect to be wasted and ruined by the judgments of God. (2.) It is the wickedness of those who preside in them that brings the ruin: "It is *for your sake* that *Zion shall be ploughed as a field*; you pretend to build up Zion, but, doing it by blood and iniquity, you pull it down." Note, The sin of priests and princes is often the ruin of states and churches. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi—The kings act foolishly and the people suffer for it.*

Chapter 4

Comparing this chapter with the close of the foregoing chapter, the comfortable promises here with the terrible threatenings there, we may, with the apostle, "behold the goodness and severity of God," (Rom. 11:22), towards the Jewish church which fell, severity when Zion was ploughed as a field, but towards the Christian church, which was built upon the ruins of it, goodness, great goodness; for it is here promised, I. That it shall be advanced and enlarged by the accession of the nations to it (v. 1, 2). II. That it shall be protected in tranquility and peace (v. 3, 4). III. That it shall be kept close, and constant, and faithful to God (v. 5). IV. That under Christ's government, all its grievances shall be redressed (v. 6, 7). V. That it shall have an ample and flourishing dominion (v. 8). VI. That its troubles shall be brought to a happy issue at length (v. 9, 10). VII. That its enemies shall be disquieted, nay, that they shall be destroyed in and by their attempts against it (v. 11–13).

Verses 1-7

It is a very comfortable *but* with which this chapter begins, and very reviving to those who lay the interests of God's church near their heart and are concerned for the welfare of it. When we sometimes see the corruptions of the church, especially of church-rulers, princes, priests, and prophets, seeking their own things and not the things of God, and when we soon after see the desolations of the church, *Zion* for their sakes *ploughed as a field*, we are ready to fear that it will one day perish between both, that the name of Israel shall be no more in remembrance; we are ready to give up all for gone, and to conclude the church will have neither root nor branch upon earth. But let not our faith fail in this matter; out of the ashes of the church another phoenix shall arise. In the last words of the foregoing chapter we left *the mountain of the house* as desolate and waste as the *high places of the forest*; and is it possible that such a wilderness should ever become a fruitful field again? Yes, the first words of this chapter bring in *the mountain of the Lord's house* as much dignified by being frequented as ever it had been disgraced by being deserted. Though *Zion* be ploughed as a field, yet God has not *cast off his people*, but by the fall of the Jews salvation has come to the Gentiles, so that it proves to be the riches of the world, Rom. 11:11, 12. This is the mystery which God by the prophet here shows us, and he says the very same in the first three verses of this chapter which another prophet said by the word of the Lord at the same time (Isa. 2:2-4), that *out of the mouth of these two witnesses* these promises might be established; and very precious promises they are, relating to the gospel-church, which have been in part accomplished, and will be yet more and more, for he is faithful that has promised.

I. That there shall be a church for God set up in the world, after the defection and destruction of the Jewish church, and this in the last days; that is, as some of the rabbins themselves acknowledge, *in the days of the Messiah*. The people of God shall be incorporated by a new charter, a new spiritual way of worship shall be enacted, and a new institution of offices to attend it; better privileges shall be granted by this new charter, and better provision made for enlarging and establishing the kingdom of God among men than had been made by the Old-Testament constitution: *The mountain of the house of the Lord* shall again appear firm ground for God's faithful worshippers to stand, and go, and build upon, in their attendance on him, v. 1. And it shall be a centre of unity to them; a church shall be set up in the world, to which the Lord will be daily *adding such as shall be*

saved.

II. That this church shall be firmly founded and well-built: It *shall be established in the top of the mountains*; Christ himself will build it upon a rock; it shall be an impregnable fort upon an immovable foundation, so that the gates of hell shall neither overthrow the one nor undermine the other (Mt. 16:18); its foundations are still in the *holy mountains* (Ps. 87:1), the *everlasting mountains*, which cannot, which shall not, be removed. It shall be established, not as the temple, upon one mountain, but upon many; for the foundations of the church, as they are sure, so they are large.

III. That it shall be highly advanced, and become eminent and conspicuous: It *shall be exalted above the hills*, observed with wonder for its growing greatness from small beginnings. The kingdom of Christ shall shine with greater lustre than ever any of the kingdoms of the earth did. It shall be as a *city on a hill, which cannot be hid*, Mt. 5:14. The glory of this latter house is greater than that of the former, Hag. 2:9. See 2 Co. 3:7, 8, etc.

IV. That there shall be a great accession of converts to it and succession of converts in it. *People shall flow unto it* as the waters of a river are continually flowing; there shall be a constant stream of believers flowing in from all parts into the church, as the people of the Jews flowed into the temple, while it was standing, to worship there. Then many tribes came to the mountain of the house, to enquire of God's temple; but in gospel-times many nations shall flow into the church, shall *fly like a cloud and as the doves to their windows*. Ministers shall be sent forth to *disciple all nations*, and they shall not *labour in vain*; for, multitudes being wrought upon to believe the gospel and embrace the Christian religion, they shall excite and encourage one another, and shall say, "*Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord now raised among us, even to the house of the God of Jacob*, the spiritual temple which we need not travel far to, for it is brought to our doors and set up in the midst of us." Thus shall people be *made willing in the day of his power* (Ps. 110:3), and shall do what they can to make others willing, as Andrew invited Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to be acquainted with Christ. They shall *call the people to the mountain* (Deu. 33:19), for there is in Christ enough for all, enough for each. Now observe what it is, 1. Which these converts expect to find in *the house of the God of Jacob*. They come thither for instruction: "*He will teach us of his ways*, what is the way in which he would have us to walk with him and in which we may depend upon him to meet us graciously." Note, Where we come to worship God we come to be taught of him. 2. Which they engage to do when they are thus taught of God: *We will walk in his paths*. Note, Those may comfortably expect that God will teach them who are firmly resolved by his grace to do as they are taught.

V. That, in order to this, a new revelation shall be published to the world, on which the church shall be founded, and by which multitudes shall be brought into it: *For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*. The gospel is here called *the word of the Lord*, for *the Lord gave the word, and great was the company of those that published it*, Ps. 68:11. It was of a divine original, a divine authority; it began to be spoken by the Lord Christ himself, Heb. 2:3. And it is *a law*, a law of faith; we are *under the law to Christ*. This was to go forth from *Jerusalem, from Zion*, the metropolis of the Old-Testament dispensation, where the temple, and altars, and oracles were, and whither the Jews went to worship from all parts; thence the gospel must take rise, to show the connexion between the Old Testament and the New, that the gospel is not set up in

opposition to the law, but is an explication and illustration of it, and a *branch growing out of its roots*. It was in Jerusalem that Christ preached and wrought miracles; there he died, rose again, and ascended; there the Spirit was poured out; and those that were to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations were ordered to *begin at Jerusalem*, so that thence flowed the streams that were to water the desert world.

VI. That a convincing power should go along with the gospel of Christ, in all places where it should be preached (v. 3): *He shall judge among many people*. Messiah, the lawgiver (v. 2.), is here *the judge*, for to him the Father *committed all judgment*, and *for judgment he came into this world*; his word, the *word of his gospel*, that was to go forth from Jerusalem, was the golden sceptre by which he shall rule and judge when he sits as *king on the holy hill of Zion*, Ps. 2:6. By it he shall *rebuke strong nations afar off*; for the Spirit working with the word shall *reprove the world*, Jn. 16:8. It is promised to the Son of David that he shall *judge among the heathen* (Ps. 110:6), which he does when in the chariot of his everlasting gospel he goes forth, and goes on, *conquering and to conquer*.

VII. That a disposition to mutual peace and love shall be the happy effect of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah: *They shall beat their swords into plough-shares*; that is, angry passionate men, that have been fierce and furious, shall be wonderfully sweetened, and made mild and meek, Tit. 3:2, 3. Those who, before their conversion, did injuries, and would bear none, after their conversion can bear injuries, but will do none. As far as the gospel prevails it makes men peaceable, for such is *the wisdom from above*; it is *gentle and easy to be entreated*; and if nations were but leavened by it, there would be universal peace. When Christ was born there was universal peace in the Roman empire; those that were first brought into the gospel church were all of *one heart and of one soul* (Acts 4:32); and it was observed of the primitive Christians how well *they loved one another*. In heaven this will have its full accomplishment. It is promised, 1. That none shall be quarrelsome. The art of war, instead of being improved (which some reckon the glory of a kingdom), shall be forgotten and laid aside as useless. They *shall not learn war any more* as they have done, for they shall have no need to defend themselves nor any inclination to offend their neighbours. *Nation shall no longer lift up sword against nation*; not that the gospel will make men cowards, but it will make men peaceable. 2. That all shall be quiet, both from evil and from the fear of evil (v. 4): *They shall sit safely*, and none shall disturb them; they shall sit securely, and shall not disturb themselves, every man *under his vine and under his fig-tree*, enjoying the fruit of them, and needing no other shelter than the leaves of them. *None shall make them afraid*; not only there shall be nothing that is likely to frighten them, but they shall not be disposed to fear. under the dominion of Christ, as that of Solomon, there shall be *abundance of peace*. Though his followers have trouble in the world, in him they enjoy great tranquillity. If this seems unlikely, yet we may depend upon it, *for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it*, and no word of his shall fall to the ground; what he has spoken by his word he will do by his providence and grace. He that is the *Lord of hosts* will be the *God of peace*; and those may well be easy whom *the Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, undertakes the protection of.

VIII. That the churches shall be constant in their duty, and so shall make a good use of their tranquillity and shall not provoke the Lord to deprive them of it, v. 5. When *the churches have rest* they shall be edified, and confirmed, and comforted, and shall resolve to be as firm to their God as other nations are to theirs, though they be no gods. Where we find the foregoing promises,

Isa. 2:2, etc. it follows (v. 5), *O house of Jacob! come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord*; and here, *We will walk in the name of the Lord our God*. Note, Peace is a blessing indeed when it strengthens our resolutions to cleave to the Lord. Observe, 1. How constant other nations were to their gods: *All people will walk every one in the name of his god*, will own their god and cleave to him, will worship their god and serve him, will depend upon him and put confidence in him. Whatever men make a god of they will make use of, and take his name along with them in all their actions and affairs. The mariners, in a storm, *cried every man to his god*, Jonah 1:5. And no instance could be found of a nation's changing its gods, Jer. 2:11: If the hosts of heaven were their gods, they loved them, and served them, and *walked after them*, Jer. 8:2. 2. How constant God's people now resolve to be to him: *"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God*, will acknowledge him in all our ways, and govern ourselves by a continual regard to him, doing nothing but what we have warrant from him for, and openly professing our relation to him." Observe, Their resolution is peremptory; it is not a thing that needs be disputed: *"We will walk in the name of the Lord our God."* It is just and reasonable: He is *our God*. And it is a resolution for a perpetuity: *"We will do it for ever and ever*, and will never leave him. He will be ours for ever, and therefore so we will be his, and never repent our choice."

IX. That notwithstanding the dispersions, distress, and infirmities of the church, it shall be formed and established, and made very considerable, v. 6, 7. 1. The state of the church had been low, and weak, and very helpless, in the latter times of the Old Testament, partly through the corruptions of the Jewish nation, and partly through the oppressions under which they groaned. They were like a *flock of sheep* that were *maimed, worried, and scattered*, Eze. 34:16; Jer. 50:6. 17. The good people among them, and in other places, that were well inclined, were dispersed, were very infirm, and in a manner lost and cast far off. 2. It is promised that all these grievances shall be redressed and the distemper healed. Christ will come himself (Mt. 15:24), and send his apostles to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, Mt. 10:6. From among the Jews that halted, or that for want of strength, could not go upright, God gathered a remnant (v. 7), that *remnant according to the election of grace* which is spoken of in Rom. 11:7, which embraced the gospel of Christ. And from among the Gentiles that were cast far off (so the Gentiles are described to be, Eph. 2:13, Acts 2:39) he raised a strong nation; greater numbers of them were brought into the church than of the Jews, Gal. 4:27. And such a strong nation the gospel-church is that the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against it. The church of Christ is more numerous than any other nation, and *strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*.

X. That the *Messiah* shall be the king of this kingdom, shall protect and govern it, and order all the affairs of it for the best, and this to the end of time. The Lord Jesus *shall reign over them in Mount Zion* by his word and Spirit in his ordinances, and this *henceforth and for ever, for of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*.

Verses 8-13

These verses relate to Zion and Jerusalem, here called the *tower of the flock* or the *tower of Edor*; we read of such a place (Gen. 35:21) near Bethlehem; and some conjecture it is the same place where the shepherds were keeping their flocks when the angels brought them tidings of the birth of Christ, and some think Bethlehem itself is here spoken of, as ch. 5:2. Some think it is a tower at that gate of Jerusalem which is called the *sheep-gate* (Neh. 3:32), and conjecture that through that gate Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem. However, it seems to be put for Jerusalem itself, or for Zion the *tower of David*. All the sheep of

Israel flocked thither three times a year; it was the *stronghold* (*Ophel*, which is also a name of a place in Jerusalem, Neh. 3:27), or castle, of the *daughter of Zion*. Now here,

I. We have a promise of the glories of the spiritual Jerusalem, the gospel-church, which is; the tower of the flock, that one fold in which all the sheep of Christ are protected under one Shepherd: "*Unto thee shall it come; that which thou hast long wanted and wished for, even the first dominion, a dignity and power equal to that of David and Solomon, by whom Jerusalem was first raised, that kingdom shall again come to the daughter of Jerusalem, which it was deprived of at the captivity. It shall make as great a figure and shine with as much lustre among the nations, and have as much influence upon them, as ever it had; this is the first or chief dominion.*" Now this had by no means its accomplishment in Zerubbabel; his was nothing like the first dominion either in respect of splendour and sovereignty at home or the extent of power abroad; and therefore it must refer to the kingdom of the *Messiah* (and to that the Chaldee-paraphrase refers it) and had its accomplishment when God gave to our Lord Jesus *the throne of his father David* (Lu. 1:32), set him king upon the holy hill of Zion and gave him the heathen for his inheritance (Ps. 2:6), made him, his first-born, higher than the kings of the earth, Ps. 89:27; Dan. 7:14. David, in spirit, called him Lord, and (as Dr. Pocock observes) he witnessed of himself, and his witness was true, that he was greater than Solomon, none of their dominions being like his for extent and duration. The common people welcomed Christ into Jerusalem with *hosannas to the son of David*, to show that it was the *first dominion* that came to the *daughter of Zion*; and the evangelist applies it to the promise of Zion's king coming to her, Mt. 21:5; Zec. 9:9. Some give this sense of the words: To Zion, and Jerusalem that tower of the flock, to the nation of the Jews, *came the first dominion*; that is, there the kingdom of Christ was first set up, the *gospel of the kingdom* was first preached (Lu. 24:47), there Christ was first called *king of the Jews*.

II. This is illustrated by a prediction of the calamities of the literal Jerusalem, to which some favour and relief should be granted, as a type and figure of what God would do for the gospel-Jerusalem in the last days, notwithstanding its distresses. We have here,

1. Jerusalem put in pain by the providences of God. "She *cries out aloud*, that all her neighbours may take notice of her griefs, because there is *no king in her*, none of that honour and power she used to have. Instead of ruling the nations, as she did when she *sat a queen*, she is ruled by them, and has become a captive. Her *counsellors* have *perished*; she is no longer at her own disposal, but is given up to the will of her enemies, and is governed by their counsellors. *Pangs have taken her.*" (1.) She is carried captive to Babylon, and there is in pangs of grief. "She *goes forth out of the city*, and is constrained to *dwell in the field*, exposed to all manner of inconveniences; she *goes even to Babylon*, and there wears out *seventy tedious* years in a miserable captivity, all that while *in pain, as a woman in travail*, waiting to be delivered, and thinking the time very long." (2.) When she is delivered out of Babylon, and redeemed from the hand of her enemies there, yet still she is in pangs of fear; the end of one trouble is but the beginning of another; for *now also*, when Jerusalem is in the rebuilding, *many nations are gathered against her*, v. 11. They were so in Ezra's and Nehemiah's time, and did all they could to obstruct the building of the temple and the wall. They were so in the time of the Maccabees; they said, *Let her be defiled*; let her be looked upon as a place polluted with sin, and be forsaken and abandoned both of God and man; let her holy places be profaned and all her honours laid in the dust;

let our eye look upon Zion, and please itself with the sight of its ruins, as it is said of Edom (Obad. 12, *Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brother*); let our eyes see our desire upon Zion, the day we have long wished for. When they hear the enemies thus combine against them, and insult over them, no wonder that they are in pain, and cry aloud. *Without are fightings, within are fears.*

2. Jerusalem made easy by the promises of God: "*Why dost thou cry out aloud?* Let thy griefs and fears be silenced; indulge not thyself in them, for, though things are bad with thee, they shall end well; thy pangs are great, but they are like those of a *woman in travail* (v. 9), that *labours to bring forth* (v. 10), the issue of which will be good at last." Jerusalem's pangs are not as dying agonies, but as travailing throes, which after a while will be forgotten, for joy that a child is born into the world. Let the literal Jerusalem comfort herself with this, that, whatever straits she may be reduced to, she shall continue until the coming of the Messiah, for there his kingdom must be first set up, and she shall not be destroyed while that blessing is in her; and when at length she is ploughed as a field, and become heaps (as is threatened, ch. 3:12), yet her privileges shall be resigned to the spiritual Jerusalem, and in that the promises made to her shall be fulfilled. Let Jerusalem be easy then, for, (1.) Her captivity in Babylon shall have an end, a happy end (v. 10): *There shalt thou be delivered, and the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thy enemies there.* This was done by Cyrus, who acted therein as God's servant; and that deliverance was typical of our redemption by Jesus Christ, and the release from our spiritual bondage which is proclaimed in the everlasting gospel, that *acceptable year of the Lord*, in which Christ himself preached *liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that were bound*, Lu. 4:18, 19. (2.) The designs of her enemies against her afterwards shall be baffled, nay, they shall turn upon themselves, v. 12, 13. They promise themselves a day of it, but it shall prove *God's day*. They are *gathered against Zion*, to destroy it, but it shall prove to their own destruction, which Israel and Israel's God shall have the glory of. [1.] Their coming together against Zion shall be the occasion of their ruin. They *associate themselves, and gird themselves*, that they may break Jerusalem in pieces, but it will prove that they shall be broken in pieces, Isa. 8:9. *They know not the thoughts of the Lord.* When they are gathering together, and Providence favours them in it, they little think what God is designing by it, nor do they understand his counsel; they know what they aim at in coming together, but they know not what God aims at in bringing them together; they aim at Zion's ruin, but God aims at theirs. Note, When men are made use of as instruments of Providence in accomplishing its purposes it is very common for them to intend one thing and for God to intend quite the contrary. The king of Assyria is to be a rod in God's hand for the correction of his people, in order to their reformation; *howbeit he means not so, nor does his heart think so*, Isa. 10:7. And thus it is here; the nations are gathered against Zion, as soldiers into the field, but God gathers them *as sheaves into the floor*, to be beaten to pieces; and they could not have been so easily, so effectually, destroyed, if they had not *gathered together against Zion*. Note, The designs of enemies for the ruin of the church often prove ruining to themselves; and thereby they prepare themselves for destruction and put themselves in the way of it; they are *snares in the work of their own hands*. [2.] Zion shall have the honour of being victorious over them, v. 13. When they are *gathered as sheaves into the floor*, to be trodden down, as the corn then was by the oxen, then, "*Arise, and thresh, O daughter of Zion!*" instead of fearing them, and fleeing from them, boldly set upon them, and take the opportunity Providence favours thee with of

trampling upon them. Plead not thy own weakness, and that thou art not a match for so many confederated enemies; God will make *thy horn iron*, to push them down, and *thy hoofs brass*, to tread upon them when they are down; and thus thou shalt *beat in pieces many people*, that have long been beating thee in pieces." Thus, when God pleases, *the daughter of Babylon is made a threshing floor (it is time to thresh her, Jer. 51:33)*, and the *worm Jacob* is made *a threshing instrument*, with which God will *thresh the mountains, and make them as chaff*, Isa. 41:14, 15. How strangely, how happily, are the tables turned, since Jacob was the threshing-floor and Babylon the threshing instrument! Isa. 21:10. Note, When God has conquering work for his people to do he will furnish them with strength and ability for it, will make the horn iron and the hoofs brass; and, when he does so, they must exert the power he gives them, and execute the commission; even the daughter of Zion must arise, and thresh. [3.] The glory of the victory shall redound to God. Zion shall thresh these sheaves in the floor, but the corn threshed out shall be a meat-offering at God's altar: *I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord* (that is, I will have it consecrated) and *their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth*. The spoils gained by Zion's victory shall be brought into the sanctuary, and devoted to God, either in part, as those of Midian (Num. 31:28), or in whole, as those of Jericho, Jos. 6:17. God is Jehovah, the fountain of being; he is the *Lord of the whole earth*, the fountain of power; and therefore he needs not any of our gain or substance, but may challenge and demand it all if he please; and with ourselves we must devote all we have to his honour, to be employed as he directs. Thus far all we have must have *holiness to the Lord* written upon it, all our gain and substance must be *consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth*, Isa. 23:18. And extraordinary successes call for extraordinary acknowledgments, whether they be of spoils in war or gains in trade. It is God that *gives us power to get wealth*, which way soever it is honestly got, and therefore he must be honoured with what we get. Some make all this to point at the defeat of Sennacherib when he besieged Jerusalem, others to the destruction of Babylon, others to the successes of the Maccabees; but the learned Dr. Pocock and others think it had its full accomplishment in the spiritual victories obtained by the gospel of Christ over the powers of darkness that fought against it. The nations thought to ruin Christianity in its infancy, but it was victorious over them; those that persisted in their enmity were *broken to pieces* (Mt. 21:44), particularly the Jewish nation; but multitudes by divine grace were gained to the church, and they and their substance were consecrated to the Lord Jesus, *the Lord of the whole earth*.

Chapter 5

In this chapter we have, I. A prediction of the troubles and distresses of the Jewish nation (v. 1). II. A promise of the Messiah, and of his kingdom, to support the people of God in the day of these troubles. 1. Of the birth of the Messiah (v. 2, 3). 2. Of his advancement (v. 4). 3. Of his protection of his people, and his victory over his and their enemies (v. 5, 6). 4. Of the great world by it (v. 7). 5. Of the destruction of the enemies of the church, both those without, that attack it, and those within, that expose it (v. 8–15).

Verses 1-6

Here, as before, we have,

I. The abasement and distress of Zion, v. 1. The Jewish nation, for many years before the captivity, dwindled, and fell into disgrace: *Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops!* It is either a summons to Zion's enemies, that had troops at their service, to come and do their worst against her (God will suffer them to do it), or a challenge to Zion's friends, that had troops too at command, to come and do their best for her; Let them *gather in troops*, yet it shall be to no purpose; for, says the prophet, in the name of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *He has laid siege against us*; the king of Assyria has, the king of Babylon has, and we know not which way to defend ourselves; so that the enemies shall gain their point, and prevail so far as *to smite the judge of Israel*—the king, the chief justice, and the other inferior judges—*with a rod upon the cheek*, in contempt of them and their dignity; having made them prisoners, they shall use them as shamefully as any of the common captives. Complaint had been made of the judges of Israel (ch. 3:11) that they were corrupt and took bribes, and this disgrace came justly upon them for abusing their power; yet it was a great calamity to Israel to have their judges treated thus ignominiously. Some make this the reason why the troops (that is, the Roman army) shall lay siege to Jerusalem, because the Jews *shall smite the judge of Israel upon the cheek*, because of the indignities they shall do to the Messiah, the Judge of Israel, whom they smote on the cheek, saying, *Prophecy, who smote thee*. But the former sense seems more probable, and that it is meant of the besieging of Jerusalem, not by the Romans, but the Chaldeans, and was fulfilled in the indignities done to king Zedekiah and the princes of the house of David.

II. The advancement of Zion's King. Having shown how low the house of David should be brought, and how vilely the shield of that mighty family should be cast away, as though it had not been anointed with oil, to encourage the faith of God's people, who might be tempted now to think that his covenant with David and his house was abrogated (according to the psalmist's complaint, Ps. 89:38, 39), he adds an illustrious prediction of the Messiah and his kingdom, in whom that covenant should be established, and the honours of that house should be revived, advanced, and perpetuated. Now let us see,

1. How the Messiah is here described. It is he that is to be *ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, from the days of eternity*, as the word is. Here we have, (1.) His existence from eternity, as God: *his goings forth, or emanations*, as the going forth of the beams from the sun, were, or have been, *of old, from everlasting*, which (says Dr. Pocock) is so signal a description of Christ's eternal generation, or his going forth as the Son of God, begotten of his Father

before all worlds, that this prophecy must belong only to him, and could never be verified of any other. It certainly speaks of a going forth that was now past, when the prophet spoke, and cannot but be read, as we read it, his *outgoings have been*; and the putting of both these words together, which severally are used to denote eternity, plainly shows that they must here be taken in the strictest sense (the same with Ps. 90:2, *From everlasting to everlasting thou are God*), and can be applied to no other than to him who was able to say, *Before Abraham was, I am*, Jn. 8:58. Dr. Pocock observes that the *going forth* is used (Deu. 8:3) for a *word* which *proceeds out of the mouth*, and is therefore very fitly used to signify the eternal generation of him who is called the *Word of God*, that was *in the beginning with God*, Jn. 1:1, 2. (2.) His office as Mediator; he was to be *ruler in Israel*, king of his church; he was to *reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, Lu. 1:32, 33. The Jews object that our Lord Jesus could not be the Messiah, for he was so far from being ruler in Israel that Israel ruled over him, and put him to death, and would not have him to reign over them; but he answered that himself when he said, *My kingdom is not of this world*, Jn. 18:36. And it is a spiritual Israel that he reigns over, the children of promise, all the followers of believing Abraham and praying Jacob. In the hearts of these he reigns by his Spirit and grace, and in the society of these by his word and ordinances. And was not he *ruler in Israel* whom winds and seas obeyed, to whom legions of devils were forced to submit, and who commanded away diseases from the sick and called the dead out of their graves? None but he whose *goings forth were from of old, from everlasting*, was fit to be *ruler in Israel*, to be head of the church, and *head over all things to the church*.

2. What is here foretold concerning him.

(1.) That Bethlehem should be the place of his nativity, v. 2. This was the scripture which the scribes went upon when with the greatest assurance they told Herod *where Christ should be born* (Mt. 2:6), and hence it was universally known among the Jews that *Christ should come out of the town of Bethlehem where David was*, Jn. 7:42. *Beth-lehem* signifies *the house of bread*, the fittest place for him to be born in who is *the bread of life*. And, because it was the city of David, by a special providence it was ordered that he should be born there who was to be the *Son of David*, and his heir and successor for ever. It is called *Bethlehem-Ephratah*, both names of the same city, as appears Gen. 35:19. It was *little among the thousands of Judah*, not considerable either for the number of the inhabitants or the figure they made; it had nothing in it worthy to have this honour put upon it; but God in that, as in other instances, chose to *exalt those of low degree*, Lu. 1:52. Christ would give honour to the place of his birth, and not derive honour from it: *Though thou be little*, yet this shall make thee great, and, as St. Matthew reads it, *Thou art not the least among the princes of Judah*, but upon this account art really honourable above any of them. A relation to Christ will magnify those that are little in the world.

(2.) That in the fulness of time he should be born of a woman (v. 3): *Therefore will he give them up*; he will give up his people Israel to distress and trouble, and will defer their salvation, which has been so long promised and expected, *until the time*, the set time, *that she who travails has brought forth*, or (as it should be read) *that she who shall bring forth shall have brought forth*, that the blessed virgin, who was to be the mother of the Messiah, shall have brought him forth at Bethlehem, the place appointed. This Dr. Pocock thinks to be the most genuine sense of the words. Though the out-goings of the Messiah were *from everlasting*, yet the *redemption in Jerusalem*, the *consolation of Israel*, must be *waited for* (Lu. 2:25–38) until the time that *she*

who should bring forth (so the virgin Mary is called, as Christ is himself called, *He that shall come*) shall *bring forth*; and in the mean time *he will give them up*. Divine salvations must be waited for until the time fixed for the bringing of them forth. (3.) That *the remnant of his brethren shall then return to the children of Israel*. The remnant of the Jewish nation shall return to the spirit of the true genuine children of Israel, a people in covenant with God; the hearts of the children shall be turned to the fathers, Mal. 4:6. Some understand it of all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews; they shall all be incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel; and, as they are all brethren to one another, so *he is not ashamed to call them brethren*, Heb. 2:11. (4.) That he shall be a glorious prince, and his subjects shall be happy under his government (v. 4): *He shall stand and feed*, that is, he shall both teach and rule, and continue to do so, as a good shepherd, with wisdom, and care, and love. So it was foretold. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd*, shall provide green pastures for them, and under-shepherds to lead them into these pastures. He is the *good shepherd that goes before the sheep*, and presides among them. He shall do this, not as an ordinary man, but *in the strength of the Lord*, as one clothed with a divine power to go through his work, and break through the difficulties in his way, so as not to *fail*, or be *discouraged*; he shall do it *in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God*, so as plainly to evidence that *God's name was in him* (Ex. 23:21) the majesty of his name, for *he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes*. The prophets prefaced their messages with, *Thus saith the Lord*; but Christ spoke, not as a servant, but as a Son—*Verily, verily, I say unto you*. This was feeding *in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God*. All power was given him *in heaven and in earth, a power over all flesh*, by virtue of which he still rules *in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God*, a name above every name. Christ's government shall be, [1.] Very happy for his subjects, for *they shall abide*; they shall be safe and easy, and continue so for ever. *Because he lives, they shall live also*. They shall lie down in the green pastures to which he shall lead them, *shall abide in God's tabernacle for ever*, Ps. 61:4. His church shall abide, and he in it, and with it, always, even to the end of the world. [2.] It shall be very glorious to himself: *Now shall he be great to the ends of the earth*. Now that he stands and feeds his flock, *now shall he be great*. For Christ reckons it his greatness to do good. Now he shall be *great to the ends of the earth*, for the uttermost parts of the earth shall be given him for his possession, and the ends of the world shall see his salvation.

(5) That he shall secure the peace and welfare of his church and people against all the attempts of his and their enemies (v. 5, 6): *This man, as king and ruler, shall be the peace when the Assyrians shall come into our land*. This refers to the deliverance of Hezekiah and his kingdom from the power of Sennacherib, who invaded them, in the type; but, under the shadow of that, it is a promise of the safety of the gospel-church and of all believers from the designs and attempts of the powers of darkness, Satan and all his instruments, the dragon and his angels, that seek to devour the church of the first-born and all that belong to it. Observe, [1.] The peril and danger which Christ's subjects are supposed to be in. The Assyrian, a potent enemy, *comes into their land* (v. 5, 6), *treads within their borders*, nay, prevails so far as to *tread in their palaces*; it was a time of *treading down and of perplexity* when Sennacherib made a descent upon Judah, took all the defenced cities, and laid siege to Jerusalem, Isa. 36:1; 37:3. This represented the gates of hell fighting against the kingdom of Christ, *encompassing the camp of the saints and of the holy city*, and threatening to bear down all before them. When the terrors of the law set themselves in array against a

convinced soul, when the temptations of Satan assault the people of God, and the troubles of the world threaten to rob them of all their comforts, then the *Assyrian comes into their land* and treads in their palaces. *Without are fightings, within are fears.* [2.] The protection and defence which his subjects are then sure to be under. *First*, Christ will himself be *their peace*. When the Assyrian comes with such a force into a land, can there be any other peace than a tame submission and an unresisted desolation? Yes, even then the church's King will be the conservator of the church's peace, will be *for a hiding-place*, Isa. 32:1, 2. Christ is our peace as a priest, making atonement for sin, and reconciling us to God; and he is our peace as a king, conquering our enemies and commanding down disquieting fears and passions; he *creates the fruit of the lips, peace*. Even when the Assyrian comes into the land, when we are in the greatest distress and danger and have received a sentence of death within ourselves, yet *this man may be the peace*. *In me*, says Christ, *you shall have peace*, when *in the world you have tribulation*; at such a time our souls may dwell at ease in him. *Secondly*, He will find out proper instruments to be employed for their protection and deliverance, and the defeat of their enemies: *Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men*, that is, a competent number of persons, proper to oppose the enemy, and make head against him, and protect the church of God in peace, men that shall have the care and tenderness of shepherds and the courage and authority of *principal men*, or *princes of men*. *Seven* and *eight* are a certain number for an uncertain. Note, When God has work to do he will not want fitting instruments to do it with; and when he pleases he can do it by a few; he needs not raise thousands, but seven or eight principal men may serve the turn if God be with them. Magistrates and ministers are shepherds and principal men, raised in defence of religion's righteous cause against the powers of sin and Satan in the world. *Thirdly*, The opposition given to the church shall be got over, and the opposers brought down. This is represented by the laying of Assyria and Chaldea waste, which two nations were the most formidable enemies to the Israel of God of any, and the destruction of them signified the making of Christ's enemies his footstool: *They shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof*; they shall make inroads upon the land, and put to the sword all that they find in arms. Note, Those that threaten ruin to the church of God hasten ruin to themselves; and their destruction is the church's salvation: *Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian*. When *Satan fell as lightning from heaven* before the preaching of the gospel, and Christ's enemies, that would not have him to reign over them, were *slain before him*, then this was fulfilled.

Verses 7-15

Glorious things are here spoken of *the remnant of Jacob*, that remnant which was raised of *her that halted* (ch. 4:7), and it seems to be that *remnant which the Lord our God shall call* (Joel 2:32), on whom the Spirit shall be poured out, the remnant that shall be saved, Rom. 9:27. Note, God's people are but a remnant, a small number in comparison with the many that are left to perish, a *little flock*; but they are *the remnant of Jacob*, a people in covenant with God, and in his favour. Now concerning this remnant it is here promised,

I. That they shall be *as a dew* in the midst of the nations, v. 7. God's church is dispersed all the world over; it is *in the midst of many people*, as gold in the ore, wheat in the heap. Israel according to the flesh dwelt alone, and was not numbered among the nations; but the spiritual Israel lies scattered *in the midst of many people*, as the *salt of the earth*, or as seed sown in the ground,

here a grain and there a grain, Hos. 2:23. Now this remnant shall be *as dew from the Lord*. 1. They shall be of a heavenly extraction; as *dew from the Lord*, who is the *Father of the rain*, and has *begotten the drops of the dew*, Job 38:28. They are *born from above*, and are not of the earth, savouring the things of the earth. 2. They shall be numerous as the drops of dew in a summer's morning. Ps. 110:3, *Thou hast the dew of thy youth*. 3. They shall be pure and clear, not muddy and corrupt, but crystal drops, as the *water of life*. 4. They shall be produced silently and without noise, as the dew that distils insensibly, we know not how; such is the way of the Spirit. 5. They shall live in a continual dependence upon God, and be still deriving from him, as the dew, which *tarries not for man*, not *waits for the sons of men*; they shall not rely upon human aids and powers, but on divine grace, for they are, and own that they are, no more than what the free grace of God makes them every day. 6. They shall be great blessings to those among whom they live, as the dew and the showers are to the grass, to make it grow without the help of man, or the sons of men. Their doctrine, example, and prayers, shall make them as dew, to soften and moisten others, and make them fruitful. Their speech shall *distil as the dew* (Deu. 32:2), and all about them shall *wait for them as for the rain*, Job 29:23. The people among whom they live shall be as the grass, which flourishes only by the blessing of God, and not by the art and care of man; they shall be beneficial to those about them by drawing down God's blessings on them, as Jacob on Laban's house, and by cooling and mitigating God's wrath, which otherwise would burn them up, as the dew preserves the grass from being scorched by the sun; so Dr. Pocock; they shall be mild and gentle in their behaviour, like their Master, who comes down *like rain upon the new-mown grass*, Ps. 72:6.

II. That they shall be *as a lion among the beasts of the forest*, that *treads down and tears in pieces*, v. 8. As they shall be silent, and gentle, and communicative of all good, to those that receive the truth in the love of it, so they shall be bold as a lion in witnessing against the corruptions of the times and places they live in, and strong as a lion, in the strength of God, to resist and overcome their spiritual enemies. The *weapons of their warfare are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds*, 2 Co. 10:4, 5. They shall have *courage which all their adversaries shall not be able to resist* (Lu. 21:15), as when the lion tears none can deliver. When infidelity is silenced, and all iniquity made *to stop her mouth*, when sinners are convinced and converted by the power of the gospel, in the doctrine of its ministers and the conversation of its professors, then the remnant of Jacob is like a lion. This is explained, v. 9, *Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thy adversaries*; the church shall have the upper hand at last of all that oppose her. Her *enemies shall be cut off*; they shall cease to be enemies; their enmity shall be cut off. Christ's arrows of conviction shall be sharp in their hearts, so that they shall fall under him; they shall yield themselves subjects to him (Ps. 45:5) and be happily conquered and subdued, Ps. 110:2.

III. That they shall be brought off from all carnal confidences, which they have relied on, that by the providence of God they shall enjoy such a security that they shall not need them, and by the grace of God they shall be brought to see the folly of them and come off from them. It was the sin of Israel that they furnished themselves extravagantly with *horses and chariots*, and were *soothsayers and idolaters*; see Isa. 2:6-8. But here it is promised that they shall not regard them any more. The tranquillity of the kingdom of Christ is intended in that promise, which explains this, Zec. 9:10, *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem*. Note, It is a great mercy to be deprived of those things in which we have reposed a

confidence in competition with God, which we have made our arm, and after which we have gone a whoring from God. Let us observe the particulars:—1. They had trusted in chariots and horses, and multiplied them (Ps. 20:7); but now God will *cut off their horses*, and *destroy their chariots* (v. 10), as *David houghed the chariot-horses*, 2 Sa. 8:4. They shall not have them, lest they should be tempted to trust in them. 2. They depended upon their strongholds, and fortified cities, for their security; but God will take care that they be demolished (v. 11): *I will cut off the cities of thy land; I will throw down thy strongholds*. They shall have them for habitations, but not for garrisons, for God will be their only place of defence, their *high tower*, and *their deliverer*. 3. Many of them depended much upon the conduct and advice of their conjurors, diviners, and fortune-tellers; and those God will cut off, not only as weak things, and insufficient to relieve them, but as wicked things, and sufficient to ruin them (v. 12): *"I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy hand, that thou shalt no more take hold of them, and stay thyself upon them, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers, for thou shalt be convinced that all their pretensions are a cheat."* The justice of the nation shall cut them off according to law, Lev. 20:27. the preaching of the gospel brought men off from using curious arts, Acts 19:19. 4. Many of them had said to the work of their hands, *You are our gods*; but now idolatry shall be abolished and abandoned (v. 13): *"Thy graven images will I cut off, and thy standing images, both those that were movable and those that were fixed; they shall be destroyed by the power of the law of Moses and deserted by the power of the gospel of Christ, so that thou shalt no more worship the work of thy hands, but be ashamed that ever thou hast been so deluded. Among other monuments of idolatry, I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee,"* v. 14. These were planted and preserved in honour of their idols, and used in the worship of them; these they were ordered to burn (Deu. 12:2, 3), and, if they do not, God will, so that they shall not have them to trust to. And so *will I destroy their cities*, meaning the cities that were dedicated to the idols, to some dunghill-deity or other, which they confided in for their protection.

IV. That those who stand it out against the gospel of Christ, and continue in league with their idolatries and witchcrafts, shall fall under the wrath of God, and be consumed by it (v. 15): *I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen* (that is, upon heathenism), *such as they have not heard*; idolatries shall be done away, and idolaters put to shame. I will execute vengeance upon the heathen *who have not heard* (so some read it), or who would not hear and receive the doctrine of Christ. God will give his Son either the hearts or the necks of his enemies, and make them either his friends or his footstool.

Chapter 6

After the precious promises in the two foregoing chapters, relating to the Messiah's kingdom, the prophet is here directed to set the sins of Israel in order before them, for their conviction and humiliation, as necessary to make way for the comfort of gospel-grace. Christ's forerunner was a reprover, and preached repentance, and so prepared his way. Here, I. God enters an action against his people for their base ingratitude, and the bad returns they had made him for his favours (v. 1-5). II. He shows the wrong course they should have taken (v. 6-8). III. He calls upon them to hear the voice of his judgments, and sets the sins in order before them for which he still proceeded in his controversy with them (v. 9), their injustice (v. 10-15), and their idolatry (v. 16), for both which ruin was coming upon them.

Verses 1-5

Here, I. The prefaces to the message are very solemn and such as may engage our most serious attention. 1. The people are commanded to give audience: *Hear you now what the Lord says*. What the prophet speaks he speaks from God, and in his name; they are therefore bound to hear it, not as the word of a sinful dying man, but of the holy living God. *Hear now* what he saith, for, first or last, he will be heard. 2. The prophet is commanded to speak in earnest, and to put an emphasis upon what he said: *Arise, contend thou before the mountains, or with the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice*, if it were possible; contend with the mountains and hills of Judea, that is, with the inhabitants of those mountains and hills; and, some think, reference is had to those mountains and hills on which they worshipped idols and which were thus polluted. But it is rather to be taken more generally, as appears by his call, not only to the mountains, but to the *strong foundations of the earth*, pursuant to the instructions given him. This is designed, (1.) To excite the earnestness of the prophet; he must speak as vehemently as if he designed to make even the hills and mountains hear him, must *cry aloud, and not spare*; what he had to say in God's name he must proclaim publicly before the mountains, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to own his message; he must speak as one concerned, as one that desired to speak to the heart, and therefore appeared to speak from the heart. (2.) To expose the stupidity of the people; "*Let the hills hear thy voice*, for this senseless careless people will not hear it, will not heed it. Let the rocks, the *foundations of the earth*, that have no ears, hear, since Israel, that has ears, will not hear." It is an appeal to the mountains and hills; let them bear witness that Israel has fair warning given them, and good counsel, if they would but take it. Thus Isaiah begins with, *Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!* Let them *judge between God and his vineyard*.

II. The message itself is very affecting. He is to let all the world know that God has a quarrel with his people, good ground for an action against them. Their offences are public, and therefore so are the articles of impeachment exhibited against them. Take notice *the Lord has a controversy with his people and he will plead with Israel*, will plead by his prophets, plead by his providences, to make good his charge. Note, 1. Sin begets a controversy between God and man. The righteous God has an action against every sinner, an action of debt, an action of trespass, an action of slander. 2. If Israel, God's own professing people, provoke him by sin, he will let them know that he has a controversy with them; he sees sin in them, and is displeased with it, nay, their sins are more displeasing to him than the sins of others, as they are a greater grief to his Spirit and dishonour

to his name. 3. God will plead with those whom he has a controversy with, will plead with his people Israel, that they may be convinced and that he may be justified. In the close of the foregoing chapter he pleaded with the heathen in anger and fury, to bring them to ruin; but here he pleads with Israel in compassion and tenderness, to bring them to repentance, *Come now, and let us reason together*. God reasons with us, to teach us to reason with ourselves. See the equity of God's cause, it will bear to be pleaded, and sinners themselves will be forced to confess judgment, and to own that *God's ways are equal*, but their *ways are unequal*, Eze. 18:25. Now, (1.) God here challenges them to show what he had done against them which might give them occasion to desert him. They had revolted from God and rebelled against him; but had they any cause to do so? (v. 3): "*O my people! what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee?*" If subjects quit their allegiance to their prince, they will pretend (as the ten tribes did when they revolted from Rehoboam), that his yoke is too heavy for them; but can you pretend any such thing? *What have I done to you* that is unjust or unkind? *Wherein have I wearied you* with the impositions of service or the exactions of tribute? *Have I made you to serve with an offering?* Isa. 43:23. *What iniquity have your fathers found in me?* Jer. 2:5. He never deceived us, nor disappointed our expectations from him, never did us wrong, nor put disgrace upon us; why then do we wrong and dishonour him, and frustrate his expectations from us? Here is a challenge to all that ever were in God's service to testify against him if they have found him, in any thing, a hard Master, or if they have found his demands unreasonable. (2.) Since they could not show any thing that he had done against them, he will show them a great deal that he has done for them, which should have engaged them for ever to his service, v. 4, 5. They are here directed, and we in them, to look a great way back in their reviews of the divine favour; let them remember their former days, their first days, when they were formed into a people, and the great things God did for them, [1.] When he brought them out of Egypt, the land of their bondage, v. 4. They were content with their slavery, and almost in love with their chains, for the sake of the garlic and onions they had plenty of; but God *brought them up*, inspired them with an ambition of liberty and animated them with a resolution by a bold effort to shake off their fetters. The Egyptians held them fast, and would not let the people go; but God *redeemed them*, not by price, but by force, *out of the house of servants*, or, rather, *the house of bondage*, for it is the same word that is used in the preface to the ten commandments, which insinuates that the considerations which are arguments for duty, if they be not improved by us, will be improved against us as aggravations of sin. When he brought them out of Egypt into a vast howling wilderness, as he left not himself without witness, so he left not them without guides, for he sent before them *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, three prophets* (says the Chaldee paraphrase), Moses the great prophet of the Old Testament, Aaron his prophet (Ex. 7:1), and Miriam a prophetess, Ex. 15:20. Note, When we are calling to mind God's former mercies to us we must not forget the mercy of good teachers and governors when we were young; let those be made mention of, to the glory of God, who went before us, saying, *This is the way, walk in it*; it was God that sent them before us, to prepare the way of the Lord and to prepare a people for him. [2.] When he brought them into Canaan. God no less glorified himself, and honoured them, in what he did for them when he brought them into the land of their rest than in what he did for them when he brought them out of the land of their servitude. When Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, were dead, yet they found God the same. Let them remember now what God did for them, *First*, In baffling and defeating the designs of Balak and Balaam against them, which he did by the

power he has over the hearts and tongues of men, v. 5. Let them remember *what Balak the king of Moab consulted*, what mischief he devised and designed to do to Israel, when they encamped in the plains of Moab; that which he consulted was to *curse Israel*, to divide between them and their God, and to disengage him from the protection of them. Among the heathen, when they made war upon any people, they endeavoured by magic charms or otherwise to get from them their tutelary gods, as to rob Troy of its Palladium. Macrobius has a chapter *de ritu evocandi Deos—concerning the solemnity of calling out the gods*. Balak would try this against Israel; but remember *what Balaam the son of Beor answered him*, how contrary to his own intention and inclination; instead of cursing Israel, he blessed them, to the extreme confusion and vexation of Balak. Let them remember the malice of the heathen against them, and for that reason never *learn the way of the heathen*, nor associate with them. Let them remember the kindness of their God to them, how he *turned the curse into a blessing (because the Lord thy God loved thee*, as it is, Deu. 23:5), and for that reason never forsake him. Note, The disappointing of the devices of the church's enemies ought always to be remembered to the glory of the church's protector, who can make *the answer of the tongue* directly to contradict the preparation and consultation of the heart, Prov. 16:1. *Secondly*, In bringing them *from Shittim*, their last lodgment out of Canaan, *unto Gilgal*, their first lodgment in Canaan. There it was, between Shittim and Gilgal, that, upon the death of Moses, Joshua, a type of Christ, was raised up to put Israel in possession of the land of promise and to fight their battles; there it was that they passed over Jordan through the divided waters, and renewed the covenant of circumcision; these mercies of God to their fathers they must now remember, that they may *know the righteousness of the Lord, his righteousness* (so the word is), his justice in destroying the Canaanites, his goodness in giving rest to his people Israel, and his faithfulness to his promise made unto the fathers. The remembrance of what God had done to them might convince them of all this, and engage them for ever to his service. Or they may refer to the controversy now pleaded between God and Israel; let them remember God's many favours to them and their fathers, and compare with them their unworthy ungrateful conduct towards him, *that they may know the righteousness of the Lord* in contending with them, and it may appear that in this controversy he has right on his side; his ways are equal, for he will be *justified when he speaks*, and *clear when he judges*.

Verses 6-8

Here is the proposal for accommodation between God and Israel, the parties that were at variance in the beginning of the chapter. Upon the trial, judgment is given against Israel; they are convicted of injustice and ingratitude towards God, the crimes with which they stood charged. Their guilt is too plain to be denied, too great to be excused, and therefore, I. They express their desires to be at peace with God upon any terms (v. 6, 7): *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?* Being made sensible of the justice of God's controversy with them, and dreading the consequences of it, they were inquisitive what they might do to be reconciled to God and to make him their friend. They apply to a proper person, with this enquiry, to the prophet, the Lord's messenger, by whose ministry they had been convinced. Who so fit to show them their way as he that had made them sensible of their having missed it? And it is observable that each one speaks for himself: *Wherewith shall I come?* Knowing every one the plague of his own heart, they ask, not, *What shall this man do?* But, *What shall I do?* Note, Deep convictions of guilt and wrath will put men upon careful enquiries after peace and pardon, and then, and not till then, there

begins to be some hope of them. They enquire *wherewith they may come before the Lord, and bow themselves before the high God*. They believe there is a God, that he is Jehovah, and that he is the *high God, the Most High*. Those whose consciences are convinced learn to speak very honourably of God, whom before they spoke slightly of. Now, 1. We know we must *come before God*; he is the God with whom *we have to do*; we must come as subjects, to pay our homage to him, as beggars, to ask alms from him, nay, we must *come before him*, as criminals, to receive our doom from him, must come before him as our Judge. 2. When we come before him we must *bow before him*; it is our duty to be very humble and reverent in our approaches to him; and, when we come before him, there is no remedy but we must submit; it is to no purpose to contend with him. 3. When we come and bow before him it is our great concern to find favour with him, and to be accepted of him; their enquiry is, *What will the Lord be pleased with?* Note, All that rightly understand their own interest cannot but be solicitous what they must do to please God, to avoid his displeasure and to obtain his good-will. 4. In order to God's being pleased with us, our care must be that the sin by which we have displeased him may be taken away, and an atonement made for it. The enquiry here is, *What shall I give for my transgression, for the sin of my soul?* Note, The transgression we are guilty of is the sin of our soul, for the soul acts it (without the soul's act it is not sin) and the soul suffers by it; it is the disorder, disease, and defilement of the soul, and threatens to be the death of it: *What shall I give for my transgressions?* What will be accepted as a satisfaction to his justice, a reparation of his honour? And what will avail to shelter me from his wrath? 5. We must therefore ask, *Wherewith may we come before him?* We must not appear before the Lord empty. What shall we bring with us? In what manner must we come? In whose name must we come? We have not that in ourselves which will recommend us to him, but must have it from another. What righteousness then shall we appear before him in?

II. They make proposals, such as they are, in order to it. Their enquiry was very good and right, and what we are all concerned to make, but their proposals betray their ignorance, though they show their zeal; let us examine them:—

1. They bid high. They offer, (1.) That which is very rich and costly—*thousands of rams*. God required one ram for a sin-offering; they proffer flocks of them, their whole stock, will be content to make themselves beggars, so that they may but be at peace with God. They will bring the best they have, the rams, and the most of them, till it comes to thousands. (2.) That which is very dear to them, and which they would be most loth to part with. They could be content to part with *their first-born for their transgressions*, if that would be accepted as an atonement, and the *fruit of their body for the sin of their soul*. To those that had become *vain in their imaginations* this seemed a probable expedient of making satisfaction for sin, because our children are pieces of ourselves; and therefore the heathen sacrificed their children, to appease their offended deities. Note, Those that are thoroughly convinced of sin, of the malignity of it, and of their misery and danger by reason of it, would give all the world, if they had it, for peace and pardon.

2. Yet they do not bid right. It is true some of these things were instituted by the ceremonial law, as the bringing of burnt-offerings to God's altar, and calves of a year old, rams for sin-offerings, and oil for the meat-offerings; but these alone would not recommend them to God. God had often declared that *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and to *hearken than the fat of rams*, that *sacrifice and offering he would not*; the legal sacrifices had their virtue and value from the institution, and the reference

they had to Christ the great propitiation; but otherwise, of themselves, it was *impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin*. And as to the other things here mentioned, (1.) Some of them are impracticable things, as *rivers of oil*, which nature has not provided to feed men's luxury, but rivers of water to supply men's necessity. All the proposals of peace but those that are according to the gospel are absurd. One stream of the blood of Christ is worth ten thousand rivers of oil. (2.) Some of them are wicked things, as to give our *first-born* and the *fruit of our body* to death, which would but add to the transgression and the *sin of the soul*. He that hates robbery for burnt-offerings much more hates murder, such murder. What right have we to our *first born* and the *fruit of our body*? Do they not belong to God? Are they not his already, and born to him? Are they not sinners by nature, and their lives forfeited upon their own account? How then can they be a ransom for ours? (3.) They are all external things, parts of that bodily exercise which profiteth little, and which could not *make the comers thereunto perfect*. (4.) They are all insignificant, and insufficient to attain the end proposed; they could not answer the demands of divine justice, nor satisfy the wrong done to God in his honour by sin, nor would they serve in lieu of the sanctification of the heart and the reformation of the life. Men will part with any thing rather than their sins, but they part with nothing to God's acceptance unless they part with them.

III. God tells them plainly what he demands, and insists upon, from those that would be accepted of him, v. 8. Let their money perish with them that think the pardon of sin and the favour of God may be so purchased; no, *God has shown thee, O man! what is good*. Here we are told,

1. That God has made a discovery of his mind and will to us, for the rectifying of our mistakes and the direction of our practice. (1.) It is God himself that has shown us what we must do. We need not trouble ourselves to make proposals, the terms are already settled and laid down. He whom we have offended, and to whom we are accountable, has told us upon what conditions he will be reconciled to us. (2.) It is to man that he has shown it, not only to thee, *O Israel!* but *to thee, O man!* Gentiles as well as Jews—to men, who are rational creatures, and capable of receiving the discovery, and not to brutes,—to men, for whom a remedy is provided, not to devils, whose case is desperate. What is spoken to *all men every where* in general, must by faith be applied to ourselves in particular, as if it were spoken *to thee, O man!* by name, and to no other. (3.) It is a discovery of *that which is good*, and which *the Lord requires of us*. He has shown us our end, which we should aim at, in showing us what is good, wherein our true happiness does consist; he has shown us our way in which we must walk towards that end in showing us what he requires of us. There is something which God requires we should do for him and devote to him; and it is good. It is good in itself; there is an innate goodness in moral duties, antecedent to the command; they are not, as ceremonial observances, good because they are commanded, but commanded because they are good, consonant to the eternal rule and reason of good and evil, which are unalterable. It has likewise a direct tendency to our good; our conformity to it is not only the condition of our future happiness, but is a great expedient of our present happiness; *in keeping God's commandments there is great reward*, as well as after keeping them. (4.) It is shown us. God has not only made it known, but made it plain; he has discovered it to us with such convincing evidence as amounts to a demonstration. *Lo this, we have searched it, so it is*.

2. What that discovery is. The good which God requires of us is not the paying of a price for the pardon of sin and acceptance with God, but doing the duty which is the condition of our interest in the pardon purchased. (1.) We must *do justly*, must *render to all their due*, according as our relation and obligation to them are; we must do wrong to none, but do right to all, in their bodies, goods, and good name. (2.) We must *love mercy*; we must delight in it, as our God does, must be glad of an opportunity to do good, and do it cheerfully. Justice is put before mercy, for we must not give that in alms which is wrongfully got, or with which our debts should be paid. *God hates robbery for a burnt-offering*. (3.) We must *walk humbly with our God*. This includes all the duties of the first table, as the two former include all the duties of the second table. We must take the Lord for our God in covenant, must attend on him and adhere to him as ours, and must make it our constant care and business to please him. Enoch's walking with God is interpreted (Heb. 11:5) his *pleasing God*. We must, in the whole course of our conversation, conform ourselves to the will of God, keep up our communion with God, and study to approve ourselves to him in our integrity; and this we must do humbly (submitting our understandings to the truths of God and our will to his precepts and providences); we must *humble ourselves to walk with God* (so the margin reads it); every thought within us must be brought down, to be brought into obedience to God, if we would walk comfortably with him. This is that which God requires, and without which the most costly services are *vain oblations*; this is more than *all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*.

Verses 9-16

God, having shown them how necessary it was that they should do justly, here shows them how plain it was that they had done unjustly; and since they submitted not to his controversy, nor went the right way to have it taken up, here he proceeds in it. Observe,

I. How the action is entered against them, v. 9. God speaks to *the city*, to Jerusalem, to Samaria. His *voice cries* to it by his servants the prophets who were to *cry aloud and not spare*. Note, The voice of the prophets is *the Lord's voice*, and that *cries to the city*, cries to the country. *Doth not wisdom cry?* Prov. 8:1. When the sin of a city cries to God his voice cries against the city; and, when the judgments of God are coming upon a city, his voice first *cries unto it*. He warns before he wounds, because he is *not willing that any should perish*. Now observe, 1. How the voice of God is discerned by some: *The man of wisdom will see thy name*. When the voice of God cries to us we may by it see his name, may discern and perceive that by which he makes himself known. Yet many see it not, are not aware of it, because they do not regard it. God *speaks once, yea, twice, and they perceive it not* (Job 33:14); but those that are men of wisdom will see it, and perceive it, and make a good use of it. Note, It is a point of true wisdom to discover the name of God in the voice of God, and to learn what he is from what he says. *Wisdom shall see thy name, for the knowledge of the holy is understanding*. 2. What this voice of God says to all: "*Hear you the rod, and who hath appointed it*. Hear the rod when it is coming; hear it at a distance, before you see it and feel it; and be awakened to go forth to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments. Hear the rod when it has come, and is actually upon you, and you are sensible of the smart of it; hear what it says to you, what convictions, what counsels, what cautions, it speaks to you." Note, Every rod has a voice, and it is the voice of God that is to be heard in the rod of God, and it is well for those that understand the language of it, which if we would do we must have an eye to *him that appointed it*. Note, Every rod is appointed, of what

kind it shall be, where it shall light, and how long it shall lie. God in every affliction *performs the thing that is appointed for us* (Job 23:14), and to him therefore we must have an eye, to him we must have an ear; we must hear what he says to us by the affliction. *Hear it, and know it for thy good*, Job v. 6. The work of ministers is to explain the providences of God and to quicken and direct men to learn the lessons that are taught by them.

II. What is the ground of the action, and what are the things that are laid to their charge.

1. They are charged with injustice, a sin against the second table. Are there yet to be found among them the marks and means of fraudulent dealing? What! after all the methods that God has taken to teach them to do justly, will they yet deal unjustly? It seems, they will, v. 10. And *shall I count them pure?* v. 11. No; this is a sin which will by no means consist with a profession of purity. Those that are dishonest in their dealings have not the spots of God's children, and shall never be reckoned pure, whatever shows of devotion they may make. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*. When a man is suspected of theft, or fraud, the justice of peace will send a warrant to search his house. God here does, as it were, search the houses of those citizens, and there he finds, (1.) *Treasures of wickedness*, abundance of wealth, but it is ill-got, and not likely to prosper; for *treasures of wickedness profit nothing*. (2.) *A scant measure*, by which they sold to the poor, and so exacted upon them and cheated them. (3.) They had *wicked balances and a bag of false weights*, by which, under a pretence of weighing what they sold, and giving the buyer what was right, they did him the greatest wrong, v. 11. (4.) Those that had wealth and power in their hands abused it to oppression and extortion; *The rich men thereof are full of violence*; for those that have much would have more, and are in a capacity of making it more by the power which their abundance of wealth gives them. They are *full of violence*, that is, they have their houses full of that which is got by violence. (5.) Those that had not the advantage of doing wrong by their wealth yet found means of defrauding those they dealt with: *The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies*; if they are not able to use force and violence, they use fraud and deceit; the *inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth*; they do not stick at a deliberate lie, to make a good bargain. Some understand it of their speaking falsely concerning God, saying, *The Lord seeth not; he hath forsaken the earth*, Eze. 8:12.

2. They are charged with idolatry (v. 6): *The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the work of the house of Ahab*. Both these kings were wicked, and *did evil in the sight of the Lord*; but the wickedness which they established by a law, concerning which they made statutes, and which was the peculiar work of that house, was idolatry. Omri walked in the way of Jeroboam, and *in his sin of provoking God to anger with their vanities*, 1 Ki. 16:26, 31. Ahab introduced the worship of Baal. These reigns were some ages before the time when this prophet lived, and yet the wickedness which they established by their laws and examples remained to this day; those statutes were still kept, and that work was still done; and the princes and people still *walked in their counsels*, took the same measures, and governed themselves and the people by the same politics. Observe, (1.) The same wickedness continued from one generation to another. Sin is a *root of bitterness*, soon planted, but not so soon plucked up again. The iniquity of former ages is often transmitted to, and entailed upon, the succeeding ones. Those that make corrupt laws, and bring in corrupt usages, are doing that which perhaps may prove the ruin of the child unborn. (2.) It was not the less evil in itself, provoking to God, and dangerous to the sinners, for its having been established and confirmed by the laws of

princes, the examples of great men, and a long prescription. Though the worship of idols is enacted by the statutes of Omri, recommended by the practice of the house of Ahab, and pleads that it has been the usage of many generations, yet it is still displeasing to God and destructive to Israel; for no laws nor customs are of force against the divine command.

III. What is the judgment given upon this. Being found guilty of these crimes, the sentence is that that which God had given them warning of (v. 9) shall be brought upon them (v. 13): *Therefore also will I make thee sick, in smiting thee.* As they had smitten the poor with the rod of their oppressions, so would God in like manner smite them, so as to make them sick, sick of the gains they had unjustly gotten, so that though they had *swallowed down riches* they should *vomit them up again*, Job 20:15. Their doom is,

1. That what they have they shall not have any comfortable enjoyment of; it shall do them no good. They grasped at more than enough, but, when they have it, it shall not be enough to make them easy and happy. What is got by fraud and oppression cannot be kept or enjoyed with any satisfaction. (1.) Their food shall not nourish them: *Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied*, either because the food shall not digest, for want of God's blessing going along with it, or because the appetite shall by disease be made insatiable and still craving, the just punishment of those that were greedy of gain and enlarged their desires as hell. Men may be surfeited with the good things of this world and yet not satisfied, Eccl. 5:10; Isa. 55:2. (2.) Their country shall not harbour and protect them: *"Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee*, that is, thou shalt be broken and ruined by the intestine troubles, mischiefs at home enough to cast thee down, though thou shouldst not be invaded by a foreign force." God can cast a nation down by that which is in the midst of them, can consume them by a fire in their own bowels. (3.) They shall not be able to preserve what they have from a foreign force, nor to recover what they have lost: *"Thou shalt take hold of what is about to be taken from thee, but thou shalt not hold it fast, shalt catch at it, but shalt not deliver it, shalt not retrieve it."* It is meant of their wives and children, that were very dear to them, which they took hold of, as resolved not to part with them, but there is no remedy, they must go into captivity. Note, What we hold closest we commonly lose soonest, and that proves least safe which is most dear. (4.) What they save for a time shall be reserved for a future and sorer stroke: *That which thou deliverest out of the hand of one enemy will I give up to the sword of another enemy*; for God has many arrows in his quiver; if one miss the sinner, the next shall not. (5.) What they have laboured for they shall not enjoy (v. 15): *"Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap*; it shall be blasted and withered, and there shall be nothing to reap, or an enemy shall come and reap it for himself, or thou shalt be carried into captivity, and leave it to be reaped by thou knowest not whom. Thou shalt *tread the olives*, but *thou shalt not anoint thyself with oil*, having no heart to make use of ornaments and refreshments when all is going to ruin. Thou shalt tread out *the sweet wine*, but *shalt not drink wine*, for many things may fall between the cup and the lip." Note, It is very grievous to be disappointed of our expectations, and not to have the pleasure of that which we have taken pains for; and this will be the just punishment of those that frustrate God's expectations from them, and answer not the cost he has been at upon them. See this threatened in the law, Lev. 26:16; Deu. 28:30, 38, etc.; and compare Isa. 62:8, 9.

2. That all they have shall at length be taken from them (v. 13): *Thou shalt be made desolate because of thy sins*; and v. 16, *a desolation and a hissing*. Sin makes a nation desolate; and when a people that have been famous and flourishing are made

desolate it is the astonishment of some and the triumph of others; some lament it, and others hiss at it. Thus *you shall bear the reproach of my people*. Their being the people of God, in name and profession while they kept close to their duty and kept themselves in his love, was an honour to them, and all their neighbours thought it so; but now that they have corrupted and ruined themselves, now that their sins and God's judgments have made their land desolate, their having been once the people of God does but turn so much the more to their reproach; their enemies will say, *These are the people of the Lord*, Eze. 36:20. Note, If professors of religion ruin themselves, their ruin will be the most reproachful of any; and they in a special manner will rise at the last day to everlasting shame and contempt.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, I. The prophet, in the name of the church, sadly laments the woeful decay of religion in the age wherein he lived, and the deluge of impiety and immorality which overwhelmed the nation, which levelled the differences, and bore down the fences, of all that is just and sacred (v. 1-6). II. The prophet, for the sake of the church, prescribes comforts, which may be of use at such a time, and gives counsel what to do. 1. They must have an eye to God (v. 7). 2. They must courageously bear up against the insolences of the enemy (v. 8-10). 3. They must patiently lie down under the rebukes of their God (v. 9). 4. They must expect no other than that the trouble would continue long, and must endeavour to make the best of it (v. 11-13). 5. They must encourage themselves with God's promises, in answer to the prophet's prayers (v. 14, 15). 6. They must foresee the fall of their enemies, that now triumphed over them (v. 16, 17). 7. They must themselves triumph in the mercy and grace of God, and his faithfulness to his covenant (v. 18-20), and with that comfortable word the prophecy concludes.

Verses 1-6

This is such a description of bad times as, some think, could scarcely agree to the times of Hezekiah, when this prophet prophesied; and therefore they rather take it as a prediction of what should be in the reign of Manasseh. But we may rather suppose it to be in the reign of Ahaz (and in that reign he prophesied, ch. 1:1) or in the beginning of Hezekiah's time, before the reformation he was instrumental in; nay, in the best of his days, and when he had done his best to purge out corruptions, still there was much amiss. The prophet cries out, *Woe is me!* He bemoans himself that his lot was cast in such a degenerate age, and thinks it his great unhappiness that he lived among a people that were ripening apace for a ruin which many a good man would unavoidably be involved in. Thus David cries out, *Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech!* He laments, 1. That there were so few good people to be found, even among those that were God's people; and this was their reproach: *The good man has perished out of the earth, or out of the land, the land of Canaan; it was a good land, and a land of uprightness* (Isa. 26:10), but there were few good men in it, none upright among them, v. 2. The *good man* is a *godly man* and a *merciful man*; the word signifies both. Those are completely good men that are devout towards God and compassionate and beneficent towards men, that love mercy and walk with God. "These have perished; those few honest men that some time ago enriched and adorned our country are now dead and gone, and there are none risen up *in their stead* that tread in their steps; honesty is banished, and there is no such thing as a good man to be met with. Those that were of religious education have degenerated, and become as bad as the worst; *the godly man ceases,*" Ps. 12:1. This is illustrated by a comparison (v. 1): they were *as when they have gathered the summer fruits*; it was as hard a thing to find a good man as to find any of the summer-fruits (which were the choicest and best, and therefore must carefully be gathered in) when the harvest is over. The prophet is ready to say, as Elijah in his time (1 Ki. 19:10), *I, even I only, am left*. Good men, who used to hang in clusters, are now as the *grape-gleanings of the vintage*, here and there a berry, Isa. 17:6. You can find no societies of them as bunches of grapes, but those that are are single persons: *There is no cluster to eat*; and the best and fullest grapes are those that grow in large clusters. Some think that this intimates not only that good people were few, but that those few who remained, who went for good people, were good for

little, like the small withered grapes, the refuse that were left behind, not only by the gatherer, but by the gleaner. When the prophet observed this universal degeneracy it made him *desire the first-ripe fruit*; he wished to see such worthy good men as were in the former ages, were the ornaments of the primitive times, and as far excelled the best of all the present age as the first and full-ripe fruits do those of the latter growth, that never come to maturity. When we read and hear of the wisdom and zeal, the strictness and conscientiousness, the devotion and charity, of the professors of religion in former ages, and see the reverse of this in those of the present age, we cannot but sit down, and wish, with a sigh, *O for primitive Christianity again!* Where are the plainness and integrity of those that went before us? Where are the Israelites indeed, without guile? Our souls desire them, but in vain. The golden age is gone, and past recall; we must make the best of what is, for we are not likely to see such times as have been.

2. That there were so many wicked mischievous people among them, not only none that did any good, but multitudes that did all the hurt they could: *"They all lie in wait for blood, and hunt every man his brother.* To get wealth to themselves, they care not what wrong, what hurt, they do to their neighbours and nearest relations. They act as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for *they all lie in wait for blood* as lions for their prey; they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as beasts of prey to them, for they *hunt every man his brother with a net*; they persecute them as noxious creatures, fit to be taken and destroyed, though they are innocent excellent ones." We say of him that is outlawed, *Caput gerit lupinum—He is to be hunted as a wolf.* "Or they hunt them as men do the game, to feast upon it; they have a thousand cursed arts of ensnaring men to their ruin, so that they may but get by it. Thus *they do mischief with both hands earnestly*; their hearts desire it, their heads contrive it, and then *both hands* are ready to put it in execution." Note, The more eager and intent men are upon any sinful pursuit, and the more pains they take in it, the more provoking it is.

3. That the magistrates, who by their office ought to have been the patrons and protectors of right, were the practicers and promoters of wrong: *That they may do evil with both hands earnestly*, to excite and animate themselves in it, *the prince asketh, and the judge asketh, for a reward*, for a bribe, with which they well be hired to exert all their power for the supporting and carrying on of any wicked design *with both hands. They do evil with both hands well* (so some read it); they do evil with a great deal of art and dexterity; they praise themselves for doing it so well. Others read it thus: *To do evil they have both hands* (they catch at an opportunity of doing mischief), *but to do good the prince and the judge ask for a reward*; if they do any good offices they are mercenary in them, and must be paid for them. The great man, who has wealth and power to do good, is not ashamed to utter his mischievous desire in conjunction with the prince and the judge, who are ready to support him and stand by him in it. *So they wrap it up*; they perplex the matter, involve it, and make it intricate (so some understand it), that they may lose equity in a mist, and so make the cause turn which way they please. It is ill with a people when their princes, and judges, and great men are in a confederacy to pervert justice. And it is a sad character that is given of them (v. 4), that *the best of them is as a brier, and the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge*; it is a dangerous thing to have any thing to do with them; *he that touches them must be fenced with iron* (2 Sa. 23:6,7), he shall be sure to be scratched, to have his clothes torn, and his eyes almost pulled out. And, if this be the character of the best and most upright, what are the worst? And, when things

have come to this pass, *the day of thy watchmen comes*, that is, as it follows, *the day of thy visitation*, when God will reckon with thee for all this wickedness, which is called *the day of the watchmen*, because their prophets, whom God set as watchmen over them, had often warned them of that day. When all flesh have corrupted their way, even the best and the most upright, what can be expected but a day of visitation, a deluge of judgments, as that which drowned the old world when *the earth was filled with violence*? 4. That there was no faith in man; people had grown so universally treacherous that one knew not whom to repose any confidence in, v. 5. "Those that have any sense of honour, or spark of virtue, remaining in them, have a firm regard to the laws of friendship; they would not discover what passed in private conversation, nor divulge secrets, to the prejudice of a friend. But those things are now made a jest of; you will not meet with a friend that you dare trust, whose word you dare take, or who will have any tenderness or concern for you; so that wise men shall give it and take it for a rule, *trust you not in a friend*, for you will find him false, you can trust him no further than you can see him; and even him that passes for an honest man you will find to be so only with good looking to. Nay, as for him that undertakes to be *your guide*, to lead you into any business which he professes to understand better than you, you cannot *put a confidence* in him, for he will be sure to mislead you if he can get any thing by it." Some by a guide understand a husband, who is called *the guide of thy youth*; and that agrees well enough with what follows, "*Keep the doors of thy lips from her that lieth in thy bosom*, from thy own wife; take heed what thou sayest before her, lest she betray thee, as Delilah did Samson, lest she be the *bird of the air* that *carries the voice* of that which thou sayest *in thy bed-chamber*," Eccl. 10:20. It is an evil time indeed when the prudent are obliged even thus far to keep silence. 5. That children were abusive to their parents, and men had no comfort, no satisfaction, in their own families and their nearest relations, v. 6. The times are bad indeed when *the son dishonours his father*, gives him bad language, exposes him, threatens him, and studies to do him a mischief, *when the daughter rises up* in rebellion against her own mother, having no sense of duty, or natural affection; and no marvel that then the *daughter-in-law* quarrels with her *mother-in-law*, and is vexatious to her. Either they cannot agree about their property and interest, or their humours and passions clash, or from a spirit of bigotry and persecution, *the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child*, Mt. 10:4; Lu. 21:16. It is sad when a man's betrayers and worst enemies are the men of his own house, his own children and servants, that should be his guard and his best friends. Note, The contempt and violation of the laws of domestic duties are a sad symptom of a universal corruption of manners. Those are never likely to come to good that are undutiful to their parents, and study to be provoking to them and cross them.

Verses 7-13

The prophet, having sadly complained of the wickedness of the times he lived in, here fastens upon some considerations for the comfort of himself and his friends, in reference thereunto. The case is bad, but it is not desperate. *Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.*

I. "Though God be now displeased he shall be reconciled to us, and then all will be well, v. 7, 9. We are now under *the indignation of the Lord*; God is angry with us, and justly, because *we have sinned against him*." Note, It is our sin against God that provokes his indignation against us; and we must see it, and own it, whenever we are under divine rebukes, that we may

justify God, and may study to answer his end in afflicting us, by repenting of sin and breaking off from it. Now, at such a time, 1. We must have recourse to God under our troubles (v. 7): *Therefore I will look unto the Lord*. When a child of God has ever so much occasion to cry, *Woe is me* (as the prophet here, v. 1), yet it may be a comfort to him that he has a God to look to, a God to come to, to fly to, in whom he may rejoice and have satisfaction. All may look bright above him when all looks black and dark about him. The prophet had been complaining that there was no comfort to be had, no confidence to be put, in friends and relations on earth, and this drives him to his God: *Therefore I will look unto the Lord*. The less reason we have to delight in any creature the more reason we have to delight in God. If princes are not to be trusted, we may say, *Happy is the man that has the God of Jacob for his help, and happy am I, even in the midst of my present woes, if he be my help*. If men be false, this is our comfort, that God is faithful; if relations be unkind, he is and will be gracious. Let us therefore look above and beyond them, and overlook our disappointment in them, and look unto the Lord. 2. We must submit to the will of God in our troubles: *"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, will bear it patiently, without murmuring and repining, because I have sinned against him."* Note, Those that are truly penitent for sin will see a great deal of reason to be patient under affliction. *Wherefore should a man complain for the punishment of his sin?* When we complain to God of the badness of the times we ought to complain against ourselves for the badness of our own hearts. 3. We must depend upon God to work deliverance for us, and put a good issue to our troubles in due time; we must not only look to him, but look for him: *"I will wait for the God of my salvation, and for his gracious returns to me."* In our greatest distresses we shall see no reason to despair of salvation if by faith we eye God as the *God of our salvation*, who is able to save the weakest upon their humble petition, and willing to save the worst upon their true repentance. And, if we depend on God as the God of our salvation, we must wait for him, and for his salvation, in his own way and his own time. Let us now see what the church is here taught to expect and promise herself from God, even when things are brought to the last extremity. (1.) *My God will hear me*; if the Lord be our God, he will hear our prayers, and grant an answer of peace to them. (2.) *"When I fall, and am in danger of being dashed in pieces by the fall, yet I shall arise, and recover myself again. I fall, but am not utterly cast down,"* Ps. 37:24. (3.) *"When I sit in darkness, desolate and disconsolate, melancholy and perplexed, and not knowing what to do, nor which way to look for relief, yet then the Lord shall be a light to me, to comfort and revive me, to instruct and teach me, to direct and guide me, as a light to my eyes, a light to my feet, a light in a dark place."* (4.) *He will plead my cause, and execute judgment for me*, v. 9. If we heartily espouse the cause of God, the just but injured cause of religion and virtue, and make it our cause, we may hope he will own our cause, and plead it. The church's cause, though it seem for a time to go against her, will at length be pleaded with jealousy, and judgment not only given against, but executed upon, the enemies of it. (5.) *"He will bring me forth to the light, make me shine eminently out of obscurity, and become conspicuous, will make my righteousness shine evidently from under the dark cloud of calumny,* Ps. 37:6; Isa. 58:10. *The morning of comfort shall shine forth out of the long and dark night of trouble."* (6.) *"I shall behold his righteousness; I shall see the equity of his proceedings concerning me and the performance of his promises to me."*

II. Though enemies triumph and insult, they shall be silenced and put to shame, v. 8, 10. Observe here,

1. How proudly the enemies of God's people trample upon them in their distress. They said, *Where is the Lord their God?* As if

because they were afflicted God had forsaken them, and they knew not where to find him with their prayers, and he knew not how to help them with his favours. This David's enemies said to him, and it was a sword in his bones, Ps. 42:10, and see Ps. 115:2. Thus, in reproaching Israel as an abandoned people, they reflected on the God of Israel as an unkind unfaithful God. 2. How comfortably the people of God by faith bear up themselves under these insults (v. 8): "*Rejoice not against me, O my enemy! I am now down, but shall not be always so, and when my God appears for me then she that is my enemy shall see it, and be ashamed*" (not only being disappointed in her expectations of the church's utter ruin, but having the same cup of trembling put into her hand), "then *my eyes shall behold her* in the same deplorable condition that I am now in; *now shall she be trodden down.*" Note, The deliverance of the church will be the confusion of her enemies; and their shame shall be double, when, as they have trampled upon God's people, so they shall themselves be trampled upon.

III. Though the land continue a great while desolate, yet it shall at length be replenished again, when the time, even the set time, of its deliverance comes. 1. Its salvation shall not come *till after it has been desolate*; so the margin reads it, v. 13. God has a controversy with the land, and it must lie long under his rebukes, *because of those that dwell therein*; it is their iniquity that makes their land desolate (Ps. 107:34); it is *for the fruit of their doings*, their evil doings which they have been themselves guilty of, and the evil fruit of them, the sins of others, which they have been accessory to by their bad influence and example. For this they must expect to smart a great while; for the world shall know that God hates sin even in his own people. 2. When it does come it shall be a complete salvation; and it seems to refer to their deliverance out of Babylon by Cyrus, which Isaiah about this time prophesied of, as a type of our redemption by Christ. (1.) *The decree shall be far removed*. God's decree concerning their captivity, and Nebuchadnezzar's decree concerning the perpetuity of it, his resolution never to release them, "these shall be set aside and revoked, and you shall hear no more of them; they shall no more lie as a yoke upon thy neck." (2.) Jerusalem and the cities of Judah shall be again reared: Then *thy walls shall be built*, walls for habitation, walls for defence, house-walls, town-walls, temple-walls; it is in order to these that the decree is repealed, Isa. 44:28. Though Zion's walls may lie long in ruins, there will come a day when they shall be repaired. (3.) All that belong to the land of Israel, whithersoever dispersed, and howsoever distressed, far and wide over the face of the whole earth, shall come flocking to it again (v. 12): *He shall come even to thee*, having liberty to return and a heart to return, from Assyria, whither the ten tribes were carried away, though it lay remote, and *from the fortified cities*, and *from the fortress*, those strongholds in which they thought they had them fast; for when God's time comes, though Pharaoh will not *let the people go*, God will fetch them out with a high hand. They shall come from all the remote parts, *from sea to sea* and *from mountain to mountain*, not turning back for fear of your discouragements, but they shall go from strength to strength till they come to Zion. Thus in the great day of redemption *God will gather his elect from the four winds*.

Verses 14-20

Here is, I. The prophet's prayer to God to take care of his own people, and of their cause and interest, v. 14. When God is about to deliver his people he stirs up their friends to pray for them, and pours out *a spirit of grace and supplication*, Zec. 12:10. And when we see God coming towards us in ways of mercy, we must go forth to meet him by prayer. It is a prophetic prayer, which

amounts to a promise of the good prayed for; what God directed his prophet to ask no doubt he designed to give. Now, 1. The people of Israel are here called the *flock of God's heritage*, for they are the sheep of his hand, the sheep of his pasture, his little flock in the world; and they are his heritage, his portion in the world. *Jacob is the lot of his inheritance*. 2. This flock *dwells solitarily in the wood, or forest, in the midst of Carmel*, a high mountain. Israel was a peculiar people, *that dwelt alone, and was not reckoned among the nations*, like a flock of sheep in a wood. They were now a desolate people (v. 13), were in the land of their captivity as sheep in a forest, in danger of being lost and made a prey of to the beasts of the forest. They are *scattered upon the mountains as sheep having no shepherd*. 3. He prays that God would *feed them there with his rod*, that is, that he would take care of them in their captivity, would protect them, and provide for them, and do the part of a good shepherd to them: "Let thy rod and staff comfort them, even in that darksome valley; and even there let them want nothing that is good for them. Let them be governed by thy rod, not the rod of their enemies, for they are thy people." 4. He prays that God would in due time bring them back to feed in the plains of Bashan and Gilead, and no longer to be fed in the woods and mountains. *Let them feed* in their own country again, *as in the days of old*. Some apply this spiritually, and make it either the prophet's prayer to Christ or his Father's charge to him, to take care of his church, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and to go in and out before them while they are here in this world as in a wood, that they may find pasture as in Carmel, as in Bashan and Gilead.

II. God's promise, in answer to this prayer; and we may well take God's promises as real answers to the prayers of faith, and embrace them accordingly, for with him saying and doing are not two things. The prophet prayed that God would feed them, and do kind things for them; but God answers that he *will show them marvellous things* (v. 15), will do for them more than they are able to ask or think, will out-do their hopes and expectations; he will *show them his marvellous lovingkindness*, Ps. 17:7. 1. He will do that for them which shall be the repetition of the wonders and miracles of former ages—*according to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt*. Their deliverance out of Babylon shall be a work of wonder and grace not inferior to their deliverance out of Egypt, nay, it shall eclipse the lustre of that (Jer. 16:14, 15), much more shall the work of redemption by Christ. Note, God's former favours to his church are patterns of future favours, and shall again be copied out as there is occasion. 2. He will do that for them which shall be matter of wonder and amazement to the present age, v. 16, 17. *The nations about* shall take notice of it, and it shall be said *among the heathen, The Lord has done great things for them*, Ps. 126:2. The impression which the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon shall make upon the neighbouring nations shall be very much for the honour both of God and his church. (1.) Those that had insulted over the people of God in their distress, and gloried that when they had them down they would keep them down, *shall be confounded*, when they see them thus surprisingly rising up; they shall be *confounded at all the might* with which the captives shall now exert themselves, whom they thought for ever disabled. They shall now *lay their hands upon their mouths*, as being ashamed of what they have said, and not able to say more, by way of triumph over Israel. Nay, *their ears shall be deaf* too, so much shall they be ashamed at the wonderful deliverance; they shall stop their ears, as being not willing to hear any more of God's wonders wrought for that people, whom they had so despised and insulted over. (2.) Those that had impudently confronted God himself shall now be struck with a fear

of him, and thereby brought, in profession at least, to submit to him (v. 17): *They shall lick the dust like a serpent*, they shall be so mortified, as if they were sentenced to the same curse the serpent was laid under (Gen. 3:14), *Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat*. They shall be brought to the lowest abasements imaginable, and shall be so dispirited that they shall tamely submit to them. *His enemies shall lick the dust*, Ps. 72:9. Nay, they shall *lick the dust* of the church's feet, Isa. 49:23. Proud oppressors shall now be made sensible how mean, how little, they are, before the great God, and they shall with trembling and the lowest submission *move out of the holes* into which they had crept (Isa. 2:21), *like worms of the earth* as they are, being ashamed and afraid to *show their heads*; so low shall they be brought, and such abjects shall they be, when they are abased. When God did wonders for his church *many of the people of the land became Jews*, because *the fear of the Jews*, and of their God, *fell upon them*, Esth. 8:17. So it is promised here: *They shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee, O Israel!* Forced submissions are often but feigned submissions; yet they redound to the glory of God and the church, though not to the benefit of the dissemblers themselves.

III. The prophet's thankful acknowledgment of God's mercy, in the name of the church, with a believing dependence upon his promise, v. 18–20. We are here taught,

1. To give to God the glory of his pardoning mercy, v. 18. God having promised to bring back the captivity of his people, the prophet, on that occasion, admires pardoning mercy, as that which was at the bottom of it. As it was their sin that brought them into bondage, so it was God's pardoning their sin that brought them out of it; Ps. 85:1, 2, and Isa. 33:24; 38:17; 60:1,2. The pardon of sin is the foundation of all other covenant-mercies, Heb. 8:12. This the prophet stands amazed at, while the surrounding nations stood amazed only at those deliverances which were but the fruits of this. Note, (1.) God's people, who are the *remnant of his heritage*, stand charged with many transgressions; being but a remnant, a very few, one would hope they should all be very good, but they are not so; God's children have their spots, and often offend their Father. (2.) The gracious God is ready to pass by and pardon the iniquity and transgression of his people, upon their repentance and return to him. God's people are a pardoned people, and to this they owe their all. When God pardons sin, he passes it by, does not punish it as justly he might, nor deal with the sinner according to the desert of it. (3.) Though God may for a time lay his own people under the tokens of his displeasure, yet he will not *retain his anger for ever*, but *though he cause grief he will have compassion*; he is not implacable; yet against those that are not of the remnant of his heritage, that are unpardoned, he will keep his anger for ever. (4.) The reasons why God pardons sin, and keeps not his anger for ever, are all taken from within himself; it is *because he delights in mercy*, and the salvation of sinners is what he has pleasure in, not their death and damnation. (5.) The glory of God in forgiving sin is, as in other things, matchless, and without compare. There is *no God like unto him* for this; no magistrate, no common person, forgives as God does. In this his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours; in this he is *God, and not man*. (6.) All those that have experienced pardoning mercy cannot but admire that mercy; it is what we have reason to stand amazed at, if we know what it is. Has God forgiven us our transgressions? We may well say, *Who is a God like unto thee?* Our holy wonder at pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it.

2. To take to ourselves the comfort of that mercy and all the grace and truth that go along with it. God's people here, as they

look back with thankfulness upon God's pardoning their sins, so they look forward with assurance upon what he would yet further do for them. His mercy *endures for ever*, and therefore as he has *shown mercy* so he will, v. 19, 20. (1.) He will renew his favours to us: *He will turn again; he will have compassion*; that is, he will again have compassion upon us as formerly he had; his compassions shall be *new every morning*; he seemed to be departing from us in anger, but he will turn again and pity us. He will turn us to himself, and then will *turn to us, and have mercy upon us*. (2.) He will renew us, to prepare and qualify us for his favour: *He will subdue our iniquities*; when he takes away the guilt of sin, that it may not damn us, he will break the power of sin, that it may not have dominion over us, that we may not fear sin, nor be led captive by it. Sin is an enemy that fights against us, a tyrant that oppresses us; nothing less than almighty grace can subdue it, so great is its power in fallen man and so long has it kept possession. But, if God forgive the sin that has been committed by us, he will subdue the sin that dwells in us, and in that there is none like him in forgiving; and all those whose sins are pardoned earnestly desire and hope; to have their corruptions mortified and their iniquities subdued, and please themselves with the hopes of it. If we be left to ourselves, our iniquities will be too hard for us; but God's grace, we trust, shall be sufficient for us to subdue them, so that they shall not rule us, and then they shall not ruin us. (3.) He will confirm this good work, and effectually provide that his act of grace shall never be repealed: *Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea*, as when he brought them out of Egypt (to which he has an eye in the promises here, v. 15) he subdued Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and cast them into the depth of the sea. It intimates that when God forgives sin he *remembers it no more*, and takes care that it shall never be remembered more against the sinner. Eze. 18:22, *His transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him; they are blotted out as a cloud* which never appears more. He casts them into the sea, not near the shore-side, where they may appear again next low water, but into *the depth of the sea*, never to rise again. *All their sins* shall be cast there without exception, for when God forgives sin he forgives all. (4.) He will perfect that which concerns us, and with this good work will do all that for us which our case requires and which he has promised (v. 20): *Then wilt thou perform thy truth to Jacob and thy mercy to Abraham*. It is in pursuance of the covenant that our sins are pardoned and our lusts mortified; from that spring all these streams flow, and with these he shall *freely give us all things*. The promise is said to be *mercy to Abraham*, because, as made to him first, it was mere mercy, preventing mercy, considering what state it found him in. But it was *truth to Jacob*, because the faithfulness of God was engaged to make good to him and his seed, as heirs to Abraham, all that was graciously promised to Abraham. See here, [1.] With what solemnity the covenant of grace is ratified to us; it was not only spoken, written, and sealed, but which is the highest confirmation, it was *sworn to our fathers*; nor is it a modern project, but is confirmed by antiquity too; it was sworn *from the days of old*; it is an ancient charter. [2.] With what satisfaction it may be applied and relied upon by us; we may say with the highest assurance, *Thou wilt perform the truth and mercy*; not one iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground. Faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it.