

temporaries died, it went to decay, so much oftentimes does one head hold up: how well is it for the gospel church, that Christ, our Joshua, is still with it, by *his Spirit*, and *will be always, even unto the end of the world!*

AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

UPON THE BOOK OF

J U D G E S.

This is called in the Hebrew *Shepherd Shophetim*, the *Book of Judges*, which the Syriac and Arabic versions enlarge upon, and call it, *The Book of the Judges of the children of Israel*; the judgments of that nation being peculiar, so were their judges, whose office differed vastly from that of the Judges of our nations. The LXX entitle it only *κριται*, *Judges*. It is the history of the *commonwealth of Israel*, during the government of the Judges from Othniel to Eli; so much of it as God saw fit to transmit to us. It contains the history (according to Dr. Lightfoot's computation) of two hundred and ninety-nine years; reckoning to Othniel of Judah, forty years; to Ehud of Benjamin, eighty years; to Barak of Naphtali, forty years; to Gideon of Manasseh, forty years; to Abimelech his son, three years; to Tola of Issachar, twenty-three; to Jair of Manasseh, twenty-two; to Jephthah of Manasseh, six; to Ibzan of Judah, seven; to Elon of Zebulun, ten; to Abdon of Ephraim, eight; to Samson of Dan, twenty; in all two hundred and ninety-nine. As for the years of their servitude, as where Eglon is said to oppress them eighteen years, and Jabin twenty years, and so some others, those must be reckoned to fall in with some or other of the years of the Judges. The judges here appear to have been of eight several tribes; that honour was thus diffused, until at last it centered in Judah. Eli and Samuel, the two Judges that fell not within this book, were of Levi. It seems, there was no Judge of Reuben or Simeon, Gad or Asher. The history of these Judges in their order we have in this book, to the end of *ch.* 16. And then in the five last chapters we have an account of some particular memorable events which happened, as the story of Ruth did, (*Ruth* 1. 1.) *in the days when the Judges ruled*, but it is not certain in which Judge's days; but they are put together at the end of the book, that the thread of the general history might not be interrupted. Now as to the state of the commonwealth of Israel during this period.

- I. They do not appear here either so great or so good as one might have expected the character of such a peculiar people should have been; that were governed by such laws, and enriched by such promises. We find them wretchedly corrupted and wretchedly oppressed, by their neighbours about them, and no where in all the book, either in war or council, do they make any figure proportionable to their glorious entry into Canaan. What shall we say to it? God would hereby show us the lamentable imperfection of all persons and things under the sun, that we may look for complete holiness and happiness in the other world, and not in this. Yet,
- II. We may hope that though the historian in this book enlarges most upon their provocations and grievances, yet there was a face of religion upon the land; and however there were those among them, that were drawn aside to idolatry, yet the tabernacle-service, according to the law of Moses, was kept up, and there were many that attended it. Historians record not the common course of justice and commerce in a nation, taking that for granted, but only the wars and disturbances that happen; but the reader must consider the other, to balance the blackness of them.
- III. It should seem that in these times each tribe had very much its government in ordinary within itself, and acted separately, without one common head, or council, which occasioned many differences among themselves, and kept them from being or doing any thing considerable.
- IV. The government of the Judges was not constant, but occasional, when it is said that after Ehud's victory *the land rested eighty years*, and after Barak's *forty*, it is not certain that they lived, much less that they governed, so long; but they and the rest were raised up and animated by the spirit of God to do particular service to the public when there was occasion, to *avenge Israel of their enemies*, and to purge Israel of their idolatries, which are the two things principally meant by their judging Israel. Ye Deborah, as a prophetess, was attended for judgment by all Israel, before there was occasion for her agency in war, *ch.* 4. 4.

V. During the government of the Judges, God was in a more especial manner Israel's king, so Samuel tells them when they were resolved to throw off this form of government, 1 Sam. 12. 12. "God would try what his own law and the constitutions of that would do to keep them in order, and it proved that when *there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes*; he therefore, toward the latter end of this time, made the government of the judges more constant and universal than it was at first, and at length gave them David, a king after his own heart; then, and not till then, Israel began to flourish; which should make us very thankful for magistrates both supreme and subordinate, for they are *ministers of God unto us for good*. Four of the Judges of Israel are here canonized, Heb. 11. 32. Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. The learned Bishop Patrick thinks the prophet Samuel was the penman of this Book.

JUDGES, I.

CHAP. I.

This chapter gives us a particular account of what sort of progress the several tribes of Israel made in the reducing of Canaan after the death of Joshua. He did (as we say) break the neck of that great work, and put it into such a posture, that they might easily have perfected it in due time, if they had not been wanting to themselves; what they did in order hereunto, and wherein they come short, we are here told. I. The united tribes of Judah and Simeon did bravely. 1. God appointed Judah to begin, v. 1, 2. 2. Judah took Simeon to act in conjunction with him, v. 3. 3. They succeeded in their enterprises against Bezek, (v. 4. 7.) Jerusalem, (v. 8.) Hebron and Debir, (v. 9. 15.) Hormah, Gaza, and other places, v. 17, 19. 4. Yet where there were chariots of iron, their hearts failed them, v. 19. Mention is made of the Kenites settling among them, v. 16. II. The other tribes, in comparison with these, acted a cowardly part. 1. Benjamin failed, v. 21. 2. The house of Joseph did well against Beth-el, (v. 22. 26.) but in other places did not improve their advantages, nor Manasseh, (v. 27. 28.) nor Ephraim, v. 29. 3. Zebulun spared the Canaanites, v. 30. 4. Ashur truckled worse than any of them to the Canaanites, v. 31, 32. 5. Naphtali was kept out of the full possession of several of his cities, v. 33. 6. Dan was straitened by the Amorites, v. 34. No account is given of Issachar, nor of the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan.

I. **N**OW, after the death of Joshua, it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? 2. And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. 3. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go up with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. 4. And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. 5. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek; and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6. But Adoni-bezek fled: and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. 7. And Adoni-bezek said, threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered *their meat* under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died. 8. Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with

the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Here,

I. The children of Israel consult the oracle of God for direction, which of all the tribes should first attempt to clear their country of the Canaanites, and to animate and encourage the rest. It was *after the death of Joshua*: while he lived, he directed them, and all the tribes were obedient to him; but when he died, he left no successor in the same authority that he had had: but the people must consult the breast-plate of judgment, and thence receive the word of command; for God himself, as he was their King, so he was the Lord of their business. The question they ask is, *Who shall go up first?* v. 1. By this time, we may suppose, they were so multiplied, that the places they were in possession of, began to be too strait for them, and they must thrust out the enemy to make room: now they inquire, who should first take up arms. Whether each tribe was ambitious of being first, and so strove for the honour of it, or whether each was afraid of being first, and so strove to decline it, does not appear; but by common consent the matter was referred to God himself, who is the fittest both to dispose of honours, and to cut out work.

II. God appointed that Judah should go up first, and promised him success; (v. 2.) "*I have delivered the land into his hand* to be possessed, and therefore will deliver the enemy into his hand, that keeps him out of possession, to be destroyed." And why must Judah be first in this undertaking? 1. Judah was the most numerous and powerful tribe, and therefore let Judah venture first. Note, God appoints service according to the strength he has given. These that are most able, from them most work is expected. 2. Judah was first in dignity, and therefore must be first in duty. He it is, whom *his brethren must praise*, and therefore he it is, who must lead in perilous services. Let the burthen of honour and the burthen of work go together. 3. Judah was first served; the lot came up for Judah first, and therefore Judah must fight. 4. Judah was the tribe *out of which our Lord was to spring*: so that in Judah, Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, went before them. Christ engaged the powers of darkness first, and foiled them, which animates us for our conflicts; and it is in him that we are *more than conquerors*. Observe, The service and the success are put together: "Judah shall go up, let him do his part, and then he shall find, *I have delivered the land into his hand*." His service will not avail unless God give the success: but God will not give the success, unless he vigorously apply himself to the service.

III. Judah hereupon prepares to go up, but courts his brother and neighbour the tribe of Simeon (the lot of which tribe fell within that of Judah, and was assigned out of it) to join forces with him, v. 3. Ob

serve here, 1. That the strongest should not despise, but desire the assistance even of those that are weaker. Judas was the most considerable of all the tribes, and Simeon the least considerable, and yet Judah begs Simeon's friendship, and prays an aid from him; the head cannot say to the foot, *I have no need of thee, for we are members one of another.* 2. Those that crave assistance, must be ready to give assistance; *Come with me into my lot, and then I will go with thee into thine.* It becomes Israelites to help one another against Canaanites; and all Christians, even those of different tribes, to strengthen one another's hands against the common interests of Satan's kingdom. Those who thus help one another in love, have reason to hope that God will graciously help them both.

IV. The confederate forces of Judah and Simeon take the field. *Judah went up, (v. 4.)* and Simeon with him, *v. 3.* Caleb, it is probable, was commander in chief of this expedition; for who so fit as he who had both an old man's head and a young man's hand; the experience of age and the vigour of youth! Josh. 14. 10, 11. It should seem too, by what follows, that he (v. 10, 11.) was not yet in possession of his own allotment. It was happy for them that they had such a general, as, according to his name, was all heart. Some think that the Canaanites were got together into a body, a formidable body, when Israel consulted who should go *fight against them*; and that they then began to stir when they heard of the death of Joshua, whose name had been so dreadful to them; but, if so, it proved they did but meddle to their own hurt.

V. God gave them great success. Whether they invaded the enemy, or the enemy first gave them the alarm, *The Lord delivered them into their hand,*

4. Though the army of Judah was strong and bold, yet the victory is attributed to God! *he delivered the Canaanites into their hand*; having given them authority, he here gives them ability to destroy them—put it in their power, and so tried their obedience to his command, which was *utterly to cut them off.* Bishop Patrick observes upon this, that we meet not with such religious expressions in the heathen writers, concerning the success of their arms, as we have here and elsewhere in this sacred history. I wish such pious acknowledgments of the Divine Providence were not grown into disuse at this time, with many that are called Christians. Now, 1. We are told how the army of the Canaanites was routed in the field, in or near Bezek, the place where they drew up, which afterward Saul made the place of a general rendezvous; (1 Sam. 11. 8.) they slew ten thousand men, which blow, if followed, could not but be a very great weakening to those that were brought already so very low. 2. How their king was taken and mortified. His name was Adoni-bezek, which signifies, *lord of Bezek.* There have been those that *called their lands by their own names*, (Ps. 49. 11.) but here was one (and there has been many another) that called himself by his land's name. He was taken prisoner after the battle, and we are here told how they used him: they cut off his thumbs, to disfit him for fighting, and his great toes, that he might not be able to run away, *v. 6.* It had been barbarous thus to triumph over a man in misery, and that lay at their mercy, but that he was a devoted Canaanite, and one that had in like manner abused others, which, probably, they had heard of. Josephus says, "They cut off his hands and his feet," probably supposing those more likely to be mortal wounds, than only the cutting off his thumbs and his great toes. But this indignity which they did him, extorted from him an acknowledgment of the righteousness of God, *v. 7.* Where observe, (1.) What a great man this Adoni-bezek had been, how great in the

field, where armies fled before him, how great at home, where kings were *set with the dogs of his flock*; and yet now himself a prisoner, and reduced to the extremity of meanness and disgrace. See how changeable this world is, and how slippery its high places are. Let not the highest be proud, nor the strongest secure, for they know not how low they may be brought before they die. (2.) What desolation he had made among his neighbours, he had wholly subdued seventy kings, to that degree as to have them his prisoners; he that was the chief person in a city, was then called a *king*, and the greatness of their title did but aggravate their disgrace, and fired the pride of him that insulted over them. We cannot suppose that Adoni-bezek had seventy of these petty princes at once his slaves, but first and last, in the course of his reign, he had thus deposed and abused so many, who perhaps were many of them kings of the same cities that successively opposed him, and whom he thus treated to please his own imperious barbarous fancy, and for a terror to others. It seems, the Canaanites had been wasted by civil wars, and those bloody ones, among themselves, which would very much facilitate the conquest of them by Israel. "Judah," says Dr. Lightfoot, "in conquering Adoni-bezek, did, in effect, conquer seventy kings." (3.) How justly he was treated as he had treated others. Thus the righteous God sometimes, in his providence, makes the punishment to answer the sin, and observes an equality in his judgments; the spoiler should be spoiled, and the *treacherous dealer dealt treacherously* with, Isa. 33. 1. And they that *showed no mercy*, shall have *no mercy showed* them, Jam. 2. 13. See Rev. 13. 10.—18. 6. (4.) How honestly he owned the righteousness of God herein. *As I have done, so God has requited me.* See the power of conscience, when God by his judgments awakens it, how it brings sin to remembrance, and subscribes to the justice of God. He that in his pride had set God at defiance, now yields to him, and reflects with as much regret upon the kings under his table, as ever he had looked upon them with pleasure when he had them there. He seems to own that he was better dealt with than he had dealt with his prisoners; for though the Israelites maimed him, (according to the law of retaliation, *an eye for an eye*, so a thumb for a thumb,) yet they did not put him *under the table* to be fed with the crumbs there; because, though the other might well be looked upon as an act of justice, that would have savoured more of pride and haughtiness than did become an Israelite.

VI. Particular notice is taken of the conquest of Jerusalem, *v. 8.* Our translators judge it spoken of here, as done formerly in Joshua's time, and only repeated on occasion of Adoni-bezek's dying there, and therefore read it, "they had fought against Jerusalem," and put this verse in a parenthesis; but the original speaks of it as a thing now done; and that seems most probable, because it is said to be done by the children of Judah in particular, not by all Israel in general, whom Joshua commanded. Joshua indeed conquered and slew Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, Josh. 10. but we read not there of his taking the city; probably, while he was pursuing his conquests elsewhere, this Adoni-bezek, a neighbouring prince, got possession of it, whom, having conquered in the field, the city fell into their hands, and they slew the inhabitants, except those who retreated into the castle, and held out there till David's time, and they *set the city on fire*, in token of their detestation of the idolatry wherewith it had been deeply infected, yet, probably, not so as utterly to consume it, but to leave convenient habitations for as many as they had to put into the possession of it.

9. And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. 10. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron, (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba,) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai. 11. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir; (and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher :) 12. And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 13. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 14. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off *her* ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? 15. And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land, give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs. 16. And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which *lieth* in the south of Arad: and they went and dwelt among the people. 17. And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it: (And the name of the city was called Hormah.) 18. Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Ashkelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. 19. And the LORD was with Judah, and he drave out *the inhabitants* of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. 20. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

We have here a further account of that glorious and successful campaign which Judah and Simeon made.

1. The lot of Judah was pretty well cleared of the Canaanites, yet not thoroughly. Those that *dwelt in the mountain* (the mountains that were round about Jerusalems) were driven out, (v. 9. 19.) but those in the valley kept their ground against them, having *chariots of iron*, such as we read of, Josh. 17. 16. Here the men of Judah failed, and thereby spoiled the influence, which otherwise their example hitherto might have had on the rest of the tribes, who followed them in this instance of their cowardice, rather than in all the other instances of their courage. They had *iron chariots*, and therefore it was thought not safe to attack them; but had not Israel God on their side, *whose chariots are thousands of angels*, (Ps. 68. 17.) before whom these iron chariots would be but as stubble to the fire? Had not God expressly promised by the oracle, (v. 2.) to give them success against the Canaan-

ites in this very expedition, without excepting those that had iron chariots? Yet they suffered their fears to prevail against their faith, they could not trust God under any disadvantages, and therefore durst not face the iron chariots, but meanly withdrew their forces, then when with one bold stroke they might have completed their victories; and it proved of pernicious consequence. They did run well, what hindered them; Gal. 5. 7.

2. Caleb was put in possession of Hebron, which, though given him by Joshua ten or twelve years ago, (as Dr. Lightfoot computes,) yet being employed in public service, for the settling of the tribes, which he preferred before his own private interests, it seems he did not till now make himself master of; so well content was that good man to serve others, while he left himself to be served last; few men are like-minded, for *all seek their own*, Phil. 2. 23, 21. Yet now the men of Judah all came in to his assistance for the reducing of Hebron, (v. 10.) slew the sons of Anak, and put him in possession of it, v. 20. They gave Hebron unto Caleb. And now Caleb, that he might return the kindness of his countrymen, is impatient to see Debir reduced, and put into the hands of the men of Judah, to expedite which, he proffers his daughter to the person that will undertake to command in the siege of that important place, v. 11, 12. Othniel bravely undertakes it, and wins the town and the lady; (v. 13.) and by his wife's interest and management with her father, gains a very good inheritance for himself and family, v. 14, 15. We had this passage before, Josh. 15. 16-19, where it was largely explained and improved.

3. Simeon got ground of the Canaanites in his border, v. 17, 18. In the eastern part of Simeon's lot, they destroyed the Canaanites in Zephath, and called it *Hormah*, *destruction*; adding this to some other devoted cities not far off, which they had some time ago, with that reason, called by that name, Numb. 21. 2, 3. And this perhaps was the complete performance of the vow they then made, that they would utterly destroy these cities of the Canaanites in the south. In the western part they took Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, cities of the Philistines; they gained present possession of the cities, but not destroying the inhabitants, the Philistines in process of time recovered the cities, and proved inveterate enemies to the Israel of God, and no better could come of doing their work by the halves.

4. The Kenites gained a settlement in the tribe of Judah, choosing it there, rather than in any other tribe, because it was the strongest, and there they hoped to be safe and quiet, v. 16. These were the posterity of Jethro, who either went with Israel when Moses invited them, (Numb. 10. 29.) or met them about the same place, when they came up from their wanderings in the wilderness thirty-eight years after, and went with them then to Canaan, Moses having promised them that they should fare as Israel fared, Numb. 10. 32. They had at first seated themselves in the *city of palm trees*, that is, Jericho, a city which never was to be rebuilt, and therefore the fitter for them who *dwelt in tents*, and did not mind building. But afterward they removed into the wilderness of Judah, either out of their affection to that tribe, which perhaps had been in a particular manner kind to them. Yet we find the tent of Jael, who was of that family, far north, in the lot of Naphtali, when Sisera took shelter there, ch. 4. 17. This respect Israel showed them to let them fix where they pleased, being a quiet people, who, wherever they were, were content with a little. They that molested none, were molested by none. *Blessed are the meek, for thus they shall inherit the earth.*

21. And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day. 22. And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Beth-el: and the LORD *was* with them. 23. And the house of Joseph sent to descry Beth-el: (Now the name of the city before *was* Luz.) 24. And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city; and they said unto him, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will show thee mercy. 25. And when he showed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family. 26. And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day. 27. Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. 28. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. 29. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. 30. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. 31. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: 32. But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. 33. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them. 34. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: 35. But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Ajalon, and in Shaalbin; yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. 36. And the coast of the Amorites *was* from the going up to Akkrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

We are here told upon what terms the rest of

the tribes stood with the Canaanites that remained. 1. Benjamin neglected to drive the Jebusites out of that part of the city of Jerusalem which fell to their lot, *v.* 21. Judah had set them a good example, and gained them great advantages by what they did, (*v.* 9.) but they did not follow the blow for want of resolution.

11. The house of Joseph bestirred themselves a little to get possession of Beth-el, *v.* 22. That this city is mentioned in the tribe of Benjamin, Josh. 18. 22. Yet it is spoken of there, (*v.* 13.) as a city in the borders of that tribe, and it should seem, the line went through it, so that one half of it only belonged to Benjamin, the other half to Ephraim; and perhaps the activity of the Ephraimites at this time, to recover it from the Canaanites, secured it entirely to them from henceforward, or at least the greatest part of it, for afterward we find it so much under the power of the ten tribes, (and Benjamin was none of them,) that Jeroboam set up one of his calves in it. In this account of the expedition of the Ephraimites against Beth-el, observe, 1. Their interest in the divine favour. *The Lord was with them*, and would have been with the tribes, if they would have exerted their strength. The Chaldee reads it here, as in many other places, *The word of the Lord was their Helper*, namely, Christ himself, the Captain of the Lord's host, now that they acted separately, as well as when they were all in one body. 2. The prudent measures they took to gain the city. They sent spies to observe what part of the city was weakest, or which way they might make their attack with most advantage, *v.* 23. These spies got very good information from a man they providentially met with, who showed them a private way into the town, which was therefore left unguarded, because, being not generally known, no danger was suspected on that side. And here, (1.) He is not to be blamed for giving them this intelligence, if he did it from a conviction that *the Lord was with them*, and that by his donation the land was theirs of right, any more than Rahab was for entertaining those whom she knew to be enemies of her country, but friends of God. Nor, (2.) Are they to be blamed who *showed him mercy*, gave him and his family not only their lives, but liberty to go wherever they pleased: for one good turn requires another. But, it seems, he would not join himself to the people of Israel, he feared them rather than loved them, and therefore he removed after a colony of the Hittites, which, it should seem, was gone into Arabia, and settled there upon Joshua's invasion of the country; with them this man chose to dwell, and among them he built a city, a small one, we may suppose, such as planters used to build, and in the name of it preserved the ancient name of his native city, *Luz, an almond tree*, preferring that before its new name which carried religion in it, *Beth-el, the house of God*. 3. Their success; the spies brought or sent notice of the intelligence they had gained to the army, which improved their advantages, surprised the city, and put them *all to the sword*, *v.* 25. But beside this achievement, it seems, the children of Joseph did nothing remarkable. (1.) Manasseh failed to drive out the Canaanites from several very considerable cities in their lot, and did not make any attempt upon them, *v.* 27. But the Canaanites being in possession, were resolved not to quit it, they would dwell in that land, and Manasseh had not resolution enough to offer to dispossess them; as if there were no meddling with them, unless they were willing to resign, which it was not to be expected they ever would be. Only as Israel got strength, they got ground, and served themselves, both by their contributions, and by their personal services, *v.* 28, 35. (2.) Ephraim likewise, though a powerful tribe neglected Gezer,

a considerable city, and suffered the Canaanites to dwell among them, (v. 29.) which some think, intimates their allowing them a quiet settlement, and indulging them the privileges of an unconquered people, not so much as making them their tributaries.

III. Zebulun, perhaps inclining to the sea-trade, for it was foretold that it should be a haven for ships, neglected to reduce Kitron and Nahalol, (v. 30.) and only made the inhabitants of those places tributaries to them.

IV. Asher quitted itself worse than any of the tribes, (v. 31, 32.) not only in leaving more towns than any of them in the hands of the Canaanites, but in submitting to the Canaanites, instead of making them tributaries; for so the manner of expression intimates, that the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, as if the Canaanites were the more numerous, and the more powerful, would still be lords of the country, and the Israelites must be only upon sufferance among them.

V. Naphtali also permitted the Canaanites to live among them, (v. 33.) only by degrees they got them so far under as to exact contributions from them.

VI. Dan was so far from extending his conquests there where his lot lay, that, wanting spirit to make head against the Amorites, he was forced by them to retire into the mountains and inhabit the cities there, but durst not venture into the valley, where, it is probable, the chariots of iron were, v. 34. Nay, and some of the cities in the mountains were kept against them, v. 35. Thus were they straitened in their possessions, and forced to seek for more room at Laish, a great way off, *ch.* 18. 1, &c. In Jacob's blessing, Judah is compared to a lion, Dan to a serpent; now observe how Judah with his lion-like courage prospered and prevailed, but Dan with all his serpentine subtlety could get no ground; craft and artful management do not always effect the wonders they pretend to. What Dan came short of doing, it seems his neighbours the Ephraimites in part did for him; they put the Amorites under tribute, v. 35.

Upon the whole matter, it appears that the people of Israel were generally very careless both of their duty and interest in this thing; they did not what they might have done to expel the Canaanites and make room for themselves. And, 1. It was owing to their slothfulness and cowardice; they would not be at the pains to complete their conquests; like the sluggard, that dreamed of a lion in the way, a lion in the streets, they fancied insuperable difficulties, and frightened themselves with winds and clouds from sowing and reaping. 2. It was owing to their covetousness; the Canaanites' labour and money would do them more good (they thought) than their blood, and therefore they were willing to let them live among them, that they might make a hand of them. 3. They had not that dread and detestation of idolatry, which they ought to have had; they thought it pity to put these Canaanites to the sword, though the measure of their iniquity was full; thought it would be no harm to let them live among them, and that they should be in no danger from them. 4. The same thing that kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, kept them now out of the full possession of it, and that was, unbelief. Distrust of the power and promise of God lost them their advantages, and run them into a thousand mischiefs.

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, we have, I. A particular message which God sent to Israel by an angel, and the impression it made upon them, v. 1. . 3. II. A general idea of the state of Israel during the government of the Judges. In

which observe, 1. Their adherence to God while Joshua and the elders lived, v. 6. . 10. 2. Their revolt afterward to idolatry, v. 11. . 13. 3. God's displeasure against them, and his judgments upon them for it, 14. . 15. 4. His pity toward them, showed in raising them up deliverers, v. 16, 18. 5. Their relapse into idolatry after the judgment was over, v. 17, 19. 6. The full stop God in anger put to their success, v. 20. . 23. These are the contents, not only of this chapter, but of the whole book.

1. **A**ND an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? 3. Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the Lord.

It was the privilege of Israel, that they had not only a law in general sent them from heaven, once for all, to direct them into, and keep them in, the way to happiness, but that they had particular messages sent them from heaven, as there was occasion, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, when at any time they turned aside out of that way. Beside the written word which they had before them to read, they often heard a word behind them, saying, *This is the way*, Isa. 30. 21. Here begins that way of God's dealing with them. When they would not hear Moses, let it be tried whether they will hear the prophets. In these verses we have a very awakening sermon that was preached to them when they began to cool in their religion.

1. The preacher was an angel of the Lord, (v. 1.) not a prophet, not Phinehas, as the Jews conceit; gospel ministers are indeed called *angels of the churches*, but the Old Testament prophets are never called *angels of the Lord*; no doubt, this was a messenger from heaven. Such extraordinary messengers we sometimes find in this book, employed in the raised up of the Judges that delivered Israel, as Gideon and Samson, and now, to show how various the good offices are they do for God's Israel, here is one sent to preach to them, to prevent their falling into sin and trouble. This extraordinary messenger was sent to command, if possible, their great regard to the message, and to affect the minds of a people, whom nothing seemed to affect but what was sensible. The learned Bishop Patrick is clearly of opinion, that this was not a created angel, but the angel of the covenant; the same that appeared to Joshua as *Captain of the hosts of the Lord*, who was God himself. Christ himself, says Dr. Lightfoot: who but God and Christ could say, *I made you to go up out of Egypt*? Joshua had lately admonished them to take heed of entangling themselves with the Canaanites, but they regarded not the words of a dying man; the same warning therefore is here brought them by the living God himself, the Son of God appearing as an angel. If they slight his servants, surely they

will reverence his Son. This angel of the Lord is said to come up from Gilgal, perhaps not walking on the earth, but flying swiftly, as the angel Gabriel did to Daniel, in the open firmament of heaven; but whether walking or flying, he seemed to come from Gilgal, for a particular reason; Gilgal was long their head quarters after they came into Canaan, many signal favours they had there received from God, and there the covenant of circumcision was renewed, (Mic. 6. 5.) of all which it was designed they should be reminded by his coming from Gilgal. The remembrance of *what we have received and heard*, will prepare us for a warning to hold fast, Rev. 3. 2, 3.

II. The persons to whom this sermon was preached, were *all the children of Israel*, v. 4. A great congregation for a great preacher! They were assembled either for war, each tribe sending in its forces for some great expedition, or rather for worship, and then the place of their meeting must be Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, at which they were all to come together, three times a year. When we attend upon God in instituted ordinances, we may expect to hear from him, and to receive his gifts at his own gates. The place is called *Bochim*, (v. 1.) because it gained that name upon this occasion. All Israel need the reproof and warning here given, and therefore it is spoken to them all.

III. The sermon itself is short, but very close. God here tells them plainly, 1. What had he done for them, v. 1. He had brought them out of Egypt, a land of slavery and toil, into Canaan, a land of rest, liberty, and plenty. The miseries of the one served as a foil to the felicities of the other. God had here been kind to them, true to the oath sworn to their fathers, had given such proofs of his power as left them inexcusable if they distrusted it, and such engagement to his service, as left them, inexcusable if they deserted it. 2. What he had promised them; *I said, I will never break my covenant with you*. When he took them to be his peculiar people, it was not with any design to cast them off again, or to change them for another people at his pleasure; let them but be faithful to him, and they should find him unchangeably constant to them. He told them plainly that the covenant he entered into with them should never break, unless it broke on their side. 3. What were his just and reasonable expectations from them, v. 2. That being taken into covenant with God, they should make no league with the Canaanites, who were both his enemies and theirs. That having set up his altar, they should throw down their altars, lest they should be a temptation to them to serve their gods. Could any thing be demanded more easy? 4. How they had in this very thing, which he had most insisted on, disobeyed him. "But ye have not in so small a matter obeyed my voice." In contempt of their covenant with God, and their confederacy with each other in that covenant, they made leagues of friendship with the idolatrous devoted Canaanites, and connived at their altars, though they stood in competition with God's: "*Why have ye done this?*" What account can you give of this perverseness of your's at the bar of right reason? What apology can you make for yourselves, or what excuse can you offer?" They that throw off their communion with God, and have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, know not what they do now, and will have nothing to say for themselves in the day of account shortly. 5. How they must expect to smart by and by for this their folly, v. 3. Their tolerating of the Canaanites among them would, (1.) Put a period to their victories: "*You will not drive them out*," says God, "and therefore *I will not*;" thus their sin was made their punishment. Thus they who

indulge their lusts and corruptions, which they should mortify, forfeit the grace of God, and it is justly withdrawn from them. If we will not resist the Devil, we cannot expect that God should tread him under our feet. (2.) It would involve them in continual troubles. "They shall be thorns in your sides to gore you, which way soever you turn, always doing you one mischief or other." Those deceive themselves, who expect advantage by friendship with those that are enemies to God. (3.) It would (which was worst of all) expose them to constant temptation, and draw them to sin. "Their gods" (their *abominations*, so the Chaldee) "will be a snare to you, you will find yourselves wretchedly entangled in an affection to them, and it will be your ruin;" so some read it. Those that approach sin, are justly left to themselves to fall into sin, and to perish in it. God often makes men's sin their punishment; and thorns and snares are *in the way of the froward*, who will walk contrary to God.

IV. The good success of this sermon is very remarkable—the people *lifted up their voice and wept*, v. 4. 1. The angel had told them of their sins, which they thus expressed their sorrow for; they lifted up their voice in confession of sin, crying out against their own folly and ingratitude, and wept, as those that were both ashamed of themselves, and angry at themselves, as having acted so directly contrary both to their reason and to their interest. 2. The angel had threatened them with the judgment of God, which they thus expressed their dread of; they lifted up their voice in prayer to God to turn away his wrath from them, and wept for fear of that wrath. They relented upon this alarm, and their hearts melted within them, and trembled at the word, and not without cause. This was good, and a sign that the word they heard, made an impression upon them; it is a wonder sinners can ever read their Bibles with dry eyes: but this was not enough; they wept, but we do not find that they reformed, that they went home and destroyed all the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the word, that harden again, before they are cast into a new mould. However, this general weeping, (1.) Gave a new name to the place, (v. 5.) they called it *Bochim, Weepers*, a good name for our religious assemblies to answer. Had they kept close to God and their duty, no voice but that of singing had been heard in their congregation; but by their sin and folly they had made other work for themselves, and now nothing is to be heard but the voice of weeping. (2.) It gave occasion for a solemn sacrifice; they *sacrificed there unto the Lord*, being (as is supposed) met at Shiloh, where God's altar was. They offered sacrifice to turn away God's wrath, and to obtain his favour, and in token of their dedication of themselves to him, and to him only, making a covenant by this sacrifice. The disease being thus taken in time, and the physic administered working so well, one would have hoped a cure might have been effected. But by the sequel of the story, it appears to have been too deeply rooted to be wept out.

6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. 7. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. 8. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being*

a hundred and ten year: old. 9. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. 11. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: 12. And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. 13. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. 14. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. 15. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. 16. Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. 17. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. 18. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings, by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. 19. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them: they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. 20. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, 21. I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died; 22. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD, to walk therein, as their fathers

did keep it, or not. 23. Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

The beginning of this paragraph is only a repetition of what account we had before of the people's good character, during the government of Joshua, and of his death and burial, Josh. 24. 29, 30. Which comes in here again, only to make way for the following account, which this chapter gives, of their degeneracy and apostasy. The angel had foretold that the Canaanites and their idols would be a snare to Israel: now the historian undertakes to show that they were so, and that they may appear the more clear, he looks back a little, and takes notice, 1. Of their happy settlement in the land of Canaan. Joshua, having distributed this land among them, dismissed them to the quiet and comfortable possession of it, v. 6. *He sent them away*, not only every tribe, but every man to his inheritance, no doubt, giving them his blessing. 2. Of their continuance in the faith and fear of God's holy name as long as Joshua lived, v. 7. As they went to their possessions with good resolutions to cleave to God, so they persisted for some time in these good resolutions, as long as they had good rulers that set them good examples, gave them good instructions, and reprov'd and restrained the corruptions that crept in among them; and as long as they had in remembrance the great things God did for them when he brought them into Canaan: they that had seen these wonders, had so much sense as to believe their own eyes, and so much reason as to serve that God who had appeared so gloriously on their behalf; but they that followed, because they had not seen, believed not. 3. Of the death and burial of Joshua, which gave a fatal stroke to the interests of religion among the people, v. 8, 9. Yet so much sense they had of their obligations to him, that they did him honour at his death, and buried him in *Timnath-heres*; so it is called here, not, as in Joshua, *Timnath-serah*. *Heres* signifies the *sun*; a representation of which, some think, was set upon his sepulchre, and gave name to it, in remembrance of the sun's standing still at his word. So divers of the Jewish writers say; but I much question whether an image of the sun would be allowed to the honour of Joshua, at that time, when, by reason of men's general proneness to worship the sun, it would be in danger of being abused to the dishonour of God. 4. Of the rising of a new generation, v. 10. All that generation in a few years were off, their good instructions and examples died and were buried with them, and there arose another generation of Israelites who had so little sense of religion, and were in so little care about it, that notwithstanding all the advantages of their education, one might truly say, that they knew not the LORD, knew him not aright, knew him not as he had revealed himself, else they would not have forsaken him. They were so entirely devoted to the world, so intent upon the business of it, and so indulgent of the flesh in ease and luxury, that they never minded the true God and his holy religion, and so were easily drawn aside to false gods and their abominable superstitions.

And so he comes to give us a general idea of the series of things in Israel, during the time of the Judges; the same repeated in the same order.

I. The people of Israel forsook the God of Israel, and gave that worship and honour, to the dunghill-deities of the Canaanites, which was due to him alone, *Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and wonder, O earth! Hath a nation*, such a nation, so well fed, so well taught, *changed its God*, such a God, a

God of infinite power, unspotted purity, inexhaustible goodness, and so very jealous of a competitor, for stocks and stones that could do neither good nor evil? Jer. 2. 11, 12. Never was there such an instance of folly, ingratitude, and perfidiousness. Observe how it is described here, *v. 11, 13*. In general, *they did evil*, nothing could be more evil, that is, more provoking to God, nor more prejudicial to themselves; and it was *in the sight of the Lord*; all evil is before him, but he takes special notice of the sin of *having any other god*. In particular, 1. *They forsook the Lord*; (*v. 12*. and again, *v. 13*.) this was one of the great evils they were guilty of, Jer. 2. 13. They had been joined to the Lord in covenant, but now they *forsook him*, as a wife *treacherously departeth from her husband*. "They forsook the worship of the Lord," so the Chaldees: for they that forsake the worship of God, do in effect forsake God himself. It aggravated this, that he was the *God of their fathers*, so that they were *born in his house*, and therefore bound to serve him; and that he *brought them out of the land of Egypt*, he *loosed their bonds*, and upon that account also they were obliged to serve him. 2. When they forsook the only true God they did not turn atheists, nor were they such fools as to say, *There is no God*; but they followed other gods: so much remained of pure nature as to own a God, yet so much appeared of corrupt nature as to multiply gods, and to take up with any, and to follow the fashion, not the rule, in religious worship. Israel had the honour of being a peculiar people, and dignified above all others, and yet so false were they to their own privileges, that they were fond of the gods of the *people that were round about them*. Baal and Asharoath, he-gods and she-gods; they made their court to sun, and moon, Jupiter and Juno. *Baalim* signifies *lords*, and *Asharoath*, *blessed ones*, both plural, for when they forsook Jehovah, who is one, they had gods many, and lords many, as a luxuriant fancy pleased to multiply them. Whatever they took for their gods, they served them, and bowed down to them, gave honour to them, and begged favours from them.

II. The God of Israel was hereby provoked to anger, and delivered them up into the hand of their enemies, *v. 14, 15*. He was wrath with them, for he is a jealous God, and true to the honour of his own name; and the way he took to punish them for their apostasy, was, to make those their tormentors whom they yielded to as their tempters. They made themselves as mean and miserable by forsaking God, as they would have been great and happy if they had continued faithful to him. 1. The scale of victory turned against them. After they forsook God, whenever they took the sword in hand, they were as sure to be beaten as before they had been sure to conquer. Formerly, their enemies could not stand before them, but wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was for them; when they began to cool in their religion, God suspended his favour, stopped the progress of their successors, and would not drive out their enemies any more, (*v. 3*.) only suffered them to keep their ground: but now, when they were quite revolted to idolatry, the war turned directly against them, and they *could not any longer stand before their enemies*. God would rather give the success to those that had never known nor owned him. Wherever they went, they might perceive that God himself was *turned to be their enemy*, and *fought against them*, Isa. 63. 10. 2. The balance of power then turned against them of course. Whoever would, might spoil them; whoever would, might oppress them; God sold them into the hands of their enemies; not only he delivered them up freely, as we do that which we have sold, but he did it upon a valuable consideration,

that he might get himself honour as a jealous God, who would not spare even his own peculiar people when they provoked him. He sold them as insolvent debtors are sold, (Matth. 18. 25.) by their sufferings to make some sort of reparation to his glory for the injury it sustained by their apostasy. Observe how their punishment, (1.) Answered what they had done; they served the gods of the *nations that were round about them*, even the meanest, and God made them serve the princes of the nations that were *round about them*, even the meanest. He that is company for every fool, is justly made a fool of by every company. (2.) How it answered what *God had spoken*. The hand of heaven was thus turned against them, *as the Lord had said*, and *as the Lord had sworn*; (*v. 15*.) referring to the curse and death set before them in the covenant, with the blessing and life. Those that have found God true to his promises, may from thence infer that he will be as true to his threatenings.

III. The God of infinite mercy took pity on them, in their distresses, though they had brought themselves into them by their own sin and folly, and wrought deliverance for them. Nevertheless, though their trouble was the punishment of their sin, and the accomplishment of God's word, yet they were in process of time saved out of their troubles, *v. 16-18*. Where observe, 1. The inducement of their deliverance. It came purely from God's pity and tender compassion, the reason was fetched from within himself. It is not said, *It repented them because of their iniquities*, (for it appears, *v. 17*. that many of them continued unreformed,) but, *It repented the Lord because of their groanings*; though it is not so much the burthen of sin, as the burthen of affliction, that they are said to groan under. It was true, they deserved to perish for ever under his curse, yet this being the day of his patience and our probation, he does not stir up all his wrath. He might in justice have abandoned them, but he could not for pity do it. 2. The instruments of their deliverance; God did not send angels from heaven to do it, or bring in any foreign power for their rescue, but raised up judges from among themselves, as there was occasion, men to whom God gave extraordinary qualifications for, and calls to, that special service for which they were designed, which was to reform and deliver Israel, and whose great attempts he crowned with wonderful success; *the Lord was with the judges* when he raised them up, and so they became saviours. Observe, (1.) In the days of the greatest degeneracy and distress of the church, there shall be some whom God will either *find or make fit* to redress its grievances, and set things to rights. (2.) God must be acknowledged in the seasonable rising up of useful men for public service. He endues men with wisdom and courage, gives them hearts to act and venture. All that are in any way the blessings of their country, must be looked upon as the gifts of God. (3.) Whom God calls, he will own, and give them his presence; whom he raises up, he will be with. (4.) The judges of a land are its saviours.

IV. The degenerate Israelites were not effectually and thoroughly reformed, no not by their judges, *v. 17-19*. 1. Even while their judges were with them, and active in the work of reformation, there were those that *would not hearken to their judges*, but at that very time *went a whoring after other gods*; so mad were they upon their idols, and so obstinately *bent to backslide*. They had been espoused to God, but broke the marriage-covenant, and *went a whoring* after false gods. Idolatry is spiritual adultery; so vile and base and perfidious a thing is it, and so hardly are those reclaimed, that are addicted to it. 2. Those that in the times of refor-

mation began to amend, *yet turned quickly out of the way* again, and became as bad as ever. The way they turned out of, was that which their godly ancestors walked in, and set them out in; but they soon started from under the influence both of their fathers' good example, and of their own good education. The wicked children of godly parents do so, and will therefore have a great deal to answer for. 3. However, *when the judge was dead*, they looked upon the dam which checked the stream of their idolatry as removed, and then it flowed down again with so much the more fury, and the next age seemed to be rather the worse for the attempts that were made toward reformation; (v. 19.) *They corrupted themselves more than their fathers*; strove to outdo them in multiplying strange gods, and inventing profane and impious rites of worship, as it were in contradiction to their reformers. *They ceased not* from, or, as the word is, *they would not let fall*, any of their own doings; grew not ashamed of those idolatrous services that were most odious, nor weary of those that were most barbarous; would not so much as diminish one step of their hard and stubborn way. Thus they that have forsaken the good ways of God, which they have once known and professed, commonly grow most daring and desperate in sin, and have their hearts most hardened.

V. God's just resolution hereupon was, still to continue the rod over them. 1. Their sin was, sparing the Canaanites; and this, in contempt and violation of the covenant God had made with them, and the commands he had given them, v. 20. 2. Their punishment was, that the Canaanites were spared, and so they were beaten with their own rod. They were not all delivered into the hand of Joshua while he lived, v. 23. Our Lord Jesus, though he *spoiled principalities and powers*, yet did not complete his victory at first; *we see not yet all things put under him*; here are remains of Satan's interest in the church, as there were of the Canaanites in the land; but yet Joshua lives for ever, and will in the great day perfect his conquests. After Joshua's death, little was done for a long time against the Canaanites: Israel indulged them, and grew familiar with them, and therefore God would not *drive them out* any more, v. 21. If they will have such inmates as these among them, let them take them, and see what will come of it. God *chose their delusions*, Isa. 66. 4. Thus men cherish and indulge their own corrupt appetites and passions, and, instead of mortifying them, make provision for them, and therefore God justly leaves them to themselves under the power of their sins, which will be their ruin: *So shall their doom be, themselves have decided it*. These remnants of the Canaanites were left to prove Israel, (v. 22.) *whether they will keep the way of the Lord or not*; not that God might know them, but that they might know themselves. It was to try, (1.) Whether they could resist the temptations to idolatry which the Canaanites would lay before them. God had told them they could not, (Deut. 7. 4.) but they thought they could; "Well," said God, "I will try you;" and, upon trial, it was found that the tempter's charms were quite too strong for them. God has told us how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts are, but we are not willing to believe it, until, by making bold with temptation, we find it too true by sad experience. (2.) Whether they would make a good use of the vexations which the remaining natives would give them, and the many troubles they would occasion them, and would thereby be convinced of sin and humbled for it, reformed, and driven to God and their duty; whether by continual alarms from them they would be kept in awe, and made afraid of provoking God.

CHAP. III.

In this chapter, I. A general account of Israel's enemies is premised, and of the mischief they did them, v. 1. . 7. II. A particular account of the brave exploits done by the three first of the judges. 1. Othniel, whom God raised up to fight Israel's battles, and plead their cause against the king of Mesopotamia, v. 8. . 11. 2. Ehud, who was employed in rescuing Israel out of the hands of the Moabites, and did it by stabbing the king of Moab, v. 12. . 30. 3. Shamgar, who signalized himself in an encounter with the Philistines, v. 31.

1. **N**OW these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, (*even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan*; 2. Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;) 3. *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath. 4. And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. 5. And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: 6. And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. 7. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

We are here told what remained of the old inhabitants of Canaan. 1. There were some of them that kept together in united bodies, unbroken; (v. 3.) *The five lords of the Philistines*, namely, Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, and Ekron, 1 Sam. 6. 17. Three of these cities had been in part reduced, (ch. 1. 18.) but, it seems, the Philistines (probably with the help of the other two, which strengthened their confederacy with each other from thenceforward) recovered the possession of them. These gave the greatest disturbance to Israel of any of the natives, especially in the latter times of the Judges, and they were never quite reduced until David did it. There was a particular nation called *Canaanites*, that kept their ground with the Sidonians, upon the coast of the great sea. And in the north the Hivites held much of mount Lebanon, it being a remote corner, in which perhaps they were supported by some of the neighbouring states. But beside these, 2. There were every where in all parts of the country some scatterings of the nations; (v. 5.) Hittites, Amorites, &c. which, by Israel's foolish connivance and indulgence, were so many, so easy, and so insolent, that the *children of Israel* are said to *dwell among them*, as if the right had still remained in the Canaanites, and the Israelites had been taken in by their permission, and only as tenants at will.

Now concerning these remnants of the natives, observe,

I. How wisely God permitted them to remain. It had been mentioned in the close of the foregoing chapter, as an act of God's *justice*, that he let them remain for Israel's correction. But here another

construction is put upon it, and it appears to have been an act of God's *wisdom*, that he let them remain for Israel's real advantage, that those who *had not known the wars of Canaan*, might learn war, v. 1, 2. It was the will of God that the people of Israel should be *inured to war*, 1. Because their country was *exceeding rich and fruitful*, and abounded with dainties of all sorts, which, if they were not sometimes made to know hardship, would be in danger of sinking them into the utmost degree of luxury and effeminacy. They must sometimes *wade in blood*, and not always in *milk and honey*, lest even their men of war, by the long disuse of arms, should become as soft and nice as the *tender and delicate woman*, that would not set so much as the sole of her foot to the ground for tenderness and delicacy; a temper as destructive to every thing that is good, as it is to every thing that is great, and therefore to be carefully watched against by all God's Israel. 2. Because their country lay very much in the midst of enemies, by whom they must expect to be insulted; for God's heritage was as a *speckled bird*, the birds round about were against her, Jer. 12. 9. It was therefore necessary they should be well disciplined, that they might defend their coasts when invaded, and might hereafter enlarge their coast as God had promised them. The art of war is best learned by experience, which not only acquaints men with martial discipline, but (which is no less necessary) inspires them with a martial disposition. It was for the interest of Israel to breed soldiers, as it is the interest of an island to breed seamen, and therefore God left Canaanites among them, that, by the lesser difficulties and hardships they met with in encountering them, they might be prepared for greater; and, by *running with the footmen*, might learn to contend with horses, Jer. 12. 5. Israel was a figure of the church militant, that must fight its way to a triumphant state. The soldiers of Christ must endure hardness, 2. Tim. 2, 3. Corruption is therefore left remaining in the hearts even of good christians, that they may learn war, may keep on the *whole armour of God*, and stand continually upon their guard. The learned Bishop Patrick offers another sense of v. 2, that they might know to teach them war, that is, they shall know what it is to be left to themselves. Their fathers fought by a divine power, God taught *their hands to war* and their fingers to fight; but now that they have forfeited his favour, let them learn what it is to fight like other men.

II. How wickedly Israel mingled themselves with those that did remain. One thing God intended in leaving them among them, was to *prove Israel*, (v. 4.) that those who were faithful to the God of Israel, might have the honour of resisting the Canaanites' allurements to idolatry, and that those who were false and insincere, might be discovered, and might fall under the shame of yielding to those allurements. Thus in the christian churches there must needs be heresies, that they which are perfect may be made manifest, 1 Cor. 11. 19. Israel, upon trial, proved bad. 1. They joined in marriage with the Canaanites, (v. 6.) though they could not advance either their honour or estate by marrying with them. They would mar their blood instead of mending it, and sink their estates instead of raising them, by such marriages. 2. Thus they were brought to join in worship with them; they served their gods, (v. 6.) *Baalim and the groves*; (v. 7.) that is, the images that were worshipped in groves of thick trees, which were a sort of natural temples. In such unequal matches there is more reason to fear that the bad will corrupt the good, than to hope that the good will reform the bad; as it is in laying two pears together, the one rotten, and the other sound. When they inclined to worship

other gods, they *forgot the Lord their God*. In complaisance to their new relations, they talked of nothing but Baalim and the groves; so that by degrees they lost the remembrance of the true God, and forgot there was such a Being, and what obligations they lay under to him. In nothing is the corrupt memory of man more treacherous than in this, that it is apt to forget God; because out of sight, he is out of mind; and here begins all the wickedness that is in the world; they have *perverted their way*, for they have *forgotten the Lord their God*.

8. Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years. 9. And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 10. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim. 11. And the land had rest forty years: and Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

We now come to the records of the government of the particular judges, the first of which was Othniel, in whom the story of this book is knit to that of Joshua, for even in Joshua's time, Othniel began to be famous; by which it appears that it was not long after Israel's settlement in Canaan, before their purity began to be corrupted, and their peace (by consequence) disturbed. And those who have taken pains to inquire into the sacred chronology, are generally agreed, that the Danites' idolatry, and the war with the Benjamites for abusing the Levite's concubine, though related in the latter end of this book, happened about this time, under or before Othniel's government, who, though a judge, was not such a king in Israel, as would keep men from doing what was *right in their own eyes*.

In this short narrative of Othniel's government, we have,

I. The distress that Israel was brought into for their sin, v. 8. God, being justly displeased with them for plucking up the hedge of their peculiarity, and laying themselves in common with the nations, plucked up the hedge of their protection, and laid them open to the nations; set them to sale as goods he would part with, and the first that laid hands on them was Chushan-rishathaim, king of that Syria which lay between the two great rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, thence called *Mesopotamia*; which signifies *the midst of rivers*. It is probable that this was a warlike prince, and, aiming to enlarge his dominions, invaded the two tribes first on the other side Jordan that lay next him, and afterward, perhaps by degrees, penetrated in the heart of the country, and, as far as he went, put them under contribution, exacting it with rigour, and perhaps quartering soldiers upon them. Laban was of this country, who oppressed Jacob with a hard service; but it lay at such a distance, that one could not have thought Israel's trouble should have come from such a far country, which shows so much the more of the hand of God in it.

II. Their return to God in this distress. *When he slew them, then they sought him* whom before they had slighted. *The children of Israel*, even the generality of them, *cried unto the Lord*, v. 9. At first, they made light of their trouble, and thought they could easily shake off the yoke of a prince at such a distance; but when it continued eight years, they began to feel the smart of it, and then they cried under it, who before had laughed at it. They who in the day of their mirth had cried to Baalim and Ashtaroth, now that they are in trouble, cry to the Lord from whom they had revolted, whose justice brought them into this trouble, and whose power and favour alone could help them out of it. Affliction makes those cry to God with importunity, who before would scarcely speak to him.

III. God's return in mercy to them for their deliverance. Though need drove them to him, he did not the more reject their prayers, but graciously raised up a *deliverer*, or *saviour*, as the word is. Observe, 1. Who the deliverer was; it was Othniel, who married Caleb's daughter; one of the old stock that had *seen the works of the Lord*, and had himself, no question, kept his integrity, and secretly lamented the apostasy of his people, but waited for a divine call to appear publicly for the redress of their grievances. He was now, we may suppose, far advanced in years, when God raised him up to this honour; but the decays of age were no hinderance to his usefulness, when God had work for him to do. 2. Whence he had his commission, not of man, or by man; but *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, v. 10. The spirit of wisdom and courage to qualify him for the service, and a spirit of power to excite him to it, so as to give him and others full satisfaction that it was the will of God he should engage in it, the Chaldee says, *The spirit of prophecy remained on him*. 3. What method he took; he first judged Israel, reproved them, called them to an account for their sins, and reformed them, and then went out to war; that was the right method. Let sin at home be conquered, that worst of enemies, and then enemies abroad will be more easily dealt with. Thus let Christ be our Judge and Law-giver, and then *he will save us*, and on no other terms, Isa. 33. 22. 4. What good success he had. He prevailed to break the yoke of the oppression, and, as it should seem, to break the neck of the oppressor; for it is said, *The Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim into his hand*. Now was Judah, of which tribe Othniel was, *as a lion's whelp gone up from the prey*. 5. The happy consequence of Othniel's good services. The land, though not getting ground, yet had rest, and some fruits of the reformation, forty years; and it had been perpetual, if they had kept close to God and their duty.

12. And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. 13. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm-trees. 14. So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. 15. But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. 16. But Ehud made him a dagger, which

had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh. 17. And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab; and Eglon was a very fat man. 18. And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present. 19. But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him. 20. And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself, alone: and Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. 21. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 22. And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. 23. Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. 24. When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. 25. And they tarried till they were ashamed; and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour: therefore they took a key and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth. 26. And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. 27. And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. 28. And he said unto them, Follow after me; for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. 29. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. 30. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Ehud is the next of the judges whose achievements are related in this history, and here is an account of his actions.

I. When Israel sins again, God raises up a new oppressor, v. 12. .14. It was an aggravation of their wickedness, that they did evil again, after they had smarted so long for their former iniquities, promised so fair when Othniel judged them,

and received so much mercy from God in their deliverance. What, and after all this, again to break his commandments! Was the disease obstinate to all the methods of cure, both corrosives and lenitives? It seems it was. Perhaps they thought they might make the more bold with their own sins, because they saw themselves in no danger from their old oppressor, the powers of that kingdom were weakened and brought low; but God made them know that he had a variety of rods wherewith to chastise them, he *strengthened Eglon king of Moab against them*. This oppressor lay nearer them than the former, and therefore would be the more mischievous to them; God's judgments thus approached them gradually, to bring them to repentance. When Israel dwelt in tents, but kept their integrity, Balak, king of Moab, that would have strengthened himself against them, was baffled; but now that they had forsaken God, and worshipped the gods of the nations round about them, (and perhaps those of the Moabites among the rest,) here was another king of Moab whom God strengthened against them, put power into his hands, though a wicked man, that he might be a scourge of Israel; *the staff in his hand*, with which he beat Israel, was, *God's indignation; howbeit he meant not so, neither did his heart think so*, Isa. 10. 6. 7. Israelites did ill, and, we may suppose, Moabites did worse; yet because God punishes the sins of his own people in this world, that, the flesh being destroyed, the spirit may be saved, Israel is weakened, and Moab strengthened against them. God would not suffer the Israelites, when they were the stronger, to distress the Moabites, nor give them any disturbance though they were idolaters; (Deut. 2. 9.) yet now he suffered the Moabites to distress Israel, and strengthened them on purpose that they might: *Thy judgments, O God, are a great deep*. The king of Moab took to his assistance the Ammonites and Amalekites, (v. 13.) and that strengthened him; and we are here told how they prevailed.

1. They beat them in the field, they *went and smote Israel*, (v. 13.) not only these tribes that lay next them on the other side of Jordan, who, though first settled, being frontier-tribes, were most disturbed; but those also within Jordan, for they made themselves masters of the *city of palm-trees*, which, it is probable, was a strong-hold erected near the place where Jericho had stood, for that was so called. (Deut. 34. 3.) into which the Moabites put a garrison, to be a bridle upon Israel, and to secure the passes of Jordan, for the preservation of the communication with their own country. It was well for the Kenites that they had left this city, (ch. 1. 16.) before it fell into the hands of the enemy. See how quickly the Israelites lost that by their own sin, which they had gained by miracles of divine mercy.

2. They made them to serve, (v. 14.) that is, exacted tribute from them, either the fruits of the earth in kind, or money in lieu of them. They neglected the service of God, and did not pay him his tribute; thus therefore did God recover from them that *wine and oil*, that silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal, Hos. 2. 8. What should have been paid to the divine *grace*, and was not, was distrained for, and paid to the divine *justice*. The former servitude (v. 8.) lasted but eight years, this eighteen; for if lesser troubles do not do the work, God will send greater.

II. When Israel prays again, God raises up a new deliverer, (v. 15.) his name *Ehud*. We are here told, 1. It was a Benjaminite. The city of palm-trees lay within the lot of this tribe, by which, it is probable, they suffered the most, and therefore stirred first to shake off the yoke. It is supposed by

the chronologer, that the Israelites' war with Benjamin for the wickedness of Gibeah, by which that whole tribe was reduced to six hundred men, happened before this, so that we may well think that tribe to be now the weakest of all the tribes; yet out of it God raised up this deliverer, in token of his being perfectly reconciled to them, to manifest his own power in ordaining strength out of weakness, and that he might bestow *more abundant honour upon that part which lacked*, 1 Cor. 12. 24. 2. That he was left-handed, as it seems, many of that tribe were, ch. 20. 16. Benjamin signifies *the son of the right hand*, and yet multitudes of them were left-handed; for men's natures do not always answer their names. The LXX. say, he was an ambidexter, one that could use both hands alike, supposing that that was an advantage to him in the action he was called to; but the Hebrew phrase, that he was *shut of his right hand*, intimates that either through disease or disuse, he made little or no use of that, but of his left hand only; and so was the less fit for war, because he must needs handle his sword but awkwardly; yet God chose this left-handed man to be the man of his right hand, whom he would make *strong for himself*, Ps. 80. 17. It was *God's right hand* that gained Israel the victory, (Ps. 44. 3.) not the right of the instruments he employed.

We are here told what Ehud did for the deliverance of Israel out of the hands of the Moabites. He saved the oppressed by destroying the oppressors, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and the set time to favour Israel was come.

(1.) He put to death Eglon the king of Moab; I say, *put him to death*; not he murdered or assassinated him, but, as a judge, or minister of divine justice, executed the judgments of God upon him, as an implacable enemy to God and Israel. This story is particularly related.

[1.] He had a fair occasion of access to him; being an ingenious active man, and fit to stand before kings, his people chose him to carry a present in the name of all Israel, over and above their tribute, to their great lord the king of Moab, that they might find favour in his eyes, v. 15. The present is called *mincha* in the original, which is the word used in the law for the offerings that were presented to God, to obtain his favour; these the children of Israel had not offered in their season, to the God that loved them; and now, to punish them for their neglect, they are laid under a necessity of bringing their offerings to a heathen prince that hated them. Ehud went on his errand to Eglon, offered his present with the usual ceremony, and expressions of dutiful respect, the better to colour what he intended, and to prevent suspicion.

[2.] It should seem, from the first, he designed to be the death of him, God putting it into his heart, and letting him know also that the motion was from himself, by the Spirit that came upon him, the impulses of which carried with them their own evidence, and so gave him full satisfaction both as to the lawfulness and the success of this daring attempt, of both which he would have had reason enough to doubt. If he be sure that God bids him do it, he is sure both that he may do it, and that he shall do it; for a command from God is sufficient to bear us out, and bring us off, both against our conscience, and against all the world. That he compassed and imagined the death of this tyrant, appears by the preparation he made of a weapon for the purpose; a short dagger, but half a yard long, like a bayonet, which might easily be concealed under his clothes, (v. 10.) perhaps, because none were suffered to come near the king with their swords by their sides. This he wore on his right thigh, that it might be the more ready to his left hand, and might be the less suspected.

[3.] He contrived how to be alone with him; which he might the more easily be, now that he had not only made himself known to him, but ingratiated himself by the present, and the compliments, which, perhaps, on that occasion, he had passed upon him. Observe how he laid his plot.

First, He concealed his design even from his own attendants; brought them part of the way, and then ordered them to go forward towards home, while he himself, as if he had forgot something behind him, went back to the king of Moab's court, v. 18. There needed but one hand to do the execution; had more been engaged they could not so safely have kept counsel, nor so easily have made an escape. *Secondly*, He returned from the quarries by Gilgal, (v. 16.) from the *graven images* (so it is in the margin) which were with Gilgal; set up perhaps by the Moabites with the twelve stones which Joshua had set up there. Some suggest that the sight of these idols stirred up in him such an indignation against the king of Moab, as put him upon the execution of that design, which otherwise he had thought to have left fall for the present. Or, perhaps, he came so far as to these images, that telling from what place he returned, the king of Moab might be the more apt to believe he had a message from God. *Thirdly*, He begged a private audience, and obtained it in a withdrawing room, here called a *summer parlour*. He told the king he had a secret errand to him, who, thereupon, ordered all his attendants to withdraw, v. 19. Whether he expected to receive some private instructions from an oracle, or some private information concerning the present state of Israel, as if Ehud would betray his country, it was a very unwise thing for him to be all alone with a stranger, and whom he had reason to look upon as an enemy; but those that are marked for ruin, are infatuated, and their *hearts hid from understanding*; God deprives them of discretion.

[4.] When he had him alone, he soon despatched him. His summer parlour, where he used to indulge himself in ease and luxury, was the place of his execution. *First*, Ehud demands his attention to a *message from God*, (v. 20.) and that message was a dagger: God sends to us by the judgment of his hand, as well as by the judgment of his mouth. *Secondly*, Eglon pays respect to a message from God. Though a king; though a heathen king; though rich and powerful; though now tyrannizing over the people of God; though a fat unwieldy man, that could not easily rise, nor stand long; though in private, and what he did not under observation; yet, when he expected to receive orders from heaven, he rose out of his seat; whether it was low and easy, or whether it was high and stately, he quitted it, and stood up when God was about to speak to him, thereby owning God his Superior. This shames the irreverence of many who are called *christians*, and yet when a message from God is delivered to them, study to show, by all the marks of carefulness, how little they regard it. Ehud, in calling what he had to do, a *message from God*, plainly avouches a divine commission for it; and God's inclining Eglon to stand up to it, did both confirm the commission, and facilitate the execution. *Thirdly*, The message was delivered, not to his ear, but immediately, and literally, to his heart, into which the fatal knife was thrust, and was left there, v. 21, 22. His extreme fatness, made him unable to resist, or to help himself; probably, it was the effect of his luxury and excess; and when *the fat closed up the blade*, God would by that circumstance show how those that pamper the body, do but prepare for their own misery. However, it was an emblem of his carnal security and senselessness. His heart was as fat as grease, and in that he thought himself enclosed. See Ps. 119. 70.—17.

10. Eglon signifies a *calf*, and he fell like a fatted calf, by the knife, an acceptable sacrifice to divine justice. Notice is taken of the coming out of the dirt or dung, that the death of this proud tyrant may appear the more ignominious and shameful. He that had been so very nice and curious about his own body, to keep it easy and clean, shall now be found wallowing in his own blood and excrements. Thus does God pour contempt upon princes. Now this act of Ehud's, 1. May justify itself, because he had special direction from God to do it, and it was agreeable to the usual method, which, under that dispensation, God took to avenge his people of their enemies, and to manifest to the world his own justice. But, 2. It will by no means justify any now in doing the like. No such commissions are now given, and to pretend to them is to blaspheme God, and make him patronise the worst of villanies. Christ bid Peter sheathe the sword, and we find not that he bid him draw it again.

[5.] Providence wonderfully favoured his escape, when he had done the execution. *First*, The tyrant fell silently, without any shriek or outcry, which might have been overheard by his servants at a distance. How silently does he go down to the pit, choked up, it may be, with his own fat, which stifled his dying groans, though he had made so great a noise in the world, and had been the *terror of the mighty in the land of the living*. *Secondly*, The heroic executioner of this vengeance, with such a presence of mind, as discovered not only no consciousness of guilt, but a strong confidence in the divine protection, shut the doors after him, took the key with him, and passed through the guards with such an air of innocence, and boldness, and unconcernedness, as made them not at all to suspect his having done any thing amiss. *Thirdly*, The servants that attended in the antechamber, coming to the door of the inner parlour, when Ehud was gone, to know their master's pleasure, and finding it locked, and all quiet, they concluded he was laid down to sleep, and covered his feet upon his couch, and was gone to consult his pillow about the message he had received, and to dream upon it, (v. 24.) and therefore would not offer to open the door. Thus by their care not to disturb his sleep, they lost the opportunity of revenging his death. See what comes of men's taking state too much, and obliging those about them to keep their distance; some time or other, it may come against them more than they think of. *Fourthly*, The servants at length opened the door, and found their master had *slept indeed his long sleep*, v. 25. The horror of this tragical spectacle, and the confusion it must needs put them into, to reflect upon their own inconsideration in not opening the door sooner, quite put by the thoughts of sending pursuers after him that had done it, whom now they despaired of overtaking. *Lastly*, Ehud by this means made his escape to Sierath, a *thick wood*; so some, v. 26. It is not said any where in this story, what was the place in which Eglon lived now; but there being no mention of Ehud's passing and repassing Jordan, I am inclined to think that Eglon had left his own country of Moab, on the other side Jordan, and made his principal residence at this time in the city of palm-trees, within the land of Canaan, a richer country than his own, and that there he was slain, and then the quarries by Gilgal were not far off him. There where he had settled himself, and thought he had sufficiently fortified himself to lord it over the people of God, there he was cut off, and proved to be fed for the slaughter like a *lamb in a larger place*.

(2.) Ehud having slain the king of Moab, gave a total rout to the forces of the Moabites that were among them, and so effectually shook off the yoke

of their oppression. [1.] He raised an army immediately in mount Ephraim, at some distance from the head-quarters of the Moabites, and headed them himself, *v.* 27. The trumpet he blew was indeed a jubilee-trumpet, proclaiming liberty, and a joyful sound it was to the oppressed Israelites, who for a long time had heard no other trumpets than those of their enemies. [2.] Like a pious man, and as one that did all this in faith, he took encouragement himself, and gave encouragement to his soldiers, from the power of God engaged for them; (*v.* 28.) "*Follow me, for the Lord hath delivered your enemies into your hands; we are sure to have God with us, and therefore may go on boldly, and shall go on triumphantly.*" [3.] Like a politic general, he first secured the fords of Jordan, set strong guards upon all those passes, to cut off communications between the Moabites that were in the land of Israel, (for upon them only his design was,) and their own country on the other side Jordan; that if, upon the alarm given them, they resolved to fly, they might not escape thither, and if they resolved to fight, they might not have assistance thence. Thus he shut them up in that land as their prison, in which they were pleasing themselves as their palace and paradise. [4.] He then fell upon them, and put them all to the sword, ten thousand of them, which, it seems, was the number appointed to keep Israel in subjection; (*v.* 29.) *There escaped not a man* of them. And they were the best and choicest of all the king of Moab's forces; all lusty men of bulk and stature, and not only able bodied, but high spirited too, and men of valour, *v.* 20. But neither their strength nor their courage stood them in any stead, when the set time was come for God to deliver them into the hand of Israel. [5.] The consequence of this victory was, that the power of the Moabites was wholly broken in the land of Israel; the country was cleared of these oppressors, and *the land had rest eighty years, v.* 30. We may hope that there was likewise a reformation among them, and a check given to idolatry, by the influence of Ehud, which continued a good part of this time. It was a great while for the land to rest, fourscore years; yet what is that to the saints' everlasting rest in the heavenly Canaan?

31. And after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox-goad: and he also delivered Israel.

When it was said *the land had rest eighty years*, some think it is meant chiefly of that part of the land which lay eastward on the banks of Jordan, which had been oppressed by the Moabites; but it seems, by this passage here, that the other side of the country which lay south-west, was in that time infested by the Philistines, against whom Shamgar made head.

1. It seems Israel needed deliverance, for *he delivered Israel*; how great the distress was, Deborah afterward related in her song, (*ch.* 5, 6.) *that in the days of Shamgar the highways were unoccupied, &c.* That part of the country which lay next to the Philistines was so infested with plunderers, that the people could not travel the roads in safety, but were in danger of being set upon and robbed; nor durst they dwell in the unguarded villages, but were forced to take shelter in the fortified cities.

2. God raised him up to deliver them, as it should seem, while Ehud was yet living, but superannuated. So inconsiderable were the enemies for number, that it seems the killing of six hundred of them amounted to a deliverance of Israel, and so many he slew with an ox-goad, or, as some read it, *a plough-share*. It is probable that he was himself

following the plough, when the Philistines made an inroad upon the country to ravage it, and God put it into his heart to oppose them: the impulse being sudden and strong, and having neither sword nor spear to do execution with, he took the instrument that was next at hand, some of the tools of his plough, and with that killed so many hundred men, and came off unhurt. See here (1.) That God can make those eminently serviceable to his glory and his church's good, whose extraction, education, and employment, are very mean and obscure. He that has the residue of the Spirit, could, when he pleased, make ploughmen judges and generals, and fishermen apostles. (2.) It is no matter how weak the weapon is, if God direct and strengthen the arm. An ox-goad, when God pleases, shall do more than Goliath's sword. And sometimes he chooses to work by such unlikely means, that the excellency of the power may appear to be of God.

CHAP. IV.

The method of the history of Deborah and Barak, (the heroes in this chapter,) is the same with that before. Here is, I. Israel revolted from God, *v.* 1. II. Israel oppressed by Jabin, *v.* 2, 3. III. Israel judged by Deborah, *v.* 4, 5. IV. Israel rescued out of the hands of Jabin. 1. Their deliverance is concerted between Deborah and Barak, *v.* 6. 2. It is accomplished by their joint agency. Barak takes the field; (*v.* 10.) Sisera, Jabin's general, meets him; (*v.* 12, 13.) Deborah encourages him, (*v.* 14.) and God gives him a complete victory. The army routed, *v.* 15, 16. The general forced to flee; (*v.* 17.) and there where he expected shelter, had his life stolen from him by Jael while he was asleep, (*v.* 18.-21.) which completes Barak's triumph, (*v.* 22.) and Israel's deliverance, *v.* 23, 24.

1. **A**ND the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. 2. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. 3. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron: and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

Here is,

I. Israel backsliding from God; They again *did evil in his sight*, forsook his service, and worshipped idols; for that was the sin which now most easily beset them, *v.* 1. See in this, 1. The strange strength of corruption, which hurries men into sin, notwithstanding the most frequent instances of its fatal consequences. The bent to backslide is very hardly restrained. 2. The common ill effects of a long peace. The land had rest eighty years, which should have confirmed them in their religion; but, on the contrary, it made them secure and wanton, and indulgent of those lusts which the worship of the false gods was calculated for the gratification of. Thus *the prosperity of fools destroys them. Jeshurun waxeth fat and kicketh.* 3. The great loss which the people sustain by the death of good governors, *They did evil, because Ehud was dead.* So it may be read. He kept a strict eye upon them, restrained and punished every thing that looked towards idolatry, and kept them close to God's service. But when he was gone, they revolted, fearing him more than God.

II. Israel oppressed by their enemies. When they forsook God, he forsook them; and then they became an easy prey to every spoiler. They alienated themselves from God, as if he were none of their's; and then God alienated them as none of his.

They that threw themselves out of God's service, threw themselves out of his protection. *What has my beloved to do in my house*, when she has thus played the harlot? Jer. 11. 15. He *sold them into the hands of Jabin*, v. 2. This Jabin reigned in Hazor, as another of the same name, and perhaps his ancestor, had done before him, whom Joshua routed, slew, and burnt his city, Josh. 11. 1, 10. But it seems, in process of time, the city was rebuilt, the power regained, the loss retrieved, and by degrees, the king of Hazor becomes able to tyrannize over Israel, who by sin had lost all their advantage against the Canaanites. This servitude was longer than either of the former, and much more grievous. Jabin, and his general Sisera, did mightily oppress Israel. That which aggravated the oppression was, 1. That this enemy was nearer them than any of the former, in their borders, in their bowels; and by that means, had the more opportunity to do them a mischief. 2. That they were the natives of the country, who bore an implacable enmity to them, for invading and dispossessing them; and when they had them in their power, would be so much the more cruel and mischievous toward them in revenge of the old quarrel. 3. That these Canaanites had, when time was, been conquered and subdued by Israel, were of old sentenced to be their servants, (Gen. 9. 25.) and might now have been under their feet, and utterly incapable of giving them any disturbance, if their own slothfulness, cowardice, and unbelief, had not suffered them thus to get head. To be oppressed by those whom their fathers had conquered, and whom they themselves had foolishly spared, could not but be very grievous.

III. Israel returning to their God; They *cried unto the Lord*, when distress drove them to him; and they saw no other way of relief. Those that slight God in their prosperity, will find themselves under a necessity of seeking him when they are in trouble.

4. And Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. 5. And she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6. And she sent and called Barak, the son of Abinoam, out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, *saying*, Go, and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? 7. And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. 8. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, *then* I will not go. 9. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

The year of the redeemed is at length come, when Israel was to be delivered out of the hands of

Jabin, and restored again to their liberty; which, we may suppose, the northern tribes, that lay nearest the oppressor, and felt most the effects of his fury, did in a particular manner cry to God for. *For the oppression of the poor, and the sighing of the needy, now will God arise*. Now here we have,

I. The preparation of the people for their deliverance, by the prophetic conduct and government of Deborah, v. 4, 5. Her name signifies a *bee*; and she answered her name by her industry, sagacity, and great usefulness to the public, her sweetness to her friends, and sharpness to her enemies. She is said to be *the wife of Lapidoth*: the termination is not commonly found in the name of a man; therefore some make it the name of a place, she was a *woman of Lapidoth*. Others take it appellatively; Lapidoth signifies *lamps*. The rabbins say, she had employed herself in making wicks for the lamps of the tabernacle; and having stooped to that mean office for God, she was afterwards thus preferred. Or, she was a woman of *illuminations*, or of *splendors*: one that was extraordinary knowing and wise, and so came to be very eminent and illustrious. Concerning her we are here told, 1. That she was intimately acquainted with God: she was a *prophetess*; one that was instructed in divine knowledge by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God, and had gifts of wisdom, which she attained to not in an ordinary way; she *heard the words of God*, and probably *saw the visions of the Almighty*. 2. That she was entirely devoted to the services of Israel. She judged Israel at the time that Jabin oppressed them; and perhaps, for being a woman, she was the more easily permitted by the oppressor to do it. She judged, not as a princess, by any civil authority conferred upon her, but as a prophetess, and as God's mouth to them, correcting abuses, and redressing grievances, especially those which related to the worship of God. The children of Israel came up to her from all parts for judgment, not so much for the deciding of controversies between man and man, as for advice in the reformation of what was amiss in things pertaining to God. Those among them, who before had secretly lamented the impieties and idolatries of their neighbours, but knew not where to apply themselves for the restraining of them, now made their complaints to Deborah; who, by the sword of the Spirit, showing them the judgment of God, reduced and reclaimed many, and excited and animated the magistrates in their respective districts to put the laws in execution. It is said she *dwelt*, or, as some read it, *sat* under a palm-tree, called ever after, from her, *the palm-tree of Deborah*. Either she had her house under a tree, a mean habitation which would couch under a tree; or she had her judgment-seat in the open air, under the shadow of that tree; which was an emblem of the justice she sat there to administer, which will thrive and grow against opposition, as palms under pressure. Josephus says, that the children of Israel came to Deborah to desire her to pray to God for them, that they might be delivered out of the hand of Jabin; and Samuel is said at one particular time to judge Israel in Mizpeh, that is, bring them back again to God, when they made the same address to him upon a like occasion, 1 Sam. 7. 6, 8.

II. The project laid for their deliverance. When the children of Israel came to her for judgment, with her they found salvation. So they that seek to God for grace, shall have grace and peace; grace and comfort, grace and glory. She was not herself fit to command an army in person, being a woman; but she nominates one that was fit, Barak of Naphtali, who, it is probable, had already signified himself in some rencontres with the forces of the oppressor, living near him, (for Hazor and Harosheth

lay within the lot of that tribe,) and thereby had gained a reputation and interest among his people. Some struggles, we may suppose, that brave man had used toward the shaking off of the yoke, but could not effect it till he had his commission and instructions from Deborah. He could do nothing without her head, nor she without his hands; but both together made a complete deliverer; and effected a complete deliverance. The greatest and best are not self-sufficient, but need one another.

1. By God's direction, she orders Barak to raise an army, and engage Jabin's forces, that were under Sisera's command, *v. 6, 7*. Barak, it may be, had been meditating some great attempt against the common enemy; a spark of generous fire was glowing in his breast, and fain he would do something to the purpose for his people, and for the cities of his God. But two things discouraged him: (1.) He wanted a commission to levy forces; that therefore Deborah here gives him under the broad seal of heaven; which, as a prophetess, she had a warrant to affix to it. "*Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded it?*" Yes, certainly he has, take my word for it." Some think she intends this as an appeal to Barak's own heart: "Has not God, by a secret whisper to thyself, given thee some intimation of his purpose, to make use of thee as an instrument in his hand to save Israel? Hast not thou felt some impulse of this kind upon thine own spirit?" If so, the spirit of prophecy in Deborah confirms the spirit of a soldier in Barak; *Go and draw toward mount Tabor*. [1.] She directs him what number of men to raise, ten thousand; and let him not fear that those will be too few, when God hath said, he will by them save Israel. [2.] Whence he should raise them; only out of his own tribe, and that of Zebulun, next adjoining; those two counties should furnish him with an army sufficient, he need not stay to go further. And, *lastly*, She orders him where to make his rendezvous; at mount Tabor, in his own neighbourhood. (2.) When he had an army raised, he knew not how he should have an opportunity of engaging the enemy, who, perhaps, declined fighting, having heard that Israel, if they had but courage enough to make head against the enemy, seldom failed of success. "Well," says Deborah, "in the name of God, *I will draw unto thee Sisera and his army*." She assures him that the matter should be determined by one pitched battle, and should not be long in the doing. [1.] In mentioning the power of the enemy, Sisera, a celebrated General, bold and experienced, his chariots, his iron chariots, and his multitude of soldiers, she obliges Barak to fortify himself with the utmost degree of resolution; for the enemy he was to engage was a very formidable one. It is good to know the worst, that we may provide accordingly. But, [2.] In fixing the very place to which Sisera would draw his army, she *gave him a sign*, which might help to confirm his faith when he came to engage. It was a contingent thing, and depended upon Sisera's own will: but when afterward he should see that falling out just as Deborah had foretold, he might from thence infer, that certainly in the rest she said she spoke under a divine direction, which would be a great encouragement to him; especially because with this, [3.] She gave him an express promise of success; *I will* (that is, God will, in whose name I speak) *deliver them into thy hand*. So when he saw them draw up against him, according to Deborah's word, he might be confident, that, according to her word, he should soon see them fallen before him. Observe, God *draws them to him* only that he might *deliver them into his hand*. When Sisera drew his forces together, he designed the destruction of Israel; but God *gathered them as sheaves into the floor*, for their own de-

struction, Mic. 4. 11, 12. *Assemble yourselves, and ye shall be broken to pieces*, Isa. 8. 9. See Rev. 19. 17, 18.

2. At Barak's request, she promises to go along with him to the field of battle. (1.) Barak insists much upon the necessity of her presence, which would be better to him than a concert of war; (*v. 8.*) "*If thou wilt go with me to direct and advise me, and in every difficult case to let me know God's mind, then I will go with all my heart, and not fear the chariots of iron;*" otherwise not. Some make this to be the language of a weak faith; he could not take her word, unless he had her with him in pawn, as it were, for performance. It seems rather to arise from a conviction of the necessity of God's presence and continual conduct, a pledge and earnest of which he would reckon Deborah's presence to be; and therefore begged thus earnestly for it. "*If thou go not up with me, in token of God's going with me, carry me not up hence.*" Nothing would be a greater satisfaction to him, than to have the prophetess with him to animate the soldiers, and to be consulted as an oracle upon all occasions. (2.) Deborah promised to go with him, *v. 9*. No toil nor peril shall discourage her from doing the utmost that becomes her to do for the service of her country. She would not send him where she would not go herself. Those that in God's name call others to their duty, should be very ready to assist them in it. Deborah was the weaker vessel, yet had the stronger faith. But though she agrees to go with Barak, if he insist upon it, she gives him a hint proper enough to move a soldier not to insist upon it. *The journey thou undertakest* (so confident was she of the success, that she calls his engaging in war but the undertaking of a journey) *shall not be for thine honour*; not so much for thine honour as if thou hadst gone thyself; for *the Lord shall sell Sisera* (now his turn comes to be sold as Israel was, *v. 2*. by way of reprisal) *into the hands of a woman*; that is, [1.] The world would ascribe the victory to the hand of Deborah; this he might himself foresee. [2.] God (to correct his weakness) would complete the victory by the hand of Jael; which would be some eclipse to his glory. But Barak values the satisfaction of his mind, and the good success of his enterprise, more than his honour; and therefore will by no means drop his request. He dares not fight unless he have Deborah with him to direct him, and pray for him. She therefore stood to her word with a masculine courage; this noble heroine *arose and went with Barak*.

10. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him. 11. Now Heber the Kenite, *which was* of the children of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, *which is* by Kedesh. 12. And they showed Sisera that Barak, the son of Abinoam, was gone up to mount Tabor. 13. And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, *even* nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that *were* with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon. 14. And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for *this is* the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak

went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. 15. And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword, before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away on his feet. 16. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left.

Here,

I. Barak beats up for volunteers, and soon has his quota of men ready, v. 10. Deborah had appointed him to raise an army of ten thousand men, (v. 6.) and so many he has presently at *his feet*, following him, and subject to his command. God is said to call us to *his feet*, (Isa. 41. 2.) that is into obedience to him. Some think it intimates that they were all footmen, and so the armies of the Jews generally were; which made the disproportion of strength between them and the enemy (who had horses and chariots) very great, and the victory the more illustrious; but the presence of God and his prophesying was abundantly sufficient to balance that disproportion. Barak had his men at *his feet*, which intimates their cheerfulness, and readiness to attend him, *whithersoever he went*, Rev. 14. 4. Though the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were chiefly depended on, yet it appears, by Deborah's song, that there were some come in to him from other tribes, Manasseh and Issachar; and more expected that came not, from Reuben, Dan, and Asher, *ch.* 5. 14. 17. But these are overlooked here: and we are only told, that to make his ten thousand effective men indeed, *Deborah went up with him*. The 11th verse, concerning the remove of Heber, one of the families of the Kenites, out of the wilderness of Judah, in the south, where those families had fixed themselves, (*ch.* 1. 16.) into the northern country, comes in for the sake of what was to follow concerning the exploit of Jael, a wife of that family.

II. Sisera, upon the notice of Barak's motions, takes the field with a very numerous and powerful army, v. 12, 13. *They showed Sisera*, that is, it was showed him. Yet some think it refers to the Kenites, mentioned immediately before, v. 11. They gave Sisera notice of Barak's rendezvous, there being peace at this time between Jabin and that family, v. 17. Whether they intended it as a kindness to him or no, it served to accomplish what God had said by Deborah, (v. 7.) *I will draw unto thee Sisera*. Sisera's confidence was chiefly in his chariots; therefore particular notice is taken of them, *nine hundred chariots of iron*, which, with the scythes fastened to their axle-trees, when they were driven into an army of footmen, did terrible execution. So ingenious have men been in inventing methods of destroying one another, to gratify those lusts *from which come wars and fightings*.

III. Deborah gives orders to engage the enemy, v. 14. Josephus says, that when Barak saw Sisera's army drawn up, and attempting to surround the mountain, on the top of which he and his forces lay encamped, his heart quite failed him, and he determined to retire to a place of greater safety; but Deborah animated him to make a descent upon Sisera, assuring him that this was the day marked out in the divine counsels for his defeat. Now they appear most threatening, they are ripe for ruin. The thing is as sure to be done, as if it were done already: *The Lord hath delivered Sisera into thy hand*. See how the work and honour of this great action

are divided between Deborah and Barak; she, as the head, *gives the word*, he, as the hand, *doeth the work*. Thus doth God dispense his gifts variously, 1 Cor. 12. 4, &c. But though ordinarily *the head of the woman is the man*, (1 Cor. 11. 2.) he that has the residue of the Spirit was pleased to cross hands, and to put the head upon the woman's shoulders, choosing the weak things of the world to shame the mighty, that no flesh might glory in his presence. It was well for Barak that he had Deborah with him; for she made up what was defective, 1. In his conduct, by telling him, *This is the day*. 2. In his courage, by assuring him of God's presence; "*Is not the Lord gone out before thee?* Darest not thou follow, when thou hast God himself for thy Leader?" Note, (1.) In every undertaking it is good to be satisfied that God goes before us, that we are in the way of our duty, and under his direction. (2.) If we have ground to hope that God goes before us, we ought to go on with courage and cheerfulness. "Be not dismayed at the difficulties thou meetest with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him; for *is not the Lord gone out before thee?* Follow him fully then."

IV. God himself routs the enemy's army, v. 15. Barak, in obedience to Deborah's orders, went down into the valley, though there upon the plain the iron chariots would have so much the more advantage against him, quitting his fastness upon the mountain in dependence upon the divine power: for *in vain is salvation hoped for from hills and mountains; in the Lord alone is the salvation of his people*, Jer. 3. 23. And he was not deceived in his confidence; *The Lord discomfited Sisera*. It was not so much the bold and surprising alarm which Barak gave their camp, that dispirited and dispersed them, but God's terror seized their spirits, and put them into an unaccountable confusion. *The stars*, it seems, fought against them, *ch.* 5. 20. Josephus says, that a violent storm of hail, which beat in their faces, gave them this rout, disabled them and drove them back; so that they became a very easy prey to the army of Israel: and Deborah's words were made good; "*The Lord has delivered them into thy hand*"; it is now in thy power to do what thou wilt with them."

V. Barak bravely improves his advantage, follows the blow with an undaunted resolution, and an unwearied diligence, prosecutes the victory, and pursues the scattered forces, even to their general's head quarters at Harosheth, (v. 16.) and spares none whom God had delivered into his hand to be destroyed; *There was not a man left*. When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts we must bestir ourselves; and when by his grace he gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness and resolution, and carry on the holy war with vigour.

17. Howbeit, Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for *there was peace* between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in my lord, turn in to me; fear not: and when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. 19. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty: and she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. 20. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent; and it

shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. 21. Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground; (for he was fast asleep, and weary;) so he died. 22. And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples. 23. So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. 24. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan.

We have seen the army of the Canaanites totally routed. It is said, Ps. 83. 9, 10. (where the defeat of this army is pleaded as a precedent for God's doing the like in aftertimes,) that they became *as dung for the earth*. Now here we have,

I. The fall of their general, Sisera, captain of the host, in whom it is likely, Jabin their king put an entire confidence, and therefore was not himself present in the action. Let us trace the steps of this mighty man's fall.

1. He quitted his chariot, and took to his feet, v. 15, 17. His chariots had been his pride and his confidence; and we may suppose he had therefore despised and defied the armies of the living God, because they were all on foot, and had neither chariot nor horse, as he had; justly therefore is he thus made ashamed of his confidence, and forced to quit it, and thinks himself *then* most safe and easy, when he is got clear of his chariot, though we may well suppose it the best made, and best drawn, of any of them. Thus are they disappointed who rest on the creature; like a broken reed, it not only breaks under them, but runs into their hand, and pierces them with many sorrows. The idol may quickly become a burthen; (Isa. 46. 1.) and what we were sick for, God can make us sick of. How sneakingly doth Sisera look, now he is dismounted. It is hard to say whether he blushes or trembles more. Put not your trust in princes, if they may so soon be brought to this; if he who but lately trusted to his arms with so much assurance, must now trust to his heels only with so little.

2. He fled for shelter in the tents of the Kenites, having no strong hold, nor any place of his own in reach to retire to. The mean and solitary way of the Kenites' living perhaps, he had formerly despised and ridiculed, and the more, because religion was kept up among them; yet now he is glad to put himself under the protection of one of these tents; and he chooses the wife's tent or apartment, either because less suspected, or because it happened to be next to him, and the first he came to, v. 17. And that which encouraged him to go thither, was, that at this time there was peace between his master and the house of Heber: not that there was any league offensive and defensive between them, only at present there was no indications of hostility. Jabin did them no harm, did not oppress them as he did the Israelites; their plain, quiet harmless way of living, making them not suspected or feared: and perhaps God so ordering it, as a recompense for their con-

stant adherence to the true religion. Sisera thought he might therefore be safe among them; not considering, that though they themselves suffered not by Jabin's power, they heartily sympathized with the Israel of God that did.

3. Jael invited him in, and bid him very welcome. Probably she stood at the tent door, to inquire what news from the army; and what the success of the battle was, which was fought not far off. (1.) She invited him in. Perhaps she stood waiting for an opportunity to show kindness to any distressed Israelites, if there should have been occasion for it; but seeing Sisera come in great haste, panting and out of breath, she invited him to come and repose himself in her tent; in which, while she seemed to design the relieving of his fatigue, perhaps she really intended the retarding of his flight: that he might fall into the hands of Barak, who was now in a hot chase of him; (v. 18.) and it may well be questioned, whether she had at first any thought of taking away his life, but rather God afterwards put it into her heart. (2.) She made very much of him, and seemed mighty careful to have him easy, as her invited guest. Was he weary? she finds him a very convenient place to repose himself in, and recruit his strength. Was he thirsty? well he might. Did he want a little water to cool his tongue? the best liquor the tent afforded was at his service, and that was milk, (v. 19.) which we may suppose, he drank heartily of; and being refreshed with it, was the better disposed to sleep. Was he cold or afraid of catching cold: or did he desire to be hid from the pursuers, if they should search that tent? she covered him with a mantle, v. 18. All expressions of care for his safety. Only, when he desired her to tell a lie for him, and to say he was not there, she declined making any such promise, v. 20. We must not sin against God, nor not to oblige those we would show ourselves most observant of. *Lastly*, We must suppose she kept her tent as quiet as she could, and free from noise, that he might sleep the sooner and the faster. And how was Sisera least safe, when he was most secure. How uncertain and precarious is human life! and what assurance can we have of it, when it may so easily be betrayed by those with whom it is trusted; and they may prove its destroyers, who we hoped would have been its protectors! It is best making God our Friend, for he will not deceive us.

4. When he lay fast asleep, she drove a long nail through his temple; so fastened his head to the ground, and killed him, v. 21. And though this was enough to do his business, yet to make sure work, (if we translate it right, *ch.* 5. 26.) she cut off his head, and left it nailed there. Whether she designed this or no when she invited him into her tent, does not appear; probably the thought was darted into her mind when she saw him lie so fair to receive such a fatal blow; and, doubtless, the thought brought with it evidence sufficient that it came not from Satan, as a murderer and destroyer, but from God, as righteous Judge and Avenger; so much of brightness and heavenly light did she perceive in the inducements to it that offered themselves, the honour of God, and the deliverance of Israel, and nothing of the blackness of malice, hatred, or personal revenge. (1.) It was a divine power that enabled her to do it, and inspired her with a more than manly courage. What if her hand should shake, and she should miss her blow? What if he should awake when she was attempting it? Or suppose some of his own attendants should follow him, and surprise her in the fact, how dearly would she and all her's be made to pay for it? Yet, obtaining help of God, she does it effectually. [2.] It was a divine warrant that justified her in the doing of it; and therefore, since no such extraordinary commissions

can now be pretended, it ought not in any case to be imitated. The laws of friendship and hospitality must be religiously observed, and we must abhor the thought of betraying any whom we have invited and encouraged to put a confidence in us. And as to this act of Jael's, (like that of Ehud's in the chapter before,) we have reason to think she was conscious of such a divine impulse upon her spirit to do it, as did abundantly satisfy herself (and it ought therefore to satisfy us) that it was well done. God's judgments are a great deep. The instrument of this execution was a nail of the tent, that is, one of the great pins with which the tent, or the stakes of it, were fastened. They often removed their tents; she had been used to drive these nails, and therefore knew how to do it the more dexterously on this great occasion. He that had thought to have destroyed Israel with his many iron chariots, is himself destroyed with one iron nail. Thus do the weak things of the world confound the mighty. See here Jael's glory, and Sisera's shame. The great commander dies, (1.) In his sleep, fast asleep, and weary. It comes in as a reason why he stirred not to make any resistance. So fettered was he in the chains of sleep, that he could not find his hands. Thus *the stout-hearted are spoiled at thy rebuke, O God of Jacob; they are cast into a deep sleep*, and so are made to sleep their last, Ps. 76. 5, 6. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength; for when he sleeps, where is it? It is weak, and he can do nothing; a child may insult him then, and steal his life from him; and yet if he sleep not, he is soon spent and weary, and can do nothing neither. These words which we here put in parenthesis, (*for he was weary*,) all the ancient versions read otherwise: *he struggled*, (or started as we say,) *and died*; so the Syriac and Arabic *Exagitans sese mortuus est*. *He fainted and died*; so the Chaldee. *He was darkened and died*; so the LXX. *Consocians morte soporem*, so the vulgar Latin, joining sleep and death together, seeing they are so near akin. *He fainted and died*. He dies, [2.] With his head nailed to the ground, an emblem of his earthly-mindedness. *O curve in terram animæ!* His ear (says Bishop Hall) was fastened so close to the earth, as if his body had been listening what was become of his soul. He dies, [3.] By the hand of a woman. This added to the shame of his death before men; and had he but known it as Abimelech did, (ch. 9. 54.) we may well imagine how much it would have added to the vexation of his own heart.

II. Here is the glory and joy of Israel hereupon.

1. Barak their leader finds his enemy dead; (v. 22.) and very well pleased, no doubt, he was to find his work done so well to his hand, and so much to the glory of God, and the confusion of his enemies. Had he stood too nice upon a point of honour, he would have resented it as an affront to have the general slain by any hand but his; but now he remembered, that this diminution of his honour he was sentenced to undergo, for insisting on Deborah's going with them; *The Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman*; though then it was little thought the prediction would have been fulfilled in such a way as this.

2. Israel is completely delivered out of the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, v. 23, 24. They not only shook off his yoke by this day's victory, but they afterward prosecuted the war against him, till they had destroyed him, he and his nation being by divine appointment devoted to ruin, and not to be spared. The Israelites having soundly smarted for their foolish pity in not doing it before, resolve, now it is in their power, to indulge them no longer, but to make a thorough riddance of them, as a people to whom to show mercy was as contrary to their own interest as it was to God's command; and pro-

bably it was with an eye to the sentence they were under, that this enemy was named three times here in the two last verses, and called *king of Canaan*; for as such he was to be destroyed; and so thoroughly was he destroyed, that I do not remember to read of the kings of Canaan any more after this. The children of Israel had prevented a great deal of mischief, if they had sooner destroyed these Canaanites, as God had both commanded and enabled them; but better be wise late, and by experience, than never wise.

CHAP. V.

This chapter is the triumphant song which was composed and sung upon occasion of that glorious victory which Israel obtained over the forces of Jabin king of Canaan, and the happy consequences of that victory. Probably it was usual then to publish poems upon such occasions, as now; but this only is preserved of all the poems of that age of the Judges because dictated by Deborah a prophetess designed for a psalm of praise then, and a pattern of praise to after ages; and it gives a great deal of light to the history of these times. 1. It begins with praise to God, v. 2, 3. II. The substance of this song transmits the memory of this great achievement. 1. Comparing God's appearances for them on this occasion, with his appearances to them on mount Sinai, v. 4, 5. 2. Magnifying their deliverance, from the consideration of the calamitous condition they had been in, v. 6. .8. 3. Calling those to join in praise, who shared in the benefits of the success, v. 9. .13. 4. Reflecting honour upon those tribes that were forward and active in that war, and disgrace on those that declined the service, v. 14. .19, 23. 5. Taking notice how God himself fought for them, v. 20. .22. 6. Celebrating particularly the honour of Jael, that slew Sisera; on which head the song is very large, v. 24. .30. It concludes with a prayer to God, v. 31.

1. **T**HEN sang Deborah, and Barak the son of Abinoam, on that day, saying, 2. Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. 3. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes: I, *even I*, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing *praise* to the LORD God of Israel. 4. LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. 5. The mountains melted from before the LORD, *even* that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

The former chapter let us know what great things God had done for Israel: in this we have the thankful returns they made to God, that all ages of the church might learn (that work of heaven) to praise God.

I. God is praised by a song. Which is, 1. A very natural expression of rejoicing: *Is any merry? Let him sing*; and holy joy is the very soul and root of praise and thanksgiving. God is pleased to reckon himself glorified by our joy in him, and in his wondrous works. His servants' joy is his delight, and their songs melody to him. 2. A very proper expedient for spreading the knowledge and perpetuating the remembrance, of great events. Neighbours would learn this song one of another, and children of their parents; and by that means they who had not books, or could not read, yet would be made acquainted with these works of God; and *one generation would thus praise God's works to another, and declare his mighty acts*, Ps. 145. 4, &c.

II. Deborah herself penned this song, as appears by v. 7, *Till I Deborah arose*. And the first words should be rendered, *Then she sang, ever Deborah*. She used her gifts as a prophetess in

composing the song; and the strain throughout is very fine and lofty, the images lively, the expressions elegant, and an admirable mixture there is in it of sweetness and majesty. No poetry is comparable to the sacred poetry. And we may suppose she used her power as a princess, in obliging the conquering army of Israel to learn and sing this song. She expects not that they should, by their poems, celebrate her praises, and magnify her; but requires, that in this poem they should join with her in celebrating God's praises, and magnifying him. She had been the first wheel in the action, and now is so in the thanksgiving.

III. It was sung on that day, not the very day that the fight was, but on that occasion, and soon after, as soon as a thanksgiving day could conveniently be appointed. When we have received mercy from God, we ought to be speedy in our returns of praise, while the impressions of the mercy are fresh. It is rent to be paid at the day.

1. She begins with a general Hallelujah: *Praise (or bless, for that is the word) ye the Lord, v. 2.* The design of the song is to give glory to God; that therefore is put first, to explain and direct all that follows, like the first petition of the Lord's prayer, *Hallowed be thy name.* Two things God is here praised for; (1.) The vengeance he took on Israel's enemies, for the avenging of Israel upon their proud and cruel oppressors, recompensing into their bosoms all the injuries they had done to his people. *The Lord is known as a righteous God, and the God to whom vengeance belongs, by the judgments which he executeth.* (2.) The grace he gave to Israel's friends; *when the people willingly offered themselves to serve in this war.* God is to have the glory of all the good offices that are at any time done us; and the more willingly they are done, the more is to be observed of that grace, which gives both to will and to do. For these two things she resolves to leave this song upon record, to the honour of the everlasting God; (*v. 3.*) *I, even I will sing unto the Lord, Jehovah, that God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power, even to the Lord God of Israel, who governs all for the good of the church.*

2. She calls to the great ones of the world, that sit at the upper end of its table, to attend to her song, and take notice of the subject of it: *Hear, O ye kings, give ear, O ye princes.* (1.) She would have them know, that as great and as high as they were, there is One above them with whom it is folly to contend, and to whom it is their interest to submit; that horses and chariots are vain things for safety. (2.) She would have them to join with her in praising the God of Israel, and no longer to praise their counterfeit deities, as Belshazzar did; (*Dan. 5. 4.*) *He praised the gods of gold and silver.* She bespeaks them as the psalmist, (*Ps. 2. 10, 11.*) *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings, serve the Lord with fear.* (3.) She would have them take warning by Sisera's fate, and not dare to offer any injury to the people of God, whose cause, sooner or later, God will plead with jealousy.

3. She looks back upon God's former appearances, and compares this with them, the more to magnify the glorious Author of this great salvation. What God is doing, should bring to our mind what he has done; for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; (*v. 4.*) *Lord when thou wentest out of Seir.* This may be understood, either, (1.) Of the appearances of God's power and justice against the enemies of Israel to subdue and conquer them; and so *Hab. 3. 3, 4, &c.* is parallel to it, where the destruction of the church's enemies is thus described. When God had led his people Israel from the country of Edom, he brought down under their feet Sihon and Og, striking them and their armies

with such terror and amazement, that they seemed apprehensive that heaven and earth were coming together. Their hearts melted, as if all the world had been melting round about them. Or it denotes the glorious displays of the Divine Majesty, and the surprising efforts of the divine power, enough to make the earth tremble, the heavens drop like snow before the sun, and the mountains to melt. Compare *Ps. 18. 7.* God's counsels are so far from being hindered by any creature, that when the time of their accomplishment comes, that which seemed to stand in their way will not only yield before them, but be made to serve them. See *Is. 64. 1, 2.* Or, (2.) It is meant of the appearances of God's glory and majesty in Israel, when he gave them his law at mount Sinai. It was then literally true, *the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, &c.* Compare *Deut. 33. 2. Ps. 68. 7, 8.* Let all the kings and princes know that this is the God whom Deborah praises, and not such mean and impotent deities as they paid their homage to. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the giving of the law, but has a strange descant on those words, *The mountains melted. Tabor, Hermon, and Carmel, contended among themselves: one said, Let the divine majesty dwell upon me; the other said, Let it dwell upon me; but God made it to dwell upon mount Sinai, the meanest and least of all the mountains.* I suppose it means the least valuable, because barren and rocky.

6. In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways. 7. *The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.* 8. They chose new gods; then *was* war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? 9. My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. 10. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. 11. *They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.*

Here,

I. Deborah describes the distressed state of Israel under the tyranny of Jabin, that the greatness of their trouble might make their salvation appear the more illustrious, and the more gracious, *v. 6.* "From the days of Shamgar, who did something toward the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, to the days of Jael, the present day, in which Jael has so signalized herself, the country has been in a manner desolate." 1. No trade. For want of soldiers to protect men of business in their business from the incursions of the enemy, and for want of magistrates to restrain and punish thieves and robbers among them, (men of broken fortunes and desperate spirits, that, having no employment, took to rob on the high-road,) all commerce ceased, and the highways were unoccupied; no caravans of merchants, as formerly. 2. No travelling. Where as in times when there was some order and govern

ment, the travellers might be safe in the open roads, and the robbers were forced to lurk in the by-ways; now, on the contrary, the robbers insulted on the open road without check, and the honest travellers were obliged to sculk, and walk through by-ways, in continual frights. 3. No tillage. The fields must needs be laid waste and unoccupied, when the inhabitants of the villages, the country-farmers, ceased from their employment, quitted their houses which were continually alarmed and plundered, and were obliged to take shelter for themselves and their families in walled and fenced cities. 4. No administration of justice. There was war in the gates where their courts were kept, *v. 8*. So that it was not till this salvation was wrought, that *the people of the Lord durst go down to the gates, v. 11*. The continual incursions of the enemy deprived the magistrates of the dignity, and the people of the benefit, of their government. 5. No peace to him that went out, or to him that came in. The gates through which they passed and repassed, were infested by the enemy; nay, the places of drawing water were alarmed by the archers—a mighty achievement for terrifying the drawers of water. 6. Neither arms nor spirit to help themselves with, not a *shield nor spear among forty thousand, v. 8*. Either they were disarmed by their oppressors, or they themselves neglected the art of war; so that though they had spears and shields, they were not to be seen, but were thrown by and suffered to rust, they having neither skill nor will to use them.

II. She shows in one word what it was that brought all this misery upon them; *They chose new gods, v. 8*. It was their idolatry that provoked God to give them up thus into the hands of their enemies. The Lord their God was one Lord, but that would not content them, they must have more, many more, still more. Their God was the Ancient of days, still the same, and therefore they grew weary of him, and must needs have new gods, which they were fond of as children of new clothes; names newly invented, heroes newly canonized. Their fathers, when put to their choice, chose the Lord for their God, (*Josh. 24. 21.*) but they would not abide by that choice, they must have gods of their own choosing.

III. She takes notice of God's great goodness to Israel, in raising up such as should redress their grievances. Herself first; (*v. 7.*) *Till that I Deborah arose*, to restrain and punish those who disturbed the public peace, and protect men in their business; and then the face of things was changed for the better quickly; those beasts of prey retired upon the breaking forth of this joyful light, and *man went forth again to his work and labour, Ps. 104. 22, 23*. Thus she became a mother in Israel, a nursing mother, such was the affection she bore to her people, and such the care and pains she took for the public welfare. Under her there were other governors of Israel, (*v. 9.*) who, like her, had done their part as governors to reform the people, and then, like her, offered themselves willingly to serve in the war, not insisting upon the exemption which their dignity and office entitled them to, when they had so fair an opportunity of appearing in their country's cause; and, no doubt, the example of the governors influenced the people in like manner, *willing to offer themselves, v. 2*. Of these governors she says, *My heart is toward them*; that is, "I truly love and honour them, they have won my heart for ever, I shall never forget them." Note, Those are worthy of double honour, that recede voluntarily from the demands of their honour to serve God and his church.

IV. She calls upon those who had a particular share in the advantages of this great salvation, to

offer up particular thanks to God for it, *v. 10, 11*. Let every man speak as he found of the goodness of God in this happy change of the posture of public affairs. 1. *Ye that ride on white asses*, that is, the nobility and gentry. Horses were little used in that country, they had, it is probable, a much better breed of asses than we have; but persons of quality, it seems, were distinguished by the colour of the asses they rode on, the white being more rare, were therefore more valued. Notice is taken of Abdon's sons and grandsirs riding on ass-coits, as indicating them to be men of distinction, *ch. 12*. 14. Let such as are by this salvation restored, not only to their liberty as other Israelites, but to their dignity, speak God's praises. 2. Let them that *sit in judgment* be sensible of it, and thankful for it as a very great mercy, that they may sit safely there; that the sword of justice is not struck out of their hand by the sword of war. 3. Let them that *walk by the way*, and meet with none there to make them afraid, speak to themselves in pious meditations, and to their fellow-travellers in religious discourses of the goodness of God in ridding the roads of those *banditti* that had so long infested them. 4. Let them that draw water in peace and have not their well taken from them, or stopped up, nor are in danger of being caught by the enemy when they go forth to draw there where they find themselves so much more safe and easy than they have been, *there let them rehearse the acts of the Lord*; not Deborah's acts, or Barak's, but the Lord's, taking notice of his hand making peace in our borders, and creating a defence upon all the glory. *This is the Lord's doing*. Observe in these acts of his, (1.) Justice executed on his daring enemies. They are the righteous acts of the Lord. See him pleading a righteous cause, and sitting in the throne judging aright, and give him glory as the Judge of all the earth. (2.) Kindness showed to his trembling people; *the inhabitants of the villages*, who lay most open to the enemy, had suffered most, and were in most danger, *Ezek. 38. 11*. It is the glory of God to protect those that are most exposed, and to help the weakest. Let us all take notice of the share we in particular have in the public peace and tranquillity, the inhabitants of the villages especially, and give God the praise of it.

12. Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. 13. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty. 14. Out of Ephraim *was there* a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people: out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handled the pen of the writer. 15. And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great thoughts of heart. 16. Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great searchings of heart. 17. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea-shore, and abode in his breaches. 18. Zebulun and Naphtali *were* a people

that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. 19. The kings came *and* fought; then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. 20. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. 21. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. 22. Then were the horse-hoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones. 23. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Here,

I. Deborah stirs up herself and Barak to celebrate this victory in the most solemn manner, to the glory of God and the honour of Israel, for the encouragement of their friends and the greater confusion of their enemies, *v.* 12. 1. Deborah, as a prophetess, must do it by a song, to compose and sing which, she excites herself, *Awake, awake*; and again, *Awake, awake*. Which intimates the sense she had of the excellency and difficulty of the work: it needed and well deserved the utmost liveliness and vigour of soul in the performance of it; all the powers and faculties of the soul in their closest attention and application ought to be employed in it. Thus too she expresses the sense she had of her own infirmity, and aptness to flag, and remit in her zeal in this work. Note, Praising God is work that we should awake to, and awake ourselves to, *Ps.* 108. 2. 2. Barak, as a general, must do it by a triumph; *Lead thy captivity captive*. Though the army of Sisera was cut off in the field, and no quarter given, yet we may suppose in the prosecution of the victory, when the war was carried into the enemy's country, many not found in arms were seized and made prisoners of war; these she would have led in chains after Barak, when he made his public entry into his own city to grace his triumphs; not as if it should be any pleasure to him to trample upon his fellow-creatures, but thus he must give glory to God, and serve that good purpose of his government, which is to *look upon those that are proud, and to abase them*.

II. She gives good reason for this praise and triumph, *v.* 13. This glorious victory had made the remnant of Israel, and Deborah in particular, look very great; a circumstance which they owed entirely to God. 1. The Israelites were become few and inconsiderable, and yet to them God gave dominion over nobles. Many of them were cut off by the enemy, many died of grief, and perhaps some had removed their families and effects into foreign parts; yet those few that remained, by divine assistance, with one brave and generous effort, not only shook off the yoke of oppression from their own neck, but got power over their oppressors. As long as any of God's Israel remain, (and a remnant God will have in the worst of times,) there is hope, be it ever so small a remnant, for God can make him that remains, though it should be but one single person, triumph over the most proud and potent. 2. Deborah was herself of the weaker sex, and the sex that from the fall had been sentenced to subjection, and yet the Lord that is himself higher than the highest, authorized her to rule over the mighty men of Israel, who wil-

lingly submitted to her conduct: and enabled her to triumph over the mighty men of Canaan, who fell before the army she commanded; so wonderfully did he *advance the low estate of his handmaid*, "The Lord made me, a woman, have dominion over mighty men." A despised stone is made *head of the corner*. This is indeed the *Lord's domg*, and *marvellous in our eyes*.

III. She makes particular remarks on the several parties concerned in this great action, taking notice who fought against them, who fought for them, and who stood neuter.

1. Who fought *against* them. The power of the enemy must be taken notice of, that the victory may appear the more glorious. Jabin and Sisera had been mentioned in the history, but here it appears further, (1.) That Amalek was in league with Jabin, and sent him in assistance, or endeavoured to do it. Ephraim is here said to act against Amalek, (*v.* 14.) probably intercepting and cutting off some forces of the Amalekites that were upon their march to join Sisera. Amalek had helped Moab to oppress Israel, (*ch.* 3. 13.) and now had helped Jabin; they were inveterate enemies to God's people, whose hand had always *been against the throne of the Lord*, (*Exod.* 17. 16.) and therefore the more dangerous. (2.) That others of the kings of Canaan, who had somewhat recovered themselves since their defeat by Joshua, joined with Jabin and strengthened his army with their forces, having the same implacable enmity to Israel that he had, and those kingdoms, when they were in their strength, having been subject to that of Hazor, *Josh.* 11. 10. These kings *came and fought*, *v.* 19. Israel had no king, their enemies had many, whose power and influence, especially acting in confederacy, made them very formidable; and yet Israel, having the Lord for their Kings, was too hard for them all. It is said of these Kings, *They took no gain of money*; they were not necessary troops hired into the service of Jabin, (such often fail in an extremity,) but they were all volunteers, and hearty in the cause against Israel: they *desired not the riches of silver*, so the Chaldee, but only the satisfaction of helping to ruin Israel. Acting upon this principle, they were the more formidable, and would be the more cruel.

2. Who fought *for* them. The several tribes that assisted in this great exploit, here are spoken of with honour; for though God is chiefly to be glorified, instruments must have their due praise, for the encouragement of others: but, after all, it was heaven that turned the scale.

(1.) Ephraim and Benjamin, those tribes among whom Deborah herself lived, bestirred themselves, and did bravely, by her influence upon them; for her palm-tree was in the tribe of Ephraim, and very near to that of Benjamin, *v.* 14, *Out of Ephraim, was there a root*, and life in the root, against Amalek. There was in Ephraim a mountain called the *mount of Amalek*, (mentioned, *ch.* 12. 13.) which some think is here meant, and some read it, *There was a root in Amalek*; that is, in that mountain; a strong resolution in the minds of that people to make head against the oppressors, which was *the root of the matter*. Herein Benjamin had set them a good example among his people; Ephraim moved after thee, Benjamin. Though Benjamin was the junior tribe, and much inferior, especially at this time, to Ephraim, both in number and wealth, yet when they led, Ephraim followed in appearing for the common cause. If we be not so bold as to lead, yet we must not be so proud and sullen as not to follow even our inferiors in a good work. Ephraim was at a distance from the place of action, and therefore could not send forth many of its boughs to the service; but Deborah, who was

one of them, knew there was a root of them, that they were hearty well-wishers to the cause. Dr. Lightfoot gives quite another sense of this; Joshua of Ephraim, had been a root of such victories against Amalek, (Exod. 17.) and Ehud of Benjamin lately against Amalek and Moab.

(2.) The ice being broken by Ephraim and Benjamin, Machir (the half tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan) and Zebulun sent in men that were very serviceable to this great design. When an army is to be raised, especially under such disadvantages as were occasioned by the long disuse of arms, and the dispiritedness of the people, it is of great consequence to be furnished, [1.] With men of courage for officers, and such the family of Machir furnished them with; for thence came down *governors*. The children of Machir were particularly famous for their valour in Moses's time, (Numb. 32. 89.) and, it seems, it continued in their family, the more because they were seated in the frontiers. [2.] With men of learning and ingenuity, for secretaries of war, and with such they were supplied out of Zebulun; thence came men *that handle the pen of the writer*, clerks that issued out orders, wrote circular letters, drew commissions, mustered their men, and kept their accounts. Thus must every man, *according as he has received the gift, minister the same*, for the public good, 1 Pet. 4. 10. The eyes see, and the ears hear, for the whole body. I know it is generally understood of the forwardness even of the scholars of this tribe, who studied the law and expounded it, to take up arms in this cause, though they were better skilled in books than in the art of war. So Sir Richard Blackmore paraphrases it,

The scribes of Zebulun and learned men,
To wield the sword, laid down the pen.

(3.) Issachar did good service too; though he *saw that rest was good*, and therefore *bowed his shoulder to bear*, which is the character of that tribe, (Gen. 49. 15.) yet they disdained to bear the yoke of Jabin's tribute, and now preferred the generous toils of war to a servile rest. Though it should seem there were not many common soldiers listed out of that tribe, yet *the princes of Issachar were with Deborah and Barak*, (v. 15.) probably, as a great council of war to advise upon emergencies. And it should seem, these princes of Issachar did in person accompany Barak into the field of battle. Did he go on foot? They footed it with him, not consulting their honour or ease. Did he go into the valley, the place of most danger? They exposed themselves with him, and were still at his right hand to advise him; for the men of Issachar were men that *had understanding of the times*, 1 Chron. 12. 32.

(4.) Zebulun and Naphtali were the most bold and active of all the tribes, not only out of a particular affection to Barak, their countryman, but because they lying nearest to Jabin, the yoke of oppression lay heavier on their necks than on any other tribe. Better die in honour than live in bondage; and therefore in a pious zeal for God and their country, they *jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field*, v. 18. With what heroic bravery did they charge and push on, even upon the chariots of iron, despising danger, and setting death itself at defiance in so good a cause.

(5.) The stars from heaven appeared, or acted at least, on Israel's side; (v. 20.) *The stars in their courses*, according to the order and direction of him who is the great Lord of their hosts, *fought against Sisera*, by their malignant influences; or by causing the storms of hail and thunder, which contributed so much to the rout of Sisera's army. The

Chaldee reads it, *From heaven, from the place where the stars go forth, war was waged against Sisera*; that is, the power of the God of heaven was engaged against him, making use of the ministration of the angels of heaven. Some way or other, the heavenly bodies (not arrested, as when the sun stood still at Joshua's word, but going on in their courses) fought against Sisera. Those whom God is an enemy to, the whole creation is at war with. Perhaps the flashes of lightning by which the stars fought, was that which frightened the horses, so as that they pranced till their very hoofs were broken; (v. 22.) and, probably, overturned the chariots of iron which they drew, or turned them back upon their owners.

(6.) The river of Kishon fought against their enemies. It swept them away, and abundance of them that hoped to make their escape through it, v. 21. Ordinarily, it was but a shallow river, and, being in their own country, we may suppose they well knew its fords and safest passages, and yet, now, probably by the great rain that fell, it was so swelled, and the stream so deep and strong, that those who attempted to pass it, were drowned, being feeble and faint, and unable to make their way through it. And then were the horse hoofs broken by means of the *plungings*. So it is in the margin, v. 22. The river of Kishon is called *that ancient river*, because described or celebrated by ancient historians or poets; or rather, because it was designed of old, in the council of God, to serve his purposes against Sisera at this time, and did so, as if it had been made on purpose; thus *the water of the old pool*, God is said to have fashioned long ago, for that use to which it was put, Isa. 22. 11.

(7.) Deborah's own soul fought against them; she speaks of it with a holy exultation; (v. 21.) *O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength*. She did it by exciting others to do it, and assisting them, which she did with all her heart; also by her prayers. As Moses conquered Amalek by lifting up his hand, so Deborah vanquished Sisera by lifting up her heart. And when the soul is employed in holy exercises, and heart-work is made of them, through the grace of God, the strength of our spiritual enemies will be trodden down, and will fall before us.

3. In this great engagement, she observes who stood *neuter*, and did not side with Israel, as might have been expected. It is strange to find how many, even of those who were called Israelites, basely deserted this glorious cause, and declined to appear. No mention is made of Judah or Simeon among the tribes concerned, because they lying so very remote from the scene of action, had not an opportunity to appear, and therefore it was not expected from them; but for those that lay near, and yet would not venture, indelible marks of disgrace are here put upon them, and they deserved it.

(1.) Reuben basely declined the service, v. 15, 16. Justly had he long ago been deprived of the privileges of the birth-right, and still does his dying father's doom stick by him, *unstable as water, he shall not excel*. Two things hindered them from engaging; [1.] Their divisions. This jarring-string she twice strikes upon to their shame. For the divisions of Reuben (or in these divisions) there were great thoughts, impressions, and searchings of heart. Not only for their division from Canaan by the river Jordan, that needed not have hindered them, had they been hearty in the cause; for Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and yet from Machir of Gilead came down governors: but it means either that they were divided among themselves, could not agree who should go, or who should lead; each striving to gain the post of honour, and shun that of danger; some unhappy contests in their tribe kept them from uniting together, and with their brethren

ren, for the common good; or, that they were divided in their opinion of this war from the rest of the tribes; thought the attempt either not justifiable, or not practicable, and therefore blamed those that engaged in it, and did themselves decline it; this occasioned great searchings of heart among the rest; especially when they had reason to suspect that whatever Reuben pretended, his sitting still now, proceeded from a cooling of his affections to his brethren, and an alienation of mind from them, which occasioned them many sad thoughts. It grieves us to see our mother's children angry with us for doing our duty, and looking strange upon us when we most need their friendship and assistance. [2.] Their business in the world. *Reuben abode among the sheepfolds*, a warmer and sifer place than the camp, pretending they could not conveniently leave the sheep they tended; he loved to *hear the bleatings of the flocks*, or, as some read it, the *whistlings of the flocks*, the music which the shepherds made with their oaten reeds or pipes, and the pastorals which they sung, these Reuben preferred before the martial drum and trumpet. Thus many are kept from doing their duty by the fear of trouble, the love of ease, and an inordinate affection to their worldly business and advantage. Narrow selfish spirits care not what becomes of the interests of God's church, so they can but get, keep, and save money; *Allseek their own*, Philip 2. 21.

(2.) Dan and Asher did the same, v. 17. These two lay on the sea-coast, and, [1.] Dan pretended he could not leave his ships, but they would be exposed, and therefore *I pray thee have me excused*. Those of that tribe perhaps pleaded that their sea-trade dis fitted them for land service, and diverted them from it; but Zebulun also was a haven for ships, a sea-faring tribe, and yet was forward and active in this expedition. There is no excuse we make to shift off duty, but what some or other have broken through and set aside, whose courage and resolution will rise up against us and shame us. [2.] Asher pretended he must stay at home and repair the breaches which the sea had in some places made upon his land, and to fortify his works against the encroachments of it; or he abode in his creeks, or small havens, where his trading vessels lay to attend them. A little thing will serve those for a pretence to stay at home, who have no mind to engage in the most necessary services, because there are difficulty and danger in them.

(3.) But above all, Meroz is condemned, and a curse pronounced upon the inhabitants of it, *because they came not to the help of the Lord*, v. 23. Probably this was some city that lay near the scene of action, and therefore the inhabitants had a fair opportunity of showing their obedience to God, and their concern for Israel, and of doing good service to the common cause; but they basely declined it, for fear of Jabin's iron chariots, being willing to sleep in a whole skin. The Lord needed not their help; he made it appear he could do his work without them: but no thanks to them; for aught they knew, the attempt might have miscarried for want of their hand; and therefore they are cursed for *not coming to the help of the Lord*, when it was in effect proclaimed, *Who is on the Lord's side?* The cause between God and the mighty, (the principalities and powers of the kingdom of darkness, will not admit of neutrality, God looks upon those as against him, that are *not with him*. This curse is pronounced by the *Angel of the Lord*, our Lord Jesus, the captain of the Lord's host, (and *those whom he curses are cursed indeed*;) and further than we have warrant and authority from him, we may not curse. He that will richly reward all his good soldiers, will certainly and severely punish all cowards and deserters.

This city of Meroz seems to have been at this time a considerable place, since something great was expected from it; but, probably, after the Angel of the Lord had pronounced this curse upon it, it dwindled, and like the fig-tree which Christ cursed, withered away, so that we never read of it after this in the scripture.

24. Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. 25. He asked water, and she gave *him* milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. 26. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera; she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. 27. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead. 28. The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? 29. Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, 30. Have they not sped? have they *not* divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two? to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needle-work, of divers colours of needle-work on both sides, *meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?* 31. So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but *let* them that love him *be* as the sun when he goeth forth in his night. And the land had rest forty years.

Deborah here concludes this triumphant song,

I. With the praise of Jael, her sister-heroine, whose valiant act had completed and crowned the victory. She had mentioned her before, (v. 6.) as one that would have served her country if it had been in her power; now she applauds her as one that did serve it admirably well when it was in her power. Her poetry is finest and most florid here in the latter end of the song. How honourably does she speak of Jael, (v. 24.) who preferred her peace with the God of Israel, before her peace with the king of Canaan; and though not a native of Israel, (for aught that appears,) yet heartily espoused the cause of Israel in this critical juncture, jeopardied her life as truly as if she had been in the high places of the field, and bravely fought for those whom she saw God fought for! *Blessed shall she be above women in the tent*. Note, Those whose lot is cast in the tent, in a very low and narrow sphere of activity, if they serve God in that according to their capacity, shall in no wise lose their reward. Jael in the tent wins as rich a blessing as Barak in the field.

Nothing is more confounding, grievous, and shameful, than disappointment; and Deborah here does most elegantly describe two great disappointments, the shame of which was typical of sinners' everlasting shame.

1. Sisera found a fatal enemy, where he expected a fast and faithful friend. (1.) Jael showed him the kindness of a friend, and perhaps at that time intended no other than kindness, until God, by an immediate impulse upon her mind, (which impulses then

were to be regarded, and carried so much of their own evidence with them, that they might have been relied upon, but cannot now be pretended to,) directed her to do otherwise, *v. 25*. He asked only for fair water to quench his thirst, but she, not only to snare her housewifery and good housekeeping, but to express her respect to him, *gave him milk*, and *brought forth butter*, that is, (say some interpreters,) milk which had the butter taken from it; we call it butter-milk. No, (say others,) it was milk that had the butter still in it; we call it cream: whichever it was, it was, probably, the best her house afforded; and, to set it off, she brought it *in a lordly dish*, such as she called so, the finest she had, and better than she ordinarily used at her own table. This confirmed Sisera's opinion of her friendship, and made him sleep the faster and the more secure. But (2.) She proved his mortal enemy; gave him his death's stroke; it is curiously described, *v. 26, 27*. [1.] How great does Jael look *hammering Sisera*, as it is in the margin, mauling that proud man, that had been so long the terror of the mighty, and sending him down slain to the pit with his *iniquities upon his bones!* Ezek. 32. 27. She seems to have gone about it with no more terror or concern, than if she had been going to nail one of the boards or bars of her tent, so confident was she of divine aid and protection. We read it, she *smote off his head*, probably with his own sword, which, now that his head was nailed through, she durst take from his side, but not before, for fear of waking him. But because there was no occasion for cutting off his head, nor was it mentioned in the history, many think it should be read, *She struck through his head*. That head which had been proudly lifted up against God and Israel, and in which had been forged bloody designs for the destruction of God's people, Jael finds a soft place in, and into that with a good will strikes her nail. [2.] How mean does Sisera look, fallen at Jael's feet! *v. 27*. At the feet of this female executioner, he bowed, he fell; all his struggles for life availed not; she followed her blow until he fell down dead. There lies extended the deserted carcass of that proud man, not in the bed of honour, not in the high places of the field, not having any glorious wound to show from a glittering sword, or a bow of steel, but in a corner of a tent, at the feet of a woman with a disgraceful wound by a sorry nail stuck through his head. Thus is shame the fate of proud men. And it is a very lively representation of the ruin of those sinners whose prosperity slays them; it flatters and caresses them with milk and butter *in a lordly dish*, as if it would make them easy and happy, but it nails their heads and hearts to the ground in earthly-mindedness, and pierces them through with *many sorrows*; its flatteries are fatal, and sinks them at last into destruction and perdition, 1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.

2. Sisera's mother had the tidings brought her of her son's fall and ruin, then when she was big with expectation of his glorious and triumphant return, *n. 28. . 30*. where we have, (1.) Her fond desire to see her son come back in triumph. *Why is his chariot so long in coming?* She speaks this, not so much out of a concern for his safety, or any jealousy of his having miscarried, (she had no fear of that, so confident was she of his success,) but out of a longing for his glory, which with a feminine weakness she was passionately impatient to see, chiding the lingering chariot, and expostulating concerning the delays of it, little thinking that her unhappy son had been, before this, forced to quit that chariot which they were so proud of, and which she thought came so slowly. *The chariots of his glory were now become the shame of his house*, Isa. 22. 18. Let

us take heed of indulging such desires as these toward any temporal good thing, particularly toward that which cherishes vain glory, for that was it she here doted on. Eagerness and impatience in our desires do us a great deal of prejudice, and make it intolerable to us to be crossed. But toward the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the glories of that day, we should thus stand affected: *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*; for here we cannot be disappointed. (2.) Her foolish hope and confidence that he would come at last in so much the greater pomp. Her wise ladies answered her, and thought they gave a very good account of the delay; yea, she (*in her wisdom*, says the Chaldee) tauntingly made answer to herself, "*Have they not sped?*" No doubt they have, and that which delays them is, that they are *dividing the prey*; which is so much, that it is a work of time to make a distribution of it." In the spoil they please themselves with the thought of, observe, [1.] How impudently, and to the reproach and scandal of their sex, these ladies boast of the multitude of damsels which the soldiers would have the abusing of. [2.] How childishly they please themselves with the hope of seeing Sisera himself in a gaudy mantle of *divers colours*; how charmingly would it look! *of divers colours of needle-work*, plundered out of the wardrobe of some Israelitish lady: it is repeated again, as that which pleased their fancy above any thing, *of divers colours of needle-work on both sides*, and therefore very rich; such pieces of embroidery they hoped Sisera would have to present his mother and the ladies with. Thus apt are we to deceive ourselves with great expectations, and confident hopes of honour and pleasure, and wealth in this world, by which we prepare for ourselves the shame and grief of a disappointment. And thus does God often bring ruin on his enemies when they are most elevated.

II. She concludes all with a prayer to God, 1. For the destruction of all his foes: "So, so shamefully, so miserably, *let all thine enemies perish, O Lord*; let all that hope to triumph in Israel's ruin, be thus disappointed and triumphed over; *Do to them all as unto Sisera*," Ps. 83. 9. Though our enemies are to be prayed for, God's enemies, as such, are to be prayed against: and when we see some of God's enemies remarkably humbled and brought down, that is an encouragement to us to pray for the downfall of all the rest. Deborah was a prophetess, and this prayer was a prediction that in due time all God's enemies shall perish, Ps. 92. 9. None ever hardened his heart and prospered. 2. For the exaltation and comfort of all his friends. "But let them that love him, and, heartily wish well to his kingdom among men, be *as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength*; let them shine so bright, appear so glorious in the eye of the world, cast such benign influences, be as much out of the reach of their enemies, who curse the rising sun because it scorches them; let them *rejoice as a strong man to run a race*, Ps. 19. 5. Let them, as burning and shining lights in their places, dispel the mists of darkness, and shine with more and more lustre and power *unto the perfect day*," Prov. 4. 18. Such shall be the honour, and such the joy, of all that love God in sincerity, and for ever they shall *shine as the sun in the firmament of our Father*.

The victory here celebrated with this song, was of such happy consequence to Israel, that for the best part of one age they enjoyed the peace which it opened the way to; *The land had rest forty years*; that is, so long it was from this victory to the raising up of Gideon. And well had it been, if, when the churches and the tribes had rest, they had been edified, and had walked in the fear of the Lord.

CHAP. VI.

Nothing that occurred in the quiet and peaceable times of Israel is recorded: the forty years' rest after the conquest of Jabin is passed over in silence, and here begins the story of another distress, and another deliverance by Gideon, the fourth of the judges. Here is, I. The calamitous condition of Israel, by the inroads of the Midianites, v. 1. . . 6. II. The message God sent them by a prophet, by convincing them of sin, to prepare them for deliverance, v. 7. . . 10. III. The raising up of Gideon to be their deliverer. 1. A commission which God sent him by the hand of an angel, and confirmed by a sign, v. 11. . . 24. 2. The first-fruits of his government in the reform of his father's house, v. 25. . . 32. 3. The preparations he made for a war with the Midianites and the encouragement given him by a sign, v. 33. . . 40.

1. **A**ND the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. 2. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. 3. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; 4. And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza; and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. 5. For they came up with their cattle, and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude: for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. 6. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

We have here,

I. Israel's sin renewed; *They did evil in the sight of the Lord, v. 1.* The burnt child dreads the fire; yet this perverse unthinking people, that had so often smarted solely for their idolatry, upon a little respite of God's judgments, return to it again. *This people hath a revolting, rebellious heart,* not kept in awe by the terror of God's judgments, nor engaged in honour and gratitude by the great things he had done for them, to keep themselves in his love. The providence of God will not change the hearts and lives of sinners.

II. Israel's troubles repeated. This would follow of course; let all that sin expect to suffer; *with the froward God will show himself froward,* (Ps. 18. 26.) and will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him, Lev. 26. 21, 24. Now as to this trouble,

1. It arose from a very despicable enemy. God delivered them into the hand of Midian; (v. 1.) not Midian in the south where Jethro lived, but Midian in the east that joined to Moab, Numb. 22. 4. A people that all men despised as uncultivated, and unheeded; hence we read not here of any king, lord, general, that they had but the force with which they destroyed Israel, was an undisciplined mob; and, which made it the more grievous, they were a people that Israel had formerly subdued, and in a manner destroyed; (see Numb. 31. 7.) and yet by this time, (near two hundred years after,)

the poor remains of them were so multiplied, and so magnified, that they were capable of being made a very severe scourge to Israel. Thus God moved them to jealousy with those which were not a people, even a foolish nation, Deut. 32. 21. The meanest creature will serve to chastise those that have made the great Creator their enemy. And when those we are authorised to rule prove rebellious and disobedient to us, it concerns us to inquire whether we have not been so to our sovereign Ruler.

2. It arose to a very formidable height, (v. 2.) *The hand of Midian prevailed,* purely by their multitude. God had promised to increase Israel as the sand on the sea-shore; but their sin stopped their growth and diminished them, and then their enemies, though otherwise every way inferior to them, overpowered them with numbers. They came upon them as grasshoppers for multitude: (v. 5.) not in a regular army to engage them in the field, but in a confused swarm, to plunder the country, quarter themselves upon it, and enrich themselves with its spoils. Bands of robbers, and no better. And sinful Israel, being separated by sin from God, had not spirit to make head against them. Observe the wretched havoc that these Midianites made with their bands of plunderers in Israel. Here is,

(1.) The Israelites imprisoned, or rather imprisoning themselves, in dens and caves, v. 2. This was owing purely to their own timorousness and faint-heartedness, that they would rather fly than fight; it was the effect of a guilty conscience which made them tremble at the shaking of a leaf, and the just punishment of their apostasy from the God who thus fought against them with those very terrors with which he would otherwise have fought for them; had it not been for this, we cannot but think Israel a match for the Midianites, and able enough to make head against them: but the heart that departs from God is lost, not only to that which is good but to that which is great. Sin dispirits men, and makes them sneak into dens and caves. The day will come when chief captains and mighty men will call in vain to rocks and mountains to hide them.

(2.) The Israelites impoverished, greatly impoverished, (v. 6.) The Midianites and the other children of the east, that joined with them to live by spoil and rapine, as long before the Sabeans and Chaldeans did that plundered Job, free-booters, these made frequent incursions into the land of Canaan; that fruitful land was a great temptation to them; and that sloth and luxury into which the Israelites were sunk by forty years' rest, made them and their substance an easy prey to them. They came up against them, (v. 3.) pitched their camps among them, (v. 4.) and brought their cattle with them, particularly camels innumerable; (v. 5.) not a flying party, to make a sally upon them, and be gone presently, but they resolved to force their way, and penetrated through the heart of the country as far as Gaza, on the western side: (v. 4.) they let the Israelites alone to sow their ground, but toward harvest they came and seized all, and ate up and destroyed it, both grass and corn; and when they went away, took with them the sheep and oxen; so that, in short, they left no sustenance for Israel, except what was privately taken by the rightful owners into the dens and caves. Now here we may see, [1.] The justice of God in the punishment of their sin. They had neglected to honour God with their substance in tithes, and offerings, and had prepared that for Baal with which God should have been served, and now God justly sends an enemy to take it away in the season thereof, Hos. 2. 8, 9. [2.] The consequence of God's departure from the people; when he goes, all good goes, and all mis-

chiefs break in. When Israel kept in with God, they reaped what others sowed; (Josh. 24. 13. Ps. 105. 44.) but now that God had forsaken them, others reaped what they sowed. Let us take occasion from this, to bless God for our national peace and tranquillity, that we *eat the labour of our hands*.

III. Israel's sense of God's hand revived at last. Seven years, year after year, did the Midianites make these inroads upon them, each, we may suppose, worse than the other, (v. 1.) until, at last, all other succours failing, *Israel cried unto the Lord*; (v. 6.) for crying to Baal ruined them, and would not help them. When God judges he will overcome; and sinners shall be made either to bend or break before him.

7. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, 8. That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; 9. And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land: 10. And I said unto you, I *am* the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Observe here,

I. The cognizance God took of the cries of Israel, when at length they were directed toward him. Though in their prosperity they had neglected him, and made court to his rivals, and though they never looked toward him till they were driven to it by extremity, yet, upon their complaint and prayer, he intended relief for them. Thus would he show how ready he is to forgive, how swift he is to show mercy, and how inclinable to hear prayer, that sinners may be encouraged to return and repent, Ps. 130. 4.

II. The method God took of working deliverance for them. Before he sent an angel to raise them up a saviour, he sent a prophet to reprove them for sin, and to bring them to repentance, v. 8. This prophet is not named, but he was a man, a prophet, not an angel, as *ch.* 2. 1. Whether this prophet took an opportunity of delivering his message to the children of Israel, when they were met together in a general assembly, at some solemn feast, or other great occasion, or whether he went from city to city, and from tribe to tribe, preaching to this purport, is not certain; but his errand was to convince them of *sin*, that in their *crying to the Lord* they might confess that with sorrow and shame, and not spend their breath only in complaining of their trouble. They cried to God for a deliverer, and God sent them a prophet to instruct them, and to make them ready for deliverance. Note, 1. We have reason to hope God is designing mercy for us, if we find he is by his grace preparing us for it. If to those that are sick he sends a messenger, an interpreter, by whom he *shows unto man his uprightness*, then is he *gracious*, and grants a recovery, Job 33. 23, 24. 2. The sending of prophets to a people, and the furnishing a land with faithful ministers, is a token for good, and an evidence that God has mercy in store for them. He thus turns to us him, and then causes his face to shine, Ps. 80. 19.

VOL. II.—R

We have here the heads of the message which this prophet delivered in to Israel, in the name of the Lord.

(1.) He set before them the great things God had done for them; (v. 8, 9.) *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*. They had worshipped the *gods of the nations*, as if they had no God of their own to worship, and therefore might choose whom they pleased; but they are here reminded of one whom they had forgotten, who was known by the title of *the God of Israel*, and to him they must return. They had turned to other gods, as if their own had been either incapable or unwilling to protect them, and therefore they are told what he did for their fathers, in whose loins they were, the benefit of which descended and still remained to this their ungrateful seed. [1.] He brought them out of Egypt, where otherwise they had continued in perpetual poverty and slavery. [2.] *He delivered them out of the hands of all that oppressed them*; this is mentioned to intimate that the reason why they were not now delivered out of the hands of the oppressing Midianites, was, not for want of any power or good will in God, but because by their iniquity they had sold themselves, and God would not redeem them until they by repentance revoked the bargain. [3.] He put them in quiet possession of this good land; this not only aggravated their sin, and affixed the brand of base ingratitude to it, but it justified God, and cleared him from the blame upon the account of the trouble they were now in: they could not say he was unkind, for he had given all possible proofs of his designing well for them; if ill befell them notwithstanding, they must thank themselves.

(2.) He shows the easiness and equity of God's demands and expectations from them; (v. 10.) "*I am the Lord your God*, to whom you lie under the highest obligations; *fear not the gods of the Amorites*," that is, "do not worship them, nor show any respect to them; do not worship them for fear of their doing you any hurt, for what hurt can they do you while I am your God? Fear God, and you need not fear them."

(3.) He charges them with rebellion against God, who had laid this injunction upon them; *But ye have not obeyed my voice*. The charge is short, but very comprehensive; this was the malignity of all their sin, it was disobedience to God; and therefore it was it that brought these calamities upon them, under which they were now groaning, pursuant to the threatenings annexed to those commands. He intends hereby to bring them to repentance; and our repentance is *then* right and genuine, when the sinfulness of sin, as disobedience to God, is that in it, which we chiefly lament.

11. And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which *was* in Ophrah, that *pertained* unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the wine-press, to hide *it* from the Midianites. 12. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD *is* with thee, thou mighty man of valour. 13. And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where *be* all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. 14. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy night,

and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? 15. And he said unto him, Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. 16. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. 17. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. 18. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. 19. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. 20. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. 21. Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. 22. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. 23. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. 24. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it *Jehovah-shalom*: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

It is not said what effect the prophet's sermon had upon the people; but we may hope it had a good effect, and that some of them at least repented and reformed upon it; for here, immediately after, we have the dawning of the day of their deliverance, by the effectual calling of Gideon to take upon him the command of their forces against the Midianites.

I. The person to be commissioned for this service, was Gideon, the son of Joash, *v.* 11. The father was now living, but he was passed by, and this honour put upon the son; for the father kept up in his own family the worship of Baal, (*v.* 25.) which we may suppose this son, as far as was in his power, witnessed against. He was of the half tribe of Manasseh that lay in Canaan, of the family of Abiezer; the eldest house of that tribe, Josh. 17. 2. Hitherto the judges were raised up out of that tribe which suffered most by the oppression, and, probably, it was so here.

II. The person that gave him the commission, was an angel of the Lord: it should seem not a created angel, but the Son of God himself, the eternal Word, the Lord of the angels, who then appeared upon some great occasion in human shape, as a

prelude (says the learned Bishop Patrick) to what he intended in the fullness of time, when he would take our nature upon him, as we say, for good and all. This angel is here called *Jehovah*, the incommunicable name of God, (*v.* 14, 16.) and he said *I will be with thee*. This divine person appeared here to Gideon, and it is observable how he found him, 1. Retired; all alone. God often manifests himself to his people, when they are out of the noise and hurry of this world. Silence and solitude befriending our communion with God. 2. Employed in threshing wheat, with a *staff or rod*, (so the word signifies,) such as they used in beating out fitches and cummin, (*Isa.* 28. 27.) but now used for wheat; probably, because he had but a little to thresh, he needed not the oxen to tread it out. It was not then looked upon as any diminution to him, though he was a person of some account, and a *mighty man of valour*, to lay his hand to the business of the husbandman. He had many servants, (*v.* 27.) and yet would not himself live in idleness. We put ourselves in the way of divine visits, when we employ ourselves in honest business. Tidings of Christ's birth were brought to the shepherds, when they were keeping their flocks. The work he was about, was an emblem of that greater work to which he was now to be called, as the disciples' fishing was. From threshing corn he is fetched to thresh the Midianites, *Isa.* 41. 15. 3. Distressed; he was threshing his wheat, not in the *threshing-floor*, the proper place, but by the *wine-press*, in some private unsuspected corner, for fear of the Midianites. He himself shared in the common calamity, and now the angel came to animate him against Midian, when he himself could speak so feelingly of the heaviness of their yoke. The day of the greatest distress is God's time to appear for his people's relief.

Let us now see what passed between the angel and Gideon, who knew not for certain, till after he was gone, that he was an angel, but supposed he was a prophet.

(1.) The angel accosted him with respect, and assured him of the presence of God with him, *v.* 12. He calls him a *mighty man of valour*, perhaps because he observed how he threshed his corn with all his might; and seest thou a man diligent in his business?—whatever his business is, he shall stand before kings. He that is faithful in a few things, shall be ruler over many. Gideon was a man of brave active spirit, and yet buried alive in obscurity, through the iniquity of the times; but he is here animated to undertake something great, like himself, with that word, *The Lord is with thee*; or, as the Chaldee reads it, *The Word of the Lord is thy help*. It was very sure the Lord was with him, when this angel was with him. By this word, [1.] He gives him his commission. If we have God's presence with us, that will justify us, and bear us out, in our undertakings. [2.] He inspires him with all necessary qualifications for the execution of his commission. "The Lord is with thee to guide and strengthen thee, to animate and support thee." [3.] He assures him of success; for *if God be for us, who can prevail against us?* If he be with us, nothing can be wanting to us. The presence of God with us is all in all to our prosperity, whatever we do. Gideon was a *mighty man of valour*, and yet he could bring nothing to pass without the presence of God, and that presence is enough to make any man mighty in valour, and to give a man courage at any time.

(2.) Gideon gave a very melancholy answer to this joyful salutation; (*v.* 13.) "*O my Lord, if the Lord be with us*," (which the Chaldee reads, *Is the Shechinah of the Lord our help?* making that the same with the *Word of the Lord*,) "*why then is all*

this befallen us? All this trouble and distress from the Midianites' incursions, which forces me to thresh wheat here by the wine-press; all this loss, and grief, and fright; and *where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of?*" Observe, In his reply he regards not the praise of his own valour, nor does that in the least elevate him, or give him any encouragement; though it is probable the angel adapted what he said to that which Gideon was at the same time thinking of; while his laborious hands were employed about his wheat, his working head and daring heart were meditating Israel's rescue and Midian's ruin, with which thought, he that knows the heart, seasonably sets in, calls him a man of valour for his brave projects, and opens him a way to put them in execution; yet Gideon, as if not conscious to himself of any thing great or encouraging in his own spi it, fastens only on the assurance the angel had given him of God's presence, as that by which they held all their comfort. Observe, The angel spake in particular to him, *The Lord is with thee*, but he expostulates for all, *If the Lord be with us*; herding himself with the thousands of Israel, and admitting no comfort but what they might be sharers in; so far is he from the thoughts of monopolizing it, though he had so fair an occasion given him. Note, Public spirits reckon that only honour and joy to themselves, which puts them in a capacity of serving the common interests of God's church.

Gideon was a mighty man of valour, but as yet weak in faith, which makes it hard to him to reconcile to the assurances now given him of the presence of God, [1.] The distress to which Israel was reduced; Why is *all this*, (and *all this* was no little) *befallen us?* Note, It is sometimes hard, but never impossible, to reconcile cross providences with the presence of God and his favour. [2.] The delay of their deliverance; "*Where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of?*" Why does not the same power which delivered our fathers from the yoke of the Egyptians, deliver us out of the hands of the Midianites?" As if because God did not immediately work miracles for their deliverance, though they had by their sins forfeited his favour and help, it must be questioned whether ever he had wrought the miracles which their fathers told them of, or if he had, whether he had now the same wisdom and power, and good-will to his people, that he had had formerly. This was his weakness. We must not expect that the miracles which were wrought when a church was in the forming, and some great truth in the settling, should be continued and repeated when the formation and settlement are completed: no, nor that the mercies of God showed to our fathers that served him, and kept close to him, should be renewed to us, if we degenerate and revolt from him. Gideon ought not to have said, either, *First*, That *God had delivered them into the hands of the Midianites*, for by their iniquities they had sold themselves; or, *Secondly*, That they were now in their hands, that he had forsaken them, for he had lately sent them a prophet, (v. 8.) which was a certain indication that he had not forsaken them.

(3.) The angel gave him a very effectual answer to his objections, by giving him a commission to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, and assuring him of success therein, v. 14. Now the angel is called *Jehovah*, for he speaks as one having authority, and not as a messenger. [1.] There was something extraordinary in the look he now gave to Gideon; it was a gracious favourable look, which revived his spirits that drooped, and silenced his fears, such a look as that with which God's countenance beholds the upright, Ps. 11. 7. He looked upon him and smiled at the objections he

made, which he gave him no direct answer to, but girded and clothed him with such power as would shortly enable him to answer them himself, and make him ashamed that ever he had made them. It was a speaking look, like Christ's upon Peter; (Luke 22. 61.) a powerful look, that strangely darted new light and life into Gideon's breast, and inspired him with a generous heat, far above what he felt before. [2.] But there was much more in what he said to him. *First*, He commissioned him to appear and act as Israel's deliverer. Such a one the few thinking people in the nation, and Gideon among the rest, were now expecting to be raised up, according to God's former method, in answer to the cries of oppressed Israel; and now Gideon is told, "Thou art the man: *Go in this thy might*, this might, wherewith thou art now threshing wheat; go and employ it to a nobler purpose, *I will make thee a thresher of men.*" Or rather, "this might wherewith thou art now endued by this look." God gave him his commission, by giving him all the qualifications that were necessary for the execution of it, which is more than the mightiest prince and potentate on earth can do for those to whom he gives commissions. God's fitting men for work, is a sure and constant evidence of his calling them to it. "Go, not in *thy* might, that which is natural, and of thyself; depend not on thine own valour: but go in *this* thy might, this which thou hast now received; *go in the strength of the Lord God*, that is the strength with which thou must strengthen thyself." *Secondly*, He assured him of success; this was enough to put courage into him, he might be confident he should not miscarry in the attempt; it should not turn either to his own disgrace, or the damage of his people, (as baffled enterprises do,) but to his honour and their happiness; "*Thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites*, and so shalt not only be an eye-witness, but a glorious instrument, of such wonders as thy fathers told thee of." Gideon, we may suppose, looked as one astonished at this strange and surprising power conferred upon him, and questions whether he may depend upon what he hears: the angel ratifies his commission with a *teste meipso*—an appeal to his own authority, there needed no more. "*Have not I commanded thee!*" I that have all power in heaven and earth, and particular authority here as Israel's King, giving commissions immediately. *I who am that I am*, the same that sent Moses," Exod. 3. 14.

(4.) Gideon made a very modest objection against this commission; (v. 15.) *O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?* This question bespeaks him either, [1.] Distrustful of God and his power. As if though God should be with him, yet it were impossible for him to save Israel. True faith is often weak, yet it shall not be rejected, but encouraged and strengthened. Or, [2.] Inquisitive concerning the methods he must take; "Lord, I labour under all imaginable disadvantages for it; if I must do it, thou must put me in the way." Note, Those who receive commissions from God, must expect and seek for instructions from him. Or rather, [3.] Humble, self-diffident, and self-denying. The angel had honoured him, but see how meanly he speaks of himself; "My family is comparatively poor in Manasse," (impoverished, it may be, more than other families, by the Midianites,) "and I am the least, that have the least honour and interest, in my father's house: what can I pretend to do? I am utterly unfit for the service, and unworthy of the honour." Note, God often chooses to do great things by those that are little, especially that are so in their own eyes. God delights to advance the humble.

(5.) This objection was soon answered by repe-

necessary he should give proofs of before he took the field, to give proofs of his valour there. [2.] That some steps might hereby be taken towards Israel's reformation, which must prepare the way for their deliverance. Sin, the cause, must be taken away, else how should the trouble come to an end, which was but the effect? And it might be hoped that this example of Gideon's, who was now shortly to appear so great a man, would be followed by the rest of the cities and tribes, and the destruction of this one altar of Baal, would be the destruction of many.

II. Gideon was *obedient to the heavenly vision*, v. 27. He that was to command the Israel of God, must be subject to the God of Israel, without disputing; and, as a type of Christ, must first *save his people from their sins*, and then save them from their enemies. 1. He had servants of his own, whom he could confide in, who, we may suppose, like him, had kept their integrity, and *had not bowed the knee to Baal*, and therefore were forward to assist him in destroying the altar of Baal. 2. He did not scruple taking his father's bullock, and offering it to God without his father's consent, because God, who expressly commanded him to do so, had a better title to it than his father had, and it was the greatest real kindness he could do his father, to prevent his sin. 3. He expected to incur the displeasure of his father's household by it, and the ill-will of his neighbours; yet he did it, remembering how much it was Levi's praise, that, in the cause of God, *he said unto his father and mother, I have not seen him*, Deut. 33. 9. And while he was sure of the favour of God, he feared not the anger of men; he that bade him do it would bear him out. Yet, 4. Though he feared not their resentments when it was done, to prevent their resistance in the doing of it, he prudently chose to do it by night, that he might not be disturbed in these sacred actions. And some think it was the same night in which God spake to him to do it; and that as soon as ever he had received the orders, he immediately applied himself to the execution of them, and finished before morning.

III. He was brought into peril of his life for doing of it, v. 28, 31. 1. It was soon discovered what was done. Gideon, when he had gone through with the business, did not desire the concealment of it, nor could it be hid, for the men of the city *rose early in the morning*, as it should seem, to say their matins at Baal's altar, and so to begin the day with their God, such a one as he was; a shame to those, who say the true God is their God, and yet, in the morning, direct no prayer to him, nor look up. 2. It was soon discovered who had done it. Strict inquiry was made; Gideon was known to be disaffected to the worship of Baal, which brought him into suspicion, and positive proof immediately came against him; "Gideon, no doubt, *has done this thing*." 3. Being found guilty of the fact, to such a pitch of impiety were these degenerate Israelites arrived, that they take it for law he must die for the same; and require his own father (who, by patronizing their idolatry, had given them too much cause to expect he would comply with them herein) to deliver him up. *Bring out thy son, that he may die*. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and tremble, O earth! By the law of God, the worshippers of Baal were to die, but these wicked men impiously turn the penalty upon the worshippers of the God of Israel. How prodigiously mad were they upon their idols! Was it not enough to offer the choicest of their bullocks to Baal, but must the bravest youth of their city fall as a sacrifice to that dunghill deity, when they pretended he was provoked? How soon will idolaters become persecutors!

IV. He was rescued out of the hands of his persecutors by his own father, v. 31. 1. There were those that stood against Gideon, that not only appeared at the first to make a demand, but insisted on it, and would have put him to death. Notwithstanding the heavy judgments they were at this time under for their idolatry, yet they hated to be reformed, and walked contrary to God then when he was walking contrary to them. 2. Yet then *Joash stood for him*; he was one of the chief men of the city. Those that have power, may do a great deal for the protection of an honest man and an honest cause, and when they souse their power, they are ministers of God for good. This Joash had patronised Baal's altar, yet now protects him that had destroyed it; either, (1.) Out of natural affection to his son, and perhaps a particular esteem for him, as a virtuous, valiant, valuable young man, and never the worse for not joining with him in the worship of Baal. Many that have not courage enough to keep their integrity themselves, yet have so much conscience left, as makes them love and esteem those that do. If Joash had a kindness for Baal, yet he had a greater kindness for his son. Or, (2.) Out of a care for the public peace. The mob grew riotous, and, he feared, would grow more so, and therefore, as some think, he bestirred himself to repress the tumult; "Let it be left to the judges, it is not for you to pass sentence upon any man; he that offers it, *let him be put to death*," he means, not as an idolater, but as a disturber of the peace, and a mover of sedition. Under this same colour, Paul was rescued at Ephesus, from those that were as zealous for Diana as these here for Baal, Acts 19. 40. Or, (3.) Out of a conviction that Gideon had done well. His son, perhaps, had reasoned with him, or God, who has all hearts in his hands, had secretly and effectually influenced him to appear thus against the advocates of Baal, though he had complied with them formerly in the worship of Baal. Note, It is good to appear for God when we are called to it, though there be few or none to second us, because God can incline the hearts of those to stand by us, from whom we little expect it. Let us do our duty, and then trust God with our safety.

Two things Joash urges; [1.] That it was absurd for them to plead for Baal. "Will you that are Israelites, the worshippers of the one only living and true God, plead for Baal, a false god? Will you be so sottish, so senseless? They whose father's god Baal was, and that never knew any other, are more excusable in pleading for him than you are, that are in covenant with Jehovah, and have been trained up in the knowledge of him. You that have smarted so much for worshipping Baal, and have brought all this mischief and calamity upon yourselves by it, will you yet plead for Baal?" Note, It is bad to commit sin, but it is a great wickedness indeed to plead for it, especially to plead for Baal, that idol, whatever it is, which possesses that room in the heart which God should have. [2.] That it was needless for them to plead for Baal; if he were not a god, as was pretended, they could have nothing to say for him; if he were, he was able to plead for himself, as the God of Israel had often done, by fire from heaven, or some other judgment against those who put contempt upon him. Here is a fair challenge to Baal, to *do either good or evil*, and the result convinced his worshippers of their folly, in praying to one to help them, that could not avenge himself; after this, Gideon remarkably prospered, and thereby it appeared how unable Baal was to maintain his own cause. *Lastly*, Gideon's father hereupon gave him a new name, (v. 32.) he called him *Jerubbaal*; "Let Baal plead, let him plead against him if he can; if he have any thing to say for

himself against his destroyer, let him say it." This name was a standing defiance to Baal; now that Gideon was taking up arms against the Midianites that worshipped Baal, let him defend his worshippers if he can; it likewise gave honour to Gideon, (a sworn enemy to that great usurper, and that had carried the day against him,) and encouragement to his soldiers, that they fought under one that fought for God, against that great competitor with him for the throne. It is the probable conjecture of the learned, that that Jerombalus, whom Sanchoniathon (one of the most ancient of all the heathen writers) speaks of as a *priest of the god Jao*, (a corruption of the name *Jehovah*,) and one to whom he was indebted for a great deal of knowledge, was this Jerubbaal. He is called *Jerubsheth*, 2 Sam. 11. 21. *Baal*, a lord, being fitly turned into *Besheth*, shame.

33. Then all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. 34. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. 35. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. 36. And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, 37. Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth besides, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. 38. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl-full of water. 39. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. 40. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Here we have,

I. The descent which the enemies of Israel made upon them, v. 33. A vast number of Midianites, Amalekites, and Arabians, got together, and came over Jordan, none either caring, or daring to guard that important and advantageous pass, against them; and they made their head-quarters in the valley of Jezreel, in the heart of Manasseh's tribe, not far from Gideon's city. Some think that the notice they had of Gideon's destroying Baal's altar, brought them over, and that they came to plead for Baal, and to make that a pretence for quarrelling with Israel; but it is more likely that it was now harvest-times when they had been wont each year to make them such a visit as this, (v. 3.) and were expected when Gideon was threshing, v. 11. God raised up Gideon to be ready against this terrible blow came. Their success's many years in these incursions, the little opposition they had met with, and the great booty they had carried off, made

them now both very eager and very confident; but it proved the *measure of their iniquity was full*; the year of recompense was come; they must now make an end to spoil, and must be spoiled, and they are gathered as sheaves to the floor, (Mic. 4. 12, 13.) for Gideon to thresh.

II. The preparation which Gideon makes to attack them in their camp, v. 34, 43. 1. God by his Spirit put life into Gideon; *The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon*, so the word is; clothed him as a robe to put honour upon him, clothed him as a coat of mail, to put defence upon him. Those are well clad, that are thus clothed, *A spirit of fortitude from before the Lord clothed Gideon*; so the Chaldee. He was of himself a mighty man of valour; yet personal strength and courage, though vigorously exerted, would not suffice for this great action; he must have the *armour of God* upon him, and that is it that he must depend upon; *the Spirit of the Lord clothed him* in an extraordinary manner; whom God calls to his work, he will qualify and animate for it. Gideon with his trumpet put life into his neighbours, God working with him; he *blew a trumpet* to call in volunteers, and more came in than perhaps he expected. (1.) The men of Abiezer, though lately enraged against him for throwing down the altar of Baal, and though they had condemned him to death as a criminal, were now convinced of their error, bravely came in to his assistance, and submitted to him as their general; *Abiezer was gathered after him*, v. 34. So suddenly can God turn the hearts, even of idolaters and persecutors. (2.) Distant tribes, even Asher and Naphtali, which lay most remote, though strangers to him, obeyed his summons, and sent him in the best of their forces, v. 35. Though they lay the furthest from the danger, yet, considering that if their neighbours were overrun by the Midianites, their own turn would be next, they were forward to join against a common enemy.

III. The signs which God gratified him with, for the confirming both of his own faith and that of his followers; and perhaps it was more for their sakes than for his own that he desired them. Or, perhaps he desired by these to be satisfied, whether this was the time of his conquering the Midianites, or whether he was to wait for some other opportunity. Observe, 1. His request for a sign; (v. 36, 37.) "Let me by this know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand; let a fleece of wool, spread in the open air, be wet with the dew, and let the ground about it be dry." The purport of this is, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*. He found his own faith weak and wavering, and therefore begged of God by this sign to perfect what was lacking in it. We may suppose God, who intended to give these signs, for the glorifying of his own power and goodness, put it into his heart to ask them. Yet, when he repeated his request for a second sign, the reverse of the former, he did it with a very humble apology, deprecating God's displeasure, because it looked so like a peevish humoursome distrust of God, and dissatisfaction with the many assurances he had already given him; (v. 39.) *Let not thine anger be hot against me*. Though he took the boldness to ask another sign, yet he did it with such fear and trembling, as showed that the familiarity God had graciously admitted him to, did not breed any contempt of God's glory, or presumption on God's goodness. Abraham had given him an example of this, when God gave him leave to be very free with him; (Gen. 18. 30, 32.) *O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak*. God's favour must be sought with great reverence, due sense of our distance, and a religious fear of his wrath. 2. God's gracious grant of his request. See how tender God is of true believers though they be weak, and how

ready to condescend to their infirmities, that the bruised reed may not be broken, nor the smoking flax quenched. Gideon would have *the fleece wet, and the ground dry*; but then, lest any should object, "It is natural for wool, if ever so little moisture fall, to drink it in, and retain it, and therefore there was nothing extraordinary in that," though the quantity wrung out was sufficient to obviate that objection, yet he desires that next night the ground might be wet and the fleece dry; and so willing is God to give to the heirs of promise strong consolation, (Heb. 6. 17, 18.) even by two immutable things. He suffers himself, not only to be prevailed with by their importunities, but even to be prescribed to by their doubts and dissatisfactions.

These signs were, (1.) Truly miraculous, and therefore abundantly serving to confirm his commission. It is said of the dew, that it is *from the Lord, and tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men*, Mic. 5. 7. And yet God here in this matter *hearkened to the voice of a man*; as to Joshua, in the directing the course of the sun, so to Gideon, in directing that of the dew, by which it appears, that it falls not by chance, but by providence. The latter sign inverted the former, and, to please Gideon, it was wrought backward and forward; whence Dr. Fuller observes, that *heaven's real miracles will endure turning, being inside and outside both alike*. (2.) Very significant. He and his men were going to engage the Midianites; could God distinguish between a small fleece of Israel, and the vast floor of Midian? Yes, by this, he is made to know that he can. Is Gideon desirous that the dew of Divine grace might descend upon himself in particular? He sees the fleece wet with dew to assure him of it. Does he desire that God will be as the dew of all Israel? Behold, all the ground is wet. Some make this fleece an emblem of the Jewish nation, which, when time was, was wet with the dew of God's word and ordinances, while the rest of the world was dry. But since the rejection of Christ and his gospel, they are dry *as the heath in the wilderness*, while the nations about are *as a watered garden*.

CHAP. VII.

This chapter presents us with Gideon in the field, commanding the army of Israel, and routing the army of the Midianites, for which great exploit we found in the former chapter how he was prepared with his converse with God, and his conquest of Baal. We are here told, I. What direction God gave to Gideon for the modelling of his army, by which it was reduced to three hundred men, v. 1..8. II. What encouragement God gave to Gideon to attack the enemy, by sending him unknown into their camp to hear a Midianite tell his dream, v. 9..15. III. How he formed his attack upon the enemy's camp with his three hundred men, not to fight them, but to frighten them, v. 16..20. IV. The success of this attack: it put them to flight, and gave them a total rout, the disbanded forces, and their other neighbours, then coming in to his assistance, v. 21..25. It is a story that shines very bright in the book of the wars of the Lord.

I. **T**HEN Jerubbaal, (who is Gideon,) and all the people that *were* with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2. And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3. Now, therefore, go to, proclaim in the ears of the

people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return, and depart early from mount Gilead: and there returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand. 4. And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people *are* yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, *that* of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6. And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7. And the LORD said unto Gideon by the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place. 8. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest of* Israel, every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

Here,

I. Gideon applies himself with all possible care and industry to do the part of a good general, in leading on the hosts of Israel against the Midianites. *He rose up early*, (v. 1.) as one whose heart was upon his business, and who was afraid of losing time. Now that he is sure God is with him, he is impatient of delay. He pitched near a famous well, that his army might not be distressed for want of water, and gained the higher ground, which, possibly, might be some advantage to him, for the Midianites *were beneath him in the valley*. Note, Faith in God's promises must not slacken, but rather quicken our endeavours. When we are sure God goes before us, then we must bestir ourselves, 2 Sam. 5. 24.

II. God provides that the praise of the intended victory may be reserved wholly to himself, by appointing three hundred men only to be employed in this service. The army consisted of thirty-two thousand men; a small army, in comparison with what Israel might have raised upon so great an occasion, and a very small one in comparison with which the Midianites had now brought into the field; Gideon was ready to think them too few, but God comes to him, and tells him they were *too many*, v. 2. Not but that they did well, who offered themselves willingly to this expedition, but God saw fit not to make use of all that came. We often find God bringing great things to pass by a few hands, but this was the only time that he purposely made them fewer. Had Deborah lately blamed those who *came not to the help of the Lord*, and yet in the next great action must they be turned off that do come? Yes; 1. God would hereby show, that when

he employed likely instruments in his service, he did not need them, but could do his work without them; so that he was not indebted to them for their service, but they to him for employing them. 2. He would hereby put them to shame for their cowardice, who had tamely submitted to the Midianites, and durst not make head against them, because of the disproportion of their numbers. They now saw, if they had but made sure of the favour of God, one of them might have chased a thousand. 3. He would hereby silence and exclude boasting: that is the reason here given by him who knows the pride that is in men's hearts, *lest Israel vaunt themselves against me*. Justly were they denied the honour of the service who would not give God the honour of the success. *Mine own hand hath saved me*, is a word that must never come out of the mouth of such as shall be saved. *He that glories must glory in the Lord*, and all flesh must be silent before him.

Two ways God took to lessen their numbers.

(1.) He ordered all that would own themselves timorous and faint-hearted to be dismissed, v. 3. He was now encamped on a mountain close to the enemy, called *mount Gilead*, from Gilead, the common ancestors of these families of Manasseh, which were seated on this side Jordan, Numb. 26. 30. And from thence they might see perhaps the vast numbers of the enemy; those therefore who were disheartened at the sight, were left to their liberty to go back if they pleased. There was a law for making such a proclamation as this, Deut. 20. 8. But Gideon perhaps thought that concerned only those wars which were undertaken for the enlarging of their coast, not, as this, for their necessary defence against an invader; therefore Gideon had not proclaimed this, if God had not commanded him, who knew how his forces would hereby be diminished. Cowards would be as likely as any, after the victory, to take the honour of it from God, and therefore God would not do them the honour to employ them in it. One would have thought there had been scarcely one Israelite to be found, that against such an enemy as the Midianites, and under such a leader as Gideon, would have owned himself fearful; yet above two parts of three took advantage of this proclamation, and filed off when they saw the strength of the enemy and their own weakness, not considering the assurances of the divine presence which their general had received of the Lord, and, it is likely, delivered unto them. Some think the oppression they had been under so long, had broken their spirits, others, more probably, that consciousness of their own guilt had deprived them of their courage. *Sin stared them in the face*, and therefore they durst not look death in the face. Note, Fearful, faint-hearted people, are not fit to be employed for God; and among those that are listed under the banner of Christ, there are more such than we think there are.

(2.) He directed the cashiering of all that remained, but three hundred men; and he did it by a sign. "*The people are yet too many for me to make use of*," v. 4. See how much God's thoughts and ways are above ours: Gideon himself, it is likely, thought they were too few, though they were as many as Barak encountered Sisera with; (ch. 4. 14.) and had he not forced his way through the discouragement by dint of faith, he himself would have started back from so hazardous an enterprise, and have made the best of his own way back: but God saith, There are *too many*; and when diminished to a third part, they are yet *too many*; which may help us to understand those providences which sometimes seem to weaken the church and its interests; its friends are too many,

too mighty, too wise, for God to work deliverance by; God is taking a course to lessen them, that he may be *exalted in his own strength*.

Gideon is ordered to bring his soldiers to the watering, probably, to the well of Harod, (v. 1.) and the stream that ran from it; he, or some appointed by him, must observe how they drank. We must suppose they were all thirsty, and were inclined to drink; it is likely he told them they must prepare to enter upon action immediately, and therefore must refresh themselves accordingly, not expecting, after this, to drink any thing else but the blood of their enemies. Now, [1.] Some, and no doubt the most, would kneel down on their knees to drink, and put their mouths to the water as horses do, and so they might get their full draught. [2.] Others, it may be, would not make such a formal business of it, but as a dog laps with his tongue, so they would hastily take up a little water in their hands, and cool their mouths with that, and be gone. Three hundred and no more there were of this latter sort, that drank in haste, and by those God tells Gideon he would rout the Midianites, v. 7. By the former distinction, none were retained but hearty men, that were resolved to do their utmost for retrieving the liberties of Israel; but by this further distinction it was provided that none should be made use of, but, *First*, Men that were *hardy*; that could endure long fatigue, without complaining of thirst or weariness; that had not in them any dregs either of sloth or luxury. *Secondly*, Men that were *hasty*; that thought it long until they were engaged with the enemy, preferring the service of God and their country before their necessary refreshments: such as these God chooses to employ, that are not only well affected, but zealously affected in a good thing; and also because these were the smaller number, and therefore the least likely to effect what they were designed for, God would by them save Israel. It was a great trial to the faith and courage of Gideon, when God bid him let all the rest of the people but these three hundred *go every man to his place*; that is, go where they pleased out of his call, and from under his command: yet we may suppose those that were hearty in the cause, though now set aside, did not go far out of hearing, but that they were ready to follow the blow, when the three hundred men had made the assault; though that does not appear.

Thus strangely was Gideon's army purged and modelled, and reduced, instead of being recruited, as one would think in so great an action it both needed and deserved to be. Now let us see how this little despicable regiment, on which the stress of the action must lie, was accoutred and fitted out. Had these three hundred been double-manned with servants and attendants, and double-armed with swords and spears, we should have thought them the more likely to bring something to pass. But instead of making them more serviceable by their equipment, they are made less so; for, 1. Every soldier turns sutler; they *took victuals in their hands*, (v. 8.) left their baggage behind, and every man burdened himself with his own provision; which was a trial of their faith, whether they could trust God when they had no more provisions with them than they could carry, and a trial of their diligence, whether they would carry as much as they had occasion for. This was indeed living from hand to mouth. 2. Every soldier turns trumpeter. The regiments that were cashiered left their trumpets behind them for the use of those three hundred men, who were furnished with those instead of weapons of war, as if they had been going rather to a game than to a battle.

9. And it came to pass the same night,

that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. 10. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: 11. And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that *were* in the host. 12. And the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the east, lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude. 13. And when Gideon was come, behold, *there was* a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14. And his fellow answered and said, This *is* nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15. And it was *so*, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Gideon's army being diminished, as we have found it was, he must either fight by faith or not at all; God therefore here provides recruits for his faith, instead of recruits for his forces.

I. He furnishes him with a good foundation to build his faith upon; nothing but a word from God will be footing for faith. He has that as full and express as he can desire, *v. 9.* A word of command to warrant the action, which otherwise seemed rash and indiscreet, and unbecoming a wise general; "*Arise, get thee down with this handful of men unto the host;*" and a word of promise to assure him of the success, which otherwise seemed very improbable; "*I have delivered it into thine hand, it is all thine own.*" This word of the Lord came to him the same night, when he was (we may suppose) full of care how he should come off; *in the multitude of his thoughts within him these comforts did delight his soul.* Divine consolations are given in to believers, not only strongly, but seasonably.

II. He furnishes him with a good prop to support his faith with. 1. He orders him to be his own spy, and now in the dead of the night to go down privately into the host of Midian and see what intelligence he could gain. "*If thou fear to go down to fight, go first only with thine own servant,* (*v. 10.*) *and hear what they say;* (*v. 11.*) and it is intimated to him he should hear that which would greatly strengthen his faith. God knows the infirmities of his people, and what great encouragement they may sometimes take from a small matter: and therefore knowing beforehand what would occur to Gideon, in that very part of the camp to which he would go down, he orders him to go down and hearken to what *they* said that he might the

more firmly believe what God said. He must take with him *Phurah his servant*, one that he could confide in; probably, one of the ten that had helped him to break down the altar of Baal; he must take him and no one else with him, must take him *with him* to be a witness of what he should hear the Midianites say, that out of the mouth of these two witnesses, when the matter came to be reported to Israel, the word might be established. He must take his servant with him, because two are better than one, and a little help better than none. 2. Being so, he orders him the sight of something that was discouraging. (1.) It was enough to frighten him, to discern, perhaps by moon-light, the vast numbers of the enemy; (*v. 12.*) the men like grasshoppers for multitude, and they proved no better than grasshoppers for strength and courage; the camels one could not count, any more than the sand. But, (2.) He heard that which was to him a very good omen; and which when he had heard, he went back again immediately, supposing he now had what he was sent thither for. He overheard two soldiers of the enemy, that were comrades, talking; probably, they were in bed together, waking in the night. [1.] One of them tells his dream, and (as our dreams generally are bad, and therefore not worthy telling again) it is a very foolish one. *He dreamed that he saw a barley-cake come rolling down the hill into the camp of the Midianites, and "methought," says he, (for so we used to tell our dreams,) "this cake struck one of our tents,"* (perhaps one of the chief of their tents,) "and with such violence, that (would you think it?) it overturned the tent, forced down the stakes, and broke the cords at one blow, so that the tent lay along, and buried its inhabitants," *v. 13.* *In multitudes of dreams there are divers vanities,* says Solomon, Eccl. 5. 7. One would wonder what odd incoherent things are often put together by a ludicrous fancy in our dreams. [2.] The other, it may be, between sleeping and waking, undertakes to interpret this dream, and the interpretation is very far fetched: *This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon,* *v. 14.* Our expositors now can tell us how apt the resemblance was; that Gideon, who had threshed corn for his family, and made cakes for his friend, (*ch. 6. 11—19.*) was fitly represented by a cake; that he and his army were inconsiderable as a cake made of a little flour, as contemptible as a barley-cake, hastily got together, as a cake suddenly baked upon the coals, and as unlikely to conquer the great army, as a cake to overthrow a tent. But, after all, do *not interpretations belong to God?* He put it into the head of the one to dream, and into the mouth of the other to give the sense of it. If Gideon had heard the dream only, and he and his servant had been to interpret it themselves, it had so little significance in it, that it would have done him little service; but having the interpretation from the mouth of an enemy, it not only appeared to come from God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand, but it was likewise an evidence that the enemy was quite dispirited, and that the name of Gideon was become so formidable to them, that it disturbed their sleep. The victory would easily be won, which was already so tamely yielded; *into his hand hath God delivered Midian.* Those were not likely to fight, who saw God fighting against them.

Gideon, observing the finger of God pointing him to that very place, at that very time, to hear this dream and the interpretation of it, was exceedingly encouraged by it against the melancholy apprehensions he had upon the reducing of his army. He was very well pleased to hear himself compared to a barley-cake, when it proved to effect such great things. Being hereby animated, we are told. (*v.*

15.) *First*, How he gave God the glory of it; he worshipped immediately, bowed his head, or, it may be, lifted up his eyes and hands, and in a short ejaculation thanked God for the victory he was now sure of, and for this encouragement to expect it. Wherever we are, we may speak to God, and worship him, and find a way open heavenward. God must have the praise of that which is encouraging in our faith. And his providence must be acknowledged in those events, which, though minute and seemingly accidental, prove serviceable to us. *Secondly*, How he gave his friends a share in the encouragements he had received; "*Arise, prepare to march presently; the Lord has delivered Midian into your hand.*"

16. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. 17. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, *that as I do, so shall ye do*. 18. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that *are* with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon*. 19. So Gideon, and the hundred men that *were* with him, came unto the outside of the camp, in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, that *were* in their hands. 20. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow *withal*; and they cried, *The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon*. 21. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

Here is,

I. The alarm which Gideon gave to the hosts of Midian in the dead time of the night; for it was intended that they who had so long been a terror to Israel, and had so often frightened them, should themselves be routed and ruined purely by terror. The attack here made was, in many circumstances, like that which Abraham made upon the army that had taken Lot captive; the number of men much the same, Abraham had three hundred and eighteen, Gideon three hundred; they both divided their forces, both made their attack by night, and were both victorious under great disadvantages, (Gen. 14. 14, 15.) and Gideon is not only a son of Abraham, (so were the Midianites by Keturah,) but an heir of his faith. Gideon, 1. Divided his army, small as it was, into three battalions (v. 16.) one of which he himself commanded, (v. 19.) because great armies (and such a one he would

make a show of) were usually divided into the right wing, and left wing, and the body of the army. 2. He ordered them all to do as he did, v. 17. He told them now, it is very likely, what they must do, else the thing was so strange, they would scarcely have done it of a sudden, but he would, by doing it first, give notice to them when to do it, as officers exercise their soldiers with the word of command, or beat of drum, *Look on me, and do likewise*; such is the word of command our Lord Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, gives his soldiers, for he has *left us an example*, with a charge to follow it, *As I do, so shall ye do*. 3. He made his descent in the night, when they were secure, and least expected it, which would put them into great consternation; and when the smallness of his army would not be discovered. In the night, all frights are most frightful; especially in the dead of the night, as this was, a little after midnight, when the middle watch began, and the alarm would wake them out of their sleep. We read of *terror by night*, as very terrible, (Ps. 91. 5.) and *fear in the night*, Cant. 5. 8. 4. That which Gideon aimed at, was, to frighten this huge host; to give them not only a fatal rout, but a very shameful one. He accoutred his army with every man a trumpet in his right hand, and an earthen pitcher, with a torch in it, in his left; and he himself thought it no disparagement to him, to march before them thus armed. He would make but jest of conquering this army, and goes out against them rather as against a company of children than of soldiers, *The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn*, Isa. 37. 22. The fewness of his men favoured his design, for being so few, they marched to the camp with the greater secrecy and expedition; so that they were not discovered till they were close by the camp; and he contrived to give the alarm when they had just mounted the guards, (v. 19.) that the sentinels, being then wakeful, might the sooner disperse the alarm through the camp, which was the best service they could do him.

Three ways Gideon contrived to strike a terror upon this army, and put them into confusion. (1.) With a great noise; every man must blow his trumpet in the most terrible manner he could, and clatter an earthen pitcher to pieces at the same time, probably, each dashed his pitcher to his next man's, and so they were broken both together, which would not only make a great crash, but was a figure of what would be the effects of the fight, even the Midianites' killing one another. (2.) With a great blaze; the lighted torches were hid in the pitchers, like a *candle under a bushel*, until they came to the camp, and then being taken out all together of a sudden, would make a glaring show, and run through the camp like a flash of lightning. Perhaps with these they set some of the tents on the outside of the camp on fire, which would very much increase the confusion. (3.) With a great shout; every man must cry, *For the Lord and for Gideon*; so some think it should be read, v. 18. for there the sword is not in the original, but it is, v. 20. *The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon*. It should seem, he borrowed the word from the Midianite's dream, (v. 14.) it is the *sword of Gideon*: finding his name was a terror to them, he thus improves it against them; but prefixes the name of Jehovah, as the figure, without which his own was but an insignificant cipher. This would put life into his own men, who might well take courage, when they had such a God as Jehovah, and such a man as Gideon, both to *fight*, and to *fight for them*: well might they follow, who had such leaders. It would likewise put their enemies into a fright, who had of old heard of Jehovah's great name, and of late of Gideon's. The sword of the

Lord is all in all to the success of the sword of Gideon, yet the sword of Gideon must be employed. Men the instruments, and God the principal Agent, must both be considered in their places; but men, the greatest and best, always in subserviency and subordination to God. This army was to be defeated purely by terrors, and those are especially the *sword of the Lord*. These soldiers, if they had swords by their sides, that was all, they had none in their hands: but they gained the victory by shouting "The Sword." So the church's enemies are routed *by a sword out of the mouth*, Rev. 19. 21.

Now this method here taken of defeating the Midianites, may be alluded to, [1.] As typifying the destruction of the Devil's kingdom in the world, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the sounding of that trumpet, and the holding forth of that light out of earthen vessels, for such the ministers of the gospel are, in whom the *treasure of that light* is deposited, 2 Cor. 4. 6, 7. Thus God chose *the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*, a barley-cake to overthrow the tents of Midian, that the *excellency of the power might be of God only*; the gospel is a sword, not in the hand, but in the mouth, the sword of the Lord and of Gideon; of God and Jesus Christ, him that sits on the throne, and the Lamb. [2.] As representing the terrors of the great day. So the excellent Bishop Hall applies it; if these pitchers, trumpets, and fire-brands, did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who shall be able to stand before the last trumpet, when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, the elements shall be on a flame, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the Lord himself shall descend with a shout!

II. The wonderful success of this alarm. The Midianites were shouted out of their lives, as the walls of Jericho were shouted down, that Gideon might see what he lately despaired of ever seeing, the *wonders that their fathers told them of*. Gideon's soldiers observed their orders, and *stood every man in his place round about the camp*, (v. 21.) sounding his trumpet to excite them to fight one another, and holding out his torch to light them to their ruin. They did not rush into the host of Midian, as greedy either of blood or spoil, but patiently stood still to *see the salvation of the Lord*, a salvation purely of his own working. Observe how the design took effect.

1. They feared the Israelites; *all the host* immediately took the alarm; it flew like lightning through all the lines, and *they ran, and cried, and fled*, v. 21. There was something natural in this fright; we may suppose they had not had intelligence of the great diminution of Gideon's army, but rather concluded that since their last advices, it had been growing greater and greater; and therefore had reason to suspect, knowing how odious and grievous they had made themselves, and what bold steps had been taken toward the throwing off of their yoke, that it was a very great army which was to be ushered in with all those trumpeters and torch-bearers: but there was more of a supernatural power impressing this terror upon them; God himself gave it the setting on, to show how that promise should have been fulfilled if they had not forfeited it, *One of you shall chase a thousand*. See the power of imagination, and how much it may become a terror at some times, as at other times it is a pleasure.

2. They fell foul upon one another; (v. 22.) *The Lord set every man's hand against his fellow*. In this confusion, observing the trumpeters and torch-bearers to stand still without their camp, they concluded the body of the army had already entered, and therefore every one ran at the next he met, though a friend, supposing him an enemy; and one such mistake as that, would occasion many, for

then he that slew him would certainly be taken for an enemy, and would be despatched immediately. It is our interest to preserve such a command of our own spirits, as never to be afraid of any amazement, for we cannot conceive what mischiefs we thereby plunge ourselves in. See also how God often makes the enemies of his church instruments to destroy one another; it is pity the church's friend should ever be thus infatuated.

3. They fled for their lives. Perhaps when daylight came, they were sensible of their mistake in fighting with one another, and concluded that by this fatal error they had so weakened themselves, that now it was impossible to make any head against Israel, and therefore made the best of their way toward their own country, though, for aught that appears, the three hundred men kept their ground. *The wicked flees when none pursues*, Prov. 28. 1. *Terrors make him afraid on every side, and drive him to his feet*, Job. 18. 11.

23. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites. 24. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. 25. And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the wine-press of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

We have here the prosecution of this glorious victory.

1. Gideon's soldiers that had been dismissed, and perhaps had begun to disperse themselves, upon notice of the enemies' flight, got together again, and vigorously pursued them whom they had not courage to face. The men of Israel out of Naphtali and Asher who did this, (v. 23.) were not such as now came from those distant countries, but the same that had enlisted themselves, (ch. 6. 35.) but had been cashiered. They who were fearful and afraid to fight, (v. 3.) now took heart, when the worst was over, and were ready enough to divide the spoil, though backward to make the onset. They also that might not fight, though they had a mind to it, and were disbanded by order from God, did not (as those, 2 Chron. 25. 10. 13.) *return in great anger*, but waited for an opportunity of doing service in pursuing the victory, though they were denied the honour of helping to force the lines.

2. The Ephraimites, upon a summons from Gideon, came in unanimously, and secured the passes over Jordan, by the several fords, to cut off the enemies' retreat into their own country, that they might be entirely destroyed, to prevent the like mischief to Israel another time. Now that they had begun to fall, they resolved utterly to destroy them, Esth. 6. 13. *They took the waters*; (v. 24.) that is, posted themselves along the river side, so that the Midianites, who fled from those who pursued them, fell into the hand of those that waited to intercept them. Here was *fear, and the pit, and the snare*, Isa. 24. 7.

3. Two of the chief commanders of the host of Midian were taken and slain by the Ephraimites on

this side Jordan, v. 25. Their names perhaps signified their nature, *Oreb* signifies a *raven*, and *Zeeb* a *wolf* (*Corvinus* and *Lupus*.) These in their flight had taken shelter, one *in a rock*, (Isa. 2. 21. Rev. 6. 15.) the other by a *wine-press*, as Gideon for fear of them had lately hid his corn by a wine-press, ch. 6. 11. But the places of their shelter were made the places of their slaughter, and the memory of it preserved to posterity in the names of the places, to their perpetual infamy; *Here fell the princes of Midian*.

CHAP. VIII.

This chapter gives us a further account of Gideon's victory over the Midianites, with the residue of the story of his life and government. I. Gideon prudently pacifies the offended Ephraimites, v. 1..3. II. He bravely pursues the flying Midianites, v. 4, 10..12. III. He justly chastises the insolence of the men of Succoth and Penuel, who basely abused him, (v. 5..9.) and were reckoned with for it, v. 13..17. IV. He honourably slays the two kings of Midian, v. 18..21. V. After all this, he modestly declines the government of Israel, v. 22, 23. VI. He foolishly gratified the superstitious humour of his people, by setting up an ephod in his own city, which proves a great snare, v. 24..27. VII. He kept the country quiet forty years, v. 28. VIII. He died in honour, and left a numerous family behind him, v. 29..32. IX. Both he and his God were soon forgotten by ungrateful Israel, v. 33..35.

1. **AND** the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. 2. And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3. God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

No sooner were the Midianites, the common enemy, subdued, than through the violence of some hot spirits, the children of Israel are ready to quarrel among themselves; an unhappy spark was struck, which if Gideon had not with a great deal of wisdom and grace extinguished immediately, might have broken out into a flame of fatal consequence. The Ephraimites, when they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon as general, instead of congratulating his successes, and addressing him with thanks for his great services, as they ought to have done, picked a quarrel with him, and grew very hot upon it.

I. Their accusation was very peevish and unreasonable; *Why didst thou not call us when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?* v. 1. Ephraim was brother to Manasseh, Gideon's tribe, and had had the pre-eminence in Jacob's blessing, and in Moses's, and therefore was very jealous of Manasseh, lest that tribe should at any time eclipse the honour of their's. Hence we find Manasseh against Ephraim, and Ephraim against Manasseh, Isa. 9. 21. *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are as the bars of a castle*, Prov. 18. 19. But how unjust was their quarrel with Gideon! They were angry he did not send for them to *begin* the attack upon Midian, as well as to follow the blow. Why were they not called to lead the van? The post of honour, they thought, belonged to them. But, 1. Gideon was called of God, and must act as he directed; he neither took

the honour to himself, nor did he dispose of honours himself, but left it to God to do all. So that the Ephraimites in this quarrel reflected upon the divine conduct; and what was Gideon that they *mur-mured against him?* 2. Why did not the Ephraimites offer themselves willingly to the service? They knew the enemy was in their country, and had heard of the forces that were raising to oppose them, to which they ought to have joined themselves, in zeal for the common cause, though they had not a formal invitation. These seek themselves more than God, that stand upon a point of honour to excuse themselves from doing real service to God and their generation. In Deborah's time there was a *root of Ephraim*, ch. 5. 14. Why did not that appear now? The case itself called them; they needed not wait for a call from Gideon. 3. Gideon had saved their credit in not calling them; if he had sent for them, no doubt, many of them would have gone back with the faint-hearted, or been dismissed with the lazy, slothful, and intemperate; so that by not calling them, he prevented the putting of those slurs upon them. Cowards will seem valiant when the danger is over, but those consult their reputation, who try their courage when danger is near.

II. Gideon's answer was very calm and peaceable, and was intended not so much to justify himself, as to please and pacify them, v. 2, 3. He answers them, 1. With a great deal of meekness and temper: he did not resent the affront, nor answer anger with anger, but mildly reasons the case with them; and he won as true honour by this command which he had over his own passion, as by his victory over the Midianites; *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty*. 2. With a great deal of modesty and humility, magnifying their performances above his own. *Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim*, who picked up the stragglers of the enemy, and cut off those of them that escaped, *better than the vintage of Abiezer*,—a greater honour to them, and better service to the country, than the first attack Gideon made upon them? The destruction of the church's enemies is compared to a vintage, Rev. 14. 18. In this he owns their gleanings better than his gatherings. The improving of a victory is often more honourable, and of greater consequence, than the winning of it; in this they had signalized themselves, and their own courage and conduct, or rather, God had dignified them; for though, to magnify their achievements, he is willing to diminish his own performances, yet he will not take any flowers from God's crown to adorn their's with; *God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian*, and a great slaughter has been made of the enemy by your numerous hosts, and *what was I able to do with three hundred men, in comparison of you and your brave exploits?*" Gideon stands here a very great example of self-denial, and this instance shows us, (1.) That envy is best removed by humility. It is true, even right works are often envied, Eccl. 4. 4. Yet they are not so apt to be so, when those who do them, appear not to be proud of them. They are malignant indeed, who seek to cast those down from their excellency, that humble and abase themselves. (2.) It is likewise the surest method of ending strife, for *only by pride comes contention*, Prov. 13. 10. (3.) Humility is most amiable and admirable in the midst of great attainments and advancements. Gideon's conquests did greatly set off his condescensions. (4.) It is the proper act of humility to *esteem others better than ourselves, and in honour to prefer one another*.

Now what was the issue of the controversy? The Ephraimites had *chidden with him sharply*, (v. 1.) forgetting the respect owing to their general, and one whom God had honoured, and giving vent to

their passion in a very indecent liberty of speech, a certain sign of a weak and indefensible cause: reason runs low when the chiding flies high. But Gideon's *soft answer turned away their wrath*, Prov. 15. 1. *Their anger was abated toward him*, (v. 3.) It is intimated, that they retained him some resentment, but he prudently overlooked it, and let it cool by degrees. Very great and good men must expect to have their patience tried, by the unkindnesses and follies even of those they serve, and must not think it strange.

4. And Gideon came to Jordan, *and passed over*, he and the three hundred men that *were* with him, faint, yet pursuing *them*. 5. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they *be* faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. 6. And the princes of Succoth said, *Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hands*, that we should give bread unto thine army? 7. And Gideon said, Therefore, when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. 8. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered *him*. 9. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. 10. Now Zebah and Zalmunna *were* in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand *men*, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. 11. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents, on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. 12. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host. 13. And Gideon, the son of Joash, returned from battle before the sun *was up*. 14. And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, *even threescore and seventeen men*. 15. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, *Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand*, that we should give bread unto thy men *that are weary*? 16. And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. 17. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

In these verses, we have,

I. Gideon, as a valiant general, pursuing the remaining Midianites, and bravely following his blow. A very great slaughter was made of the enemy at first, *one hundred and twenty thousand men that drew the sword*, v. 10. Such a terrible execution did they make among themselves, and so easy a prey were they to Israel: but, it seems, the two kings of Midian, being better provided than the rest for an escape, with fifteen thousand men, got over Jordan before the passes could be secured by the Ephraimites, and made toward their own country: Gideon thinks he does not fully execute his commission to save Israel, if he let them escape. He is not content to chase them out of the country, but he will *chase them out of the world*, Job 18. 18. This resolution is here pushed on with great firmness, and crowned with great success.

1. His firmness was very exemplary; he effected his purpose under the greatest disadvantages and discouragements that could be. (1.) He took none with him, but his three hundred men, who now laid aside their trumpets and torches, and betook themselves to their swords and spears. God had said, *By these three hundred men will I save you*; (ch. 7. 7.) and confiding in that promise, Gideon kept to them only, v. 4. He expected more from three hundred men, supported by a particular promise, than from so many thousands, supported only by their own valour. (2.) They were *faint and yet pursuing*; much fatigued with what they had done, and yet eager to do more against the enemies of their country. Our spiritual warfare must thus be prosecuted with what strength we have, though we have but little; it is many a time the true christian's case, fainting, and yet pursuing. (3.) Though he met with discouragement from those of his own people, was jeered for what he was doing, as going about what he could never accomplish, yet he went on with it. If those that should be our helpers in the way of our duty, prove hinderances to us, let not that drive us off from it. Those know not how to value God's acceptance, that know not how to despise the reproaches, and contempts of men. (4.) He made a very long march by *the way of them that dwelt in tents*, v. 11. Either because he hoped to find them kinder to him than the men of Succoth, and Penuel, that dwelt in walled towns; (sometimes there is more generosity and charity found in country tents than in city places;) or, because that was a road in which he would be least expected, and therefore that way it would be the greater surprise to them. It is evident, he spared no pains to complete his victory. Now he found it an advantage to have his three hundred men, such as could bear hunger, and thirst, and toil. It should seem, he set upon them by night, as he had done before, *for the host was secure*. The security of sinners often proves their ruin, and dangers are most fatal when least feared.

2. His success was very encouraging to resolution and industry in a good cause. He routed the army, (v. 11.) and took the two kings prisoners, v. 12. Note, The fear of the wicked shall come upon him. They that think to run *from the sword of the Lord and of Gideon*, do but run upon it. If he *flee from the iron weapon*, yet the bow of steel shall strike him through; for evil pursueth sinners.

II. Here is Gideon, as a righteous judge, chastising the insolence of the disaffected Israelites, the men of Succoth, and the men of Penuel, both in the time of God, on the other side Jordan.

1. The crime was great. Gideon, with a handful of feeble folk, was pursuing the common enemy, to complete the deliverance of Israel; his way leads him through the city of Succoth first, and afterward of Penuel; he expects not that the magistrates

should meet him in their formalities, congratulate his victory, present him with the keys of their city, give him a treat, much less that they should send forces in to his assistance, though he was entitled to it all; but he only begs some necessary food for his soldiers that were ready to faint for want, and he does it very humbly and importunately, *Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me, v. 5.* The request had been reasonable if they had been but poor travellers in distress; but considering that they were soldiers, *called and chosen, and faithful*, (Rev. 17. 14.) men whom God had greatly honoured, and whom Israel was highly obliged to, who had done great service to their country, and were now doing more; that they were conquerors, and had power to put them under contribution; that they were fighting God's battles and Israel's; nothing could be more just than that they should furnish them with the best provisions their city afforded. But the princes of Succoth neither *feared God, nor regarded man!* For, (1.) In contempt of God, they refused to answer the just demands of him whom God had raised up to save them, affronted him, bantered him, despised the success he had already been honoured with, despaired of success of his present undertaking, did what they could to discourage him in prosecuting the war, and were very willing to believe that the remaining forces of Midian, which they had now seen march through their country, would be too hard for him. *Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand?* "No, nor never will be;" so they conclude, judging by the disproportion of numbers. (2.) *The bowels of their compassion were shut up* against their brethren; they were as destitute of love as they were of faith; would not give morsels of bread (as some read it) to them that were ready to perish. Were these princes? Were these Israelites? Unworthy either title; base and degenerate men! Surely they were worshippers of Baal, or in the interests of Midian. The men of Penuel gave the same answer to the same request, *defying the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, v. 8.*

2. The warning he gave them of the punishment of their crime, was very fair. (1.) He did not punish it immediately, because he would not lose so much time from the pursuit of the enemy that were flying from him, because he would not seem to do it in a heat of passion, and because he should do it more to their shame and confusion, when he had completed his undertaking which they thought impracticable. But, (2.) He told them how he would punish it, (v. 7, 9.) to show the confidence he had of success in the strength of God, and that if they had the least grain of grace and consideration left, they might, upon second thoughts, repent of their folly, humble themselves, and contrive how to atone for it, by sending after him succours and supplies, which if they had done, no doubt, Gideon would have pardoned them. God gives notice of danger, and space to repent, that sinners may *flee from the wrath to come.*

3. The warning being slighted, the punishment, though very severe, was really very just. (1.) The princes of Succoth were first made examples; Gideon got intelligence of their number, seventy-seven men, their names and places of abode, which were described in writing to him, v. 14. And to their great surprise, when they thought he had scarce overtaken the Midianites, he was returned a conqueror; his three hundred men were now the ministers of his justice; they secured all these princes, and brought them before Gideon, who showed them his royal captives in chains, "These are the men you thought me an unequal match for, and would give me no assistance in the pursuit of," v. 15. And he punished them with thorns and briers, but it should

seem, not unto death. With these, [1.] He tormented their bodies, either by scourging, or rolling them in the thorns and briers; some way or other he *tore their flesh, v. 7.* Those shall have judgment without mercy, that have showed no mercy. Perhaps he observed them to be soft and delicate men, who despised him and his company for their roughness and hardness, and therefore Gideon thus mortified them for their effeminacy. [2.] He instructed their minds; with these *he taught the men of Succoth, v. 16.* The correction he gave them, was intended, not for destruction, but wholesome discipline, to make them wiser and better for the future. *He made them know,* (so the word is,) made them know themselves and their folly, God and their duty; made them know who Gideon was, since they would not know by the success wherewith God had crowned him. Note, Many are taught with the briers and thorns of affliction, that would not learn otherwise. God gives *wisdom by the rod and reproof, chastens and teaches,* and by correction *opens the ear of discipline.* Our blessed Saviour, though he were a Son, yet *learned obedience by the things which he suffered,* Heb. 5. 8. Let every *pricking brier, and grieving thorn,* especially when it become a *thorn in the flesh,* be thus interpreted, thus improved, "By this God designs to teach me; what good lessons shall I learn?" (2.) Penuel's doom comes next, and it should seem he used them more severely than the other, for good reason, no doubt, v. 17. [1.] *He beat down their tower,* of which they gloried, in which they trusted, perhaps scornfully advising Gideon and his men rather to secure themselves in that, than to pursue the Midianites. What men make their pride, the ruin of it is justly made their shame. [2.] *He slew the men of the city,* not at all, perhaps not the elders or princes, but those that had affronted him, and those only. He slew some of the men of the city that were most insolent and abusive, for terror to the rest, and *so he taught the men of Penuel.*

18. Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men *were they* whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so *were* they; each one resembled the children of a king. 19. And he said, They *were* my brethren, *even* the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. 20. And he said unto Jether his first-born, Up, and slay them: but the youth drew not his sword; for he feared, because he *was* yet a youth. 21. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man *is*, so *is* his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that *were* on their camels' necks.

Judgment began at the house of God, in the just correction of the men of Succoth and Penuel, who were Israelites, but it did not end there. The kings of Midian, when they had served to demonstrate Gideon's victories, and grace his triumphs, must now be reckoned with.

1. They are indicted for the murder of Gideon's brethren some time ago at mount Tabor. When the children of Israel, for fear of the Midianites, made them *dens in the mountains,* (ch. 6. 2.) those young men, it is likely, took shelter in that mountain, where they were found by these two kings, and most basely and barbarously slain in cold

blood. When he asks them *what manner of men they were*, (v. 18.) it is not because he was uncertain of the thing, or wanted proof of it; he was not so little concerned for his brethren's blood, as not to inquire it out before now, nor were these proud tyrants solicitous to conceal it; but he puts that question to them, that by their acknowledgment of the more than ordinary comeliness of the persons they slew, their crimes might appear the more heinous, and consequently their punishment the more righteous. They could not but own, that though they were found in a mean and abject condition, yet they had an unusual greatness and majesty in their countenances not unlike Gideon himself at this time; they *resembled the children of a king*, born for something great.

2. Being found guilty of this murder by their own confession, Gideon, though he might have put them to death as Israel's judge, for the injuries done to that people in general, as Oreb and Zeeb, (ch. 7. 25.) yet he chooses rather to put on the character of an *avenger of blood*, as next of kin to the persons slain. *They were my brethren*, v. 19. The other crimes might have been forgiven, at least Gideon would not have slain them himself, let them have answered it to the people; but *the voice of his brethren's blood cries*, cries to him, now it is in the power of his hand to avenge it, and therefore there is no remedy, by him must *their blood be shed*, though they were kings. Little did they think to have heard of this so long after; but murder seldom goes unpunished in this life.

3. The execution is done by Gideon himself with his own hand, because he was the *avenger of blood*; he bade his son slay them, for he was a near relation to the persons murdered, and fittest to be his father's substitute and representative; and he would thus train him up to the acts of justice and boldness, v. 20. But, (1.) The young man himself desired to be excused; he feared, though they were bound and could make no resistance, *because he was yet a youth*, and not used to such work: courage does not always run in the blood. (2.) The prisoners themselves desired that Gideon would excuse it; (v. 21.) begged, if they must die they might die *by his own hand*, which would be somewhat more honourable to them, and more easy, for by his great strength they would sooner be despatched and rid out of their pain. *As the man, so is his strength*. Either they mean it of themselves, they were men of such strength as called for a better hand than that young man's to overpower quickly; or of Gideon. "Thou art at thy full strength, he is not yet come to it, therefore be thou the executioner." From those that are grown up to maturity, it is expected, that what they do in any service, be done with so much the more strength. Gideon despatched them quickly, and seized the *ornaments that were on their camel's necks, ornaments like the moon*, so it is in the margin, either badges of their royalty, or perhaps of their idolatry, for Ashtaroth was represented by the moon, as Baal by the sun. With these he took all their other ornaments, as appears, v. 26. where we find he did not put them to so good a use as one would have wished. The destruction of these two kings, and that of the two princes, (ch. 7. 25.) is long after pleaded as a precedent in prayer for the ruin of others of the church's enemies; (Ps. 83. 11.) *Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, and all their princes as Zebah and Zalmunna*; let them all be cut off in like manner.

22. Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou

hast delivered us from the hand of Midian 23. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you. 24. And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the ear-rings of his prey: (for they had golden ear-rings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25. And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the ear-rings of his prey. 26. And the weight of the golden ear-rings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred *shekels* of gold, besides ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that *was* on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that *were* about their camels' necks. 27. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, *even* in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it; which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. 28. Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more: and the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

Here is,

I. Gideon's laudable modesty after his great victory, in refusing the government which the people offered him. 1. It was honest in them to offer it; (v. 22.) *Rule thou over us, for thou hast delivered us*. They thought it very reasonable that he who had gone through the toils and perils of their deliverance, should enjoy the honour and power of commanding them ever after; and very desirable that he who in this great and critical juncture had had such manifest tokens of God's presence with him, should ever after preside in their affairs. Let us apply it to the Lord Jesus, he hath delivered us out of the hands of our enemies, our spiritual enemies, the worst and most dangerous, and therefore it is fit he should rule over us; for how can we be better ruled than by one that appears to have so great an interest in heaven, and so great a kindness for this earth? We are delivered, that we may *serve him without fear*, Luke 1. 74, 75. 2. It was honourable in him to refuse it; (v. 23.) *I will not rule over you*. What he did, was his design to serve them, not to rule them; to make them safe, easy, and happy, not to make himself great or honourable. And as he was not ambitious of grandeur himself, so he did not covet to entail it upon his family, "*My son shall not rule over you*, either while I live, or when I am gone, *but the Lord shall still rule over you*, and constitute your judges by the special designation of his own Spirit, as he has done." This intimates, (1.) His modesty, and the mean opinion he had of himself and his own merits. He thought the honour of doing good was recompense enough for all his services, which needed not to be rewarded with honour of bearing sway; *He that is greatest, let him be your minister*. (2.) His piety, and the great opinion he had of God's government. Perhaps he discerned in the people a dislike of the theocracy, or divine government, a desire of a king like the nations; and his merits might have supplied a colourable pretence to move for this change of government. But Gideon would

by no means admit it. No good man can be pleased with any honour done to himself, which ought to be peculiar to God. *Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* 1 Cor. 1. 13.

II. Gideon's irregular zeal to perpetuate the remembrance of this victory, by an ephod, made of the choicest of the spoils. 1. He asked the men of Israel to give him the ear-rings of their prey; for such ornaments they stripped the slain of in abundance. These he demanded, either because they were the finest gold, and therefore fittest for a religious use, or because they had had as ear-rings some superstitious signification, which he thought too well of. Aaron called for the ear-rings to make the golden calf of, Exod. 32. 2. These Gideon begged, v. 24. And he had reason enough to think that they who offered him a crown, when he declined it, would not deny him their ear-rings, when he begged them, nor did they, v. 25. 2. He himself added the spoil he took from the kings of Midian, which, it should seem, had fallen to his share, v. 26. The generals had that part of the prey which was most splendid, the *prey of divers colours*, ch. 5. 30. 3. Of this he made an ephod, v. 27. It was plausible enough, and might be well intended to preserve a memorial of so divine a victory in the judge's own city. But it was a very unadvised thing to make that memorial to be an ephod, a sacred garment. I would gladly put the best construction that can be upon the actions of good men, and such a one we are sure Gideon was. But we have reason to suspect that this ephod had, as usual, a teraphim annexed to it, (Hos. 3. 4.) and that, having an altar already built by divine appointment, (ch. 6. 26.) which he erroneously imagined he might still use for sacrifice, he intended this for an oracle, to be consulted in doubtful cases. So the learned Dr. Spencer supposes. Each tribe having now very much its government within itself, they were too apt to covet their religion among themselves. We read very little of Shiloh and the ark there, in all the story of the Judges. Sometimes by divine dispensation, and much oftener by the transgression of men, that law which obliged them to worship only at that one altar, seems not to have been so religiously observed as one would have expected, no more than afterward, when, in the reigns even of very good kings, *the high places were not taken away*; from which we may infer, that that law had a further reach as a type of Christ, by whose mediation alone all our services are accepted. Gideon therefore, through ignorance or inconsideration, sinned in making this ephod, though he had a good intention in it. Shiloh, it is true, was not far off, but it was in Ephraim, and that tribe had lately disoblighd him, (v. 1.) which made him perhaps not care to go so often among them, as his occasions would lead him, to consult the oracle, and therefore he would have one nearer home. However this might be honestly intended, and at first did little hurt, yet in process of time, (1.) *Israel went a whoring after it*; that is, they deserted God's altar and priesthood, being fond of change, and prone to idolatry, and having some excuse for paying respect to this ephod, because so good a man as Gideon had set it up, and by degrees their respects to it grew more and more superstitious. Note, Many are led into false ways, by one false step of a good man. The beginning of sin, particularly of idolatry and will-worship, *is as the letting forth of water*, so it has been found in the fatal corruptions of the church of Rome, therefore *leave it off before it be meddled with*. (2.) It became a snare to Gideon himself, abating his zeal for the house of God in his old age, and much more to his house, who were drawn by it into sin, and it proved the ruin of the family.

III. Gideon's happy agency for the repose of Israel, v. 28. The Midianites that had been so vexatious, gave them no more disturbance; Gideon, though he would not assume the honour and power of a king, governed as a judge, and did all the good offices he could for his people; so that *the country was in quietness forty years*. Hitherto the times of Israel had been reckoned by forties; Othniel judged forty years, Ehud eighty—just two forties, Barak forty, and now Gideon forty. Providence so ordering it, to bring in mind the forty years of their wandering in the wilderness; *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*. And see Ezek. 4. 6. After these Eli ruled forty years, (1 Sam. 4. 18.) Samuel and Saul forty, (Acts 13. 21.) David forty, and Solomon forty. Forty years is about an age.

29. And Jerubbaal the son of Joash, went and dwelt in his own house. 30. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. 31. And his concubine, that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 32. And Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites. 33. And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. 34. And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: 35. Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, *namely* Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.

We have here the conclusion of the story of Gideon.

1. He lived privately; (v. 29.) he was not puffed up with his great honours, did not covet a palace or castle to dwell in, but retired to the house he had lived in before his elevation. Thus that brave Roman who was called from the plough upon a sudden occasion to command the army, when the action was over, returned to his plough again.

2. His family was multiplied. He had many wives; (therein he transgressed the law;) by them he had seventy sons, (v. 30.) but one by a concubine, whom he named *Abimelech*, which signifies *my father a king*, that proved the ruin of his family, v. 31.

3. He died in honour, in a good old age, when he had lived as long as he was capable of serving God and his country; and who would desire to live any longer? And he was *buried in the sepulchre of his fathers*.

4. After his death, the people corrupted themselves, and went all to naught. As soon as ever Gideon was dead, who had kept them close to the worship of the God of Israel, they found themselves under no restraint, and then they *went a whoring after Baalim*, v. 33. They went a whoring, first after another ephod, (v. 27.) for which irregularity Gideon had himself given them too much occasion, and now they went a whoring after another god. False worships made way for false deities. They now chose a new god, (ch. 5. 8.) a

god of a new name, *Baal-berith*; a goddess, say some. Berith, some think, was Berytus, the place where the Phœnicians worshipped this idol. *The Lord of a covenant*, so it signifies, perhaps because his worshippers joined themselves by covenant to him, in imitation of Israel's covenanting with God, for the Devil is God's ape. In this revolt of Israel to idolatry, they showed, (1.) Great ingratitude to God; (*v. 34.*) *They remembered not the Lord*, not only who had delivered them into the hands of their enemies, to punish them for their idolatry, but who had also *delivered them out of the hands of their enemies*, to invite them back again into his service: both the judgments and the mercies were forgotten, and the impression of them lost. (2.) Great ingratitude to Gideon, *v. 35.* A great deal of *goodness he had showed unto Israel*, as a father to his country, for which they ought to have been kind to his family when he was gone, for that is one way by which we ought to show ourselves grateful to our friends and benefactors, and may be returning their kindness when they are in their graves. But Israel showed not this kindness to Gideon's family, as we shall find in the next chapter. No wonder if those who forget their God, forget their friends.

CHAP. IX.

The apostasy of Israel after the death of Gideon, is punished, not as the former apostasies, by a foreign invasion, or the oppressions of any neighbouring power, but by intestine broils among themselves, which in this chapter we have the story of; and it is hard to say whether their sin or their misery appears most in it. It is an account of the usurpation and tyranny of Abimelech, who was *base son* to Gideon; so we must call him, and not more modestly, his *natural son*, he was so unlike him. We are here told, I. How he thrust himself into the government at Shechem, his own city, by subtlety, and particularly by the murder of all his brethren, *v. 1-6.* II. How his doom was read in a parable of Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, *v. 7-21.* III. What strifes there were between Abimelech and his friends the Shechemites, *v. 22-41.* IV. How this ended in the ruin of the Shechemites, (*v. 42-49.*) and of Abimelech himself, *v. 50-57.* Of this meteor, this *ignis fatuus* of a prince, that was not protector, but a plague to his country, we may say, as once was said of a great tyrant, that he came in like a fox, ruled like a lion, and died like a dog. *For the transgression of a land such are the princes thereof.*

1. **A**ND Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal, went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2. Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, *which are* threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that *I am* your bone and your flesh. 3. And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, *He is our brother.* 4. And they gave him threescore and ten *pieces* of silver out of the house of Baal-berith; wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. 5. And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren, the sons of Jerubbaal, *being* threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding, yet Jotham, the youngest

son of Jerubbaal, was left: for he hid himself. 6. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that *was* in Shechem.

We are here told by what arts Abimelech got into authority, and made himself great. His mother perhaps had instilled into his mind some towering ambitious thoughts, and the name his father gave him, carrying royalty in it, might help to blow up these sparks; and now that he has buried his father, nothing will serve his proud spirit but he will succeed him in the government of Israel, directly contrary to his father's will, for he had declared *no son of his should rule over them.* He had no call from God to this honour as his father had, nor was there any present occasion for a judge to deliver Israel, as there was when his father was advanced, but his own ambition must be gratified, and that is all he aims at. Now observe here,

I. How craftily he got his mother's relations into his interests. Shechem was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, of great note, Joshua had held his last assembly there; if that city would appear for him, and set him up, he thought it would go far in his favour. There he had an interest in the family of which his mother was, and by them he made an interest in the leading men of the city. It does not appear that any of them had an eye to him as a man of merit, who had any thing to recommend him to such a choice, but the motion came first from himself. None would have dreamed of making such a one king, if he had not dreamed of it himself. And see here, 1. How he wheedled them into the choice, *v. 2, 3.* He basely suggested that Gideon having left seventy sons that made a good figure and had a good interest, they were designing to keep the power which their father had, in their hands, and by a joint influence to reign over Israel; "Now," says he, "you had better have one king than more, than many, than so many. Affairs of state are best managed by a single person," *v. 2.* We have no reason to think that all or any of Gideon's sons had the least intention to reign over Israel, (they were of their father's mind, that *the Lord should reign over them*, and they were not called of him,) yet this he insinuates, to pave the way to his own pretensions. Note, Those who design ill themselves, are commonly most apt to suspect that others design ill. As for himself, he only puts them in mind of his relation to them. *Verbum sapienti—A word to the wise is sufficient; remember that I am your bone and your flesh.* The plot took wonderfully. The magistrates of Shechem were pleased to think of their city being a royal city, and the metropolis of Israel, and therefore they *inclined to follow him*, for they said, "*He is our brother*, and his advancement will be our advantage." 2. How he got money from them to bear the charges of his pretensions, *v. 4.* They gave him *seventy pieces of silver*; it is not said what the value of these pieces was; so many shekels was less, and so many talents more, than we can well imagine; therefore it is supposed they were each a pound weight; but they gave it out of the house of Baal-berith, that is, out of the public treasury, which, out of respect to their idol, they deposited in his temple to be protected by him; or, out of the offerings that had been made to that idol, which they hoped would prosper the better in his hands for its having been consecrated to their god. How unfit was he to reign over Israel, because unlikely to defend them, who, instead of restraining and punishing idolatry, thus early made himself a pensioner to an idol! 3. What soldiers he enlisted; he hired into his service vain and light persons, the

scum and scoundrels of the country, men of broken fortunes, giddy heads, and profligate lives; none but such would own him, and they were fittest to serve his purpose. Like leader, like followers.

II. How cruelly he got his father's sons out of the way. The first thing he did with the rabble he headed, was, to kill all his brethren at once, publicly, and in cold blood, threescore and ten men, one only escaping, all slain upon one stone. See in this bloody tragedy, 1. The power of ambition, what beasts it will turn men into, how it will break through all the ties of natural affection and natural conscience, and sacrifice that which is most sacred, dear, and valuable, to its designs. Strange that ever it should enter into the heart of a man to be so barbarous! 2. The peril of honour and high birth. Their being the sons of so great a man as Gideon, exposed them thus, and made Abimelech jealous of them. We find just the same number of Ahab's sons slain together at Samaria, 2 Kings 10. 1, 7. The Grand Seigniors have seldom thought themselves safe while any of their brethren have been unstrangled. Let none envy those of high extraction, or complain of their own meanness and obscurity. The lower, the safer.

Way being thus made for Abimelech's election, the men of Shechem proceeded to choose him king, *v. 6.* God was not consulted whether they should have any king at all, much less who it should be; here is no advising with the priest, or with their brethren of any other city or tribe, though it was designed he should reign over Israel, *v. 22.* But, (1.) The Shechemites, as if *they* were the people, and wisdom must die with them, do all; they aided and abetted him in the murder of his brethren, (*v. 24.*) and then they *made him king.* The men of Shechem, that is, the great men, the chief magistrates of the city, and the house of Millo, that is, the common council, the *full-house*, or *house of fullness*, as the word signifies, those that met in the Guild-hall; (we read often of the house of Millo, or state-house in Jerusalem, or the city of David, 2 Sam. 5. 9. 2 Kings 12. 20.) these gathered together, not to prosecute and punish Abimelech for this barbarous murder, as they ought to have done, he being one of their citizens, but to *make him king.* *Pretium sceleris tulit hic diadema—His wickedness was rewarded with a diadem.* What could they promise themselves from a king that laid the foundation of his kingdom in blood? (2.) The rest of the Israelites were so very sottish as to sit by unconcerned; they took no care to give check to this usurpation, to protect the sons of Gideon, or to avenge their death, but tamely submitted to the bloody tyrant, as men, who with their religion had lost their reason, and all sense of honour and liberty, justice and gratitude. How vigorously had their fathers appeared to avenge the death of the Levite's concubine, and yet so wretchedly degenerate are they now, as not to attempt the avenging of the death of Gideon's sons; it is for this that they are charged with ingratitude; (*ch. 8. 35.*) *Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal.*

7. And when they told *it* to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. 8. The trees went forth *on a time* to anoint a king over them: and they said unto the olive-tree, Reign thou over us. 9. But the olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they

honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? 10. And the trees said to the fig-tree, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 11. But the fig-tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? 12. Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 13. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? 14. Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, *and* reign over us. 15. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, *then* come *and* put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. 16. Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; 17. (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 18. And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maid-servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he *is* your brother;) 19. If ye have then dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you; 20. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. 21. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

We have here the only testimony that appears to have been borne against the wicked confederacy of Abimelech, and the men of Shechem. It was a sign they had provoked God to depart from them, that neither any prophet was sent, nor any remarkable judgment, to awaken this stupid people, and to stop the progress of this threatening mischief. Only Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, who by a special providence escaped the common ruin of his family, (*v. 5.*) dealt plainly with the Shechemites, and his speech, which is here recorded, shows him to be a man of such great ingenuity and wisdom, and really such an accomplished gentleman, that we cannot but the more lament the fall of Gideon's sons. Jotham did not go about to raise an army out of the other cities of Israel, (in which, one would think, he might have made a good interest, for his father's sake,) to avenge his brethren's death, much less to set up himself in competition with Abimelech, so groundless was the usurper's suggestion, that the sons of Gideon aimed at domin

ion; (v. 2.) but he contents himself with giving a faithful reproof to the Shechemites, and fair warning of the fatal consequences. He got an opportunity of speaking to them from the top of mount Gerizzim, the mount of blessings, at the foot of which, probably, the Shechemites were, upon some occasion or other, gathered together, Josephus says, solemnizing a festival, and it seems they were willing to hear what he had to say.

1. His preface is very serious; (v. 7.) "*Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. As ever you hope to obtain God's favour, and to be accepted of him, give me a patient and impartial hearing.*" Note, Those who expect God to hear their prayers, must be willing to hear reason, to hear a faithful reproof, and to hear the complaints and appeals of wronged innocence. If we turn away our ear from hearing the law, *our prayers will be an abomination*, Prov. 28. 9.

11. His parable is very ingenious—that when the trees were disposed to choose a king, the government was offered to those valuable trees, the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine; but they refused it, choosing rather to serve than rule, to do good than bear sway. But the same tender being made to the bramble, he accepted it with vain-glorious exultation. The way of instruction by parables, is an ancient way, and very useful, especially to give reproofs by.

1. He hereby applauds the generous modesty of Gideon, and the other judges who were before him, and perhaps of the sons of Gideon, who had declined accepting the state and power of kings when they might have had it. And likewise shows that it is in general the temper of all wise and good men to decline preferment, and to choose rather to be useful than to be great.

(1.) There was no occasion at all for the trees to choose a king; they are all the *tree of the Lord* which he has planted, (Ps. 104. 16.) and which therefore he will protect. Nor was there any occasion for Israel to talk of setting a king over them, for *the Lord was their king*.

(2.) When they had it in their thoughts to choose a king, they did not offer the government to the stately cedar, or the lofty pine, which are only for show and shade, and not otherwise useful till they are cut down, but to the fruit-trees, the vine, and the olive. Those that bear fruit for the public good, are justly respected and honoured by all that are wise, more than they that affect to make a figure. For a good useful man some *would even dare to die*.

(3.) The reason which all these fruit-trees gave for their refusal was much the same. The olive pleads, (v. 9.) *Should I leave my fatness?* And the vine, (v. 13.) *Should I leave my wine*, wherewith both God and man are served and honoured. For oil and wine were used both at God's altars, and men's tables; and *shall I leave my sweetness*, saith the fig-tree, and my good fruit, (v. 11.) and go to be promoted over the trees? Or, as the margin reads it, *go up and down for the trees?* It is intimated, [1.] That government involves a man in a great deal both of toil and care; he that is promoted over the trees, must go up and down for them, and make himself a perfect drudge to business. [2.] That those who are preferred to places of public trust and power, must resolve to forego all their private interests and advantages, and sacrifice them to the good of the community. The fig-tree must lose its sweetness, its sweet retirement, sweet repose, and sweet conversation and contemplation, if it go to be promoted over the trees, and must undergo a constant fatigue. [3.] That those who are advanced to honour and dignity, are in great danger of losing their fatness and fruitfulness. Preferment is apt to make men proud and slothful; and that spoils their

usefulness, with which, in a lower sphere, they honour God and man. For which reason, they that desire to do good, are afraid of being too great.

2. He hereby exposes the ridiculous ambition of Abimelech, whom he compares to the bramble or thistle, v. 14. He supposes the trees to make their court to him, *Come thou, and reign over us*; perhaps, because he knew not that the first motion of Abimelech's preferment came from himself, as we found, (v. 2.) but thought the Shechemites had proposed it to him: however, supposing it so, his folly in accepting it deserved to be chastised. The bramble, a worthless plant, not to be numbered among the trees, useless and fruitless, nay, hurtful and vexatious, scratching and tearing, and doing mischief, it began with the curse, and its end is to be burned. Such a one was Abimelech, and yet chosen to the government *by the trees, by all the trees*: this election seems to have been more unanimous than any of the other. Let us not think it strange, if we see *folly set in great dignity*, (Eccl. 10. 6.) and the *vilest men exalted*, (Ps. 12. 8.) and men blind to their own interest in the choice of their guides. The bramble being chosen to the government, he takes no time to consider whether he should accept it or no, but immediately, as if he had been born and bred to dominion, hectors, and assures them they should find him as he found them. See what *great swelling words of vanity* he speaks, (v. 15.) what promises he makes to his faithful subjects—*Let them come and trust in his shadow*: a goodly shadow to trust in! How unlike to the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, which a good magistrate is compared to, Isa. 32. 2. Trust in his shadow! More likely to be injured by him than benefited. Thus men *boast of a false gift*. Yet he threatens with as much confidence as he promises; If ye be not faithful, *let fire come out of the bramble*; a very unlikely thing to emit fire, and devour the cedars of Lebanon! more likely to catch fire and be itself devoured.

III. His application is very close and plain. In it, 1. He reminds them of the many good services his father had done for them, v. 17. He fought their battles, at the hazard of his own life, and to their unspeakable advantage. It was a shame that they needed to be put in mind of this. 2. He aggravates their unkindness to his father's family; they had not *done to him according to the deserving of his hands*, v. 16. Great merits often meet with very ill returns, especially to posterity, when the benefactor is forgotten, as Joseph was among the Egyptians. Gideon had left many sons that were an honour to his name and family, and those they had barbarously murdered; one son he had left, that was the blemish of his name and family, for he was the son of his maid-servant, whom all that had any respect to Gideon's honour, would endeavour to conceal, yet him they made their king. In both, they put the utmost contempt imaginable upon Gideon. 3. He leaves it to the event to determine whether they had done well, whereby he lodges the appeal with the divine providence; (1.) If they prospered long in this villany, he would give them leave to say they had done well, v. 19. "If your conduct toward the house of Gideon be such as can be justified at any bar of justice, honour or conscience, much good may it do you with your new king." But, (2.) If they had, as he was sure they had, dealt basely and wickedly in this matter, let them never expect to prosper, v. 20. Abimelech and the Shechemites, that they had strengthened one another's hands in this villany, would certainly be a plague and ruin one to another. Let none expect to do ill, and fare well.

Jotham, having given them this admonition, made a shift to escape with his life; (v. 21.) either they

could not reach him, or they were so far convinced, that they would not add the guilt of his blood to all the rest: but for fear of Abimelech, he lived in exile, in some remote obscure place. Those whose extraction and education are ever so high, know not to what difficulties and straits they may be reduced.

22. When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, 23. Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: 24. That the cruelty *done* to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. 25. And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech. 26. And Gaal, the son of Ebed, came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27. And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode *the grapes*, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. 28. And Gaal, the son of Ebed, said, Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is* not *he* the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem; for why should we serve him? 29. And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out. 30. And when Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal, the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. 31. And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed, and his brethren, be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. 32. Now, therefore, up by night, thou and the people that *is* with thee, and lie in wait in the field: 33. And it shall be, *that* in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, *when* he and the people that *is* with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion. 34. And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that *were* with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. 35. And Gaal, the son of Ebed, went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that *were* with him, from lying in wait. 36. And when Gaal saw the

people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as *if they were* men. 37. And Gaal spake again, and said, See, there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim. 38. Then said Zebul unto him, Where *is* now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who *is* Abimelech, that we should serve him? *Is* not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them. 39. And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many were overthrown *and* wounded, *even* unto the entering of the gate. 41. And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. 42. And it came to pass on the morrow that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. 43. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people *were* come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. 44. And Abimelech, and the company that *was* with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two *other* companies ran upon all *the people* that *were* in the fields, and slew them. 45. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day: and he took the city, and slew the people that *was* therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt. 46. And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard *that*, they entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith. 47. And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48. And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid *it* on his shoulder, and said unto the people that *were* with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, *and* do as *I have done*. 49. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put *them* to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

Three years Abimelech reigned, after a sort, without any disturbance; it is not said, He judged Israel, or did any service at all to his country, b. c.

So long, he enjoyed the title and dignity of a king; and not only the Shechemites, but many other places, paid him respect. They must have been fond of a king, that could please themselves with such a one as this.

But the triumphing of the wicked is short. *Within three years, as the years of a hireling, all this glory shall be contemned, and laid in the dust,* Isa. 16. 14. The ruin of these confederates in wickedness, was from the righteous hand of the God to whom vengeance belongs. *He sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the Shechemites;* (v. 23.) that is, they grew jealous one of another, and ill-affected one to another. He slighted them that set him up, and countenanced, perhaps more than their's, other cities which now began to come into his interests; and then they grew uneasy at his government, blamed his conduct, and quarrelled at his impositions. This was from God. He permitted the Devil, that great mischief-maker, to sow discord between them, and he is an *evil spirit*, whom God not only keeps under his check, but sometimes serves his own purposes by. Their own lusts were evil spirits, they are devils in men's own hearts, from them come wars and fightings. These God gave them up to, and so might be said to *send the evil spirits between them*. When men's sin is made their punishment, though God is not the Author of the sin, yet the punishment is from him. The quarrel God had with Abimelech and the Shechemites, was for the murder of the sons of Gideon; (v. 24.) *That the cruelty done to them might come, and their blood be laid as a burthen upon Abimelech that slew them, and the men of Shechem that helped him.* Note, 1. Sooner or later, God will make inquisition for blood, innocent blood, and will return it on the heads of those that shed it, who shall have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. 2. Accessories shall be reckoned with, as well as principals, in that and other sins. The Shechemites that countenanced Abimelech's pretensions, aided and abetted him in his bloody projects, and avowed the fact by making him king after he had done it, must fall with him, fall by him, and fall first. 3. Those that combine together to do wickedly, are justly dashed to pieces one against another. Blood cannot be a lasting cement to any interest.

1. The Shechemites began to affront Abimelech; perhaps they scarcely knew why, or wherefore, but they were given to change. 1. *They dealt treacherously with him,* v. 23. It is not said, They repented of their sin in owning him, had they done so, it had been laudable to disown him; but they did it only upon some particular pique, conceived against him by their pride or envy. They that set him up, were the first that deserted him, and endeavoured to dethrone him. It is not strange that those who were ungrateful to Gideon, were unfaithful to Abimelech; for what will hold those that will not be held by the obligation of such merits as Gideon's? Note, It is just with God, that those who tempt others to be once perfidious, should afterward be themselves betrayed by those whom they have taught to be perfidious. 2. They aimed to seize him when he was at Arumah, (v. 41.) his country-seat; expecting him to come to town, they *set liers in wait for him,* (v. 25.) who should make him their prisoner, whom they had lately made their prince. Those who were thus posted, he not coming, took the opportunity of robbing travellers, which would help to make the people more and more uneasy under Abimelech, when they saw he could not, or would not, protect them from highway-men. 3. They entertained one Gaal, and set him up as their head in opposition to Abimelech, v. 25. This Gaal is said to be the son of *Ebed*, which signifies a *servant*, perhaps denoting the meanness of

his extraction; as Abimelech was by the mother's side, so he by the father's, the son of a servant; here was one bramble contending with another. We have reason to suspect that this Gaal was a native Canaanite, because he courts the Shechemites into subjection to the men of Hamor, who was the ancient lord of this city in Jacob's time. He was a bold ambitious man, served their purpose admirably well, when they were disposed to quarrel with Abimelech, and they also served his purpose; so he went over to them to blow the coals, and they *put their confidence in him*. 4. They did all the despite they could to Abimelech's name, v. 27. They made themselves very merry in his absence, as those who were glad he was out of the way, and who, now that they had another to head them, were in hopes to get clear of him: nay, they *went into the house of their god*, to solemnise their feast of ingathering, and there *they did eat, and drink, and cursed Abimelech*; not only said all the ill they could of him in their table-talk and the song of their drunkards, but wished all the ill they could to him over their sacrifices, praying to their idol to destroy him. They drank healths to his confusion, and with as loud huzzas as ever they had drunk them to his prosperity. That very temple whence they had fetched money to set him up with, did they now meet in to curse him, and contrive his ruin. Had they deserted their idol-god with their image-kings, they might have hoped to prosper; but while they still cleave to the former, the latter shall cleave to them to their ruin. How should Satan cast out Satan? 5. They pleased themselves with Gaal's defying of Abimelech, v. 28, 29. They loved to hear that impudent upstart speak scornfully, (1.) Of Abimelech; though calling him in disdain *Shechem*, or a *Shechemite*, he reflected upon their own city. (2.) Of his good father likewise, Gideon; *Is not he the son of Jerubbaal?* So he calls him, perhaps in an impious indignation at his name and memory, for throwing down the altar of Baal; turning that to his reproach which was his praise. (3.) Of his prime minister of state, *Zebul his officer, and ruler of the city*. "We may well be ashamed to serve them, and need not be afraid to oppose them." Men of turbulent ambitious spirits, thus *despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities*. Gaal aimed not to recover Shechem's liberty, only to change their tyrant, "O that this people were under my hand, what I would do! I would challenge Abimelech to try titles for the crown;" and it should seem he desired his friends to send him word that he was ready to dispute it with him, whenever he pleased; "*Increase thine army and come out*. Do thy worst; let the point be determined by the sword." This pleased the Shechemites, who were now as sick of Abimelech as ever they had been fond of him. Men of no conscience will be men of no constancy.

II. Abimelech turned all his force upon them, and, in a little time, quite ruined them. Observe the steps of it.

1. The Shechemites' counsels were betrayed to Abimelech by Zebul his confidant, the ruler of the city, who continued hearty for him. *His anger was kindled,* (v. 30.) and the more, because Gaal had spoken slightly of him; (v. 28.) for perhaps if he had complimented and caressed him now that things were in this ferment, he might have gained him to his interest; but he, being disobliged, sends notice to Abimelech of all that was said and done in Shechem against him, v. 31. Betrayers are often betrayed by some among themselves, and the cursing of the king is sometimes strangely carried by a bird of the air. He prudently advises him to come against the city immediately, and lose no time, v. 32, 33. He thinks it best that he should march his

forces by night into the neighbourhood, surprise the city in the morning, and then make the best of his advantages. How could the Shechemites hope to speed in their attempt, when the ruler of their city was in the interests of their enemy? They knew it, and yet took no care to secure him.

2. Gaal, that headed their faction, having been betrayed by Zebul, Abimelech's confidant, was most wretchedly bantered by him. Abimelech, according to Zebul's advice, drew all his forces down upon Shechem by night, *v.* 54. Gaal, in the morning, went out *to the gate*, (*v.* 55.) to see what posture things were in, and to inquire, What new? Zebul, as a ruler of the city, met him there as a friend. Abimelech and his forces beginning to move toward the city, Gaal discovers them; (*v.* 36.) takes notice of their approach to Zebul that was standing with him, little thinking that he had sent for them, and was now expecting them. "Look," says he, "do not I see a body of men coming down from the mountain towards us? Yonder they are," pointing to the place; "No, no," says Zebul, "thine eye-sight deceives thee, it is but *the shadow of the mountains* which thou takest to be an army." By this he intended, (1.) To ridicule him as a man of no sense or spirit, and therefore unfit for what he pretended to; as a man might easily be imposed upon, and made to believe any thing, and that was so silly and so cowardly, that he apprehended danger where there was none, and was ready to fight with a shadow. (2.) To detain him, and hold him in talk, while the forces of Abimelech were coming up, that thereby they might gain advantage. But when Gaal, being content to believe those that he now saw, to be but the shadow of the mountains, (perhaps the mountains of Ebal and Gerizzim, which lay close by the city,) was undeceived by the discovery of two other companies that marched apace toward the city, then Zebul took another way to banter him, upbraiding him with what he had said but a day or two before, in contempt of Abimelech; (*v.* 38.) "*Where is now thy mouth, that foul mouth of thine, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech?*" Note, Proud and haughty people are often made, in a little time to change their note, and to dread those whom they had most despised. Gaal had, in a bravado, challenged Abimelech to *increase his army and come out*; but now Zebul, in Abimelech's name, challenges him: "*Go out, and fight with them, if thou darest.*" Justly are the insolent thus insulted over.

3. Abimelech routed Gaal's forces that sallied out of the town, *v.* 39, 40. Gaal, disheartened, no doubt, by Zebul's hectoring him, and perceiving his interest weaker than he thought it was, though he marched out against Abimelech with what little force he had, was soon put to the worst, and obliged to retire into the city with great precipitation. In this action the Shechemites' loss was considerable, *many were overthrown and wounded*; the common effect of popular tumults, in which the inconsiderate multitude are often drawn into fatal snares by those that promise them glorious success.

4. Zebul, that night, expelled Gaal, and the party he had brought with him into Shechem, out of the city, (*v.* 41.) sending him to the place whence he came. For though the generality of the city continued still averse to Abimelech, as appears by the sequel of the story, yet they were willing to part with Gaal, and did not oppose his expulsion, because, though he had talked big, both his conduct and courage had failed him when there was occasion for them. Most people judge of men's fitness for business by their success, and he that does not speed well, is concluded not to do well. Well, Gaal's interest in Shechem is soon at an end, and he that had talked of removing Abimelech, is him-

self removed, nor do we ever hear of him any more. *Exit Gaal—Gaal retires.*

5. Abimelech, the next day, set upon the city, and quite destroyed it, for their treacherous dealings with him. Perhaps Abimelech had notice of their expelling Gaal, who had headed the faction, with which they thought he would have been satisfied, but the crime was too deep to be thus atoned for, and his resentments too keen to be pacified by so small an instance of submission, besides that it was more Zebul's act than their's; by it their hands were weakened, and therefore he resolved to follow his blow, and effectually to chastise their treachery. (1.) He had intelligence brought him that the people of Shechem were come out *into the field*; (*v.* 42.) some think, into the field of business, to plough and sow, (having lately gathered in their harvest,) or to perfect their harvest, for it was only their vintage that they had made an end of, (*v.* 27.) and then it intimates that they were secure. And because Abimelech was retired, (*v.* 41.) they thought themselves in no danger from him, and then the issue of it is an instance of sudden destruction coming upon those that cry, Peace and safety. Others think they went out into the field of battle; though Gaal was driven out, they would not lay down their arms, but put themselves into a posture for another engagement with Abimelech, in which they hoped to retrieve what they had lost before. (2.) He himself, with a strong detachment, cut off the communication between them and the city; *stood in the entering of the gate*, (*v.* 44.) that they might neither make their retreat into the city, nor receive any succours from the city, and then sent two companies of his men, who were too strong for them, and they put them all to the sword, *ran upon them that were in the fields and slew them*. When we go out about our business, we are not sure that we shall come home again; there are deaths both in the city and in the field. (3.) He then fell upon the city itself, and with a rage reaching up to heaven, though it was the place of his nativity, laid it in ruins, slew all the people, beat down all the buildings, and, in token of his desire that it might be a perpetual desolation, sowed it with salt, that it might remain a lasting monument of the punishment of perfidiousness. Yet Abimelech prevailed not to make its desolations perpetual, for it was afterward rebuilt, and became so considerable a place, that all Israel came thither to make Rehoboam king, 1 Kings 12. 1. And the place proved an ill omen. Abimelech intended hereby to punish the Shechemites for their slighting him now, but God intended to punish them for their serving of him formerly in the murder of Gideon's sons. Thus when God makes use of men as instruments in his hand to do his work, *he* means one thing, and *they* another, Isa. 10. 6, 7. They design to maintain their honour, but God to maintain his.

6. Those that retired into a strong-hold of their idol-temple, were all destroyed there. These are called *the men of the tower of Shechem*, (*v.* 46, 47.) some castle that belonged to that city, but lay at some distance from it; they, hearing of the destruction of the city, withdrew into a hold of the temple, trusting, it is likely, not so much to its strength, as to its sanctity: they put themselves under the protection of their idol; for *thus all people will walk in the name of their god*, and shall not we then choose to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life; For *in the time of trouble he shall hide us in his pavilion*, Ps. 27. 5. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*, Prov. 18. 10. But that which they hoped would have been for their welfare, proved to them a snare and a trap, as those will certainly find, that run to idols for shelter; it will prove a refuge of lies. When Abimelech had them altogether

penned up in that hold, he desired no more. That barbarous project immediately came into his head, of setting fire to the strong-hold, and, so to speak, burning all the birds together in the nest. He kept the design to himself, but set all his men on work to expedite the execution of it, v. 48, 49. He ordered them all to follow him, and do as he did: as his father had said to his men, (*ch. 7. 17.*) *Look on me, and do likewise*; so said he to his, as becomes a general that will not be wanting to give both the plainest direction, and the highest encouragement that can be, to his soldiers, *What ye have seen me do, make haste to do as I have done.* Not *Ite illuc—Go thither*, but *Venite huc—Come hither*. The officers in Christ's army should thus teach by their example, Phil. 4. 9. He and they fetched each of them a bough from a wood, not far off, laid all their boughs together under the wall of this tower, which, it is probable, was of wood, set fire to their boughs, and so burnt down their hold, and all that were in it, who were either burnt or stifled with the smoke. What inventions men have to destroy one another! Whence come these cruel wars and fightings, but from their lusts? Some think that the men of the tower of Shechem were the same with the house of Millo, and then Jotham's just imprecation was answered in the letter, *Let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour not only in general the men of Shechem, but in particular the house of Millo*, v. 20. About one thousand men and women perished in these flames, many of whom, it is probable, were no way concerned in the quarrel between Abimelech and the Shechemites, nor meddled with either side, yet, in this civil war, came to this miserable end; for men of factious turbulent spirits, *perish not alone in their iniquity*, but involve many more, that follow them in their simplicity, in the same calamity with them.

50. Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. 51. But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut *it* to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. 52. And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53. And a certain woman cast a piece of a mill-stone upon Abimelech's head, and all to break his skull. 54. Then he called hastily unto the young man his armour-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. 56. Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren. 57. And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

We have seen the ruin of the Shechemites completed by the hand of Abimelech; and now it comes to his turn to be reckoned with, who was their leader in villany. Thebez was a small city, proba-

bly not far from Shechem, dependent upon it, and in confederacy with it. Now,

I. Abimelech attempted the destruction of this city, (v. 50.) drove all the inhabitants of the town into the castle, or citadel, v. 51. When he had them there, he did not doubt but he should do the same execution here that he had lately done at the strong-hold of the temple of Baal-berith, not considering that the tower of an idol-temple lay more exposed to divine vengeance than any other tower. He attempted to set fire to this tower, at least, to burn down the door, and so force an entrance, v. 52. Those who have escaped and succeeded well in one desperate attempt, are apt to think the like attempt another time not desperate. This instance was long after quoted, to show how dangerous it is to come near the wall of a besieged city, 2 Sam. 11. 20, &c. But God infatuates those whom he will ruin.

II. In the attempt, he was himself destroyed, having his brains knocked out with a piece of a millstone, v. 58. *No doubt this man was a murderer, whom, though he had escaped the dangers of the war with Shechem, yet vengeance suffered not to live*, Acts 28. 4. *Evil pursues sinners*, and sometimes overtakes them then when they are not only secure, but triumphant. Thebez, we may suppose, was a weak inconsiderable place, conquered with Shechem. Abimelech, having conquered the bigger, makes no doubt of being master of the less without any difficulty, especially when he had taken the city, and had only the town to deal with; yet he lays his bones with that, and there is all his honour buried. Thus are the *mighty things of the world* often confounded by the weakest, and these things that are most made light of. See here what rebukes these are justly put under many times by the divine providence, that are unreasonable in their demands of satisfaction for injuries received. Abimelech had some reason to chastise the Shechemites, and he had done it with a witness; but when he will carry his revenge further, and nothing will serve but that Thebez also must be sacrificed to his rage, he is not only disappointed there, but destroyed, for verily there is a God that judges in the earth.

Three circumstances are observed in the death of Abimelech.

1. That he was slain with a stone, & so he had slain his brethren all *upon one stone*. 2. That he had his skull broken: vengeance aimed at that guilty head which had worn the usurped crown. 3. That the stone was cast upon him by a woman, v. 53. He saw the stone come, it was therefore strange he did not avoid it; but, no doubt, it made it so much the greater mortification to him, to see from what hand it came. Sisera died by a woman's hand, and knew it not; Abimelech knew it, and when he found himself ready to breathe his last, nothing troubled him so much as this, that it should be said, A woman slew him. See, (1.) His foolish pride, in laying so much to heart this little circumstance of his disgrace. Here was no care taken about his precious soul, no concern what would become of that, no prayer to God for his mercy; but very solicitous he is to patch up his shattered credit, when there is no patching of his shattered skull. O let it never be said that such a mighty man as Abimelech was killed by a woman! The man was dying, but his pride was alive and strong, and the same vain-glorious humour that had governed him all along, appears now at last. *Qualis vita, finis ita—As was his life, such was his death*. As God punished his cruelty by the manner of his death, so he punished his pride by the instrument of it. (2.) His foolish project to avoid this disgrace; nothing could be more ridiculous; his own servant must run

him through, not to rid him the sooner out of his pain, but *that men say not, A woman slew him.* Could he think that this would conceal what the woman had done, and not rather proclaim it the more? Nay, it added to the infamy of his death, for hereby he becomes a self-murderer. Better have it said, *A woman slew him*, than that it should be said, His servant slew him by his own order; yet now both will be said of him to his everlasting reproach. And it is observable, that this very thing which Abimelech was in such care to conceal, appears to have been more particularly remembered by posterity, than most passages of this history; for Joab speaks of it, as that which he expected David would reproach him with, for coming so *nigh the wall*, 2 Sam. 11. 21. The ignominy we seek to avoid by sin, we do but perpetuate the remembrance of.

Now the issue of all, is, that Abimelech being slain, [1.] Israel's peace was restored, and an end was put to this civil war, for they that followed him, *departed every man unto his place*, v. 55. [2.] God's justice was glorified, v. 56, 57. *Thus God punished the wickedness of Abimelech, and of the men of Shechem*, and performed Jotham's curse, for it was not a *curse causeless*. Thus he preserved the honour of his government, and gave warning to all ages to expect blood for blood. The Lord is known by these judgments which he executes, when the wicked is snared in the works of his own hands. Though wickedness may prosper awhile, it will not prosper always.

CHAP. X.

In this chapter we have, I. The peaceable times Israel enjoyed under the government of two judges, Tola and Jair, v. 1. .55. II. The troublesome times that ensued. 1. Israel's sin that brought them into trouble, v. 6. 2. The trouble itself they were in, v. 7. .9. III. Their repentance and humiliation for sin, their prayers and reformation; and the mercy they found with God thereupon, v. 10. .16. IV. Preparations made for their deliverance out of the hand of their oppressors, v. 17, 18.

1. **A**ND after Abimelech there arose, to defend Israel, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. 2. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir. 3. And after him arose Jair a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. 4. And he had thirty *sons* that rode on thirty *ass-colts*, and they had thirty *cities*, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

Quiet and peaceable reigns, though the best to live in, are the worst to write of, as yielding least variety of matter for the historian to entertain his reader with; such were the reigns of these two judges, Tola and Jair, who make but a small figure, and take up but a very little room in this history. But, no doubt, they were both *raised up of God* to serve their country in the quality of judges, not pretending, as Abimelech had done, to the grandeur of kings, nor, like him, taking the honour they had to themselves, they were called of God to it.

1. Concerning Tola, it is said, that he arose after Abimelech to defend Israel, v. 1. After Abimelech had debauched Israel by his wickedness, disquieted and disturbed them by his restless ambition, and, by the mischiefs he brought on them,

exposed them to enemies from abroad, God animated this good man to appear for the reforming of abuses, the putting down of idolatry, the appeasing of tumults, and the healing of the wounds given to the state by Abimelech's usurpation. Thus he saved them from themselves, and guarded them against their enemies. He was of the tribe of Issachar, a tribe disposed to serve, for he *bowed his shoulder to bear*; (Gen. 49. 14, 15.) yet one of that tribe is here raised up to rule: for those that humble themselves, shall be exalted. He bore the name of him that was ancestor to the first family of that tribe; of the sons of Issachar, Tola was the first, Gen. 46. 13. Numb. 26. 23. It signifies a *worm*, yet being the name of his ancestor, he was not ashamed of it. Though he was of Issachar, yet, when he was raised up to the government, he came and dwelt in mount Ephraim, which was more in the heart of the country, that the people might the more conveniently resort to him for judgment. He judged Israel twenty-three years; (v. 2.) kept things in good order, but did not any thing very memorable.

2. Jair was a Gileadite, so was his next successor Jephthah, both of that half tribe of the tribe of Manasseh, which lay on the other side Jordan; though they seemed separated from their brethren, yet God took care, while the honour of the government was shifted from tribe to tribe, and before it settled in Judah, that they who lay remote, should sometimes share in it, *putting more abundant honour on that part which lacked*. Jair bore the name of a very famous man of the same tribe, who in Moses' time was very active in reducing this country, Numb. 32. 41. Josh. 13. 30. That which is chiefly remarkable concerning this Jair, is, the increase and honour of his family, *he had thirty sons*, v. 4. And, (1.) They had good preferments, for they *rode on thirty ass colts*; that is, they were judges itinerant, who, as deputies to their father, rode from place to place in their several circuits to administer justice. We find afterward that Samuel made his sons judges, though he could not make them good ones, 1 Sam. 8. 1—3. (2.) They had good possessions; every one a city, out of those that were called, from their ancestor, of the same name with their father, *Havoth-jair; the villages of Jair*; yet they are called *cities*, either because those young gentlemen to whom they were assigned, enlarged and fortified them, and so improved them into cities; or because they were as well pleased with their lot in those country towns, as if they had been cities compact together, and fenced with gates and bars. Villages are cities to a contented mind.

6. And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. 7. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. 8. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel eighteen years, all the children of Israel that *were* on the other side Jordan, in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead: 9. (Moreover, the children of Ammon pass-

ed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim;) so that Israel was sore distressed.

While those two judges, Tola and Jair, preside in the affairs of Israel, things went well, but afterward,

I. Israel returned to their idolatry, that sin which did mos easily beset them; (*v. 6.*) *they did evil again in the sight of the Lord* from whom they were unaccountably bent to backslide, as a *foolish people and unwise*. 1. They worshipped many gods; not only their old demons Baalim and Ashtaroth, which the Canaanites had worshipped, but, as if they would proclaim their folly to all their neighbours, they served the gods of Syria, Zidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. It looks as if the chief trade of Israel were to import deities from all countries. It is hard to say, whether it was more impious or impolitic to do this. By introducing these foreign deities, they rendered themselves mean and despicable, for no nation that had any sense of honour, changed their gods. Much of the wealth of Israel, we may suppose, was carried out, in offerings to the temples of the deities in the several countries, when they came, on which, as their mother-churches, their temples in Israel were expected to own their dependence; the priests and devotees of those sorry deities would follow their gods, no doubt, in crowds into the land of Israel, and if they could not live in their own country, would take root there, and so "strangers would devour their strength." If they did it in compliment to the neighbouring nations, and to ingratiate themselves with them, justly were they disappointed; for those nations which by their wicked arts they sought to make their friends, by the righteous judgments of God became their enemies and oppressors. *In quo quis peccat, in eo punitur—Wherein a person offends, therein he shall be punished.* 2. They did not so much as admit the God of Israel to be one of these many deities they worshipped, but quite cast him off; they *forsook the Lord, and served not him* at all. Those that think to serve both God and mammon, will soon come entirely to forsake God, and to serve mammon only. If God have not all the heart, he will soon have none of it.

II. God renewed his judgments upon them, bringing them under the power of oppressing enemies. Had they *fallen into the hands of the Lord* immediately, they might have found that *his mercies were great*; but God let them *fall into the hand of man*, whose tender mercies are cruel; he *sold them into the hands of the Philistines* that lay south-west of Canaan, and of the Ammonites that lay north-east, both at the same time; so that between those two millstones they were miserably *crushed*, as the original word is, (*v. 8.*) *for oppressed*. God has appointed that if any of the cities of Israel should revolt to idolatry, the rest should make war upon them, and cut them off, *Deut. 13. 12, &c.* They had been jealous enough in this matter, almost to an extreme, in the case of the altar set up by the two tribes and a half; (*Josh. 22.*) they were grown so very bad, that when one city was infected with idolatry, the next took the infection, and instead of punishing it, imitated and out-did it; and therefore since they that should have been revengers to *execute wrath on them that did this evil*, were themselves guilty, or *bore the sword in vain*, God brought the neighbouring nations upon them to chastise them for their apostasy.

The oppression of Israel by the Ammonites, the posterity of Lot, was, 1. Very long; it continued

eighteen years. Some make these years to be part of the judgeship of Jair, who could not prevail to reform and deliver Israel as he would. Others make them to commence at the death of Jair, which seems the more probable, because that part of Israel which was most infested by the Ammonites, was Gilead, Jair's own country, which we can not suppose to have suffered so much while he was living, but that part at least would be reformed and protected. 2. Very grievous; they vexed them and oppressed them. It was a great vexation to be oppressed by such a despicable people as the children of Ammon were. They began with those tribes that lay next to them on the other side Jordan, here called *the land of the Amorites*, (*v. 8.*) because the Israelites were so wretchedly degenerated, and had made themselves so like the heathen, that they were become, in a manner, perfect Amorites, *Ezek. 16. 3.* Or, because by their sin they forfeited their title to this land, so that it might justly be looked upon as *the land of the Amorites* again, from whom they took it. But by degrees they pushed forward, came over Jordan, and invaded Judah, and Benjamin, and Ephraim, (*v. 9.*) three of the most famous tribes of Israel; yet thus insulted by them, when they had forsaken God, and unable to make head against the invader. Now the threatening was fulfilled, that they should be *slain before their enemies*, and should have *no power to stand before them*, *Lev. 26. 17, 37.* *Their ways and their doings procure this to themselves*; they are sadly degenerated, and so they come to be sorely distressed.

10. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim. 11. And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, *Did not I deliver you* from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? 12. The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. 13. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. 14. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation. 15. And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned, do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. 16. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. 17. Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead: and the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh. 18. And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is *he* that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

Here is,

I. An humble confession which Israel makes to

God in their distress, *v. 10.* Now they own themselves guilty, like a malefactor upon the rack, and promise reformation, like a child under the rod. They did not only complain of the distress, but acknowledged it was their own sin that had brought them into the distress; therefore God was righteous, and they had no reason to repine. They confess their omissions, for in them their sin began, "We have forsaken our God;" and their commissions, "We have served Baalim, and herein have done foolishly, treacherously, and very wickedly."

II. A humbling message which God thereupon sends to Israel; whether, by an angel, (as *ch. 2. 1.*) or by a prophet, (as *ch. 6. 8.*) not certain. It was kind that God took notice of their cry, and did not turn a deaf ear to it, and send them no answer at all; it was kind likewise that when they began to repent, he sent them such a message as was proper to further and promote their repentance, that they might be qualified and prepared for deliverance. Now in this message, 1. He upbraids them with their great ingratitude, reminds them of the great things he had done for them, delivering them from such and such enemies; the Egyptians first, out of whose land they were rescued; the Amorites whom they conquered, and into whose land they entered; and since their settlement there, when the Ammonites had joined with the Moabites to oppress them, (*ch. 3. 13.*) when the Philistines were vexatious in the days of Shamgar, and afterward other enemies had given them trouble; upon the petition, God had wrought many a great salvation for them, *v. 11, 12.* Of their being oppressed by the Zidonians and the Moabites we read not elsewhere; God had in justice corrected them, and in mercy delivered them, and therefore might have expected that either through fear or through love they would have adhered to him and his service; well therefore might the word cut them to the heart, (*v. 13.*) yet *ye have forsaken me* that have brought you out of your troubles, and *served other gods* that brought you into your troubles. Thus did they *forsake their own mercies for their own delusions.* 2. He shows them how justly he might now abandon them to ruin, by abandoning them to the *gods that they had served.* To awaken them to a thorough repentance and reformation, he lets them see, (1.) Their folly in serving Baalim; they had been at a vast expense to obtain the favour of such gods as could not help them, then when they had most need of their help. "*Go, and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen,*" (*v. 14.*) try what they can do for you now; you have worshipped them as gods, try if they have now either a divine power, or a divine goodness, to be employed for you; you paid your homage to them as your kings and Lords, try if they will now protect you; you brought your sacrifices of praise to their altars as your benefactors, imagining that they gave you your corn, and wine, and oil; but a friend indeed will be a friend in need; what stead will their favour stand you in now?" Note, It is necessary, in true repentance, that there be a full conviction of the utter insufficiency of all those things to help us and do us any kindness, which we have idolized and set upon the throne in our hearts in competition with God. We must be convinced that the pleasures of sense on which we have doted, cannot be our satisfaction, nor the wealth of the world which we have coveted, be our portion; that we cannot be happy or easy any where but in God. (2.) Their misery and danger in forsaking God. "See what a pass you have brought yourselves to; now you can expect no other than that I should say, *I will deliver you no more;* and what will become of you then?" *v. 13.* This he tells them, not only as what he *might* do, but as what he *would* do, if they rested in a confes-

sion of what they had done amiss, and did not put away their idols, and amend for the future.

III. An humble submission which Israel hereupon made to God's justice, with an humble application to his mercy; (*v. 15.*) *The children of Israel met together,* it is probable, in a solemn assembly at the door of the tabernacle; received the impressions of the message God had sent them; were not driven by it to despair, though it was very threatening; but resolve to lie at God's feet, and if they perish, they will perish there. They not only repeat their confession, *We have sinned;* but, 1. They surrender themselves to God's justice, *Do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee.* Hereby they own that they deserved the severest tokens of God's displeasure, and were sure he could do them no wrong, whatever he laid upon them; they humbled themselves under his mighty and heavy hand, and *accepted of the punishment of their iniquity,* which Moses had made the condition of God's return in mercy to them, *Lev. 26. 41.* Note, True penitents dare and will refer themselves to God to correct them as he thinks fit, knowing that their sin is highly malignant in its deserts, and that God is not rigorous or extreme in his demands. 2. They supplicate for God's mercy, and implore that; "*Deliver us only, we pray thee, this day, from this enemy.*" They acknowledge what they deserved, yet pray to God not to deal with them according to their deserts. Note, We must submit to God's justice, with a hope in his mercy.

IV. A blessed reformation set on foot hereupon. They brought forth fruits meet for repentance; (*v. 16.*) *then put away the gods of strangers,* (as the word is,) *strange gods,* and worshipped by those nations that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and to the covenant of promise; and they *served the Lord.* Need drove them to him. They knew it was to no purpose to go to the gods whom they had served, and therefore return to the God whom they had slighted. This is true repentance, not only for sin, but from sin.

V. God's gracious return in mercy to them, which is expressed here very tenderly; (*v. 16.*) *His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.* Not that there is any grief in God, he has infinite joy and happiness in himself, which cannot be broken in upon by either the sins or the miseries of his creatures; not that there is any change in God, he *is in one mind, and who can turn him?* But his goodness is his glory; by it he proclaims his name, and magnifies it above all his name; and as he is pleased to put himself into the relation of a father to his people that are in covenant with him, so he is pleased to represent his goodness to them, by the compassions of a father toward his children; for as he is the Father of lights, so he is the Father of mercies; as the disobedience and misery of a child are a grief to a tender father, and make him feel very sensibly from his natural affection, so the provocations of God's people are a grief to him; (*Ps. 95. 10.*) he is *broken with their whorish heart;* (*Ezek. 6. 9.*) their troubles also are a grief to him; so he is pleased to speak when he is pleased to appear for the deliverance of his people; changing his way and method of proceeding, as tender parents, when they begin to relent toward their children with whom they have been displeased. Such are the tender mercies of our God, and so far is he from having any pleasure in the death of sinners.

VI. Things are now working toward their deliverance from the Ammonites' oppression, *v. 17, 18.* God had said, "I will deliver you no more;" but now they are not what they were, they are other men, they are new men, and now he will deliver them. That threatening was denounced, to convince and humble them; and now that it had taken

its desired effect, it is revoked, in order to their deliverance. 1. The Ammonites are hardened to their own ruin; they gathered together in one body, that they might be destroyed at one blow, Rev. 16. 16. 2. The Israelites are animated to their own rescue. They assembled likewise, v. 17. During their eighteen years' oppression, as in their former servitudes, they were run down by their enemies, because they would not incorporate; each family, city, or tribe, would stand by itself, and act independently, and so they all became an easy prey to the oppressors, for want of a due sense of a common interest to cement them; but whenever they got together, they did well; so they did here. When God's Israel become as one man to advance a common good, and oppose a common enemy, what difficulty can stand before them? The people and princes of Gilead being met, consult first about a general that should command in chief against the Ammonites. Hitherto most of the deliverers of Israel had an extraordinary call to the office, as Ehud, Barak, Gideon; but the next is to be called in a more common way, by a convention of the states, who inquired out a fit man to command their army, found out one admirably well qualified for the purpose, and God owned their choice by putting his Spirit upon him, ch. 11. 29. So that this instance is of use for direction and encouragement in after ages, when extraordinary calls are no longer to be expected. Let such be impartially chosen to public trust and power, whom God has qualified, and then God will graciously own those who are thus chosen.

CHAP. XI.

This chapter gives us the history of Jephthah, another of Israel's judges, and numbered among the worthies of the Old Testament, that by faith did great things, (Heb. 11. 32.) though he had not such an extraordinary call as the rest there mentioned had. Here is, I. The disadvantages of his rise and original, v. 1. . 3. II. The Gileadites' choice of him to be commander in chief against the Ammonites, and the terms he made with them, v. 4. . 11. III. His treaty with the king of Ammon about the rights of the two nations, that the matter might be determined, if possible, without bloodshed, v. 12. . 28. IV. His war with the Ammonites, which he enters upon with a solemn vow, (v. 29. . 31.) prosecuted with bravery, (v. 32.) and ends with a glorious victory, v. 33. V. The straits he was brought into at his return to his own house, by the vow he had made, v. 34. . 40.

1. **N**OW Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 2. And Gilead's wife bare him sons: and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. 3. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

The princes and people of Gilead we left, in the close of the foregoing chapter, consulting about the choice of a general, being come to this resolve, that whoever would undertake to lead their forces against the children of Ammon, should by common consent be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. The enterprise was difficult, and it was fit that so great an encouragement as this should be proposed to him that would undertake it. Now all agreed that Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of

valour, and very fit for that purpose; none so fit as he; but he lay under three disadvantages:

1. He was the son of a harlot, (v. 1.) of a strange woman, (v. 2.) one that was neither a wife nor a concubine; some think his mother was a Gentile; so Josephus, who calls him a stranger by the mother's side. An Ishmaelite, say the Jews. If his mother was a harlot, that was not his fault, however it was his disgrace. Men ought not to be reproached with any of the infelicities of their parentage or extraction, so long as they are endeavouring by their personal merits to roll away the reproach. The son of a harlot, if born again, born from above, shall be accepted of God, and be as welcome as any other to the glorious liberties of his children. Jephthah could not read in the law the brand there put on the Ammonites, the enemies he was to grapple with, that they should not enter into the congregation of the Lord, but in the same paragraph he met with that which looked back upon himself, that a bastard should be in like manner excluded, Deut. 23. 2, 3. But if that law means, as most probably it does, only those that are born of incest, not of fornication, he was not within the reach of it.

2. He had been driven from his country by his brethren. His father's legitimate children, insisting upon the rigour of the law, thrust him out of having any inheritance with them, without any consideration had of his extraordinary qualifications, which merited a dispensation, and would have made him a mighty strength and ornament of their family, if they had overlooked his being illegitimate, and admitted him to a child's part, v. 2. One would not have thought this abandoned youth was intended to be Israel's deliverer and judge, but God often humbles those whom he designs to exalt, and makes that stone the head of the corner which the builders refused; so Joseph, Moses, and David, the three most eminent of the shepherds of Israel, were all thrust out by men, before they were called of God to their great offices.

3. He had, in his exile, headed a rabble, v. 3. Being driven out by his brethren, his great soul would not suffer him either to dig, or beg, but by his sword he must live; and being soon noted for his bravery, those that were reduced to such straits and animated by such a spirit, enlisted themselves under him. Vain men they are here called, that is, men that had run through their estates and were to seek for a livelihood, those that went out with him, not to rob or plunder, but to hunt wild beasts, and perhaps to make incursions upon these countries which Israel was entitled to, but were not as yet come to the possession of, or were some way or other injured by.

This is the man that must save Israel. That people had by their idolatry made themselves children of whoredoms, and aliens from God and his covenant, and therefore, though God upon their repentance will deliver them, yet, to mortify them and remind them of their sin, he chooses to do it by a bastard and an exile.

4. And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. 5. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: 6. And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. 7. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate

me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? 8. And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. 9. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? 10. And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. 11. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

Here is,

I. The distress which the children of Israel were in upon the Ammonites' invasion of their country, *v. 4.* Probably this was the same invasion with that mentioned, *ch. 10. 17*, when the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in or against Gilead. And those words, in process of time, refer to what goes immediately before the expulsion of Jephthah: many days after he had been thus thrust out in disgrace, was he fetched back again with honour.

II. The court which the elders made to Jephthah hereupon to come and help them. They did not write or send a messenger to him, but went themselves to fetch him, resolving to have no denial, and the exigence of the case was such as would admit no delay. Their errand to him was, (*v. 6.*) *Come, and be our captain.* They knew none among themselves that was able to undertake that great trust, but do in effect confess themselves unfit for it; they knew him to be a stout man, and inured to the sword, and therefore he must be the man. See how God prepares men for the service he designs them for, and makes their troubles work for their advancement. If Jephthah had not been put to his shifts, by his brethren's unkindness, he had not had such an occasion as that gave him, to exercise and improve his martial genius, and so to signalize himself and become famous; *Out of the eater comes forth meat.* The children of Israel were assembled and encamped, *ch. 10. 17.* But an army without a general, is like a body without a head, therefore, *Come, say they, and be our captain, that we may fight.* See the necessity of government; though they were hearty enough in the cause, yet they owned they could not fight without a captain to command them. So necessary is it to all societies, that there be a *pars imperans*, and a *pars subdita*, some to rule, and others to obey, and that a community should humbly beg the favour of being commanded, rather than that every man should be his own master. Blessed be God for government, for a good government!

III. The objections Jephthah makes against accepting their offer; (*v. 7.*) *Did ye not hate me, and expel me?* It should seem that his brethren were some of these elders; or these elders, by suffering his brethren to abuse him, and not righting him as they ought to have done, (for their business is to defend the poor and fatherless, *Ps. 82. 3, 4.*) had made themselves guilty of this expulsion, and he might justly charge them with it. Magistrates

that have power to protect those that are injured, if they do not do them right, really do them wrong. "You hated me and expelled me, and therefore how can I believe that you are sincere in your proposal? And how can you expect that I should do you any service?" Not but that Jephthah was very willing to serve his country, but he thought fit to give them a hint of their former unkindness to him, that they might repent of their sin in using him so ill, and might for the future be the more sensible of their obligations. Thus Joseph humbled his brethren before he made himself known to them. The particular case between the Gileadites and Jephthah, was a resemblance of the general state of the case between Israel and God at this time; they had thrust God out by their idolatries, yet in their distress they begged his help; he told them how justly he might have rejected them, and yet graciously delivered them. So did Jephthah. Many slight God and good men, till they come to be in distress, and then they are desirous of God's mercy and good men's prayers.

IV. Their urgency with him to accept the government they offer him, *v. 8.* "Therefore because we formerly did thee that wrong, and to show thee that we repent of it, and would gladly atone for it, we turn again to thee now, to put such an honour upon thee as shall balance that indignity." Let this instance be, 1. A caution to us not to despise or trample upon any because they are mean, or to be injurious to any that we have advantage against, because, whatever we think of them now, the time may come when we may have need of them, and would be glad to be beholden to them. It is our wisdom to make no man our enemy, because we know not how soon our distresses may be such, as that we may be highly concerned to make him our friend. 2. An encouragement to men of worth that are slighted and ill treated; let them bear it with meekness and cheerfulness, and leave it to God to make their light shine out of obscurity. Fuller's remark on this story in his *Pisgah-Sight*, is this; *Virtue once in an age will work our own advancement, and when such as hate it chance to need it, they will be forced to prefer it*, and then the honour will appear the brighter.

V. The bargain he makes with them. He had mentioned the injuries they had formerly done him, but perceiving their repentance, his spirit was too great and generous to mention them any more. God had forgiven Israel the affronts they had done him, (*ch. 10. 16.*) and therefore Jephthah will forgive. Only he thinks it prudent to make his bargain wisely for the future, since he deals with men that he had reason to distrust. 1. He puts to them a fair question, *v. 9.* He speaks not with too much confidence of his success, knowing how justly God might suffer the Ammonites to prevail for the further punishment of Israel; but puts an *if* upon it. Nor does he speak with any confidence at all in himself; if he do succeed, it is the Lord that delivers them into his hand, intending thereby to remind his countrymen to look up to God, as Arbitrator of the controversy, and the Giver of victory, for so he did. "Now if, by the blessing of God, I come home a conqueror, tell me plainly, shall I be your head? If I deliver you under God, shall I, under him, reform you?" The same question is put to those who desire salvation by Christ. "If he save you, will ye be willing that he shall rule you? For on no other terms will he save you; if he make you happy, shall he make you holy? If he be your helper, shall he be your head?" 2. They immediately give him a positive answer; (*v. 10.*) "We will do according to thy words; command us in war, and thou shalt command us in peace." They do not take time to consider of it; the case was too

plain to need a debate, and the necessity too pressing to admit a delay; they knew they had power to conclude a treaty for those whom they represented, and therefore found it with an oath, *The Lord be witness between us*. They appeal to God's omniscience as the judge of their present sincerity, and to his justice as an avenger, if afterward they should prove false. *The Lord be a hearer*, so the word is. Whatever we speak, it concerns us to remember that God is a hearer, and to speak accordingly. Thus was the original contract ratified between Jephthah and the Gileadites, which all Israel, it should seem, agreed to afterward, for it is said, (*ch. 12. 7.*) *he judged Israel*. He hereupon went with them (*v. 11.*) to the place where they were all assembled, (*ch. 10. 17.*) and there, by common consent, they made him head and captain, and so ratified the bargain their representatives had made with him, that he should be not only captain now, but head for life. Jephthah, to obtain this little honour, was willing to expose his life for them; (*ch. 12. 3.*) and shall we be discouraged in our christian warfare by any of the difficulties we may meet with in it, when Christ himself has promised a *crown of life to him that overcometh*?

VI. Jephthah's pious acknowledgment of God in this great affair, (*v. 11.*) *he uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*. That is, upon his elevation, he immediately retired to his devotions, and in prayer spread the whole matter before God, both his choice to the office, and his execution of the office, as one that had his eye ever toward the Lord, and would do nothing without him, that leaned not to his own understanding or courage, but depended on God and his favour. He utters before God all his thoughts and cares in this matter, for he gives us leave to be free with him. 1. "Lord, the people have made me their head; wilt thou confirm the choice, and own me as thy people's head under thee, and for thee?" God justly complains of Israel, (*Hos. 8. 4.*) *they have set up kings, but not by me*; "Lord," said Jephthah, "I will be no head of their making without thee. I will not accept the government unless thou give me leave." Had Abimelech done this, he might have prospered. 2. "Lord, they have made me their captain, to go before them in this war with the Ammonites; shall I have thy presence? Wilt thou go before me? If not carry me not up hence. Lord, satisfy me in the justice of the cause. Assure me of success in the enterprise." This is a rare example, to be imitated by all, particularly by great ones; in all our ways let us acknowledge God, seek his favour, ask counsel at his mouth, and take him along with us; so shall we make our way prosperous. Thus Jephthah opened the campaign with prayer. That was likely to end gloriously, which began piously.

12. And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

13. And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now, therefore, restore those lands again peaceably. 14. And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon, 15. And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: 16. But when Israel came up from

Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh; 17. Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab; but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. 18. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. 19. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land unto my place. 20. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21. And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. 22. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. 23. So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? 24. Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. 25. And now, art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, 26. While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time? 27. Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. 28. Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

We have here the treaty between Jephthah, now judge of Israel, and the king of the Ammonites, who is not named; that the controversy between the two nations might, if possible, be accommodated without the effusion of blood.

I. Jephthah, as one having authority, sent to the king of Ammon, who in this war was the aggressor,

to demand his reasons for invading the land of Israel; (v. 12.) *Why art thou come to fight against me in my land?* Had I come first into thy land to disturb thee in thy possession, that had been reason enough for fighting against me, for how must force be repelled but by force? But what hast thou to do to come thus in a hostile manner into *my land?*" So he calls it, in the name both of God and Israel. Now this fair demand shows, 1. That Jephthah did not delight in war, though he was a mighty man of valour, but was willing to prevent it by a peaceable accommodation. If he could by reason persuade the invaders to retire, he would not compel them to do it by the sword. War should be the last remedy, not to be used till all other methods of ending matters in variance have been tried in vain. *Ratio ultima regum—The last resource of kings.* This rule should be observed in going to law. The sword of justice, as the sword of war, must not be appealed to till the contending parties have first endeavoured by gentler means to understand one another, and to accommodate matters in variance, 1 Cor. 6. 1, 2. That Jephthah did delight in equity, and designed no other than to do justice. If the children of Ammon could convince him that Israel had done them wrong, he was ready to restore the rights of the Ammonites. If not, it was plain by their invasion that they did Israel wrong, and he was ready to maintain the rights of the Israelites. A sense of justice should guide and govern us in all our undertakings.

II. The king of the Ammonites now gives in his demand, which he should have published before he had invaded Israel, v. 13. His pretence is, "Israel took away my lands long since, now therefore restore these lands." We have reason to think the Ammonites, when they made this descent upon Israel, meant no other than to spoil and plunder the country, and enrich themselves with the prey, as they had done formerly under Eglon, (ch. 3. 13.) when no such demand as this was made, though the matter was then fresh; but when Jephthah demanded the cause of their quarrel, and they could not for shame own what was their true intent and meaning, some old forgotten records were searched, or some ancient traditions inquired into, and from them this reason is drawn to serve the present turn, for a colourable pretence of equity in the invasion. Even those that do the greatest wrong, yet have such a conviction in their consciences of justice, that they would seem to do right. *Restore those lands.* See upon what uncertain terms we hold our worldly possessions; what we think we have the surest hold of, may be challenged from us, and wrested out of our hands. Those that are got to the heavenly Canaan, need not fear having their titles questioned.

III. Jephthah gives in a very full and satisfactory answer to this demand, showing it to be altogether unjust and unreasonable, and that the Ammonites had no title to this country that lay between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, now in the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad. As one very well versed in the history of his country, he shows,

1. That Israel never took any land away, either from the Moabites or Ammonites; he puts them together, because they were brethren, the children of Lot, near neighbours, and of united interests, having the same god, Chemosh, and perhaps sometimes the same king. The lands in question Israel took away, not from the Moabites or Ammonites, they had particular orders from God not to meddle with them, or any thing they had, (Deut. 2. 9, 19.) and religiously observed their orders; but they found them in the possession of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and out of his hand they took them justly and honourably, as he will show afterward. If the Amorites, before Israel came into that country, had

taken these lands from the Moabites or Ammonites, as it should seem they had, (Numb. 21. 26. Josh. 13. 25.) Israel was not concerned to inquire into that, or answer for it. If the Ammonites had lost these lands and their title to them, the children of Israel were under no obligation to recover the possession for them. Their business was to conquer for themselves, not for other people. This is the first plea, "Not guilty of the trespass."

2. That they were so far from invading the property of any other nations than those of the devoted posterity of accursed Canaan, (one of the branches of which the Amorites were, Gen. 10. 16.) that they would not so much as force a passage through the country, either of the Edomites, the seed of Esau, or of the Moabites, the seed of Lot, but even after a very tedious march through the wilderness, with which they were sadly tired, (v. 16.) when the king of Edom first, and afterward the king of Moab, denied them the courtesy of a way through their country, (v. 17.) rather than give them any offence or annoyance, weary as they were, they put themselves to the further fatigue of compassing both the land of Edom and that of Moab, and came not within the border of either, v. 18. Note, Those that conduct themselves inoffensively, may take the comfort of it, and plead it against those that charge them with injustice and wrong doing. *Our righteousness will answer for us in time to come,* (Gen. 30. 33.) *and will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,* 1 Pet. 2. 15.

3. That in that war in which they took this land out of the hands of Sihon king of the Amorites, he was the aggressor, and not they, v. 12. 20. They sent a humble petition to him, for leave to go through his land, willing to give him any security for their good behaviour in their march; "*Let us pass (say they) unto my place,* that is, to the land of Canaan; that is the only place we call ours, and to which we are pressing forward, not designing a settlement here." But Sihon not only denied them this courtesy, as Edom and Moab had done, (had he only done so, who knows but Israel might have gone about some other way?) but he mustered all his forces, and fought against Israel; (v. 20.) not only shut them out of his own land, but would have cut them off from the face of the earth; (Numb. 21. 23, 24.) aimed at nothing less than their ruin, v. 20. Israel therefore, in their war with him, stood in their own just and necessary defence, and therefore, having routed his army, might justly, in further revenge of the injury, seize his country as forfeited; so Israel came to the possession of this country, and doubted not to make good their title to it; and it is very unreasonable for the Ammonites to question their title, for the Amorites were the inhabitants of that country, and it was purely their land and their coasts that the Israelites then made themselves masters of, v. 21.

4. He pleads a grant from the crown, and claims under that, v. 23, 24. It was not Israel, they were fatigued with their long march, and were not fit for action so soon; but it was the Lord God of Israel, who is King of nations, whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof, he it was, that dispossessed the Amorites, and planted Israel in their room. God gave it them by an express and particular conveyance, such as vested the title in them, which they might make good against all the world; (Deut. 2. 24.) *I have given into thy hand, Sihon and his land:* he gave it them, by giving them, a complete victory over the present occupants, notwithstanding the great disadvantages they were under: "Can you think that God gave it us in such an extraordinary manner, with design that we should return it to the Moabites or Ammonites again? No, we put a higher value upon God's favours, than to part with

them so easily." To corroborate this plea, he urges him with an argument *ad hominem*—directed to the man, *Wilt thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee?* He not only appeals to the common resolutions of men, to hold their own against all the world, but to the common religion of the nations, which, they thought, obliged them to make much of that which their gods gave them. Not that Jephthah thought Chemosh a god, only he is *thy god*; and the worshippers even of those dung-hill-deities that could do neither good nor evil, yet thought themselves beholden to them for all they had, (Hos. 2. 12, *These are my rewards which my lovers have given me*; and see Judg. 16. 24.) and make this a reason why they would hold it fast, that their gods gave it them. "This thou thinkest a good title, and shall not we?" The Ammonites had dispossessed those that dwelt in their land before them; they thought they did it by the help of Chemosh their god, but really it was Jehovah the God of Israel, that did it for them, as is expressly said, Deut. 2. 19, 21. "Now," says Jephthah, "we have as good a title to our country as you have to your's." Note, One instance of the honour and respect we owe to God, as our God, is, rightly to possess that which he gives us to possess, receive it from him, use it for him, keep it for his sake, and part with it when he calls for it. He has given us to possess, not to enjoy. He himself only must be enjoyed.

5. He pleads prescription. (1.) Their title had not been disputed when they first entered upon it, v. 25. "Barak, who was then king of Moab, from whom the greatest part of these lands had been taken by the Amorites, and who was most concerned and best able to oppose us, if he only had had any thing to object against our settlement there, yet sat still, and never offered to strive against Israel." He knew that for his own part he had fairly lost it to the Amorites, and was not able to recover it, and could not but acknowledge that Israel had fairly won it of the Amorites, and therefore all his care was to secure what was left, he never pretended a title to what was lost. See Numb. 21. 2, 3. "He then acquiesced in God's way of disposing kingdoms, and wilt not thou now?" (2.) Their possession had never been disturbed, v. 26. He pleads that they had kept this country as their own, now about three hundred years, and the Ammonites in all that time had never attempted to take it from them, no, not when they had it in their power to oppress them, ch. 3. 12, 13. So that, supposing their title had not been clear at the first, (which yet he had proved it was,) yet no continual claim being made by so many descents, the entry of the children of Ammon, without doubt, was barred for ever. A title so long unquestioned, shall be presumed unquestionable.

6. By these arguments Jephthah justifies himself and his own cause; (v. 27.) "I have not sinned against thee in taking or keeping what I have no right to, if I had, I would instantly make restitution;" and condemns the Ammonites, "*Thou doest me wrong to war against me*, and must expect to speed accordingly." It seems to me an evidence that the children of Israel, in the days of their prosperity and power, (for some such days they had in the times of the Judges,) had conducted themselves very inoffensively to all their neighbours, and had not been vexatious, or oppressing to them, (either by way of reprisal, or under colour of propagating their religion, that the king of the Ammonites, when he would seek an occasion of quarrelling with them, was forced to look three hundred years back for a pretence. It becomes the people of God thus to be blameless and harmless, and without rebuke.

7. For the deciding of the controversy, he puts himself upon God and his sword, and the king of Ammon joined issue with him; (v. 27, 28.) *The*

Lord the Judge be Judge this day. With this solemn reference of the matter to the Judge of heaven and earth, he designs either to deter the Ammonites from proceeding, and oblige them to retire, when they saw the right of the cause was against them, or to justify himself in subduing them, if they should go on. Note, War is an appeal to heaven, to God the Judge of all, to whom the issues of it belong. If doubtful rights be disputed, he is thereby requested to determine them: if manifest rights be invaded or denied, he is thereby applied to for the vindicating of what is just, and the punishing of wrong. As the sword of justice was made for lawless and disobedient persons, (1 Tim. 1. 9.) so was the sword of war made for lawless and disobedient princes and nations. In war therefore the eye must be ever up to God, and it must always be thought a dangerous thing to desire or expect that God should patronise unrighteousness.

Neither Jephthah's apology, nor his appeal, wrought upon the king of the children of Ammon; they had found the sweets of the spoil of Israel, in the eighteen years wherein they had oppressed them, (ch. 10. 8.) and hoped now to make themselves masters of the tree which they had so often enriched themselves with the fruit of. He hearkened not to the words of Jephthah, his heart being hardened to his destruction.

29. Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah; and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. 30. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 31. Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering. 32. So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon, to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33. And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, *even* twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. 34. And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she *was his* only child: besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. 36. And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, *even* of the children of Ammon. 37. And

she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 38. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39. And it came to pass, at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, 40. *That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.*

We have here Jephthah triumphing in a glorious victory, but, as an allay to his joy, troubled and distressed by an unadvised vow.

I. Jephthah's victory was clear, and shines very bright, both to his honour, and to the honour of God, his in pleading, and God's in owning, a righteous cause.

1. God gave him an excellent spirit, and he used it bravely, v. 39. Then when it appeared by the people's unanimous choice of him for their leader, that he had so clear a call to engage, and by the obstinate deafness of the king of Ammon to the proposal of accommodation, that he had so just a cause to engage in, then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and very much advanced his natural faculties, enduing him with power from on high, and making him more bold and more wise than ever he had been, and more fired with a holy zeal against the enemies of his people. Hereby God confirmed him in his office, and assured him of success in his undertaking. Thus animated, he loses no time, but with an undaunted resolution takes the field. Particular notice is taken of the way by which he advanced towards the enemies' camp, probably, because the choice of it was an instance of that extraordinary direction with which the Spirit of the Lord had furnished him; for those who sincerely walk after the spirit, shall be led forth the right way.

2. God gave him eminent success, and he bravely improved that too; (v. 32.) *The Lord delivered the Ammonites into his hand*, and so gave judgment upon the appeal in favour of the righteous cause, and made these feel the force of war, that would not yield to the force of reason, for he *sits in the throne, judging right*. Jephthah lost not the advantages given him, but pursued and completed his victory; having routed their forces in the field, he pursued them to their cities, where he put to the sword all he found in arms, so as utterly to disable them to give Israel any molestation, v. 33. But it does not appear that he utterly destroyed the people, as Joshua had done those of the devoted nations, or that he offered to make himself master of the country, though their pretensions to the land of Israel might have given him colour to do so, only he took care that they should be effectually subdued. Though others' attempting wrong to us, will justify us in the defence of our own right, yet it will not authorize us to do them wrong.

II. Jephthah's vow is dark, and much in the clouds. When he was going out from his own house, upon this hazardous undertaking, in prayer to God for his presence with him, he makes a secret but solemn vow, or religious promise to God, that if God would graciously bring him back a con-

querer, whosoever, or whatsoever, should first come out of his house to meet him, it should be devoted to God, and offered up for a burnt-offering; at his return, tidings of his victory coming home before him, his own and only daughter meets him with the seasonable expressions of joy; this puts him into a great confusion, but there was no remedy; after she had taken some time to lament her own infelicity, she cheerfully submitted to the performance of his vow.

Now, 1. There are several good lessons to be learned out of this story. (1.) That there may be remainders of distrust and doubting even in the hearts of true and great believers. Jephthah had reason enough to be confident of success, especially when he found the *Spirit of the Lord come upon him*; and yet now that it came to the settling, he seems to hesitate; (v. 30.) "*If thou shalt without fail deliver them into my hand, then I will do so and so.*" And perhaps the snare into which his vow brought him, was designed to correct the weakness of his faith; and a fond conceit he had, that he could not promise himself a victory, unless he proffered something considerable to be given to God in lieu of it. (2.) That yet it is very good, when we are in the pursuit or expectation of any mercy, to make vows to God of some instance of acceptable service to him, not as a purchase of the favour we desire, but as an expression of our gratitude to him, and the deep sense we have of our obligations to render according to the benefit done to us. The matter of such a singular vow (Lev. 27. 2.) must be something that has a plain and direct tendency, either to the advancement of God's glory, and the interests of his kingdom among men, or to the furtherance of ourselves in his service, and in that which is antecedently our duty. (3.) That we have great need to be very cautious, and well advised, in the making of such vows, lest, by indulging a present emotion even of pious zeal, we entangle our own consciences, involve ourselves in perplexities, and are forced at last to *say before the angel that it was an error*, Eccl. 5. 2-6. *It is a snare to a man, hastily to devour that which is holy*, without due consideration, (*quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recusent—what we are able to effect*), and without inserting the needful provisos and limitations which might prevent the entanglement, and then after vows to make the inquiry which should have been made before, Prov. 20. 25. Let Jephthah's harm be our warning in this matter. See Deut. 29. 22. (4.) That what we have solemnly vowed to God, we must conscientiously perform, if it be possible and lawful, though it be ever so difficult and grievous to us. Jephthah's sense of the powerful obligation of his vow must always be our's (v. 35.) *I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in a solemn vow, and I cannot go back*; that is, "I cannot recall the vow myself, it is too late, nor can any power on earth dispense with it, or give me up my bond. The thing was mine own, and in mine own power," (Acts 5. 4.) but now it is not." *Vow and play*, Ps. 76. 11. We deceive ourselves, if we think to mock God. If we apply this to the consent we have solemnly given in our sacramental vows to the covenant of grace, made with poor sinners in Christ, what a powerful argument will it be against the sins we have by those vows bound ourselves out from, and what a strong inducement to the duties we have thereby bound ourselves up to, and what a ready answer to every temptation! "*I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot go back*; I must therefore go forward: I have sworn, and I must, I will, perform it. Let me not dare to play fast and loose with God." (5.) That it will become children, obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord, and particularly

to comply with their pious resolutions for the honour of God, and the keeping up of religion in their families, though they be harsh and severe, as Rechabites, who for many generations religiously observed the commands of Jonadab their father in forbearing wine, and Jephthah's daughter here, who, for the satisfying of her father's conscience, and for the honour of God and her country, yielded herself as one devoted; (v. 36.) "*Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; I know I am dear to thee, but am well content that God should be dearer.*" The father might disallow any vow made by the daughter, (Numb. 30, 5.) but the daughter could not disallow or disannul, no, not such a vow as this, made by the father. This magnifies the law of the fifth commandment. (6.) That our friends' grievances should be our griefs. Where she went to bewail her hard fate, the virgins, her companions, joined with her in her lamentations, v. 38. With those of her own sex and age she used to associate, who, no doubt, now that her father was of a sudden grown so great, expected, shortly after his return, to dance at her wedding, but were heavily disappointed, when they were called to retire to the mountains with her and share in her griefs. Those are unworthy of the name of friends, that will only rejoice with us, and not weep with us. (7.) That heroic zeal for the honour of God and Israel, though alloyed with infirmity and indiscretion, is worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. It well became the daughters of Israel, by an annual solemnity to preserve the honourable memory of Jephthah's daughter, who made light even of her own life, like a noble heroine, when God had taken vengeance of Israel's enemies, v. 36. Such a rare instance of one that preferred the public interest before life itself, was never to be forgotten. Her sex forbade her to follow to the war, and so to expose her life in battle, in lieu of which she hazards it much more, (and perhaps apprehends that she did so, having some intimation of his vow, and did it designedly, for he tells her, (v. 30.) *Thou hast brought me very low,*) to grace his triumphs. So transported was she with the victory as a common benefit, that she was willing to be herself offered up as a thank-offering for it, and would think her life well bestowed when laid down on so great an occasion. She thinks it an honour to die, not as a sacrifice of atonement for the people's sins, (that honour was reserved for Christ only,) but as a sacrifice of acknowledgment for the people's mercies. (8.) From Jephthah's concern on this occasion, we must learn not to think it strange if the day of our triumphs in this world proves upon some account or other the day of our griefs, and therefore must rejoice with trembling! we hope for a day of triumph hereafter which will have no alloy.

2. Yet there are some difficult questions that do arise upon this story, which have very much employed the pens of learned men; I will say but little to them, because Mr. Poole has discussed them very fully in his English annotations.

(1.) It is hard to say, what Jephthah did to his daughter in performance of his vow. [1.] Some think he only shut her up for a nun, and that it being unlawful, according to one part of his vow, (for they make it disjunctive,) to offer her up for a burnt-offering, he thus, according to the other part, engaged her to be the Lord's, that is, totally to sequester herself from all the affairs of this life, and consequently from marriage, and to employ herself wholly in the acts of devotion all her days. That which countenances this opinion, is, that she is said to bewail her virginity, (v. 37, 38.) and that she knew no man, v. 39. But if he sacrificed her, it was proper enough for her to bewail, not her death,

because that was intended to be for the honour of God, and she would undergo it cheerfully, but that unhappy circumstance of it, which made it more grievous to her than any other, because she was her father's only child, in whom he hoped his name and family would have been built up; that she was unmarried, and so left no issue to inherit her father's honour and estate; therefore that is it that is particularly taken notice of, (v. 34) that beside her he had neither son nor daughter. But that which makes me think Jephthah did not go about thus to satisfy his vow, or evade it rather, is, that we do not find any law, usage, or custom, in all the Old Testament, which does in the least intimate that a single life was any branch or article of religion, or that any person, man or woman, was looked upon as the more holy, more the Lord's, or devoted to him, for living unmarried; it was no part of the law, either of the priests, or of the Nazarites; Deberah and Huldah, both prophetesses, are both of them particularly taken notice of to be married women. Besides, had she only been confined to a single life, she needed not to have desired these two months to bewail it in; she had her whole life before her to do that, if she saw cause. Nor needed she to take such a bad leave of her companions; for they that are of that opinion, understand what is said, (v. 40.) of their coming to *talk with her*, as our margin reads it, four days in the year. Therefore, [2.] It seems more probable that he offered her up for a sacrifice, according to the letter of his vow, misunderstanding that law which spoke of persons devoted to the cause of God, as if it were to be applied to such as were devoted by men's vows; (Lev. 27. 29.) *None devoted shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death;* and wanting to be better informed of the power the law gave him in this case to redeem her. Abraham's attempt to offer up Isaac, perhaps encouraged him, and made him think, if God would not accept this sacrifice which he had vowed, he would send an angel to stay his hand, as he did Abraham's; if she came out designedly to be made a sacrifice, as who knows but she might, perhaps he thought that would make the case the plainer; *Volenti non sit injuria—An injury cannot be done to a person when he himself consents to it.* He imagined, it may be, that where there was neither anger nor malice, there was no murder, and that his good intention would sanctify this bad action; and since he had made such a vow, he thought it better to kill his daughter than to break his vow, and let Providence bear the blame, that brought her forth to meet him.

(2.) But supposing that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, the question is, whether he did well? [1.] Some justify him in it, and think he did well, and as became one that preferred the honour of God before that which was dearest to him in this world. He is mentioned among the eminent believers, who by faith did great things, Heb. 11, 12. And this was one of the great things he did: it was done deliberately, and upon two months' consideration and consultation. He is never blamed for it by any inspired writer. Though it highly exalts the paternal authority, yet it cannot justify any in doing the like; he was an extraordinary person, *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*; many circumstances, now unknown to us, might make this altogether extraordinary, and justify it, yet not so that it might justify the like. Some learned men have made this sacrifice a figure of Christ the great Sacrifice; he was of unspotted purity and innocence, as she a chaste virgin; he was devoted to death by his Father, and so made a curse, or an anathema, for us: he submitted himself, as she did, to his Father's will—*Not as I will, but as thou wilt.* But, [2.] Most condemn Jephthah; he did ill to make so rash a vow, and worse to perform it. He could not be

bound by his vow, to that which God had forbidden by the letter of the sixth commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*. God had forbidden human sacrifices, so that it was (says Dr. Lightfoot) in effect a sacrifice to Moloch. And, probably, the reason why it is left dubious by the inspired penman, whether he sacrificed her or no, was that they who did afterwards offer their children, might not take any encouragement from this instance. Concerning this, and some other such passages in the sacred story, which learned men are in the dark, divided, and in doubt about, we need not much amuse ourselves; what is necessary to our salvation, thanks be to God, is plain enough.

CHAP. XII.

In this chapter, we have, I. Jephthah's rencounter with the Ephraimites, and the bloodshed on that unhappy occasion, (v. 1. . 6.) and the conclusion of Jephthah's life and government, v. 7. II. A short account of three other of the judges of Israel; Ibzon, (v. 8. . 10.) Elon, (v. 11, 12.) and Abdon, v. 13. . 15.

1. **AND** the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire. 2. And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. 3. And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day to fight against me? 4. Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites. 5. And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped, said, Let me go over, that the men of Gilead said unto him, *Art thou an Ephraimite?* If he said, Nay; 6. Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth; and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan; and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. 7. And Jephthah judged Israel six years: then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Here is,

I. The unreasonable displeasure of the men of Ephraim against Jephthah, because he had not called them in to his assistance against the Ammonites, that they might have shared in the triumphs and spoils, v. 1. Pride was at the bottom of the quarrel, only by that comes contention. Proud men

think all the honours lost, that go beside themselves, and then *who can stand before envy?* The Ephraimites had the same quarrel with Gideon, (ch. 8. 1.) who was of Manasseh on the other side Jordan, as Jephthah was of Manasseh on their side Jordan. Ephraim and Manasseh were nearer akin than any other of the tribes, being both the sons of Joseph, and yet they were more jealous one of another than any other of the tribes. Jacob having crossed hands, and given Ephraim the preference, looking as far forward as the kingdom of the ten tribes, which Ephraim was the head of, after the revolt from the house of David, that tribe, not content with that honour in the promise, was displeased if Manasseh had any honour done it in the mean time. 'It is pity that kindred and relations, which should be an inducement to love and peace, should ever be an occasion (as it often proves) of strife and discord. *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are as the bars of a castle.* The anger of the Ephraimites at Jephthah was, 1. Causeless and unjust. *Why didst thou not call us to go with thee?* For a good reason, because they were the men of Gilead that had made him their captain, not the men of Ephraim, so that he had no authority to call them. Had his attempt miscarried for want of their help, they might justly have blamed him for not desiring it. But when the work was done, and done effectually, the Ammonites subdued, and Israel delivered, there was no harm done, though their hands were not employed in it. 2. It was cruel and outrageous. They got together in a tumultuous manner, went over Jordan as far as Mizpeh in Gilead, where Jephthah lived, and no less will satisfy their fury, but they will burn his house, and him in it. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce.* Those resentments that have the least reason for them, have commonly the most rage in them. Jephthah was now a conqueror over the common enemies of Israel, and they should have come to congratulate him, and return him the thanks of their tribe for the good services he had done; but we must not think it strange if we receive ill from those from whom we deserve well. Jephthah was now a mourner for the calamity of his family, upon his daughter's account, and they should have come to console and comfort him; but barbarous men take a pleasure in adding affliction to the afflicted. In this world, the end of one trouble often proves the beginning of another; nor must we ever *boast as though we had put off the harness.*

II. Jephthah's warm vindication of himself. He did not endeavour to pacify them, as Gideon had done in the like case; the Ephraimites were now more outrageous than they were then, and Jephthah had not so much of a meek and quiet spirit as Gideon had. Whether they would be pacified or no, Jephthah takes care,

1. To justify himself, v. 2, 3. He makes it out that they had no cause to quarrel with him, for, (1.) It was not in pursuit of glory that he had engaged in this war, but for the necessary defence of his country, with which the children of Ammon greatly strove. (2.) He had invited the Ephraimites to come and join with him, though he neither needed them, nor was under any obligation to pay that respect to them; but yet they had declined the service; *I called you, and ye delivered me not out of their hands.* Had that been true which they charged him with, yet it had not been a just ground of quarrel, but it seems it was false; and, as the matter of fact now appears, he had more cause to quarrel with them, for deserting the common interests of Israel in a time of need. It is no new thing for those who are themselves most culpable, to be most clamorous in accusing the innocent. (3.) The enterprise was very hazardous, and they had more rea-

son to pity him, than to be angry with him; *I put my life in my hands*; that is, "exposed myself to the utmost peril in what I did, having so small an army." The honour they envied, was bought dear enough, they needed not to grudge it him; few of them would have ventured so far for it. (4.) He does not take the glory of the success to himself, (that had been invidious,) but gives it all to God, "*The Lord d tivered them into mine hand*." If God was pleased so far to make use of me for his glory, why should you be offended at that? Have you any reason to *fight against me*? Is not that in effect to fight against God, in whose hand I have been only an unworthy instrument?"

2. When this just answer (though not so soft an answer as Gideon's) did not prevail to turn away their wrath, he took care both to defend himself from their fury, and to chastise their insolence with the sword, by virtue of his authority as Israel's judge.

(1.) The Ephraimites had not only quarrelled with Jephthah, but when his neighbours and friends appeared to take his part, they had abused them, and given them fine language; for I adhere to our translation, and so take it, v. 4. They said in scorn, "Ye Gileadites that dwell here on the other side Jordan, are but fugitives of Ephraim, the scum and dregs of the tribes of Joseph, of which Ephraim is the chief, the refuse of the family, and are so accounted among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites. Who cares for you? All your neighbours know what you are, no better than fugitives and vagabonds, separated from your brethren, and driven hither into a corner." The Gileadites were as true Israelites as any other, and at this time had signalized themselves, both in the choice of Jephthah, and in the war with Ammon, above all the families of Israel, and yet are most basely and unjustly called *fugitives*. It is an ill thing to fasten names or characters of reproach upon persons or countries, as is common, especially upon those who lie under outward disadvantages: it often occasions quarrels that prove of ill consequence, as it did here. See likewise what a mischievous thing an abusive tongue is, that calls ill names, and gives scurrilous language; it *sets on fire the course of nature*, and is *set on fire of hell*, (Jam. 3. 6.) and many a time cuts the throat of him that uses it, as it did here, Ps. 64. 8. If these Ephraimites could have denied themselves the poor satisfaction of calling the Gileadites *fugitives*, they might have prevented a great deal of bloodshed, for *grievous words stir up anger*, and who knows how great a matter a little of that fire may kindle?

(2.) This affront raises the Gileadites' blood, and the indignity done to themselves, as well as to their captain, must be revenged. [1.] They routed them in the field, v. 4. They fought with Ephraim, and Ephraim being but a rude unheaded rabble, smote Ephraim, and put them to flight. [2.] They cut off their retreat, and so completed their revenge, v. 5, 6. The Gileadites, who perhaps were better acquainted with the passages of Jordan than the Ephraimites were, secured them with strong guards, who were ordered to slay every Ephraimite that offered to pass the river. Here was, *First*, Cruelty enough in the destruction of them. Sufficient surely was the punishment which was inflicted by many: when they were routed in the field, there needed not this severity to cut off all that escaped. Shall the sword devour for ever? Whether Jephthah is to be praised for this, I know not, perhaps he saw it to be a piece of necessary justice. *Secondly*, Cunning enough in the discovery of them. It seems the Ephraimites, though they spoke the same language with other Israelites, yet had got a custom in the dialect of their country to pronounce the He-

brew letter *Shin* like *Samech*, and they had so strangely used themselves to it, that they could not do otherwise, no, not to save their lives. We learn to speak by imitation; they that first used *s* for *sh*, did it either because it was shorter, or because it was finer, and their children liked to speak like them, so that you might know an Ephraimite by it; as in England we know a west-country man, or a north-country man, nay, perhaps a Shropshire man, and a Cheshire man, by his pronunciation. *Thou art a Gileean, and thy speech betrays thee*. By this the Ephraimites were discovered. If they took a man that they suspected to be an Ephraimite, but he denied it, they bade him say *Shibboleth*; but either he *could not*, as our translation reads it, or he did not heed, or frame, or direct himself, as some read, to pronounce it right, but said *Sibboleth*, and so was known to be an Ephraimite, and was slain immediately. *Shibboleth* signifies a *river* or *stream*; "Ask leave to go over *Shibboleth*, the river." Those that were thus cut off, made up the whole number of slaughtered Ephraimites forty-two thousand, v. 6. Thus another mutiny of that angry tribe was prevented.

Now let us observe the righteousness of God in the punishment of these proud and passionate Ephraimites, which in several instances answered to their sin. 1. They were proud of the honour of their tribe, gloried in this, that they were Ephraimites; but how soon are they brought to be ashamed or afraid to own their country! *Art thou an Ephraimite?* No, now rather of any tribe than that. 2. They had gone in a rage over Jordan to burn Jephthah's house with fire, but now they come back to Jordan as sneakingly as they had passed it furiously, and were cut off from ever returning to their own houses. 3. They had upbraided the Gileadites with the infelicity of their country, lying at such a distance; and now they suffer by an infirmity peculiar to their own country, in not being able to pronounce *Shibboleth*. 4. They had called the Gileadites, unjustly, *fugitives*, and now they are really and in good earnest become fugitives themselves: and in the Hebrew, the same word (v. 5.) is used of the Ephraimites that escaped, or that fled, which they had used in scorn of the Gileadites, calling them *fugitives*; he that rolls the stone of reproach unjustly upon another, let him expect that it will justly return upon himself.

Lastly, Here is the end of Jephthah's government. He judged Israel but six years, and then died, v. 7. Perhaps the death of his daughter sunk him so, that he never looked up after; but it shortened his days, and he went to his grave mourning.

8. And after him Ibzan of Beth-lehem judged Israel. 9. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, *whom* he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons: and he judged Israel seven years. 10. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Beth-lehem. 11. And after him Elon a Zebulonite judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. 12. And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Ajalon, in the country of Zebulun. 13. And after him Abdon, the son of Hillel a Pirathonite, judged Israel. 14. And he had forty sons, and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass-colts: and he judged Israel eight years. 15. And Abdon, the son of Hillel the Pirathonite, died, and was buried in Pi-

rathon, in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

We have here a short account of the short reigns of three more of the judges of Israel; the first of which governed but seven years, the second ten, and the third eight. *For the transgression of a land, many are the princes thereof*, many in a short time, successively, Prov. 28. 2. Good men being removed in the beginning of their usefulness, and by the time they had applied themselves to their business.

I. Ibzan of Beth-lehem; most probably, Beth-lehem of Judah, David's city, not that in Zebulun, which is only mentioned once, Josh. 19. 15. He ruled but seven years, but by the number of his children, and his disposing of them all in marriage himself, it appears that he lived long; and, probably, the great increase of his family, and the numerous alliances he made, added to his personal merits, made him the more fit to be either chosen by the people, as Jephthah was, or called of God immediately, as Gideon was, to be Israel's judge, to keep up and carry on the work of God among them. That which is remarkable concerning him, is, his children. 1. That he had many children, sixty in all, a quiver full of these arrows. Thus was Beth-lehem of old famous for increase, the very city where he was to be born, whose spiritual seed should be *as the stars of heaven*. 2. That he had an equal number of each sex, thirty sons and thirty daughters, a thing which does not often happen in the same family, yet in the great family of mankind, he that first made two, male and female, by his wise providence, preserves a succession of both in some sort of equality, as far as is requisite to the keeping up of the generations of men upon earth. 3. That he took care to marry them all; his daughters he sent abroad, *et maritis dedit*, so the vulgar Latin adds—*he provided husbands for them*; and, as it were in exchange, and both ways strengthening his interest, he took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. The Jews say, Every father owes three things to his son, to teach him to read the law, give him a trade, and get him a wife. What a difference was there between Ibzan's family, and that of his immediate predecessor, Jephthah! Ibzan has sixty children and all married, Jephthah but one, a daughter, that dies or lives unmarried. Some are increased, others are diminished; both are the Lord's doing.

II. Elon of Zebulun, in the north of Canaan, was next raised up to preside in public affairs, to administer justice, and to reform abuses; ten years he continued a blessing to Israel; and then died, v. 11, 12. Dr. Lightfoot computes, that in the beginning of his time, the forty years' oppression by the Philistines began, (spoken of, ch. 13. 1.) and about that time Samson was born. Probably, his residence being in the north, the Philistines who bordered upon the southern parts of Canaan, took the opportunity of making incursions upon them.

III. Abdon, of the tribe of Ephraim, succeeded, and in him that illustrious tribe begins to recover in reputation, having not afforded any person of note since Joshua; for Abimelech the Shechemite was rather a scandal to it. This Abdon was famous for the multitude of his offspring; (v. 14.) he had forty sons and thirty grandsons, all which he lived to see grown up; and they rode on seventy ass-colts, either as judges and officers, or as gentlemen and persons of distinction. It was a satisfaction to him thus to see his children's children, but it is feared he did not see peace upon Israel, for by this time the Philistines had begun to break in upon them.

Concerning this, and the rest of these judges that ever so short an account given of them, yet notice is taken where they were buried; (v. 7, 10,

12, 15.) perhaps, because the inscriptions upon their monuments (for such were anciently used, 2 Kings 23. 17.) would serve for the confirmation and enlargement of their story, and might be consulted by such as desired further information concerning them. St. Peter having occasion to speak of David, says, *His sepulchre is with us unto this day*, Acts 2. 29. Or it is intended for the honour of the places where they laid their bones; but may be improved for the lessening of our esteem of all worldly glory, which death and the grave will stain the pride of. These judges that were as gods to Israel, died like men, and all their honour was laid in the dust.

It is very strange, that in the history of all these judges, some of whose actions are very particularly related, there is not so much as once mention made of the High Priest, or any other priest, or Levite appearing either for counsel or action in any public affair, from Phinehas (ch. 20. 28.) to Eli, which may well be computed two hundred and fifty years; only the name of the High Priests at that time are preserved, 1 Chron. 6. 4—7. and Ezra 7. 3—5. How can this strange obscurity of that priesthood for so long a time, now in the beginning of its days, agree with that mighty splendour with which it was introduced, and the figure which the institution of it makes in the law of Moses? Surely it intimates, that the institution was chiefly intended to be typical, and that the great benefits that seemed to be promised by it, were to be chiefly looked for in its anti-type, the everlasting priesthood of our Lord Jesus, in comparison of the excelling glory of which that priesthood had no glory, 2 Cor. 3. 10.

CHAP. XIII.

At this chapter begins the story of Samson, the last of the Judges of Israel, whose story is recorded in this book, and next before Eli. The passages related concerning him, are, from first to last, very surprising and uncommon. The figure he makes in this history is really great, and yet vastly different from that of his predecessors. We never find him at the head, either of a court or of an army, never upon the throne of judgment, or in the field of battle, yet in his own proper person a great patriot of his country and a terrible scourge and a check to its enemies and oppressors: he was an eminent believer, (Heb. 11. 32.) and a glorious type of Him who with his own arm wrought salvation. The history of the rest of the Judges commences from their advancement to that station, but Samson's begins with his birth, nay with his conception, and no less than an angel from heaven ushers him into the world, as a pattern of what should be afterward done to John Baptist, and Christ. This is related in this chapter. I. The occasion of raising up this deliverer was the oppression of Israel by the Philistines, v. 1. II. His birth is foretold by an angel to his mother, v. 2.. 5. III. She relates it to his father, v. 6, 7. IV. They both together have it again from the angel, (v. 8.. 14.) whom they treat with respect, (v. 15.. 18.) and who, to their great amazement, discovers what he was, at parting, v. 19.. 23. V. Samson is born, 34, 35.

1. **A**ND the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. 2. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. 3. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. 4. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any un-

clean thing : 5. For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. 6. Then the woman came, and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible; but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told me his name. 7. But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

The first verse gives us a short account, such as we have too often met with already, of the great distress that Israel was in, which gave occasion for the raising up of a deliverer. They did evil, as they had done, *in the sight of the Lord*, and then God delivered them, as he had done, into the hands of their enemies. If there had been no sin, there had needed no Saviour; but sin was suffered to abound, that grace might much more abound. The enemies God now sold them to, were the Philistines, their next neighbours, that lay within them, the first and chief of the nations which were devoted to destruction; but which God *left to prove them*, (ch. 3. 1, 3.) *the five lords of the Philistines*, an inconsiderable people in comparison with Israel, (they had but five cities of any note,) and yet when God made use of them as the staff in his hand, they were very oppressive and vexatious. And this trouble lasted longer than any yet, it continued forty years, though, probably, not always alike violent.

When Israel was in this distress, Samson was born; and here we have his birth foretold by an angel. Observe,

I. His extraction. He was of the tribe of Dan, v. 2. *Dan* signifies a *judge* or *judgment*, Gen. 30. 6. And, probably, it was with an eye to Samson, that dying Jacob foretold, *Dan shall judge his people*, that is, "he shall produce a judge for his people, though one of the sons of the handmaids, as one, as well as any one of the tribes of Israel," Gen. 49. 16. The lot of the tribe of Dan lay next to the country of the Philistines, and therefore one of that tribe was most fit to be made a bridle upon them. His parents had been long childless. Many eminent persons were born of mothers that had been kept a great while in the want of the blessing of children; as Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and John Baptist, that the mercy might be the more acceptable when it did come. *Sing, O barren, that thou didst not bear*, Isa. 54. 1. Note, Mercies long waited for, often prove signal mercies, and it is made to appear that they were worth waiting for, and by them others may be encouraged to continue their hope in God's mercy.

II. The glad tidings brought to his mother, that she should have a son. The messenger was an *angel of the Lord*, (v. 3.) yet appearing as a man, with the aspect and garb of a prophet, or man of God. And this angel (as the learned Bishop Patrick supposes, v. 18.) was the Lord himself, that is, the *Word of the Lord*, who was to be the Messiah, for his name is called *Wonderful*, (v. 18.) and *Jehovah*, v. 19. The great Redeemer did in a particular manner concern himself about this typical deliverer. It was not so much for the sake of Manoah and his wife, obscure Danites, that this extraordinary message was sent, but for Israel's sake, whose

deliverer he was to be; and not only so, his services to Israel not seeming to answer to the grandeur of his entry, but for the Messiah's sake, whose type he was to be, and whose birth must be foretold by an angel, as his was.

The angel, in the message he delivers, 1. Takes notice of her affliction, *Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not*. From hence she might gather he was a prophet, that, though a stranger to her, and one she had never seen before, yet he knew this to be her grievance. He tells her of it, not to upbraid her with it, but because perhaps at this time she was actually thinking of this affliction, and bemoaning herself as one written childless. God often sends in comfort to his people very seasonably, when they feel most from their troubles. "*Now thou art barren, but thou shalt not be always so*," as she feared, "*nor long so*." 2. He assures her that she should *conceive and bear a son*, (v. 3.) and repeats it, v. 5. To show the power of a divine word, the strongest man that ever was, a child of promise, as Isaac, born by force and virtue of a promise and faith in that promise, Heb. 11. 11, Gal. 4. 23. Many a woman, after having been long barren, has borne a son by providence, but Samson was by promise, because a figure of the Promised Seed, so long expected by the faith of the Old Testament saints. 3. He appoints that the child should be a Nazarite from his birth, and therefore that the mother should be subject to the law of the Nazarites, (though not under the vow of a Nazarite,) and should *drink no wine or strong drink*, so long as this child was to have his nourishment from her, either in the womb or at the breast, v. 4, 5. Observe, This deliverer of Israel must be in the strictest manner devoted to God, an example of holiness. It is spoken of as a kindness to the people, that God raised up their young men for Nazarites, Amos 2. 11. Other judges had corrected their apostasies from God, but Samson must appear as one, more than any of them, consecrated to God; and notwithstanding what we read of his faults, we have reason to think, that being a Nazarite of God's making, he did, in the course of his conversation, exemplify, not only the ceremony, but the substance, of that *separation to the Lord*, in which the Nazariteship did consist, Numb. 6. 2. Those that would save others, must by singular piety distinguish themselves. Samuel, who carried on Israel's deliverance from the Philistines, was a Nazarite by his mother's vow, (1 Sam. 1. 11.) as Samson by the divine appointment. The mother of this deliverer must therefore deny herself, and not eat any unclean thing; what was lawful at another time, was now to be forborne. As the promise tried her faith, so this precept tried her obedience; for God requires both from those on whom he will bestow his favours. Women with child ought conscientiously to avoid whatever they have reason to think will be any way prejudicial to the health or good constitution of the fruit of their body. And perhaps Samson's mother was to refrain from wine and strong drink, not only because he was designed for a Nazarite, but because he was designed for a man of strength, which his mother's temperance would contribute to. 4. He foretells the service which this child should do to his country, *He shall begin to deliver Israel*. Note, It is very desirable that our children may be not only devoted entirely to God themselves, but instrumental for the good of others, and the service of their generation; not recluses, *candles under a bushel*, but *on a candlestick*. Observe; *He shall begin* to deliver Israel. This intimated that the oppression of the Philistines should last long, for Israel's deliverance from it should not so much as begin, not one step be taken towards it, till this child, which was now unborn, should be

grown up to a capacity of beginning it. And yet he must not complete the deliverance neither, he shall only *begin* to deliver Israel, which intimates that the trouble should still be prolonged; God chooses to carry on his work gradually, and by several hands. One lays the foundation of a good work, another builds, and perhaps a third brings forth the top-stone.

Now herein Samson was a type of Christ. (1.) As a Nazarite to God, a Nazarite from the womb. For though our Lord Jesus was not a Nazarite himself, yet he was typified by the Nazarites, as being perfectly pure from all sin, not so much as conceived in it, and entirely devoted to his Father's honour. Of the Jewish church, *as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, because to them pertained the promise of him, Rom. 9. 4, 5. By virtue of that promise, he long lay as it were in the womb of that church, which for many ages was pregnant of him, and therefore, like Samson's mother, during that pregnancy, was made a holy nation and a peculiar people, and strictly forbidden to *touch any unclean thing for his sake*, who in the fulness of time was to come from them. (2.) As a deliverer of Israel; for he is Jesus a Saviour, who saves his people from their sins. But with this difference: Samson did only begin to deliver Israel, David was afterwards raised up to complete the destruction of the Philistines, but our Lord Jesus is both Samson and David too; both the *Author and Finisher of our faith*.

III. The report which Manoah's wife, in a transport of joy, brings in all haste to her husband, of this surprising message, v. 6, 7. The glad tidings were brought her when she was alone, perhaps religiously employed in meditation or prayer; but she could not, she would not, conceal it from her husband, but gives him an account,

1. Of the messenger. It was a man of God, v. 6. His countenance she could describe; it was very awful: he had such a majesty in his look, such a sparkling eye, such a shining face, so powerfully commanding reverence and respect, that, according to the idea she had of an angel, he had the very countenance of one. But his name she can give no account of, nor to what tribe or city of Israel he belonged, for he did not think fit to tell her, and, for her part, the very sight of him struck such an awe upon her, that she durst not ask him. She was abundantly satisfied that he was a servant of God, his person and message she thought carried their own evidence along with them, and she inquired no further.

2. Of the message. She gives him a particular account both of the promise and of the precept, (v. 7.) that he also might believe the promise, and might on all occasions be a monitor to her to observe the precept. Thus should yoke-fellows communicate to each other their experiences of communion with God, and their improvements in acquaintance with him, that they may be helpful to each other in the way that is called *holy*.

8. Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my LORD, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. 9. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. 10. And the woman made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me

the other day. 11. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, *Art* thou the man that speakest unto the woman? And he said, *I am*. 12. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass: how shall we order the child? and *how* shall we do unto him? 13. And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 14. She may not eat of any *thing* that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean *thing*: all that I commanded her let her observe.

We have here an account of a second visit, which the angel of God made to Manoah and his wife.

I. Manoah earnestly prayed for it, v. 1. He was not incredulous, and therefore *the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her*; he knew she would not go about to impose upon him, much less was he, as Josephus unworthily represents him, jealous of his wife's conversation with this stranger; but, 1. He takes it for granted, that this child of promise would in due time be given them, and speaks without hesitation of *the child that shall be born*. There was *not found so great faith*, no not in Zechariah, a priest, then in waiting at the altar of the Lord, and to whom the angel himself appeared, as was in this honest Danite. Things hidden from the wise and prudent, who value themselves upon the niceness of their inquiries, are often revealed unto babes, who know how to prize God's gifts, and to take God's word. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet, as Manoah here, have believed*. 2. All his care is, *What they should do to the child* that should be born. Note, Good men are more solicitous and desirous to know the duty that is to be done by them, than to know the events that shall be concerning them; for duty is curs, events are God's. Solomon inquires concerning what the good men should *do*, not the good they should have, Eccl. 2. 3. 3. He therefore prays to God to send the same blessed messenger again, to give them further instructions concerning the management of this Nazarite, fearing lest his wife's joy for the promise, might have made her forget some part of the precept, in which she was desirous to be fully informed, and lie under no mistake. "*Lord, let the man of God come again unto us*, for we desire to be better acquainted with him." Note, Those that have heard from heaven cannot but wish to hear more from thence, again and again to meet with the name of God. Observe, He does not go, or send his servants abroad, to find out this man of God, but seeks him upon his knees, prays to God to send him, and, thus seeking, finds him. Would we have God's messengers, the ministers of his gospel, to bring a word proper for us, and for our instruction? *Entreat the Lord* to send them to us to teach us, Rom. 15. 30, 32.

II. God graciously granted it: (v. 9.) *God hearkened to the voice of Manoah*. Note, God will not fail some way or other to guide those by his counsel, that are sincerely desirous to know their duty, and apply themselves to him to teach them, Ps. 25. 8, 9.

1. The angel appears the second time also to the wife, when she was sitting alone, probably tending the flocks, or otherwise well employed in the field where she was retired; solitude is often a good opportunity of communion with God; good people have thought themselves never less alone than when alone, if God be with them.

2. She goes in all haste to call her husband, doubtless humbly beseeching the stay of this blessed messenger, till she return, and her husband with her, v. 10, 11. She did not desire him to go with her to her husband, but will fetch her husband to him. Those that would meet with God, must attend there where he is pleased to manifest himself. "Oh," says she, overjoyed, "my dear love, thy prayers are answered, yonder is the man of God come to make us another visit; he that came the other day;" or, as some read it, *this day, for other* is not in the original, and it is probable enough that both these visits were the same day, and at the same place, and that the second time she sat expecting him. The man of God is very willing she should call her husband, John 4. 16. Those that have got acquaintance with the things of God themselves, should invite others to the same acquaintance, John 1. 45, 46. Manoah is not disgusted that the angel did not this second time appear to him, but very willingly goes after his wife to the man of God. To atone (as it were) for the first fatal miscarriage, when Eve earnestly pressed Adam to that which was evil, and he too easily yielded to her, let yokefellows excite one another to love and follow good works; and if the wife will lead, let not the husband think it any disparagement to him, to follow her in that which is virtuous and praiseworthy.

3. Manoah being come to the angel, and satisfied by him that he was the same that had appeared to his wife, does, with all humility, (1.) Welcome the promise; (v. 12.) *Now let thy words come to pass*; this was the language, not only of his desire, but of his faith, like that of the blessed Virgin, (Luke 1. 38.) "*Be it according to thy word.*" Lord, I lay hold on what thou hast said, and depend upon it; *let it come to pass.*" (2.) Beg that the prescriptions given, might be repeated; *How shall we order the child?* The directions were given to his wife, but he looks upon himself as concerned to assist her in the careful management of this promised seed, according to order; for the utmost care of both the parents, and their constant joint endeavour, are little enough to be engaged for the good ordering of children that are devoted to God, and to be brought up for him. Let not one devote it on the other, but both do their best. Observe, from Manoah's inquiry, [1.] In general, that when God is pleased to bestow any mercy upon us, our great care must be how to use it well, and as we ought, because it is then only a mercy indeed, when it is rightly managed. God has given us bodies, souls, estates; how shall we order them, that we may answer the intent of the donor, and give a good account of them? [2.] In particular, those to whom God has given children, must be very careful how they order them, and what they do unto them, that they may drive out the foolishness that is *bound up in their hearts*, from their minds and manners well betimes, and *train them in the way wherein they should go*. Herein pious parents will beg divine assistance. "Lord, teach us how we may order our children, that they may be Nazarites, and living sacrifices to thee."

4. The angel repeats the direction he had before given; (v. 13, 14.) *Of all that I forbade let her beware. And all that I commanded her let her observe.* Note, There is need of a great deal both of caution and observation, for the right ordering both of ourselves and of our children. Beware, and observe; take heed not only of drinking *wine or strong drink*, but of *eating any thing that cometh of the vine*. Those that would preserve themselves pure, must keep at a distance from that which borders upon sin, or leads to it. When she was with child of a Nazarite, she must not eat *any unclean thing*; so those in whom Christ is formed, must carefully cleanse them-

selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and do nothing to the prejudice of that new man.

15. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. 16. And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt-offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD: for Manoah knew not that he *was* an angel of the LORD. 17. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that, when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honour? 18. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? 19. So Manoah took a kid, with a meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar: and Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. 21. (But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife.) Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD. 22. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. 23. But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands; neither would he have showed us all these *things*, nor would, as at this time, have told us *such things* as these.

We have here an account,

I. Of what further passed between Manoah and the angel at this interview. It was in kindness to him, that while the angel was with him, it was concealed from him that it was an angel; for had he known it, it would have been such a terror to him, that he durst not have conversed with him as he did; (v. 16.) *He knew not that he was an angel.* So Christ was in the world, and the world knew him not. *Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself.* We could not bear the sight of the divine glory unveiled. God having determined to speak to us by men like ourselves, prophets and ministers, even when he spake by his angels, or by his Son, they appeared in the likeness of men, and were taken but for men of God.

Now, 1. The angel declined to accept his treat, and appointed him to turn it into a sacrifice. Manoah, being desirous to show some token of respect and gratitude to this venerable stranger who had brought them these glad tidings, begged he would take some refreshment with him; (v. 15.) "*We will soon make ready a kid for thee.*" They that welcome the message, will be kind to the messengers for his sake that sends them, 1 Thess. 5. 13. But the angel told him (v. 16.) he would *not eat of his bread*, any more than he would of Gideon's, but, as there, directed him to offer it to God, *ch. 6. 20, 21.*

Angels' need not meat or drink; but the glorifying of God is their meat and drink, and it was Christ's, John 4. 34. And we in some measure do the will of God as they do it, if, though we cannot live without meat and drink, yet we eat and drink to the glory of God, and so turn even our common meals into sacrifices.

2. The angel declined telling him his name, and would not so far gratify his curiosity. Manoaah desired to know his name, (v. 17.) and of what tribe he was, not as if he doubted the truth of his message, but that they might return his visit, and be better acquainted with him. It is good to increase and improve our acquaintance with good men and good ministers: and he has a further design, "*That when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honour, celebrate thee as a true prophet, and recommend others to thee for divine instruction; that we may call the child that shall be born, after thy name, and so do thee honour; or that we may send thee a present, honouring one whom God has honoured. But the angel denies his request with something of a check to his curiosity, (v. 18.) Why askest thou thus after my name? Jacob himself could not prevail for this favour, Gen. 32. 29. Note, We have not what we ask, when we ask we know not what. Manoaah's request was honestly meant, and yet was denied. God told Moses his name, (Exod. 3. 13, 14.) because there was a particular occasion for his knowing it; but here there was no occasion. What Manoaah asked for instruction in his duty, he was readily told; (v. 12, 13.) but what he asked to gratify his curiosity, was denied; God has in his word given us full directions concerning our duty, but never designed to answer all the inquiries of a speculative head. He gives him a reason for his refusal, "It is secret." The names of angels were not as yet revealed, to prevent the idolizing of them: after the captivity, when the church was cured of idolatry, angels made themselves known to Daniel by their names, Michael and Gabriel; and to Zacharias, the angel told his name unasked, (Luke 1. 19.) *I am Gabriel.* But here it is *secret*, or it is *wonderful*, too wonderful for us. One of Christ's names is *Wonderful*, Isa. 9. 6. His name was long a secret, but by the gospel it is brought to light, *Jesus, a Saviour.* Manoaah must not ask, because he must not know. Note, (1.) There are secret things which belong not to us, and which we must content ourselves to be in the dark about, while we are here in this world. (2.) We must therefore never indulge a vain curiosity in our inquiries concerning these things, Col. 2. 18. *Nescire velle quæ Magister maximus docere non vult eruditia inscitia est—To be willingly ignorant of those things which our great Master refuses to teach us, is to be at once ignorant and wise.**

3. The angel assisted and owned their sacrifice, and, at parting, gave them to understand who he was. He had directed them to offer their burnt-offering to the Lord, v. 16. Praises offered up to God, are the most acceptable entertainment of the angels; see Rev. 22. 9. *worship God.* And Manoaah having so good a warrant, though he was no priest, and had no altar, turned his meat into a meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock to the Lord; (v. 19.) that is, he brought and laid it to be offered; "Lord, here it is, do what thou pleasest with it." Thus we must bring our hearts to God as living sacrifices, and submit them to the operation of his Spirit. All things being now ready, (1.) *The angel did wondrously*, for his name was *Wonderful*. Probably the wonder he did was the same with what he had done for Gideon, he made fire to come either down from heaven, or up out of the rock, to consume the sacrifice. (2.) He ascended up toward

heaven in the flame of the sacrifice, v. 20. By this it appeared, that he was not, as they thought, a mere man, but a messenger immediately from heaven; thence certainly he descended, for thither he ascended, John 3. 13.—6. 62. This signified God's acceptance of the offering, and intimates to what we owe the acceptance of all our offerings, even to the mediation of the angel of the covenant, that other angel, who puts much incense to the prayers of saints, and so offers them before the throne, Rev. 8. 3. Prayer is the ascent of the soul to God. But it is Christ in the heart by faith that makes it an offering of a sweet smelling savour: without him our services are offensive smoke, but in him acceptable flame. We may apply it to Christ's sacrifice of himself for us; he ascended in the flame of his own offering, for by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, Heb. 9. 12. While the angel did this, it is twice said (v. 19, 20.) that Manoaah and his wife looked on. This is a proof of the miracle, the matter of fact was true, for out of the mouth of these two eye-witnesses the report of it is established. The angel did all that was done in the sacrifice, they did but look on; yet doubtless when the angel ascended toward heaven, their hearts ascended with him in thanksgiving for the promise which came from thence, and in expectation of the performance to come from thence too. Yet when the angel is ascended, they dare not, as those that were the witnesses of Christ's ascension, stand gazing up into heaven, but in holy fear and reverence they fell on their faces to the ground. And now, (1.) *They knew that he was an angel, v. 21.* It was plain it was not the body of a man they saw, since it was not chained to the earth, nor prejudiced by fire; but ascended, and ascended in flame; and therefore with good reason they conclude it was an angel, for he maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. (2.) But he did not any more appear to them: it was for a particular occasion, now over, that he was sent, not to settle a constant correspondence, as with prophets. They must remember and observe what the angel had said, and not expect to hear more.

II. We have an account of the impressions which this vision made upon Manoaah and his wife. While the angel did wondrously, they looked on, and said nothing; (so it becomes us carefully to observe the wondrous works of God, and to be silent before him;) but when he was gone, having finished his work, they had time to make their reflections.

1. In Manoaah's reflections upon it there is great fear, v. 22. He had spoken with great assurance of the son they should shortly be the joyful parents of, (v. 8. 12.) and yet is now put into such a confusion by that very thing which should have strengthened and encouraged his faith, that he counts upon nothing but their being both cut off immediately, *We shall surely die.* It was a vulgar opinion generally received among the ancient Jews, that it was present death to see God, or an angel; and this notion quite overcame his faith, for the present, as it did Gideon's, ch. 6. 22.

2. In his wife's reflection upon it there is great faith, v. 23. Here the weaker vessel was the stronger believer, which perhaps was the reason why the angel chose once and again to appear to her. Manoaah's heart began to fail him, but his wife, as a help-meet for him, encouraged him. Two are better than one, for if one fall into dejections and despondencies, the other will help to raise him up. Yoke-fellows should piously assist each other's faith and joy as there is occasion. None could argue better than Manoaah's wife does here. *We shall surely die*, said her husband; "Nay," said she, "we need not fear that; let us never turn that against us which is really for us. We shall not die

unless God be pleased to kill us, our death must come from his hand and his pleasure; now the tokens of his pleasure which we have received, forbid us to think that he designs our destruction. Had he thought fit to kill us," (1.) "He would not have accepted our sacrifice, and signified to us his acceptance of it by *turning it to ashes*, Ps. 20. 3. *marg.* The sacrifice was the ransom of our lives, and the fire fastening upon that, was a plain indication of the turning away of his wrath from us. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, but you see ours is not so." (2.) "He would not have showed us all these things, these strange sights, now at a time when there is little or no open vision," (1 Sam. 3. 1.) nor would he have given these exceeding great and precious promises of a son, that shall be a Nazarite, and a deliverer of Israel; he would not have told us such things as these if he had been pleased to kill us. We need not fear the withering of those roots out of which such a branch is yet to spring." Note, *Hereby* it appears God designs not the death of sinners, that he has accepted the great sacrifice which Christ offered up for their salvation, and has put them in a way of obtaining his favour, and assured them of it upon their repentance. Had he been pleased to kill them, he would not have done so. And let those good christians, who have had communion with God in the word and prayer, to whom he has graciously manifested himself, and who have had reason to think God has accepted their works, take encouragement from thence in a cloudy and dark day; "God would not have done what he has done for my soul, if he had designed to forsake me, and leave me to perish at last; for his work is perfect, nor will he mock his people with his favours. Learn to reason as Manoa's wife did, "If God had designed me to perish under his wrath, he would not have given me such distinguishing tokens of his favours." *O woman, great is thy faith.*

24. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Here is,

1. Samson's birth. The woman that had been long barren, bare a son, according to the promise; for no word of God shall fail to the ground. Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? His name *Samson*, has been derived, by some, from *Shemesh the sun*, turned into a diminutive, *sol exiguus—the sun in miniature*; perhaps because, being born like Moses to be a deliverer, he was, like him, exceeding fair, his face shone like a little sun: or, in remembrance of the shining countenance of that man of God, who brought them the notice of him; though they knew not his name, yet thus, now that his sayings were come to pass, they did him honour. A little sun, because a Nazarite born, for the Nazarites were as *rubies* and *sapphires*, Lam. 4. 7. And because of his great strength, the sun is compared to a *strong man*; (Ps. 19. 5.) why should not a strong man then be compared to the sun when he goes forth in his strength? A little sun, because the glory of, and a light to his people Israel. A type of Christ, the Sun of righteousness.

2. His childhood. He grew more than ordinary in strength and stature, far outgrew other children of his age, and not in that only, but in other instances, it appeared that the Lord blessed him, qualified him, both in body and mind, for something great and extraordinary. Children of promise shall have the blessing.

3. His youth. When he grew up a little, *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him*, v. 25. This was an evidence that the Lord blessed him. Where God gives his blessing, he gives his Spirit to qualify for the blessing. These are blessed indeed, in whom the Spirit of grace begins to work betimes, in the days of their childhood. If the *Spirit be poured out upon our offspring*, they will spring up as *willows by the water courses*, Isa. 44. 3. 4. The Spirit of God moved Samson in the camp of Dan, that is, in the general muster of the trained bands of that tribe, who, probably, had formed a camp between Zorah and Eshtaol, near the place where he lived, to oppose the incursions of the Philistines; there Samson, when a child, appeared among them, and signalized himself by some very brave actions, excelling them all in many exercises and trials of strength, and, probably, he showed himself more than ordinarily zealous against the enemies of his country, and discovered more of a public spirit than could be expected in a child. The Spirit moved him at *times*, not at all times, but as the wind blows, when he listed, to show that what he did, was not from him himself, then he could have done it at any time. Strong men think themselves greatly animated by wine; (Ps. 78. 65.) but Samson drank no wine, and yet excelled in strength and courage, and every thing that was bold and brave, for he had the spirit of God moving him: therefore *be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit*, who will come to those that are sober and temperate.

CHAP. XIV.

The idea which this chapter gives us of Samson, is not what one might have expected concerning one, who, by the special designation of heaven, was a Nazarite to God, and a deliverer of Israel; and yet really he was both. Here is, I. Samson's courtship of a daughter of the Philistines, and his marriage to her, v. 1. . 5, 7, 8. II. His conquest of a lion, and the prize he found in the carcase of it, v. 5, 6, 8, 9. III. Samson's riddle proposed to his companions (v. 10. . 14.) and unriddled by the treachery of his wife, v. 15. . 18. IV. The occasion this gave him to kill thirty of the Philistines, (v. 19.) and to break off his new alliance, v. 20.

1. **A**ND Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. 2. And he came up and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; now, therefore, get her for me to wife. 3. Then his father and his mother said unto him, *Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?* And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. 4. But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. 5. Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. 6. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and *he had* nothing in his hand: but he told not his fa-

ther or his mother what he had done. 7. And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8. And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion; and, behold, *there was* a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. 9. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Here,

I. Samson, under the extraordinary guidance of Providence, seeks an occasion of quarrelling with the Philistines, by joining in affinity with them. A strange method, but the truth is, Samson was himself a riddle, a paradox of a man, did that which was really great and good, by that which was seemingly weak and evil, because he was designed not to be a pattern to us, (who must walk by rule, and not by example,) but a type of him, who, though he knew no sin, was made sin for us, and appeared *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, that he might *condemn and destroy sin in the flesh*, Rom. 8. 3.

1. As the negotiation of Samson's marriage was a common case, we may observe, (1.) That it was weakly and foolishly done of him to set his affections upon a daughter of the Philistines; the thing appeared very improper. Shall one, that is not only an Israelite, but a Nazarite, devoted to the Lord, covet to become one with a worshipper of Dagon? Shall one, marked for a patriot of his country, match among those that were its sworn enemies? He saw this woman, (*v. 1.*) and she *pleased him well*, *v. 3.* It does not appear that he had any reason to think her either wise or virtuous, or any way likely to be a help-meet for him: but he saw something in her face that was very agreeable to his fancy, and therefore nothing will serve, but she must be his wife. He that, in the choice of a wife, is guided only by his eye, and governed by his fancy, must afterward thank himself, if he find a Philistine in his arms. (1.) Yet it was wisely and well done, not to proceed so much as to make his addresses to her, till he had first made his parents acquainted with the matter. He told them, and desired them to *get her for him to wife*, *v. 2.* Herein he is an example to all children, conformable to the law of the fifth commandment. Children ought not to marry, nor to move towards it, without the advice and consent of their parents; they that do, (as Bishop Hall here expresses it,) *willfully unchild themselves, and exchange natural affections for violent*. Parents have a property in their children as parts of themselves. In marriage, this property is transferred, for such is the law of the relation, that *a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife*: it is therefore not only unkind and ungrateful, but very unjust, to alienate this property without their concurrence; whoso thus *robbereth his father or mother*, stealing himself from them, who is nearer and dearer to them than their good, and yet *saieth, It is no transgression, the same is a companion of a destroyer*, Prov. 28. 24. (2.) His parents did well to dissuade him from yoking himself thus unequally with an unbeliever. Let those who profess religion, but are courting an affinity with the profane and irreligious, matching into families where they have reason to think the fear of God is not, nor the worship of God, let them hear their reasoning, and apply it to themselves. *"Is there never a woman among the daughters of the brethren, or if none of*

our own tribe, never a one among my people, never an Israelite, that pleases thee, or that thou canst think worthy of thine affection, that thou shouldst marry a Philistine?" In the old world, the sons of God corrupted and ruined themselves, their families, and that truly primitive church, by marrying with the *daughters of men*, Gen. 6. 2. God had forbidden the people of Israel to marry with the devoted nations, one of which the Philistines were, Deut. 7. 3. (3.) If there had not been a special reason for it, it had certainly been improper in him to insist upon his choice, and in them to agree to it at last. Yet their tender compliance with his affections, may be observed as an example to parents, not to be unreasonable in crossing their children's choices, not to deny their consent, especially to those that have seasonably and dutifully asked it, without some very good cause. As children must *obey their parents in the Lord*, so parents must not *provoke their children to wrath, lest they be discouraged*. This Nazarite, in his subjection to his parents, asking their consent, and not proceeding till he had it, was not only an example to all children, but a type of the holy child Jesus, who *went down with his parents to Nazareth*, (thence called a *Nazarene*,) and was subject to them Luke 2. 51.,

2. But this treaty of marriage is expressly said to be *of the Lord*, *v. 4.* Not only that God afterwards overruled it to serve his designs against the Philistines, but that he put it into Sampson's heart to make his choice, that he *might have occasion against the Philistines*. It was not a thing evil in itself for him to marry a Philistine. It was forbidden, because of the danger of receiving hurt by idolaters; where there was not only no danger of that kind, but an opportunity hoped for of doing that hurt to them, which would be good service to Israel, the law might well be dispensed with. It was said, (*ch. 13. 25.*) that *the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times*, and we have reason to think, he himself perceived that Spirit to move him at this time, when he made this choice; and that otherwise, he would have yielded to his parents' dissuaves, nor would they have consented at last, if he had not satisfied them it was *of the Lord*. This would bring him into acquaintance and converse with the Philistines, by which he might have such opportunities of galling them, as otherwise he could not have. It should seem, the way in which the Philistines oppressed Israel, was, not by great armies, but by the clandestine incursions of their giants, and small parties of their plunderers; in the same way therefore Samson must deal with them; let him but by this marriage get among them, and he would be a *thorn in their sides*. Jesus Christ, being to deliver us from the present evil world, and to cast out the prince of it, did himself visit it, though full of pollution and enmity, and, by assuming a body, did in some sense join in affinity with it, that he might destroy our spiritual enemies, and his own arm might work the salvation.

II. Samson, by a special providence, is animated and encouraged to attack the Philistines. That being the service to which he was designed, God, when he called him to it, prepared him for it by two occurrences.

1. By enabling him, in one journey to Timnath, to *kill a lion*, *v. 5, 6.* Many decline doing the service they might do, because they *know not their own strength*. God let Samson know what he could do in the strength of *the Spirit of the Lord*, that he might never be afraid to look the greatest difficulties in the face. David, that was to complete the destruction of the Philistines, must try his hand first upon a *lion and a bear*, that from thence he might infer, as we might suppose Samson did,

that the uncircumcised Philistines should be as one of them, 1 Sam. 17. 36. (1.) Samson's encounter with the lion was hazardous. It was a young lion, one of the fiercest sort, that set upon him, roaring for his prey, and setting his eye particularly upon him; *he roared in meeting him*, so the word is. He was all alone, in the vineyards, whither he had ambled from his father and mother, (who kept the high road,) probably to eat grapes. Children consider not how they expose themselves to the roaring lion that seeks to devour, when, out of a foolish fondness for liberty, they wander from under the eye and wing of their prudent pious parents. Nor do young people consider what lions lurk in the vineyards, the vineyards of red wines, as dangerous as snakes under the green grass. Had Samson met with this lion in the way, he might have had more reason to expect help both from God and man, than here in the solitary vineyards, out of his road. But there was a special providence in it, and the more hazardous the encounter was, (2.) the victory was so much more illustrious. It was obtained without any difficulty; he strangled the lion, and tore his throat as easily as he would have strangled a kid, yet without any instrument, not only no sword or bow, but not so much as a staff or knife; he had *nothing in his hand*. Christ engaged the roaring lion, and conquered him in the beginning of his public work, (Matth. 4. 1, &c.) and afterward spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them *in himself*, as some read it, not by any instrument. He was *exalted in his own strength*. That which added much to the glory of Samson's triumph over the lion, was, that when he had done this great exploit, he did not boast of it, *did not so much as tell his father or mother* that which many a one would soon have published through the whole country. Modesty and humility make up the brightest crown of great performances.

2. By providing him, the next journey, with honey in the carcase of this lion, *v. 8, 9*. When he came down the next time to solemnize his nuptials, and his parents with him, he had the curiosity to turn aside into the vineyard where he had killed the lion, perhaps, that with the sight of the place he might affect himself with the mercy of that great deliverance, and might there solemnly give thanks to God for it. It is good thus to *remind ourselves* of God's former favours to us. There he found the carcase of the lion; the birds or beasts of prey, it is likely, had eaten the flesh, and in the skeleton a swarm of bees had knit, and made a hive of it, and had not been idle, but had there laid up a good stock of honey, which was one of the staple commodities of Canaan; such plenty was there of it, that it is said to *flow with milk and honey*. Samson, having a better title than any man to the hive, seizes the honey with his hand. This supposes an encounter with the bees; but he that dreaded not the lion's paws, had no reason to fear *their* stings. As by his victory over the lion, he was emboldened to encounter the Philistine-giants, if there should be occasion, notwithstanding their strength and fierceness, so by dislodging the bees, he was taught not to fear the multitude of the Philistines; though they compassed about him like bees, yet in the name of the Lord he should *destroy them*, Ps. 118. 12. Of the honey he here found, (1.) He ate himself, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for the dead bones of an unclean beast had not that ceremonial pollution in them, that the bones of a man had. John Baptist, that Nazarite of the New Testament, lived upon wild honey. (2.) He gave to his parents, and they did eat; he did not eat all himself; *Hast thou found honey, eat so much as is sufficient for thee*, and no more, Prov. 25. 16. He let his parents share with him. Children should be grate-

ful to their parents with the fruits of their own industry, and so *show piety at home*, 1 Tim. 5. 4. Let those that by the grace of God have found sweetness in religion themselves, communicate their experience to their friends and relations, and invite them to come and share with them. He told not his parents whence he had it, lest they should have scrupled eating it. Bishop Hall observes here, that *those are less wise and more scrupulous than Samson, that decline the use of God's gifts, because they find them in ill vessels*. Honey is honey still, though in a dead lion. Our Lord Jesus having conquered Satan, that roaring lion, believers find honey in the carcase, abundant strength and satisfaction, enough for themselves, and for all their friends, from that victory.

10. So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. 11. And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. 12. And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if you can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets, and thirty change of garments: 13. But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets, and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. 14. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle. 15. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? *is it not so?* 16. And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? 17. And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day that he told her, because she lay sore upon him; and she told the riddle to the children of her people. 18. And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day, before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle. 19. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle: and his anger was kindled, and he went up to his

father's house. 20. But Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

We have here an account of Samson's wedding feast, and the occasion it gave him to fall foul of the Philistines.

I. Samson conformed to the custom of the country, in making a festival on his nuptial solemnities, which continued seven days, *v.* 10. Though he was a Nazarite, he did not affect, in a thing of this nature, to be singular, but did *as the young men used to do* upon such occasions. It is no part of religion to go contrary to the innocent usages of the places where we live; nay, it is a reproach to religion, when those who profess it, give just occasion to others to call them covetous, sneaking, and morose. A good man should strive to make himself, in the best sense, a good companion.

II. His wife's relations paid him the accustomed respect of the place upon that occasion, and brought him thirty young men to keep him company during the solemnity, and to attend him as his grooms-men. *When they saw him*, (*v.* 11.) what a comely man he was, and what an ingenuous graceful look he had, they brought him these to do him honour, and to improve by his conversation, while he stayed among them. Or rather, when they saw him, what a strong stout man he was, they brought these seemingly to be his companions, but really to be a guard upon him, or spies to observe him. Jealous enough they were of him, but would have been more so, had they known of his victory over the lion, which therefore he had industriously concealed. The favours of Philistines have often some mischief or other designed in them.

III. Samson, to entertain the company, propounds a riddle to them, and lays a wager with them that they cannot find it out in seven days, *v.* 12-14. The usage, it seems, was very ancient upon such occasions, when friends were together, to be innocently merry, not to spend all the time in dull eating and drinking, as Bishop Patrick expresses it, or in the other gratifications of sense, as music, dancing, or shows, but to propose questions, by which their learning and ingenuity might be tried and improved. This becomes men, wise men, that value themselves by their reason; but very unlike to it are the infamous and worse than brutish entertainments of this degenerate age, which send nothing round but the glass and the health, till reason is drowned, and wisdom sunk. Now, 1. Samson's riddle was his own invention, for it was his own achievement that gave occasion for it; *Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.* Read my riddle, what is this? Beasts of prey do not yield meat for man, yet *food came from the devourer*; and those creatures that are strong when they are alive, commonly smell strong, and are every way offensive when they are dead, as horses, and yet *out of the strong*, or out of *the bitter*, so the Syriac and Arabic read it, *came sweetness.* If they had but so much sense as to consider what eater is most strong, and what meat is most sweet, they would have found out the riddle; and neither lions nor honey were such strangers to their country, that the thoughts of them needed to be out of the way: the solving of the riddle would have given him occasion to tell them the entertaining story on which it was founded. This riddle is applicable to many of the methods of divine providence and grace. When God, by an overruling providence, brings good out of evil to his church and people; when that which threatened their ruin, turns to their advantage; when their enemies are made serviceable to them, and the wrath of men

turns to God's praise, then comes *meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong.* See Phil. 1. 12. 2. His wager was more considerable to him than to them, because he was one against thirty partners. It was not a wager laid upon God's providence, or upon the chance of a die or a card, but upon their ingenuity, and amounted to no more than an honorary recompense of wit, and a disgrace upon stupidity.

IV. His companions, when they could not expound the riddle themselves, obliged his wife to get from him the exposition of it, *v.* 15. Whether they were really of a dull capacity, or whether under a particular infatuation at this time, it was strange that none of the thirty could in all this time stumble upon so plain a thing as that, *What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?* It should seem, that in wit as well as manners, they were barbarous; barbarous indeed, to threaten the bride, that if she would not use means with the bridegroom to let them into the meaning of it, they would *burn her and her father's house with fire.* Could any thing be more brutish? It was base enough to turn a jest into earnest, and they were unworthy of conversation, that would grow so outrageous rather than confess their ignorance and lose so small a wager; nor would it save their credit at all, to tell the riddle when they were told it. It was yet more villainous, to engage Samson's wife to be a traitor to her own husband, and to pretend a greater interest in her than he had. Now that she was married she must *forget her own people.* Yet most inhuman of all was it, to threaten, if she could not prevail, to burn her and all her relations with fire, and all for fear of losing each of them the value of a shirt and a coat: *Have ye called us to take what we have?* Those must never lay wagers, that cannot lose more tamely and easily than thus.

V. His wife, by unreasonable importunity, obtains from him a key to his riddle. It was *on the seventh day*, that is, the seventh day of the week, (as Dr. Lightfoot conjectures,) but the fourth day of the feast, that they solicited her to entice her husband; (*v.* 15.) and she did it, 1. With great art and management, (*v.* 16.) resolving not to believe he loved her, unless he would gratify her in this thing. She knew he could not bear to have his love questioned, and therefore if any thing would work upon him, that would; "*Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not, if thou deniest me;*" whereas he had much more reason to say, "*Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not, if thou insistest on it.*" And that she might not make this the test of his affection, he assures her he had not told his own parents, notwithstanding the confidence he reposed in them. If this prevail not, she will try the powerful eloquence of tears, she *wept before him* the rest of the *days of the feast*, choosing rather to mar the mirth, as the bride's tears must needs do, than not gain the point, and oblige her countrymen, *v.* 17. 2. With great success. At last, being quite wearied with her importunity, he told her what was the meaning of his riddle, and though we may suppose she promised secrecy, and that if he would but let her know, she would tell nobody, she immediately told it to the *children of her people*; nor could he expect better from a Philistine, especially when the interests of her country were ever so little concerned. See Mic. 7. 5. 6. The riddle is at length *unriddled*; (*v.* 18.) *What is sweeter than honey, or a better meat?* Prov. 24. 13. *What is stronger than a lion, or a greater devourer?* Samson generously owns they had won the wager, though he had good reason to dispute it, because they had not declared the riddle, as the bargain was, (*v.* 12.) but it had been declared to them. But he only thought

fit to tell them of it, *If ye had not ploughed with my heifer*, made use of your interest with my wife, *you had not found out my riddle*. Satan, in his temptations, could not do us the mischief he does, if he did not plough with the heifer of our own corrupt nature.

VI. Samson pays his wager to these Philistines with the spoils of others of their countrymen, v. 19. He took this occasion to quarrel with the Philistines, went down to Ashkelon, one of their cities, where, probably, he knew there was some great festival observed at this time, to which many flocked, out of whom he picked out thirty, slew them, and took their clothes, and gave them to those that expounded the riddle: so that, in balancing the account, it appeared that the Philistines were the losers, for one of the lives they lost, was worth all the suits of clothes they won; since the body is more than raiment. *The Spirit of the Lord came upon him*, both to authorise and to enable him to do this.

Lastly, This proves a good occasion of weaning Samson from his new relations. He found how his companions had abused him, and how his wife had betrayed him, and therefore *his anger was kindled*, v. 19. Better be angry with Philistines, than in love with them, because, when we join ourselves to them, we are most in danger of being ensnared by them. And meeting with this ill usage among them, he *went up to his father's house*. It were well for us, if the unkindnesses we meet with from the world, and our disappointments in it, had but this good effect upon us, to oblige us by faith and prayer to return to our heavenly Father's house, and rest there. The inconveniences that occur in our way, should make us love home, and long to be there. No sooner was he gone, than his wife was disposed of to another, v. 20. Instead of begging his pardon for the wrong she had done him, when he justly signified his resentment of it, only by withdrawing in displeasure for a time, she immediately marries him that was the chief of the guests, the friend of the bridegroom, whom perhaps she loved too well, and was too willing to oblige, when she got her husband to tell her the riddle. See how little confidence is to be put in man, when those may prove our enemies whom we have used as our friends.

CHAP. XV.

Samson, when he had courted an alliance with the Philistines, did but seek an occasion against them, ch. 14. 4. Now here we have a further account of the occasions he took to weaken them, and to avenge, not his own, but Israel's quarrels, upon them. Every thing here is surprising; if any thing be thought incredible, because impossible, it must be remembered that with God nothing is impossible, and it was by the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him, that he was both directed to, and strengthened for, those unusual ways of making war. I. From the perfidiousness of his wife and her father, he took occasion to burn their corn, v. 1. . 5. II. From the Philistines' barbarous cruelty to his wife and her father, he took occasion to smite them with a great slaughter, v. 6. . 8. III. From the treachery of his countrymen, who delivered him bound to the Philistines, he took occasion to kill one thousand of them with the jaw-bone of an ass, v. 9. . 17. IV. From the distress he was then in for want of water, God took occasion to show him favour in a seasonable supply, v. 18. . 20.

BUT it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat-harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber: but her father would not suffer him to go in. 2. And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated

her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her. 3. And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure. 4. And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. 5. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let *them* go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives. 6. Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire. 7. And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. 8. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Here is,

I. Samson's return to his wife, whom he had left in displeasure; not hearing, perhaps, that she was given to another, when time had a little cooled his resentment, he came back to her, *visited her with a kid*, v. 1. The value of the present was inconsiderable, but it was intended as a token of a reconciliation, and perhaps was then so used, when those that had been at variance were brought together again; he sent this that he might sup with her in her apartments, and she with him on his provision, and so they might be friends again. It was generously done of Samson, though he was the party offended, and the superior relation, to whom therefore she was bound in duty to sue for peace, and to make the first motion of reconciliation. When differences happen between near relations, let those be ever reckoned the wisest and the best, that are most forward to forgive and forget injuries, and most willing to stoop and yield for peace sake.

II. The repulse he met with; her father forbade him to come near her, for truly he had married her to another, v. 2. He endeavours, 1. To justify himself in this wrong. *I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her*. A very ill opinion he had of Samson, measuring that Nazarite by the common temper of the Philistines; could he think worse of him, than to suspect, that because he was justly angry with his wife, he utterly hated her; and because he had seen cause to return to his father's house for a while, therefore he had abandoned her for ever? Yet this is all he had to say, in excuse of this injury. Thus he made the worst of jealousies to patronise the worst of robberies. But it will never bear us out in doing ill, to say, "We thought others designed ill." 2. He endeavours to pacify Samson, by offering him his younger daughter, whom, because the handsomer, he thought Samson might accept, in full recompense for the wrong. See what confusions those did admit, and bring their families to, that were not governed by the fear and law of God; marrying a daughter this week to one, and next week to another; giving a

man one daughter first, and then another. Samson scorned his proposal; he knew better things than *to take a wife to her sister*, Lev. 18. 18.

III. The revenge Samson took upon the Philistines for this abuse. Had he designed herein only to plead his own cause, he would have challenged his rival, and would have chastised him and his father-in-law only. But he looks upon himself as a public person, and the affront as done to the whole nation of Israel; for probably, they put this slight upon him, because he was of that nation, and pleased themselves with it, that they had put such an abuse upon an Israelite; and therefore he resolves to do the Philistines a displeasure, and does not doubt but this treatment which he had met with among them, would justify him in it; (*v. 3.*) *Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines.* He had done what became him, in offering to be reconciled to his wife; but she having rendered it impracticable, now they could not blame him if he showed his just resentments. Note, When differences arise, we ought to do our duty in order to the ending of them, and then whatever the ill consequences of them may be, we shall be blameless. Now the way Samson took to be revenged on them, was, by setting their corn-fields on fire, which would be a great weakening and impoverishing to the country, *v. 4, 5.* 1. The method he took to do it, was very strange; he sent one hundred and fifty couple of foxes, tied tail to tail, into the corn-fields; each couple had a stick of fire between their tails, with which being terrified, they ran into the corn for shelter, and so set fire to it; thus the fire would break out in many places at the same time, and therefore could not be conquered, especially if it was done, as it is probable it was, in the night. He might have employed men to do it, but perhaps he could not find Israelites enough that had courage to do it, and himself could do it but in one place at a time, which would not effect his purpose. We never find Samson, in any of his exploits, make use of any person whatsoever, either servant or soldier, therefore, in this project, he chose to make use of foxes as his incendiaries. They had injured Samson by their subtlety and malice, and now Samson returns the injury by subtle foxes and mischievous fire-brands. By the meanness and weakness of the animals he employed, he designed to put contempt upon the enemies he fought against. This stratagem is often alluded to, to show how the church's adversaries, that are of different interests and designs among themselves, that look and draw contrary ways in other things, yet have often united in a fire-brand, some cursed project or other, to waste the church of God, and particularly to kindle the fire of division in it. 2. The mischief he hereby did to the Philistines, was very great. It was in the time of wheat harvest, (*v. 1.*) so that the straw being dry, it soon burnt both the shocks of corn that were cut, and *the standing corn, and the vineyards and olives.* This was a waste of the good creatures, but where other acts of hostility are lawful, destroying the forage is justly reckoned to be so. If he might take away their lives, he might take away their livelihood: and God was righteous in it; *the corn, and the wine, and the oil,* which they had prepared for Dagon, to be a meat-offering to him, were thus, in the season thereof, made a burnt-offering to God's justice.

IV. The Philistines' outrage against Samson's treacherous wife and her father; understanding that they had provoked Samson to do this mischief to the country, the rabble set upon them and burnt them with fire, perhaps in their own house, *v. 6.* Samson himself they durst not attack, and therefore with more justice than perhaps they themselves designed in it, they wreak their vengeance

upon those who, they could not but own, had given him cause to be angry. Instead of taking vengeance upon Samson, they took vengeance for him, when he, out of respect to the relation he had stood in to them, was not willing to do it for himself. See his hand in it, *to whom vengeance belongs!* those that deal treacherously, shall be spoiled and dealt treacherously with, and *the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes;* especially when, as here, he makes use of his people's enemies as instruments for revenging his people's quarrels one upon another. When a barbarous Philistine sets fire to a treacherous one, the *righteous man rejoice to see the divine vengeance*, Ps. 58. 10, 11. Thus shall *the wrath of man praise thee*, Ps. 76. 10. The Philistines had threatened Samson's wife, that if she would not get the riddle out of him, they would *burn her and her father's house with fire*, ch. 14. 15. She, to save herself, and oblige her countrymen, betrayed her husband; and what came of it? The very thing that she feared, and sought by sin to avoid, came upon her; she and her father's house were burnt with fire, and her countrymen, whom she sought to oblige by the wrong she did to her husband, brought it upon her. The mischief we seek to escape by any unlawful practices, we often pull them upon our own heads. *He that will thus save his life shall lose it.*

V. The occasion that Samson took from hence to do them yet a greater mischief, which touched their bone and their flesh; (*v. 7, 8.*) "*Though ye have done this to them, and thereby showed what ye would do to me if ye could, yet that shall not deter me from being further vexatious to you.*" Or, Though ye think, by doing this, ye have made me satisfaction for the affront I received among you, yet I have Israel's cause to plead as a public person, and for the wrongs done to them, *I will be avenged on you;* and if ye will then forbear your insults, I will cease, aiming at no more than the deliverance of Israel." So he *smote them hip and thigh, with a great stroke;* so the word is. We suppose the wounds he gave them to have been mortal, as wounds in the hip or thigh often prove, and therefore translate it, *with a great slaughter.* Some think he only lamed them, disabled them for service, as horses were houghed or ham-strung. It seems to be a phrase used to express a desperate attack; he killed them pell-mell, or routed them horse and foot. He smote them with his hip upon thigh, that is, with the strength he had, not in his arms and hands, but in his hips and thighs, for he kicked and spurned at them, and so mortified them, *trod them in his anger, and trampled them in his fury*, Isa. 63. 3. And, when he had done, he retired to a natural fortress in the top of the rock Etam, where he waited to see whether the Philistines would be tamed by the correction he had given them.

9. Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. 10. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he has done to us. 11. Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. 12. And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we

may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. 13. And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. 14. And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. 15. And he found a new jaw-bone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. 16. And Samson said, With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. 17. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jaw-bone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

Here is,

I. Samson violently pursued by the Philistines. They went up in a body, a more formidable force than they had together when Samson smote them hip and thigh, and they pitched in Judah, and spread themselves up and down the country to find out Samson, who, they heard, was come this way, v. 9. When the men of Judah, who had tamely submitted to their yoke, pleaded that they had paid their tribute, and that none of their tribe had given them any offence, they freely own they designed nothing in this invasion but to seize Samson; they would fight *neither against small nor great*, but only that *Judge of Israel*, (v. 10.) *to do to him, as he has done to us*; that is, to smite hip and thigh, as he did our's; *an eye for an eye*. Here was an army come against one man, for indeed he was himself an army. Thus a whole band of men was sent to seize our Lord Jesus, that blessed Samson, though a tenth part would have served now that his hour was come, and ten times as many would have done nothing, if he had not yielded.

II. Samson basely betrayed and delivered up by the men of Judah, v. 11. Of Judah were they? Degenerate branches of that valiant tribe! Utterly unworthy to carry in their standard the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*. Perhaps they were disaffected to Samson because he was not of their tribe; out of a foolish fondness for their forfeited precedency, they would rather be oppressed by Philistines, than rescued by a Danite. Often has the church's deliverance been obstructed by such jealousies, and pretended points of honour. Rather it was, because they stood in awe of the Philistines, and were willing, at any rate, to get them out of their country. If their spirits had not been perfectly cowed and broken by their sins and troubles, and they had not been given up to a spirit of slumber, they would have taken this fair opportunity to shake off the Philistines' yoke. If they had had the least spark of ingenuousness and courage remaining in them, having so brave a man as Samson was, to head them, they would now have made one bold struggle for the recovery of their liberty; but no marvel if they that had debased themselves to hell in the worship of their dunghill-gods, (Isa. 57. 9.) thus debased

themselves to the dust, in submission to their insulting oppressors. Sin dispirits men, nay, it infatuates them, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to their peace. Probably, Samson went into the border of that country to offer his service, *supposing his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them*, as Moses did, Acts 7. 25. But they thrust him from them, and very disingenuously, 1. Blamed him for what he had done against the Philistines, as if he had done them a great injury. Such ungrateful returns have those often received, that have done the best service imaginable to their country. Thus our Lord Jesus did many good works, and for those they were ready to stone him. 2. They begged of him that he would suffer them to bind him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. Cowardly, unthankful wretches! Fond of their fetters, and in love with servitude! Thus the Jews delivered up our Saviour, under pretence of a fear lest the Romans should come, and take away their place and nation. With what a sordid servile spirit do they argue; *Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us?* And whose fault was that? They knew they had no right to rule over them, nor had they been sold into their hands, if they had not first *sold themselves to work wickedness*.

III. Samson tamely yielding to be bound by his countrymen, and delivered into the hands of his enraged enemies, v. 12, 13. How easily could he have beaten them off, and kept the top of his rock against these three thousand men, and none of them all could, or durst, have lain hands on him; but he patiently submitted, 1. That he might give an example of great meekness, mixed with great strength and courage; as one that had rule over his own spirit, he knew how to yield, as well as how to conquer. 2. That by being delivered up to the Philistines, he might have an opportunity of making a slaughter of them. 3. That he might be a type of Christ, who when he had showed what he could do in striking those down that came to seize him, yielded to be bound and led as a *lamb to the slaughter*. Samson justified himself in what he had done against the Philistines; "*As they did to me, so I did to them*"; it was a piece of necessary justice, and they ought not to retaliate it upon me, for they began." He covenants with the men of Judah, that if he put himself into their hands, they should not fall upon him themselves, because then he should be tempted to fall upon them, which he was very loath to do. This they promised him, (v. 13.) and then he surrendered. The men of Judah, being his betrayers, were, in effect, his murderers: they would not kill him themselves, but they did that which was worse, they delivered him into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who, they knew, would do worse than kill him, would abuse and torment him to death. Perhaps they thought, as some think Judas did, when he betrayed Christ, that he would by his strength, deliver himself out of their hands; but if he did, that was no thanks to them, and if they thought he would, they might of themselves have thought this again, that he could and would have delivered them too, if they would have adhered to him, and made him their head. Justly is their misery prolonged, who to oblige their worst enemies, thus abuse their best friend. Never were men so infatuated, except those who thus treated our blessed Saviour.

IV. Samson making his part good against the Philistines, even then when he was delivered into their hands, fast pinioned with two new cords. The Philistines, when they had him among them, *shouted against him*, v. 14. So, triumphing in their success, and insulting over him; if God had not tied their hands faster than the men of Judah had tied

his, they would have shot at him, (as their archers did at Saul,) to despatch him immediately, rather than have shouted at him, and given him time to help himself. But their security and joy were a presage of their ruin. When they shouted against him as a man run down, confident that all was their own, then the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him*; came mightily upon him, inspired him with more than ordinary strength and resolution. Thus fired, 1. He presently got clear of his bonds; the two new cords, upon the first struggle he gave, broke, and were melted (as the original word is) from off his hands, no doubt, to the great amazement and terror of those that shouted against him, whose shouts were hereby turned into shrieks. When the *Spirit of the Lord came upon him, his cords were loosed; where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty*, and those are free indeed, who are thus freed. This typified the resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit of holiness; in it he loosed the bands of death; and its cords, the grave clothes, fell from his hands, without being loosed as Lazarus's were, because it was impossible that the mighty Saviour should be holden of them, and thus he triumphed over the powers of darkness that shouted against him, as if they had him sure. 2. He made a great destruction among the Philistines, who all gathered about him to make sport with him, *v. 15*. See how poorly he was armed: he had no better weapon than the jaw-bone of an ass, and yet what execution he did with it; he never laid it out of his hand, till he had with it laid a thousand Philistines dead upon the spot: and thus that promise was more than accomplished, *One of you shall chase a thousand*, Josh. 23. 10. A jaw-bone was an inconvenient thing to grasp, and, one would think, might easily be wrested out of his hand, and a few such blows as he gave with it, might have crushed and broken it, and yet it held good to the last. Had it been the jaw-bone of a lion, especially that which he himself had slain, it might have helped to heighten his fancy, and to make him think himself the more formidable; but to take the bone of that despicable animal, was to do wonders by the *foolish things of the world*, that the *excellency of the power might be of God, and not of man*. One of David's worthies slew three hundred Philistines at once, but it was with a spear, 1 Chron. 11. 11. Another slew of them till his hand was weary, and stuck to his sword, 2 Sam. 23. 10. But they all came short of Samson. What could be thought too hard, too much, for him to do, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily! *Through God we shall do valiantly*. It was strange the men of Judah did not now come in to his aid; towards can strike a falling enemy; but he was to be a type of him that *trod the wine press alone*.

V. Samson celebrated his own victory, since the men of Judah would not do even that for him; he composed a short song, which he sang to himself, for the daughters of Israel did not meet him, as afterwards they did Saul, to sing, with more reason, *Samson hath slain his thousands*. The burden of this song was, *With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, have I slain a thousand men*, *v. 16*. The same word in Hebrew (Chamor) signifies both an ass and a heap, which makes this an elegant paronomasia, and represents the Philistines falling as tamely as asses. He also gave a name to the place, to perpetuate the Philistines' disgrace, (*v. 17*) *Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone*. Yet he did not vain-gloriously carry the bone about with him as a show, but threw it away when he had done with it. So little were relics valued then.

18. And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given

this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised! 19. But God clave a hollow place that *was* in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day. 20. And he judged Israel, in the days of the Philistines, twenty years.

Here is,

I. The distress Samson was in, after this great performance, *v. 18*, *He was sore athirst*. It was a natural effect of the great heat he had been in, and the great pains he had taken; his zeal consumed him, ate him up, and made him forget himself, till, when he had time to pause a little, he found himself reduced to the last extremity for want of water, and ready to faint. Perhaps there was a special hand of God in it, as there was in the whole transaction; and God would hereby keep him from being proud of his great strength and great achievements, and let him know that he was but a man, and liable to the calamities that are common to men. And Josephus says, It was designed to chastise him for not making mention of God and his hand, in his memorial of the victory he had obtained, but taking all the praise to himself; *I have slain a thousand men*; now that he is ready to die for thirst, he is under a sensible conviction that his own arm could not have saved him, without God's right hand and arm. Samson had drunk largely of the blood of the Philistines, but blood will never quench any man's thirst. Providence so ordered it, that there was no water near him, and he was so fatigued that he could not go far to seek it: the men of Judah, one would think, should have met him, now that he was come off a conqueror, *with bread and wine*, as Melchizedek did Abram, to atone for the injury he had done him; but so little notice did they take of their deliverer, that he was ready to perish for want of a draught of water. Thus are the greatest slights often put upon those that do the greatest services. Christ, on the cross, said, *I thirst*.

II. His prayer to God in this distress. Those that forget to attend God with their praises, may perhaps be compelled to attend him with their prayers. Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God. Two things he pleads with God in this prayer; 1. His having experienced the power and goodness of God in his late success; *Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant*. He owns himself God's servant in what he had been doing, "Lord, wilt thou not own a poor servant of thine that has spent himself in thy service? *I am thine, save me*." He calls this victory a *deliverance, a great deliverance*; for if God had not helped him, he had not only not conquered the Philistines, but had been swallowed up by them. He owns it to come from God, and now corrects his former error, in assuming it too much to himself; and this he pleads in his present strait. Note, Past experiences of God's power and goodness, are excellent pleas in prayer for further mercy. "Lord, thou hast delivered often, wilt thou not deliver still? 2 Cor. 1. 10. Thou hast begun, wilt thou not finish? Thou hast done the greater, wilt thou not do the lesser?" Ps. 56. 13. 2. His being now exposed to his enemies: "*Lest I fall into the hands of the uncircumcised*, and then they will triumph, will tell it in Gath, and in the streets of Ashkelon; and will, it not redound to God's dishonour, if his champion be-

come so easy a prey to the uncircumcised?" The best pleas are those taken from God's glory.

III. The seasonable relief God sent him. God heard his prayer, and sent him water, either out of the bone, or out of the earth through the bone, *v. 19*. That bone which he had made an instrument of God's service, God, to recompense him, made an instrument of his supply. But I rather incline to our marginal reading, *God clave a hollow place that was in Lehi*: the place of this action was, from the jaw-bone, called *Lehi*: even before the action we find it so called, *v. 9, 14*. And there, in that field, or hill, or plain, or whatever it was, that was so called, God caused a fountain suddenly and seasonably to open just by him, and water to spring up out of it in abundance, which continued a well ever after. Of this fair water he drank, and his spirits revived. We should be more thankful for the mercy of water, did we consider how ill we can spare it. And this instance of Samson's relief, should encourage us to trust in God, and seek to him, for, when he pleases, he can *open rivers in high places*. See *Isa. 41. 17, 18*.

IV. The memorial of this, in the name which Samson gave this upstart fountain, *En-hakkore, the well of him that cried*, thereby keeping in remembrance, both his own distress, which occasioned him to cry, and God's favour to him, in answer to his cry. Many a spring of comfort God opens to his people, which may fitly be called by his name, it is *the well of him that cried*. Samson had given a name to that place, which denoted him great and triumphant, *Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone*; but here he gives it another name, which denotes him wanting and dependant.

Lastly, The continuance of Samson's government after these achievements, *v. 20*. At length Israel submitted to him whom they had betrayed. Now it was past dispute that God was with him, so that henceforward they all owned him, and were directed by him as their judge; *the stone which the builders refused, became the head-stone*. It intimates the low condition of Israel, that the government was dated by *the days of the Philistines*; yet it was a mercy to Israel, that though they were oppressed by a foreign enemy, yet they had a Judge that preserved order, and kept them from ruining one another. Twenty years his government continued according to the usage of the Judges' administration; but of the particulars we have no account, save of the beginning of his government in this chapter, and the end of it in the next.

CHAP. XVI.

Samson's name (we have observed before) signifies *a little sun*; (*sol parvus*;) we have seen this sun rising very bright, and his morning-ray strong and clear; and nothing appearing to the contrary, we take it for granted, that the middle of the day was proportionably illustrious, while he judged Israel twenty years; but the melancholy story of this chapter gives us such an account of his evening, as did not commence his day. This little sun set under a cloud, and yet, just in the setting, darted forth one such strong and glorious beam, as made him then a type of Christ, conquering by death. Here is, I. Samson greatly endangered by his familiarity with one harlot, and hardly escaping, *v. 1-3*. II. Samson quite ruined by his familiarity with another harlot, Delilah. Observe, I. How he was betrayed by her to his sworn enemies, the Philistines, who (1.) By her means got it out of him at last where his great strength lay, *v. 5-17*. (2.) Then robbed him of his strength, by taking from his head the crown of his separation, *v. 18-20*. (3.) Then seized him, blinded him, imprisoned him, and at a solemn festival made a show of him, *v. 21-25*. 2. How he avenged himself of them, by pulling down the theatre upon their heads, and so dying with them, *v. 26-31*.

1. **T**HEN went Samson to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in unto her. 2. *And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.* 3. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that *is* before Hebron.

Here is,

I. Samson's sin, *v. 1*. His taking a Philistine to wife, in the beginning of his time, was, in some degree, excusable; but to join himself to a harlot that he accidentally saw among them, was such a profanation of his honour as an Israelite, as a Nazarite, that we cannot but blush to read it, *Tell it not in Gath*. This vile impurity makes the graceful visage of this Nazarite *blacker than a coal*, *Lam. 4. 7, 8*. We find not that Samson had any business at Gaza; if he went thither in quest of a harlot, it would make one willing to hope, that, as bad as things were otherwise, there were no prostitutes among the daughters of Israel. Some think he went thither to observe what posture the Philistines were in, that he might get some advantages against them; if so, he forgot his business, neglected that, and so fell into this snare. His sin began in his eye, with which he should have made a covenant; he saw there one in the *attire of a harlot*, and the lust which conceived, brought forth sin, he *went in unto her*.

2. Samson's danger. Notice was sent to the magistrates of Gaza, perhaps by the treacherous harlot herself, that Samson was in the town, *v. 2*. Probably, he came in a disguise, or in the dusk of the evening, went into an inn, or public-house, which happened to be kept by this harlot. The gates of the city were hereupon shut, guards set, all kept quiet, that Samson might suspect no danger; now they thought they had him in a prison, and doubted not but to be the death of him the next morning. O that all those who indulge their sensual appetites in drunkenness, uncleanness, or any fleshly lusts, would see themselves thus surrounded, waylaid, and marked for ruin, by their spiritual enemies! The faster they sleep, and the more secure they are, the greater is their danger.

3. Samson's escape, *v. 3*. He rose at midnight, perhaps roused by a dream, in slumberings upon the bed, (*Job 33. 15*.) by his guardian angel, or rather by the checks of his own conscience; he rose with a penitent abhorrence (we hope of the sin he was now committing, and of himself because of it, and with a pious resolution not to return to it; rose under an apprehension of the danger he was in, that he was as one that slept upon the top of a mast, rose with such thoughts as these; "Is this a bed fit for a Nazarite to sleep in? Shall a temple of the living God be thus polluted? Can I be safe under this guilt?" It was bad that he lay down without such checks; but it would have been worse if he had lain still under them. He makes immediately toward the gate of the city, probably finds the guards asleep, else he had made them sleep their last, stays not to break open the gates, but plucks up the posts, takes them, gates and bar and all, all very large and strong, and a vast weight, yet he carries them on his back several miles *up to the top of a*

hill, in disdain of their attempt to secure him with gates and bars, designing thus to render himself more formidable to the Philistines, and more acceptable to his people; thus to give a proof of the great strength God had given him, and a type of Christ's victory over death and the grave. He not only rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and so came forth himself, but carried away the gates of the grave, bar and all, and so left it, ever after, an open prison to all that are his; it shall not, it cannot, always detain them. *O death, where is thy sting?* Where are thy gates? Thanks be to him that not only gained a victory for himself, out giveth us the victory!

4. And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5. And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength *lieth*, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and we will give thee, every one of us, eleven hundred *pieces* of silver. 6. And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength *lieth*, and where-with thou mightest be bound to afflict thee. 7. And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. 8. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9. Now *there were* men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire: so his strength was not known. 10. And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, where-with thou mightest be bound. 11. And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. 12. Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And *there were* liars in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread. 13. And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. 14. And she fastened *it* with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web. 15. And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love

thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength *lieth*. 16. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, 17. That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for *I have been* a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

The burnt child dreads the fire; yet Samson, that has more than the strength of a man, in this comes short of the wisdom of a child; for though he had been more than once brought into the highest degree of mischief and danger by the love of women, and lusting after them, yet he would not take warning, but is here again taken in the same snare, and this third time pays for all. Solomon seems to refer especially to this story of Samson, when in his caution against uncleanness, he gives this account of a whorish woman, Prov. 7. 26, *That she hath cast down many wounded, yea many strong men have been slain by her.* And ch. 6. 26, *That the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.* This bad woman that brought Samson to ruin, is here named *Delilah*, an infamous name, and fitly used to express the person, or thing, that by flattery or falsehood, brings mischief and destruction on those to whom kindness is pretended. See here,

I. The affection Samson had for Delilah; he loved her, v. 4. Some think she was his wife; but then he would have had her home to his own house; others, that he courted her to make her his wife; but there is too much reason to suspect that it was a sinful affection he had for her, and that he lived in uncleanness with her: whether she was an Israelite or a Philistine, is not certain. If an Israelite, which is scarcely probable, yet she had the heart of a Philistine.

II. The interest which the lords of the Philistines made with her to betray Samson, v. 5. 1. That which they told her they designed, was, to humble him, or afflict him; they would promise not to do him any hurt, only they would disable him to do them any. And so much conscience it should seem they made of this promise, that even then, when he lay ever so much at their mercy, they would not kill him, no, not when the razor that cut his hair, might sooner, and more easily have cut his throat. 2. That which they desired, in order hereunto, was, to know where his great strength lay, and by what means he might be bound. Perhaps they imagined he had some spell or charm which he carried about with him, by the force of which he did these great things, and doubted not, but if they could get that from him, he would be manageable; and therefore, having had reason enough formerly to know which was his blind side, hoped to find out his riddle a second time; by ploughing with his heifer, they engaged Delilah to get it out of him, telling her what a kindness it would be to them, and, perhaps, assuring her it should not be improved to any real mischief, either to him or her. 3. For this they bid high, promised to give her each of them eleven hundred pieces of silver, fifty-five hundred in all. So many shekels reckoned to above one thousand pounds sterling; with this she was hired to betray one she pretended to love; see what horrid wickedness the love of money is the root of.

Our blessed Saviour was thus betrayed by one whom he called *friend*, and with a kiss too, for filthy lucre. No marvel if those who are unchaste, as Delilah, be unjust; such as lose their honesty in one instance, will in another.

III. The arts by which he put her off from time to time, and kept his own counsel a great while. She asked him *where his great strength lay*, and whether it was possible for him to be bound and afflicted, (v. 6.) pretending that she desired only he would satisfy her curiosity in that one thing, and that she thought it was impossible he should be bound, otherwise than by her charms. When she urged him very much, he told her, 1. That he might be bound with *seven green withs*, v. 7. The experiment was tried, (v. 8.) but it would not do; he *broke the withs as easily as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire*, v. 9. 2. When she still continued her importunity, (v. 10.) he told her that with two new ropes he might be so cramped and hampered, that he might be as easily dealt with as any other man, v. 11. This experiment was tried too, but it failed; the *new ropes* broke from off his arm *like a thread*, v. 12. 3. When she still pressed him to communicate the secret, and upbraided him with it as an unkindness, that he had bantered her so long, he then told her that the weaving of the seven locks of his head would make a great alteration in him, v. 13. This came nearer the matter than any thing he had yet said, but it would not do; his strength appeared to be very much in his hair, when, upon the trial of this, purely by the strength of his hair, he carried away the *fini of the beam*, and the web.

Now, in the making of all these experiments, it is hard to say, whether there appears more of Samson's weakness, or Delilah's wickedness. (1.) Could any thing be more wicked than her restless and unreasonable importunity with him, to discover a secret, which she knew would endanger his life, if ever it were lodged any where but in his own breast? What could be more base and disingenuous, more false and treacherous, than to lay his head in her lap, as one whom she loved, and at the same time to design the betraying of him to those by whom he was mortally hated? (2.) Could any thing be more weak than for him to continue a parley with one who, he so plainly saw, was aiming to do him a mischief, that he should lend an ear so long to such an impudent request, that she might *know how to do him a mischief*; that when he perceived liars in wait for him in the chamber, and that they were ready to apprehend him if they had been able, he did not immediately quit the chamber, with a resolution never to come into it any more; nay, that he should again lay his head in that lap, out of which he had been so often roused with that alarm, *The Philistines are upon thee, Samson*? One can hardly imagine a man so perfectly besotted, and void of all consideration, as Samson now was; but whoredom is one of those things that *take away the heart*. It is hard to say what Samson meant, in suffering her to try so often whether she could weaken and afflict him: some think he did not certainly know where his strength lay; but that, it should seem, he did; for when he told her that which would disable him indeed, it is said, *He told her all his heart*. It seems, he designed to banter her, and to try if he could turn it off with a jest, and to baffle the *liars in wait*, and make fools of them; but it was very unwise in him, that he did not quit the field, as soon as ever he perceived that he was not able to keep the ground.

IV. The discovery he at last made of this great secret; and if the discovery prove fatal to him, he must thank himself, who had not power to keep his own counsel from one that manifestly sought his

ruin. *Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird*, but in Samson's sight is the net spread, and yet he is taken in it. If he had not been blind before the Philistines put out his eyes, he might have seen himself betrayed. Delilah signifies a *consumer*, she was so to him. Observe, 1. How she teased him, telling him she will not believe he loved her, unless he will gratify her in this matter; (v. 15.) *How canst thou say I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?* That is, "when thou canst not trust me with the counsels of thy heart?" Passionate lovers cannot bear to have their love called in question, they would do any thing rather than their sincerity should be suspected; here therefore Delilah had this fond fool (excuse me that I call him so) at an advantage. This expostulation is indeed grounded upon a great truth, That those only have our love, not that have our good words, or our good wishes, but that have our hearts. That is love without dissimulation; but it is falsehood and flattery in the highest degree, to say, We love those with whom our hearts are not. How can we say, We love either our brother whom we have seen, or God, whom we have not seen, if our hearts be not with them? She continued many days vexatious to him with her importunity, so that he had no pleasure of his life with her; (v. 16.) why then did he not leave her? It was because he was captivated to her by the power of love, falsely so called, but truly lust. This bewitched and perfectly intoxicated him, and by the force of it, see, 2. How she conquered him; (v. 17.) *he told her all his heart*. God left him to himself to do this foolish thing, to punish him for indulging himself in the lusts of uncleanness. The angel that foretold his birth said nothing of his great strength, but only that he should be a Nazarite, and particularly that *no razor should come upon his head*, ch. 13. 5. His consecration to God was to be his strength, for he was to be *strengthened according to the glorious power of that Spirit which wrought in him mightily*, that his strength, by promise, not by nature, might be a type and figure of the spiritual strength of believers, Col. 1. 11, 29. Therefore the badge of his consecration was the pledge of his strength; if he lose the former, he knows he forfeits the latter. "If I be shaven, I am no longer a Nazarite, and then my strength is gone." The making of his bodily strength to depend so much on his hair, which could have no natural influence upon it, either one way or other, teaches us to magnify divine institutions, and to expect God's grace, and the continuance of it, only in the use of those means of grace, wherein he has appointed us to attend upon him, the word, sacraments, and prayer. In these earthen vessels is his treasure.

18. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once; for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. 19. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. 20. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. 21

But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him in fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house.

We have here the fatal consequences of Samson's folly in betraying his own strength; he soon paid dear for it. *A whore is a deep ditch; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.* In that pit Samson sinks. Observe,

1. What care Delilah took to make sure of the money for herself. She now perceived, by the manner of his speaking, that he had *told her all his heart*, and the lords of the Philistines that hired her to do this base thing, are sent for; but they must be sure to bring the *money in their hands*, v. 18. The wages of unrighteousness are accordingly produced, unknown to Samson; it would grieve one's heart, to see one of the bravest men then in the world, sold and bought, as a *sheep for the slaughter*; how does this instance sully all the glory of man, and forbid the strong man ever to boast of his strength!

2. What course she took to deliver him up to them according to the bargain. Many in the world would, for the hundredth part of what was here given Delilah, sell those that they pretend the greatest respect for. *Trust not in a friend then, put no confidence in a guide.* See what a treacherous method she took, (v. 19.) *she made him sleep upon her knees.* Josephus says, She gave him some intoxicating liquor, which laid him to sleep; what opiates she might steal into his cup, we know not, but we cannot suppose that he knowingly drank wine or strong drink, for that would have been a forfeiture of his Nazariteship, as much as the cutting off his hair. She pretended the greatest kindness then when she designed the greatest mischief; which yet she could not have compassed, if she had not made him sleep. See the fatal consequences of security. Satan ruins men by rocking them asleep, flattering them into a good opinion of their own safety, and so bringing them to mind nothing, and fear nothing, and then he robs them of their strength and honour, and leads them captive at his will. When we sleep our spiritual enemies do not. When he was asleep, she had a person ready to cut off his hair, which he did so silently and so quickly, that it did not awake him, but plainly afflicted him; even in his sleep, his spirit manifestly sunk upon it. I think we may suppose, that if this ill turn had been done him in his sleep by some spiteful body, without his being himself accessory to it, as he was here, it would not have had this strange effect upon him; but it was his own wickedness that corrected him. It was his iniquity, else it had not been so much his infelicity.

3. What little concern he himself was in at it, v. 20. He could not but miss his hair as soon as he awoke, and yet said, *"I will shake myself, as at other times, after sleep;"* or "as at other times, when the Philistines are upon me, to make my part good against them." Perhaps he thought to shake himself the more easily, and that his head would feel the lighter, now that his hair was cut; little thinking how much heavier the burden of guilt was, than that of hair. He soon found in himself some change, we have reason to think so, and yet *wist not that the Lord was departed from him.* He did not consider that that was the reason of the change. Note, Many have lost the favourable presence of God, and are not aware of it; they have provoked God to withdraw from them, but are not sensible of their loss, nor ever complain of it. Their souls languish and are grown weak, their gifts wither, every thing goes cross with them; and yet they impute not this to the right cause, they are not aware

that *God is departed from them*, nor are they in any care to reconcile themselves to him, or to recover his favour. When God is departed, we cannot do as at other times.

4. What improvement the Philistines soon made of their advantages against him, v. 21. The Philistines took him when God was departed from him; those that have thrown themselves out of God's protection, become an easy prey to their enemies. If we sleep in the lap of our lust, we shall certainly wake in the hands of the Philistines. It is probable they had promised Delilah not to kill him, but they took an effectual course to disable him; the first thing they did when they had him in their hands, and found they could manage him, was, to *put out his eyes by applying fire to them*, says the Arabic version. They considered that his eyes would never come again, as perhaps his hair might, and that the strongest arms could do little without eyes to guide him, and therefore if now they blind him, they for ever blind him. His eyes were the inlets of his sin, he saw the harlot at Gaza, and went in unto her, (v. 1.) and now his punishment began there. Now that the Philistines had blinded him, he had time to remember how his own lust had blinded him. The best preservative of the eyes, is, to turn them away from beholding vanity. They *brought him down to Gaza*, that there he might appear in weakness, where he had lately given such proofs of his strength, (v. 3.) and be a jest to those to whom he had been a terror. They *bound him with fetters of brass*, who had before been held in the cords of his own iniquity, and he did *grind in the prison*, work in their Bridewell, either for their profit, or his punishment, or both. The Devil does thus by sinners, *blinds the minds of them which believe not*, and so enslaves them and secures them in his interests. Poor Samson, how art thou fallen! How is thine honour laid in the dust! How are the glory and defence of Israel become the drudge and triumph of the Philistines! *The crown is fallen from his head; woe unto him, for he hath sinned.* Let all take warning by his fall, carefully to preserve their purity, and to watch against all fleshly lusts; for all our glory is gone, and our defence departed from us, when the covenant of our separation to God, as spiritual Nazarites, is profaned.

22. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. 23. Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24. And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. 25. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. 26. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. 27. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there: and

there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. 28. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein: so the dead which he slew at his death, were more than *they* which he slew in his life. 31. Then his brethren, and all the house of his father, came down, and took him, and brought *him* up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Though the last stage of Samson's life was inglorious, and one could wish there were a veil drawn over it, yet this account here given of his death may be allowed to lessen, though it do not quite roll away, the reproach of it, for there was honour in his death. No doubt, he greatly repented of his sin, the dishonour he had by it done to God, and his forfeiture of the honour God had put upon him, for that God was reconciled to him, appears, 1. By the return of the sign of his Nazariteship; (v. 22.) *His hair began to grow again when he was shaven*, that is, to be as thick and as long as when it was cut off. It is probable their general thanksgiving to Dagon was not long deferred, before which Samson's hair was thus grown; by which, and the particular notice taken of it, it seems to have been extraordinary, and designed for a special indication of the return of God's favour to him upon his repentance. For the growth of his hair was neither cause nor sign of the return of his strength, further than as it was the badge of his consecration, and a token that God accepted him as a Nazarite again, after the interruption, without those ceremonies which were appointed for the restoration of a lapsed Nazarite, which he had not now the opportunity of performing, Numb. 6. 9. It is strange that the Philistines, in whose hands he was, were not jealous of the growth of his hair again, and did not cut it; but perhaps they were willing his great strength should return to him, that they might have so much the more work out of him, and now he was blind they were in no fear of any hurt from him. 2. By the use God made of him for the destruction of the enemies of his people, and that at a time when it would be most for the honour of God, and the vindication of that, and not immediately for the defence and deliverance of Israel. Observe,

I. How insolently the Philistines affronted the God of Israel. (1.) By the sacrifices they offered to Dagon, his rival. This Dagon they call their god, a god of their own making, represented by an image, the upper part of which was in the shape of a man, the lower part of a fish, purely the creature of fancy; yet it served them to set up in opposition to the true and living God. To this pretend-

ed deity they ascribe their success; (v. 23, 24.) *Our god has delivered Samson our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, into our hands.* So they dreamed, though he could do neither good nor evil. They knew Delilah had betrayed him, and they had paid her for doing it; yet they attribute it to their god, and are confirmed by it in their belief of his power to protect them. All people will thus walk in the name of their gods, they will give them the praise of their achievements; and shall not we pay this tribute to our God, whose kingdom ruleth over all? Yet considering what wicked arts they used to get Samson into their hands, it must be confessed it was only such a dunghill-deity as Dagon, that was fit to be made a patron of their villainies. Sacrifices were offered, and songs of praise sung on the general thanksgiving-day, for this victory obtained over one man, and great expressions of joy, and all to the honour of Dagon. Much more reason have we, to give the praise of all our successes to our God: *Thanks be to him who causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus!* (2.) By the sport they made with Samson, God's champion, they reflected on God himself. When they were merry with wine, to make them more merry, Samson must be fetched to make them sport; (v. 25, 27.) that is, for them to make sport with. Having sacrificed to their god, and eat and drunk upon the sacrifice, they rose up to play, according to the usage of idolaters, (1 Cor. 10. 7.) and Samson must be the fool in the play. They made themselves, and one another, laugh, to see how, being blind, he stumbled and blundered. It is likely, they *smote this Judge of Israel upon the cheek*, (Mic. 5. 1.) and said, *Prophesy who smote thee.* It was an instance of their barbarity, to trample thus upon a man in misery, at the sight of whom a while ago they would have trembled. It put Samson in the depth of misery, and as a sword in his bones were their reproaches, when they said, *Where is now thy God?* Nothing could be more grievous to so great a spirit; yet being a penitent, that makes him patient, and he accepts it as a punishment of his iniquity. How unrighteous soever the Philistines were, he could not but own that God was righteous. He had sported himself in his own deceivings, and with his own deceivers, and justly are the Philistines let loose upon him to make sport with him. Uncleanliness is a sin that makes men vile, and exposes them to contempt; *a wound and dishonour shall he get*, whose heart is deceived by a woman, and *his reproach shall not be wiped away.* Everlasting shame and contempt will be the portion of those that are blinded and bound by their own lusts. The Devil that deceived them, will insult over them.

II. How justly the God of Israel brought sudden destruction upon them, by the hands of Samson. Thousands of the Philistines were got together, to attend their lords in the sacrifices and joys of this day, and to be the spectators of this comedy; but it proved to them a fatal tragedy, for they were all slain, and buried in the ruins of the house; whether it was a temple, or a theatre, or some slight building run up for the purpose, is uncertain. Observe,

1. Who were destroyed; all the *lords of the Philistines*, (v. 27.) who had by bribes corrupted Delilah to betray Samson to them. Evil pursued those sinners. Many of the people likewise, to the number of three thousand, and, among them, a great many women, one of whom, it is likely, was that harlot of Gaza, mentioned v. 1. Samson had been drawn into sin by the Philistine women, and a great slaughter is made among them, as was by Moses's order among the women of Midian, because it was they that *caused the children of Israel to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor*, Numb. 31. 16.

2. When they were destroyed; (1.) When they were merry, secure, and jovial, and far from apprehending themselves in any danger: When they saw Samson lay hold on the pillars, we may suppose it served them for a jest, and they made sport with that too; *What will this feeble Jew do?* How are sinners brought to desolation in a moment! They are lifted up in the pride and mirth, that their fall may be the more dreadful. Let us never enjoy the mirth of wicked people, but infer, from this instance, that their triumphing is short, and their joy but for a moment. (2.) It was when they were praising Dagon their god, and giving that honour to him, which is due to God only; which is no less than treason against the King of kings, his crown and dignity; justly therefore is the blood of these traitors mingled with their sacrifices. Belshazzar was cut off when he was praising his made gods, Dan. 5. 4. (3.) It was when they were making sport with an Israelite, a Nazarite, and insulting over him, persecuting him whom God had smitten. Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any person or people faster than mocking and misusing the servants of God, yea, though it is by their own folly that they are brought low. Those know not what they do, nor whom they affront, that make sport with a good man.

3. How they were destroyed; Samson pulled the house down upon them; God, no doubt, putting it into his heart, as a public person, thus to avenge God's quarrel with them, Israel's, and his own. (1.) He gained strength to do it by prayer, *v. 28.* That strength which he had lost by sin, he recovers, like a true penitent, by prayer; as David, who, when he had provoked the Spirit of grace to withdraw, prayed, (Ps. 51. 12.) *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.* We may suppose that this was only a mental prayer, and that his voice was not heard; (for it was made in a noisy clamorous crowd of Philistines;) but though his voice was not heard of men, yet his prayer was heard of God, and graciously answered; and though he lived not to give an account himself of this his prayer, as Nehemiah did of his, yet God not only accepted it in heaven, but, by revealing it to the inspired penman, provided for the registering of it in his church. He prayed to God to remember him, and strengthen him this once, thereby owning that his strength for what he had already done, he had from God, and begged it might be afforded to him once more to give them a parting blow. That it was not from a principle of passion or personal revenge, but from a holy zeal for the glory of God and Israel, that he desired to do this, appears from God's accepting and answering the prayer. Samson died praying, so did our blessed Saviour; but Samson prayed for vengeance, Christ for forgiveness. (2.) He gained opportunity to do it, by leaning on the two pillars which were the chief supports of the building, and were, it seems, so near together, that he could take hold of them both at one time, *v. 26, 29.* Having hold of them, he bore them down with all his might, crying aloud, *Let me die with the Philistines, v. 30. Animamque in vulnere ponit—While inflicting the wound, he dies.* The vast concourse of people that was upon the roof, looking down through it to see the sport, we may suppose contributed to the fall of it. A weight so much greater than ever it was designed to carry, might perhaps have sunk of itself, at least it made the fall more fatal to those within; and indeed few of either could escape being either stifled or crushed to death. This was done, not by any natural strength of Samson, out by the almighty power of God, and is not only marvellous, but miraculous, in our eyes.

Now in this, [1.] The Philistines were greatly

mortified. All their lords and great men were killed, and abundance of their people, and this, in the midst of their triumph; the temple of Dagon (as many think the house was) was pulled down, and Dagon buried in it. This would give a great check to the insolence of the survivors; and if Israel had had but so much sense and spirit left them as to improve the advantages of this juncture, they might now have thrown off the Philistines' yoke. [2.] Samson may very well be justified, and brought in not guilty of any sinful murder, either of himself or of the Philistines. He was a public person, a declared enemy to the Philistines, against whom he might therefore take all advantage; they were now in the most barbarous manner making war upon him, all present were aiding and abetting, and justly die with him. Nor was he a *felo de se*, or a *self murderer*, in it, for it was not his own life that he aimed, though he had too much reason to be weary of it, but the lives of Israel's enemies, for the reaching of which he bravely resigned his own, *not counting it dear to him, so he might finish his course with honour.* [3.] God was very much glorified, in pardoning Samson's great transgressions, of which this was an evidence. It has been said that the prince's giving of a commission to one convicted, amounts to a pardon. Yet *though he was a God that forgave him, he took vengeance of his inventions;* (Ps. 99. 8.) and by his suffering his champion to die in fetters, warned all to take heed of those lusts which war against the soul. However, we have good reason to hope that though Samson died with the Philistines, he had not his everlasting portion with them. *The Lord knows them that are his.* [4.] Christ was plainly typified. He pulled down the Devil's kingdom, as Samson did Dagon's temple; and when he died, obtained the most glorious victory over the powers of darkness. Then when his arms were stretched out upon the cross, as Samson's to the two pillars, he gave a fatal shake to the gates of hell, and, *through death destroyed him, that had the power of death, that is the Devil;* (Heb. 2. 14, 15.) and *herein* exceeded Samson, that he not only died with the Philistines, but rose again to triumph over them.

Lastly, The story of Samson concludes, 1. With an account of his burial; his own relations, animated by the glories that attended his death, came and found out his body among the slain, brought it honourably to his own country, and buried it in the place of his father's sepulchres; the Philistines being in such a consternation, that they durst not oppose it. 2. With the repetition of the account we had before of the continuance of his government, *he judged Israel twenty years;* and if they had not been as mean and sneaking as he was brave and daring, he had left them clear of the Philistines' yoke. They might have been easy, safe and happy, if they would but have given God and their judges leave to make them so.

CHAP. XVII.

All agree that what is related in this, and the rest of the chapters to the end of this book, was not done, as the narrative occurs, after Samson, but long before, even soon after the death of Joshua, in the days of Phinehas the son of Eleazar, ch. 20. 28. But it is cast here into the latter part of the book, that it might not interrupt the history of the Judges. That it might appear how happy the nation was in the Judges, here is showed how unhappy they were when there was none. I. Then idolatry began in the family of Micah, ch. 17. II. Then it spread itself into the tribe of Dan, ch. 18. III. Then villany was committed in Gibeah of Benjamin, ch. 19. IV. Then that whole tribe was destroyed for countenancing it, ch. 20. V. Then strange expedients were adopted to keep up that tribe, ch. 21. Therefore blessed be God for the government we are under. In this chapter we are told how Micah an Ephraimite furnished himself, 1.

With an image for his god, ver. 1. . 6. 2. With a Levite, such a one as he was, for his priest, v. 7. . 13.

1. **AND** there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2. And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son. 3. And when he had restored the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD, from my hand, for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image; now, therefore, I will restore it unto thee. 4. Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah. 5. And the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6. In those days *there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

Here we have,

I. Micah and his mother quarrelling. 1. The son robs the mother. The old woman had hoarded, with long scraping and saving, a great sum of money—eleven hundred pieces of silver. It is likely she intended, when she died, to leave it to her son; in the mean time, it did her good to look upon it, and to count it over. The young man has a family of children grown up, for he had one of age to be a priest; (v. 5.) he knows where to find his mother's cash, thinks he has more need of it than she has, cannot stay till she dies, and so takes it away privately for his own use. Though it is a fault in parents to withhold from the children that which is meet, and leads them into temptation to wish them in their graves, yet even that will by no means excuse the wickedness of those children that steal from their parents, and think all their own which they can get from them, though by the most indirect methods. 2. The mother curses the son, or whosoever had taken her money. It should seem she suspected her son; for when she cursed, she spoke in his ears so loud, and with so much passion and vehemence, as made both his ears to tingle. See what mischief the love of money makes, how it destroys the duty and comfort of every relation. It was the love of money that made Micah so undutiful to his mother as to rob her, and made her so unkind and void of natural affection to her son as to curse him if he had it and concealed it. Outward losses drive good people to their prayers, but bad people to their curses. This woman's silver was her god, before it was made either into a graven or a molten image, else the loss of it would not have put her into such a passion as quite to forget and break through all the laws of decency and piety. It is a very foolish thing for those that are provoked, to throw their curses about, *as a madman that casteth fire-brands, arrows and death*, since they know not but they may light upon those that are most dear to them.

II. Micah and his mother reconciled. 1. The

son was so terrified with the mother's curses, that he restored the money. Though he had so little grace as to take it, he had so much left as not to dare to keep it, when his mother had sent a curse after it. He cannot believe his mother's money would do him any good, without his mother's blessing; nor dares he deny the theft when he is charged with it, nor retain the money when it is demanded by the right owner. It is best not to do evil, but it is next best, when it is done, to undo it again, by repentance, confession, and restitution. Let children be afraid of having the prayers of their parents against them; for though the curse causeless shall not come, yet that which is justly deserved, may be justly feared, even though it was passionately and indecently uttered. 2. The mother was so pleased with her son's repentance, that she recalled her curses, and turned them into prayers for her son's welfare; *Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son.* When those that have been guilty of a fault, appear to be free and ingenuous in owning it, they ought to be commended for their repentance, rather than still be condemned and upbraided for their fault.

III. Micah and his mother agreeing to turn their money into a god, and set up idolatry in their family; and this seems to have been the first instance of the revolt of any Israelite from God and his instituted worship, after the death of Joshua, and the elders that outlived him, and is therefore thus particularly related. And though this was only the worship of the true God by an image, against the *second* commandment, yet this opened the door to the worship of the other gods, Baalim and the groves, against the *first and great* commandment. Observe,

1. The mother's contrivance of this matter. When the silver was restored, she pretends she had *dedicated it to the Lord*; (v. 3.) either before it was stolen, and then she would have that thought to be the reason why she was so much grieved at the loss of it, and imprecated evil on him that had taken it, because it was a dedicated, and therefore an accursed, thing; or, after it was stolen, she had made a vow that if she could retrieve it, she would dedicate it to God, and then she would have the providence that had so far favoured her as to bring it back to her hands, to be an owning of her vow. "Come," said she to her son, "the money is mine, but thou hast a mind to it: let it be neither mine nor thine, but let us both agree to make it into an image for a religious use." Had she put it to a use that had been indeed for the service and honour of God, it had been a good way of accommodating the matter between them; but as it was, the project was wicked. Probably, this old woman was one of those that came out of Egypt, and would have such images made as she had seen there; now that she began to dote, she called to remembrance the follies of her youth, and perhaps told her son that this way of worshipping God by images, was, to her knowledge, the old religion.

2. The son's compliance with her. It should seem, when she first proposed the thing, he stumbled at it, knowing what the second commandment was; for when she said (v. 3.) she designed it for her son to make an image of, yet he restored it to his mother, (being loath to have a hand in making the image,) and she gave it to the founder and had the thing done, blaming him perhaps for scrupling it, v. 4. But when the images were made, Micah, by his mother's persuasion, was not only well reconciled to them, but exceedingly pleased and in love with them; so strangely bewitching was idolatry, and so much supported by traditions received from their parents, 1 Pet. 1. 18. Jer. 44. 17. But observe how the old woman's covetousness prevailed, in part, above her superstition; she had wholly de-

dictated the silver to make the graven and molten images, (v. 3.) all the eleven hundred pieces; but when it came to be done, she made less than a fifth part serve, even *two hundred shekels*, v. 4. She thought that enough, and indeed it was too much to give for an image that is a teacher of lies. Had it been devoted truly to the honour of God, he would not thus have been put off with part of the price, but would have signified his resentment of the affront, as he did in the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

Now observe, (1.) What was the corruption here introduced, v. 5. The man Micah had a *house of gods, a house of God*, so the LXX, for so he thought it, as good as that at Shiloh, and better, because his own, of his own inventing, and at his own disposal; for people love to have their religion under their girdle, to manage it as they please. *A house of error*, so the Chaldees, for really it was so, a deviation from the way of truth, and an inlet to all deceit. Idolatry is a great cheat, and one of the worst of errors. That which he aimed at in the progress of his idolatry, whether he designed it at first or no, was, to mimic and rival both God's oracles and his ordinances. (1.) His oracles. For he made *Teraphim*, little images, which he might advise with as there was occasion, and receive informations, directions, and predictions from. What the *Urim* and *Thummim* were to the prince and people, these *Teraphim* should be to his family; yet he could not think that the true God should own them, or give answers by them, and therefore depended upon such demons as the heathen worshipped, to inspire them, and make them serviceable to him. Thus while the honour of Jehovah was pretended, (v. 3.) yet, his institution being relinquished, they unavoidably lapsed into downright idolatry and demon-worship. (2.) His ordinances. Some room or apartment in the house of Micah was appointed for the temple or house of God; an ephod, or holy garment, was provided for his priest to officiate in, in imitation of those used at the tabernacle of God; and one of his sons he consecrated, probably the eldest, to be his priest. And when he had set up a graven or molten image to represent the object of his worship, no marvel if a priest of his own getting and his own making, served to be the manager of it. Here is no mention of any altar, sacrifice, or incense, in honour of these silver gods, but, having a priest, it is probable he had all these; unless we suppose that, at first, his gods were intended only to be advised with, not to be adored, like Laban's *Teraphim*; but the beginning of idolatry, as of other sins, is *like the letting forth of water*. Break the dam, and you bring a deluge. Here idolatry began, and it spread like a fretting leprosy. Dr. Lightfoot would have us observe that as eleven hundred pieces of silver were here devoted to the making of an idol, which ruined religion, especially in the tribe of Dan, (as we shall find after,) which was Samson's tribe; so eleven hundred pieces of silver were given by each Philistine-lord for the ruin of Samson.

(2.) What was the cause of this corruption, (v. 6.) *there was no king in Israel*, no Judge or sovereign prince to take cognizance of the setting up of these images, (which, doubtless, the country about soon resorted to,) and to give orders for the destroying of them: none to convince Micah of his error, and to restrain and punish him; to take this disease in time, by which the spreading of the infection might have been happily prevented. Every man did that which was *right in his own eyes*, and they soon did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord*. When they were without a king to keep good order among them, God's house was forsaken, his priests neglected, and all went to ruin among them. See what a mercy government is, and what reason there

is, that not only *prayers and intercessions, but giving of thanks*, should be made for kings and all in authority, 1 Tim. 2. 1, 2. Nothing contributes more, under God, to the support of religion in the world, than the due administration of those two great ordinances, magistracy and ministry.

7. And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. 8. And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah, to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. 10. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten *shekels* of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in. 11. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. 12. And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. 13. Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

We have here an account of Micah's furnishing himself with a Levite for his chaplain, either thinking his son, because the heir of his estate, too good to officiate, or rather, because not of God's tribe, not good enough. Observe,

I. What brought this Levite to Micah. By his mother's side he was of the family of Judah, and lived at Beth-lehem among his mother's relations, (for that was not a Levites' city,) or, upon some other account, as a stranger or inmate, sojourned there, v. 7. Thence he went to *sojourn where he could find a place*, and in his travels came to the house of Micah in mount Ephraim, v. 8. Now, 1. Some think it was his unhappiness that he was under a necessity of removing, either because he was persecuted and abused, or rather neglected and starved, at Bethlehem. God had made plentiful provision for the Levites, but the people withheld their dues, and did not help them into the possession of the cities assigned them; so that they were reduced to straits, and no care was taken for their relief. Israel's forsaking of God, began with forsaking the Levites, which therefore they are warned against, Deut. 12. 19. It is a sign religion is going to decay, when good ministers are neglected, and at a loss for a livelihood. But, 2. It seems rather to have been his fault and folly, that he loved to wander, threw himself out where he was, and forfeited the respect of his friends, and, having a roving head, would go seek his fortune, as we say. We cannot conceive that things were yet come to that bad pass among them, that a Levite should be poor, unless it was his own fault. As these are fit to be pitied, that would fix but may not, so those are fit to be punished, that might fix but will not. Unsettledness being, one would think, a constant uneasiness, it is strange that any Israelite, especially any Levite, should affect it.

II. What bargain Micah made with him. Had he not been well enough content with his son for his priest, he would have gone or sent abroad to inquire out a Levite; but now he only takes hold of one that drops into his hands, which showed that he had no great zeal in the matter. It is probable that this rambling Levite heard, in the country, of Micah's house of gods, *his graven and molten image*, which, if he had had any thing of the spirit of a Levite in him, would have brought him thither, to reprove Micah for his idolatry, to tell him how directly contrary it was to the law of God, and how it would bring the judgments of God upon him; but instead of that, like a base and degenerate branch of that sacred tribe, thither he goes, to offer his service, with *Have you any work for a Levite?* For I am out of business, and *go to sojourn where I may find a place*; all he aimed at was to get bread, not to do good, v. 9. Micah courts him into his family, (v. 10.) and promises him, 1. Good preferment; *Be unto me a father and a priest*. Though a young man and taken up at the door, yet if he take him for a priest, he will respect him as a father, so far is he from setting him among his servants. He asks not for his credentials, takes no time to inquire how he behaved in the place of his last settlement, considers not whether, though he was a Levite, yet he might not be of such a bad character, as to be a plague and scandal to his family, but thinks, though he were ever so great a rake, he might serve for a priest to a graven image, like Jeroboam's priest of the *lowest of the people*, 1 Kings 12. 31. No marvel if they who can make any thing serve for a god, make any thing serve for a priest. 2. A tolerable maintenance. He will allow him *meat, and drink, and clothes, a double suit*, so the word is in the margin, a better and a worse, one for every day's wear, and one for holy days, and ten shekels, about twenty-five shillings a year, for spending money; a poor salary, in comparison of what God provided for the Levites that behaved well; but those that forsake God's service, will never mend themselves, nor find a better master. The ministry is the best *calling*, but the worst *trade*, in the world.

III. The Levite's settlement with him, v. 11. He was *content to dwell with the man*; though his work was superstitious, and his wages scandalous, he objected against neither, but thought himself happy that he had lighted on so good a house. Micah, thinking himself holier than any of his neighbours, presumes to consecrate this Levite; (v. 12.) as if his building, furnishing, and endowing, this chapel, authorized him, not only to appoint the person that should officiate there, but to confer those orders upon him which he had no right to give, nor the other to receive. And now he shows him respect as a father, and tenderness as a son, and, with that, is willing to make up the deficiency of the coin he gave him.

IV. Micah's satisfaction in this; (v. 13.) *Now know I that the Lord will do me good*; that is, he hoped that his new establishment would gain reputation among his neighbours, and that would turn to his advantage, for he would share in the profits of his altar; or rather, that God would countenance and bless him in all he put his hand unto, *because I have a Levite to be my priest*. 1. He thought it was a sign of God's favour to him and his images, that he had so opportunely sent a Levite to his door. Thus they who please themselves with their own delusions, if Providence unexpectedly bring any thing to their hands, that furthers them in their evil way, are too apt from thence to infer that God is pleased with them. 2. He thought now that the error of his priesthood was amended, all was well, though he still retained his graven and molten image. Note, Many deceive themselves into a good

opinion of their state, by a partial reformation. They think they are as good as they should be, because, in some particular instance, they are not so bad as they have been; as if the correcting of one fault would atone for persisting in all the rest. 3. He thought the making of a Levite into a priest was a very meritorious act, which really was a presumptuous usurpation, and very provoking to God. Men's pride, and ignorance, and self-flattery, will undertake, not only to justify, but magnify and sanctify, the most daring impieties and invasions upon the divine prerogatives. With much reason might Micah have said, "Now may I fear that God will curse me, because I have debauched one of his own tribe, and drawn him into the worship of a graven image;" yet, for this, he hopes God will do him good. 4. He thought that having a Levite in the house with him, would of course entitle him to the divine favour. Carnal hearts are apt to build too much upon their external privileges, and to conclude that God will certainly do them good, because they are born of godly parents, dwell in praying families, are linked in society with those that are very good, and sit under a lively ministry; whereas all this is but like having a Levite to be their priest, which amounts to no security at all that God will do them good, unless they be good themselves, and make a good use of those advantages.

CHAP. XVIII.

How idolatry crept into the family of Micah we read in the chapter before, how it was translated from thence into the tribe of Dan we have an account in this chapter, and how it gained a settlement in a city of note; for how great a matter doth a little fire kindle! The tribe of Dan had their lot assigned them last of all the tribes, and, it happening to be too strait for them, a considerable city in the utmost corner of Canaan northward was added to it, "Let them get it, and take it;" it was called *Laish* or *Leshem*, Josh. 19. 47. Now here we are told, I. How they sent spies to bring them an account of the place, who, by the way, got acquainted with Micah's priest, v. 1. . 6. II. What an encouraging report these spies brought back, v. 7. . 10. III. What forces were sent to conquer Laish, v. 11. . 13. IV. How they, by the way, plundered Micah of his gods, v. 14. . 26. V. How easily they conquered Laish, v. 27. . 29, and, when they had it, set up the graven image in it, v. 30, 31.

1. **I**N those days *there was no king in Israel*: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day *all their inheritance* had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel. 2. And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who, when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there. 3. When they *were* by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite; and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this *place*? and what hast thou here? 4. And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. 5. And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may

know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. 6. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

Here is,

1. The eye which these Danites had upon Laish, not the whole tribe of Dan, but one family of them, to whose lot, in the subdivision of Canaan, that city fell. Hitherto this family had sojourned with their brethren, who had taken possession of their lot, which lay between Judah and the Philistines, and had declined going to their own city, because there was *no king in Israel* to rule over them, *v. 1*. It lay a great way off, separate from the rest of their tribe: it was entirely in the enemy's hand, and therefore they would sponge upon their brethren, rather than go far to provide for themselves. But, at length, necessity forced them to it, and they began to think of an inheritance to dwell in. It is better to have a little of one's own, than always to hang upon others.

2. The inquiry which this family of the Danites made concerning Laish. They sent *five men* to search the land, (*v. 2.*) that they might know the character of the country, whether it was an inheritance worth going so far for; and the posture of the people, whether the making of themselves masters of it was a thing practicable, what force was necessary in order thereunto, and which was the best way of making an attack upon it. The men they sent, were men of valour, who, if they fell into their enemies' hands, knew how to look danger in the face. It is prudent to look before we leap; Dan had the subtlety of a *serpent by the way*, (*Gen. 49. 17.*) as well as the courage of a *lion's whelp*, *leaping from Bashan*, *Deut. 33. 22*.

3. The acquaintance which their spies got with Micah's priest, and the improvements they made of that acquaintance. It seems, they had known this Levite formerly, he having, in his rambles, been sometimes in their country; and though his countenance might be altered, they knew him again by his voice, *v. 3*. They were surprised to find him so far off, inquired what brought him thither, and he told them, *v. 4*. what business he had there, and what encouragement. They, understanding that he had no oracle in his custody, desired he would tell them whether they should prosper in their present undertaking, *v. 5*. See their carelessness and regardlessness of God and his providence; they would not have inquired of the Lord at all, if this Levite's mentioning of the teraphim he had with him, had not put it into their heads. Many never think of religion but just when it falls in their way, and they cannot avoid it, like chance-customers. See their ignorance of the divine law, that they thought God, who had forbidden the religious use of graven images, would yet own them in consulting an image, and give them an answer of peace. *Should he be inquired of by them?* *Ezek. 14. 3*. They seem to have had a greater opinion of Micah's teraphim, than of God's Urim; for they had passed by Shiloh, and, for aught that appears, had not inquired there of God's High-priest, but Micah's shabby Levite shall be an oracle to them. He betakes himself to his usual method of consulting his teraphim; and whether he himself believed it or no, he humoured the thing so well, that he made them believe he had an answer from God, encouraging them to go on, and assuring them of good success, *v. 6*. "*Go in peace, you shall be safe, and may be easy, for before the Lord is your way,*" that is, he approves it," (as the Lord is said to *know the way of the righteous* with acceptance,) "and therefore he will make it prosperous; his eye will be upon you

for good, he will direct your way, and preserve your going out and coming in." Note, Our great care should be that our way be such as God approves, and if it be so, we may go in peace. If God care for us, on him let us cast our care, and be satisfied that we cannot miss our way, if he go before us.

7. Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing: and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man. 8. And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye? 9. And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land. 10. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth. 11. And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war. 12. And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan, unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim. 13. And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

Here is,

1. The observation which the spies made upon the city of Laish, and the posture of its inhabitants, *v. 7*. Never was place so ill governed, and so ill guarded, which would make it a very easy prey to the invader.

1. It was ill governed, for every man might be as bad as he would, and there was *no magistrate*, no *heir of restraint*, as the word is, that might so much as put them to shame in any thing, much less put them to death! so that by the most impudent immoralities they provoked God's wrath, and by all manner of mutual mischiefs weakened and consumed one another. See here, (1.) What the office of magistrates is; they are to be *heirs of restraint*, that is, to preserve a constant entail of power, as heirs to an inheritance, in the places where they are, for the restraining of that which is evil. They are *possessors of restraint*, intrusted with their authority for this end that they may check and suppress every thing that is vicious, and be a terror to evil doers. It is only God's grace that can renew men's depraved minds and turn their hearts; but the magistrate's power may restrain their bad practices, and tie their hands, so that the wickedness of the wicked may not be either so injurious, or so infectious, as otherwise it would be. Though the sword of justice cannot cut up the root of bitterness, it may cut off its branches, and hinder its growth and spreading, that vice may not go without a check, for then it becomes daring and dangerous, and the

community shares in the guilt. (2.) See what method must be used for the restraint of wickedness. Sinners must be put to shame, that they who will not be restrained by the shamefulness of the sin before God and their own consciences, may be restrained by the shamefulness of the punishment before men. All ways must be tried to dash sin out of countenance, and cover it with contempt, to make people ashamed of their idleness, drunkenness, cheating, lying, and other sins, by making reputation always appear on virtue's side. (3.) See how miserable, and how near to ruin, those places are, that either have no magistrates, or none that bear the sword to any purpose; the wicked then *walk on every side*, Ps. 12. 8. And how happy we are in good laws and a good government.

2. It was ill guarded. The people of Laish dwelt careless, quiet, and secure, their gates left open, their walls out of repair, because under no apprehension of danger, any way; though their wickedness was so great, that they had reason to fear divine vengeance every day. It was a sign that the Israelites, through their sloth and cowardice, were not now such a terror to the Canaanites, as they had been when they first came among them, else the city of Laish, which, probably, knew itself to be assigned to them, would not have been so very secure. Though they were an open and inland town, they *lived secure like the Zidonians*, who were surrounded with the sea, and were well fortified both by art and nature; but were *far from the Zidonians*, who therefore could not come in to their assistance, nor help to defend them from the danger which, by debauching their manners, they had helped to bring them into. And lastly, They had *no business with any man*, which bespeaks either the idleness they affected, they followed no trade, and so grew lazy and luxurious, and utterly unable to defend themselves, or the independency they affected, they scorned to be either in subjection to, or alliance with, any of their neighbours, and so they had none to protect them, or bring in any aid to them. They cared for nobody, and therefore nobody cared for them. Such as these were the men of Laish.

II. The encouragement which from hence they gave to their countrymen that sent them, to prosecute their design upon this city, v. 8-10. Probably, the Danites had formed notions of the insuperable difficulties of the enterprise, thought it impossible ever to make themselves masters of Laish, and therefore had kept themselves so long out of the possession of it; perhaps suggesting likewise to one another, in their unbelief, that it was not a country worth going so far and running such a risk for. Which jealousies the spies (and they were not, in this, evil spies) had an eye to in their report. 1. They represent the place as desirable. "If you will trust our judgments, *we have seen the land*, and we are agreed in our verdict upon the view, that, behold, *it is very good*, (v. 9.) better than this mountainous country into which we are here crowded by the Philistines. You need not doubt of living here comfortably in it, for it is a place *where there is no want of any thing*," v. 10. See what a good land Canaan was, that this city, which lay furthest of all northward, in the utmost corner of the country, stood on such a fruitful spot. 2. They represent it as attainable; they do not at all question but, with God's blessing, they may soon get possession of it; for *the people are secure*, v. 10. And the more secure, always the less safe; "God *has given it into your hands*, and you may have it for the taking." They stir them up to the undertaking; "*Arise, that we may go up against them*, let us go about it speedily and resolutely. They expostulate with them for their delays, and chide them out for their

sluggishness; *Are ye still? Be not slothful to go*. Men need to be thus stirred up to mind even their interest. Heaven is a *very good land where there is no want of any thing*; our God has, by the promise, *given it into our hands*, let us be not slothful then in making it sure, and *laying hold on eternal life*, but *strive to enter*.

III. The Danites' expedition against Laish. This particular family of them, to whose lot that city fell, now at length make towards it, v. 11-13. The military men were but six hundred in all, not a hundredth part of that tribe, for when they entered Canaan, the Danites were above sixty-four thousand, Numb. 26. 43. It was strange that none of their brethren of their own tribe, much less of any other, came in to their assistance; but it was long after Israel came to Canaan, before there appeared among them any thing of a public spirit, or concern for a common interest, which was the reason why they seldom united in a common head, and that kept them low and inconsiderable. It appears, by v. 21. that these six hundred were the whole number that went to settle there, for they had their families and effects with them, their *little ones and cattle*, so confident were they of success. The other tribes gave them a free passage through their country, their first day's march brought them to Kirjath-jearim; (v. 12.) and such rare things were military encampments now become in Israel, that the place where they rested that night, was from thence called *Mahanah-dan, the camp of Dan*; and, probably, the place whence they began their march between Zorah and Eshtaol, was called by the same name, and is meant, *ch. 13. 25*. The second day's march brought them unto mount Ephraim, near Micah's house, (v. 13.) and there we must pause awhile.

14. Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now, therefore, consider what ye have to do. 15. And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, *even* unto the house of Micah, and saluted him. 16. And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate. 17. And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, *and* came in thither, *and* took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men *that were* appointed with weapons of war. 18. And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye? 19. And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: *is it* better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? 20. And the priest's heart

was glad; and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people. 21. So they turned and departed, and put the little ones, and the cattle, and the carriage, before them. 22. And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan. 23. And they cried unto the children of Dan: and they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company? 24. And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say, unto me, What aileth thee? 25. And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life with the lives of thy household. 26. And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned, and went back unto his house.

The Danites had sent out their spies to find out a country for them, and they sped well in their search; but here, now that they came to the place, (for till that brought it to their mind, it does not appear that they had mentioned it to their brethren,) they oblige them with a further discovery, they can tell them where there are gods; "Here in these houses, there are an ephod, and teraphim, and a great many fine things for devotion, such as we have not the like in our country, now therefore consider what ye have to do, v. 14. We consulted them, and had a good answer from them; they are worth having, nay, they are worth stealing, (that is, having upon the worst terms,) and if we can but make ourselves masters of these gods, we may the better hope to prosper, and make ourselves masters of Laish." So far they were in the right, that it was desirable to have God's presence with them, but wretchedly mistaken when they took these images for tokens of God's presence, which were fitter to be used in a puppet play, than in acts of devotion. They thought an oracle would be pretty company for them in their enterprise, and instead of a council of war, to advise upon every emergency: and the place they were going to settle in, being so far from Shiloh, they thought they had more need of a *house of gods* among themselves, than Micah had that lived so near it. They might have made as good an ephod and teraphim themselves as this was, and which would have served their purpose every whit as well, but the reputation which they found this in the possession of, (though it had had that reputation but a while,) amused them into a strange veneration for it, which they would soon have dropped, if they had had so much sense as to inquire into its original, and whether there was any thing divine in its institution.

Being determined to take these gods along with them, we are here told how they stole the images, cajoled the priest, and frightened Micah from attempting to rescue them.

I. The five men that knew the house, and the avenues to it, and particularly the chapel, went in

and fetched out the images, with the ephod and teraphim, and all the appurtenances, while the six hundred men kept the priest in talk at the gate, v. 16. 18. See what little care this sorry priest took of his gods; while he was sauntering at the gate, and gazing at the strangers, his treasure (such as it was) was gone. See how impotent these sorry gods were, that could not keep themselves from being stolen; it is mentioned as the reproach of idols, that *themselves are gone into captivity*, Isa. 46. 2. O, the sottishness of these Danites! How could they imagine those gods should protect them, that could not keep themselves from being stolen? Yet because they went by the name of gods, as if it were not enough that they had with them the presence of the invisible God, nor that they stood in relation to the tabernacle, where there were even visible tokens of his presence, nothing will serve them but they must have *gods to go before them*, not of their own making indeed, but, which was as bad, of their own stealing. Their idolatry began in theft, a proper prologue for such an opera. In order to the breaking of the second commandment, they begin with the eighth, and take their neighbour's goods to make them their gods. The holy God *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*, but the Devil loves it. Had these Danites seized the images, to deface and abolish them, and the priest, to punish him, they had done like Israelites indeed, and had appeared jealous for their God, as their fathers had done; (Josh. 22. 16.) but to take them for their own use was such a complicated crime, as showed they neither feared God, nor regarded man, but were perfectly lost both to godliness and honesty.

II. They set upon the priest, and flattered him into a good humour, not only to let the gods go, but to go himself along with them; for without him they knew not well how to make use of the gods. Observe, 1. How they tempted him, v. 19. They assured him of better preferment with them than what he now had. It would be more honour and profit to be chaplain to a regiment, (for they were no more, though they call themselves a *tribe*,) than to be only a domestic chaplain to a private gentleman. Let him go with them, and he shall have more dependents on him, more sacrifices brought to his altar, and more fees for consulting his teraphim, than he had here. 2. How they won him. A little persuasion served, *his heart was glad*, v. 20. The proposal took well enough with his rambling fancy, which would never let him stay long at a place, and gratified his covetousness and ambition. He had no reason to say, but that he was well off, where he was, Micah had not *deceived him*, or *changed his wages*, he was not moved with any remorse of conscience for attending on a graven image; had he gone away to Shiloh to minister to the Lord's priests, according to the duty of a Levite, he might have been welcome there, (Deut. 18. 6.) and his removal had been commendable; but instead of that, he takes the images with him, and carries the infection of the idolatry into the whole city. It had been very unjust and ungrateful to Micah, if he had only gone away himself, but much more so, to take the images along with him, which, he knew, the heart of Micah was set upon. Yet better could not be expected from a treacherous Levite; what house can be sure of him who has forsaken the house of the Lord? Or what friend will he be true to, that has been false to his God? He could not pretend that he was under compulsive force, for he was *glad in his heart* to go. If ten shekels won him, (as Bishop Hall expresses it,) eleven would lose him; for what can hold those that have made shipwreck of a good conscience? *The hireling flees because he is a hireling*. The priest and his gods went in the midst of the people, there

they placed him, that they might secure him, either from going back himself, if his mind should change, or from being fetched back by Micah; or perhaps in imitation of the order of Israel's march through the wilderness, in which the ark and the priests went in the midst of their camp.

III. They frightened Micah back, when he pursued them to recover his gods. As soon as ever he perceived that his chapel was plundered, and his chaplain was run away from him, he mustered all the forces he could, and pursued the robbers, *v. 22*. His neighbours, and perhaps tenants, that used to join with him in his devotions, were forward to help him on this occasion; they got together, and pursued the robbers, who having their children and cattle before them, (*v. 21.*) could make no great haste, so that they soon overtook them; hoping by strength of reason to recover what was stolen, for the disproportion of their numbers was such, that they could not hope to do it by strength of arm. The pursuers called after them, desiring to speak a word with them; they in the rear, (where it is probable they posted the fiercest and strongest of their company, expecting there to be attacked,) turned about, and asked Micah what ailed him to be so much concerned, and what he would have, *v. 23*. He argues with them, and pleads his right, which he thought should prevail; but they, in answer, plead their might, which, it proved, did prevail; for it is common that might overcomes right.

1. He insists upon the wrong they had certainly done him; (*v. 24.*) "*Ye have taken away my gods, my images of God, which I have such an incontestable title to, for I made them myself, and which I have such an affection for, that I am undone if I lose them, for what have I more that will do me any good, if these be gone?*" Now, (1.) This discovers to us the folly of idolaters, and the power that Satan has over them. What a folly was it for him to call those his gods, which he had made, when he only is to be worshipped by us as a God, that made us! Folly indeed to set his heart upon such silly idle things, and to look upon himself as undone when he had lost them! (2.) This may discover to us our spiritual idolatry; that creature which we place our happiness in, which we set our affections inordinately upon, and which we can by no means find in our hearts to part with, of which we say, "*What have we more?*" That we make an idol of. That is put in God's place, and is an usurper, which we are concerned about, as if our life and comfort, our hope, and happiness, and all, were bound up in it. But, (3.) If all people will thus walk in the name of their god, shall we not be in like manner affected towards our God, the true God? Let us reckon the having of an interest in God, and communion with him, incomparably the richest portion, and the loss of God the sorest loss; Woe unto us if he depart, for what have we more? Deserted souls that are lamenting after the Lord, may well wonder, as Micah did, that you should ask, what ails them? For the tokens of God's favour are suspended, his comforts are withdrawn; and what have they more?

2. They insist upon the mischief they would certainly do him, if he prosecuted his demand. They would not hear reason, nor do justice, nor would so much as offer to pay him the prime cost he had been at upon those images, nor promise to make restitution of what they had taken, when they had served their present purpose with them in this expedition, and had time to copy them, and make others like them for themselves: much less had they any compassion for a loss he so bitterly lamented; they would not so much as accost him kindly, or give him good words, but resolve to justify their robbery with murder, if he did not immediately let fall his

claims; (*v. 25.*) "*Take heed, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life; and that is worse than losing thy gods.*" Wicked and unreasonable men reckon it a great provocation to be asked to do justice, and support themselves by their power against right and reason. Micah's crime is asking his own; yet, for this, he is in danger to lose his life, and the lives of his household. Micah has not courage enough to venture his life for the rescue of his gods, so little opinion had he of their being able to protect him and bear him out, and therefore tamely gives them up, *v. 26.* *He turned, and went back to his house:* and if the loss of his idols did but convince him (as, one would think, it should) of their vanity and impotency, and of his own folly in setting his heart upon them, and send him back to the true God from whom he had revolted, he that lost them, had a much better bargain than they that by force of arms carried them off. If the loss of our idols cure us of the love of them, and make us say, *What have we to do any more with idols?* the loss will be unspeakable gain. See Isa. 2. 20.—30. 22.

27. And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. 28. And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein. 29. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit, the name of the city was Laish at the first. 30. And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Here is,

I. Laish is conquered by the Danites. They proceeded on their march, and, because they met with no disaster, perhaps concluded they had not done amiss in robbing Micah; many justify themselves in their impiety by their prosperity. Observe, 1. What posture they found the people of Laish in, both those of the city, and those of the country about; they were quiet and secure, not jealous of the five spies that had been among them to search out the land, nor had they any intelligence of the approach of this enemy, which made them a very easy prey to this little handful of men that came upon them, *v. 27*. Note, Many are brought to destruction by their security. Satan gets advantage against us when we are careless and off our watch; happy therefore is the man that feareth always. 2. What a complete victory they obtained over them; they put all the people to the sword, and burnt down so much of the city as they thought fit to rebuild, (*v. 27, 28.*) and, for aught that appears herein, they met with no resistance; for the measure of the iniquity of the Canaanites was full, that of the Danites was but beginning to fill. 3. How the con-

querors sett'ed themselves in their room, v. 28, 29. They bu't the city, or much of it, anew, (the old buildings being gone to decay,) and *called the name of it Dan*, to be a witness for them that they were Danites by birth, though separated so far off from their brethren, which might hereafter, by reason of their distance, be called in question. We should feel concerned not to lose the privilege of our relation to God's Israel, and therefore should take all occasions to own it, and preserve the remembrance of it to our's after us.

II. Idolatry immediately set up there. God had graciously performed his promise, in putting them in possession of that which fell to their lot, obliging them thereby to be faithful to him who had been so to them: they *inherited the labour of the people, that they might observe his statutes*, Ps. 105. 44, 45. But the first thing they do after they are settled, is, to break his statutes; as soon as they began to settle themselves, they *set up the graven image*, v. 30. perversely attributing their success to that idol, which, if God had not been infinitely patient, would have been their ruin. Thus a prosperous idolater goes on to offend, *imputing this his power unto his god*, Heb. 1. 11. Their Levite, who officiated as priest, is at length named here, *Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh*. The word *Manasseh*, in the original, has the letter *Nun* set over the head, which, some of the Jewish Rabbins say, is an intimation that it should be left out, and then Manasseh will be *Moses*, and this Levite, they say, was grandson to the famous Moses, who indeed had a son, named Gershom; but, say they, the historian, in honour of Moses, by a half interposition of that letter, turned the name into Manasseh. The vulgar Latin reads it *Moses*. And if indeed Moses had a grandson that was rakish, and was picked up as a fit tool to be made use of in the setting up of idolatry, it is not the only instance (would to God it were!) of the unhappy degenerating of the posterity of great and good men. Children's children are not always the crown of old men. But the learned Bishop Patrick takes this to be an idle conceit of the Rabbins, and supposes this Jonathan to be of some other family of the Levites. How long these corruptions continued, we are told in the close. 1. That the posterity of this Jonathan continued to act as priests to this family of Dan, that was seated at Laish, and in the country about, till the captivity, v. 30. After Micah's image was removed, that family retained the character of priests, and had respect paid them as such by that city, and it is very probable that Jeroboam had an eye to them, when he set up one of his calves there, (which they would welcome to Dan, and put some reputation upon, when the priests of the Lord would have nothing to do with them,) and that his family officiated as some of his priests. 2. That these images continued till Samuel's time, for so long *the ark of God was at Shiloh*; and, it is probable, in his time effectual care was taken to suppress and abolish this idolatry. See how dangerous it is to admit an infection, for spiritual distempers are not so soon cured as caught.

CHAP. XIX.

The three remaining chapters of this book contain a most tragical story of the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, patronised by the tribe of Benjamin, for which that tribe was severely chastised, and almost entirely cut off by the rest of the tribes. This seems to have been done, not long after the death of Joshua, for it was when there was *no king, no judge in Israel*; (v. 1. and ch. 21. 25.) and Phinehas was then High Priest, ch. 20. 28. These particular iniquities, the Danites' idolatry, and the Benjaminites' immorality, let in that general apostasy, ch. 3. 7. The abuse of the Levites' concubine is here very particularly related. I. Her adulterous elopement from

him, v. 1, 2. II. His reconciliation to her, and the journey he took to fetch her home, v. 3. III. Her father's kind entertainment of him, v. 4. . 9. IV. The abuse he met with at Gibeah, where, being benighted, he was forced to take up. 1. He was neglected by the men of Gibeah, (v. 10. . 15.) and entertained by an Ephraimite that sojourned among them, v. 16. . 21. They set upon him in his quarters, as the Sodomites did on Lot's guests, v. 22. . 24. 3. They villainously forced his concubine to death, v. 25. . 28. V. The course he took, to send notice of this to all the tribes of Israel, v. 29, 30.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in those days, when *there was no king in Israel*, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah. 2. And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months. 3. And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, *and* to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him. 4. And his father-in-law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there. 5. And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son-in-law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way. 6. And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry. 7. And when the man rose up to depart, his father-in-law urged him; therefore he lodged there again. 8. And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them. 9. And when the man rose up to depart, he and his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold now, the day draweth toward evening; I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end; lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to-morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home. 10. But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem: and *there were* with him two asses saddled; his concubine also *was* with him. 11. *And* when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in unto this city of the

Jebusites, and lodge in it. 12. And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah. 13. And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah. 14. And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them *when they were* by Gibeah, which *belongeth* to Benjamin. 15. And they turned aside thither, to go in *and* to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city; for *there was* no man that took them into his house to lodging.

The domestic affairs of this Levite would not have been related thus largely, but to make way for the following story of the injuries done him, in which the whole nation interested themselves. Bishop Hall's first remark upon this story is, *That there is no complaint of a publicly ordered state, but there is a Levite at one end of it, either as an agent, or as a patient.* In Micah's idolatry, a Levite was active; in the wickedness of Gibeah, a Levite was passive; *no tribe shall sooner feel the want of government than that of Levi*; and in all the book of Judges, no mention is made of any of that tribe, but of these two. This Levite was of mount Ephraim, *v. 1.* He married a wife of Beth-lehem-Judah; she is called his *concubine*, because she was not endowed, for perhaps he had nothing to endow her with, being himself a sojourner, and not settled; but it does not appear that he had any other wife, and the margin calls her *a wife, a concubine, v. 1.* She came from the same city that Micah's Levite came from, as if Beth-lehem-Judah owed a double ill turn to mount Ephraim, for she was as bad for a Levite's wife, as that other for a Levite.

I. This Levite's concubine played the whore, and eloped from her husband, *v. 2.* The Chaldee reads it, only that she *carried it insolently to him, or despised him*, and he being displeased at it, *she went away from him*, and (which was not fair) was received and entertained at her father's house. Had her husband turned her out of doors unjustly, her father ought to have pitied her affliction; but when she treacherously departed from her husband to embrace the bosom of a stranger, her father ought not to have countenanced her sin. Perhaps she would not have violated her duty to her husband, if she had not known too well where she should be kindly received. Children's ruin is often owing very much to parents' indulgence.

II. The Levite went himself to court her return. It was a sign there was no king, no judge, in Israel, else she had been prosecuted and put to death, as an adulteress, but instead of that, she is applied to in the most respectful manner by her injured husband, who takes a long journey on purpose to beseech her to be reconciled, *v. 3.* If he had put her away it had been a crime in him to return to her again, Jer. 3. 1. But she having gone away, it was a virtue in him to forgive the offence, and, though the party wronged, to make the first motion to her to be friends again. It is a part of the

character of the wisdom from above, that it is gentle and easy to be entreated. He spake *friendly* to her, or *comfortably*, for so the Hebrew phrase of *speaking to the heart* commonly signifies; which intimates that she was in sorrow, penitent for what she had done amiss, which, probably, he heard of

when he came to fetch her back. Thus God promises concerning adulterous Israel, (Hos. 2. 14.) *I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her.*

III. Her father bid him very welcome, and, by his extraordinary kindness to him, endeavoured to atone for the countenance he had given his daughter in withdrawing from him, and to confirm him in his disposition to be reconciled to her. 1. He entertains him kindly, *rejoices to see him, v. 3.* treats him generously for three days, *v. 4.* And the Levite, to show that he was perfectly reconciled, accepted his kindness, and we do not find that he upbraided him or his daughter with what had been amiss, but was as easy and as pleasant as at his first wedding-feast. It becomes all, but especially Levites, to forgive as God does. Every thing among them gave a hopeful prospect of their living comfortably together for the future; but could they have foreseen what befell them within one day or two, how would all their mirth have been bittered and turned into mourning! When the affairs of our families are in the best posture, we ought to rejoice with trembling; because we know not what troubles one day may bring forth. We cannot foresee what evil is near us, but we ought to consider, what may be, that we may not be secure, as if to-morrow must needs be as this day, and *much more abundant*, Isa. 56. 12. 2. He is very earnest for his stay, as a further demonstration of his hearty welcome: the affection he had for him, and the pleasure he took in his company, proceeded, 1. From a civil regard to him as his son-in-law and an ingrafted branch of his own house. Note, Love and duty are owing to those whom we are by marriage related to, as well as to those who are bone of our bone; and they that show kindness, as this Levite did, may expect, as he did, to receive kindness. And, 2. From a pious respect to him as a Levite, a servant of God's house; if he were such a Levite as he should be (and nothing appears to the contrary,) he is to be commended for courting his stay, finding his conversation profitable, and having opportunity to learn from him the *good knowledge of the Lord*; hoping also that the *Lord will do him good, because he has a Levite* to be his son-in-law, and will bless him for his sake. (1.) He forces him to stay the fourth day, and that was kind, not knowing when they might be together again, he engages him to stay as long as he possibly could. The Levite, though nobly treated, was very urgent to be gone; a good man's heart is where his business is, for *as a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man that wanders from his place.* It is a sign a man has either little to do at home, or little heart to do what he has to do, that can take pleasure in being long abroad where he has nothing to do. It is especially good to see a Levite willing to go home to his few sheep in the wilderness. Yet this Levite was overcome by importunity and kind management to stay longer than he intended, *v. 5, 7.* We ought to avoid the extremes of an over-easy yielding, to the neglect of our duty on the one hand, and that of moroseness and wilfulness to the neglect of our friends and their kindnesses on the other hand. Our Saviour, after his resurrection, was prevailed upon to stay with his friends longer than he first intimated to be his purpose, Luke 24. 28, 29. (2.) He forces him to stay till the afternoon of the fifth day, and that, as it proved, was unkind, *v. 8, 9.* He would by no means let him go before dinner, promises him he shall have dinner early, designing thereby, as he had done the day before, to detain him another night; but the Levite was intent on the *house of the Lord at Shiloh, v. 18.* and being impatient to get thither, would stay no longer. Had they set out early, they might have

reached some better lodging place than that which they were now constrained to take up with, nay, they might have got to Shiloh. Note, Our friends' designed kindnesses often prove, in the event, real injuries; what is meant for our welfare, becomes a trap. *Who knows what is good for a man in this life?* The Levite was unwise in setting out so late; he might have got home better, if he had staid a night longer, and taken the day before him.

IV. In his return home, he was forced to lodge at Gibeah, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, afterward called *Gibeah of Saul*, which lay on his road toward Shiloh and mount Ephraim. When it drew toward night, and the shadows of the evening were stretched out, they began to think (as it behoves us to do when we observe the day of our life hastening towards a period) where they must lodge. When night came, they could not pursue their journey; *he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goes*: they could not but desire rest, for which the night was intended, as the day for labour. 1. The servant proposed that they should lodge in Jebus, afterwards Jerusalem, but as yet in the possession of the Jebusites. "Come," (said the servant,) "let us lodge in this city of the Jebusites," v. 11. And if they had done so, it is probable they had had much better usage than they met with in Gibeah of Benjamin. Debauched and profligate Israelites are worse and much more dangerous than Canaanites themselves. 2. But the master, as became one of God's tribe, would by no means quarter, no, not one night, in a city of strangers, (v. 12.) not because he questioned his safety among them, but he was not willing, if he could possibly avoid it, to have so much intimacy and familiarity with them as a night's lodging came to, nor to be so much beholden to them. By shunning this place, he would witness against the wickedness of those that contracted friendship and familiarity with those devoted nations. Let Israelites, Levites especially, associate with Israelites, and not with the *sons of the stranger*. 3. Having passed by Jebus, which was about five or six miles from Beth-lehem, (the place whence they came,) and not having daylight to bring them to Ramah, they stopped at Gibeah; (v. 13-15.) there they sat down in the street, nobody offering them a lodging. In these countries, at that time, there were no inns, or public-houses, in which, as with us, travellers might have entertainment for their money; but they carried entertainment along with them, as this Levite did here, (v. 19.) and depended upon the courtesy and hospitality of the inhabitants for a lodging. Let us take occasion from hence, when we are in journeys, to thank God for this, among other conveniences of travelling, that there are inns to entertain strangers, and in which they may be welcome, and well accommodated, for their money. Surely there is no country in the world, wherein one may stay at home with more satisfaction, or go abroad with more comfort, than in our own nation. This traveller, though a Levite, (and to those of that tribe God had particularly commanded his people to be kind upon all occasions,) met with very cold entertainment at Gibeah, *no man took them into his house*; if they had any reason to think he was a Levite, perhaps that made those ill-disposed people the more shy of him. There are those who will have this laid to their charge at the great day, *I was a stranger, and ye took me not in*.

16. And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which *was* also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place *were* Benjamites. 17. And when

he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a way-faring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou? 18. And he said unto him, *We are* passing from Beth-lehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence *am* I: and I went to Beth-lehem-judah, but I *am now* going to the house of the LORD; and there *is* no man that receiveth me to house. 19. Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man *which is* with thy servants: *there is* no want of any thing. 20. And the old man said, Peace *be* with thee: howsoever, *let* all thy wants *lie* upon me; only lodge not in the street. 21. So he brought them into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.

Though there was not one *of* Gibeah, yet it proved there was one *in* Gibeah, that showed some civility to this distressed Levite, who was glad that any one took notice of him. It was strange that some of those wicked people, who, when it was dark, designed so ill to him and his concubine, did not, under pretence of kindness, invite them in, that they might have a fairer opportunity of perpetrating their villany; but either they had not wit enough to be so designing, or not wickedness enough to be so de-ceiving. Or, perhaps, none of them separately thought of such a wickedness, till in the black and dark night they got together to contrive what mischief they should do. Bad people in confederacy make one another much worse than any of them would be by themselves. When the Levite, and his wife, and servant, were beginning to fear that they must lie in the street all night, (and as good have lain in a den of lions,) they were at length invited into a house. And we are here told,

I. Who that kind man was, that invited them. 1. He was a man of mount Ephraim, and only sojourned in Gibeah, v. 16. Of all the tribes of Israel, the Benjamites had most reason to be kind to poor travellers, for their ancestor, Benjamin, was born upon the road, his mother then upon a journey, and very near to this place, Gen. 35. 16, 17. Yet they were hard-hearted to a traveller in distress, while an honest Ephraimite had compassion on him, and no doubt, was the more kind to him, when, upon inquiry, he found that he was his countryman, of mount Ephraim likewise. He that was himself but a sojourner in Gibeah, was the more compassionate to a wayfaring man, for he *knew the heart of a stranger*, Exod. 23. 9. Deut. 10. 19. Good people that look upon themselves but as strangers and sojourners in this world, should, for this reason, be tender one to another, because they all belong to the same better country, and are not at home here. 2. He was an old man, one that retained some of the expiring virtue of an Israelite; the rising generation was entirely corrupted; if there was any good remaining among them, it was only with those that were old and going off. 3. He was coming home from his work out of the field at even. The evening calls home labourers, Ps. 104. 23. But, it should seem, this was the only labourer that this evening brought home to Gibeah. The rest had given up themselves to sloth

and luxury, and no marvel there was among them, as in Sodom, *abundance of uncleanness*, when there was among them, as in Sodom, *abundance of idleness*, Ezek. 16. 49. But he that was honestly diligent in his business, all day, was disposed to be generously hospitable to these poor strangers, at night. Let men *labour, that they may have to give*, Eph. 4. 28. It appears, from v. 21. that he was a man of some substance, and yet had been himself at work in the field. No man's estate will privilege him in idleness.

II. How free and generous he was in his invitation; he did not stay till they applied themselves to him to beg for a night's lodging, but when he saw them, (v. 17.) inquired into their circumstances, and prevented them with his kindness: thus our good God answers before we call. Note, A charitable disposition expects only *opportunity*, not *importunity*, to do good, and will succour, upon sight, unsought unto. Hence we read of a *bountiful eye*, Prov. 22. 9. If Gibeah was like Sodom, this old man was like Lot in Sodom, who *sat in the gate* to invite strangers, Gen. 19. 1. Thus *Job opened his doors to the traveller*, and would not suffer him to lodge in the street, Job 31. 32. Observe, 1. How ready he was to give credit to the Levite's account of himself, when he saw no reason at all to question the truth of it. Charity is not apt to distrust, but *hopeth all things*, (1 Cor. 13. 7.) and will not make use of Nabal's excuse for his churlishness to David, *Many servants now-a-days break from their master*, 1 Sam. 25. 10. The Levite, in his account of himself, professes that he was now going to the house of the Lord, (v. 18.) for there he designed to attend, either with a *trespass-offering* for the sins of his family, or with a *peace-offering* for the mercies of his family, or both, before he went to his own house. And if the men of Gibeah had any intimation of his being bound that way, probably they would therefore be disinclined to entertain him; the Samaritans would not receive Christ, because his face was toward Jerusalem, Luke 9. 53. But for that reason, because he was a Levite, and was now going to the house of the Lord, this good old man was the more kind to him. Thus he received a disciple in the name of a disciple, a servant of God for his Master's sake. 2. How free he was to give him entertainment. The Levite was himself provided with all necessities, (v. 19.) wanted nothing but a lodging, but his generous host would be himself at the charge of his entertainment, (v. 20.) *Let all thy wants be upon me*; so he brought him into his house, v. 21. Thus God will, some way or other, raise up friends for his people and ministers, even when they seem forlorn.

22. Now, as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him. 23. And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. 24. Behold, here is my daughter, a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so

vile a thing. 25. But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go. 26. Then came the woman, in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light. 27. And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. 28. And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going: but none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place. 29. And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel. 30. And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

Here is,

1. The great wickedness of the men of Gibeah. One could not imagine that ever it should enter into the heart of men that had the use of human reason, of Israelites that had the benefit of divine revelation, to be so very wicked. "Lord, what is man!" said David, "what a mean creature is he!" "Lord, what is man," may we say, upon the reading of this story, "what a vile creature is he, when he is given up to his own heart's lusts!" 1. The sinners are here called the sons of Belial, that is ungovernable men, men that would endure no yoke. Children of the Devil, for he is Belial, resembling him, and joining with him in rebellion against God and his government. Sons of Benjamin, of whom Moses had said, *The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him*, (Deut. 33. 12.) are become such sons of Belial, that an honest man cannot lodge in safety among them. 2. The sufferers were a Levite and his wife, and that kind man that gave them entertainment. We are strangers upon earth, and must expect strange usage. It is said they were making their hearts merry when this trouble came upon them, v. 22. If the mirth was innocent, it teaches us of what uncertain continuance all our creature-comforts and enjoyments are; when we are ever so well pleased with our friends, we know not how near our enemies are; nor, if it be well with us this hour, can we be sure it will be so the next. If the mirth was sinful and excessive, let it be a warning to us to keep a strict guard upon ourselves, that we grow not intemperate in the use of lawful things, nor be transported into indecencies by our cheerfulness, for the end of that mirth is heaviness. God can soon change the note of those that are making their hearts merry, and turn their laughter into mourning, and their joy into heaviness.

Let us see what the wickedness of these Benjamites was.

(1.) They made a rude and insolent assault, in the night, upon the habitation of an honest man, that not only lived peaceably among them, but kept a good house, and was a blessing and ornament to their city. They beset the house round, and, to the great terror of those within, beat as hard as they could at the door, *v.* 22. A man's house is his castle, in which he ought to be both safe and quiet, and where there is law, it is taken under the special protection of it; but there was no king in Israel to keep the peace, and secure honest men from the sons of violence.

(2.) They had a particular spite at the strangers that were within their gates, that only desired a night's lodging among them, contrary to the laws of hospitality, which all civilized nations have accounted sacred, and which the master of the house pleaded with them; (*v.* 23.) *Seeing that this man is come into my house.* They are base and abject spirits indeed, that will trample upon the helpless, and use a man the worse for his being a stranger, whom they know no ill of.

(3.) They designed, in the most filthy and abominable manner, (not to be thought of without horror and detestation,) to abuse the Levite, whom perhaps they had observed to be young and comely. *Bring him forth, that we may know him.* We should certainly have concluded they meant only to inquire whence he came, and to know his character, but that the good man of the house, who understood their meaning too well, by his answer lets us know that they designed the gratification of that most unnatural and worse than brutish lust, which was expressly forbidden by the law of Moses, and called an *abomination*, *Lev.* 18. 22. They that are guilty of it are ranked in the New Testament among the worst and vilest of sinners, (1 Tim. 1. 10.) and such as *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. 6. 9. Now, [1.] This was the sin of Sodom, and from thence is called *Sodomy*. The dead Sea, which was the standing monument of God's vengeance upon Sodom for its filthiness, was one of the boundaries of Canaan, and lay not many miles off from Gibeah; we may suppose the men of Gibeah had seen it many a time, and yet would not take warning by it, but did worse than Sodom, (*Ezek.* 16. 48.) and sinned just *after the similitude of their transgression*. Who would have expected (says Bishop Hall) such extreme abomination to come out of the loins of Jacob? Even the worst pagans were saints to them. What did it avail them that they had the ark of God in Shiloh, when they had Sodom in their streets; God's law in their fingers, but the Devil in their hearts? Nothing but hell itself can yield a worse creature than a depraved Israelite. (2.) This was the punishment of their idolatry, that sin to which they were, above all other, most addicted. Because they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, therefore he *gave them up to these vile affections*, by which they dishonoured themselves, as they had by their idolatry dishonoured him, and turned his glory into shame, *Rom.* 1. 24. 28. See and admire, in this instance, the patience of God; why were not these sons of Belial struck blind, as the Sodomites were? Why were not fire and brimstone rained from heaven upon their city? It was because God would leave it to Israel to punish them by the sword, and would reserve his own punishment of them for the future state, in which those that *go after strange flesh*, shall *suffer the vengeance of eternal fire*, *Jude* 7.

(4.) They were deaf to the reproofs and reasonings of the good man of the house, who, being well-acquainted (we may suppose) with the story of Lot and the Sodomites, seeing the men of this city imitate the Sodomites, set himself to imitate Lot, *v.* 23.

24. Compare *Gen.* 19. 6, 8. He went out to them as Lot did, spoke civilly to them, and called them *brethren*, begged of them to desist, pleaded the protection of his house which his guests were under, and represented to them the great wickedness of their attempt; "Do not so wickedly, so very wickedly," he calls it *folly* and a *vile thing*. But in one thing he conformed too far to Lot's example, (as we are apt, in imitating good men, to follow them, even in their false steps,) in offering them his daughter to do what they would with. He had not power thus to prostitute his daughter, nor ought he to have done this evil that good might come. But this wicked proposal of his, may be in part excused, from the great surprise and terror he was in, his concern for his guests, and his having too close a regard to what Lot did in the like case, especially not finding that the angels who were by, reproved him for it. And perhaps he hoped that his mentioning of this as a more natural gratification of their lust, would have sent them back to their common harlots. But *they would not hearken to him*, *v.* 25. Headstrong lusts are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, they sear the conscience and make it insensible.

(5.) They got the Levite's wife among them, and abused her to death, *v.* 25. They slighted the old man's offer of his daughter to their lust, either because she was not handsome, or because they knew her to be one of great gravity and modesty; but when the Levite brought them his concubine, they took her with them by force to the place appointed for their filthiness. Josephus, in his narrative of this story, makes her to be the person they had a design upon when they beset the house, and says nothing of their villainous design upon the Levite himself. They saw her (he says) in the street, when they came into the town, and were smitten with her beauty; and perhaps, though she was reconciled to her husband, her looks did not speak her to be one of the most modest; many bring mischief of this kind upon themselves by their loose carriage and behaviour; a little spark may kindle a great fire. One would think the Levite should have followed them, to see what became of his wife, but it is probable he durst not, lest they should do him a mischief. In the miserable end of this woman, we may see the righteous hand of God, punishing her for her former uncleanness, when she played the whore against her husband, *v.* 12. Though her father had countenanced her, and her husband had forgiven her, and the fault was forgotten now that the quarrel was made up, yet God remembered it against her, when he suffered these wicked men thus wretchedly to abuse her: in doing which, how unrighteous soever they were, in permitting it the Lord was righteous. Her punishment answered her sin. *Culpa libido fuit, poena libido fuit—Lust was her sin, and lust was her punishment.* By the law of Moses, she was to have been put to death for her adultery; she escaped that punishment from men, yet vengeance pursued her; for if there was no king in Israel, yet there was a God in Israel, a God that judgeth in the earth. We must not think it enough to make our peace with men, whom by our sins we have wronged, but are concerned, by repentance and faith, to make our peace with God, who sees not as men see, nor makes so light of sin as men often do. The justice of God in this matter, does not at all extenuate the horrid wickedness of those men of Gibeah, than which nothing could be more barbarous and inhuman.

II. The notice that was sent of this wickedness to all the tribes of Israel. The poor abused woman made towards her husband's lodgings, as soon as ever the approach of the day-light obliged the sons

of Belial to let her go, (for those works of darkness hate and dread the light,) v. 25. Down she fell at the door, with her hands on the threshold, begging pardon (as it were) for her former transgression, and in the posture of a penitent, with her mouth in the dust, she expired; there he found her, (v. 26, 27.) supposed her asleep, or overcome with shame and confusion for what had happened, but soon perceived she was dead; (v. 28.) took up her dead body, which we may suppose, had all over it marks of the hands, the blows, and other abuses, she had received. On this sad occasion, he waved his purpose of going to Shiloh, and went directly home; he that went out in hopes to return rejoicing, came in again melancholy and disconsolate, sat down and considered, "Is this an injury fit to be passed by?" He cannot call for fire from heaven to consume the men of Gibeah, as those angels did who were, after the same manner, insulted by the Sodomites. There was no king in Israel, nor (for aught that appears) any Sanhedrim, or great council, to appeal to, and demand justice from; Phinehas is High Priest, but he attends closely to the business of the sanctuary, and will be no judge or divider; he has therefore no other way left him, than to appeal to the people: let the community be judge; though they had no general stated assembly of all the tribes, yet it is probable that each tribe had a meeting of their chiefs within itself; to each of the tribes, in their respective meetings, he sent by special messengers a remonstrance of the wrong that was done him, in all its aggravating circumstances, and with it a piece of his wife's dead body, (v. 29.) both to confirm the truth of the story, and to affect them the more with it. He divided it into twelve pieces, *according to the bones*, so some read it, that is by the joints, sending one to each tribe, even to Benjamin among the rest, with the hope that some among them would have been moved to join in punishing so great a villany, and the more warmly, because committed by some of their own tribe. It did indeed look very barbarous, thus to mangle a dead body, which, having been so wretchedly dishonoured, ought to have been decently interred; but the Levite designed hereby, 1. To represent their barbarous usage of his wife, whom they had better have cut in pieces thus, than have used as they did. 2. To express his own passionate concern, and thereby to excite the like in them.

And it had the desired effect. All that saw the pieces of the dead body, and were told how the matter was, expressed the same sentiments upon it. (1.) That the men of Gibeah had been guilty of a very heinous piece of wickedness, the like to which had never before been known in Israel, v. 30. It was a complicated crime, loaded and blackened with all possible aggravations. They were not such fools as to make a mock at this sin, or turn the story off with a jest. (2.) That a general assembly of all Israel should be called, to debate what was fit to be done for the punishment of this wickedness, that a stop might be put to this threatening inundation of debauchery, and the wrath of God might not be poured upon the whole nation for it. It is not a common case, and therefore they stir up one another to come together upon the occasion, with this, *Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds*. We have here the three great rules by which they that sit in council ought to go in every arduous affair. (1.) Let every man retire into himself, and weigh the matter impartially and fully in his own thoughts, and seriously and calmly consider it, without prejudice on either side, before he speaks of it. (2.) Let them freely talk it over, and every man take advice of his friend, know his opinion, with his reasons, and weigh them. (3.) Then let every man speak his mind, and give his

vote according to his conscience. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety.

CHAP. XX.

Into the book of the wars of the Lord the story of this chapter must be brought, but it looks as sad and uncomfortable as any article in all that history; for there is nothing in it that looks bright and pleasant, but the pious zeal of Israel against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, which made it on their side a just and holy war; but otherwise the obstinacy of the Benjamites in protecting their criminals, which was the foundation of the war, the vast loss which the Israelites sustained in carrying on the war, and (though the righteous cause was victorious at last, yet) the issuing of the war, in the almost utter extirpation of the tribe of Benjamin, make it, from first to last, melancholy. And yet this happened soon after the glorious settlement of Israel in the land of promise, upon which, one would have expected every thing to be prosperous and serene. In this chapter we have, I. The Levite's cause heard in a general convention of the tribes, v. 1. . . 7. II. A unanimous resolve to avenge his quarrel upon the men of Gibeah, v. 8. . . 11. III. The Benjamites appearing in defence of the criminals, v. 12. . . 17. IV. The defeat of Israel in the first and second day's battle, v. 18. . . 25. V. Their humbling of themselves before God upon that occasion, v. 26. . . 28. VI. The total rout they gave the Benjamites in the third engagement, by a stratagem, by which they were all cut off, except six hundred men, v. 29. . . 48. And all this, the effect of the indignities done to one poor Levite and his wife; so little do they that do iniquity, consider what will be the end thereof.

1. **T**HEN all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the Lord in Mizpeh. 2. And the chief of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword. 3. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us how was this wickedness? 4. And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that *belongeth* to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge: 5. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me; and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. 6. And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel. 7. Behold, ye *are* all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel. 8. And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house: 9. But now, this *shall* be the thing which we will do to Gibeah, we will go up by lot against it: 10. And we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten

thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel. 11. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

Here is,

I. A general meeting of all the congregation of Israel, to examine the matter concerning the Levite's concubine, and to consider what was to be done upon it, *v.* 1, 2. It does not appear that they were summoned by the authority of any one common head, but they came together by the consent and agreement, as it were, of one common heart, fired with a holy zeal for the honour of God and Israel. 1. The place of their meeting was *Mizpeh*, they gathered together unto the Lord there; for Mizpeh was so very near to Shiloh, that their encampment might very well be supposed to reach from Mizpeh to Shiloh. Shiloh was a small town, and therefore, when there was a general meeting of the people to present themselves before God, they choose Mizpeh for their head-quarters, which was the next adjoining city of note; perhaps, because they were not willing to give that trouble to Shiloh, which so great an assembly would occasion; it being the residence of the priests that attended the tabernacle. 2. The persons that met, were all Israel, from Dan, (the city very lately so called, *ch.* 18. 29.) in the north, to Beer-sheba, in the south, with the land of Gilead, that is, the tribes on the other side Jordan, all *as one man*; so unanimous were they in their concern for the public good. Here was an assembly of the people of God; not a convocation of the Levites and priests, though a Levite was the person principally concerned in the cause, but an assembly of the people, to whom the Levite referred himself with an *Aff-hello populum—I appeal to the people; the people of God were four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword*, that is, were armed and disciplined, and fit for service; and some of them, perhaps, such as had *known the wars of Canaan*, *ch.* 3. 1. In this assembly of all Israel, the chief (or corners) of the people (for rulers are the corner-stones of the people that keep all together) presented themselves as the representatives of the rest; they rendered themselves at their respective posts, at the head of the thousands and hundreds; the fifties and tens, over which they presided; for so much order and government, we may suppose at least, they had among them, though they had no general or commander in chief. So that here was, (1.) A general congress of the states for counsel; the chief of the people presented themselves to lead and direct in this affair. (2.) A general rendezvous of the militia for action, all that drew sword and were men of war, *v.* 17. not hirelings or pressed men, but the best freeholders that went at their own charge. Israel was above six hundred thousand when they came into Canaan, and we have reason to think they were, at this time, much increased, rather than diminished: but then all between twenty and sixty were military men; now we may suppose more than the one half exempted from bearing arms, to husband the land; so that these were as the trained bands. The militia of the two tribes and a half were forty thousand, *Josh.* 4. 13. but the tribes were many more.

II. Notice given to the tribe of Benjamin of this meeting, *v.* 3. *They heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh*; probably they had a legal summons sent them to appear with their brethren, that the cause might be fairly debated,

before any resolutions were taken up upon it, and so the mischiefs that followed, would have been happily prevented; but the notice they had of this meeting, rather hardened and exasperated them, than awakened them to think of things that belonged to their peace and honour.

III. A solemn examination of the crime charged upon the men of Gibeah. A very horrid representation of it had been made by the report of the messengers that were sent to call them together, but it was fit it should be more closely inquired into, because such things are often made worse than really they were; a committee therefore was appointed to examine the witnesses, (upon oath, no doubt,) and to report the matter. It is only the testimony of the Levite himself, that is here recorded, but it is probable his servant and the old man were examined, and gave in their testimony, for that more than one were examined, appears by the original, (*v.* 3.) which is, *Tell ye us*; and the law was, that none should be put to death, much less many, upon the testimony of one witness only. The Levite gives a particular account of the matter. That he came into Gibeah only as a traveller, to lodge there, not exciting the least suspicion that he designed them any ill turn, *v.* 4. That the men of Gibeah, even those that were of substance among them, that should have been a protection to the stranger within their gates, riotously set upon the house where he lodged, and *thought to have slain him*; he could not, for shame, relate the demand which they, without shame, made, *ch.* 19. 22. They declared their sin as Sodom, even the sin of Sodom, but his modesty would not suffer him to repeat it, it was sufficient to say they would have slain him, for he would rather have been slain than have submitted to their villany; and if they had got him into their hands, they would have abused him to death; witness what they had done to his concubine, they have *forced her, that she is dead*, *v.* 5. And to excite in his countrymen an indignation at this wickedness, he had sent pieces of the mangled body to all the tribes which had fetched them together to bear their testimony against the *lewdness and folly committed in Israel*, *v.* 6. All lewdness is folly, but especially lewdness in Israel; for them to defile their own bodies, who have the honourable seal of the covenant in their flesh; for them to defy the divine vengeance, to whom it is so clearly revealed from heaven—Nabal is their name, and folly is with them. He concludes his declaration with an appeal to the judgment of the court, *v.* 7, *Ye are all children of Israel*, and therefore *ye know law and judgment*; (*Esth.* 1. 13.) “Ye are a holy people to God, and have a dread of every thing which will dishonour God, and defile the land; ye are of the same community; members of the same body, and therefore likely to feel from the distempers of it; ye are the children of Israel, that ought to take particular care of the Levites, God's tribe among you, and therefore give here your advice and counsel, what is to be done.”

IV. The resolution they came to hereupon, which was, that, being now together, they would not disperse till they had seen vengeance taken upon this wicked city, which was the reproach and scandal of their nation. Observe, 1. Their zeal against the lewdness that was committed. They would not return to their houses, how much soever their families and their affairs at home wanted them, till they had vindicated the honour of God and Israel, and recovered with their swords, if it could not be had otherwise, that satisfaction for the crime, which the justice of the nation called for, *v.* 8. By this they showed themselves children of Israel indeed, that they preferred the public interest before

their private concerns. 2. Their prudence in sending out a considerable body of their forces to fetch provisions for the rest, *v.* 9, 10. One of ten, and he chosen by lot, forty thousand in all, must go to their respective countries, whence they came, to fetch bread and other necessities for the subsistence of this great army; for when they came from home, they took with them provisions only for a journey to Mizpeh, not for an encampment (which might prove long) before Gibeah. This was to prevent their scattering to forage for themselves, which, if they had done, it would have been hard to get them all together again, especially all in so good a mind. Note, When there appears in people a pious zeal for any good work, it is best to strike while the iron is hot, for such zeal is apt to cool quickly, if the prosecution of it be delayed. Let it never be said that we left that good work to be done to-morrow, which we could as well have done to-day. 3. Their unanimity in these counsels, and the execution of them. The resolution was voted, *Nemine contradicente—Without a dissenting voice*, (*v.* 8.) it was one and all; and, when it was put in execution, they were *knit together as one man*, *v.* 11. This was their glory and strength that the several tribes had no separate interests when the common good was concerned.

12. And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? 13. Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel: 14. But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel. 15. And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time, out of the cities, twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men. 16. Among all this people *there were* seven hundred chosen men left-handed; every one could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not miss. 17. And the men of Israel, besides Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these *were* men of war.

Here is,

I. The fair and just demand which the tribes of Israel, now encamped, sent to the tribe of Benjamin, to deliver up the malefactors of Gibeah to justice, *v.* 12, 13. If the tribe of Benjamin had come up, as they ought to have done, to the assembly, and agreed with them in their resolutions, they had had none to deal with but the men of Gibeah only, but they, by their absence, taking part with the criminals, application must be made to them all; the Israelites were zealous against the wickedness that was committed, yet they were discreet in their zeal, and did not think it would justify them in falling upon the whole tribe of Benjamin, unless they, by refusing to give up the criminals, and protecting them against justice, should make themselves guilty, *ex post facto—as accessories after the*

fact. They desire them to consider how great the wickedness was, that was committed, *v.* 12. and that it was done among them; and how necessary it was therefore that they should either punish the malefactors with death themselves, according to the law of Moses, or deliver them up to this general assembly, to be so much the more publicly and solemnly punished, that evil might be put away from Israel, the national guilt removed, the infection stopped by cutting off the gangrened part, and national judgments prevented; for the sin was so very like that of the Sodomites, that they might justly fear, if they did not punish it, God would rain hail from heaven upon them, as he did, not only upon Sodom, but the neighbouring cities. If the Israelites had not made this reasonable demand, they would have had much more reason to lament the following desolations of Benjamin. All methods of accommodation must be used before we go to war, or go to law. The demand was like that of Joab's to Abel, 2 Sam. 20. 20, 21. "Only deliver up the traitor, and we will lay down our arms." On these terms, and no other, God will be at peace with us, that we may part with our sins, that we mortify and crucify our lusts, and then all shall be well; his anger will be turned away.

II. The wretched obstinacy and perverseness of the men of Benjamin, who seem to have been as unanimous and zealous in their resolutions to stand by the criminals, as the rest of the tribes were to punish them; so little sense had they of their honour, duty, and interest.

They were so prodigiously vile, as to patronise the wickedness that was committed. *They would not hearken to the voice of their brethren*, *v.* 13. Either because they of that tribe were generally more vicious and debauched at this time than the rest of the tribes, and therefore would not bear to have that punished in others, which they knew themselves guilty of. Some of the most fruitful and pleasant parts of Canaan fell to the lot of this tribe; their land, like that of Sodom, was *as the garden of the Lord*, which, perhaps, helped to make the inhabitants, like the men of Sodom, wicked, and *sinners before the Lord exceedingly*, Gen. 13. 10, 13. Or, because (as Bishop Patrick suggests) they took it ill that the other tribes should meddle with the concerns of their's; they would not do that which they knew was their duty, because they were reminded of it by their brethren, by whom they scorned to be taught and controlled. If there were any wise men among them that would have complied with the demand made, yet they were overpowered by the majority, who thus made the crime of the men of Gibeah their own. Thus we have *fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*, if we say *A confederacy* with those that have, and make ourselves guilty of other men's sins, by countenancing and defending them. It seems there is no cause so bad but it will find some patrons, some advocates, to appear for it; but *woe be to those by whom such offences come*. Those will have a great deal to answer for, that obstruct the course of necessary justice, and strengthen the hands of the wicked, by saying, *O wicked man, thou shalt not die*.

2. They were so prodigiously vain and presumptuous, as to make head against the united force of all Israel. Never, surely, were men so wretchedly infatuated as they were, when they took up arms in opposition (1.) to so good a cause as Israel had. How could they expect to prosper when they fought against justice, and consequently against the just God himself, against them that had the High Priest and the divine oracle on their side, and so acted in downright rebellion against the sacred and supreme

authority of the nation? (2.) To so great a force as Israel had. This disproportion of their numbers was much greater than that, Luke 14. 31, 32. where he that had but ten thousand, durst not meet him that came against him with twenty thousand, and therefore desired conditions of peace. There the enemy was but two to one, here above fifteen to one; yet they despised conditions of peace. All the forces they could bring into the field, were but twenty-six thousand men, beside seven hundred men of Gibeah; (v. 15.) yet with these they will dare to face four hundred thousand men of Israel, v. 17. Thus sinners are infatuated to their own ruin, and provoke him to jealousy, who is so infinitely stronger than they, 1 Cor. 10. 22. But it should seem they depended upon the skill of their men, to make up what was wanting in numbers, especially a regiment of slingers, seven hundred men, who, though left-handed, were so dexterous at slinging stones, that they would not be a hair's breadth beside their mark, v. 16. But these good marksmen were very much out of their aim, when they espoused this bad cause. *Benjamin signifies the son of the right hand*, yet we find his posterity left-handed.

18. And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, *Judah shall go up first.* 19. And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 20. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. 21. And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground, of the Israelites that day, twenty and two thousand men. 22. And the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array, in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. 23. (And the children of Israel went up, and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.) 24. And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. 25. And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground, of the children of Israel again, eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

We have here the defeat of the men of Israel in their first and second battle with the Benjamites.

I. Before their first engagement, they ask counsel of God concerning the order of their battle, and were directed, and yet they were sorely beaten. They did not think it was proper to ask of God, whether they should go up at all against Benjamin, (the case was plain enough, the men of Gibeah must be punished for their wickedness, and they must do it, or it would not be done,) but "Who shall go first?" (v. 18.) that is, "Who shall be general of our ar-

my?" For, whichsoever tribe was appointed to go first, the prince of that tribe must be looked upon as commander in chief of the whole body; for if they had meant it of the order of their march only, it had been proper to have asked, "Who shall go next?" and then, "Who next?" But if they know that Judah must go first, they know they must all observe the orders of the prince of that tribe. This honour was done to Judah because our Lord Jesus was to spring from that tribe, who was in all things to have the pre-eminence. The tribe that went up first had the most honourable post, but withal the most dangerous, and, probably, lost most in the engagement. Who would strive for precedence that sees the peril of it?

Yet though Judah, that strong and valiant tribe, goes up first, and all the tribes of Israel attend them, *little Benjamin* (so he is called, Ps. 68. 27.) is too hard for them all. The whole army lay siege to Gibeah, v. 19. The Benjamites advance to raise the siege, and the army prepares to give them a warm reception, v. 20. But between the Benjamites that attacked them in the front with incredible fury, and the men of Gibeah that sallied out upon their rear, they were put into confusion, and lost twenty-two thousand men, v. 21. Here was no prisoners taken, for there was no quarter given, but all put to the sword.

II. Before the second engagement, they again *asked counsel of God*, and more solemnly than before, for they *wept before the Lord until even*, (v. 23.) lamenting the loss of so many brave men, especially as it was a token of God's displeasure, and would give occasion to the Benjamites to triumph in the success of their wickedness. Also at this time they did not ask, Who should go up first; but, Whether they should go up at all. They intimate a reason, why they should scruple it, especially now that Providence had frowned upon them, because Benjamin was their brother; and a readiness to lay down their arms, if God should so order them. God bid them go up, he allowed the attempt; though Benjamin was their brother, he was a gangrened member of their body, and must be cut off. Upon this, they encouraged themselves, perhaps more in their own strength than in the divine commission, and made a second attempt upon the forces of the rebels, in the same place where the former battle was fought, (v. 22.) with the hope of retrieving their credit upon the same spot of ground where they had lost it, which they would not superstitiously change, as if there were any thing unlucky in the place; but they were, this second time, repulsed, with the loss of eighteen thousand men, v. 25. The former day's loss, and this, amounted to forty thousand, which was just a tenth part of the whole army, and the same number that they had drawn out by lot to fetch victuals, v. 10. They decimated themselves for that service, and now God again decimated them for the slaughter.

But what shall we say to these things, that so just and honourable a cause should thus be put to the worst once and again? Were they not fighting God's battles against sin? Had they not his commission? What, and yet miscarry thus! 1. God's judgments are a great deep, and his way is in the sea. *Clouds and darkness are often round about him, but judgment and justice are always the habitation of his throne.* We may be sure of the righteousness, when we cannot see the reasons, of God's proceedings. 2. God would hereby show them, and us in them, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, that numbers are not to be confided in, which perhaps the Israelites did with too much assurance. We must never lay that weight on an arm of flesh, which the Rock of ages only will bear. 3. God designed hereby to correct

Israel for their sins. They did well to show such a zeal against the wickedness of Gibeah; but *were there not with them, even with them, sins against the Lord their God?* Those must be made to know their own iniquity, that are forward in condemning the iniquity of others. Some think it was a rebuke to them, for not witnessing against the idolatry of Micah and the Danites, by which their religion was corrupted, as they now did against the lewdness of Gibeah and the Benjamites, by which the public peace was disturbed, though God had particularly ordered them to levy war upon idolaters, Deut. 13. 12, &c. 4. God would hereby teach us, not to think it strange, if a good cause suffer worst for a while, nor to judge of the merits of it by the success of it. The interest of grace in the heart, and of religion in the world, may be foiled, and suffer great loss, and seem to be quite run down, but judgment will be brought forth to victory at last. *Vincimur in prælio, sed non in bello—We are foiled in a battle, but not in the whole campaign.* Right may fall, but it shall arise.

26. Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the LORD. 27. And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days; 28. And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to-morrow I will deliver them into thine hand. 29. And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah. 30. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31. And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city; and began to smite of the people *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32. And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways. 33. And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar; and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah. 34. And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil *was* near them. 35. And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day

twenty and five thousand and a hundred men: all these drew the sword. 36. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah. 37. And the liers in wait hastened, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. 38. Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city. 39. And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons; for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle. 40. But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven. 41. And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them. 42. Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them: and them which *came* out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. 43. *Thus* they inclosed the Benjamites round about, *and* chased them, *and* trode them down with ease, over against Gibeah toward the sun-rising. 44. And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men: all these *were* men of valour. 45. And they turned, and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them. 46. So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword: all these *were* men of valour. 47. But six hundred men turned, and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. 48. And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

We have here a full account of the complete victory which the Israelites obtained over the Benjamites in the third engagement: the righteous cause was victorious at last, when the managers of it amended what had been amiss; for when a good cause suffers, it is for want of good management.

Observe then how the victory was obtained, and how it was pursued.

I. How the victory was obtained. Two things they had trusted too much to in the former engagements, the goodness of their cause, and the superiority of their numbers; it was true, that they had both right and strength on their side, which were great advantages. But they depended too much upon them, to the neglect of those duties, which now, this third time, when they see their error, they apply themselves to.

1. They were, previously, so confident of the goodness of their cause, that they thought it needless to address themselves to God for his presence and blessing; they took that for granted, nay, perhaps they concluded that he owed them his favour, and could not in justice withhold it, since it was in defence of virtue that they appeared, and took up arms. But God having showed them that he was under no obligation to prosper their enterprise, that he neither needed them nor was tied to them, that they were more indebted to him for the honour of being ministers of his justice, than he to them for the service, now they became humble petitioners for success. Before, they only consulted God's oracle, *Who shall go up first? And, Shall we go up?* But now they implored his favour, fisted and prayed, and offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, v. 26. to make an atonement for sin, and an acknowledgment of their dependence upon God, as an expression of their desire toward him. We cannot expect the presence of God with us, unless we thus seek it in the way he has appointed. And when they were in this frame, and thus sought the Lord, that he not only ordered them to go up against the Benjamites the third time, but gave them a promise of victory, *To-morrow I will deliver them into thine hand, v. 28.*

2. They were, previously, so confident of the greatness of their strength, that they thought it needless to use any art, to lay any ambush, or form a stratagem, not doubting but to conquer them purely by a strong hand; but now they saw it was requisite to use some policy, as if they had an enemy to deal with them, that had been superior in number; accordingly they set *liers in wait, v. 29.* and gained their point, as their fathers did before Ai; Josh. 8. stratagems of that kind being most likely to take effect after a previous defeat, which has flushed the enemy, and made the pretended flight the less suspected. The management of this artifice is here very largely described. The assurance God had given them of success in this day's action, instead of making them remiss and presumptuous, set all heads and hands on work for the effecting of what God had promised. Observe the method they took; the body of the army faced the city of Gibeah, as they had done before, advancing toward the gates, v. 30. The Benjamites, the body of whose army was now quartered at Gibeah, sallied out upon them, charged them with great bravery; the besiegers gave back, retired with precipitation, as if their hearts failed them upon the sight of the Benjamites, which they were willing to believe, who proudly conceived that by their former success they had made themselves very formidable; some loss the Israelites sustained in this counterfeit flight, about thirty men were cut off in their rear, v. 31. 39. But when the Benjamites were all drawn out of the city, the ambush seized the city, v. 37. gave a signal to the body of the army, v. 38. 40. which immediately turned upon them, v. 41. and, it should seem, another considerable party that was posted at Baal-tamar came upon them at the same time; v. 33. so that the Benjamites were quite surrounded, which put them into the greatest consternation that could be: a sense of guilt now disheartened

them, and the higher their hopes had been raised, the more grievous was this confusion. At first, *the battle was sore, v. 34.* the Benjamites fought with fury, but when they saw what a snare they were drawn into, they thought one pair of heels (as we say) was worth two pair of hands, and they made the best of their way *toward the wilderness, v. 42.* but in vain, *the battle overtook them, and, to complete their distress, they which came out of the cities of Israel, that waited to see the event of the battle, joined with the pursuers and helped to cut them off.* Every man's hand was against them.

Observe, in this story, 1. That the Benjamites, in the beginning of the battle, were confident that the day was their own. *They are smitten down before us, v. 32. 39.* Sometimes God suffers wicked men to be lifted up in successes and hopes, that their fall may be the sorer. See how short their joy is, and their triumphing but for a moment. *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast, except he has reason to boast in God.* 2. Evil was near them, and they did not know it; v. 34. but v. 41. they saw, when it was too late to prevent it, *that evil was come upon them.* What evils may at any time be near us, we cannot tell, but the less they are feared, the heavier they fall; sinners will not be persuaded to see evil near them, but how dreadful will it be when it comes, and there is no escaping! 1 Thess. 5. 3. (3.) Though the men of Israel played their parts so well in this engagement, yet the victory is ascribed to God; v. 35, *The Lord smote Benjamin before Israel.* The battle was his, and so was the success. 4. They *trode down the men of Benjamin with ease,* when God fought against them, v. 43. It is an easy thing to trample upon those who have made God their enemy. See Mal. 4. 3.

II. How the victory was prosecuted and improved in a military execution done upon these sinners against their own souls. 1. Gibeah itself was destroyed in the first place, that nest of lewdness. The ambush that entered the city by surprise, *drew themselves along,* that is, dispersed themselves into several parts of it, which they might easily do, now that all the men of war were sallied out, and had very presumptuously left it defenceless, and they smote all they found, even women and children, *with the sword, v. 37.* and set fire to the city, v. 40. Sin brings ruin upon cities. 2. The army in the field was quite routed and cut off, eighteen thousand men of valour lay dead upon the spot, v. 44. 3. Those that escaped from the field were pursued, and cut off in their flight, to the number of seven thousand, v. 45. It is to no purpose to think of out-running divine vengeance. *Evil pursues sinners,* and it will overtake them. 4. Even they that tarried at home, were involved in their ruin. They *let their sword devour for ever,* not considering that it would be *bitterness in the latter end,* as Abner pleads long after, when he was at the head of an army of Benjamites, probably with an eye to this very story, 2 Sam. 2. 25, 26. They put to the sword all that breathed, and set fire to *all the cities, v. 48.* So that of all the tribe of Benjamin, for aught that appears, there remained none alive but six hundred men that took shelter in the rock Rimmon, and lay close there four months, v. 47. Now, 1. It is hard to justify this severity, as it was Israel's act. The whole tribe of Benjamin was culpable; but must they therefore be used as devoted Canaanites? That it was done in the heat of war—That this was the way of prosecuting victories which the sword of Israel had been accustomed to—That the Israelites were extremely exasperated against the Benjamites for the slaughter they had made among them in the two former engagements—will go but a little way to excuse the cruelty of this execution. It is true, they had sworn that who-

soever did not come up to Mizpeh, should be put to death: *ch.* 21. 5. but that, if it was a justifiable oath, yet extended only to the men of war, the rest were not expected to come. Yet, (2.) It is easy to justify the hand of God in it; Benjamin had sinned against him, and God had threatened, that if they forgot him, they should *perish as the nations* that were before them perished, *Deut.* 8. 20. who were all in this manner cut off. It is easy likewise to improve it for warning against the beginnings of sin, they are *like the letting forth of water, therefore leave it off before it be meddled with*, for we know not *what will be in the end thereof*. The eternal ruin of souls will be worse, and more fearful, than all these desolations of a tribe. This affair of Gibeah is twice spoken of by the prophet Hosea, as the beginning of the corruption of Israel, and a pattern to all that followed, *ch.* 9. 9. *They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days in Gibeah*, and *ch.* 10. 9. *Thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah*, and it is added, that *the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not* that is, did not at *first, overtake them*.

CHAP. XXI.

The ruins of the tribe of Benjamin we read of in the foregoing chapter; now here we have, I. The lamentation which Israel made over these ruins, *v.* 1. . 4. 6, 15. II. The provision they made for the repair of them out of the six hundred men that escaped, for whom they procured wives, 1. Of the virgins of Jabesh-Gilead, when they destroyed that city for not sending to the general rendezvous, *v.* 5, 7. 14. 2. Of the daughters of Shiloh, *v.* 16. . 25. And so this melancholy story concludes.

1. **N**OW the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife. 2. And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; 3. And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel? 4. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. 5. And the children of Israel said, Who *is there* among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death. 6. And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. 7. How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD, that we will not give them of our daughters to wives? 8. And they said, What one *is there* of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. 9. For the people were numbered, and, behold, *there were* none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there 10. And the congregation sent

thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. 11. And this *is* the thing that ye shall do, ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. 12. And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan. 13. And the whole congregation sent *some* to speak to the children of Benjamin that *were* in the rock Rimmon. and to call peaceably unto them. 14. And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not. 15. And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

We may observe, in these verses,

I. The ardent zeal which the Israelites *had* expressed against the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, as it was countenanced by the tribe of Benjamin. Occasion is here given to mention two instances of their zeal on this occasion, which we did not meet with before.

1 While the general convention of the states was gathering together, and was waiting for a full house before they would proceed, they bound themselves with the great execration, which they called the *Cherum*, utterly to destroy all those cities that should not send in their representatives and their quota of men upon this occasion; or, had sentenced them to that curse, who should thus refuse; (*v.* 5.) for they would look upon such refusers, as having no indignation at the crime committed, no concern for the securing of the nation from God's judgments by the administration of justice, nor any regard to the authority of a common consent, by which they were summoned to meet.

2. When they were met, and had heard the cause, they made another solemn oath, that none of all the thousands of Israel, then present, nor any of those whom they represented, (not intending to bind their posterity,) should, if they could help it, *marry a daughter* to a Benjamite, *v.* 1. This was made an article of the war, not with any design to extirpate the tribe, but because in general they would treat them who were then actors and abettors of this villany, in all respects as they treated the devoted nations of Canaan, whom they were not only obliged to destroy, but with whom they were forbidden to marry; and because in particular, they judged them unworthy to match with a daughter of Israel, that had been so very barbarous and abusive to one of the tender sex, than which nothing could be done more base and villanous, nor a more certain indication of a mind perfectly lost to all honour and virtue. We may suppose that the Levite's sending the mangled pieces of his wife's body to the several tribes, helped very much to inspire them with all this fury, and much more than a bare narrative of the fact, though ever so well attested, would have done. So much does the eye affect the heart.

II. The deep concern which the Israelites *did*

express for the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin when it was accomplished. The tide of their anger at Benjamin's crime, did not run so high and so strong before, but the tide of their grief for Benjamin's destruction, ran as high and as strong after. *They repented for Benjamin their brother, v. 6. 15.* They did not repent of their zeal against the sin; there is a holy indignation against sin, the fruit of godly sorrow, which is *to salvation, not to be repented of*, 2 Cor. 7. 10, 11. But they repented of the sad consequences of what they had done, that they had carried the matter further than was either just or necessary; it had been enough to destroy all they found in arms, they needed not to have cut off the husbandmen and shepherds, the women and children. Note, 1. There may be over-doing in well-doing. Great care must be taken in the government of our zeal, lest that which seemed supernatural in its causes, prove unnatural in its effects. That is no good divinity, which swallows up humanity. Many a war is ill ended which was well begun. 2. Even necessary justice is to be done with compassion. God does not punish with delight, nor should men. 3. Strong passions make work for repentance. What we say and do in a heat, our calmer thoughts commonly wish undone again. 4. In a civil war, (according to the usage of the Romans,) no victories ought to be celebrated with triumphs, because, whichever side gets, the community loses, as here *there is a tribute cut off from Israel*. What the better is the body for one member's crushing another?

Now, how did they express their concern?

(1.) By their grief for the breach that was made; they came to the house of God, for thither they brought all their doubts, all their counsels, all their cares, and all their sorrows. There was to be heard on this occasion, not the voice of joy and praise, but only that of lamentation, and mourning, and woe. *They lifted up their voices and wept sore, (v. 2.)* not so much for the forty thousand which they had lost, (those would not be so much missed out of eleven tribes,) but for the entire destruction of one whole tribe; for this was the complaint they poured out before God, (v. 3.) *There is one tribe lacking*. God had taken care of every tribe; their number twelve was that which they were known by; every tribe had his station appointed in the camp, and his stone in the High Priest's breast-plate; every tribe had his blessing, both from Jacob and Moses, and it would be an intolerable reproach to them, if they should drop any out of this illustrious jury, and lose one out of twelve; especially Benjamin, the youngest, who was particularly dear to Jacob their common ancestor, and whom all the rest ought to have been in a particular manner tender of. Benjamin is not; what then will become of Jacob? Benjamin become a Benoni; the son of the right hand, a son of sorrow! In this trouble they built an altar, not in competition, but in communion, with the appointed altar at the door of the tabernacle, which was not large enough to contain all the sacrifices they designed; for they offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, to give thanks for their victory, and also to atone for their own folly in the pursuit of it, and to implore the divine favour in their present strait. Every thing that grieves us, should bring us to God.

(2.) By their amicable treaty with the poor distressed refugees that were hidden in the rock Rimmon, to whom they sent an act of indemnity, assuring them, upon the public faith, that they would now no longer treat them as enemies, but receive them as brethren, v. 13. The falling out of friends should thus be the renewing of friendship. Even those that have sinned, if at length they repent, must be *forgiven and comforted*, 2 Cor. 2. 7.

(3.) By the care they took to provide wives for

them, that their tribe might be built up again, and the ruins of it repaired. Had the men of Israel sought themselves, they would have been secretly pleased with the extinguishing of the families of Benjamin, because then the land allotted to them would escheat to the rest of the tribes, *ob defectum sanguinis—for want of heirs*, and be easily seized for want of occupants; but those have not the spirit of Israelites, who aim to raise themselves upon the ruins of their neighbours. They were so far from any design of this kind, that all heads are at work to find out ways and means for the rebuilding of this tribe. All the women and children of Benjamin were slain; they had sworn not to marry their daughters to any of them; it was against the divine law that they should match with the Canaanites; to oblige them to that, would be, in effect, to bid them *go serve other gods*.

What must they do then for wives for them? While the poor distressed Benjamites that were hidden in the rock feared their brethren were contriving to ruin them, they were at the same time upon a project to prefer them; and it was this;

[1.] There was a piece of necessary justice to be done upon the city of Jabesh-Gilead, which belonged to the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. It was found, upon looking over the muster-roll, (which was taken, *ch. 20. 2.*) that none appeared from that city, upon the general summons, (v. 8, 9.) and it was then resolved, before it appeared who were absent, that whatever city of Israel should be guilty of such a contempt of the public authority and interest, that city should be an anathema; Jabesh-Gilead lies under that severe sentence, which might by no means be dispensed with. They that had spared the Canaanites in many places, who were devoted to destruction by the divine command, could not find in their hearts to spare their brethren that were devoted by their own curse. Why did they not now send men to root the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, to avoid whom the poor Levite had been forced to go to Gibeah? *ch. 19. 11, 12.* Men are commonly more zealous to support their own authority than God's. A detachment is therefore sent of twelve thousand men, to execute the sentence upon Jabesh-Gilead. Having found, that when the whole body of the army went against Gibeah, the people were thought too many for God to deliver them into their hands, on this expedition they sent but a few, v. 10. Their commission is, to put all to the sword, men, women, and children, (v. 11.) according to that law, (Lev. 27. 29.) *Whatsoever is devoted of men*, by those that have power to do it, *shall surely be put to death*.

[2.] An expedient is from hence formed for providing the Benjamites with wives. When Moses sent the same number of men to avenge the Lord of Midian, the same orders were given, as here, that all married women should be slain with their husbands, as one with them, but that the virgins should be saved alive, Numb. 31. 17, 18. That precedent was sufficient to support the distinction here made between a wife and virgin, v. 11, 12. Four hundred virgins that were marriageable, were found in Jabesh-Gilead, and these were married to so many of the surviving Benjamites, v. 14. Their fathers were not present when the vow was made, not to marry with Benjamites, so that they were not under any colour of obligation by it; and besides, being a prey taken in war, they were at the disposal of the conquerors. Perhaps the alliance now contracted between Benjamin and Jabesh-Gilead, made Saul, who was a Benjamite, the more concerned for that place, (1 Sam. 11. 4.) though then inhabited by new families.

16. Then the elders of the congregation

said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin? 17. And they said, *There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.* 18. Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin. 19. Then they said, Behold, *there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly, in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.* 20. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; 21. And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22. And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes; because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, *that ye should be guilty.* 23. And the children of Benjamin did so, and took *them* wives according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them: 24. And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe, and to his family; and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. 25. In those days *there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

We have here the method that was taken to provide the two hundred Benjamites that remained, with wives. And though the tribe was reduced to a small number, they were only in care to provide each man with one wife, not with more, under pretence of multiplying them the faster. They may not bestow their daughters upon them; but to save their oath, and yet marry some of their daughters to them, they put them into a way of taking them by surprise, and marrying them, which should be ratified by their parents' consent, *ex post facto—afterward.* The less consideration is used before the making of a vow, the more, commonly, there is need of after, for the keeping of it.

I. That which gave an opportunity for the doing of this, was, a public ball at Shiloh, in the fields, at which all the young ladies of that city, and the parts adjacent, that were so disposed, met to dance, in honour of a *feast of the Lord* then observed; probably the feast of tabernacles, (v. 19.) for that feast (Bishop Patrick says,) was the only season wherein the Jewish virgins were allowed to dance; and that, not so much for their recreation, as to express their holy joy, as David, when he danced before the ark: otherwise, the present melancholy posture of public

affairs would have made dancing unseasonable, as Isa. 22. 12, 13. The dancing was very modest and chaste, it was not mixed dancing; no men danced with these daughters of Shiloh, nor did any married women so far forget their gravity as to join with them. However, their dancing thus in public, made them an easy prey to those that had a design upon them. Whence, Bishop Hall observes, that *the ambushes of evil spirits carry away many souls from dancing to a fearful desolation.*

II. The elders of Israel gave authority to the Benjamites to do this, to *lie in wait in the vineyards* which surrounded the green they used to dance on, and, when they were in the midst of their sport, to come upon them, and catch every man a wife for himself, and carry them straight away to their own country, v. 20, 21. They knew that none of their own daughters would be there, so that they could not be said to give them, for they knew nothing of the matter. A sorry *salvo* is better than none, to save the breaking of an oath: it were much better to be cautious in making vows, that there be not occasion afterward, as there was here, *to say before the angel, that it was an error.* Here was a very preposterous way of match-making, when both the mutual affection of the young people and the consent of the parents must be presumed to come after; the case was extraordinary, and may by no means be drawn into a precedent. Over-hasty marriages often occasion a leisurely repentance; and what comfort can be expected from a match made either by force or fraud? The virgins of Jabesh-Gilead were taken out of the midst of blood and slaughter, but these of Shiloh out of the midst of mirth and joy; the former had reason to be thankful that they had their lives for a prey, and the latter, it is to be hoped, had no cause to complain, after a while, when they found themselves matched, not to men of broken and desperate fortunes, as they seemed to be, who were lately fetched out of a cave, but to men of the best and largest estates in the nation, as they must needs be, when the lot of the whole tribe of Benjamin, which consisted of forty-five thousand six hundred men, (Numb. 26. 41.) came to be divided again among six hundred, who had all by survivorship.

III. They undertook to pacify the fathers of these young women: as to the infringement of their paternal authority, they would easily forgive it, when they considered to what fair estates their daughters were matched, and what mothers in Israel they were likely to be; but the oath they were bound by, not to give their daughters to Benjamites, might perhaps stick with some of them, whose consciences were tender; yet as to that, this might satisfy them: 1. That the necessity was urgent, (v. 22.) *We reserved not to each man his wife;* now owning that they did ill to destroy all the women, and desiring to atone for their too rigorous construction of their vow to destroy them, by the most favourable construction of their vow not to match with them. "And therefore, for our sakes, who were too severe, let them keep what they have got." For, 2. In strictness it was not a breach of their vow; they had sworn not to give them their daughters, but they had not sworn to fetch them back if they were forcibly taken. So that if there was any fault, the elders must be responsible, not the parents. And *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet—That which ought not to have been done, is yet valid when it is done.* The thing was done, and is ratified only by connivance, according to the law, Numb. 30. 4.

Lastly, In the close of all, we have, 1. The settling of the tribe of Benjamin again. The few that remained, returned to the inheritance of that tribe, v. 23. And soon after from among them sprang Ehud, who was famous in his generation, the second

Judge of Israel, *ch.* 3. 15. 2. The disbanding and dispersing of the army of Israel, *v.* 24. They did not set up for a standing army, nor pretend to make any alterations or establishment in the government; but when the affair was over, for which they were called together, they quietly departed in God's peace, every man to his family. Public services

must not make us think ourselves above our own private affairs, and the duty of providing for our own house. 3. A repetition of the cause of these confusions, *v.* 25. Though God was their King, every man would be his own master, as if there was no king. Blessed be God for magistracy.