

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

OF THE PROPHECY OF

AMOS.

Though this prophet appeared a little before Isaiah, yet he was not, as some have mistaken, that Amos, who was the father of Isaiah, (Isa. i. 1.) for in the Hebrew their names are very different; their families too were of a different character; for Isaiah was a courtier, Amos a country farmer. Amos signifies, a *burthen*, whence the Jews have a tradition, that he was of a slow tongue, and spake with stammering lips; we may rather, in allusion to his name, say, that his speech was *weighty*, and his word the *burthen of the Lord*. He was (as most think) of Judah, yet prophesied chiefly against Israel, and at Bethel, *ch. vii. 13*. Some think his style savours of his extraction, and is more plain and rustic than that of some of the other prophets; I do not see it so, but it is plain that his matter agreed with that of his contemporary, Hosea, that *out of the mouth of these two witnesses the word might be established*. It appears by his contest with Amaziah the priest of Bethel, that he met with opposition in his work; but was a man of undaunted resolution in it, faithful and bold in reproving sin, and denouncing the judgments of God for it, and pressing in his exhortations to repentance and reformation. He begins with threatenings against the neighbouring nations that were enemies to Israel, *ch. i. and ii.* He then calls Israel to account; and judges them for their idolatry, their unworthy walking under the favours God had bestowed upon them, and their incorrigibleness under his judgments, *ch. iii. and iv.* He calls them to repentance, (*ch. v.*) rejecting their hypocritical sacrifices, unless they did repent. He foretells the desolations that were coming upon them, notwithstanding their security, (*ch. vi.*) some particular judgments, (*ch. vii.*) particularly on Amaziah; and after other reproofs and threatenings, (*ch. viii. and ix.*) concludes with a promise of the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom, and the happiness of God's spiritual Israel therein; just as the prophecy of Joel concluded. These prophets, having opened the wound in their reproofs and threatenings, which show *all wrong*, in the promises of gospel-grace open the remedy, which alone will *set all to rights*.

AMOS, I

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, we have, 1. The general title of this prophecy, v. 1. with the general scope of it, v. 2. 11. God's particular controversy with Syria, (v. 3. . 5.) with Palestine, (v. 6. . 8.) with Tyre, (v. 9. 10.) with Edom, (v. 11, 12.) and with Ammon, (v. 13. . 15.) for their cruelty to his people, and the many injuries they had done them. This explains God's pleading with the nations, *Joel iii. 2*.

1. **T**HE words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. 2. And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and

utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

Here is,

1. The general character of this prophecy. It is, *the words which the prophet saw*. Are words to be seen? Yes, God's words are; the apostles speak of the *word of life*, which they had not only *heard*, but which they had *seen with their eyes*, which they had *looked upon*, and which their *hands had handled*; (1 John i. 1.) such a real, substantial thing is the word of God. The prophet saw these words, (1.) They were revealed to him in a *vision*, as John is said to see the *voice* that spake to him; Rev. i. 12. (2.) That which was foretold by them, was to him as certain as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes

It intimates how strong he was in that faith which is the *evidence of things not seen*.

2. The person by whom this prophecy was sent; Amos, *who was among the herdmen of Tekoa*, and was one of them. Some think he was a *rich dealer* in cattle; the word is used concerning the king of Moab; (2 Kings iii. 4.) *He was a sheep-master*; it is probable that he got money by that business, and yet he must quit it, to follow God as a prophet. Others think he was a *poor keeper* of cattle, for we find, (ch. vii. 14, 15.) that he was withal a *gatherer of wild figs*, a poor employment, by which we may suppose he could but just get his bread, and that God took him, as he did David, from *following the flock*, and Elisha from *following the plough*. Many were trained up for great employments, in the quiet, innocent contemplative business of *shepherds*. When God would send a prophet to reprove and warn his people, he employed a *shepherd*, a herdsman, to do it, for they had made themselves as the *horse and mule that have no understanding*; nay, worse than the *ox that knows his owner*. God sometimes chooses the *foolish things of the world*, to confound the wise, 1 Cor. i. 27. Note, Those whom God has endued with abilities for his service, ought not to be *despised or laid aside* for the meanness either of their original, or of their beginnings. Though Amos himself is not ashamed to own that he was a *herdsman*, yet others ought not to upbraid him with it, or think the worse of him for it.

3. The persons concerned in the prophecy of this book; it is concerning *Israel, the ten tribes*, who were now *ripened in sin, and ripening apace* for ruin. God had raised them up prophets among themselves, (ch. ii. 11.) but they regarded them not; therefore God sends them one from Tekoa, in the land of Judah, that, coming from another country, he might be the more *valued*, and perhaps he was there rather sent out of his own country, because there he was *despised* for his having been a *herdsman*. See Matt. xiii. 55, 57.

4. The time when these prophecies were delivered. (1.) The book is dated, as laws used to be, by the reigns of the kings under whom the prophet prophesied. It was in the days of *Uzziah king of Judah*, when the affairs of that kingdom went *very well*, and of Jeroboam the second king of Israel, when the affairs of that kingdom went *pretty well*; yet then they must both be told both of the *sins* they were guilty of, and of the *judgments* that were coming upon them for those sins, that they might not with the present gleam of prosperity flatter themselves into an opinion of their innocence, or a confidence of their perpetual security. 2. It is dated by a particular event to which his prophecy had a reference; it was *two years before the earthquake*, that earthquake which is mentioned to have been in the days of *Uzziah*, (Zech. xiv. 5.) which put the nation into a dreadful fright, for it is there said, *They fled before it*. But how could they flee from it? Some conjecture that this earthquake was at the time of Isaiah's vision, when the *posts of the door were moved*, Isa. vi. 4. The tradition of the Jews is, that it happened just at the time when Uzziah presumptuously invaded the priest's office, and went in to burn incense, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. Josephus mentions this earthquake, *Antiq.* IX. 11. and says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off; and it spoiled the king's gardens." God by this prophet gave warning of it *two years before*, that God by it would shake down their houses, ch. iii. 15.

5. The introduction to these prophecies, containing the general scope of them; (v. 2.) *The Lord will roar from Zion*. His threatenings by his *prophets*, and the executions of those threatenings in his *providence*, will be as *terrible* as the *roaring*

of a lion is to the shepherds and their flocks. Amos here speaks the same language with his contemporaries, Hosea (ch. xi. 10.) and Joel, ch. iii. 16. *The lion roars before he tears*; God gives warning before he strikes. Observe (1.) Whence this warning comes; *from Zion and Jerusalem*, from the oracles of God there delivered; for *by them is thy servant warned*, Ps. xix. 11. Our God, whose special residence is there, will issue out warrants, *given at that court*, as it were, for the executing of judgments on the land. See Jer. xxv. 30. In Zion was the *mercy-seat*, thence the Lord roars; intimating that God's *acts of justice* are consistent with *mercy*, allayed and mitigated by mercy, nay, as they are *warnings*, they are really *acts of mercy*. We are *chastened*, that we may not be condemned. (2.) What effect the warning has; *The habitations of the shepherds mourn*, either because they *fear the roaring lion*, or, because they *feel* what is signified by that comparison, the consequence of a *great drought*, (ch. iv. 7.) which made the *top of Carmel*, of the most fruitful fields, to *wither*, and become as a desert, Joel i. 12, 17.

3. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the *punishment* thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing-instruments of iron: 4. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. 5. I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD. 6. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the *punishment* thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom: 7. But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof: 8. And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn my hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord God. 9. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the *punishment* thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: 10. But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof. 11. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the *punishment* thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and kept his wrath for ever: 12. But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah. 13. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not

turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: 14. But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind: 15. And their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith the Lord.

What *the Lord* says here, may be explained by what he says, Jer. xii. 14. *Thus saith the Lord, against all my evil neighbours that touch the inheritance of my people Israel, Behold, I will pluck them out.* Damascus was a near neighbour to Israel on the north, Tyre and Gaza on the west, Edom on the south, Ammon and (in the next chapter) Moab on the east; and all of them had been, one time, one way, or other, *striking briars* and *grieving thorns* to Israel, evil neighbours to them; and because God espouses his people's cause, he *there* calls them *his evil neighbours*, and here comes forth to reckon with them. The method taken in dealing with each of them is, in part, the same, and therefore we put them together, and yet in each there is something peculiar.

1. Let us see what is repeated, both by way of *charge*, and by way of *sentence*, concerning them all. The controversy God has with each of them, is prefaced with, *Thus saith the Lord, Jehovah, the God of Israel.* Though those nations will not worship him as *their God*, yet they shall be made to know that they are accountable to him as *their Judge*. The God of Israel is the *God of the whole earth*, and has something to say to them, that shall make them tremble. Against them the *Lord roars out of Zion*. And before God, by the prophet, threatens Israel and Judah, he denounces judgments against these nations whom he *made use of* as scourges to them for their being so; which might serve for a check to their pride and insolence, and a relief to his people under their dejections; for hereby they might see that God had not quitted his interest in them, and therefore might hope they had not lost their interest in him.

Now as to all these nations here *arraigned*,

1. The indictment drawn up against them all is thus far the same, (1.) That they are charged in general with *three transgressions*, and *with four*, that is, with *many transgressions*; as by *one or two*, we mean a *few*, so by *three or four* we mean many, as in Latin, a man that is very happy, is said to be *terque quaterque beatus*—*three and four times happy*; or with three and four, that is, with seven transgressions, a number of perfection; intimating that they have *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, and are ripe for ruin. Or, *with three*, that is, a variety of sins, and with a *fourth* especially, which is specified concerning each of them, though the other three are not. As Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21, 29. where we read of *three things, yea, four*, generally one seems to be more especially intended. (2.) That the particular sin, which is fastened upon as the *fourth*, and which alone is specified, is, the sin of *persecution*; it is some mischief or other done to the people of God, that is particularly charged upon every one of them; for persecution is the *measure-filling sin* of any people; and it is this sin that will be particularly reckoned for; *I was hungry, and you gave me no meat*; much more if it may be said, *I was hungry, and you took my meat from me*.

2. The judgment given against them all, is thus far the same. (1.) That, their sin being come to such a height, *God will not turn away the punishment thereof*. Though he has granted them a long

reprieve, and has often *turned away their punishment*, yet now he will turn it away no longer, but justice shall take its course, "*I will not revoke it* (so some read it); I will not recall the voice which is *gone forth* from Zion and Jerusalem, (v. 2.) speaking death and terror to the sinful nations." It is an irrevocable sentence; God has spoken it, and he will not *call it back*. Note, Though God bear *long*, he will not bear *always*, with these that provoke him, and when the decree *brings forth*, it will *bring up*. (2.) That God will *kindle a fire* among them; this is said concerning all these *evil neighbours*, v. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14. God will *send a fire* into their cities. When fires are *kindled*, that lay cities, towns, and houses in ashes, whether designedly or casually, God must be acknowledged in it; they are of his *sending*; sin stirs up the fire of his jealousy, and that kindles other fires.

11. Let us see what is mentioned both by way of charge, and by way of sentence, that is peculiar to each of them; that every one may take his portion.

1. Concerning Damascus, the head city of Syria, a kingdom that was often vexatious to Israel. (1.) *The peculiar sin* of Damascus was, using the Gileadites barbarously; *They threshed Gilead with threshing-instruments of iron*, (v. 3.) which may be understood either literally, of their putting the inhabitants of Gilead to the torture, or to cruel deaths, whom they got into their hands; as David put the Ammonites under *saws and harrows*, 2 Sam. xii. 31. We read with what inhumanity Hazael king of Syria prosecuted his wars with Israel; (2 Kings viii. 12.) he *dashed their children*, and *ripped up their women with child*; and see what desolations he made in their land, 2 Kings x. 32, 33. Or, it may be taken figuratively, for his laying the country waste, and this very similitude is used in the history of it; (2 Kings xiii. 7.) *He destroyed them, and made them like the dust by threshing*. Note, Men often do that unjustly and wickedly, and shall be severely reckoned with for it, which yet God justly permits them to do. The church is called *God's threshing, and the corn of his floor*; (Isa. xxi. 10.) but if men make it *their threshing*, and the *chaff of their floor*, they shall be sure to hear of it. (2.) *The peculiar punishment* of Damascus is, [1.] That the fire which shall be sent up, shall fasten upon the court in the first place, not on the chief city, or the country towns, but on the *house of Hazael*, which he built; and it shall *devour the palaces of Ben-hadad*, the royal palaces inhabited by the kings of Syria, many of whom were of that name. Note, Even royal palaces are no fence against the judgments of God, though ever so richly furnished, though ever so strongly fortified. [2.] That the enemy shall force his way into the city; (v. 5.) *I will break the bar of Damascus*; and then the gate flies open. Or, it may be understood figuratively; all that which is depended upon as the strength and safety of that great city, shall fail, and prove insufficient. When God's judgments come with commission, it is in vain to think of *turning them out*. [3.] That the people shall be destroyed with the sword; *I will cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, the valley of idolatry*, for the gods of the Syrians were *gods of the valleys*, (1 Kings xx. 23.) were worshipped in valleys; as the idols of Israel were worshipped on the *hills*; *him also that holdeth the sceptre of power*, some petty king or other that used to boast of the sceptre he held from Beth-Eden; the *house of pleasure*. Both those that were given to idolatry, and those that were given to sensuality, shall be *cut off* together. [4.] That the body of the nation shall be carried off. *The people shall go into captivity unto Kir*, which was in the country of the Medes. We find this fulfilled, (2 Kings xvi. 9.) about fifty years after this, when the king

of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin, at the instigation of Ahaz king of Judah.

2. Concerning Gaza, a city of the Philistines, and now the metropolis of that country. (1.) *The peculiar sin of the Philistines was, carrying away captive the whole captivity*, either of Israel or Judah, which, some think, refers to that inroad made upon Jehoram, when they took away *all the king's sons, and all his substance*; (2 Chron. xxi. 17.) or, perhaps it refers to their seizing of those that fled to them for shelter, when Sennacherib invaded Judah, and *selling of them to the Grecians*, (Joel iii. 4, 6.) or, (as here) to the Edomites, who were always sworn enemies to the people of God. They spared none, but carried off all they could lay their hands on, designing, if possible, to *cut off the name of Israel*, Ps. lxxxiii. 4, 7. (2.) *The peculiar punishment of the Philistines is, that the fire which God will send, shall devour the palaces of Gaza, and that the inhabitants of the other cities of the Philistines, Ashdod, (or Azotus,) Ashkelon, and Ekron, should all be cut off*, and God would make as thorough work with them in their ruin as they would have made with God's people when they carried away the whole captivity; for even the *remnant of them shall perish*, v. 8. Note, God will make a full end of those that think to make a full end of his church and people.

3. Concerning Tyre, that famous city of wealth and strength, that was itself a kingdom, v. 9. (1.) *The peculiar sin of Tyre is, delivering up the whole captivity to Edom*, selling to the Edomites those of Israel that fled to them for shelter, or any way fell into their hands; not caring what hardships they put upon them, so they could but make gain of them to themselves. Herein they forgot the *brotherly covenant*, the league that was between Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre, (1 Kings v. 12.) which was so intimate, that Hiram called Solomon his brother, 1 Kings ix. 13. Note, It is a great aggravation of enmity and malice, when it is the violation of friendship and of a *brotherly covenant*. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in the *punishment of Tyrus*, but that *the palaces thereof shall be devoured*; which was done when Nebuchadnezzar took it after thirteen years' siege. Their merchants were all princes, and their private houses were as palaces; but the fire shall make no more of them than cottages.

4. Concerning Edom, the posterity of Esau. (1.) *Their peculiar sin was, an unmerciful, unwearied pursuit of the people of God, and their taking all advantages against them to do them a mischief*, v. 11. He did *pursue his brother with the sword*, not only of old, when the king of Edom took up arms to oppose the children of Israel's passage *through his border*, (Numb. xx. 1.) but ever since upon all occasions; they had not strength and courage enough to face them in the field of battle, but, whenever any other enemy had put Judah or Israel to flight, then the Edomites set in with the pursuers, fell upon the rear, slew those that were *half dead* already, and (as is usual with cowards when they have an enemy at an advantage) they did *cast off all pity*. Those that are least *courageous*, are commonly most *cruel*; Edom was so; his malice *destroyed his compassion*; (so the word is;) he stripped himself of the tenderness of a man, and put on the fierceness of a beast of prey; and, as such a one, he did *tear*, his anger did *tear perpetually*. His cruelty was *insatiable*, and he never knew when he had sucked enough of the blood of Israel, but, like the horse-leech, still cried, *Give, give*. Nay, he *kept his wrath for ever*; when he wanted objects of his wrath, and opportunity to show it, yet he kept it in reserve, (it rested in his bosom,) rolled it under his tongue as a sweet morsel, and had it ready to spit in the face of Israel

upon the next occasion. Cursed be such cruel wrath and anger so fierce, so outrageous; which makes men like the devil, who *continually seeks to devour*, and unlike to God, who *keeps not his anger for ever*. Edom's malice was *unnatural*, for thus he pursued his brother, whom he ought to have protected: it was *hereditary*, as if it had been entailed upon the family ever since Esau hated Jacob, and time itself could not wear it out, no, nor the brotherly conduct of Israel toward them, (Deut. ii. 4.) and the express law given to Israel, (Deut. xxiii. 7.) *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother*. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in their *punishment*; but (v. 12.) *a fire shall be sent to devour their palaces*. Note, The fire of our anger against our brethren kindles the fire of God's anger against us.

5. Concerning the Ammonites, v. 13.—15. (1.) See how *violently* the fire of their anger turned against the people of God; they not only triumphed in their calamities, (as we find, Ezek. xxv. 2, 6.) but they did themselves use them barbarously, they *ripped up the women with child of Gilead*, a piece of cruelty, the very mention whereof strikes a horror upon one's mind; one would think it not possible that any of the human race should be so *inhuman*. Hazael was guilty of it, 2 Kings viii. 12. It was done not only in a *brutish* rage, which falls without consideration upon all that comes before it, but with a *devilish* design to extirpate the race of Israel by killing not only all that were *born*, but all that were *to be born*, worse than Egyptian cruelty. It was that they might *enlarge their border*, that they might make the land of Gilead their own, and there might be none to lay claim to it, or give them any disturbance in the possession of it. We find, (Jer. xlix. 1.) that the Ammonites *inherited* Gad, that is, Gilead, under pretence that Israel had *no sons, no heirs*. We know how heavy their doom was, and how heinous their crime, who said, *This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours* by occupancy. See what cruelty covetousness is the cause of; and what horrid practices those are often put upon, that are greedy to *enlarge their own border*. (2.) See how *violently* the fire of God's anger burned against them; shall not God visit for these things done to any of mankind, especially when they are done to his own people? *Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* No doubt it shall. The fire shall be kindled *with shouting in the day of battle*, war shall kindle the fire, it shall be a *fire* accompanied with the *sword*, or a roaring fire, which shall make a noise like that of soldiers ready to engage. And it shall be as a *tempest in the day of the whirlwind*, which comes swiftly, furiously, and bears down all before it. Or, This *tempest and whirlwind* shall be as bellows to the fire, to make it burn the stronger, and spread the further. It is particularly threatened *into their king and his princes shall go together into captivity*, carried away by the king of Babylon, not long after Judah was. See what changes God's providence often makes with men, or, rather, their own sin; kings become *captives*, and *princes prisoners*. *Milchom shall go into captivity*; some understand it of the god of the Ammonites, whom they called *Moloch*—a king; he, and his princes, and his priests that attended him, shall go *into captivity*; their idol shall be so far from protecting them, that it shall itself go into captivity with them. Note, These who by violence and fraud seek to enlarge *their own border*, will justly be *expelled and excluded* their own border; nor is it strange if those who *make no conscience* of invading the rights of others, be able to *make no resistance* against those who invade theirs.

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, I. God, by the prophet, proceeds in a like controversy with Moab as before with other nations, v.

1. 3. II. He shows what quarrel he had with Judah, v. 4, 5. III. He at length begins his charge against Israel, to which all that goes before is but an introduction. Observe, 1. The sins they are charged with— injustice, oppression, whoredom, v. 6. 1. 8. 2. The aggravation of those sins—the temporal and spiritual mercies God had bestowed upon them, for which they had made him such ungrateful returns, v. 9. 1. 12. 3. God's complaint of them for their sins, (v. 13.) and his threatenings of their ruin, and their utter inability to prevent it, v. 14. 1. 16.

1. **THUS** saith the LORD, for three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime; 2. But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kiriath; and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet: 3. And I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof, and will slay all the princes thereof with him, saith the LORD. 4. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked; 5. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. 6. Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; 7. That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek; and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name: 3. And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Here is,

I. The judgment of Moab, another of the nations that bordered upon Israel. They are reckoned with, and shall be punished for three transgressions and for four, as those before. Now, 1. Moab's fourth transgression, as theirs who were before set to the bar, was, *cruelty*; the instance given refers not to the people of God, but to a heathen like themselves. The king of Moab burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime. We find there was war between the Edomites and the Moabites, in which the king of Moab, in distress, and rage, offered his own son for a burnt-offering, to appease his deity, 2 Kings iii. 26, 27. And it should seem that afterward he, or some of his successors, in revenge upon the Edomites for bringing him to that extremity, having an advantage against the king of Edom, either seized him alive, and burnt him to ashes, or slew him, and burnt his body, or digged up the bones of their dead king, of that particularly who had so straitened him, and, in token of his rage and fury, burnt them to lime, and perhaps made use of the powder of his bones for the white-washing of the walls and ceiling of his palace, that he might please himself with the sight of that monument of his revenge. *Est vindicta bonum vitâ jucundius ipsâ—Revenge is sweeter than life itself.* It is barbarous

to abuse human bodies, for we ourselves also are in the body; it is senseless to abuse dead bodies, nay, it is impious, for we believe and look for their resurrection. And to abuse the dead bodies of kings, (whose persons and names ought to be in a particular manner respected and had in veneration,) is an affront to majesty; it is an argument of a base spirit for those to trample upon a dead lion, who, were he alive, would tremble before him. 2. Moab's doom for this transgression is, (1.) A judgment of death. Those that deal cruelly shall be cruelly dealt with; (v. 2.) Moab shall die, the Moabites shall be cut off with the sword of war, which kills with tumult, with shouting, and with sound of trumpet, circumstances that make it so much the more terrible; as the lion's roaring aggravates his tearing; every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, Isa. ix. 5. (2.) It is a judgment upon their judge, who had passed the sentence upon the bones of the king of Edom, that they should be burnt to lime; I will cut him off, says God; (v. 3.) he shall know there is a Judge that is higher than he. The king, the chief judge, and all the inferior judges and princes, shall be cut off together. If the people sometimes suffer for the sin of their princes, yet the princes themselves shall not escape, Jer. xlviii. 47. Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

II. Judah also is a near neighbour to Israel, and therefore now that justice is riding the circuit, that shall not be passed by; that nation had made itself like the heathen, and mingled itself with them, and therefore the indictment here runs against them in the same form in which it had run against all the rest; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; their sins are as many as the sins of other nations, and we find them huddled up with them in the same character, Jer. ix. 26. Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, jumble them together, they are all alike; the sentence here also is the same; (v. 5.) I will send a fire upon Judah, though it is the land where God is known, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, though it is the holy city, and God has been known in its palaces for a refuge, Ps. xlviii. 3. But the sin here charged upon Judah, is different from all the rest. The other nations were reckoned with for injuries done to men, but Judah is reckoned with for indignities done to God, v. 4. 1. They put contempt upon his statutes; and persisted in disobedience to them; They have despised the law of the Lord, as if it were not worth taking notice of, nor had any thing in it valuable; and herein they despised the wisdom, justice, and goodness, as well as the authority and sovereignty, of the Law-Maker; this they did, in effect, when they kept not his commandments, made no conscience of them, took no care about them. 2. They put honour upon his rivals, their idols, here called their lies, which caused them to err; for an image is a teacher of lies, Hab. ii. 18. And they that are led away into the error of idolatry, are by that led into a multitude of other errors, *Uno dato absurdo mille sequuntur—One absurdity draws after it a thousand.* God is an infinite, eternal Spirit; but when that truth of God is by idolatry changed into a lie, all his other truths are in danger of being so changed likewise; thus their idols caused them to err, and God justly gave them up to strong delusions; nor was it any excuse for their sin, that they were the lies after which their fathers walked, for they should rather have taken warning, than taken pattern, by those that perished with these lies in their right hand.

III. We now at length come to the words which Amos saw concerning Israel; the reproofs and threatenings having walked the round, here they centre, here they settle. He begins with them as with the rest, For three transgressions of Israel, and

for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; if all these nations must be punished for their iniquities, shall Israel go unpunished? Observe here, what their sins were, for which God would reckon with them.

1. *Perverting justice.* This was the sin of those who were intrusted with the administration of justice, the judges and magistrates, and all parties concerned; they made nothing of selling a righteous man, and his righteous cause when it came to be tried before them; for a piece of silver sentence was passed, not according to the merits of the cause, but the bribe always turned the scale, and judgment was set to sale by auction to the highest bidder. They would sell the life and livelihood of a poor man for a pair of shoes, for the least advantage to themselves that could be proposed to them; give them but a pair of shoes, and the cause of a poor man, who could not give them so much as that, should be betrayed, and left at the mercy of those that will have no mercy; they will rather play at small game than sit out; for a piece of bread such a man will transgress. Note, Those who will wrong their consciences for any thing, will come at length to do it for next to nothing, those who begin to sell justice for silver, will, in time, be so sordid as to sell it for a pair of shoes, for a pair of old shoes.

2. *Oppressing the poor,* and seeking to benefit themselves by doing them a mischief; *They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor; they swallow up the poor* with the utmost greediness, and make a prey of them that are in sorrow, with dust on their heads; poor orphans that are in mourning for their parents, they catch at them to get their estates into their hands; they never rest till they have got the heads of the poor in the dust, to be trodden on. Or, *They pant after the dust of the earth, silver and gold, white and yellow dust; they covet it earnestly, and levy it upon the head of the poor,* by their unjust exactions. Note, Men's seeking to enrich themselves by the impoverishing of others, is a transgression which God will not long turn away the punishment of. This is turning aside the way of the meek, contriving to do injury to those who, they know, are mild and patient, and will bear injury. They invade their rights, break their measures, and obstruct the course of justice in favour of them, not suffering them to go on with their righteous cause; this is turning aside their way. Note, The more patiently men bear the injuries that are done them, the greater is the sin of those that injure them, and the more occasion they have to expect that God will right them, and take vengeance for them. 1, as a deaf man, heard not, and then thou wilt hear.

3. *Abominable uncleanness,* even incest itself, such as is not named among the Gentiles, that a man should have his father's wife, (1 Cor. v. 1.) his father's concubine; A man and his father will go in unto the same young woman, as black an instance as any other of an unbounded, promiscuous lust; and yet where the former iniquities of oppression and extortion are, this also is found; for laws of modesty seldom hold those that have broken the bands of justice, and cast away its cords from them. This wickedness is such a scandal to religion, and the profession of it, that they who are guilty of it, are looked upon as designing thereby to profane God's holy name, and to render it odious among the heathen, as if he countenanced the villainies which those who pretend relation to him allow themselves in, and were altogether such a one as they.

4. *Regaling themselves, and yet pretending to honour their God* with that which they had got by oppression and extortion, v. 8. They add idolatry to their injustice, and then think to atone for their injustice with their idolatry. (1.) They make merry

with that which they have unjustly squeezed from the poor. They lay themselves down at ease, and in state, and stretch themselves upon clothes laid to fledge, which they ought to have restored the same night, according to the law, Deut. xxiv. 12, 13. And they drink the wine of the condemned, of such as they have fined and laid heavy mulcts upon; spending that in sensuality, which they have got by injustice. (2.) They think to make atonement for this, by feasting on the gains of oppression before their altars, and drinking this wine in the house of their god, in the temples where they worshipped their calves, as if they would make God a Partner in their crimes, by making him a Partner of the profits of them—service good enough for false gods; but the true God will not thus be mocked; he has declared that he hates robbery for burnt-offerings, and cannot be served acceptably but with that which is got honestly.

9. Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. 10. Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. 11. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the Lord. 12. But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not. 13. Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. 14. Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: 15. Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself: 16. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the Lord.

Here, 1. God puts his people Israel in mind of the great things he had done for them, in putting them into possession of the land of Canaan, the greatest part of which these ten tribes now enjoyed, v. 9, 10. Note, We need often to be reminded of the mercies we have received, which are the heaviest aggravations of the sins we have committed. God gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our meanness and unworthiness, and the disproportion between his gifts and our merits; but he justly upbraids us with our ingratitude, and ill requital of his favours, and tells us what he has done for us, to shame us for not rendering again according to the benefit done to us. Son, remember; Israel, remember, (1.) "That God brought thee out of a house of bondage, rescued thee out of the land of Egypt, where, else, thou hadst perished in slavery." (2.) That he led thee forty years through a desert land, and fed thee in a wilderness, where, else, thou hadst perished with hunger. Mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us; for if they had been cut off, we had not been. (3.) That he made room for them in Canaan, by extirpating the natives, by a series of wonders little inferior to those by which they were redeemed out of Egypt; I destroyed the Amorite

before them, here put for all the devoted nations. Observe the *magnificence* of the enemies that stood in their way, which is taken notice of, that God may be the more *magnified* in the subduing of them; they were of *great stature*, his *height was like the height of the cedars*, and the people of Israel were as shrubs to them; and of *great strength*, not only tall, but well set, he was *strong as the oaks*; their kingdom was *eminent* among the nations, and overtopped all its neighbours; the support and defences of it seemed impregnable, it was as *fine* as the *stately cedar*, it was as *firm* as the *sturdy oak*; yet when God had a *vine* to plant there, (Ps. lxxx. 8, 9.) this Amorite is not only cut down, but plucked up; *I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath*, so the Amorites were no more a nation, nor ever read of any more. Thus highly did God value Israel; he gave men for them, and *people for their life*, Isa. xliii. 4. How ungrateful then were they, who put such contempt upon him! (4.) That he made them *possess the land of the Amorite*, not only put it into their hands so that they became masters of it *jure belli*—by right of conquest, but gave them a better title to it, so that it became theirs by promise.

2. He likewise upbraids them with the spiritual privileges and advantages they enjoyed as a holy nation, v. 11. They had *helps for their souls*, which taught them how to make good use of their temporal enjoyments, and were therefore more valuable. It is true, the ten tribes had not God's temple, altar, and priesthood, and it was their own fault that they *deserted* them, and for that they might justly have been left in utter darkness; but God *left not himself without witness*, or them without guides, to show them the way. (1.) They had *prophets* that were *powerful instructors* in piety, divinely inspired and commissioned to make known the mind of God to them, to show them what is pleasing to God, and what displeasing; to reprove them for their faults, and warn them of their danger; to direct them in their difficulties, and comfort them in their troubles. God *raised them up* prophets, spirited them for that work, and employed them in it. He raised them up of *their sons*, from among themselves, as Moses and Christ were raised up *from among their brethren*, Deut. xviii. 15. It was an honour put upon their nation, and upon their families, that they had children of their own to be God's messengers to them, of their own language, not strangers sent from another country, whom they might suspect to be prejudiced against them and their land, but those who they knew wished well to them. Note, Faithful ministers are great blessings to any people, and it is God that raises them up to be so, and they may justly be reckoned an honour to the families they are of. (2.) They had Nazarites that were *bright examples* of piety; *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*, men that bound themselves by a vow to God and his service, and, in pursuance of that, denied themselves many of the lawful delights of sense, as drinking wine, and eating grapes. There were some of *their young men* that were in their prime for the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life, and yet voluntarily *abridged* themselves of them; these God *raised up* by the power of his grace, to be *monuments of his grace*, to his glory, and to be his witnesses against the impieties of that degenerate age. Note, It is as great a blessing to any place to have eminent good *Christians* in it as to have eminent good *ministers* in it; for so they have examples to their rules. We must acknowledge that it bodes well to any people, when God raises up numbers of hopeful young people among them, when he makes their *young men Nazarites*, devout and conscientious, and mortified to the pleasures of sense;

those that are such Nazarites, are *purer than snow, whiter than milk*, they are indeed the *polite young men*, for their *polishing is of sapphires*, Lam. iv. 7. They that have such men, such young men, among them, have therein such an advantage, both for direction and encouragement, to be religious, as they will be called to an account for another day, if they do not improve. Israel is here reckoned with, not only for the prophets, but for the Nazarites, raised up among them. Concerning the truth of this, he appeals to themselves; "*Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? Can ye deny it? Have not you yourselves been sensible of the advantage you had by the prophets and Nazarites raised up among you?*" Note, Sinners' own consciences will be witnesses for God, that he has not been wanting to them in the means of grace, so that if they perish, it is because they have been wanting to themselves in not improving those means. The men of Judah shall themselves *judge between God and his vineyard*, whether he could have *done more for it*, Isa. v. 3, 4.

3. He charges them with the abuse of the means of grace they enjoyed, and the opposition they gave to God's designs in affording them those means, v. 12. They were so far from *walking in the light*, that they *rebelled against it*, and did what they could to extinguish it, that it might not shine in their faces to their conviction. (1.) They did what they could to *debauch good people*; to draw them off from their seriousness in devotion, and their strictness in conversation; *Ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink*, contrary to their vow, that, having broken it in that instance, they might not pretend to keep it in any other. Some they surprised, or allured, into it, and *with their much fair speech caused them to yield*; others they forced and frightened into it, reproached and threatened them, if they were more *precise* than their neighbours; and by drawing them in to *drink wine* they spoiled them for Nazarites. Note, Satan and his agents are very busy to corrupt the minds of young people that look heavenward; and many that we thought would have been Nazarites, they have overcome by *giving them wine to drink*, by drawing them into the love of mirth and pleasure, and drinking company; multitudes of young men that bid fair for eminent professors of religion, have *erred through wine*, and been undone for ever. And how do the factors for hell triumph in the debauching of a Nazarite! (2.) They did what they could to *silence good ministers*, and to stop their mouths; "*You commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not*, and threatened them if they did prophesy, (ch. vii. 12.) as if God's messengers were bound to observe your orders, and might not deliver their errand unless you gave them leave, and so you not only *received the grace of God*, in raising up those prophets, *in vain*, but put the highest affront imaginable upon that God in whose name the prophets spake." Note, Those have a great deal to answer for that cannot bear faithful preaching, and those much more who suppress it.

4. He complains of the wrong they did him by their sins; (v. 13.) "*I am pressed under you*, I am *straitened* by you, and know not what to do, Hos. xi. 8, 9. I am *loaded and burthened* by you, and can no longer bear it, and therefore *I will ease me of my adversaries*, Isa. i. 24. *I am pressed under you*, and the load of your sins, as a *cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*, is loaded with corn, in the midst of the *joy of harvest*, as long as any will *lie on*." Note, The great God complains of sin, especially the sins of his professing people, as a burthen to him. He is *grieved with this generation*, (Ps. xcvi. 10.) *is broken with their whorish heart*, Ezek. vi. 9. A consideration which if it make not the sinners repentance very deep, it will make his

ruin very great. The great God that upholds the world, and never complains that he is *pressed under* the weight of it, he *fainteth not, neither is weary*, yet complains of the sins of Israel, yea, and of their hypocritical services too, that he is *weary of bearing them*, Isa. i. 14. No wonder the *creature groans being burthened*, (Rom. viii. 22.) when the Creator says, *I am pressed under them*.

5. He threatens them with unavoidable ruin. And so some read, v. 13. *Behold, I will press or straiten your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses; they shall be loaded with judgments till they shall sink under them, and shall make a noise, as a cart overloaded does. They that will not submit to the convictions of the word, that will neither be won by that, nor by the conversation of those about them, shall be made to sink under the weight of God's judgments. If God load us daily with his benefits, and we, notwithstanding that, load him with our sins, how can we expect any other than that he should load us with his judgments?* And it is here threatened in the three last verses, that when God comes forth to contend with this provoking people, they shall not be able to stand before him, to flee from him, or to make their part good with him; for when God judges, he will overcome. Though his patience be tired out, his power is not, and so the sinner shall find, to his cost. When the Assyrian army comes to lay the country waste by sword and captivity, none shall escape, but every one shall have his share in the common desolation. (1.) It will be in vain to think of *fleeing from the enemy* that comes armed with a commission to make all desolate. *The flight shall perish from the swift; the arts of those that have been famed for happy escapes and happy retreats, shall now fail them; they shall have no time to flee, or shall find no way to take; or they shall have no strength or spirit to attempt it. They shall be at their wits' end, and then they are soon at their flight's end. Are they, as Asahel, as swift of foot as a wild roe?* (2 Sam. ii. 18.) Yet, like him, they shall run the faster upon their own destruction; *He that is swift of foot, shall not deliver himself, v. 15. Or, do they say, (as those, Isa. xxx. 16.) We will flee upon horses, and we will ride upon the swift?* Yet they shall be forsaken; *Neither shall he that rides the horse, deliver himself from the pursuers. A horse is a vain thing for safety.* (2.) It will be in vain to think of *fighting it out*. God is at war with them; and are they *stronger than he?* Is there any military force that can pretend to be a match for Omnipotence? No, *the strong shall not strengthen his force.* He that has a habit of strength, shall not be able to exert it when he has occasion for it. And *the mighty*, who should protect and deliver others, shall not be able to *deliver himself, to deliver his soul*, (so the word is,) shall not save his life. Let not the *strong man* then *glory in his strength*, nor trust in it, but *strengthen himself in the Lord his God*, for in him is *everlasting strength*. And as the bodily strength shall fail, so shall the weapons of war; the armour as well as the arm shall become insufficient; *Neither shall he stand that handles the bow*, though he stand at a distance, but shall betake himself to flight, and not trust to his own bow to save him; though the arm were ever so strong, and the armour ever so well fixed, neither will avail when the spirit fails; (v. 16.) *He that is courageous among the mighty*, that used to look danger in the face, and not be dismayed at it, he shall *flee away naked in that day*; not only disarmed, having thrown away his weapons both offensive and defensive, but plundered of his treasure, which he thought to have carried away with him, and he shall think it as much as bargain, that he has his life for a prey. Thus when God pleases, he takes away the

heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causes them who used to boast of their courage, and their daring enterprizes in the field, to wander and sneak in a wilderness where there is no way, Job xii. 24.

CHAP. III.

A stupid, senseless, heedless people, are, in this chapter, called upon to take notice, I. Of the judgments of God denounced against them, and the warnings he gave them of those judgments; and to be hereby awakened out of their security, v. 1. . 8. II. Of the sins that were found among them, by which God was provoked thus to threaten, thus to punish, that they might justify God in his controversy with them, and, unless they repented and reformed, might expect no other than that God should proceed in his controversy, v. 9. . 15.

1. **H**EAR this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 2. You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. 3. Can two walk together except they be agreed? 4. Will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den if he have taken nothing? 5. Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? 6. Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? 7. Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. 8. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

The scope of these verses is, to convince the people of Israel that God had a controversy with them; that which the prophet has to say to them, is, to let them know that the Lord has something to say against them, v. 1. They were his peculiar people above others, knew his name, and were called by it; nevertheless he had something against them, and they were called to hear what it is, that they may consider what answer they shall make; as the prisoner at the bar is bid to *hearken to his indictment*. The children of Israel would not regard the words of counsel and comfort that God had many a time spoken to them, and now they shall be made to hear the word of reproof and threatening that the Lord has spoken against them; for He will act as He has spoken.

1. Let them know that the gracious cognizance God had taken of them, and the favours he had bestowed upon them, should not exempt them from the punishment due to them for their sins. It is a family that God brought up out of the land of Egypt, (v. 1.) and it was no more than a family, when it went down thither; thence God delivered it, thence he fetched it to be a family to himself. It is not only the ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel, that must take notice of this, but that of Judah also, for it is spoken against the whole family that God brought up out of Egypt. It is a family that God has bestowed distinguishing favours upon, has owned in a peculiar manner; *You only have I known of all the families of the earth*. Note, God's church in the world is a family dignified above a

the families of the earth. Those that know God, are *known of him*; in Judah is God *known*, and therefore Judah is more than any people known of God. God has *known* them; he has chosen them, covenanted with them, and conversed with them as his acquaintance.

Now, one would think, it should follow, "Therefore I will spare you, will connive at your faults, and excuse you." No, *Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* Note, The distinguishing favours of God to us, if they do not serve to *restrain* us from sin, shall not serve to *exempt* us from punishment: nay, the nearer any are to God in profession, and the kinder notice he has taken of them, the more surely, the more quickly, and the more severely, will he reckon with them, if they by a course of wilful sin profane their character, disgrace their relation to him, violate their engagements, and put a slight upon the favours and honours with which they have been distinguished. *Therefore they shall be punished*, because their sins dishonour him, affront him, and grieve him, more than the sins of others; and because it is necessary that God should vindicate his own honour by making it appear that he hates sin, and hates it most in those that are nearest to him; if they be but *as bad as others*, they shall be punished *worse than others*, because it is justly expected that they should be so much *better than others.* *Judgment begins at the house of God*, begins at the sanctuary; for God will be sanctified either by or upon those that come nigh unto him, Lev. x. 3.

2. Let them know that they could not expect any comfortable communion with God, unless they first made their peace with him; (v. 3.) *Can two walk together except they be agreed?* No, how should they? Where there is no friendship, there can be no fellowship; if two persons be at variance, they must first accommodate the matters in difference between them, before there can be any interchanging of good offices. Israel had affronted God, had broken their covenant with him, and ill requited his favours to them; and yet they expected that he should continue to *walk with them*, should take their part, act for them, and give them assurances of his presence with them, though they took no care by repentance and reformation to *agree with their Adversary*, and to turn away his wrath. "But how can that be?" (says God,) "while you continue to *walk contrary to God*, you can look for no other than that he should *walk contrary to you*," Lev. xxvi. 23, 24. Note, We cannot expect that God should be present with us, or act for us, unless we be reconciled to him. God and man cannot *walk together, except they be agreed*; unless we agree with God in our end, which is his glory, we cannot *walk with him by the way.*

3. Let them know that the warnings God gave them of judgments approaching, were not causeless and groundless, merely to amuse them, but certain declarations of the wrath of God against them, which (if they did not speedily repent) they would infallibly feel the effects of; (v. 4.) "*Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey in view?* No, he roars upon his prey; nor will a young lion cry out of his den, if the old lion have taken nothing to bring home to him; nor would God thus give you warning both by the threatenings of his word, and by lesser judgments, if you had not by your sins made yourselves a prey to his wrath, nor if he were not really about to fall upon you with desolating, destroying judgments." Note, The threatenings of the word and providence of God are not bugbears, to frighten children and fools, but are certain inferences from the sin of man, and certain presages of the judgments of God.

4. Let them know that as their own wickedness

was the procuring cause of these judgments, so they shall not be removed till they have done their work, v. 5. When God is come forth to contend with a sinful people, it is necessary that they should understand, (1.) That it is *their own sin* that has entangled them; for, *can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him?* No, nature does not lay snares for the creatures, but the art of men; a bird is not taken in a snare by chance, but with the fowler's design; so the providence of God prepares trouble for sinners, and it is *in the work of their own hands* that they are snared; affliction does not *spring out of the dust*, but it is God's justice, and *our own wickedness*, that corrects us. (2.) It is nothing but *their own repentance* that can disentangle them; for *shall one take up a snare from the earth*, which he laid with design, except he have taken something as he designed? So neither will God remove the affliction he has sent, till it have done its work, and accomplished that for which he sent it. If our hearts be duly humbled, and we are brought by our afflictions to confess and forsake our sins, then the snare has *taken something*, then the point is gained, the end is answered, and then, and not till then, the *snare is broken*, is taken up from the earth, and *we are delivered* in love and mercy.

5. Let them know that all their troubles came from the hand of God's providence, and from the counsel of his will; (v. 6.) *Shall there be evil in a city, in a family, in a nation, and the Lord has not done it*, appointed it, and performed what he appointed? The evil of sin is from ourselves, it is our own doing; but the evil of trouble, personal or public, is from God, and is his doing; whoever are the instruments, God is the principal Agent. *Out of his mouth both evil and good proceed.*

This consideration, That, whatever evil is in the city, the Lord has done it, should engage us patiently to bear our share in public calamities, and to study to answer God's intention in them.

6. Let them know that their prophets, who give them warning of judgments approaching, deliver nothing to them but what they have received from the Lord, to be delivered to his people. (1.) God makes it known beforehand to the prophets; (v. 7.) *Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing*, none of that evil in the city spoken of, (v. 6.) *but he reveals it to his servants the prophets*, though to others it is a secret. Therefore they know not what they do, who make light of the warnings which the prophets give them, in God's name. Observe, God's prophets are *his servants*, whom he employs to go on his errands to the children of men. The secret of God is with them; it is in some sense with all the righteous, (Prov. iii. 32.) with *all that fear God*, (Ps. xxv. 14.) but in a peculiar manner with the prophets, to whom the Spirit of *prophecy* is a Spirit of revelation.

It had put honour enough upon prophets, if it had been only said, that sometimes God is pleased to reveal to his prophets what he designs to do; but it speaks something very great, to say that he *doeth nothing*, but what he *reveals it to them*, as if they were the men of his counsel. *Shall I hide from Abraham*, who is a prophet, *the thing which I do?* Gen. xviii. 17. God will therefore be sure to reckon with those who put contempt on the prophets whom he puts this honour upon. (2.) The prophets cannot but make that known to the people, which God has made known to them; (v. 8.) *The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?* His prophets, to whom he has spoken in secret by dreams and visions, cannot but speak in public to the people what they have heard from God. They are so full of those things themselves, so well assured concerning them, and so much affected with them, that they cannot but speak of them; for out of the abundance

of the heart the mouth will speak. *I believed, therefore have I spoken*, Acts iv. 20. Nay, and beside the prophetic impulse which went along with the inspiration, and made the word *like a fire in their bones*, (Jer. xx. 9.) they received a command from God to deliver what they had been charged with; and they had been *false to their trust*, if they had not done it. *Necessity was laid upon them*, as upon the preachers of the gospel, 1 Cor. ix. 16.

7. Let them know that they ought to *tremble before God*, upon the fair warning he had given them; as they would, (1.) Upon the *sounding of a trumpet*, to give notice of the approach of the enemy, that all may stand upon their guard, and stand to their arms; Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid, or run together? So some read it, v. 6. Will they not immediately come together in a fright, to consider what is best to be done for the common safety? Yet when God by his prophets gives them notice of their danger, and summons them to come, and enlist themselves under his banner, it makes no impression; they will sooner give credit to a *watchman on their walls*, than to a *prophet sent of God*; will sooner obey the summons of the governor of their city, than the orders given them by the Governor of the world. God says, *Hearken to the voice of the trumpet, but they will not hearken*, nay, and they tell him plainly that they will not, Jer. vi. 17. (2.) Upon the *roaring of a lion*. God is sometimes as a lion, and a young lion, to the house of Judah, Hos. v. 14. The lion roars before he tears; thus God warns before he wounds; if therefore the lion roars upon a poor traveller, (as he did against Samson, Judg. xiv. 5.) he cannot but be put in great consternation; yet the Lord roars out of Zion, (ch. i. 2.) and none are afraid, but they go on securely as if they were in no danger. Note, The fair warning given to a careless world, if it be not taken, will aggravate its condemnation another day. The lion roared, and they were not moved with fear to prepare an ark. O the amazing stupidity of an unbelieving world, that will not be wrought upon, no, not by the terrors of the Lord.

9. Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof. 10. For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. 11. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled. 12. Thus saith the LORD, As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch. 13. Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord God, the God of hosts. 14. That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also visit the altars of Beth-el; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. 15. And I will smite the winter-house with the sum-

mer-house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.

The Israelites are here again convicted and condemned, and particular notice given of the crimes they are convicted of, and the punishment they are condemned to.

1. Notice is given of it to their neighbours. The prophet is ordered to publish it in the palaces of Ashdod, one of the chief cities of the Philistines; nay, the summons must go further, even to the palaces in the land of Egypt; the great men of both those nations that dwell in the palaces, that are inquisitive concerning the affairs of the neighbouring nations, and are conversant with the public intelligence, let them assemble themselves upon the mountains of Samaria, v. 9. There, upon a throne high and lifted up, the judgment is set; Samaria is the criminal that is to be tried, let them be present at the trial, for it shall be (as other trials are) public, in the face of the country; let them make an appointment to meet there from all parts, to judge between God and his vineyard. God appeals to all impartial righteous men, Ezek. xxiii. 45. They will all subscribe to the equity of his proceedings, when they see how the case stands. Note, God's controversies with sinners do not fear a scrutiny; even Philistines and Egyptians will be made to see, and say, that the ways of the Lord are equal, but our ways are unequal. They are likewise summoned to attend, not only that they may justify God, and be witnesses for him that he deals fairly, but that they may themselves take warning; for if judgment begin at the house of God, as they see it does, what shall be the end of those that are strangers to him? 1 Pet. iv. 17. If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry? Or, this intimates that the sin of Israel had been so notorious, that the neighbouring nations could come in witnesses against them, and therefore it was fit that their punishment should be so. If it could have been concealed, we would have said, Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; but why should their friends consult their reputation, when they themselves do not consult it? If they are grown impudent in sin, let them bear the shame; publish it in Ashdod, in Egypt.

1. Let them see how black the charge is, and how well proved; let them observe the behaviour of the inhabitants of Samaria, let them look off from the adjacent hills, and they may see how rude and boisterous they are, and hear how loud the cry of their sin is, as was that of Sodom. (1.) Look into their streets, and you will see nothing but riot and disorder, great tumults in the midst thereof; reason and justice are upon all occasions run down by the noise and fury of an outrageous mob; the dominion of which is the sin and shame of any people, and is likely to be their ruin. (2.) Look into their prisons, and you see them filled with injured innocents; the oppressed are in the midst thereof; thrown down and crushed by their oppressors, overpowered and overwhelmed, and they had no comforter, Eccl. iv. 1. (3.) Look into their courts of justice, and they who preside in those courts, know not to do right, because they have always been accustomed to do wrong; they act as if they had no notion at all of the thing called justice, are in no care to do justice themselves, or to see that others do justice. (4.) Look into their treasures and stores, and you see them replenished with violence and robbery, with that which was unjustly got, and is still unjustly kept; thus they have heaped treasure together for the last days, but it will prove a treasure of wrath against the day of wrath. It may well be

said, *Those know not to do right*, who think to enrich themselves by *doing wrong*.

2. Let them see *how heavy the doom is*, and how well *executed*, v. 11, 12. (1.) Their country shall be *invaded and ruined*; and observe how the punishment answers to the sin. [1.] *Great tumults are in the midst of the land*, and therefore an *adversary shall be even round about the land*; the Assyrian forces shall surround it, and break in upon it on every side. Note, When sin is harboured and indulged in the *midst* of a people, they can expect no other than that *adversaries* should be *round about* them, so that, go which way they will, they go into the mouth of danger, Luke xix. 43. [2.] They *strengthened themselves* in their wickedness, but the enemy shall *bring down their strength* from them, that strength which they abused in *oppressing* the poor, and doing *violence* to all about them.

Note, That power which is made an instrument of unrighteousness, will justly be *brought down and broken*. [3.] They stored up *robbery in their palaces*, and therefore their *palaces* shall be *spoiled*; for what is got and kept wrongfully, will not be kept long. Even palaces will be no protection to fraud and oppression; but the greatest of men, if they have spoiled others, shall themselves be spoiled, for the *Lord is the Avenger of all such*. (2.) Their countrymen shall not escape, v. 12. They shall be in the hands of the enemy, as a lamb in the mouth of a lion, all devoured and eaten up, and they shall be utterly unable to make any resistance; and if any do make their escape, so as neither to fall by the sword nor go into captivity, yet they shall be very few, and those of the meanest and least considerable, like *two legs*, or shanks, of a lamb, or, it may be, a *piece of an ear*, which the lion drops, or the *shepherd* takes from him, when he has eaten the whole body; so, perhaps, here and there one may escape from Samaria and from Damascus, when the king of Assyria shall fall upon them both, but none to make any account of: and those that do escape, it shall be with the utmost difficulty and hazard, by hiding themselves in the *corner of a bed* or under the *bed's feet*; which intimates that their spirits shall be quite cowed and broken, and they shall sneak shamefully in the time of danger; they shall not hide themselves in dens and caves, but in the *corner of a bed*, or the *piece of a bed*, such as poor people must be content with. They shall very narrowly escape; as it is foretold concerning the last destruction of Jerusalem, that there shall be *two in a bed together, one taken, and the other left*. Note, When God's judgments come forth against a people with commission, it will be in vain to think of escaping them. Some make their *dwelling in the corner of a bed*, and in a *couch*, to speak their present security and sensuality; they are at ease, as *in a bed* or *on a couch*, but when God comes to contend with them, he shall make them *uneasy*, shall take them away *out of the bed* of their sloth and slumber; those that stretch themselves lazily upon their couches when God's judgments are abroad, shall *go captive with the first that go captive*.

II. Notice is given of it to *themselves*, v. 13. Let this be *testified*, and *heard*, in the *house of Jacob*, among all the seed of Israel, for it is spoken by the *Lord God, the God of hosts*, who has *authority* to pass this sentence, and *ability* to execute it; let them know from him, that the *day* is at hand when God will *visit the transgressions of Israel upon him*; when he will inquire into them, and reckon for them: there will come a *day of visitation*, a day of *punishment*, and in that day, all those things they are proud of, and put confidence in, shall fail them, and so they shall smart for the sins they have been guilty of about them.

1. Wo to *their altars*, for God will visit them.

He will inquire into the sins they have been guilty of at *their altars*, and bring into the account all their superstition and idolatry, all their *expenses* on their false gods, and all their *expectations* from them; and he will lay *the altars* themselves under the marks of his displeasure; for the *horns of the altar shall be cut off*, and *fall to the ground*, and with them the altar itself demolished, and broken to pieces. We find the altar at Bethel prophesied against, (1 Kings xiii. 2.) and immediately *rent*; (v. 3.) and that prophecy fulfilled when *Josiah burnt men's bones upon it*, 2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16. This here seconds that prophecy, and seems to point at the same event. Note, If men will not destroy idolatrous altars, God will, and those with them that had them in veneration. Some make the *horns of the altar* to signify all those things which they *flee to* for refuge, and *trust in*, and which they make their *sanctuary*: they shall all be *cut off*, so that they shall have nothing to *take hold of*.

2. Wo to *their houses*, for God will *visit them* too. He will inquire into the sins they have been guilty of in their houses, the *robbery* they have *stored up in their houses*, and the luxury in which they lived; and (v. 15.) *I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house*. Their nobility, and gentry, and rich merchants, had their *winter-houses* in the city, and their *summer-houses* in the country; so nice were they in guarding against the inconveniencies of the winter, when the country was thought too cold, and of the summer, when the city was thought too hot; though the climate of that good land was so temperate, like that of ours, that neither the cold nor heat was ever in extremity. They indulged a foolish affectation of change and variety; but God will, either by war, or by the earthquake, smite both the *winter-house* and the *summer-house*; neither shall serve to shelter them from his judgments; Their *houses of ivory*, (so called because either the ceiling or wainscot, or some of the ornaments of them, were edged or inlaid with ivory,) those *shall perish*, shall be burnt or pulled down, and the *great houses shall have an end*, the most splendid and spacious houses, the houses of their great men, they shall no longer be, or, at least, be no longer theirs. Note, The pomp and pleasantness of men's houses will be so far from fortifying them against God's judgments, that it will make them the more grievous and vexatious; as their extravagance about them will be put to the score of their sins and follies.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter, I. The oppressors in Israel are threatened for their oppression of the poor, v. 1-3. II. The idolaters in Israel, being *joined to idols*, are given up to their own heart's lusts, v. 4, 5. III. All the sins of Israel are aggravated from their incorrigibleness in them, and their refusal to return and reform, notwithstanding the various rebukes of Providence which they had been under, v. 6-11. IV. They are invited yet at length to humble themselves before God, since it is impossible for them to make their part good against him, v. 12, 13.

1. **H**EAR this word, ye *kine of Bashan*, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, *Bring, and let us drink*. 2. The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish-hooks. 3. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every *cow at that which is* before her; and ye shall cast *them* into the palace, saith the LORD. 4. Come to Beth-el and

transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years; 5. And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free-offerings; for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.

It is here foretold, in the name of God, that oppressors shall be *humbled*, and idolaters shall be *hardened*.

I. That proud oppressors shall be humbled for their oppressions; for he that does wrong, shall receive according to the wrong that he has done. Now observe,

1. How their *sin* is described, *v.* 1. They are compared to the *kine of Bashan*, which were a breed of cattle very large and strong, especially if, though bred there, they were fed upon the *mountain of Samaria*, where the pastures were extraordinarily fat. Amos had been a *herdsman*, and he speaks in the dialect of his calling, comparing the rich and great men, that lived in luxury and wantonness, to the *kine of Bashan*, which were wanton and unruly, would not be kept within the bounds of their own pasture, but broke through the hedges, broke down all the fences, and trespassed upon the neighbouring grounds; and not only so, but pushed and gored the lesser cattle that were not a match for him.

They that had their *summer-houses upon the mountains of Samaria*, when they went thither for fresh air, were as mischievous as the *kine* upon the mountains of *Bashan*, and as injurious to those about them. (1.) They *oppress* the *poor* and *needy* themselves; they *crush* them, to squeeze something to themselves out of them. They take advantage of their *poverty*, and *necessity*, and inability to help themselves, to make them poorer, and more necessitous than they are. They make use of their power as judges and magistrates for the invading of men's rights and properties, the poor not excepted; for they made no conscience of *robbing* even the *hospital*. (2.) They are in confederacy with them that do so. They *say to their masters*, to the *masters* of the poor, that abuse them, and violently take from them what they have, when they ought to have relieved them, they say to them, "*Bring, and let us drink*, let us feast with you upon the gains of your oppression, and then we will protect you, and stand by you in it, and reject the appeals of the poor against you." Note, What is got by extortion is commonly made use of as *provision for the flesh*, to fulfil the *lusts thereof*; and therefore men are tyrants to the poor, because they are slaves to their appetites; *Bring, and let us drink*, is the language of those that *crush the needy*, as if the *tears of the oppressed*, mingled with their wine, made it drink the better. And by their associations for drinking, and revelling, and an excess of riot, they strengthen their combinations for persecution and oppression, and harden the hearts of one another in it.

2. How their *punishment* is described; (*v.* 2, 3.) God will take them away with *hooks*, and their *posterity* with *fish-hooks*; he will send the Assyrian army upon them that shall make a prey of them, shall not only enclose the body of the nation in their *net*, but shall *angle* for particular persons, and take them prisoners and captives as with *hooks* and *fish-hooks*, shall draw them out of their own land as fish are drawn out of the water, which is their *element*, them and their children with them; or, They in their day shall be drawn out by one victorious enemy, and their posterity in their day by another; so that by a succession of destroying judgments they shall at length be wholly extirpated. These *kine of Bashan* thought they could no more be drawn

out with a *hook* and a *cord* than the Leviathan can, Job xli. 1, 2. But God will make them know that he has a *hook for their nose*, and a *bridle for their jaws*, Isa. xxxvii. 29. The enemy shall take them away as easily as the fisherman takes away the little fish, and shall make it their sport and recreation. When the enemy has made himself master of Samaria, then, (1.) Some shall attempt to escape by flight; *Ye shall go out at the breaches* made in the wall of the city, *every cow at that which is before her*, to shift for her own safety, and make the best of their way; and now the unruly *kine of Bashan* are tamed, and are themselves crushed, as they crushed the *poor* and *needy*. Note, Those to whom God has given a good pasture, if they are wanton in it, will justly be turned out of it; and those who will not be kept within the hedge of God's precept, forfeit the benefit of the hedge of God's protection, and will be forced in vain to *flee through the breaches* they have themselves fearfully made in that hedge. (2.) Others shall think to shelter themselves, or, at least, their best effects, in the *palace*, because it is a castle well fortified and a garrison well manned; *Ye shall throw yourselves*, (so some read it,) or throw them, your *posterity*, your children, or whatever is dear to you, *into the palace*, where the enemy will find it ready to be seized. Note, What is got by oppression cannot long be enjoyed with satisfaction.

3. How their sentence to this punishment is ratified; *The Lord God has sworn it by his holiness*; he had often said it, and they regarded it not, they thought God and his prophets did but jest with them; therefore he *swears it in his wrath*, and what he has *sworn* he will not *revoke*. He swears by his *holiness*, that attribute of his which is so much his *glory*, and which is so much glorified in the punishment of wicked people; for as sure as God is a holy God, they that *plough iniquity*, and *sow wickedness*, shall *reap the same*.

II. That obstinate idolaters shall be *hardened* in their idolatries; (*v.* 4, 5.) *Come to Bethel, and transgress*. It is spoken ironically; "Do so, take your course, multiply your transgressions by multiplying your sacrifices, for this liketh you; but what will ye do in the end hereof?" Here we see, 1. How intent they were upon the service of their idols, and how willing they were to be at cost upon them; they brought their *sacrifices*, and their *tithes*, and their *free-offerings*, hoping that therein they should be accepted of God, but it was all an abomination to him. The profuseness of idolaters in the service of their false gods may shame our strait-handedness in the service of the true and living God. 2. How they mimicked God's institutions. They had their *daily sacrifice* at the altar of Bethel, as God had at his altar; they had their *thank-offerings* as God had, only they allowed *leaven* in them, which God had forbidden, because their priests did not like to have the bread so heavy and tasteless as it would be if it had not leaven in it, or something to *ferment* it. Holy bread would not serve them, unless it were pleasant bread. 3. How well pleased they were with these services themselves; *This liketh you, O ye children of Israel. So ye love*. What was their own invention they were *fond of*, and *wedded to*, and thought it must therefore be pleasing to God, because it was agreeable to their own fancy. 4. How they are upbraided with it; "*Come to Bethel, to Gilgal, bring the sacrifices and tithes yourselves, proclaim and publish to the nation the free-offerings*, pressing them to bring in abundance of such, *go on in this way*;" that is, (1.) "It is plain that you are resolved to do it, whatever God and conscience say to the contrary." (2.) "Your prophets shall let you alone in it, and not admonish you as they have done, for it is to no purpose; *Let no man*

strive or rebuke his neighbour." (3.) "Your foolish hearts shall be more and more darkened and besotted, and you shall be quite *given up* to these *strong delusions to believe a lie.*" (4.) "What will you get by it? Come to Bethel, and *multiply your sacrifices*; and see what the better you will be, what returns you will have to your sacrifices, what stead they will stand you in, in the day of distress; *You shall be ashamed of Bethel your confidence.*" Jer. xlviii. 13. (5.) "*Come, and transgress, come, and multiply your transgressions, that ye may fill up the measure of your iniquity, and be ripened for ruin.*" Thus Christ said to Judas, *What thou doest, do quickly*; and to the Jews, *Kill ye up the measure of your fathers*, Matth. xxiii. 32.

6. And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 7. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when *there were* yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. 8. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 9. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens, and your vineyards, and your fig-trees, and your olive-trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured *them*: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 10. I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 11. I have overthrown *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 12. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: *and* because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. 13. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what *is* his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, the God of hosts, *is* his name.

Here,

I. God complains of his people's incorrigibleness under the judgments which he had brought upon them, in order to their humiliation and reformation. He had by several tokens intimated to them his displeasure, with this design, that they might by repentance make their peace with him; but it had not that effect. It is five times repeated in these verses, as the burthen of the charge, "*Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord*; you have been several times *corrected*, but in vain; you are not *reclaimed*, there is no sign of amendment. You have

been *sent for* by one messenger after another, but you have not *come back*, you have not *come home.*"

1. This intimates that that which God designed in all his providential rebukes, was, to reduce them to their allegiance, to influence them to *return* to him. 2. That, if they had returned to their God, they should have been accepted, he would have hid them welcome, and the troubles they were in should have been removed. 3. That the reason why God sent further troubles, was, because former troubles had not done the work, otherwise it is *no pleasure to the Almighty that he should afflict.* 2. That God was grieved at their obstinacy, and took it unkindly that they should force him to do that which he did so unwillingly; "*You have not returned to me from whom you have revolted, to me with whom you are in covenant, to me who stand ready to receive you, to me who have so often called you.*"

Now, to aggravate their incorrigibleness, and to justify himself in inflicting greater judgments, he recounts the lesser judgments with which he had tried to bring them to repentance.

(1.) There had sometimes been a *scarcity of provisions*, though there was no visible cause of it; (v. 6.) "*I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities*, for you had no meat to chew, whereby your teeth might be fouled;" especially *no flesh*, which dirties the teeth; or *emptiness of teeth*, nothing to fill your mouths with. "*Bread*, the staff of life, has been wanting, for you have *sown much and brought in little*;" as Hag. i. 9. Some think this refers to that *seven years' famine* that was in Elisha's time, which we read of, 2 Kings viii. 1. Now when God thus took *away their corn in the season thereof*, because they had prepared it for Baal, they should have said, *We will go and return to our first husband*, having *paid dear* for leaving him; but it had not that effect; *They have not returned to me*, saith the Lord.

(2.) Sometimes they had *wanted rain*, and then of course they wanted the fruits of the earth. This evil was of the Lord; *I have withholden the rain from you*. God has the key of the clouds, and if he *shut up*, who can open? v. 7. The rain was withheld *when there were yet three months to the harvest*, at the time when they used to have it; and therefore the withholding of it was an extraordinary thing, and if the course of nature was altered, they must therein own the hand of the God of nature; and it was at a time when they most needed it, and therefore the want of it was a very sore judgment, and blasted their expectations of a crop at harvest.

And one circumstance which made this very remarkable, was, that when there were some places that wanted rain, and withered for want of it, there were other places near adjoining that had it in abundance. *God caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another*, in the same country; nay, he caused it to rain *upon one field, one piece* of a field, and it was thereby made *fruitful and flourishing*, but on the next field, on the other side of the hedge, nay, on another part of the same field, *it rained not* at all, and it was so long without rain, that all the products of it *withered*.

No doubt this was literally true, and there were many instances of it, which were generally taken notice of. Now, [1.] By this it appeared that the withholding of the rain was not *casual*, but by a divine direction and disposal; that the cloud which waters the earth is *turned round about by the counsels of God, to do whatsoever he commands it, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy*, Job xxxvii. 12, 18. Rain does not *go by planets*, (as common people speak,) but as God sends it by his winds. [2.] We have reason to think that those cities on which it *rained not*, were the most infamous for wickedness, such as Bethel and Gilgal,

(v. 4.) and that those on which it *rained*, were such as retained something of religion and virtue among them. And so in the town-fields it *rained*, or *rained* not, upon the piece, according as the owner was; for we are sure the *curse of the Lord is in the house*, and upon the ground, *of the wicked*, but he *blesses the habitation of the just*, and his field is a *field that the Lord has blessed*. [3.] It would be the greater grief and vexation to those whose fields withered for want of rain, to see their neighbour's fields well watered and flourishing. *My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry*, Isa. lxxv. 13. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved*. Probably, those that were *oppressed*, were *rained* upon, and so they recovered their losses, while the oppressors withered, and so lost their gains. [4.] Yet as to the nation in general, it was a mixture of mercy with the judgment, and, consequently, strengthened the call to repentance and reformation, and encouraged them to hope for *all mercy*, in their returns to God, since there was so much mercy even in God's rebukes of them. But because they did not make a good use of this gracious allay to the extremity of the judgment, they had not the benefit of it, which otherwise they might have had, for (v. 8.) *Two or three cities wandered* at uncertainty, as beggars, *unto one city, to drink water*, and, if possible, to have some to carry home with them, but *they were not satisfied*; it was but here and there *one city* that had water, while many wanted, and then it was not, as usual, *Usus communis aquarum—Water is free to all*; they that *had it*, had occasion for it, or knew not how soon they might, and therefore could afford but little to them that *wanted*, saying, *Lest there be not enough for us and you*. They that came *drank water*, but *they were not satisfied*, because they drank it *by measure*, and *with astonishment*; and they that *drink of this water, shall thirst again*, John iv. 13. They were not satisfied, because their desires were greedy, and what they had God did not bless to them, Hag. i. 6.

And now, one would think, when they met with all this disappointment, they should have considered their ways, and repented; but it had not that effect; "*Yet have ye not returned to me*, no, not so much as to pray in a right manner for the former and latter rain," Zech. x. 1. See the folly of carnal hearts; they will wander from city to city, from one creature to another, in pursuit of satisfaction, and still they miss of it; they labour for that *which satisfies not*, (Isa. lv. 2.) and yet, after all, they *will not return to God*, will not incline their ear to him in whom they might have satisfaction. The preaching of the gospel is as *rain*; God sometimes blesses one place with it more than another; some countries, some cities are, like Gideon's fleece, wet with this dew, while the ground about is *dry*; all *wITHERS* where this rain is wanting; but it were well if people were but as wise for their souls as they are for their bodies, and, when they have not this rain near them, would go and seek it where it is to be had; if they *seek aright*, they shall not seek in vain.

(3.) Sometimes the fruits of their ground were eaten up by caterpillars, or blasted with mildew; (v. 9.) heaven and earth are armed against those who have made God their Enemy; when God pleased, that is, when he was displeased, [1.] They suffered by a *malignant air*; the influence of which, either too hot or too cold, blasted their fruits, with a force that could be neither discerned nor resisted, and against which there was no defence. [2.] They suffered by *malignant animals*. Their *vineyards and gardens* yielded their increase in great abundance, so did their *fig-trees and olive-trees*, but the *palmer-worm devoured them* before the fruits were ripe, and fit to be gathered in; this was either the same judgment with that which we read of, Joel

i. 4, 6. or a lesser judgment of the same nature, sent before to give warning of that. But they did not take warning; *Yet ye have not returned unto me*.

(4.) Sometimes the *plague* had raged among them, and the *sword of war* had cut off multitudes, v. 10. The *pestilence* is God's messenger, this he *sent among them*, with directions whom to strike dead, and it was done; it was a *pestilence after the manner of Egypt*; deaths were scattered among them by the hand of a *destroying angel at midnight*. And perhaps this pestilence, as that of Egypt, fastened upon the first-born; *in the way of Egypt*, so the margin; when they were making their escape to Egypt, or going thither to seek for aid, the pestilence seized them by the way, and stopped their journey. The *sword of war* is likewise the *sword of the Lord*; this was drawn among them with commission; and then it *slew their young men*, the *strength* of the present generation, and the *seed* of the next. God says, *I have slain them*; he avows the execution. *The slain of the Lord ore many*. The enemy *took away their horses*, and converted them to their own use; and the dead carcasses of those that were slain either with sword or pestilence were so many, and for want of surviving friends, were left so long unburied, that the *stench of their camps came up into their nostrils*, and was both noisome and dangerous, and might put them in mind of the offensiveness of their sin to God. And yet this did not prevail to humble and reclaim them; *You have not returned to him that smites you*. Such a rueful, woful sight as this, prevailed not to make them religious.

(5.) In these and other judgments some were remarkably *cut off*, and made monuments of *justice*, others were remarkably *spared*, and made monuments of *mercy*, the setting of which the one over against the other, one would have thought likely to work upon them, but it had not its effect, v. 11. [1.] Some were *quite ruined*, their families destroyed, and themselves in them; *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah*, perhaps consumed them with lightning, as Sodom was, or the houses were, some other way, burnt to the ground, and the inhabitants in them. Sodom and Gomorrah, are said to be *condemned with an overthrow, and so made an example*, 2 Pet. ii. 6. God had threatened to destroy the whole land with such an *overthrow* as that of Sodom, Deut. xxix. 23. But he began with some particular places first, to give them warning, or perhaps with some particular persons, whose *sins went beforehand to judgment*. [2.] Others very *narrowly escaped*; "*Ye were many of you as a firebrand plucked out of the burning*, like Lot out of Sodom, when the fire had already kindled upon you; and yet you hate sin never the more for the danger it has brought you to, nor love God ever the more for the deliverance he wrought for you; you that have been so signally delivered, and in such a distinguishing way, *have not returned unto me*."

II. God, in the close, calls upon his people, now at length, in this their day, to understand the things that belong to their peace, before they were hid from their eyes, v. 12, 13. Observe here,

1. How God threatens them with sorer judgments than any they had yet been under; "*Therefore, seeing you have been wrought upon by correction hitherto, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel*." He does not say *how* he will do, but it shall be something worse than had come yet, John v. 14. Or, "*Thus I will go on to do unto thee*, following one judgment with another, like the plagues of Egypt, till I have made a full end." Nothing else but reformation will prevent the ruin of a sinful people. If they *turn* not to him, his anger is not *turned away*, but *his hand is stretched out still*. *I will punish you*

yet seven times more, if you will not be reformed; so it was written in the law, Lev. xxvi. 23, 24.

2. How he awakens them therefore to think of making their peace with God: "*Seeing I will do this unto thee, and there is no remedy, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel;*" that is, (1.) "Consider how unable thou art to meet him as a *combatant*." Some make it to be spoken by way of irony or challenge; "Prepare to meet God, who is coming forth to contend with thee; what armour of proof canst thou put on? What courage canst thou steel thyself with? Alas, it is but putting *briers and thorns* before a consuming Fire, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. Art thou able with less than 10,000, to meet him that comes forth against thee with more than 20,000?" Luke xiv. 31. (2.) "Resolve therefore to meet him as a *penitent*, as a humble *suppliant*; to meet him as thy God, in covenant with thee, to submit, and stand it out no longer." We must prepare to meet God in the way of his judgments, (Isa. xxvi. 8.) to take hold on his strength, that we may make peace. Note, Since we cannot flee from God, we are concerned to prepare to meet him; and therefore he gives us warning, that we may prepare. When we are to meet him in his ordinances, we must prepare to meet him, prepare to seek him.

3. How he sets forth the greatness and power of God as a reason why we should prepare to meet him, v. 13. If he be such a God as he is here described to be, it is folly to contend with him, and our duty and interest to make our peace with him; it is good having him our Friend, and bad having him our Enemy. (1.) He formed the mountains, made the earth, the strongest, stateliest parts of it, and by the word of his power still upholds it and them. Whatever are the products of the everlasting mountains, he formed them; whatever *salvation is hoped for from hills and mountains*, he is the Founder of it, Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12. He that formed the *great mountains*, can make them *plain*, when they stand in the way of his people's salvation. (2.) He creates the wind: the power of the air is derived from him, and directed by him; he brings the wind out of his treasures, and orders from what point of the compass it shall blow; and he that made it, rules it; even the winds and the seas obey him. (3.) He declares unto man what is his thoughts; he makes known his counsel by his servants the prophets to the children of men, the thought of his justice against impenitent sinners, and the thought of good he thinks toward those that repent. He can also make known, for he perfectly knows, the thought that is in man's heart; he understands it afar off, and in the day of conviction will set the evil thoughts among the other sins of sinners in order before them. (4.) He often makes the morning darkness, by thick clouds overspreading the sky immediately after the sun rose bright and glorious; so when we look for prosperity and joy, he can dash our expectations with some unlooked-for calamity. (5.) He treads upon the high places of the earth; is not only higher than the highest, but has dominion over all, tramples upon proud men, and upon the idols that were worshipped in the highest places. (6.) Jehovah, the God of hosts is his name, for he has his being of himself, and is the Fountain of all being, and all the hosts of heaven and earth are at his command. Let us humble ourselves before this God, prepare to meet him, and give all diligence to make him our God, for happy the people whose God he is, who have all this power engaged for them.

CHAP. V.

The scope of this chapter is to prosecute the exhortation given to Israel in the close of the foregoing chapter, to prepare to meet his God; he here tells them, 1. What preparation they must make; they must seek the Lord, and not seek any more to idols; (v. 4.-9.) they must

seek good, and love it, v. 14, 15. II. Why they must make this preparation to meet their God. 1. Because of the present deplorable condition they were in, v. 1.-3. 2. Because it was by sin that they were brought into such a condition, v. 7, 10.-12. 3. Because it would be their happiness to seek God, and he was ready to be found of them, v. 8, 9, 14. 4. Because he would proceed, in his wrath, to their utter ruin, if they did not seek him, v. 5, 6, 13, 16, 17. 5. Because all their confidences would fail them, if they did not seek unto God, and make him their Friend. (1.) Their profane contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance, would not secure them, v. 18.-20. (2.) Their external services in religion, and the shows of devotion, would not avail to turn away the wrath of God, v. 21.-24. (3.) Their having been long in possession of church-privileges, and in a course of holy duties, would not be their protection, while all along they had kept up their idolatrous customs, v. 25.-27. They have therefore no way left them to save themselves, but by repentance and reformation.

1. **H**EAR ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. 2. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up. 3. For thus saith the Lord God, The city that went out by a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went forth by a hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel.

This chapter begins, as those two next foregoing began, with, *Hear this word*. Where God has a mouth to speak, we must have an ear to hear; it is our duty, it is our interest; yet so stupid are most men, that they need to be again and again called upon to hear the word of the Lord; to give audience, to give attention; hear this word. This convincing, awakening word must be heard and heeded, as well as words of comfort and peace; the word that is taken up against us, as well as that which makes for us; for, whether we hear or forbear, the word of God shall take effect, and not a tittle of it shall fall to the ground. It is the word which I take up—not the prophet only, but the God that sent him. It is the word that the Lord has spoken, ch. iii. 1.

The word to be heard is a lamentation, a lamentable account of the present calamitous state of the kingdom of Israel, and a lamentable prediction of its utter destruction. Their condition is sad; The virgin of Israel is fallen, (v. 2.) is come down from what she was; that state, though not pure and chaste as a virgin, yet was beautiful and gay, and had its charms; she looked high herself, and was courted by many as a virgin; but she is fallen into contempt and poverty, and is universally slighted; nay, and their condition is helpless; She shall no more rise, shall never recover her former dignity again. God had lately begun to cut Israel short, (2 Kings x. 32.) and because they repented not, it was not long before he cut Israel down.

1. Their princes, that should have helped them up, were disabled; She is forsaken upon her land. Not only those she was in alliance with abroad failed her, but her friends at home deserted her; she had not been carried captive into a strange land, if she had not first been forsaken upon her own land, and thrown to the ground there, and all her true interests abandoned by those that should have had them at heart. There is none to raise her up, none that can do it, none that cares to lend her a hand.

2. Their people, that should have helped them up, were diminished, v. 3. The city that had a militia a thousand strong, and in the beginning of the war, had furnished out a thousand effective

men, able-bodied and well armed, when they come to review their troops after the battle, shall find but a *hundred left*; and, in proportion, the city that sent out a *hundred*, shall have but *ten* come back; so great a slaughter shall be made, and *so few* left to the house of Israel for the public service and safety.

Scarcely one in ten shall escape of the hands that should relieve this abject, this dejected nation. Note, The lessening of the numbers of God's spiritual Israel by death or desertion, is just matter for *lamentation*; for by whom shall Jacob arise, by whom shall the decays of piety be repaired, when *ne is thus made small*.

4. For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live. 5. But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought. 6. Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. 7. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, 8. *Seek him* that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name: 9. That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. 10. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. 11. Forasmuch, therefore, as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. 12. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate *from their right*. 13. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time. 14. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. 15. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

This is a message from God to the house of Israel, in which,

I. They are *told of their faults*, that they might see what occasion there was for them to *repent and reform*, and that, when they were called to return, they might not need to ask, *Wherein shall we return?* God tells them in general, (v. 12.) "*I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins; and you shall be made to know them too.*"

In our penitent reflections upon our sins, we must consider, as God does in his judicial remarks upon

them, and will do in the great day, 1. That they are *very numerous*; they are our *manifold transgressions*; sins of various kinds, and often repeated. O what a multitude of vain and vile thoughts lodge within us! What a multitude of idle, foolish, wicked words have been spoken by us! In what a multitude of instances have we gratified and indulged our corrupt appetites and passions! And how many are our omissions of duty, and in duty! Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends? God knows how many, just how many, our transgressions are, none of them pass him *unobserved*; we know that they are to us innumerable, *more than the hairs of our head*; and we have reason to see what danger we have brought ourselves into, and what abundance of work we have made for repentance, by our *manifold transgressions*, by the numberless number of our sins of daily incursion. 2. That some of them are *very heinous*; they are our *mighty sins*; sins that are *more exceeding sinful* in their own nature, and by being committed presumptuously, and with a high hand; sins against the light of nature, flagrant crimes, that are *mighty* to overpower your convictions, and to pull down judgments upon you.

He specifies some of these *mighty sins*. (1.) They *corrupted the worship of God*, and turned to idols; that is implied, v. 5. They had *sought to Bethel*, where one of the golden calves was; they had frequented Gilgal, a place which they chose to set up idols in, because it had been made famous in the days of Joshua by God's wonderful appearances *to, and for*, his people. Beer-sheba likewise, a place that had been famous in the days of the patriarchs, was now another rendezvous of idols; as we find also, *ch. viii. 14.* And thither they *passed*, though it lay at a distance, in the land of Judah. Now, having thus shamefully gone a whoring from God, no doubt they should have felt themselves concerned to *return* to him. (2.) They *perverted justice* among themselves; (v. 7.) "*Ye turn judgment to wormwood*; ye make your administrations of justice bitter and nauseous, and highly displeasing both to God and man."

That fruit is become a *weed*, a weed in the garden; as nothing is more *venerable*, nothing more *valuable*, than justice duly administered, so nothing is more hurtful, nothing more abominable, than *designedly doing wrong*, under colour and pretence of *doing right*. *Corruptio optimi est pessima*—The best, when corrupted, becomes the worst. Ye leave off righteousness in the earth; as if those that do wrong were accountable to the God of heaven only, and not to the princes and judges of the earth; thus it was as before the flood, when the earth was filled with violence. (3.) They were very *oppressive to the poor*, and made them poorer; they *tread upon the poor*, (v. 11.) trampled upon them, hectorated over them, made them their footstool, and were most imperious and barbarous to those that were most obsequious and submissive; they cared not what shame and slavery they put them to who were *poor*, and such as they could get nothing by. That was it that the judges aimed at, nothing but to enrich themselves; and therefore they *took from the poor burdens of wheat*, took it by extortion, either by way of bribe or by usury. The poor had no other way to save themselves from being trodden upon, and trodden to dirt, by them, than by presenting to them horse-loads of that corn which they and their families should have had to subsist upon; and they forced them to do it. They took from the poor *debts of wheat*; so some read it. It was legally due either for rent or for corn lent, but they exacted it with rigour from those who were disabled by the providence of God to pay it, as Neh. v. 2, 3. In demanding and recovering even of a just debt, we

must take heed lest we act either unjustly or uncharitably. This sin of oppression they are again charged with, (v. 12.) *They afflict the just*, by turning the edge of the law and of the sword of justice against those that are the innocent and *quiet in the land*; they therefore hated men, because they were more righteous than themselves, and he that *departed from evil*, thereby made himself a prey to them. They take a bribe from the rich to patronize and protect them in oppressing the poor; so that he who has money in his hand, is sure to have the judge and judgment on his side, be his cause ever so bad. Thus they turn aside the poor in the gate, in the courts of justice, from their right. If the poor sue for their right, who cannot bribe them, or are so honest, that they will not, though they have it ever so clear in view, and ever so near, yet they are turned away from it by their unrighteous sentence, and cannot come at it. And therefore the prudent will keep silence, v. 13. Men will reckon it their prudence, when they are wronged and injured, to be silent, and make no complaints to the magistrates, for it will be to no purpose, they shall not have justice done them. (4.) They were malicious persecutors of God's faithful ministers and people, v. 10. Their hearts were so fully set in them to do evil, that they could not bear to be reprov'd, [1.] By the ministry of the word; by the reading and expounding of the law, and the messages which the prophets delivered to them, in the name of the Lord. They hate him that rebukes in the gate, in the gate of the Lord's house, or in their courts of justice, or in the places of concourse, where wisdom is lifting up her voice, Prov. i. 21. Reprovers in the gate are reprovers by office; these they hated, counting them their enemies because they told them the truth, as Ahab hated Micaiah. They not only despised them, but had an enmity to them, and sought to do them mischief. Those that hate reproof, love ruin. [2.] By the conversation of their honest neighbours. Though things were generally very bad, yet there were some among them that *spoke uprightly*, that made conscience of what they said, and as it was their praise, so it was the shame of those that *spoke deceitfully*, and condemned them, as Noah's faith condemned the unbelief of the old world, and for that reason they abhorred them; they were such inveterate enemies to the thing called honesty, that they could not endure the sight of an honest man.

All that have any sense of the common interest of mankind, will love and value such as *speak uprightly*, for veracity is the bond of human society; to what a pitch of folly and madness then were they arrived, who, having banished all notions of justice out of their own hearts, would have them banished out of the world too, and so put mankind into a state of war, for they abhor him that speaks uprightly! And for this reason the prudent shall keep silence in that time, v. 13. Prophets cannot, dare not, keep silence: the impulse they are under will not allow them to act on prudential considerations, they must cry aloud, and not spare; but as for other wise and good men, they shall keep silence, and shall reckon it is their prudence to do so, because it is an evil time. First, They shall think it dangerous to complain, and therefore shall keep silence: this was one way in which they afflicted the just, that by false suggestions and strained innuendoes they made men offenders for a word; (Isa. xix. 21.) and therefore the prudent, who were wise as serpents, because they knew not how what they said might be misinterpreted and misrepresented, were so cautious as to say nothing, lest they should run themselves into a *fræmunire*, because it was an evil time. Note, Through the iniquity of the times, as good men are hid, so good men are silent,

and it is their wisdom to be so; little said soon amended. But it is their comfort that they may speak freely to God, when they know not whom else they can speak freely to. Secondly, They shall think it fruitless to reprove. They see what wickedness is committed, and their spirits are stirred up, as Paul's at Athens; but they shall think it prudent not to bear an open testimony against it, because it is to no purpose. They are joined to their idols, let them alone. Let no man strive or rebuke another; for it is but casting pearls before swine. The cautious men will say to a bold reprov'er, as Erasmus to Luther, *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei, Domine*—Away to thy cell, and cry, Have mercy on me, O Lord. Let grave lessons and counsels be kept for better men, and better times. And there is a time to keep silence as well as a time to speak, Eccl. iii. 7. Evil times will not bear plain dealing; that is, evil men will not. And the men the prophet here speaks of, had reason to think themselves evil men indeed, when wise and good men thought it in vain to speak to them, and were afraid of having any thing to do with them.

II. They are told of their danger, and what judgments they lay exposed to for their sins. 1. The places of their idolatry are in danger of being ruined in the first place, v. 5. Gilgal, the head-quarters of idolatry, shall go into captivity; not only its inhabitants, but its images, and Bethel with its golden calf, shall come to naught. The victorious enemy shall make nothing of it, so easily shall it be spoiled; and shall bring it to nothing, so effectually shall it be spoiled. Idols were always vanity, and things of naught, and so they shall prove when God appears to abolish them. 2. The body of the kingdom is in danger of being ruined with them, v. 6. There is danger, lest, if you seek him not in time, he break out like a fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it; for our God is a righteous Judge, is a consuming Fire, and the men of Israel, as criminals, are stubble before him; wo to those that make themselves fuel to the fire of God's wrath! It follows, And there shall be none to quench it in Bethel; there their idols were, and their idolatrous priests, thither they brought their sacrifices, and there they offered up their prayers; but God tells them that when the fire of his judgments kindles upon them, all the gods they served at Bethel should not be able to quench it, should not turn away the judgment, or be any relief to them under it. Thus they that make an idol of the world, will find it insufficient to protect them, when God comes to reckon with them for their spiritual idolatry. 3. What they have got by oppression and extortion shall be taken from them; (v. 11.) "You have built houses of hewn stone, which you thought would be lasting; but ye shall not dwell in them, for your enemies shall burn them down, or press them for themselves, or take you into captivity. You have planted pleasant vineyards, have contrived how to make them every way agreeable, and have promised yourselves many a pleasant walk in them; but you shall be forced to walk off, and shall never drink wine of them."

The law had tenderly provided that if a man had built a house, or planted a vineyard, he should be at his liberty to return from the wars, Deut. xx. 5, 6. But now the necessity would be so urgent, that it would not be allowed, all must go to the battle, and many of those who had lately been building and planting, should fall in battle, and never enjoy what they had been labouring for. What is not honestly got is not likely to be long enjoyed.

III. They are told their duty, and have great encouragement to set about it in good earnest, and good reason. The duties here prescribed to them are, godliness and honesty, seriousness in their applica-

tions to God, and justice in their dealings with men; and each of these is here pressed upon them with proper arguments to enforce the exhortation.

1. They are here exhorted to be sincere and devout in their addresses to God, v. 4. God says to the *house of Israel*, *Seek ye me*, and with good reason; *for should not a people seek unto their God?* ISA. viii. 19. Whither else should they go but to their Protector? Israel was a *prince with God*; let his descendants *seek the Lord*, as he did, and they shall be so too. Now, in order to their doing of this, they must abandon their idolatries. God is not sought *truly*, if he be not sought *only*, for he will endure no rivals; "*Seek ye the Lord, and seek not Bethel*, (v. 5.) consult not your idol-oracles, nor ask at the mouth of the priests of Bethel; seek not to the golden calf there for protection, nor bring your prayers and sacrifices any longer thither, or to Gilgal, for you *forsake your own mercies*, if you observe those *lying vanities*." But *seek the Lord*; (v. 6, 8.) inquire after him, inquire of him; seek to know his mind as your rule, to secure his favour as your felicity." To press this exhortation, we are bid to consider, (1.) What we shall get by seeking God; it will be *our life*, we shall find him, and shall be happy in him. So he tells them himself; (v. 4.) *Seek ye me, and ye shall live*. So the prophet tells them; (v. 6.) *Seek the Lord, and ye shall live*. They that seek *perishing* gods, shall *perish* with them, (v. 5.) but they that seek the *living* God, shall *live* with him: "*You shall be delivered from the killing judgments which you are threatened with; your nation shall live, shall recover from its present languishings; your souls shall live, you shall be sanctified and comforted, and made for ever blessed; Ye shall live*." (2.) What a God he is, whom we are to *seek*, v. 8, 9.

[1.] He is a God of *almighty power himself*. The idols were impotent things, could do neither good nor evil, and therefore it was folly either to *fear* or *trust* them; but the God of Israel *does* every thing, and *can do* any thing, and therefore we ought to seek to him; he challenges our homage, who has all power in his hand, and it is our interest to have him on our side.

Divers proofs and instances are here given of God's power, as Creator, in the kingdom of nature, as both founding and governing that kingdom. Compare *ch. iv. 13*. *First*, The stars are the work of his hands; those stars which the heathens worshipped, (v. 26.) the *stars of your god*, those stars are God's creatures and servants. He *makes the seven stars and Orion*, two very remarkable constellations, which Amos, a herdsman, while he kept his cattle by night, had particularly observed the motions of. He *made* them at the first, he still *makes* them to be what they are to this earth; and either *binds* or *looses the sweet influences* of Pleiades and Orion, the two constellations here mentioned, (Job xxxviii. 31.—ix. 9.) to which passages Amos seems here to refer, putting them in mind of those ancient discoveries of the glory of God before he was called the *God of Israel*. *Secondly*, The constant succession of day and night is under his direction, and is kept up by his power and providence. It is he that *turns the night* (which is dark as the *shadow of death*,) *into the morning* by the rising of the sun, and by the setting of the sun *makes the day dark with night*; and the same power can, for humble penitents, easily turn affliction and sorrow into prosperity and joy, but can as easily turn the prosperity of presumptuous sinners into darkness, into utter darkness. *Thirdly*, The rain rises and falls as he appoints. He *calls for the waters of the sea*; out of them vapours are drawn up by the heat of the sun, which gather into clouds, and are *poured out upon the face of the earth*, to water it, and

make it fruitful. This was the mercy that had been *withholden from them* of late; (*ch. iv. 7*.) and therefore to whom should they apply themselves but to him who had power to give it? For all the *vanities of the heathen* could not *give rain*, nor could the *heavens* of themselves *give showers*, Jer. xiv. 22. It is God that has *made these things*; *Jehovah is his name*; the name by which the God of nature, the God of the whole earth, has made himself known to his people Israel, and covenanted with them.

[2.] As he is a God of almighty power himself, so he *gives strength and power unto his people* that seek him, and *renews strength* to those that had lost it, if they *wait upon him* for it; for (v. 9.) he *strengthens the spoiled against the strong*, to such a degree, that the spoiled come *against the fortress*, and make bold and brave attacks upon those that had spoiled them. This is an encouragement to the people to *seek the Lord*, that if they do so, they shall find him able to retrieve their affairs, when they are brought to the lowest ebb; though they are the *spoiled*, and their enemies are the *strong*, if they can but engage God for them, they shall soon recruit so as the next time to be not only the aggressors, but the conquerors; they *come against the fortress*, to make reprisals, and become masters of it.

2. They are here exhorted to be honest and just in their dealings with men, (v. 14, 15.) where observe,

(1.) The duty required; *Seek good, and not evil. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate*; re-establish it there, whence it has been banished, v. 7. Note, Things are not so *bad* but that they may be *amended*, if the right course be taken; we must not despair but that grievances may be redressed, and abuses rectified; justice may yet *triumph* there where injustice *tyrannizes*. In order to this, good must be *loved* and *sought*, evil must be *hated*, and no longer sought. We must love good principles, and adhere to them, love to do good, and abound in it; love good people, and good converse, and good duties; and, whatever good we do, we must do it from a principle of love; do it of choice and with delight. They who thus *love good*, will *seek it*, will contrive to do all the good they can, inquire for opportunities to do it, and endeavour it to the utmost of their power. They will also *hate evil*, will abhor the thought of doing an unjust thing, and abstain from all appearance of it.

In vain do we pretend to *seek God* in our devotions, if we do not *seek good* in our whole conversations.

(2.) The reasons annexed. [1.] This is the *sure way* to be *happy ourselves*, and to have the continual presence of God with us. "*Seek good and not evil, that you may live*, may escape the punishment of the evil you have sought and loved; (*righteousness delivereth from death*;) that you may have the favour of God, which is your life, which is better than life itself; that you may have comfort in yourselves, and may live to some good purpose. You shall live, for so the Lord God of hosts shall be with you, and be your Life." Note, Those that keep in the way of duty, have the presence of God with them, as the *God of hosts*, a God of almighty power. "*He will be with you as you have spoken*, as you have *gloried*; you shall have that really, which, while you went on in unrighteous ways, you only *seemed to have*, and *boasted of* as if you had." They that truly repent and reform, enter into the enjoyment of that comfort which before they had only flattered themselves with the imagination of. Or, "*As you have prayed, when you sought the Lord*. Live up to your prayers, and you shall have what you pray for." [2.] This is the *likeliest way*

to make the nation happy; "If you seek and love that which is good, you may contribute to the saving of the land from ruin." *It may be, the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph;* though there is but a remnant left, if God be gracious to that remnant, it will rise to a great nation again; and if some among them turn from sin, especially if judgment be established in the gate, though we cannot be certain, yet there is a great probability, that public affairs will take a new and happy turn, and every thing will mend if men mend their lives. Temporal promises are made with an *It may be*; and our prayers must be made accordingly.

16. Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus, Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! And they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. 17. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. 18. Wo unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. 19. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

Here is,

I. A very terrible threatening of destruction approaching, v. 16, 17. Because they would not take the right course to obtain the favour of God, God would take an effectual course to make them feel the weight of his displeasure. The threatening is introduced with more than ordinary solemnity, to strike an awe upon them; it is not the word of the prophet only, (if so, it might be made light of,) but it is the Lord Jehovah, who has an infinite, eternal being, it is the God of hosts, who has a boundless, irresistible power, and it is Adonai—the Lord, who has an absolute, incontestable sovereignty, and an universal dominion, it is he who says it, who can and will make his words good, and he has said, 1. That the land of Israel shall be put in mourning, true mourning; that all places shall be filled with lamentation for the calamities coming upon them. Look into the cities, and wailing shall be in all streets, in the great streets, in the by-streets. Look into the country, and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! we are all undone! The lamentation shall be so great, as not to be confined within doors, nor kept within the bounds of decency, but it shall be proclaimed in the streets and highways, and shall run wild. The husbandman shall be called from the plough by the calamities of his country to the natural expressions of mourning; and because those will come short of the merits of the cause, such as are skilful of lamentation shall be called to artificial mourning, to put accents upon the lamentations of the real mourners with their *Ah, ah, ah, alone*. Even in all the vineyards, where there used to be nothing but mirth and pleasure, there shall be general wailing, when a foreign force invades the country, lays all waste, and there is no making any head against it, no weapons left but prayers and tears. 2. That the land of Israel shall be brought to ruin, and the advances of that ruin are the occasion of all this wailing; *I will pass*

through thee, as the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy the first-born, but then passed over the houses of the Israelites. God's judgments had often passed by them, but now they shall pass through them, shall run them through.

II. A just and severe reproof to those who made light of these threatenings, and impudently bid defiance to the justice of God and his judgments, v.

18. Wo unto you that desire the day of the LORD, that really wish for times of war and confusion; as some do who have restless spirits, and long for changes, or who choose to fish in troubled waters, hoping to raise their families, as some had done, upon the ruins of their country; but the prophet tells them that this should be so great a desolation, that nobody could get by it. Or, it is spoken to those who, in their wailings and lamentations for the calamities they were in, wished they might die, and he rid out of their misery; as Job did, with passion. The prophet shows them the folly of this. Do they know what death is to those who are unprepared for it, and how much more terrible it will be than any thing that can befall them in this life? Or, rather, it is spoken to those who speak jestingly of that day of the LORD, which the prophet spake so seriously of; they desired it, they challenged it; they said, Let him do his worst, let him make speed, and hasten his work, Isa. v. 19. Where is the promise of his coming? 2 Pet. iii. 4. It intimates, 1. That they do not believe it. They say that they wish it would come, because they do not believe it will ever come; nor will they believe it unless they see it. 2. That they do not fear it; though they may have some belief of it, yet they have so little consideration of it, and their mind is so intent upon other things, that they are under no apprehension at all of their peril from it; instead of having the conscience to dread it, they have the curiosity to desire it. In answer to this,

(1.) He shows the folly of those who impudently wished for any of God's judgments, and made a jest of any of the terrors of the LORD; "To what end is it for you that the day of the LORD should come? You will find it both certain and sad; not a thing to be bantered, for it is neither a thing to be questioned whether it will come or no, nor a thing to be turned off with a slight when it does come. The day of the LORD is darkness, and not light, v. 18. Shall it not be so? v. 20. Do not your own consciences tell you that it will be so, that it will be very dark, and no brightness in it?" Note, The day of the LORD will be a dark, dismal, gloomy day to all impenitent sinners; the day of judgment will be so; and sometimes the day of their present trouble. And when God makes a day dark, all the world cannot make it light.

(2.) He shows the folly of those who impatiently wished for a change of God's judgments, in hopes that the next will be better and more tolerable. They desire the day of the LORD, in hopes to mend themselves, (though their hearts and lives be not amended;) or, however, to know the worst. But the prophet tells them that they know not what they ask, v. 19. It is as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him, a beast of prey more cruel and ravenous than a lion. Or as if a man, to escape all dangers abroad, went into the house for security, and leaned his hand on the wall to rest himself, and there a serpent bit him. Note, Those who are not reformed by the judgments of God, will be pursued by them; and if they escape one, another stands ready to seize them; fear, and the pit, and a snare surround them, Isa. xxiv. 17, 18. It is madness therefore to defy the day of the LORD.

21. I hate, I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

22. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. 23. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. 24. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. 25. Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? 26. But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. 27. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

The scope of these verses is to show how little God valued their shows of devotion, nay, how much he detested them, while they went on in their sins. Observe,

1. How *unpleasing*, nay, how *displeasing*, their hypocritical services were to God. They had their *feast-days* at Bethel, in imitation of those at Jerusalem, in which they pretended to rejoice before God; they had their *solemn assemblies* for religious worship, in which they put on the gravity of those who come before God, as his people come, and sit before him as his people sit; they offered to God *burnt-offerings*, to the honour of God, together with the *meat-offerings* which by the law were to be offered with them; they offered the *peace-offerings*, to implore the favour of God, and they offered them of the *fat beasts* that they had, *v. 21, 22*. In imitation likewise of the temple-music, they had the *noise of their songs*, and the *melody of their viols*, (*v. 23*.) vocal and instrumental music, with which they praised God; with these services they hoped to make God amend for the sins they had committed, and to obtain leave to go on in sin; and therefore they were so far from being *acceptable* to God, that they were *abominable*. He *hated*, he *despised*, their *feast-days*, not only *despised* them as no valuable services done to him, but *hated* them as an affront and provocation to him, as we *hate* to see men dissemble with us, pretend a respect for us, when really they have none.

Nothing more *hateful*, more *despicable*, than hypocrisy; *he that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, it shall be counted a curse*, when it appears that his heart is not with him. God will not *smell* in their *solemn assemblies*, for there is nothing in them that is grateful to him, but a great deal that is offensive. Their sacrifices are not to him of a *sweet-smelling savour*, as Noah's was, Gen. viii. 21. He will not *accept* them, he will not *regard* them, will not take any notice of them, he will not *hear the melody of their viols*; for when sin is a jar in the harmony, it grates in his ears; "*Take it away*," says God, "*I cannot bear it*." Now this speaks, (1.) That sacrifice itself is of small account with God, in comparison with moral duties; to love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt-offering and sacrifice*. (2.) That the sacrifice of the wicked is really an abomination to him, Prov. xv. 8. Dissembled piety is double iniquity, and so it will be found, when, if any place in hell be hotter than other, that will be the hypocrite's portion.

2. What it was that he required in order to the acceptableness of their sacrifices, and without which no sacrifice would be acceptable; (*v. 24*.) *Let judgment run down as waters among you, and*

righteousness as a mighty stream, (1.) "Let there be a *general reformation of manners* among you; let religion, God's *judgment* and *righteousness*, have their due influence upon you; let your land be *watered* with it, and let it bear down all the opposition of vice and profaneness; let it run *wide* as overflowing *waters*, and yet run *strong* as a *mighty stream*." (2.) "In particular, let justice be duly administered by magistrates and rulers; let not the *current* of it be stopped by partiality and bribery, but let it come *freely* as waters do, in the natural course, let it be *pure* as *running waters*, not *muddied* with corruption, or whatever may pervert justice; let it run *like a mighty stream*, and not suffer itself to be obstructed, or its course retarded by the fear of man; let all have free access to it as a common stream, and have benefit by it, as *trees planted by the rivers of waters*." The great thing laid to Israel's charge was, *turning judgment into wormwood*; (*v. 7*.) in that matter therefore they must reform, *Zech. vii. 9*. This was it that God desired *more than sacrifices*, *Hos. vi. 6*. 1 Sam. xv. 22.

3. What little stress God had laid upon the law of sacrifices, though it was his own law, in comparison with the moral precepts; (*v. 25*.) *Did ye offer unto me sacrifices in the wilderness forty years?* No, you did not; for the greatest part of that time sacrifice was very much neglected, because of the unsettledness of their state: after the second year, the passover was not kept till they were come into Canaan, and other institutions were in like manner intermitted; and yet, because God will have *mercy* and not *sacrifice*, he never imputed the omission to them as their fault, but *continued* his care of them, and kindness to them; it was not that, but their murmuring and unbelief, for which God was displeased with them. He that so owned his people, though they did not sacrifice, when in other things they kept close to him, will certainly *disown* them, though they do *sacrifice*, if in other things they depart from him. But though ritual sacrifices may thus be dispensed with, spiritual sacrifices will not; even justice and honesty will not excuse for the want of prayer and praise, a broken heart, and the love of God. Stephen quotes this passage, (*Acts vii. 42*.) to show the Jews that they ought not to think it strange that the ceremonial law was repealed, when from the beginning it was comparatively made light of. Compare Jer. vii. 22, 23.

4. What little reason they had to expect that their sacrifices should be acceptable to God, when they and their fathers had been all along addicted to the worship of other Gods. So some take *v. 25*. *Did you offer to me sacrifices*, to ME only? No, and therefore not at all to ME acceptably; for the law of worshipping the Lord our God, is, *Him only we must serve*. "*But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch*, (*v. 26*.) little shrines that you made to carry about with you, pocket-idols for your private superstition, when you durst not be seen to do it publicly. You have had the images of your *Moloch—your king*," (probably representing the sun, that sits king among the heavenly bodies,) "*and Chiun, or Remphan*," as Stephen calls it, *Acts vii. 43*, after the LXX. which, it is supposed, represented Saturn, the highest of the seven planets. The worship of the sun, moon, and stars, was the most ancient, most general, and most plausible idolatry; they *made to themselves the star of their god*, some particular star which they took to be their god, or the name of which they gave to their god. This idolatry Israel was from the beginning prone to; (*Deut. iv. 19*.) and those that retain any affection for *false gods*, cannot expect the favour of the *true God*.

5. What punishment God would inflict upon them for their persisting in idolatry; (*v. 27*.) *I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus*. They

were led captive by Satan into idolatry, and therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters, and hurried them into a *strange land*, who were so fond of *strange gods*. They were carried *beyond Damascus*; their captivity by the Assyrians was far *beyond* that by the Syrians; for if lesser judgments do not work that for which they were sent, God will send greater. Or, the captivity of Israel under Shalmaneser, was far *beyond* that of Damascus under Tiglath-pileser, and much more grievous and destructive, which was foretold, *ch. i. 5.* For, as the sins of God's professing people are greater than the sins of others, so it may be expected that their punishments will be proportionable. We find the spoil of Damascus, and that of Samaria, carried off together by the king of Assyria, *Isa. viii. 4.* Stephen reads it, *I will carry you away beyond Babylon*, (*Acts vii. 43.*) further than Judah shall be carried, so far further, as not to return. And, to make this sentence appear both the more *certain*, and the more *dreadful*, he that passes it, calls himself *the Lord, whose name is, The God of hosts*, and who is therefore able to execute the sentence, having *hosts* at command.

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have, 1. A *sinful people* studying to put a *slight* upon God's threatenings, and to make them appear *trivial*; confiding in their privileges and pre-eminences above other nations, (*v. 2, 3.*) and their power, (*v. 13.*) and wholly addicted to their pleasures, *v. 4. . 6.* 2. A *serious prophet* studying to put a *weight* upon God's threatenings, and to make them appear *terrible*, by setting forth the severity of those judgments that were coming upon those sensualists; (*v. 7.*) God's abhorring them, and abandoning them and theirs to death, (*v. 8. . 11.*) and bringing utter desolation upon them, since they would not be wrought upon by the methods he had taken for their conviction, *v. 12. . 14.*

1. **W**O to them *that are* at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, *which are* named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! 2. Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: *be they* better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? 3. Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; 4. That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; 5. That chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; 6. That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. 7. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

The first words of the chapter are the contents of these verses; but they sound very strange, and contrary to the sentiments of a vain world; *Woe to them that are at ease!* We are ready to say, *Happy they that are at ease*, that neither *feel* any trouble, nor *fear* any, that lie soft and warm, and lay nothing to heart; and *wise* we think are *they that do so*, that bathe themselves in the delights of sense, and care not how the world goes. They are looked upon as *doing well for themselves*, that do well for

their bodies, and make much of them; but against them this *wo* is *denounced*, and we are here told what their *ease* is, and what the *wo* is.

1. Here is a description of their pride, security, and sensuality, for which God would reckon with them.

1. They were vainly conceited of their own dignities, and thought those would vainly secure them from the judgments threatened, and be their defence against the wrath both of God and man.

(1.) Those that dwell in Zion, thought that was honour and protection enough for them, and they might *there be quiet from all fear of evil*, because it was a *strong city*, well fortified both by nature and art, (we read of Zion's *strong holds*, and her *bulwarks*,) and because it was a royal city, where were set the thrones of the house of David; it was the head-city of Judah, and therefore truly great; and especially because it was the holy city where the temple was, and the testimony of Israel; they that dwelt there doubted not but that God's sanctuary would be a sanctuary to them, and would shelter them from his judgments. The temple of the Lord are these, *Jer. vii. 4.* They are *haughty because of the holy mountain*, *Zeph. iii. 11.* Note, Many are puffed up with pride, and rocked asleep in carnal security, by their church-privileges, and the place they have in Zion. (2.) Those that dwell in the mountain of Samaria, though it was not a holy hill, like that of Zion, yet they trusted in it, because it was the metropolis of a potent kingdom, and, perhaps, in imitation of Jerusalem, was the head-quarters of its religion; and by tract of time the hill of Shemer became with them in as good repute as the hill of Zion ever was. They hoped for salvation from these hills and mountains. (3.) Both these two kingdoms valued themselves upon their relation to Israel, that prince with God, which they looked upon as making them the *chief of the nations*, more ancient and honourable than any of them; the *first-fruits of the nations*, (so the word is,) dedicated to God, and sanctifying the whole harvest.

The house of Israel came to them, was divided into those kingdoms, Zion and Samaria were the mother-cities of. Those that were at ease, were the princes and rulers, the great men, that were *chief of the nations*, chief of those two kingdoms, and to whom having their residence in Zion and Samaria, the whole house of Israel applied themselves for judgment. Note, It is hard to be *great*, and not to be *proud*. Great nations and great men are apt to overvalue themselves, and to overlook their neighbours, because they think they a little overtop them. But, for a check to their pride and security, the prophet bids them take notice of these cities that were within the compass of their knowledge, that had been as illustrious in their time as ever Zion or Samaria was, and yet were destroyed, *v. 2.* Go to Calneh, (which was an ancient city built by Nimrod, *Gen. x. 10.*) and see what is become of that, it is now in ruins; so is Hamath the *great*, one of the chief cities of Syria; Sennacherib boasts of *destroying the gods of Hamath*. Gath was likewise made desolate by Hazael, and not long ago, 2 Kings xii. 17. Now were they better than these kingdoms of Judah and Israel? Yes, they were, and their border greater than your border, so that they had more reason than you to be confident of their own safety: yet you see what is become of them, and dare you be secure? Art thou better than populous No? Nah. iii. 8. Note, The examples of others' ruin forbids us to be secure.

2. They persisted in their wicked courses, upon a presumption that they should never be called to an account for them; (*v. 3.*) "You put far away the evil day, the day of reckoning, as a thing that shall never come; or, you look upon it as at such a distance,

that it makes no impression at all upon you; you *put it far away*, and think you can still put it yet further, and adjourn it *de die in diem—from day to day*, and therefore you *cause the seat of violence to draw near*; ye venture upon all acts of injustice and oppression, and have *fellowship with the throne of iniquity, which frames mischief by a law*, Ps. xciv. 20. "You cause that to come near, as if that would be your protection from these judgments, which really ripens you for them." Note, *Therefore men take sin to be near them*, because they take judgment to be *far off from them*; but they deceive themselves, who thus mock God.

3. They indulged themselves in all manner of sensual pleasures and delights, v. 4, 6. These Israelites were perfect epicures and slaves to their appetites. Their *dignities*, (in consideration of which they ought to have been examples of self-denial and mortification,) they thought, would *justify* them in their sensuality: the gains of their oppression and *violence*, they thought, would bear the charge of it; and they put the evil day at a distance, that that might give them no disturbance in it.

That which they are here charged with, is not in itself sinful, (these things might be soberly and moderately used,) but they placed their happiness in the gratification of their carnal appetites; and though they were men in office, that had business to mind, they gave themselves up to their pleasures, spent their time in them, and threw away their thoughts, and cares, and estates, upon them; they were in these enjoyments as in their element; their hearts were upon them, they exceeded all bounds in them, and this at a time when God in his providence was calling them to *weeping and mourning*; (Isa. xxii. 12, 13.) when they were under guilt and wrath, and the judgments of God were ready to break in upon them, they called for *wine and strong drink*, presuming that *to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant*, (Isa. lvi. 12.) thus walking contrary to God, and setting his justice at defiance.

(1.) They were extravagant in their furniture; nothing would serve them but *beds of ivory*, to sleep upon, or to sit on at their meat, when *sack-cloth and ashes* had better become them. (2.) They were lazy, and humoured themselves in the love of ease; they did not only *lie down*, but *stretched themselves* upon their couches, when they should have *stirred up themselves* to their business; they were *willingly slothful*, and took a pride in doing nothing; they *abounded in superfluities*, (so the margin reads it,) when many of their poor brethren wanted necessities. (3.) They were nice and curious in their diet, must have every thing of the best, and abundance of it; they eat *the lambs out of the flock*, (lambs by wholesale,) and *the calves out of the midst of the stall*, the fattest they could lay their hand on; and these perhaps not out of their own *flock* and their own *stall*, but taken by oppression from the poor. (4.) They were merry and jovial, and diverted themselves at their feasts with music and singing; they *chant to the sound of the viol*, sing and play in concert, and they *invent new-fashioned instruments of music*, striving herein, more than in any thing else, to excel their ancestors; they set their wits on work to contrive how to please their fancy. Some men never show their ingenuity but in their luxury; on that they bestow all their faculty of invention and contrivance. They *invent instruments of music, like David*; entertain themselves with that which formerly used to be the entertainment of kings only. Or, it intimates their profaneness in their mirth; they mimicked the temple-music, and made a jest of that, because, it may be, it was *old-fashioned*, and they took a pride in bantering it, as the Babylonians did when they urged the captives to sing them the *songs of Zion*;

such was Belshazzar's profaneness, when he drank wine in temple-bowls, and such theirs that sing vain and loose songs in psalm tunes, on purpose to ridicule a divine institution. (5.) They drink to excess, and never think they can pour down enough; they *drink wine in bowls*, not in glasses or cups; (as Jer. xxxv. 5.) they hate to be stinted, and must have large draughts, and *therefore* make use of vessels, that they can steal a draught out of. (6.) They affect the strongest perfumes; they *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*, to please the smell, and to make them more in love with their own bodies, and to guard against those presages of putrefaction which they carry about with them while they live. No ordinary ointments would serve their turn; they must have *the chief*, such as were far-fetched and dear-bought, when cheaper would have served as well.

4. They had no concern at all for the interests of the church of God, and of the nation, that were sinking, and going to decay; *They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*; the church of God, including both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, (which are called *Joseph*, Ps. lxxx. 1.) was in distress, invaded, insulted, and broken in upon; their own kingdom which they were intrusted with the government of, the affairs of which they were the directors of, the peace of which they were the conservators of, great *breaches* were made upon it, upon its peace and welfare; and they were so besotted, that they were not aware of them, so indulgent of their pleasures, that they never laid them to heart, and had such an aversion to the thing called *business*, that they were in no care or concern to get them *repaired*. It is all one to them whether the nation sink or swim, so that they can but lie at ease, and live in pleasure. Particular persons that belonged to Joseph, were in affliction, and they *took no cognizance* of their case, of the wrongs and hardships they sustained, and the troubles they were in, nor took any *care* to relieve them and right them; contrary to the temper of holy Job, who, when he was in prosperity, *wept with him that was in misery*, and his *soul was grieved for the poor*, Job xxx. 25. Some think that in calling the afflicted church *Joseph*, there is an allusion to the story of Pharaoh's butler, who, when he was preferred to give the cup again into his master's hand, *remembered not Joseph, but forgot him*, Gen. xl. 21, 23. Thus these *drank wine in bowls, but were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. Note, Those are commonly careless of the troubles of others, who are set upon their own pleasures; and it is a great offence to God when his church is in affliction, and we are not *grieved* for it, nor lay it to heart.

11. Here is the doom passed upon them; (v. 7.) *Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive*, and shall fall into all the miseries that attend captives; and the *banquet of them that stretched themselves* upon their couches, *shall be removed*. Their plenty shall be taken from them, and they from it, because they made it the food and fuel of their lusts. 1. Those who lived in luxury, shall lose even their liberty; and by being brought into servitude, shall be justly punished for the abuse of their dignity and dominion. 2. Those who trusted in the delights and pleasures of their own land, shall be carried away into a strange land, and so made ashamed of their pride and confidence; they shall *go captive*. 3. Those who placed their happiness in the pleasures of sense, and set their hearts upon them, shall be deprived of those pleasures; their *banquet* shall be removed, and they shall know what it is to fare hard. 4. Those who *stretched themselves*, shall be made to contract themselves, and to come into a less compass. 5. Those who *put the evil day far from them*, shall find it nearer to them

than it is to others; *they shall go captive with the first*, who flattered themselves with hopes that if trouble did come, they would be the last who should be seized by it. Those are ripening apace for trouble themselves, who lay not to heart the troubles of others, and of the church of God. Those who give themselves to mirth, when God calls them to mourning, will find it is a sin that shall not go unpunished, Isa. xxii. 14.

3. The Lord God hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD, the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city, with all that is therein. 9. And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. 10. And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, *Is there yet any with thee?* and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue; for we may not make mention of the name of the LORD. 11. For, behold, the LORD commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts. 12. Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock. 13. Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? 14. But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.

In the former part of the chapter, we had these secure Israelites loading themselves with pleasures, as if they could never be made *merry enough*; here we have God loading them with punishments, as if they never could be made *miserable enough*. And observe,

I. How *strongly* this burthen is *bound on*, not to be shaken off by their presumption and security; for it is bound by the *Lord*, the *God of hosts*, by his mighty, his almighty hand, which none can resist; it is bound with an oath, which puts the sentence past revocation; *The Lord God has sworn, and he will not repent*, and since he could swear by no greater, he has sworn *by himself*. How dreadful, how miserable, is the case of those whose ruin, whose eternal ruin, God himself has *sworn*, who can *execute* his purpose, and cannot *alter* it!

II. How *heavy* this burthen lies! Let us see the particulars.

1. God will *abhor* and *abandon* them; and that speaks misery enough, all misery; *I abhor the excellency of Jacob*; all that which they are proud of, and value themselves upon, and for which they call and count themselves the *chief of the nations*. Their visible church-membership, and the privileges of that, their temple, altar, and priesthood, these were, more than any thing, the excellencies of Jacob; but when these were profaned and polluted by sin, God *abhorred* them, he *hated* and *despised* them, *ch. v. 21*. Note, God *abhors* that *form of godliness* which hypocrites keep up, while they abhor the *power* of

it. And if he abhors their *temple*, for the iniquity of that, no marvel that he *hates their palaces*, for the injustice and oppression he finds there. Note, That creature which we take such complacency, and put such a confidence in, as to make it a rival with God, is thereby made abominable to him. He *hates the palaces* of sinners, for the sake of the wickedness of them which dwell therein, Prov. iii. 33. *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked*. And if God *abhor* them, immediately it follows, He will *deliver up the city with all that is therein*, deliver it up into the hands of the enemy, that will lay it waste, and make a prey of all its wealth. Note, Those that are abhorred and abandoned of God, are undone to all intents and purposes.

2. There shall be a great and general mortality among them; (*v. 9.*) *If there remain ten men in one house*, that have escaped the sword of the enemy, yet they shall be met with another way; *they shall all die* by famine or pestilence. In the most sickly times, if there be ten in a house, one may hope that at least the one half of them will escape, according to the proportion of two in a bed, *one taken and the other left*; but here not *one of ten* shall live to bury the rest. Another instance of the greatness of the mortality, is, (*v. 10.*) that the nearest relations of the dead shall be forced with their own hands to wind up their bodies, and bury them, for want of other hands to be employed in it; that is all that the *next of kin*, to whom the right of redemption belongs, can do for them, and with great reluctance will they do that. It intimates that the young people shall be cut off soonest; for the *uncle* that survives, is, ordinarily, the *senior* relation. When the *uncle* comes with the sexton, (or *him that burns*,) to bring out the bones out of the house, he shall say to him that he sees next about the house, "*Is there yet any with thee?*" Are there any left alive?" And he shall say, "No, this is the last; now the whole family is cut off by death, and neither root nor branch remains." But that which makes this judgment the more grievous, is, that their hearts seem to be hardened under it. When he that was found by the sides of the house, began to enter into discourse with those that were carrying off the dead, they shall say, "*Hold thy tongue*; do not stand preaching to us about the hand of Providence in this calamity, for *we may not make mention of the name of the Lord*; God is so angry with us, that there is no speaking to him, he is so extreme to mark what we do amiss, that we dare not so much as *make mention of his name*." Thus the foolishness of men *perverts their way*, and brings them into distress, and then their heart *frets against the Lord*. Even then they *will not* take notice of his hand, nor suffer these about them to do it.

Perhaps it was forbidden by some of the idolatrous kings to make mention of the name of *Jehovah*, as by the law of Moses it was forbidden to make mention of the names of the heathen gods; *We may not* do it without incurring the penalty. Note, Those hearts are wretchedly hardened indeed, that will not be brought to make mention of God's name, and to worship him, when the hand of God is gone out against them, and when, as here, sickness and death are in their families. Thus those *heap up wrath*, who *cry not when God binds them*.

3. Their houses shall be destroyed, *v. 11*. God will *smite the great house with breaches*, and the *little house with clefts*; they shall both be cracked so as to lose their *beauty and strength*, and to be hastening towards a fall. The princes' *palaces* are not above the rebukes of divine justice, nor the poor men's *cottages* beneath it; neither shall escape when sin has marked them for ruin, God will find ways to bring it about. It is by order from him that *breaches are made*.

III. How *justly* they are thus burthened; if we understand the matter aright, we shall say, *The Lord is righteous.*

1. The method used for their reformation had been all fruitless and ineffectual; (v. 12.) *Shall horses run upon the rock, to hurl or harrow the ground there? Or will one plough there with oxen?* No, for there will be no profit to countervail the pains. God had sent them his prophets, to *break up their fallow-ground*; but they found them as hard and inflexible as the rock, rough and rugged, and they could do no good with them, nor work upon them, and therefore they shall not attempt it any more. They will not be *reclaimed*, and therefore shall not be *reproved*, but quite *abandoned*. Note, Those who will not be husbanded as fields and vineyards, shall be rejected as barren rocks and deserts, Heb. vi. 7, 8.

2. They had abused their power to the wrong and oppression of many, whose injured cause the sovereign Judge would not only right, but revenge; *Ye have turned judgment into gall*, which is nauseous, and *the fruit of righteousness into hemlock*, which is noxious; it would *make one sick* to see how those that were intrusted with the administration of public justice, bear down equity with *that* power with which they ought to have defended and supported it, and so turned its own artillery against itself. Note, When our services of God are soured with sin, his providences will justly be imbittered to us.

3. They had set the judgments of God at defiance, and confiding in their own strength, thought themselves a match for Omnipotence, v. 13. They *rejoiced in a thing of naught*, pleased themselves with a fancy that no evil should befall them, though they had no ground at all for *that* confidence, nothing to trust to that would bear any weight. They said, *"Have we not taken to us horns, are we not arrived to great dignity and dominion, have we not pushed down our enemies, and pushed on our victories, and this by our own strength, our own conduct and courage, our own wealth and military force? Who then need we be afraid of? Who then need we make court to? Not God himself."* Note, Prosperity and success commonly make men secure and haughty; and those that have *done much* think they can *do any thing*, any thing *without God*, nay, any thing against him: But those who trust in *their own strength* rejoice in a *thing of naught*, and so they will find. Probably they did not say this with their lips, *totidem verbis*, but it was the language of *their hearts*, and of *their actions*, both which God understands.

IV. How *easily* and *effectually* this burthen shall be brought upon them, v. 14. He that brings it upon them is *the Lord, the God of hosts*, who both may do, and can do, what he pleaseth; who has all creatures at his command, and who, when he has work to do, will not want instruments to do it with; though they are the house of Israel, yet he will *raise up against them a nation* which they feared not, but had many a time hoped in, even the Assyrians, and this nation shall *afflict them*, bring them into straits, and put them to pain, from the *entering in of Hamath*, in the north, to the *river of the wilderness*, the river of Egypt, Sihor, or Nile, in the south. The whole nation hath shared in the iniquity, and therefore must expect to share in the calamity. Note, When men are any way instruments of *affliction* to us, we must see God *raising them up against us*, for they are *his hand*, the rod, the sword in his hand. The Lord hath bidden Shimei curse David.

CHAP. VII.

In this chapter, we have, I. God *contending* with Israel, by the judgments brought on *their* land. 1. They are

threatened with lesser judgments, but are reprieved, and the judgments turned away at the prayer of Amos, v. 1. . 6. 2. God's patience is at length worn out by their obstinacy, and they are rejected, and sentenced to utter ruin, v. 7. . 9. II. Israel *contending* with God, by the opposition given to his prophet. 1. Amaziah informs against Amos, (v. 10, 11.) and does what he can to rid the country of him as a public nuisance, (v. 12, 13.) 2. Amos justifies himself in what he did as a prophet, (v. 14, 15.) and denounces the judgments of God against Amaziah his prosecutor, (v. 16, 17.) for when the contest is between God and man, it is easy to foresee, it is very easy to foretell, who will come off with the worst of it.

1. **T**HUS hath the Lord God shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, *it was* the latter growth after the king's mowings. 2. And it came to pass, *that* when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee; by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. 3. The Lord repented for this: it shall not be, saith the Lord. 4. Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me; and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. 5. Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee; by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. 6. The Lord repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God. 7. Thus he shewed me; and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall *made* by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. 8. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: 9. And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

We here see that God bears long, but that he will not bear always, with a provoking people; both these God here *showed* the prophet; *Thus hath the Lord God showed me*, v. 1, 4, 7. He showed him what was present, foreshowed him what was to come; gave him the knowledge both of what he *did*, and of what he *designed*; for the *Lord God reveals his secret to his servants the prophets*, ch. iii. 7.

1. We have here two instances of God's *sparing* mercy, remembered in the *midst of judgment*, the narratives of which are so like one another, that they will be best considered together, and very considerable they are.

1. God is here coming forth against this sinful nation, first by one judgment, and then by another.

(1.) He begins with the judgment of *famine*; the prophet saw this in *vision*. He saw God *forming grasshoppers*, or *locusts*, and bringing them up upon the land, to eat up the fruits of it, and so to *strip* it of its beauty, and *starve* its inhabitants, v. 1. God *formed* these grasshoppers, not only as they were his creatures, (and much of the wisdom and power of God appears in the formation of minute animals, as much in the structure of an ant as of an elephant,

but as they were instruments of his wrath. God is said to *frame evil* against a sinful people, Jer. xviii.

11. These *grasshoppers* were *framed* on purpose to eat up the grass of the land; and vast numbers of them were prepared accordingly. They were sent in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth, after the king's mowings. See here how the judgment was mitigated by the mercy that went before it. God could have sent these insects to eat up the grass at the beginning of the *first growth*, in the spring, when the grass was most needed, was most plentiful, and was the best in its kind; but God suffered that to *grow*, and suffered them to *gather it in*; the king's mowings were safely housed, for the king himself is served from the field, (Ecc. v. 9.) and could as ill be without his mowings as without any other branch of his revenues. Uzziah was now king of Judah, who loved husbandry, 2 Chron. xxvi. 10. But the grasshoppers were commissioned to eat up only the *latter growth*, the edgew, (we call it in the country,) the after-grass, which is of little value, in comparison with the former.

The mercies which God gives us, and continues to us, are more valuable than those he removes from us; which is a good reason why we should be *thankful*, and not *complain*. The remembrance of the mercies of the *former growth* should make us submissive to the will of God, when we meet with disappointments in the *latter growth*. The prophet, in vision, saw this judgment prevailing far. These grasshoppers eat up the grass of the land, which should have been for the cattle; which the owners must of course suffer by. Some understand this figuratively, of a wasting, destroying army brought upon them. In the days of Jeroboam, the kingdom of Israel began to recover itself from the desolations it had been under in the former reigns; (2 Kings xiv. 25.) the *latter growth* shot up, after the mowings of the kings of Syria, which we read of, 2 Kings xiii. 3. And then God commissioned the king of Assyria with an army of caterpillars to come upon them, and lay them waste; that nation spoken of, ch. vi. 14. which afflicted them from the entering of Hamath to the river of the wilderness, which seems to refer to 2 Kings xiv. 25. where Jeroboam is said to have restored their coast from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain. God can then bring all to ruin, when we think all is in some good measure repaired.

(2.) He proceeds to the judgment of *fire*, to show that he has many arrows in his quiver, many ways of humbling a sinful nation; (v. 4.) *The Lord God called to contend by fire*. He contended; for God's judgments upon a people are his *controversies* with them; in them he prosecutes his action against them; and his controversies are neither causeless nor groundless. He *called to contend*; he did by his prophets give them notice of his controversy, and drew up a declaration, setting forth the meaning of it. Or, he *called* for his angels, or other ministers of his justice, that were to be employed in it. A *fire* was kindled among them; by which is meant, either a great drought, the heat of the sun, which should have warmed the earth, scorched it, and burnt up the roots of the grass which the locusts had eaten the spires of; or, a raging fever, which was as a fire in their bones, which devoured and ate up multitudes: or, lightning, fire from heaven, which consumed their houses, as Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed; (ch. iv. 11.) or, it was the burning of their cities, either by accident, or by the hand of the enemy, for *fire* and *sword* used to go together; thus were the towns wasted, as the country was by the grasshoppers. This *fire* which God called for, did terrible execution; it devoured the *great deep*, as the fire that fell from heaven on Elijah's altar, *licked up* the water that was in the

trench. Though the water designed for the stopping and quenching of this fire was as the water of the *great deep*, yet it devoured it; for *who*, or *what*, can stand before a fire kindled by the wrath of God? It did eat up a part, a great part, of the cities where it was sent; or, it was as the fire at Taberah, which consumed the uttermost parts of the camp; (Numb. xi. 1.) when some were overthrown, others were as brands plucked out of the fire. All deserved to be devoured, but it ate up only a part, for God does not stir up all his wrath.

2. The prophet goes forth to meet him in the way of his judgments, and by prayer seeks to turn away his wrath, v. 2. When he saw, in vision, what dreadful work these caterpillars made, that they had eaten up in a manner all the grass of the land, (he foresaw they would do so, if suffered to go on,) then he said, *O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee*; (v. 2.) *cease, I beseech thee*, v. 5. He that foretold the judgment in his preaching to the people, yet deprecated it in his intercessions for them. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*. It was the business of prophets to pray for those whom they prophesied to, and so to make it appear that though they denounced, they did not desire, the woful day. Therefore God showed his prophets the evils coming, that they might befriend the people, not only by warning them, but by praying for them, and standing in the gap, to turn away God's wrath, as Moses, that great prophet, often did. Now observe here,

(1.) The prophet's prayer; *O Lord God, [1.] Forgive, I beseech thee*, and take away the sin, v. 2. He sees sin at the bottom of the trouble, and therefore concludes that the pardon of sin must be at the bottom of the deliverance, and prays for that in the first place. Note, Whatever calamity we are under, personal or public, the forgiveness of sin is that which we should be most earnest with God for. [2.] *Cease, I beseech thee*, and take away the judgment; *cease* the fire, *cease* the controversy; *cause thine anger towards us to cease*. This follows upon the forgiveness of sin. Take away the cause, and the effect will cease. Note, Those whom God contends with, will soon find what need they have to cry for a *cessation of arms*; and there are hopes that though God has begun, and proceeded far, in his controversy, yet it may be obtained.

(2.) The prophet's plea to enforce this prayer; *By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?* v. 2. And it is repeated, (v. 5.) and yet no vain repetition. Christ, in his agony, prayed earnestly, saying the same words again and again. [1.] It is Jacob that he is interceding for, the professing people of God, called by his name, calling on his name, the seed of Jacob, his chosen, and in covenant with him. It is Jacob's case that is in this prayer spread before the God of Jacob. [2.] *Jacob is small*, very small already, weakened and brought low by former judgments; and therefore if these come, he will be quite ruined, and brought to nothing. The people are few, the dust of Jacob is now soon counted, which once was innumerable. Those few are feeble; (it is the worm Jacob, Isa. xli. 14.) they are unable to help themselves or one another. Sin will soon make a great people small; will diminish the numerous, impoverish the plenteous, and weaken the courageous. [3.] *By whom shall he arise?* He is fallen, and cannot help himself up, and he has no friend to help him, none to raise him, unless the hand of God do it; what will become of him then, if the hand that should raise him be stretched out against him? Note, When the state of God's church is very low and very helpless, it is proper to be recommended by our prayers to God's pity.

3. God graciously lets fall his controversy, in answer to the prophet's prayer, once and again; (v. 3.)

The Lord repented for this; he did not change *his mind*, for he is in one mind, and who can turn him? But he changed *his way*, took another course, and determined to deal in mercy, and not in wrath. He said, *It shall not be*. And again, (v. 6.) *This also shall not be*. The caterpillars were countermanded, were remanded, a stop put to the progress of the fire, and thus a reprieve was granted. See the power of prayer, of *effectual, fervent* prayer, and how much it *avails*, what great things it *pre-vents for!* A stop has many a time been put to a judgment by making *supplication to the Judge*. This was not the first time that Israel's life was *begged*, and so *saved*. See what a blessing praying people, praying prophets, are to a land, and therefore how highly they ought to be valued. Ruin had many a time broken in, if they had not stood in the breach, and made good the pass. See how ready, how *swift*, God is to *show mercy*, how he *waits to be gracious*. Amos moves for a reprieve, and obtains it, because God inclines to grant it, and looks about to see if there be any that will intercede for it, Isa. lix. 16. Nor are former reprieves objected against further instances of mercy, but are rather encouragements to pray and hope for them. This *also* shall not be, any more than *that*. It is the glory of God, that he *multiplies to pardon*, that he spares, and forgives, to more than seventy times seven times.

II. We have here the rejection of those at last, who had been often reprieved, and yet never reclaimed, reduced to straits, and yet never reduced to their God and their duty. This is represented to the prophet by a vision, (v. 7, 8.) and an express prediction of utter ruin, v. 9.

1. The vision is of a *plumb-line*, a line with a plummet at the end of it, such as masons and bricklayers use, to run up a wall by, *that they may work it straight and true, and by rule*. (1.) Israel was a *wall*, a strong wall, which God himself had reared, as a bulwark, or wall of defence, to his *sanctuary*, which he set up among them. The Jewish church says of herself, (Cant. viii. 10.) *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers*. This wall was made by a *plumb-line*, very exact and firm. So happy was its constitution, so well compacted, and every thing so well ordered according to the *model*; it had long stood fast as a *wall of brass*; but (2.) God now *stands upon* this wall, not to hold it up, but to tread it down; or rather, to consider what he should do with it; he *stands upon it with a plumb-line in his hand*, to take measure of it, that it may appear to be a bowing, bulging wall, *Recti est index sui et obliqui*—*This plumb-line would discover where it was crooked*. Thus God would bring the people of Israel to the trial, would discover their wickedness, and show wherein they erred; and he would likewise bring his judgments upon them according to equity, would set a *plumb-line in the midst of them*, to mark how far their wall must be pulled down; as David measured the *Moabites with a line*, (2 Sam. viii. 2.) *to put them to death*. And when God is coming to the ruin of a people, he is said to *lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet*; for when he punishes, it is with exactness. It is now determined, *I will not again pass by them any more*; they shall not be spared and reprieved as they have been; their *punishment shall not be turned away*, ch. i. 3. Note, God's patience, which has long been *sinned against*, will at length be *sinned away*; and the time will come when those that have been spared *often*, shall be *no longer* spared. *My spirit shall not always strive*. After frequent reprieves, yet a day of execution will come.

2. The prediction is of utter ruin, v. 9. (1.) The body of the people shall be destroyed, with all those things that were their ornament and defence. They

are here called *Isaac* as well as *Israel*; *the house of Isaac*; (v. 16.) some think, in allusion to the signification of Isaac's name; it is *laughter*; they shall become a jest among all their neighbours; they shall *laugh at them*. The desolation shall fasten upon their *high places*, and their *sanctuaries*; either their *castles*, or their *temples*, both built on *high places*; their castles they thought *safe*, and their temples *sacred as sanctuaries*; these shall be *laid waste*, to punish them for their idolatry, and to make them ashamed of their carnal confidences, which were the two things for which God had a controversy with them. When these were made desolate, they might read their sin and folly in their punishment. (2.) The royal family shall sink first, as an earnest of the ruin of the whole kingdom; *I will rise against the house of Jeroboam*, Jeroboam the second, who was now king of the ten tribes; his family was extirpated in his son Zecharias, who was *slain with the sword before the people*, by Shallum, who *conspired against him*, 2 Kings xv. 10. How unrighteous soever the instruments were, God was righteous, and in them God *rose up against* that idolatrous family. Even king's houses will be no shelter against the sword of God's wrath.

10. Then Amaziah, the priest of Beth-el, sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. 11. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. 12. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: 13. But prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court. 14. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore-fruit: 15. And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. 16. Now, therefore, hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not *thy word* against the house of Isaac. 17. Therefore thus saith the LORD, Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

One would have expected that what we met with in the former part of the chapter, should, 1. Have awakened the people to repentance, when they saw that *therefore* they were *reprieved*, that they might have *space to repent*, and that they could not obtain a pardon unless they did repent. 2. That it should have endeared the prophet Amos to them, who had not only showed his good will to them, in praying against the judgments that *invaded* them, but had prevailed to *turn away* those judgments; which, if they had had any sense of gratitude, would have gained him an interest in their affections; but it fell out quite contrary; they continue impenitent, and

the next news we hear of Amos, is, that he is persecuted. Note, As it is the praise of great saints, that they pray for those that are enemies to them, so it is the shame of many great sinners, that they are enemies to those who pray for them, Ps. xxxv. 13, 15. cix. 4. We have here,

1. The malicious information brought to the king against the prophet Amos, v. 10, 11. The informer was Amaziah the *priest of Bethel*, the chief of the priests that ministered to the golden calf there, the *president* of Bethel, (so some read it,) that had the principal hand in civil affairs there. He complained against Amos, not only because he prophesied without license from him, but because he prophesied against *his* altars, which would soon be deserted and demolished, if Amos's preaching could but have gained credit. Thus the *shrine-makers* at Ephesus hated Paul, because his preaching tended to spoil their trade. Note, Great *pretenders* to sanctity are commonly the worst enemies to those who are really sanctified. Priests have been the most bitter persecutors. Amaziah brings an information to Jeroboam against Amos. Observe,

1. The crime he is charged with, is no less than treason; "*Amos has conspired against thee, to depose and murder thee, he aims at succeeding thee, and therefore is taking the most effectual way to weaken thee. He sows the seeds of sedition in the hearts of the good subjects of the king, and makes them disaffected to him and his government, that he may draw them by degrees from their allegiance; upon this account the land is not able to bear his words.*" It is slyly insinuated to the king, that the country was exasperated against him, and it is given in as *their* sense, that his preaching was intolerable, and such as nobody could be reconciled to, such as the *times* would by no means bear, that is, the *men of the times* would not. Both the *impudence* of his supposed treason, and the ill *influence* it would have upon the country, are intimated in that part of the charge, that he conspired against the king in the midst of the house of Israel. Note, It is no new thing for the accusers of the brethren to misrepresent them as enemies to the king and kingdom, as traitors to their prince, and troublers of the land, when really they are the best friends to both. And it is common for designing men to assert that as the sense of the country, which is far from being so. And yet here, I doubt, it was too true, that the *people* could not bear plain dealing with any more than the *priests*.

2. The words laid in the indictment, for the support of this charge; (v. 11.) *Amos says, and they have witnesses ready to prove it, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be led away captive; and hence they infer that he is an enemy to his king and country, and not to be tolerated. See the malice of Amaziah; he does not tell the king how Amos had interceded for Israel, and by his intercession had turned away, first one judgment and then another, and did not let fall his intercession till he saw the decree was gone forth: he does not tell him that these threatenings were conditional, and that he had often assured them, that if they would repent and reform, the ruin should be prevented. Nay, it was not true that he said, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, nor did he so die, (2 Kings xiv. 28.) but that God would rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword, v. 9. God's prophets and ministers have often had occasion to make David's complaint, (Ps. lvi. 5.) Every day they wrest my words. But shall it be made the watchman's crime, when he sees the sword coming, to give warning to the *people*, that they may get themselves secured? Or the physician's crime, to tell his *patient* of the danger of his disease, that he may use means for the cure of it? What enemies are fool-*

ish men to themselves, to their own peace, to their best friends! It does not appear that Jeroboam took any notice of this information; perhaps he revered a *prophet*, and stood more in awe of the divine authority than Amaziah his *priest* did.

II. The method he used to persuade Amos to withdraw, and quit the country; (v. 12, 13.) when he could not gain his *point* with the king to have Amos imprisoned, banished, or put to death, or at least to have him frightened into silence or flight, he tried what he could do by fair means to get rid of him; insinuated himself into his acquaintance, and with all the arts of wheedling endeavoured to persuade him to go *prophesy* in the land of Judah, and not at Bethel. He owns him to be a *seer*, and does not pretend to enjoin him silence, but suggests to him, 1. That Bethel was not a proper place for him to exercise his ministry in, for it was the *king's chapel, or sanctuary*, where he had his idols, and their altars and priests; and it was the *king's court, or the house of the kingdom*, where the royal family resided, and where were set the thrones of judgment; and therefore *prophesy not any more here*. And why not? (1.) Because Amos is too plain and blunt a preacher for the court and the king's chapel. They that wear silk and fine clothing, and speak silken soft words, are fit for kings' palaces. (2.) Because the worship that is in the king's chapel will be a continual vexation and trouble to Amos, let him therefore get far enough from it, and what the eye sees not, the heart grieves not for. (3.) Because it was not fit that the king and his house should be affronted in their own court and chapel by the reproofs and threatenings which Amos was continually teasing them with in the name of the Lord; as if it were the prerogative of the *prince*, and the privilege of the *peers*, when they are running headlong upon a *precipice*, not to be told of their danger. (4.) Because he could not expect any countenance or encouragement there, but, on the contrary, to be bantered and ridiculed by some, and to be threatened and brow-beaten by others; however, he could not think to make any converts there, or to persuade any from that idolatry which was supported by the authority and example of the king. To preach his doctrine there, was but (as we say) to run his head against a post; and therefore *prophesy no more there*. But, 2. He persuades him, that the land of Judah was the fittest place for him to set up in; *Flee thee away thither with all speed, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; there thou wilt be safe, there thou wilt be welcome, the king's court and chapel there are on thy side; the prophets there will second thee, the priests and princes will take notice of thee, and allow thee an honourable maintenance. See here, (1.) How willing wicked men are to get clear of their faithful reprovers, and how ready to say to the seers, See not, or see not for us; the two witnesses were a torment to them that dwelt on the earth, (Rev. xi. 10.) and it were indeed a pity that men should be tormented before the time, but that it is in order to the preventing of eternal torment. (2.) How apt worldly men are to measure others by themselves; Amaziah, as *priest*, aimed at nothing but the *profits* of his *place*, and he thought Amos, as a *prophet*, had the same views, and therefore *advises* him to *prophesy* there where he might eat bread, where he might be sure to have as much as he chose; whereas Amos was to *prophesy* where God appointed him, and where there was most need of him, not where he would get most money. Note, Those that make gain their godliness, and are governed by the hopes of wealth and preferment themselves, are ready to think these the most powerful inducements with others also.*

III. The reply which Amos made to these sug-

gestions of Amaziah's; he did not *consult with flesh and blood*, nor was it his care to enrich himself, but to *make full proof of his ministry*, and to be *found faithful* in the discharge of it, not to sleep in a whole skin, but to keep a good conscience; and therefore he resolves to abide by his post, and, in answer to Amaziah,

1. He justifies himself in his constant adherence to his work, and to his place; (v. 14, 15.) and that which he is sure will not only *bear him out*, but *bind him to it*, is, that he had a divine warrant and commission for it; *I was no prophet, or prophet's son*, neither born or bred to the office, not originally designed for a prophet, as Samuel and Jeremiah, not educated in the schools of the prophets, as many others were; but *I was a herdsman*, a keeper of cattle, and a *gatherer of sycamore-fruit*. Our sycamores bear no fruit, but, it seems, theirs did, which Amos gathered, either for his cattle, or for himself and his family, or to sell; he was a plain countryman, bred up and employed in country work, and used to country fare. He *followed the flocks* as well as the herds, and thence God *took him*, and bid him *go prophesy to his people Israel*, deliver to them such messages as he should from time to time receive from the Lord. God made him a *prophet*, and a *prophet to them*; appointed him his work, and appointed him his *post*. Therefore he ought not to be silenced, for, (1.) He could produce a divine commission for what he did; he did not run before he was sent, but pleads, as Paul, that he was *called to be an apostle*; and men will find it is *at their peril* if they contradict and oppose any that come in God's name; if they say to his *seers*, *See not*, or *silence* those whom he has *bid speak*, such *fight against God*. An affront done to an ambassador is an affront to the prince that sends him. Those that have a warrant from God, ought not to *fear the face of man*.

(2.) The mean character he wore before he received that commission, strengthened his warrant, so far was it from weakening it. [1.] He had no thoughts at all of ever being a prophet, and therefore his prophesying could not be imputed to a *raised expectation*, or a *heated imagination*, but purely to a divine impulse. [2.] He was not educated or instructed in the art or mystery of *prophesying*, and therefore he must have his abilities for it immediately from God, which is an undeniable proof that he had his mission from him. The apostles, being originally unlearned and ignorant men, evidenced that they owed their knowledge to their having *been with Jesus*, Acts iv. 13. When the treasure is put into such earthen vessels, it is thereby made to appear that the *excellency of the power is of God, and not of man*, 2 Cor. iv. 7. [3.] He had an honest calling, by which he could comfortably maintain himself and his family, and therefore did not need to prophesy for *bread*, as Amaziah suggested, (v. 12.) did not take it up as a *trade to live by*, but as a *trust* to honour God and do good with. [4.] He had all his days been accustomed to a plain, homely way of living, among poor husbandmen, and never affected either gaieties or dainties, and therefore would not have thrust himself so near the king's court and chapel, if the business God had called him to, had not called him thither. [5.] Having been so meanly bred, he could not have had courage to speak to kings and great men, especially to speak such bold and provoking things to them, if he had not been animated by a greater spirit than his own. If God that sent him had not strengthened him, he could not thus have *set his face as a flint*, Isa. l. 7. Note, God often chooses the *weak and foolish things of this world* to confound the wise and mighty; and a *herdsman of Tekoa* puts to shame a *priest of Bethel*, when he receives from God authority and ability to act for him.

2. He condemns Amaziah for the opposition he gave him, and denounces the judgments of God against him; not from any private resentment or revenge, but in the name of the Lord, and by authority from him, v. 16, 17. Amaziah would not suffer Amos to preach at all, and therefore he is particularly ordered to *preach against him*; now therefore *hear thou the word of the Lord*, hear it and tremble. Those that cannot bear general woes, may expect woes of their own. The sin he is charged with is, forbidding Amos to prophesy; we do not find that he beat him or put him in the stocks, only he enjoined him silence, *Prophesy not against Israel*, and *drost not thy word against the house of Isaac*; he must not only not *thunder* against them, but he must not so much as *drost a word* against them; he cannot bear, no, not the most gentle distilling of that rain, that small rain. Let him therefore hear his doom.

(1.) For the opposition he gave to Amos, God will bring ruin upon himself and his family. This was the sin that filled the measure of his iniquity. [1.] He shall have no comfort in any of his relations, but be afflicted in those that were nearest to him. *His wife shall be a harlot*; either she shall be forcibly abused by the soldiers, as the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah, (they *ravish the women in Zion*, Lam. v. 11.) or she shall herself wickedly play the harlot, which, though her sin, her great sin, would be his affliction, his great affliction and reproach, and a just punishment upon him for promoting spiritual whoredom. Sometimes the sins of our relations are to be looked upon as the judgments of God upon us. His children, though they keep honest, yet shall not keep alive; *His sons and his daughters shall fall by the sword of war*, and he himself shall live to see it. He had *trained them up in iniquity*, and therefore God will *cut them off* in it. [2.] He shall be stripped of all his estate, it shall fall into the hands of the enemy, and be *divided by line*, by lot among the soldiers. What is ill got will not be long kept. [3.] He shall himself perish in a strange country, not in the *land of Israel*, which had been holiness to the Lord, but in a *polluted land*, in a heathen country, the fittest place for such a heathen to end his days in, that hated and silenced God's prophets, and contributed so much to the *polluting* of his own land with idolatry.

(2.) Notwithstanding the opposition he gave to Amos, God will bring ruin upon the land and nation; he was accused for saying, *Israel shall be led away captive*, (v. 11.) but he stands to it, and repeats it; for the unbelief of man shall not make the word of God of no effect; the *burthen of the word of the Lord* may be *striven with*, but it cannot be *shaken off*; let Amaziah rage, and fret, and say what he will to the contrary, *Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land*. Note, It is to no purpose to contend with the judgments of God; for when God judges he will overcome. Stopping the mouth of God's ministers will not stop the progress of God's word, for it shall not return void.

CHAP. VIII.

Sinful times are here attended with sorrowful times, so necessary is the connexion between them; it is threatened here again and again that the laughter shall be turned into mourning. I. By the vision of a *basket of summer-fruit* is signified the *hastening on of the ruin* threatened, (v. 1. 3.) and that shall change their note. II. Oppressors are here called to an account for their abusing of the poor; and their destruction is foretold, which will set them mourning, v. 4. 10. III. A famine of the word of God is here made the punishment of a people that go a whoring after other gods; (v. 11. 14.) yet for this, which is the most mournful judgment of all, they are not here brought in mourning.

1. **T**HUS hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and, behold, a basket of

summer-fruit. 2. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer-fruit. Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. 3. And the songs of the temples shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: *there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.*

The great reason why sinners defer their repentance *de die in diem—from day to day*, is, because they think God thus defers his judgments, and there is no song wherewith they so effectually sing themselves asleep as that, *My Lord delays his coming*; and therefore God, by his prophets, frequently represents to Israel the day of his wrath not only as just and certain, but as *very near* and hastening on apace; so he does in these verses.

1. The approach of the threatened ruin is represented by a *basket of summer-fruit* which Amos saw in a vision; for the Lord showed it him, (v. 1.) and obliged him to take notice of it; (v. 2.) *Amos, what seest thou?* Note, It concerns us to inquire whether we do indeed see that which God has been pleased to show us, and hear what he has been pleased to say to us; for many a thing God speaks, God shows *once, yea, twice*, and men perceive it not. Are we in the midst of the visions of the Almighty? Let us consider *what we see*. He saw a *basket of summer-fruit* gathered and ready to be eaten; which signified, (1.) That they were *ripe* for destruction, rotten ripe, and it was time for God to put in the sickle of his judgments, and to cut them off; nay, the thing was in effect done already, and they lay ready to be eaten up. (2.) That the year of God's patience was drawing towards a conclusion; it was *autumn* with them, and their year would quickly have its period in a dismal winter. (3.) Those we call *summer-fruits* that will not keep till winter, but must be used immediately; an emblem of this people, that had nothing *solid* or *consistent* in them.

2. The intent and meaning of this vision is no more than this. It signifies that *the end is come upon my people Israel*. The word that signifies the end, is *ketz*, which is of near affinity with *kitz*, the word used for *summer-fruit*. God had long spared them, and borne with them, but now his patience is tired out: they are indeed *his people Israel*, but *their end*, that *latter end* they had been so often reminded of, but had so long forgotten, is now come. Note, If sinners do not make an end of sin, God will make an end of them, yea, though they be *his people Israel*. What was said, *ch. vii. 8.* is here repeated as God's determined resolution; *I will not again pass by them any more*, they shall not be connived at as they have been, nor the judgment coming *turned away*.

3. The consequence of this shall be a universal desolation; (v. 3.) When the end is come, *sorrow and death* shall ride in triumph, they are accustomed to go together, and shall at length go away together, when in heaven *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow*, Rev. xxi. 4. But here in a sinful world, in a sinful nation, (1.) Sorrow reigns; reigns to that degree, that the *songs of the temple shall be howlings*; the songs of God's temple at Jerusalem, or, rather, of their idol-temples, where they used, when, in honour of the golden calves, they had eaten and drunk, to rise up to play. They were perhaps wanton, profane songs; and it is certain that sooner or later those will be turned into howlings. Or if they had a sound or show of piety and religion, yet, not coming from the heart nor being sung to the glory of God, he valued them not, but

would justly turn them into howlings. Note, Mourning will follow *sinful mirth*, yea, and *sacred mirth* too, if it be not sincere. And when God's judgments are abroad, they will soon turn the greatest joy into the greatest heaviness; the *temple-songs*, which used to sound so pleasant, not only into sighs and groans, but into loud howlings which sound dismally. They shall come to the temple, and, finding that in ruins, there they shall howl most bitterly. (2.) Death reigns; reigns to that degree, that there shall be *dead bodies, many dead bodies in every place*, (Ps. cx. 6.) slain by sword or pestilence; so many, that the survivors shall not bury them with the usual pomp and solemnity of funerals, they shall not so much as have the bell tolled, but they shall cast them forth with silence; shall bury them in the dead of the night, and charge all about them to be silent, and to take no notice of it; either because they have not wherewithal to bear the charges of a funeral, or because, the killing disease being infectious, none will come near them; or for fear the enemy should be provoked, if they should be known to lament their slain. Or, they shall charge themselves and one another silently to submit to the hand of God in these desolating judgments, and not to repine and quarrel with him. Or, it may be taken not for a *patient* but a *sullen* silence; their hearts shall be hardened, and all these judgments shall not extort from them one word of acknowledgment, either of God's righteousness or their own unrighteousness.

4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail. 5. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? 6. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? 7. The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. 8. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. 9. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: 10. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

God is here contending with proud oppressors, and showing them, I. The *heinousness* of the sin they were guilty of; in short, they had the character of the unjust judge, (Luke xviii. 2.) that neither feared God nor regarded man.

1. Observe them in their devotions, and you will say, "They have no reverence for God." Bad as they are they do indeed keep up a show and form of godliness, they observe the *sabbath* and the *new moon*, they put some difference between those days and other days; but they were soon weary of them, and had no affection at all to them, for their hearts

were wholly set upon the world and the things of it. It is a sad character which this gives of them, that they said, *When will the sabbath be gone, that we may sell corn?* Yet it is still the character of many that are called Christians. (1.) They were weary of sabbath-days; *When will they be gone?* They were weary of the *restraints of the sabbaths and the new moons*, and therefore wished them over, because they might *do no servile work therein*. They were weary of the *work and business of the sabbaths and new moons*, snuffed at it, (Mal. i. 13.) and were as *Doeg, detained before the Lord*; (1 Sam. xxi. 7.) they would rather have been any where else than about God's altars. Note, Sabbath-days and sabbath-work are a burthen to carnal hearts, that are always afraid of doing too much for God and eternity. Can we spend our time better than in communion with God? And how much time do we spend pleasantly with the world? Will not the sabbath be gone before we have done the work of it, and reaped the gains of it? Why then should we be in such haste to part with it? (2.) They were fond of market-days; they longed to be *selling corn, and setting forth wheat*. When they were employed in religious services, they were thinking of their marketings, their hearts *went after their covetousness*, (Ezek. xxxiii. 31.) and thus made my Father's house a house of merchandise, nay, a den of thieves. Therefore they were weary of holy duties, because their worldly business stood still the while; in which they were as in their element, but in God's sanctuary as a fish upon dry ground. Note, Those are strangers to God, and enemies to themselves, that love market-days better than sabbath-days, that would rather be selling corn than worshipping God.

2. Observe them in their conversations, and you will see they have no regard to man; and this commonly follows upon the former; those that have lost the savour of piety, will not long retain the sense of common honesty. These here neither *do justly*, nor *love mercy*.

(1.) They cheat those they deal with. When they *sell their corn*, they impose upon the buyer, both in giving out the goods, and in receiving the money for them. They *measure* him the corn by their own measure, and pretend to give him what he agreed for, but they *make the ephah small*. The measure is scanty, and not statute measure, and so they wrong him that way; when they receive his money, they must weigh it in their own scales, by their own weights, and their *shekel* they weigh by, is above standard; they *make the shekel great*, so that the money, being found too light, must have more added to it; and so they cheat that way too, and this under colour and pretence of exactness in doing justice. By such wicked practices as these, men show such a greediness of the world, such a love of themselves, such a contempt of mankind in general, of the particular persons they deal with, and of the sacred laws of justice, as speak them to have in their hearts neither the fear nor the love of that God who has so plainly said that *false weights and balances are an abomination to him*. Another instance of their fraudulent dealing is, that they *sell the refuse of the wheat*, and, taking the advantage of their neighbours' ignorance or necessity, make them take it at the same price at which they sell the *finest of the wheat*.

(2.) They are barbarous and unmerciful to the poor; they *swallow up the needy*, and *make the poor of the land to fail*. [1.] They valued themselves so much on their wealth, that they looked upon all that were poor with the highest contempt imaginable; they hated them, could not endure them, but abandoned them; and therefore did what they could to make them cease; not by relieving them to make them cease to be poor, but by ban-

ishing and destroying them, to make them cease to be, or, at least, to be in *their land*. But he who thus *reproaches the poor, despises his Maker*, in whose hands *rich and poor meet together*. [2.] They were so eager to increase their wealth, and make it more, that they *robbed the poor to enrich themselves*; and therefore they fastened upon the poor, to *make a prey* of them, because they were not able to right themselves, nor to resist or revenge the violence of their oppressors. Those riches that are got by the ruin of the poor, will bring ruin on those that get them. They swallowed up the poor by making them hard bargains, and cheating them in those bargains; for *therefore they falsify the balances by deceit*, not only that they *may enrich themselves*, may have money at command, and so may have every thing else (as they think) at command too, but that they may *impovertish* those about them, and bring them so low, that they may force them to become slaves to them, and so having drained them of every thing else, they may have their labour for nothing, or next to nothing: thus *they buy the poor for silver*, they bring them and their children *into bondage*, because they have not wherewithal to pay for the corn they have bought; see Neh. v. 2, 5. And there were so many that were reduced to this extremity, that the price was very low; and the oppressors had beaten it down so, that you might buy a poor man to be your slave for a *pair of shoes*. Property was first invaded, and then liberty: it is the method of oppressors first to make men beggars, and then to make them their vassals. Thus is the dignity of the human nature lost in the misery of those that are trampled on, and the tenderness of it in the sin of those that trample on them.

II. Observe the grievousness of the punishment that shall be inflicted on them for this sin. When the poor are injured, they will *cry unto God*, and he will hear their cry, and reckon with those that are injurious to them; for, they being his receivers, he takes the wrongs done to them as done to himself, Exod. xxii. 23, 24.

1. God will remember their sin against them; *He has sworn by the excellency of Jacob*, (v. 7.) by himself, for he can swear by no greater; and who but he is the *Glory and Magnificence* of Jacob? He has sworn by those tokens of his presence with them, and his favour to them, which they had profaned and abused, and had done what they could to make them detestable to him; for he is said (*ch. vi. 8.*) to *abhor the excellency of Jacob*. He swears in *his wrath*, swears by his own name, that name which was so well known, and was so great in Israel: he swears, *Surely I will never forget any of their works*; but upon all occasions they shall be remembered against them, for more is implied than is expressed. *I will never forget them*, is as much as to say, *I will never forgive them*; and then it speaks the case of these unjust, unmerciful men, to be miserable indeed, eternally miserable; wo, and a thousand woes, to that man that is cut off by an oath of God from all benefit by pardoning mercy; and those have reason to fear judgment without mercy, that have *showed no mercy*.

2. He will bring utter ruin and confusion upon them. It is here described largely, and in a great variety of emphatical expressions, that, if possible, they might be frightened into a sincere repentance and reformation.

(1.) There shall be a universal terror and consternation; *Shall not the land tremble for this*, (v. 8.) *this land*, out of which you thought to have driven the poor? *Shall not every one mourn, that dwells therein?* Certainly they shall. Note, Those that will not tremble and mourn as they ought for national sins, shall be made to tremble and mourn

for national judgments; those that look unconcerned upon the sins of the oppressors, which should make them *tremble*, and upon the miseries of the oppressed, which should make them *mourn*, God will find out a way to make them *tremble* at the fury of those that oppress them, and *mourn* for their own losses and sufferings by it.

(2.) There shall be a universal deluge and desolation; when God comes forth against them, the waters of trouble and calamity shall *rise up wholly as a flood*, that swells when it is dammed up, and soon overflows its banks. Every thing shall make against them; that with which they thought to check the progress of God's judgments, shall but make them rise the higher. Judgments shall force their way, as the *breaking forth of waters*. The whole land shall be *cast out, and drowned*, and laid under water, as the land of Egypt is every year by the overflowing of its river Nile. Or, the expressions may allude to some former judgments of God; Their ruin shall *rise up wholly as a flood*, as Noah's flood, which overwhelmed the whole world, so shall this the whole land; and the land shall be *cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt*, as Pharaoh and his Egyptians were buried in the Red sea, which was to them the *flood of Egypt*; both which judgments, as this here threatened, were the punishment of *violence, and oppression*, which the Lord is the Avenger of.

3. It shall surprise them, and come upon them when they little think of it; (v. 9.) *I will cause the sun to go down at noon*, when it is in its full strength and lustre; at their *noon*, when they promise themselves a long afternoon, and think they have at least half a day good before them. The earth shall be *darkened in the clear day*; when every thing looks pleasant and hopeful. Thus *uncertain* are all our creature-comforts and enjoyments, even life itself; the highest degree of health and prosperity often proves the next degree to sickness and adversity; Job's sun *went down at noon*; many are taken away in the midst of their days, and *their sun goes down at noon*; in the midst of life we are in death. Thus terrible are the judgments of God to those that sleep in security; they are to them as the sun's *going down at noon*; the less they are expected, the more confounding they are: when they *cry peace and safety*, then *sudden destruction* comes, comes as a *snare*, Luke xxi. 35.

4. It shall change their note, and mar all their mirth; (v. 10.) *I will turn your feasts into mourning, as v. 3. the songs of the temple into howlings*. Note, The end of the sinner's mirth and jollity is heaviness. As to the *upright*, there arises *light in the darkness*, which gives them the *oil of joy for mourning*, so on the wicked there falls darkness in the midst of light, which turns their *laughter into mourning*, their *joy into heaviness*. So great, so general shall the desolation be, that *sackcloth shall be brought upon all loins, and baldness upon every head*, instead of the *well-set hair*, and the rich garments they used to wear. The mourning at that day shall be as *mourning for an only son*, which speaks the most bitter and lasting lamentation. But are there no hopes that when things are at the worst they will mend, and that at evening time it will yet be light? No, even *the end thereof shall be as a bitter day*; a day of bitter mourning; the state of impenitent sinners grows worse and worse; and the last of all will be the worst of all. *This shall ye have at my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow*.

11. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

12. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. 13. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst. 14. They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.

In these verses is threatened,

1. A general judgment of spiritual famine coming upon the whole land; a *famine of the word of God*; the failing of oracles, and the scarcity of good preaching. This is spoken of as a thing at some distance; *The days come*, they will come hereafter, when another kind of darkness shall come upon that land of light. When Amos prophesied, and for a considerable time after, there was great plenty of prophets, abundant opportunities of *hearing the word of God*, in season and out of season, they had precept upon precept, and line upon line; prophecy was their daily bread; and it is probable that they surfeited upon it, as Israel on the manna, and therefore God threatens that hereafter he will deprive them of this privilege. Probably in the land of Israel there were not so many prophets, about the time that their destruction came upon them, as there were in the land of Judah; and when the ten tribes went into captivity, they *saw not their signs*, there were *no more any prophets*, none to *show them how long*, Ps. lxxiv. 9. The Jewish church, after Malachi, had no prophets for many ages; and some think this threatening looks further yet, to the blindness which is in part happened to Israel in the days of the Messiah, and the veil that is on the heart of the unbelieving Jews. They reject the gospel, and the ministers of it that God sends to them, and covet to have prophets of their own, as their fathers had, but they shall have none; *the kingdom of God being taken from them, and given to another people*. Observe here,

1. What the judgment itself is, that is threatened. It is a *famine*, a scarcity, not of *bread and water*, (which are the necessary supports of the body, and the want of which is very grievous,) but a much sorer judgment than that, even a *famine of hearing the words of the Lord*. There shall be no congregations for ministers to preach to, nor any ministers to preach, nor any instructions and abilities given to those that do set up for preachers, to enable them for their work. The *word of the Lord* shall be *precious* and scarce, there shall be no *vision*, 1 Sam. iii. 1. They shall have the written word, Bibles to read, but no ministers to explain and apply it to them; the water in the well, but nothing to draw. It is a gracious promise, (Isa. xxx. 20.) that though they have a scarcity of bread, they shall have plenty of the means of grace. God will *give them the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction*, but their eyes shall see their teachers; and it was a common saying among the Puritans, that brown bread and the gospel is good fare; but it is here a threatening, that on the contrary they should have plenty enough of bread and water, and yet their *teachers* should be *removed*. Now, (1.) This was the departure of a great part of their glory from their land. This made their nation great and high, that to them were *committed the oracles of God*; but when those were taken from them, their beauty was stained, and their honour laid in the dust. (2.) This was a token of God's highest displeasure against them; surely he was

angry indeed with them, when he would no more speak to them as he had done, and had abandoned them to ruin, when he would no more afford them the means of bringing them to repentance. (3.) This made all the other calamities that were upon them truly melancholy, that they had no prophets to instruct and comfort them from the word of God, nor to give them any hopeful prospect. We should say at any time, and will say in a time of trouble, that a famine of the word of God is of all others the worst famine, the heaviest judgment.

2. What will be the effect of this; (v. 12.) *They shall wander from sea to sea*, from the sea of Tiberias to the great sea, from one border of the country to another, to see if God will send them prophets, either by sea or land, from other countries; since they have none among themselves, they shall go from the north to the east; when they are disappointed in one place, they shall try another, and shall run to and fro, as men at a loss, and in a hot pursuit to seek the word of the Lord, to inquire if there be any prophets, any prophecy, any message from God, but they shall not find it. (1.) Though to many this is no affliction at all, yet some will be very sensible of it as a great grievance, and will gladly travel far to hear a good sermon; but they shall sensibly feel the loss of those mercies which others have foolishly sinned away. (2.) Even those that slighted prophets when they had them, shall wish for them, as Saul did for Samuel, when they are deprived of them: many never know the worth of mercies till they feel the want of them. Or, it may be meant thus, Though they should thus wander from sea to sea, in quest of the word of God, yet they shall not find it. Note, The means of grace are moveable things; and the candlestick, when we think it stands most firm, may be removed out of its place; (Rev. ii. 5.) and those that now slight the days of the son of man, may wish in vain to see them. And in the day of this famine the fair virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst; (v. 13.) those who, one would think, could well enough have borne the toil, shall sink under it. The Jewish churches, and the masters of their synagogues, some take to be meant by the virgins and the young men; these shall lose the word of the Lord, and the benefit of divine revelation, and shall faint away for want of it, shall lose all their strength and beauty. Those that trust in their own merit and righteousness, and think they have no need of Christ, others take to be meant by the fair virgins and the choice young men; those shall faint for thirst, when those that hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ shall be abundantly satisfied and filled.

II. The particular destruction of those that were ringleaders in idolatry, v. 14. Observe, 1. The sin they are charged with. They swear by the sin of Samaria, by the god of Samaria, the idol that was worshipped at Bethel, not far off from Samaria; thus did they glory in their shame, and swear by that as their god, which was their iniquity, thinking that that could help them, which would certainly ruin them, and giving the highest honour to that which they should have looked upon with the utmost abhorrence and detestation. They say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; that was the other golden calf, a dumb, dead idol, and yet caressed and complimented as if it had been the living and the true God. They say, The manner, or way, of Beer-sheba liveth; they swear by the religion of Beer-sheba, the way and manner of worship used there, which they looked upon as sacred, and therefore swear by, and appealed to as a judge of controversy. Thus the Papists swear by the mass, as the manner of Beer-sheba. 2. The destruction they are threatened with; those who thus give that honour to idols, which is due to God alone, will find that the God

they affront is thereby made their enemy, so that they shall fall, and that the gods they serve cannot stand their friends, so that they shall never rise again. They will find that God is jealous, and will resent the indignity done him; and that he will be victorious, and it is to no purpose to contend with him.

CHAP. IX.

In this chapter we have, 1. Judgments threatened, which the sinner shall not escape, (v. 1. . 4.) which an almighty power shall inflict, (v. 5, 6.) which the people of Israel have deserved as a sinful people; (v. 7, 8.) and yet it shall not be the utter ruin of their nation, (v. 8.) for a remnant of good people shall escape, v. 9. But the wicked ones shall perish, v. 10. II. Mercy promised, which was to be bestowed in the latter days, (v. 11. . 15.) as appears by the application of it to the days of the Messiah, Acts xv. 16. And with those comfortable promises, after all the foregoing rebukes and threatenings, the book concludes.

1. I SAW the LORD standing upon the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that sleeth of them shall not flee away; and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. 2. Though they dig into hell, thence shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: 3. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: 4. And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good. 5. And the Lord God of hosts is he that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn; and it shall rise up wholly like a flood, and shall be drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. 6. It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth; he that call-eth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; The LORD is his name. 7. Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Assyrians from Kir? 8. Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saying that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD. 9. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. 10. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,

which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.

We have here the justice of God passing sentence upon a provoking people; and observe,

1. With what solemnity the sentence is passed. The prophet saw in vision the *Lord standing upon the altar*, (v. 1.) the altar of burnt-offerings; for the *Lord has a sacrifice*, and multitudes must fall as victims to his justice. He is removed from the *mercy-seat* between the *cherubims*, and stands upon the altar, the *judgment-seat*, on which the fire of God used to fall, to devour the sacrifices. He stands upon the altar, to show that the ground of his controversy with his people was their profanation of his holy things; here he *stands* to avenge the quarrel of his altar; as also to signify that the sin of the house of Israel, like that of the house of Eli, shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever, 1 Sam. iii. 14. He stands on the altar, to prohibit sacrifice. Now the order given is, *Smite the lintel of the door of the temple, the chapter, smite it with such a blow, that the posts may shake, and cut them, wound them in the head, all of them; break down the door of God's house, or of the courts of his house, in token of this—that he is going out from it, and forsaking it, and then all judgments are breaking in upon it.* Or it signifies the destruction of those in the first place, that should be as the *door-posts* to the nation for its defence, so that, they being broken down, it becomes as a *city without gates and bars*. Smite the king, who is as the lintel of the door, that the princes, who are as the *posts*, may shake; cut them in the head, cleave them down, all of them, as wood for the fire; and *I will slay the last of them*, the posterity of them, them and their families, or the least of them, them and all that are employed under them; or, *I will slay them all*, them and all that remain of them, till it comes to the last man; the slaughter shall be general. There is no living for those of whom God has said, *I will slay them*; no standing before his sword.

2. What effectual care is taken that none shall escape the execution of this sentence. This is enlarged upon here, and is intended for warning to all that *provoke the Lord to jealousy*: let sinners read it, and tremble; as there is no fighting it out with God, so there is no fleeing from him. His judgments, when they come with commission, as they will *overpower the strongest* that think to *outface* them, so they will *overtake the swiftest* that think to *outrun* them, v. 2. *Those of them that flee*, and take to their heels, shall soon be out of breath, and shall not *flee away* out of the reach of danger; for as sometimes the *wicked flee when none pursues*, so he cannot *flee away* when God pursues, though he would *fain flee out of his hand*. Nay, he that *escapes of them*, that thinks he has gained his point, he shall not be delivered; *evil pursues sinners*, and will arrest them.

This is here enlarged upon by showing that wherever sinners flee for shelter from God's justice, it will overtake them, and the shelter will prove but a *refuge of lies*; what David says of the ubiquity of God's presence, (Ps. cxxxix. 7, 10.) is here said of the extent of God's power and justice. (1.) Hell itself, though it has its name in English from its being *hilled*, or *covered over*, or *hidden*, cannot *hide* them; (v. 2.) "*Though they dig into hell, into the centre of the earth, or the darkest recesses of it, yet thence shall my hand take them*, and bring them forth to be made public monuments of divine justice." The *grave* is a *hiding-place* to the righteous from the malice of the world, (Job iii. 17.) but it shall be no *hiding-place* to the wicked from the justice of God; from thence God's hands shall take them, when they shall rise in the great day to ever-

lasting shame and contempt. (2.) *Heaven*, though it has its name from being *heaved*, or *lifted up*, shall not put them out of the reach of God's judgments as *hell cannot hide them*, so *heaven will not*. Though they *climb up to heaven* in their own conceit, yet *thence will I bring them down*. Those whom God brings to heaven by his grace, shall never be *brought down*; but those who *climb thither* themselves, by their own presumption, and confidence in themselves, will be brought down, and filled with shame. (3.) *The top of Carmel*, one of the highest parts of the dust of the world in that country, shall not protect them; "*Though they hide themselves there, where they imagine nobody will look for them, I will search, and take them out thence*; neither the thickest bushes, nor the darkest caves, in the *top of Carmel*, will serve to hide them." (4.) *The bottom of the sea* shall not serve to *conceal* them; though they think to hide themselves there, even there the judgments of God shall find them out, and lay hold on them; *Thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them*; the *crooked serpent*, even the *dragon that is in the sea*, Isa. xxvii. 1. They shall find their plague and death there where they hope to find shelter and protection; *diving* will stand them in no more stead than *climbing*. (5.) Remote countries will not befriend them, nor shall lesser judgments excuse them from greater; (v. 4.) *Though they go into captivity before their enemies*, who carry them to places at a great distance, and mingle them with their own people, among whom they seem to be lost, yet that shall not serve their turn; *Thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them*; the sword of the enemy, or one another's sword; when God judges, he will overcome. That which *binds* on all this, and makes their escape impossible, and their ruin inevitable, is, that God will *set his eyes upon them for evil, and not for good*. His eyes are in every place, are upon all men, and upon all the ways of men, upon some *for good, to show himself strong* on their behalf, but upon others *for evil*, to take notice of their sins, (Job xiii. 27.) and take all opportunities of punishing them for their sins. Their case is truly miserable, who have the providence of God, and all the dispensations of it, *against them*, working for their hurt.

3. What a great and mighty God he is, that passes this sentence upon them, and will take the executing of it into his own hands. Threatenings are more or less formidable, according to the power of him that threatens. We laugh at *impotent* wrath; but the wrath of God is not so, it is *omnipotent* wrath; *who knows the power of it*? What he had before said he would do, (ch. viii. 8.) is here repeated, that he would *make the land melt and tremble, and all that dwell therein mourn*, that the judgment should *rise up wholly like a flood*, and the country should be *drowned*, and laid under water, as by the *flood of Egypt*, v. 5. But is he able to make his words good? Yes, certainly he is, he does but *touch the land, and it melts, touch the mountains and they smoke*; he can do it with the greatest ease, for, (1.) He is the *Lord God of hosts*, who undertakes to do it; the God who has all the power in his hand, and all creatures at his beck and call, who, having made them all, and given them their several capacities, makes what use he pleases of them, and all their powers. Very miserable is the case of those who have the *Lord of hosts* against them, for they have *hosts* against them, the whole creation at war with them. (2.) He is the Creator and Governor of the upper world. *It is he that builds his stories in the heavens*, the celestial orbs or spheres, one over another, as so many stories in a high and stately palace; they are his, for he built them at first, when he said, *Let there be a firmament, and he made the*

firmament, and he *builds* them still, is continually *building* them, not that they need repair, but by his providence he still upholds them; his power is the pillars of heaven, by which it is borne up. Now he that has the command of those stories, is certainly to be feared, for from thence, as from a castle, he can *fire upon* his enemies, or cast upon them *great hail stones*, as on the Canaanites, or make the stars in their courses, the furniture of those *stories*, to fight against them, as against Sisera. (3.) He has the conduct and command of this lower world too, in which we dwell, the terraqueous globe, both *earth and sea*, so that, which way soever his enemies think to make their escape, he will meet them, or to make opposition, he will match them. Do they think to make a *land-fight* of it? He *has sounded his troop in the earth*, his troop of guards, which he has at command, and makes use of for the protection of his subjects, and the punishment of his enemies. All the creatures on earth make *one bundle*, (as the margin reads it,) one bundle of arrows, out of which he takes what he pleases to discharge against the persecutors, Ps. vii. 13. They are all *one army*, *one body*; so closely are they connected, and so harmoniously and so much in concert do they act for the accomplishing of their Creator's purposes. Do they think to make a *sea-fight* of it? He will be too hard for them there, for he has the waters of the sea at command: even its *waves*, the most tumultuous, rebellious waters, do obey him. He *calls for the waters of the sea* in the course of his common providence, *causes vapours to ascend* out of it, and *pours them out* in showers, the small rain and the great rain of his strength, *upon the face of the earth*; this was mentioned before as a reason why we should *seek the Lord*, (ch. v. 8.) and make him our Friend, as it is here made a reason why we should fear him, and dread having him our Enemy.

4. How justly God passes this sentence upon the people of Israel. He does not destroy them by an act of sovereignty, but by an act of righteousness; for, (v. 8.) it is a *sinful kingdom*, and the *eyes of the Lord* are upon it, discovering it to be so; he sees the great sinfulness of it, and therefore he will *destroy it from off the face of the earth*. Note, When those kingdoms that in name and profession were *holy kingdoms*, and *kingdoms of priests*, as Israel was, become *sinful kingdoms*, no other can be expected than that they should be cut off and abandoned. Let sinful kingdoms, and sinful families, and sinful persons too, see the *eyes of the Lord* upon them, observing all their wickedness, and reserving the notice of it for the day of reckoning and recompense. This being a *sinful kingdom*, see how light God makes of it, v. vii. (1.) Of the relation wherein he stood to it; *Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?* A sad change! children of Israel become as children of the Ethiopians? [1.] They were so *in themselves*, that was *their sin*; it is a thing to be greatly lamented, that the children of Israel often became as children of the Ethiopians; the *children of godly parents* degenerate, and become the reverse of those that went before them. Those that were well *educated* and *trained up* in the *knowledge* and fear of God, and set out well, and promised fair, throw off their profession, and become as bad as the worst. *How is the gold become dim!* [2.] They were so *in God's account*, and that was *their punishment*; he valued them no more, though they were children of Israel, than if they had been *children of the Ethiopians*. We read of one in the title of Ps. vii. that was *Cush*, (an *Ethiopian*, so some understand it,) and yet a Benjamite. Those that by birth and profession are children of Israel, if they degenerate, and become wicked and vile, are to God no more

than *children of the Ethiopians*. This is an intimation of the rejection of the unbelieving Jews in the days of the Messiah; because they embraced not the doctrine of Christ, the kingdom of God was taken from them, they were unchurched and cast out of covenant, became as children of the Ethiopians, and are so to this day. And it is true of those that are called *Christians*, but do not live up to their name and profession, that rest in the form of piety, but live under the power of reigning iniquity, that they are to God as *children of the Ethiopians*; he rejects them, and their services. (2.) See how light he makes of the favours he had conferred upon them; they thought he would not, he could not, cast them off, and put them upon a level with other nations, because he had done that for them which he had not done for other nations, whereby they thought he was *bound* to them, so as never to leave them. No, says he, The favours showed you are not so distinguishing as you think they are; *Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt?* It is true, I have; but I have also *brought the Philistines from Caphtor*, or *Caphtadocia*, where they were either *natives*, or *captives*, or both; they are called the *remnant of the country of Caphtor*, (Jer. xlvii. 4.) and the Philistines are joined with the Caphtorim, Gen. x. 14. In like manner, the Syrians were brought up from Kir, when they had been carried away thither, 2 Kings xvi. 9. Note, If God's Israel lose the peculiarity of their holiness, they lose the peculiarity of their privileges; and what was designed as a favour of special grace shall be set in another light, shall have its property altered, and shall become an act of *common providence*; if professors liken themselves to the world, God will level them with the world. And if we live not up to the obligation of God's mercies, we forfeit the honour and comfort of them.

How graciously God will separate between the precious and the vile, in the day of retribution. Though the *wicked* Israelites shall be as the *wicked* Ethiopians, and their being called *Israelites* shall stand them in no stead, yet the *pious* Israelites shall not be as the *wicked* ones; no, the *Judge of all the earth will do right*, more right than to *slay the righteous with the wicked*, Gen. xviii. 25. His *eyes are upon the sinful kingdom*, to spy out those in it who preserve their integrity, and swim against the stream, who sigh and cry for the abominations of their land, and they shall be marked for preservation, so that the *destruction* shall not be *total*; *I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob*, not ruin them by wholesale, and in the gross, good and bad together, but I will *distinguish*, as becomes a righteous Judge. The house of Israel shall be *sifted as corn is sifted*; they shall be greatly hurried, and shaken, and tossed, but still in the hands of God, in both his hands, as the sieve in the hands of him that sifts; (v. 9.) *I will sift the house of Israel among all nations*; wherever they are shaken and scattered, God will have his eye upon them, and will take care to separate between the corn and chaff, which was the thing he designed in sifting them. (1.) The righteous ones among them, that are as the solid wheat, shall none of them *perish*; they shall be delivered either *from*, or *through*, the common calamities of the kingdom; *not the least grain shall fall on the earth*, so as to be lost and forgotten; not the least *stone*, so the word is, for the *good corn* is weighty as a stone, in comparison with that which we call *light corn*. Note, Whatever shakings there may be in the world, God does, and will, effectually provide that none who are truly his, shall be truly miserable. (2.) The wicked ones among them, who are hardened in their sins, shall all of them *perish*, v. 10. See what a height of impiety they are come to; *They say, The evil shall not overtake*

and prevent us, They think they are *innocent*, and do not deserve punishment, or, that the profession they make of relation to God will be their exemption and security from punishment, or, that they shall be able to make their part good against the judgments of God, that they shall flee so swiftly from them, that they shall not overtake them, or guard so carefully against them, that they shall not prevent or surprise them. Note, Hope of impunity is the deceitful refuge of the impenitent. But see what it will come to at last; *all the sinners that thus flatter themselves, and affront God, shall die by the sword*, the sword of war, which to them shall be the sword of divine vengeance; yea, though they be the *sinners of my people*; for their profession shall not be their protection. Note, Evil is often nearest those that put it at the greatest distance from them.

11. 'In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: 12. That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. 13. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. 14. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. 15. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.'

To Him to whom all the prophets bare witness, this prophet, here in the close, bears his testimony, and speaks of *that day, those days that shall come*, in which God will do great things for his church, by the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, for the rejecting of which the rejection of the Jews was foretold in the foregoing verses. The promise here is said to agree to the planting of the Christian church, and in that to be fulfilled, Acts xv. 15, 17.

1. It is promised that in the Messiah the kingdom of David shall be restored; (v. 11.) the *tabernacle of David* it is called, his house and family, which, though great and fixed, yet, in comparison with the kingdom of heaven, was mean and moveable as a *tabernacle*. The church *militant*, in its present state, dwelling as in *shepherds' tents*, to feed, as in soldiers' tents, to fight, is the *tabernacle of David*. God's *tabernacle* is called the *tabernacle of David*, because David desired and chose to dwell in God's *tabernacle for ever*, Ps. lxi. 4. Now, (1.) These tabernacles were fallen and gone to decay, the royal family was so impoverished, its power abridged, its honour stained, and laid in the dust; for many of that race degenerated, and in the captivity it lost the imperial dignity; sore breaches were made upon it, and at length it was laid in ruins. So it was with the church of the Jews; in the latter days of it, its glory was departed, it was like a tabernacle broken down, and brought to ruin, in respect both of purity and of prosperity. (2.) By Jesus Christ these ta-

bernacles were raised and rebuilt. In him God's covenant with David had its accomplishment; and the glory of that house, which was not only sullied, but quite sunk, revived again, the *breaches* of it were closed, and its ruins raised up, as in the days of old; nay, the spiritual glory of the family of Christ far exceeded the temporal glory of the family of David, when it was at its height. In him also God's covenant with Israel had its accomplishment, and in the gospel-church the *tabernacle of God* was set up among men again, and raised up out of the ruins of the Jewish state. This is quoted in the first counsel at Jerusalem, as referring to the calling in of the Gentiles, and God's taking out of them a people for his name. Note, While the world stands, God will have a church in it, and if it be fallen down in one place, and among one people, it shall be raised up elsewhere.

2. It is promised that that kingdom shall be enlarged, and the territories of it shall extend far, by the accession of many countries to it; (v. 12.) that the house of David may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, that is, that Christ may have them given him for his inheritance, even the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, Ps. ii. 8. Those that had been strangers and enemies, shall become willing, faithful subjects to the son of David, shall be added to the church, or those of them that are called by my name, saith the Lord, that belong to the election of grace, and are ordained to eternal life; (Acts xiii. 48.) for it is true of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, that the election hath obtained, and the rest were blinded, Rom. xi. 7. Christ died to gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad, here said to be those that were called by his name; the promise is to all that were afar off, even as many of them as the Lord our God shall call, Acts ii. 39. St. James expounds this as a promise, that the residue of men should seek after the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called. But may the promise be depended upon? Yes, the Lord saith this, who doeth this; who can do it, who has determined to do it, the power of whose grace is engaged for the doing of it, and with whom saying and doing are not two things, as they are with us.

3. That in the kingdom of the Messiah there shall be great plenty, and abundance of all good things, that the country produces, (v. 13.) The ploughman shall overtake the reaper; there shall be such a plentiful harvest every year, and so much corn to be gathered in, that it shall last all summer, even till autumn, when it is time to begin to plough again; and in like manner the vintage shall continue till seed-time; and there shall be such abundance of grapes, that even the mountains shall drop new wine into the vessels of the grape-gatherers, and the hills that were dry and barren, shall be moistened, and shall melt with the fatness, or mellowness (as we call it) of the soil. Compare this with Joel ii. 24. and iii. 18. This must certainly be understood of the abundance of spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which all those are, and shall be, blessed with, who are in sincerity added to Christ and his church; they shall be abundantly replenished with the goodness of God's house, with the graces and comforts of his Spirit; they shall have bread, the bread of life, to strengthen their hearts, and the wine of divine consolations to make them glad; meat indeed, and drink indeed, all the benefit that comes to the souls of men from the word and Spirit of God; these had been long confined to the vineyard of the Jewish church, divine revelation, and the power that attended it, were to be found only within that enclosure; but in gospel-times, the mountains and hills of the Gentile world shall be enriched with these privileges by the gospel of Christ preached,

and professed, and received in the power of it. When great multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ, and nations were born at once, when the preachers of the gospel were *always caused to triumph* in the success of their preaching, then the *ploughman overtook the reaper*; and when the Gentile churches were *enriched in all utterance, and in all knowledge*, and all manner of *spiritual gifts*, (1 Cor. i. 5.) then the *mountains dropped sweet wine*.

4. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall be *well peopled*; as the country shall be replenished, so shall the cities be; there shall be mouths for this meat, v. 14. Those that were *carried captives*, shall be *brought back* out of their captivity; their enemies shall not be able to detain them in the land of their captivity, nor shall they themselves incline to settle in it, but the *remnant* shall return, and shall *build the waste cities, and inhabit them*, shall form themselves into Christian churches, and set up pure doctrine, worship, and discipline among them, according to the gospel-charter, by which Christ's cities are incorporated; and they shall enjoy the benefit and comfort thereof, they shall *plant vine yards, and make gardens*; though the *mountains and hills* drop wine, and the privileges of the gospel-church are laid in common, yet they shall enclose for themselves, not to *monopolize* these privileges, to the exclusion of others, but to *appropriate* and *improve* these privileges, in *communion* with others, and they shall *drink the wine, and eat the fruit*, of their own *vineyards and gardens*; for they that *take pains* in religion, as men must do about their vine-

yards and gardens, shall have both the pleasure and the profit of it. The *bringing again* of the *captivity* of God's Israel, which is here promised, may refer to the cancelling of the ceremonial law, which had been long to God's Israel as a *yoke of bondage*, and the investing of them in the *liberty* wherewith Christ came to make his church *free*, Gal. v. 1.

5. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall take such deep rooting in the world, as never to be rooted out of it; (v. 15.) *I will plant them upon their land*. God's spiritual Israel shall be *planted*, by the right hand of God himself, upon the land assigned them, and *they shall no more be pulled up out of it*, as the old Jewish church was. God will preserve them from throwing themselves out of it by a total apostacy, and will preserve them from being thrown out of it by the malice of their enemies; the church may be *corrupted*, but shall not quite *forsake God*, may be persecuted, but shall not quite be *forsaken of God*, so that the gates of hell, neither with their temptations, nor with their terrors, shall prevail against it. Two things secure the perpetuity of the church; (1.) God's grants to it; It is *the land which I have given them*; and God will confirm and maintain his own grants. The part he has given to his people, is that good part which shall never be taken from them; he will not revoke his grant, and all the powers of earth and hell shall not invalidate it. (2.) Its interest in him; He is *the Lord thy God*, who has said it, and will make it good, *thine, O Israel*, who shall *reign for ever*, as thine *unto all generations*. And because he lives, the church shall live also.