EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

MICAH.

We shall have some account of this prophet, in the first verse of the book of his prophecy; and therefore shall here only observe, that being contemporary with the prophet Isaiah, (only that he began to prophesy a little after him,) there is a near resemblance between that prophet's prophecy and this; and there is a prediction of the advancement and establishment of the gospel-church, which both of them have, almost in the same words, that out of the mouth of two such witnesses so great a word might be established. Compare Isa. ii. 2, 3, with Mic. iv. 1, 2. Isaiah's prophecy is said to be concerning Judah and Jerusalem, but Micah's concerning Samaria and Jerusalem; for though his prophecy be dated only by the reigns of the kings of Judah, yet it refers to the kingdom of Israel, the approaching ruin of which, in the captivity of the ten tribes, he plainly foretells and sadly laments. What we find here in writing, was but an abstract of the sermons he preached during the reigns of three kings. The scope of the whole is,

I. To convince sinners of their sins, by setting them in order before them, charging both Israel and Judah with idolatry, covetousness, oppression, contempt of the word of God; and their rulers especially, both in church and state, with the abuse of their power; and also by showing them the judgments of God ready to break in upon them for their sins.

II. To comfort God's people with promises of mercy and deliverance, especially with an assurance of the coming of the Messiah, and of the grace of the gospel through him. It is remarkable concerning this prophecy, and confirms its authority, that we find two quotations out of it, made publicly upon very solemn occasions, and both referring to very great events. 1. One is, a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, (ch. iii. 12.) which we find quoted in the Old Testament, by the elders of the land, (Jer. xxvi. 17, 18.) in justification of Jeremiah, when he foretold the judgments of God coming upon Jerusalem, and to stay the proceedings of the court against him. Micah (say they) foretold that Zion should be ploughed as a field, and Hezekiah did not put him to death; why then should we punish Jeremiah for saying the same? 2. Another is a chief prediction of the birth of Christ, (ch. v. 2.) which we find quoted in the New Testament, by the chief priests and scribes of the people, in answer to Herod's inquiry, where Christ should be born; (Matt. ii. 5, 6.) for still we find that to him bear all the prophets witness.

MICAH, I.

CHAP. I.

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

1. THE word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite, in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. 2. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. 3
For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. 4. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. 5. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? 6. Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. 7. And all the graven images thereof shall be broken to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burnt with fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of a harlot, and they shall return to the hire of a harlot.

Here is,

1. A general account of this prophet and his prophecy, v. 1. This is prefixed for the satisfaction of all that read and hear the prophecy of this book, who will give the more credit to it, when they know the author and his authority. 1. The prophecy is the word of the Lord, it is a divine revelation. Note, What is written in the Bible, and what is predicated of kings, and of ministers, and of kingdoms, and of times, is, what is written there, must be heard and received, not as the word of dying men, which we may be judges of, but as the word of the living God, which we must be judged by, for so it is. This word of the Lord came to the prophet, came plainly, came powerfully, came in a preventing way, and he saw it, saw the vision in which it was conveyed to him, saw the things themselves which he foretold would, as much clearness and certainty as if they had been already accomplished. 2. The prophet is Micah the Morasthite; his name Micah is a contraction of Micaiah, the name of a prophet some ages before, in Ahaz's time; (1 Kings xxii. 8.) his surname, the Morasthite, signifies that he was born or lived, at Morasth, which is mentioned here, v. 14, or Marreshah, which is mentioned, v. 15, and Josh. xv. 44. The place of his abode is mentioned, that any one might inquire in that place, at that time, and might find there was, or had been, such a one there, who was generally reputed to be a prophet. 3. The date of his prophecy is in the reigns of three kings of Judah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Ahaz was one of the worst of Judah's kings; he was a most oppressor of the poor, times pass over God's ministers, times that frown and times that smile, to each of which they must study to accommodate themselves, and to arm themselves against the temptations of both. The promises and threatenings of this book are interwoven, by which it appears that even in the wicked reign he preached comfort, and said to the righteous, live, and be well with them; and that in the righteous reign he preached conviction, and said to the wicked then, that it should be ill with them; for, however the times change, the word of the Lord is still the same. 4. The parties concerned in this prophecy; it is concerning Samaria and Jerusalem, the head-cities of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, under the influence of which the kingdoms themselves were. Though ten tribes have deserted the houses both of David and Aaron, yet God is pleased to send prophets to them. 5. A very solemn introduction to the following prophecy, v. 2. In which, 1. The people are summoned to draw near, and come to hearing, as upon a court of judicature; Hear, all ye people. Note, Where God has a mouth to speak, we must have an ear to hear; we all must, for we are all concerned in what is delivered. "Hear, ye people," (all of them, so the margin reads it,) "all ye that are now within hearing, and all others that hear it at second hand. It is an unusual construction; but these words with which Micah begins his prophecy, are the very same in the original with those wherein Micaiah ended his, 1 Kings xxii. 28. 2. The earth is called upon, with all that therein is, to hear what the prophet has to say; Hearken, O earth. The earth shall be made to shake under the stroke and weight of the judgments coming; sooner will the earth hear, than this stupid, senseless people, but God will be heard when he pleads. If the church, and those in it, will not hear, the earth, and those in it, shall, and shame them. 3. God himself is appealed to, and his omniscience, power, and justice, are vouch'd in testimony against this people; "Let the Lord God be Witness against you;" a Witness that you had fair warning given you, that your prophets did their duty faithfully, as well as you, but you not take the warning; let the accomplishment of the prophecy be a witness against your contempt and disbelief of it, and prove, to your conviction and confusion, that it was the word of God, and that no word of his shall fail to the ground." Note, God himself will be a Witness, by the judgments of his hand, against those that would not receive his testimonies in his judgments; he will be a Witness against the high temple of heaven, when he comes down to execute judgment (v. 5.) against those that turned a deaf ear to his oracles, wherein he witnessed to them, out of his holy temple at Jerusalem.
MICAH, I.

V. The punishment made to answer the sin, in the particular destruction of the idols, v. 7. 1. The gods they worshipped shall be destroyed; the graven images shall be beaten to pieces by the army of the Assyrians, and all the idols shall be laid desolate. 2. The vineyard of Samaria and her idols were ruined together by Sennacherib. 3. Thus they were cut into the fire, for they were no gods: (Isa. xxxvii. 19.) and this was the Lord's doing: I will lay the idols desolate. Note, If the law of God prevail not to make men in authority destroy idols, God will take the work into his own hands, and will do it himself. (2.) The gifts that passed between them, and their gods shall be destroyed; for all the hire thereof shall be burnt with fire; which may be meant, either of the presents they made to their idols for the replenishing of their altars, and the adorning of their statues and temples, these shall become a prey to the victorious army, they shall rifle not only private houses, but the houses of their gods; or, of the corn, and wine, and oil, which they called the rewards, or hire, which their idols, their gods, gave them, (Hos. ii. 12.) these shall be taken from them by him whom (by ascribing them to their dear idols) they had defrauded of the honour due to him. Note, That cannot prosper, by which men either are hired to sin, or hire others to sin; for the wages of sin will be death. She gathered it of the hire of the harlot, and it shall return to the hire of a harlot. They enriched themselves by their leagues with the idolatrous nations who gave them advantages, to court them into the service of their idols, and their idols' temples were enriched with gifts by those who went a whoring after them. And all this wealth shall become a prey to the idolatrous nations, and so be the hire of an harlot again; wages to an army of idlers, which shall take it as a reward given them by their gods. It shall be a present to king Dareb, Hos. x. 6. What they gave to the gods, out of the goods which they thought they got by them, shall be as the hire of an harlot; the curse of God shall be upon it, and it shall never prosper, or do them any good. It is common that what is squeezed out by one lust, is squandered away upon another.

8. Therefore I will wail and howl. I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. 9. For her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah: he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem. 10. Declare ye it not at Gath, weep ye not at all: in the house of Aphon roll thyself in the dust. 11. Pass ye away, thou inhabitant of Saphir, having thy shame naked; the inhabitant of Zaanam came not forth in the mourning of Beth-czeel; he shall receive of you his standing. 12. For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good; but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem. 13. O thou inhabitant of Laish, bind the camnet to the swift beast: she is the beginning of the sin to the
daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee. 14. Therefore shall thou give presents to Moresheth-gath: the houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel. 15. Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Moreshah: he shall come unto Adullam the glory of Israel. 16. Make thee bale, and poll thee, for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

We have here a long train of mourners attending the funeral of a ruined kingdom.
1. The prophet is himself chief mourner; (v. 8, 9.) I will weep and howl, I will go stripped and naked, as a man distracted with grief. The prophets usually expressed their own grief for the public grievances, partly to mollify the predictions of them, and to make it appear it was not out of ill will that they denounced the judgments of God—so far were they from desiring the woful day, that they dreaded it more than any thing; partly to show how very dreadful and mournful the calamities would be, and to stir up in the people a holy fear of them. The divine representative, the-mouth of mercy, the voice of God.
Note. We ought to lament the punishment of sinners as well as the sufferings of saints in this world; the weeping prophet did so, (Jer. ix. 1.) so did this prophet, he makes a walking like the dragons, or rather the jackals, ravenous beasts, that in those countries used to meet in the night, and howl, and make hideous noises; he mourns as the ox, the seven-year-old, some say, on account of the seven years of famine. Two things the prophet here thus dolefully laments. 1. That Israel's case is desperate; Her wound is incurable, it is ruin without remedy, man cannot help her, God will not, because she will not by repentance and reformation help herself. There is indeed balm in Gilead, and a Physician there; but they will not apply themselves to the Physician, nor apply the balm to themselves, and therefore the wound is incurable. 2. That Judah likewise is in danger. The cup is going round, and is now put into Judah's hand; The enemy is come to the gate of Jerusalem. Soon after the destruction of Samaria and the ten tribes, the Assyrian army, under Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem, came to the gate, but could not force their way against the gates. Sennacherib was with great care and trouble that the prophet foresaw the fright, so dearly did he love the peace of Jerusalem.

11. Other places are here brought in mourning, and are called upon to mourn; but with this proviso, that there should not let the Philistines hear them; (v. 16.) Declare it not in Gath; this is borrowed from the way the Philistines would rejoice at the misfortunes of their neighbours. 2 Sam. i. 20. Tell it not in Gath, for the uncircumcised will triumph in Israel's tears. Note. One would not, if it could be helped, gratify those that make themselves and their companions merry with the sins or with the sorrows of God's Israel, David was silent, and stifled his griefs, when the wicked were before him, Ps. xxxix. 1. But though it may be prudent not to let the Philistines know of one's distress, yet it is no sin to admit a silent one, when the church of God is in distress. Roll thyself in the dust, as great mourners used to do, and so let the house of Judah and every house in Jerusalem become a house of Ashrah, a house of dust; covered with dust, crumpled into dust. When God makes the house dust, it becomes us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and to put our mouths in the dust. Thus accommodating ourselves to the providences that concern us. Dust we are; God brings us to the dust, that we may know it, and own it.

Divers other places are here named, that should be sharers in this universal mourning; the names of some of them are here used by the prophet in his parables, where it is conjectured that they are names just upon them by the prophet, the signification of which might either indicate or aggravate the miseries coming upon them; thereby to awaken this secure and stupid people to a holy fear of divine wrath. We find Sennacherib's invasion thus described, in the prediction of it, by the imprescriptible law of God, who must make an end of the several cities that fall in his way, Isa. x. 28, 29, &c. Let us observe the particulars here. 1. The inhabitants of Saphir, which signifies near and beautiful, (Thou that dwellest fairly, so the margin reads it,) shall pass away into captivity, or be forced to flee, stripped of all their ornaments, and having their shame naked. Note. Those who appear ever so fine and delicate, know not what contempt they may be exposed to; and the more grievous will the shame be to those who have been inhabitants of Saphir. 2. The inhabitants of Zaanann, which signifies the country of vlocks, a populous country, where the people are as numerous and thick as flocks of sheep, shall yet be so taken up with their own calamities, felt or foreseen, that they shall not make a way for themselves in the passing of Beth-zel, which signifies a place near, shall not conndle with, or bring any succour to their next neighbours in distress; for he shall receive of you his standing; the enemy shall encamp among you, O inhabitants of Zaanann, shall take up a station there, shall find footing among you. They may well think themselves excused from helping their neighbours, whom they have enough to do to help themselves and to hold their own. 3. As for the inhabitants of Maroth, which, some think, is put for Ramoth; others, that it signifies the rough places; they waited carefully for good, and were grieved for the want of it, but were disappointed; for evil came from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem, when the Assyrian army besieged it, v. 12. The inhabitants of Maroth might well overlook their own particular grievances, when they saw the holy city itself in danger; and might well overlook the Assyrian, that was the instrument, when they saw the evil coming from the Lord. 4. Lachish was a city of Judah, which Sennacherib laid siege to, Isa. xxxvi. 1, 2. The inhabitant of that city is called to bind the chariot to the swift beast, to prepare for or to secure the city. Lachish was not left to secure themselves and their families; or, it is spoken ironically; You have had your chariots and your swift beasts, but where are they now? God's quarrel with Lachish is, that she is the beginning of the sin, probably the sin of idolatry, to the daughter of Zion; (v. 13.) they had learned it from the ten tribes, their near neighbours, and so infected the two tribes with it. Note. Those who help to bring sin into a country, do but the reprobate for the throwing of themselves out of it. They must expect to be first in the punishment, who have been ringleaders in sin. The transgressions of Israel were found in thee; when they came to be traced up to their original, they were found to take rise very much from that city. God knows at whose hands the first stone is thrown, and whom to find guilty. Lachish, having been so much necessary to the sin of Israel, shall certainly be reckoned with; Thou shalt give presents to Moresheth-gath, a city of the Philistines, which perhaps had a dependence upon Gath, that famous Philistine city; thou shalt send to court those of that city to assist thee, but it shall be in vain; for, (v. 14.) the houses of Achzib (a city which joined to Moreshah, or Moresheth, and is mentioned with it,
Josh. xv. 43.) shall be a lie to the kings of Israel; though they depend upon their strength, yet they shall fail them; here is an allusion to 
Achish signifies a lie, and so it shall prove to those that trust in it. 5. Maresah, that could not, or would not, help Israel, shall herself be made a prey; (v. 15.) "I will make an heir an enemy, that shall take possession of thy lands, with as much assurance as if he were heir-at-law to them, and he shall come to Adullam, and to the glory of Israel, to Jerusalem the head city;" or, "The glory of Israel shall come to be Adullam, a poor despica-
ble place;" or, "The king of Assyria, whom Israel had gloried in, shall come to Adullam, in laying the country waste." 6. The whole land of Judah seems to be spoken to, (v. 16.) and called to weeping and murmuring; "Make thee bold, by tearing thy hair and shaving thy head; pull thee for thy delicate children, that had been tenderly and nicely brought up; charge thy baldness as the eagle when shelesheth her feathers, and is all over bald, for they are gone into captivity from thee, and are not likely to return; and their captivity will be the more grievous to them, because they have been brought up delicately, and have not been inured to hardships." Or this is directed particularly to the inhabitants of Maresah, as v. 13. That was the prophet's own city, and yet he denounces the judgments of God against the inhabitants of his city, as an aggravation of his sin, that it had such a prophet, and knew not the day of its visitation. Its being thus privileged, since it improved not the privilege, shall not procure favour for it either with God or with his prophet.

CHAP. II.
In this chapter, we have, 1. The sins with which the people of Israel are charged, carelessness and oppression, fraudulent and violent practices, (v. 1, 2.) dealing barbarously, even with women and children, and other harmless people, v. 3. Opposition of God's prophets, and silencing them, (v. 6, 7.) and delighting in false prophets, v. 11. II. The judgments with which they are threatened for those sins, that they should be humbled and impoverished, (v. 3., 5.) and banished, v. 10. III. Gracious promises of comfort, reserved for the good people among them, in the Messiah, v. 12, 13. And this is the sum and scope of most of the chapters of this and other prophecies.

1. WO to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. 2. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away; so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. 3. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil. 4. In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a dolorous lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled; he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields. 5. Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the Lord.

Here is, 1. The injustice of man contriving the evil of sin, v. 1, 2. God was coming forth against this people to destroy them, and here he shows what was the ground of his controversy with them, it is that which is variously mentioned as sin that hastens the ruin of nations and families as much as any other, the sin of oppression. Let us see the steps of that evil, and how eagerly desire that which is not their own— that is the root of bitterness, the root of all evil; (v. 2.) They cover fields and houses, as Ahab did Naboth's vineyard. "O that such a one's field and house were mine! It lies convenient for me, and I would manage it better than he does; it is fitter for me than for him." 2. They set their wits on work, to devise iniquity. When they devise iniquity with a great deal of cursed art and policy, they plot how to do it effectually, and yet so as not to expose themselves, or bring them- selves into danger, or under reproach by it. This is called working evil; they are working it in their heads, in their families, and are as intent upon it, and with as much pleasure, as if they were doing it, and are as confident of their success (so wisely do they think they have laid their scheme) so if we were assuredly done. Note, It is bad to do mischief upon a sudden thought, but much worse to devise it, to do it with design and deliberation; when the craft and subtilty of the old serpent appears with his poison and venom, it is wickedness in perfection. They devised it upon their beds, when they sat down to their beds, and no man could have been an aware of the design of its sin, that it had such a prophet, and knew not the day of its visitation. Its being thus privileged, since it improved not the privilege, shall not procure favour for it either with God or with his prophet.

2. Iniquity is a thing that is likable to the sinner. The only desire that God has of any man, when he deals with him on the大陆平面上，是一个半径为3的圆。如果一个人在圆内随机选取一个点，这个点落在半径为1的圆内的概率为1/4。若一个人在半径为1的圆内随机选取一个点，这个点落在半径为3的圆内的概率为1/9。如果一个人在半径为3的圆内随机选取一个点，这个点落在半径为1的圆内的概率为1/9。
son is banished from it; and if any man love this world, as the love of the Father, so the love of his neighbour, is not in him.

11. The justice of God contriving the evil of punishment (for this sin) (2.) Therefore this with the Lord, the righteous God, that judges between man and man, and is an Avenger on them that do wrong; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, against the whole kingdom, the house of Israel, and particularly those families in it that were cruel and oppressive: they unjustly devise evil against their brethren, and God will justly devise against them punishment of their sin, that it shall be very sure, and such as cannot be avoided, very severe, and such as they cannot bear, very signal and remarkable, and such as shall be universally observed to answer to the sin. The more there appears of a wicked wit in the sin, the more there shall appear of a holy wisdom and conduct in the punishment; for the Lord will be known by the judgments he executes, he will be owned by them. 1. He finds them very secure, and confident that they shall some way or other escape the judgment, or, though they fall under it, shall soon throw it off, and get clear of it, and therefore he tells them, It is an evil from which they shall not remove their neck. They were children of light, who did not entertain the word of God's righteous commands, but broke those bonds asunder, and cast away those cords from them; and therefore God will lay upon them the heavy yoke of his righteous judgments, and they shall not be able to withdraw their necks from that; those that will not be overruled shall be overcome. 2. He finds them very proud and stately, and therefore he tells them that they shall not go haughtily with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mixing as they go; (Isa. iii. 16.) for this time is evil, and the events of it were very humiliating and mortifying, and such as will bring down the stoutest spirit. 3. He found them very merry and jovial, and therefore tells them their note shall be changed, their laughter shall be turned into mourning, and their joy into heaviness; (v. 4.) In that day, when God comes to punish you for your oppression, shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, with a lamentation of lamentations, (so the word is,) a most lamentable lamentation; as a song of songs is a most pleasing song. Their enemies shall insult over them, and make a jest of their griefs, for they shall take up a parable against them, and shall set up satirical songs over them, and lay to heart their calamities, and this shall be the general cry, "We be utterly spoiled, we are all undone." Note, They that were most haughty and secure in their prosperity, are commonly most dejected, and most ready to despair, in their adversity. 4. He found them very rich in houses and lands, which they had gained by oppression, and therefore tells them that they shall be stripped of all. (1.) They should, in their despair, give it all up; they shall say, We are utterly spoiled; he has changed the portion of my people, so that it is now no longer theirs, but it is in the possession and occupation of their enemies, How has he removed it from me! How suddenly, how powerfully. What is unjustly got by us, will not continue with us, but immediately turn to our hurt. Turning away from us in wrath, he has divided our fields, and given them into the hands of strangers. Wo to those from whom God turns away. The margin reads it, "Instead of restoring, he has divided our fields; instead of putting us again in the possession of our estates, he has confirmed the portions of those to whom they have taken them from us." Note, It is just with God, that those who have dealt fraudulently and violently with others, should themselves be dealt fraudulently and violently with. (2.) God shall ratify what they say in their despair; (v. 5.) so it shall be: Thou shalt have none to cast a cord by lot, in the congregation of the Lord; never to divide inheritances, because there shall be no inheritances to divide, no courts to try titles to lands, or determine controversies about them, or cast lots upon them, as in Joshua's time, for all shall be in the enemy's hand. This hand, which should be taken from them, they had not only an unquestionable title to, but a very comfortable enjoyment of, for it was in the congregation of the Lord, or, rather, the congregation of the Lord was in it; it was God's land, it was a holy land, and therefore it was the more grievous to them to be turned out of it. Note, Those are to be reckoned the sorest calamities, which cut us off from the congregation of the Lord, or cut us short in the enjoyment of the privileges of it.

6. Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them that they shall not take shame. 7. O thou that art named The house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly? 8. Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. 9. The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever. 10. Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction. 11. If a man, walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine, and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

Here are two sins charged upon the people of Israel, and judgments denounced against them for each, such judgments as exactly answer the in-jerminating God's prophets, and oppressing God's people.

1. Persecuting God's prophets; suppressing and silencing them is a sin that provokes God as much as any other, for it not only spoils the face of his authority over us, but spurns at the bowels of his mercy to us, for his sending prophets to us is a sure and valuable token of his good will. Now observe here,

What the obstruction and opposition were, which this people gave to God's prophets. They said to them that prophesy, Prophesy ye not, as Isa. xxx. 10. They said to the seers, "See not; do not trouble us with accounts of what you have seen, nor bring us any such frightful messages." They must not prophesy at all, or they must prophesy only what they please. The word for prophesying, here, and the warlike signification, for the words of the prophets dropped from heaven as the dew. Note, Those that hate to be reformed, hate to be reproved, and do all they can to silence faithful ministers. Amos was forbidden to prophesy, Amos vii. 16. &c. Therefore persecutors stop their breath, because they have no other way to stop their mouths, or if they have they will preach, and torment them that dwell on the earth, as the two witnesses did, Rev. xi. 10. Some read it, Prophesy not, let
these prophesy; Let not those prophesy, that tell us of our faults, and threaten us, but let these prophesy, that will flatter us in our sins, and cry peace to us. They will not say that they have no ministers at all, but that they have such a minister as what they would have them, and go their way. This they are charged with, v. 11. that when they silenced and frowned upon the true prophets, they contemnently and encouraged pretenders, and set them up, and made an interest for them, to confront God's faithful prophets; If a man walk in the spirit of falsehood, pretend to have the Spirit of God, and shall have a speech of a song, a sermon, or a reason, of what they would have them, and go their way. They are charged with, v. 11. that when they silenced and frowned upon the true prophets, they contemnently and encouraged pretenders, and set them up, and made an interest for them, to confront God's faithful prophets; If a man walk in the spirit of falsehood, pretend to have the Spirit of God, and shall have a speech of a song, a sermon, or a reason, of what they would have them, and go their way.

This is what a scandal it was to their profession as Jews; "You are named the house of Jacob, and it is your honour; but are these his doings? Are these the doings of your father Jacob? Do you herein tread in his steps? No; If you were indeed his children, you would do his works; but now you seek to kill and silence a man that tells you the truth, in God's name; This did not Abraham," John viii. 59, 40. This did not Jacob. Or, "Are these God's doings? Are these the doings that will please him? Are these the doings of his people? No, you know the, when I did the things I named not, however some may be so to make blinded and bigoted as to kill God's ministers, and think that therein they do him service," John xvi. 2. (3.) Let them consider how unreasonable and absurd the thing was in itself; Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly? Yes, certainly they do; it is an appeal to the experiences of the generation of the upright; "Call now if there be any of you that will harden himself against me;" "Call now if there be any that will harden himself against me.

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God will leave them to themselves to hear and to such; for they will not be deceived, and they will not believe the truth in the love of it, God will send them strong delusions, to show to believe a lie, 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. They shall have prophets who shall prophesy to them for wine and strong drink, (so some read it,) then shall they have a cast of their eyes to their mind, for a bottle of wine, or a flagon of ale; shall sooth the sinners in their sins, if they will but feed them with the gratification of their lusts; to have such prophets, and to be ridden by them, is as bad a judgment as any people can be under, and as bad a preface of ruin approaching as it is to a particular person to be under the influence of a debauched conscience.

1st. Oppressing God's poor is another sin they are charged with, as before; (v. 1, 2.) for it is a sin doubly hateful and provoking to God. Observe, 1. How the sin is described; (v. 8, 9.) when they contemned God's prophets and opposed them, they broke out into all other wickedness: what bonds will hold those that have no reverence for God's word? They were formerly rose up against the enemies of the nation and defence of the country, and therein behaved themselves bravely, now of late rose up as enemies of the nation, and, instead of defending it, destroyed it, and did it more mischief (as usually such vipers in the bowels of a state do) than a foreign enemy could do. They made a prey of men, women, and children. (1.) Of men, that were true, that were innocent, that were not such as men averse from war, that were far from any bad designs, but were peaceable about their lawful occasions; those they set upon, as if they had been dangerous, obnoxious people, and pulled off the robe with the garment from them, they stripped them both of the upper and the inner garment, took away their cloak, and would have their coat also; thus they brought into use things that were given in the land, who, being harmless, were fearless, and so the more easily made a prey of. (2.) Of women, whose sex should have been their protection; (v. 9.) The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; they devour widows' houses, (Matt. xxiii. 14.) and torment them out of the possession of them, because they were pleasant houses, and the widows belonging to them. Is not this to deal thus barbarously with women; but that which especially aggravated it was, that they were the women of God's people, whom they knew to be under his protection. (3.) Of children, whose age entitles them to a tender usage; From their children have you taken away my glory for ever. It was the glory of the Israelites' children, that they were free; but they enslaved them; that they were born in God's house, and had a right to the privileges of it, but they sold them to strangers, sent them into idlestrous countries, where they were de- prived for ever of that glory, at least, the oppressors designed their captivity should be perpetual. Note, The righteous God will certainly reckon for injuries done to the widows and fatherless, who, being inoffensive and friendless, cannot otherwise expect to be righted.

2. What the sentence is, that is passed upon them for it; (v. 10.) "Arise ye, and depart; prepare to quit this land, for you shall be forced out of it, as you have forced the women and children of my people out of their possessions; it is not, it shall not be, your rest, as it was intended that Canaan should be, Ps. xxiv. 1. You shall have neither contentment nor continuance in it, because it is polluted by your wickedness." Sin is defiling to a land, and sinners cannot expect to rest in a land which they have polluted, but it will spue them out, as this land spued out the Canaanites of old, when they had polluted it with their abominations, Lev. xviii. 27, 28. "Nay, you shall not only be obliged to depart out of this land, but it shall destroy you even with a sore destruction; you shall either be turned out of it, or (which is all one) you shall be ruined in it." We may apply this to our state in this present world; it is polluted, there is a great deal of corruption in this world, through lust, and therefore we should arise, and depart out of it, keep at a distance from the corruption that is in it, and keep ourselves unspotted from it; it is not our rest, it was never intended to be so; it was designed for our passage, but not for our portion, our inn, but not our home; here we have no continuing city; let us therefore arise and depart, let us sit loose to it, and live above it, and think of leaving it, and seek a continuing city above...

12. I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. 13. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them.

After the threatenings of wrath, the chapter here concludes, as is usual in the prophets, with promises of mercy, which were in part fulfilled when the Jews returned out of Babylon, and had their full accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah. Their grievances shall be all redressed.

1. Whereas they were dispersed, they shall be brought together, and shall be gathered, and shall receive the tokens of God's favour to them, and shall have communion with each other, and comfort in each other; (v. 12.) "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee, all that belong to thee, all that are named of the house of Jacob, (v. 7.) that are now expelled your country, v. 10. I will bring you together again, and not one of you shall be lost, not one of you shall be strayed, no woman shall be barren, no man sterile. Utter destruction is designed and reserved for salvation, they shall be brought to incorporate in one body; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah." Sheep are inoffensive and sociable creatures; they shall be as the flock in the midst of their fold, their own fold, where they are safe under the shepherd's eye and care; and they shall make great noise, as numerous flocks and herds do, in their bleating and lowing, by reason of the multitude of men, (for the sheep are men, as the prophet explains this comparison, Ezek. xxxiv. 31.) not by reason of their strifes and contentions, but by reason of their great numbers. This was accomplished, when Christ by his gospel gathered together in one all the children of God that were scattered abroad, and united both Jews and Gentiles in one fold, and under one Shepherd; when all the complaint was, that the place was too strait for them—that was the noise, by reason of their multitude (Isa. xlix. 19, 20.) when there were some added to the church from all parts of the world, and all men were drawn to Christ by the attractive power of his cross; which shall be done yet more and more, and perfectly done, when he shall send forth his angels to gather in his elect from the four winds.

2. Whereas God had seemed to desert them, and cast them off, now he will own them, and head them, and help them through all the difficulties that are in the way of their return and deliverance;
MICAH, III.

1. The breaker is come up before them, to break down all opposition, and clear the road for them; and under his guidance they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, the door of escape out of their captivity, and are gone out by it with courage and resolution, having Omnipotence for their Vanguard. Their King shall pass before them, (even Jehovah, (he is their King,) on the head of them,) as he was on the head of the armies of Israel, when they followed the pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness, and when he appeared to Joshua, as Captain of the Lord's hosts. Christ is the church's King; he is Jehovah; he heads them; pass before them; brings them out of the land of their captivity; brings them into the land of their inheritance. 

2. "He is that come no more to be moved; of the primary欺骗them, (v. 1.) and take them, (v. 3.) and break in upon the powers of darkness, and broke through them; that rent the vail, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The learned Bishop Pearson applies it to the resurrection of Christ, by which he obtained the power and became the Pattern of our resurrection. The Breaker is gone up before us out of the grave, and has carried away its gates, as Symson did Oad's, (v. and 9.) and take them, (v. 3.) and break in upon the powers of darkness, and broke through them; that rent the vail, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

3. The learned Dr. Pocock mentions it as the sense which some of the ancient Jews give of it, that the breaker is Elias, and their King the Messiah, the Son of David; and he thinks we may apply it to Christ and his forerunner John the Baptist. John was the breaker, he broke the ice, prepared the way of the Lord by the baptism of repentance in him the gospel began, from his time the kingdom of heaven suffered violence; and so the Christian church is introduced, with Messiah the Prince before it, on the head of it, going forth conquering and to conquer.

CHAP. III.

What the apostle says of another of the prophets, is true of this, who was also his contemporary. "Estim is very bold, Rom. x. 20. So in this chapter, Micah is very bold, in reproving and threatening the great men that were the ringleaders in sin; and he gives the reason, (v. 9.) why he was so bold, because he had commission and instruction from God to say what he said, and was carried out in it by a higher spirit and power than his own. Magistracy and ministry are two great ordinances of God, for good to his church, but these have often corrupted the church, and the intentions of them perverted; and upon those that abused them, and so abused the church with them, the prophet is very severe, and justly so. 1. He gives them the kind of reproach, and of threatening, princes, (v. 1-4.) and false and flattering prophets, v. 5-7. 2. He gives them their lesson jointly, putting them together, as acting in conjunction for the ruin of the kingdom, which they should see the ruins of, v. 9-12.

1. And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know judgment? 2. Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; 3. Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. 4. Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them; he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. 5. Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry,
pretended crimes, they ruined the estates and families of their subjects, took away from some of their lives, from others their livelihoods, and were to their subjects as beasts of prey, rather than shepherds. They brake their bones to come to the marrow, and chop the fleshy faces as for the pot. This was their manner; the rule of this. (1.) Veryavenous and greedy for themselves, indulging themselves in luxury and sensuality. (2.) Very barbarous and cruel to those that were under them, not caring whom they beggared, so they could but enrich themselves; such evil is the love of money the root of. 3. How they might expect that God should deal with them, who had treated their hands as for the pot. They shall have judgment without mercy, that have showed no mercy; (v. 4.) They shall cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them, in the day of their distress, as the poor cried to them in the day of their prosperity, and they would not hear them. There will come a time, when the most proud and scornful sinners will cry to the Lord, and see for that mercy, which they once neither valued nor copied out; but it will then be in vain, God will even hide his face from them at that time, that time when they need his favour, and see themselves undone without it. At another time they would have turned their back upon him; but at that time he will turn his back upon them, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. Note, Men cannot expect to do ill any way that they please, but God can, and will do it better, and bezek did, that done to them, which they did to others, for he is righteous who takes vengeance; with the forward God will show himself forward, and he often gives up cruel and unmerciful men into the hands of those who are cruel and unmerciful to them, as themselves have formerly been to others. This agrees with Prov. xxii. 13. Whoso stoppeth his ear, the cry of the poor, he shall be his own and shall not be heard; but the merciful have reason to hope that they shall obtain mercy.

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

1. What was their sin. (1.) They made it all their business to flatter and deceive the people; They make my people err, lead them into mistakes, both concerning what they should do, and concerning what God would do with them; it is ill with a people, when their leaders cause them to err, and draw them out of the way, that should guide them, and go before them, in it. They make them to cry by crying peace, by telling them that they do well, and that all shall be well with them; whereas they are in the paths of sin, and within a step of ruin. They cry peace, but they bite with their teeth; which perhaps is meant of their biting their own lips, as we are apt to do, when we would suppress something which we are ready to speak; when they cried peace, their own hearts gave them the lie, and they were so full of their own words and to contradict themselves, but they bit with their teeth and kept it in. They were not blind leaders of the blind, for they saw the ditch before them, and yet led their followers into it. (2.) They made it all their aim to glut themselves, and serve their own belly, as the seducers in St. Paul's time; (Rom. vi. 15.) for their god is their belly, Phil. iii. 19. They believed their own fancies, and will flatter and compliment those that will feed them with good bits, will give them something to eat; but as for those that put not into their mouths, that are not continually cramming them, they look upon them as their enemies, to them they do not cry peace, as they do to those whom they look upon as their benefactors, but they even prepare war against them; against them they denounced the judgments of God; they preach either comfort or terror to men, not according as they are to God, but as they are to them; as the crafty priests of the church of Rome, in some places, make their image either to smile or frown upon the offerer, according as his offering is. I shall insist on as a necessary qualification of a minister, (1 Tim. iii. 3. and again, Tit. i. 7.) that he be not greedy of filthy lucre.

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

3. But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. 9. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. 10. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. 11. The heads thereof of judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof of divine money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us! none evil can come upon us. 12. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field; and Jerusalem shall become heaps; and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

Here,

1. The prophet experiences a divine power going along with him in his work, and he makes a solemn profession of protestation of it, as that which would justify him, and bear him out, in his plain dealing with the princes and rulers. He would not, he durst not, make thus bold with the great men, but that he was carried out to do it by a prophetic impulse and impression. It was not he that said it, but God by him, and he could not but speak the word that the
God put into his mouth. It comes in likewise by way of opposition to the false prophets, who were full of shame when they lived to see themselves proved liars, and who never had courage to deal faithfully with the people, but flattered them in their sins; they were "unwise, not having the Spirit," but truly (v. 7), "they were the Spirit of the Lord." (v. 8.) Having in himself an assurance of the truth of what he said, he said it with assurance. Compare him with those false prophets, and you will say, There is no comparison between them, What is the chaff to the wheat? Jer. xxiii. 28. What is painted fire to real fire? Observe here, 1. What the qualifications were, with which this prophet was furnished before he had office: "I am endued with judgment and of might." He had an ardent love to God and to the souls of men, a deep concern for his glory and their salvation, and a flaming zeal against sin. He had likewise courage to reprove it, and witness against it, not fearing the wrath either of great men or of great multitudes; whatever difficulties or discouragements he met with, they did not deter him or drive him from his work; none of these things moved him; and all this was guided by judgment and discretion; he was a man of conduct as well as courage; in all his preaching there was light, as well as heat, and a spirit of wisdom as well as of zeal; thus was this man of God thoroughly furnished for every good work, he had to say, and every good work he had to do. Those he preached to, could see the edge of his sword and know his power; and judgment, for they found both their understandings opened, and their hearts made to burn within them; with such evidence and demonstration, and with such power, did the word come from him. 2. Whence he had these qualifications; not from and of himself, but he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord. Knowing that it was indeed the Spirit of the Lord that was in him, a full light to him, that it was a divine revelation that he delivered, he spake it boldly, and as one having authority, set his face as a flint, knowing he should be justified and borne out in what he said, Isa. 1. 7, 8. Note, Those who act honestly, may act boldly; and those who are sure that they have a commission from God, need not be afraid of opposition from men. Nay, he could not speak the word in any other manner; the ground of his boldness, but the Spirit of sanctification endued him with the boldness and wisdom which were requisite for him. It was not in any strength of his own that he was strong; for who is sufficient for these things? But in the Lord, and in the power of his might; for from him all our sufficiency is. Are we full of power at any time, for that which is good? It is purely by the Spirit of the Lord, for of ourselves we are weak as water; it is the God of Israel that gives strength and power both to his people and to his ministers. 3. What use he made of these qualifications—this judgment and this power; he declared to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. If transgression be found in Jacob and Israel, they must be told of it, and it is the business of God's prophets to tell them of it; to cry aloud, and not to spare, Isa. viii. 1. Those who command the word of God, must be willing to be told of their faults, and must not only give their ministers leave to deal plainly and faithfully with them, but take it kindly, and be thankful; but because few have meekness enough to receive reproof, those have need of a great deal of boldness, who are to give reproofs, and must pray for a Spirit both of wisdom and meekness. II. The prophet exerts this power in dealing with the heads of the house of Jacob, both the princes and the prophets, whom he had drawn up a high charge against, in the former part of the chapter, he repeats the summons of their attendance and attention, (v. 9.) the same that we had, v. 1. directing himself to the princes of the house of Israel, yet he means those of Judah; for it appears (Jer. xxxvi. 18, 19. where v. 12. is quoted) that this was spoken in Hezekiah's kingdom; but, the ten tribes being gone into captivity, Judah is all that is now left to the princes of the house of Israel, who was speaking respectfully to them; Hear, I pray you, and give up their titles of heads and princes. Ministers must be faithful to great men in reproving them for their sins, but they must not be rude and uncivil to them. Now observe here, 1. The great wickedness that these heads of the house of Jacob were guilty of, princes, priests, and prophets. They were "hypocrites," they were "false "prophets," they "had turned their offices to their love of money." (1.) The princes abhorred all judgment; they would not be governed by any of its laws, either in their own practice or in passing sentence upon appeals made to them; they perverted all equity, and scorned to be under the direction or correction of justice, when it could not be made pliable to their secular interests. When, under pretence of doing right, they did the most palpable wrongs, then they "laid up equity, and made it serve a purpose contrary to the intention of the Founder of magistracy and Foundation of power. It is laid to their charge, (v. 10.) that they build up Zion with blood. They pretend, in justification of their extortion and oppressions, that they build up Zion and Jerusalem, they add new buildings to the city, and fortify it with walls and gates; but they build up Zion with blood, and free for the most unholy cause shall be carried. Miserable is the people's case, when the judge's inquiry upon a cause, is not, "What is to be done in it?" but "What is to be got by it?" (2.) The priests' work was to teach the people, and for that the law had provided them a very honourable, comfortable maintenance; but that will not content them; they teach for hire over and above, and will be hired to teach any thing, as an oracle of God, which they know will please, and gain them an interest. (3.) The prophets, it should seem, had honorary fees given them by way of gratuity, 1 Sam. ix. 7, 8. But these prophets govern themselves in their prophesying by the prospect of temporal advantage, and that was the main thing they had in their eye; They draw money, their tongues were mercenary, they would either prophesy, or let it alone, according as they found it most for their advantage; and a man might have what oracle he would from them, if he would but pay them for it; the successors of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Note, Though that which is wicked can never be consecrated by a zeal for the church, yet he which should be, and often is, desecrated, by the love of the world. When men do that which in itself is good, but do it for filthy lucre, it loses its excellence, and becomes an abomination both to God and man. 2. Their vain presumption and carnal confidence, notwithstanding; They lean upon the Lord, and
because they are, in profession, his people, they think there is neither harm nor danger in these their wicked practices. Faith builds upon the Lord, rests in him, and relies upon him, as the soul's Foundation; presumption only feasts upon the Lord as a Rep, makes use of him to serve a turn, while still the world is the foundation that is built upon. They speak with a great deal of confidence, (1.) Of their honour; "Is not the Lord among us? Have we not tokens of his presence with us, his temple, his ark, his lively oracles?" They are haughty because of the holy mountain, and its dignities, (Zeph. iii. 11.) as if their church-privileges would palliate the worst of practices; or if as God's presence with them were intended to make the priests and people rich with the sale of their performances. It was true that the Lord was among them by his ordinances, and this puffed them up with pride; but if they imagined that he was among them by his favour and love, they were mistaken; but it is a cheat the children of men often put upon themselves, to think they have God with them, when they have by their sin provoked him to depart from them. (2.) They are confident of their own safety; "No evil can come upon us. Many are rocked asleep in a fatal security by their church-privileges, as if those would protect them in sin, and shelter them from punishment, which are really, and will be, the greatest aggravations both of their sin and of their punishment. The strongest arguments will not restrain them from doing evil, it can never secure them from suffering evil for so doing; and it is very absurd for sinners to think that their impudence will be their immunity."

3. The doom passed upon them for their real wickedness, notwithstanding their imaginary pretensions: (v. 17.) "For yet a little while" he ploughed as a field. This is that passage which is quoted as a bold word spoken by Micah, (Jer. xxvi. 18.) which yet Hezekiah and his princes took well, though in another reign it might have gone near to cost him his head; nay, they repented and reformed, and so the execution of this threatening was prevented, and did not come in those days. (3.) But that very land of plowed land, which had been highly honoured with the tokens of God's presence, and the performances of his worship; it is Zion that shall be ploughed as a field, the building burnt to the ground, and levelled with it. Some observe that this was literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the ground was ploughed up, on which the city stood, in token of its utter desolation, and that no city should be built upon that ground without the emperor's leave. Even Jerusalem, the holy city, shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house on which the temple is built, shall be overgrown with briars and thorns, as the high places of the forest. If sacred places be polluted by sin, they must expect to be wasted and ruined by the ploughshare of God. (2.) The wickeder of those who preside in them, that brings the ruin: "It is for your sake, that Zion shall be ploughed as a field, you pretend to build up Zion, but doing it by blood and iniquity, you pull it down." Note, The sin of priests and priests is often the ruin of states and churches. Dehurant reges, pecuniarum Achivi—The kings are bemaddened, and the people suffer for it.

CHAP. IV.

Comparing this chapter with the close of the foregoing chapter, the comfortable promises here with the terrible threats there, may, with much reason, beheld in the goodness and severity of God; (Rom. xi. 22.) toward the Jewish church, which fell, severity, when Zion was ploughed as a field; but toward the Christian church, which was built upon the ruins of it, goodness, great goodness; for it is here promised, 1. That it shall be advanced and enlarged by the accession of the nations to it, v. 1, 2. 2. That it shall be protected in tranquility and peace, v. 3, 4. 3. That it shall be kept close, and constant, and faithful to God, v. 5. 4. That, under Christ's protection, they shall come to Zion, with their tabernacles, and find a safety and satisfaction, (Ps. xciv. 13.) v. 6, 7. 5. That it shall have an ample and flourishing dominion, v. 3. 6. That its troubles should be brought to a happy issue at length, v. 9, 10. 7. That its enemies should be disquieted, nay, that they should be destroyed in and by their attempts against it, v. 11, 13.

1. BUT in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall exalt itself above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. 2. And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 3. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 4. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. 5. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. 6. In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted: 7. And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

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

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

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

3. That it shall be highly advanced, and become eminent and conspicuous; It shall be exalted above the hills, observed with wonder for its growing greatness, and beauty; of which the dear Christ shall shine with greater lustre than ever any of the kingdoms of the earth did. It shall be as a city on a hill, which cannot be hid, Matt. v. 14. The glory of this latter house is greater than that of the former, Hic. ii. 9. See 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, &c.

4. That there shall be a great accession of con verts to it, and succession of converts in it. Peo ple shall flow unto it as the waters of a river; they are continually flowing; there shall be a constant stream of beholders flowing in from all parts into the church, as the people of the Jews flowed into the temple, while it was standing, to worship there. Then many tribes came to the mountain of the house, to inquire of God's temple; but in gospel-times many nations shall flow into the church, shall flow, as a chapter to which we need noth-ing far to, for it is brought to our doors, and set up in the midst of us. Thus shall people be made willing in the day of his power, (Ps. cxv. 3.) and shall do what they can to make others willing, as Andrew invited Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to be acquaint ed with Christ. They shall call the people to the mountain (Deut. xxxiii. 19.) for there is in Christ enough for all, enough for each. Now observe what it is, (1.) Which these converts expect to find in the house of the God of Jacob; they come thither for instruction: He will teach us of his ways, what is the way of peace in the Roman empire, we will walk with him, and in which we may depend upon him to meet us graciously." Note, Where we come to worship God, we come to be taught of him. (2.) Which they engage to do when they are thus taught of God; We will walk in his paths. Note, Those may comfortably expect that God will teach them, who are firmly resolved by his grace to do as they are taught.

5. That, in order to this, a new revelation shall be published to the world, on which the church should be founded, and by which multitudes should be brought into it; For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. The gospel is here called the word of the Lord, for the Lord gave the word, and great was the company of them that published it, Ps. lxviii. 11. It was of a divine original, a divine authority, it began to be spoken by the Lord Christ himself, Heb. ii. 3. And it is a law, a law of faith, we are under the law to Christ; this was to go forth from Jerusalem, from Zion, the metropolis of the Old Testament dispensation, where the temple and altars and oracles were, and whither the Jews went to worship from all parts; thence it was to go forth, to show the close connection between the Old Testament and the New, that the gospel is not set up in opposition to the law, but is an explication and illustration of it, and a branch growing out of its roots. It was in Jerusalem that Christ preached and wrought miracles, there he died, rose again, and ascended, there the Spirit was poured out, and those that were to preach repentance and the remission of sins to all nations, were to be fitted to begin at Jerusalem, so that thence flowed the streams that went to water the desert world.

6. That a convincing power should go along with the gospel of Christ, in all places where it should be preached; (v. 2.) He shall judge among many people. Messiah, the Lawgiver, (v. 3.) is here the Judge, for to him the Father committed all judgment, John v. 22, and first of all he shall choose a form of words, the word of his gospel, that was to go forth from Jerusalem, was the golden sceptre by which he shall rule and judge, when he sits as King on the holy hill of Zion, Ps. ii. 6. By it he shall rebuke strong nations afar off; for the Spirit working with the word, shall revprove the word, John xvi. 8. It is promised to the Son of David that he shall judge among the heathen, (Ps. cxv. 6.) which he does when in the chariot of his everlasting gospel he goes forth, and goes on, conquering and to conquer.

7. That a disposition to mutual peace and love should be the happy effect of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah; They shall beat their swords into ploughshares; angry, passionate men, that have been fierce and furious, shall be wonder-fully sweetened, and made mild and meek, Matt. 2. 3. They who, before their conversion, did inju ries, and would bear none, after their conversion, can bear injuries, but will do none. As far as the gospel prevails, it makes men peaceable, for such is the wisdom from above, it is gentle and easy to be entreated. And if nations were but leavened by it, there would be universal peace. When Christ was in the world, there was universal peace in the Roman empire; those that were first brought into the gospel-church, were all of one heart and of one soul, Acts iv. 32. And it was observed of the primitive Chris tians, how well they loved one another; in heaven this will have its accomplishment. It is promised, (1.) That none shall be quarrelsome; the art of
war, instead of being improved, (which some reckon the glory of a kingdom,) shall be forgotten and hid aside as useless; they shall not learn any more as they had done, for they shall have no need to defend themselves, nor any inclination to offend their neighbours;  

[1033]Kush shall no longer lift up sword against nation; nor shall the gospel make men cowardly, but it will make men peaceable. (2.) That all shall be quiet both from evil and from the fear of evil; (v. 4.) They shall sit safely, and none shall disturb them; they shall sit securely, and shall not disturb themselves, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, enjoying the fruit of them, and needing no other shelter than the leaves of them. None shall make them afraid; not only from open injuries of the Gentiles, but, worse than this, from their God, which shall not be disposed to fear, under the dominion of Christ, as that of Solomon, there shall be abundance of peace. Though his followers have trouble in the world, in him they enjoy great tranquillity. If this seem unlikely, yet we may depend upon it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it, and no word of his shall fall to the ground; what he has spoken by his word, he will do by his providence and grace. He that is the Lord of hosts, will be the God of peace; and those may well be easy, whom the Lord of hosts, of all hosts, undertakes the protection of.

8. That the churches shall be constant in their duty, and so shall make a good use of their tranquillity, and shall not provoke the Lord to deprive them of it. Their churches shall be ordered, they shall be elected, confirmed, and comforted, and shall be resolved to be as firm to their God, as other nations are to theirs, though they be no gods. Where we find the foregoing promises, Isa. ii. 2, &c. it follows, (v. 5.) O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord, and here, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God. Note, Those pleasant walks are only such, when they strengthen our resolution to cleave to the Lord. Observe, (1.) How constant other nations were to their gods; All people shall walk every one in the name of his god, will own their god, and cleave to him, will worship their god, and serve him, will depend upon him, and put confidence in him. Whatever men make a god of they will make use of, and take his name along with them in all their actions and affairs. They were in a storm, cried every man to his god, Joth. i. 5. And no instance could be found of a nation's changing their gods, Jer. ii. 11. If the hosts of heaven were their gods, they loved them, and served them, and walked after them, Jer. vii. 2.

(2.) How constant God's people now resolve to be to him; We will walk in the name of the Lord our God, will acknowledge him in all our ways, and govern ourselves by a continual regard to him, doing nothing but what we have warrant from him for, and openly professing our relation to him. Observe, Their resolution is heretofore, it is not a thing that needs be disputed; We will walk in the name of the Lord our God; it is just and reasonable; He is our God; and it is a resolution for a perpetually ever, and will never leave him. He will be ours for ever, and therefore so we will be his, and never repent our choice.

9. That, notwithstanding the dispensations, distress, and infirmities of the church, it shall be formed and established, and made very considerable, v. 6, 7. (1.) The state of the church of the Lord was love and weak, and therefore distressful, in the latter times of the Old Testament, partly through the corruptions of the Jewish nation, and partly through the oppressions under which they groaned. They were like a flock of sheep that were maimed, worried, and scattered, Ezek. xxxiv. 16. Jer. 1. 6, 17. The good people among them, and in other places, that were well inclined, were dispersed, were very infirm, and in a manner lost and cast far off. (2.) It is promised that all these grievances shall be redressed, and the dis temper healed. Christ will come himself, (Matt. xv. 24.) and send his apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matt. x. 6. From among the Jews that hailed, or that, for want of strength, could not go upright, God gathered a remnant, (v. 7.) that remnant according to the election of grace, which is spoken of in Rom. xi. 7. which embraced the gospel of Christ. And from among the Gentiles that were cast far off, (so the Gentiles are described to be, Eph. ii. 13. Acts ii. 39.) he raised a strong nation; greater numbers of the Gentiles that belong to the church of God, than the Jews, Gal. iv. 27. And such a strong nation the gospel-church is, that the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against it. The church of Christ is more numerous than any other nation, and strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 10. That the Messiah shall be the King of this kingdom, shall protect and govern it, and order all the affairs of it for the best, and this to the end of time. The Lord Jesus shall reign over them in mount Zion by his word and Spirit in his ordinances, and this from henceforth and for ever, for the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.

3. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

9. Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. 10. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. 11. Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. 12. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. 13. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

These verses concern Zion and Jerusalem, here called the tower of the flock, or the tower of Eleasar; we read of such a place, (Gen. xxxv. 21.) near Bethlehem; and some conjecture it is the same place where the shepherds were keeping their flocks when the angels brought them tidings of the birth of Christ, and some think Bethlehem itself is here meant, as the place where the Shepherds saw the Child Jesus; it was there at that gate of Jerusalem which is called the sheep-gate, (Neh. iii. 22.) and conjecture that through that gate Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem. However, it seems to be put for Jerusalem itself, or for Zion the tower of David; all the sheep of Israel flocked thither three times a year; it was the strong
1. We have a promise of the glories of the spiritual Jerusalem, the gospel-church, which is the tower of the flock, that one fold in which all the sheep of Christ are protected under one Shepherd; Unto thee shall it come, that which thou hast long waited and desired. The spiritual Jerusalem shall have that everlasting dignity and power equal to that of David and Solomon, by whom Jerusalem was first raised; that kingdom shall again come to the daughter of Jerusalem, which it was deprived of at the captivity. It shall make as great a figure, and shine with as much lustre among the nations, and have as much influence upon them, as ever it had; this is the first or chief kingdom. Its establishment in Zerubbabel, was nothing like the first dominion, either in respect of splendour and sovereignty at home, or the extent of power abroad; and therefore it must refer to the kingdom of the Messiah, (and to that the Chaldee Paraphrase refers it,) and had its accomplishment when God gave to our Lord Jesus the throne of his father David, (Luke i. 33.) set him King upon the holy hill of Zion, (Ps. cix. 10.) made him King of kings, (Dan. vii. 14.) David, in spirit, called him Lord, and (as Dr. Pocock observes) he witnessed of himself, and his witness was true, that he was greater than Solomon, none of their dominions being like his for extent and duration. The common people welcomed Christ into Jerusalem with banners to the son of David, to show that it was the first dominion that came to the daughter of Zion; and the evangelist applies it to the promise of Zion's king coming to her, Matt. xxvi. 5. Zech. ix. 9. Some give this sense of the words to Zion, and Jerusalem that tower of the flock; To the nation of the Jews came the first dominion; that is, the kingdom of Christ was first set up, the gospel of the kingdom was first preached, (Luke xix. 47.) there Christ was first called King of the Jews.

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

1. Jerusalem put in pain by the providences of God; she cries out aloud, that all her neighbours may take notice of her griefs. Because there is no king in her, none of that honour and power she used to have, instead of ruling the nations, as she did when she sat a queen, she is ruled by them, and become a captive; her counsellors are perished, she is no longer at her own disposal, but is given up to the wild designs of her enemies, and governed by their counsellors; Pangs have taken her. (1.) She is carried captive to Babylon, and there is in pangs of grief; she goes forth out of the city, and is constrained to dwell in the field, exposed to all manner of inconveniencies; she goes even to Babylon, and there wears out seventy tedious years in a miserable captivity, all that while in pain, as a woman in travail, waiting of her enemies, and enduring the time very long. (2.) When she is delivered out of Babylon, and redeemed from the hand of her enemies there, yet still she is in pangs of fear, the end of one trouble is but the beginning of another; for now also, when Jerusalem is in the rebuilding, many nations are gathered against her; (v. 11.) they were so in Ezra and Nehemiah's time, and did all they could to obstruct the building of the temple and the wall; they were so in the time of the Maccabees, they said, Let her be defiled, let her be looked upon as a place polluted with sin, and be forsaken and abandoned both of God and man; let her holy places be profaned, and all her honours laid in the dust; let our eye look upon Zion, and dole out with the sight of its ruins, as it is said of Edom, (Obad. 12.) Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brethren; let our eyes see our desire upon Zion, the day we have long wished for. When they hear the voice of war, they do not tremble against them, and insult over them, but consider that the Lord has made them cry aloud; Without are fightings, within are fears.

2. Jerusalem made easy by the promises of God, Why dost thou cry aloud? Let thy griefs and fears be silenced, indulge not thyself in them, for though things are bad with thee, they shall end well; thy pangs are great, but they are like those of a woman in travail, (v. 9.) that labour to bring forth, (v. 10.) they shall be relieved, and all at last. Jerusalem's pangs are not as dying agonies, but as travelling throes, which after awhile will be forgotten, for joy that a child is born into the world. Let the literal Jerusalem comfort herself with this, that, whatever straits she may be reduced to, she shall continue until the coming of the Messiah, for there his kingdom must be first set up; and she shall not be deserted, but be supported both inwardly and outwardly, and when at length she is ploughed as a field, and become heaps, (as is threatened, ch. iii. 12.) yet her privileges shall be resigned to the spiritual Jerusalem, and in that the promises made to her shall be fulfilled. Let Jerusalem be easy then, for

(1.) Her captivity in Babylon shall have an end, a happy end; (v. 16.) There shall thou be delivered, from hence the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies there. This was done by Cyrus, who acted therein as God's servant; and that deliverance was typical of our redemption by Jesus Christ, and the release from our spiritual bondage, which is proclaimed in the everlasting gospel, that acceptable year of the Lord, in which Christ himself preached liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, Luke iv. 18, 19.

(2.) The designs of her enemies against her after-ward shall be baffled, nay, they shall turn upon themselves, v. 12, 13. They promise themselves a day of it, but it shall prove God's day. They are gathered against Zion, to destroy it, but it shall prove to their own destruction, which Israel and his God shall have the glory of. (1.) Their coming together against Zion shall be the occasion of their destruction, and of their destructions. Those that come together against her, and say, that they may break Jerusalem in pieces, but it shall prove that they shall be broken in pieces, Isa. viii. 9. They know not the thoughts of the Lord. When they are gathering together, and Providence favours them in it, they little think what God is designing by it, nor do they understand his counsel, they know what they aim at, in coming together, but they know not what God has in heart think so, Isa. x. 7. And thus it is here; the nations are gathered against Zion, as soldiers into the field, but God gathers them as sheaves into the floor, to be beaten to pieces; and they could not have been so easily, so effectually destroyed, if they had not gathered together against Zion. Note, The designs of enemies for the ruin of the church often prove ruin to themselves; and thereby they prepare themselves for destruction, and put themselves in the way of it; they are snared in the work of
1. NOW gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us; they shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. 2. But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting. 3. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaillest hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. 4. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. 5. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land; and, when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. 6. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders.

Here, as before, we have,

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

II. The advancement of Zion’s King; having showed how low the house of David should be brought, and how vilely the shield of that day if only should be cast away, as though it had not been anointed with oil; to encourage the faith of
God’s people, who might be tempted now to think that his covenant with David and his house was abrogated, (Par. vi. 3.) he adds an illustrious prediction of the Messiah and his kingdom, in whom that covenant should be established, and the honours of that house should be revived, advanced, and perpetuated. Now let us see,

1. How the Messiah is here described; it is he that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, from the days of eternity, and hence it is called (1.) His existence from eternity, as God; His goings forth, or emanations, as the going forth of the beams from the sun were, or have been, of old, from everlasting; which (says Dr. Pocock) is so signal a description of Christ’s eternal generation, or his going forth as the Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, that this prophecy must belong only to him, and could never be verified of any other. It certainly speaks of a going forth that was now past, when the prophet spake, and cannot but be read as we read it, his goings have been; and the putting of both these words together, which severally are used to denote eternity, plainly shows that they must here be taken in the strictest sense, the same with Ps. xc. 2. From everlasting to everlasting thou art. And this was applied to none other than the Son, who was able to say, Before Abraham was, I am, John viii. 58. Dr. Pocock observes, that the going forth is used, Deut. viii. 3. for a word which precedes out of the mouth, and is therefore very fitly used to signify the eternal generation of him who is called the Word of God, that was in the beginning with God, John i. 1. (2.) His office as Mediator, he was to be Ruler in Israel, King of glory; and this he was to begin for the children of Israel, Luke i. 32, 33. The Jews object, that our Lord Jesus could not be the Messiah, for he was so far from being Ruler in Israel, that Israel ruled over him, and put him to death, and would not have him to reign over them; but he answered that himself, when he said, My kingdom is not of this world, John xviii. 36. And it is a spiritual Israel that he reigns over, the children of promise, all the followers of God, believing Abraham and praying Jacob; in the hearts of these he reigns by his Spirit and grace; and in the society of these by his word and ordinances. And was not he Ruler in Israel, whom winds and seas obeyed, and legions of devils were forced to truckle to, and who commanded away diseases from the sick, and called the dead out of their graves? None, except him whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting, was fit to be Ruler in Israel, to be Head of the church, and Head over all things to the church.

2. What is here foretold concerning him.

(1.) That Bethlehem should be the place of his nativity, v. 2. This was the scripture which the scribes went upon, when with the greatest assurance they told Herod where the Lord should be born; (Matt. ii. 6.) that we now know among the Jews, that Christ should come out of the town of Bethlehem where David was, John vii. 42. Bethlehem signifies the house of bread, the fittest place for him to be born in, who is the Bread of life. And because it was the city of David, by a special providence it was ordered that he should be born in Bethlehem, shall be the Son of David, and his Heir and Successor found for him, the city and kingdom of David, and Ephrath, both names of the same city, as appears, Gen. xxxv. 19. It was little among the thousands of Judah, not considerable either for the number of the inhabitants, or the figure they made; it had nothing in it worthy to have this honour put upon it; but God in that, as in other instances, chose to exalt them of low degree, Luke i. 32. Christ would give honour to the place of his birth, and not derive honour from it; ‘Though thou be little, yet shall thou be greater than the kings."

(2.) That in the fulness of time he should be born of a woman; (v. 3.) therefore will he give them up, he will give up his people Israel to distress and trouble, and will defer their salvation, which has been so long foretold, to the time of the set time, that she who travails hath brought forth, or, as it should be read, that she who shall bring forth, shall have brought forth; that the blessed virgin, who was to be the mother of the Messiah, shall have brought him forth at Bethlehem, the place appointed. This Dr. Pocock thinks to be the most genuine sense of the words. Though the outgoings of the Messiah were from everlasting, yet the redemption in Jerusalem, the consolation of Israel, must be waited for, (Luke ii. 25, 38,) until the time that she who should bring forth, (so the Virgin Mary is called, as Christ is himself called, He that shall come,) shall bring forth; and in the mean time he will give them up. Divine salvations must be waited for until the time fixed for the bringing of them forth.

(3.) That the remnant of his brethren shall then return to the children of Israel. The remnant of the Jewish nation shall return to the spirit of the true, genuine children of Israel, a people in covenant with God; the hearts of the children shall be turned to the fathers, Mal. iv. 6. Some understand it of all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews, they shall all be incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel; but this seems better, that he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Heb. ii. 11. (4.) That he shall be a glorious prince, and his subjects shall be happy under his government; (v. 4.) He shall stand and feed, he shall both teach and rule, and shall continue to do so, as a good Shepherd, with wisdom, and care, and love; so it was foretold, He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, shall provide green pastures for them, and under-shepherds to lead them into these pastures. He is the good Shepherd that goes before the sheep, and presides among them. He shall do this, not as an ordinary man, but in the strength of the Lord, as one clothed with a divine power, to go through his work, and break through the difficulties in his way, so as not to fail or be discouraged; he shall do it in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, so as plainly to evidence that God’s name was in him, (Exod. xxxiii. 21.) the majesty of his name, for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes. The prophets prefaced their message with, Thus saith the Lord; but Christ spake, not as a Servant, but as a Son; Verily, verily, I say unto you. This was feeding in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, all power was given him in heaven and in earth, a power given him over all flesh, of which in the fullness of time he shall be Head, Ps. lxi. 4. His shepherds shall be wise, and feed in it, and with it, always, even to the end of the world. (2.) It shall be very glorious to himself; Now shall he be great to the ends of the earth. Now that he stands, and feeds his flock, now shall he be great. For Christ reckons it his greatness to do good. Now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, for the uttermost parts of the earth shall be
given him for his possession, and the ends of the world shall see his salvation.

(5.) That he shall secure the peace and welfare of his church and people against the attempts of his and their enemies. (v. 5.) Verse 5. This man, as King Solomon, shall be the Peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land. This refers to the deliverance of Hezekiah and his kingdom from the power of Sennacherib, who invaded them, in the type; but, under the shadow of that, is a promise of the safety of the gospel-church and of all believers from the designs and attempts of the powers of darkness, the great enemy Satan, the prince of the power of the air, the invisible, and the invisible angels, that seek to devour the church of the first-born, and all that belong to it. Observe, [1.] The peril and danger which Christ's subjects are supposed to be in; The Assyrian, a potent enemy, comes into their land, (v. 5, 6.) treads within their borders, nay, prevails so far as to tread in their palaces; it was a time of treading down and of perplexity, when Sennacherib made a descent upon Judah, took all the defended cities, and laid siege to Jerusalem, Isa. xxxvi. 1.-xxxviii. 3. This represented the gates of hell fighting against the kingdom of Christ, compassing the camp of the saints and of the holy city, and threatening to bear down all before them. When the terrors of the law set themselves in array against a convinced soul, when the temptations of Satan assault the people of God, and the troubles of the world threaten to rob them of all their comforts, then the Assyrian comes into their land, and treads in their palaces; without are fightings, within are fears. [2.] The protection and defence which his subjects are then sure to be under; First, Christ will himself be their Peace. When the Assyrian comes with such a force into a land, can there be any other peace than a temporary commission and an unresisted desolation? Yes, even then the church's King will be the Conservator of the church's peace, will be for a hiding-place, Isa. xxxviii. 1.-xxxix. 2. Christ is our Peace as a Priest, making atonement for sin, and reconciling us to God; and he is our Peace as a King, conquering our enemies, and commanding down disputing fears and passions; he creates the fruits of the life, peace. Even when the Assyrian comes into the land, when we are in the greatest distress and danger, and have received a sentence of death within ourselves, yet this man may be the Peace. In me, says Christ, you shall have peace, when in the world you have tribulation; at such a time our souls may dwell at ease in him. Secondly, He will find out proper instruments, appointed for the execution of his commission and his deliverance, and the defeat of their enemies; Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men, a competent number of persons, proper to oppose the enemy, and make head against him, and protect the church of God in peace; men that shall have the care and tenderness of shepherds, and the courage and authority of principal men, exhorting the remnant of Israel to stand, and to be strong in the Lord; a calm in the midst of a tempest. Note, When God has work to do, he will not want fitting instruments to do it with; and when he pleases, he can do it by a few; he needs not raise thousands, but seven or eight principal men may serve the turn, if God be with them. Magistrates and ministers are shepherds and principal men, raised in defence of religion's rights, and to minister in the affairs of the church, and in the world. Thirdly, The opposition given to the church shall be got over, and the opponents brought down. This is represented by the laying of Assyria and Chaldea waste, which two nations were the most formidable enemies to the Israel of God, of any other; and the destruction of them signifies the making of Christ's enemies his footstool; They shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrance thereof, they shall make inroads upon the land, and put to the sword all that they find in arms. N. B. The destruction is not through the hand or instrument of God, but themselves. And their destruction is the church's salvation; Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian. When Satan fell as lightning from heaven before the preaching of the gospel, and Christ's enemies, that would not have him to reign over them, were slain before him, then this was fulfilled.

7. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarryeth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. 8. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he goeth through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. 9. Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. 10. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots; 11. And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds; 12. And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: 13. Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images, out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thy hands. 14. And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities. 15. And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Glorious things are here spoken of the remnant of Jacob; that remnant which was raised of her that hated, ch. iv. 7. And it seems to be that remnant which is spoken of, Our God shall call, (Hos. ii. 2.) and I will cause them to be cast upon the mountains of sacrifice, and upon the hills shall be their places, Hos. iii. 19. And God's Spirit shall lead the remnant that shall be saved, Rom. ix. 27. Note, God's people are but a remnant, a small number, in comparison with the many that are left to perish; a little flock; but they are the remnant of Jacob, a people in covenant with God, and in his favour.

Now concerning this remnant it is here promised, 1. That they shall be as a dew in the midst of a burning night, (v. 7.) when God's church is dispersed all the world over; it is in the midst of many people, as gold in the ore, wheat in the heap. Israel, according to the flesh, dwelt alone, and was not numbered among the nations; but the spiritual Israel lies scattered in the midst of many people, as the salt of the earth, or as seed sown in the ground, here a grain and there a grain, Hos. ii. 23. Now this remnant shall be as dew from the Lord. (1.) They shall be of a heavenly extraction, as dew from the Lord, who is the Father of the rain, and has begotten the drops of the dew, Job xxxviii. 28. They are born from above, and are not of the earth, savouring the things of the earth. (2.) They shall be numerous as the drops of dew in a summer's morning; (Ps. cxvii. 3.) Thou hast the dew of thy youth. (3.) They shall be pure and clear, not muddy and corrupt but
2 Sam. viii. 4. They shall not have them, lest they should be tempted to trust in them. (2.) They depended upon their strong holds, and fortified cities, for their security; but God will take care that they should be demolished; (v. 11.) I will cut off the cities of thy land. They shall have them for habitations, but not for garrisons, for God will be their only Place of defence, their high Tower, and their Deliverer. (3.) Many of them depended much upon the conduct and advice of their conjurers, diviners, and fortune-tellers; and those God will cut off not only as weak things, and insufficient to relieve them, but as wicked things, and sufficient to ruin them; (v. 12.) "I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand, that thou shalt no more take hold of them, and stay thyself upon them, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers, for thou shalt be convinced that all their pretensions are a cheat." The justice of the nation shall cut them off according to the law, Lev. xx. 27. The preaching of the gospel brought men off from using curious arts, Acts xix. 19. (4.) Many of them had said to the work of their hands, Ye are our gods; but now idolatry shall be abolished and abandoned; (v. 13.) "Thy graven images will I cut off, and thy standing images, both those that were moveable, and those that were fixed; they shall be destroyed by the power of the bow and the arrows, and destroyed by the gospel of grace; we shall not any more worship the work of thy hands, but be ashamed that ever thou hast been so deceived. Among other monuments of idolatry, I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee," v. 14. These were planted and preserved in honour of their idols, and used in the worship of them; these they were ordered to burn, (Deut. xii. 3.) and if they do not, God will, so that they shall have them to trust to. And so will I destroy thy cities, meaning the cities that were dedicated to the idols, to some dunghill-deity or other, which they confided in for their protection.

4. That those who stand it against the gospel of Christ, and continue in league with their idolaters and witchcrafts, shall fall under the wrath of God, and it is connected by v. 5. "Vengeance is longer a fruit upon the heathen, (upon heathensim) such as they have not heard; idolatry shall be done away; and idolaters put to shame. I will execute vengeance upon the heathen which have not heard, (so some read it,) or which would not hear and receive the doctrine of Christ. God will give his Son either the hearts or the necks of his enemies, and make them either his friends or his footstool."

CHAP. VI.

After the precious promises, in the two foregoing chapters, relating to the Messiah's kingdom, the prophet is here directed to the sins of Israel, and to their punishment for their conviction and humiliation, as necessary to make way for the comfort of gospel-peace. Christ's forerunner was a repever, and preached repentance, and so prepared his way. Here, 1. God enters an action against his people for their base ingratitude, and the bad returns they had made him for his favours, v. 1... 5. He shows them the wrong course they took, when they were oppressed, and, as it was not only as an evasion of his grace, but a dereliction to their own, still as much without effect. When they were made, in answer to his charge, and what course they should have taken, v. 6... 8. He calls upon them to hear the voice of his judgments, and sets the sins in order before them, for not only as a controversy with them, (v. 9.) their injustice, (v. 10... 15.) and their idolatry, (v. 16.) for which ruin was coming upon them.

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

1. The message itself was very affecting; he is to let all the world know that God has a quarrel with his people, good ground for an action against them. Their offences are public, and therefore so are the articles of impeachment exhibited against them. Take notice, the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel, will plead by his prophets, plead by his providences, to make good his charge. Note, 1. Sin begets a controversy between God and man. The righteous God has an action against every sinner, an action of debt, an action of trespass, an action of slander. 2. If Israel, God's own professing people, provoke him to sin, he will let them know that he has a controversy with them; he sees sin in them, and is displeased with them, no, their sins are more displeasing to him than the sins of others, as they are a greater grief to his Spirit, and dishonour to his name. 3. God will plead with those whom he has a controversy with, will plead with his people Israel, that they may be convinced, and that he may be justified. In the close of the foregoing chapter he pleaded with the heathen in anger and fury, to bring them to ruin; but here he pleads for the people Israel, to excite tenderness, to bring them to repentance. Come now and let us reason together. God reasons with us, to teach us to reason with ourselves. See the equity of God's cause; it will bear to be pleaded, and sinners themselves will be forced to confess judgment, and to own that God's ways are good, but man's ways cause much reproach.  
4. (Now, 1.) God here challenges them to show what he had done against them, which might give them occasion to desecract them. They had revolted from God, and rebelled against him; but had they any cause to do so? (v. 5.) "O my people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee?" If subjects quit their allegiance to their prince, they will pretend, as the ten tribes did, when they revolted from Rehoboam, that his yoke is too heavy for them; but can you pretend any such thing? What have I done to you, that is unjust or unkind? Wherein have I wearied you, with the impositions of service, or the excations of tribute? Have I made you to serve with an offering? Isa. xliii. 25. What iniquity have your fathers found in me? Jer. xviii. 1. He will not find them. He never accused them, or clothed them with dishonour, out of any just or unkind action or omission of theirs. They pointed our expectations from him; never did we wrong, or put disgrace upon us; why then do we wrong and dishonour him, and frustrate his expectations from us? Here is a challenge to all that ever were in God's service, to testify against him, if they have found him, in any thing, a hard Master, and his demands unreasonable.  
5. (b.) Since they build not show any thing that he has done against them, he will show them a great deal that he had done for them, which should have engaged them for ever to his service, v. 4, 5. They are directed, and we in them, to look a great way back in their reviews of divine favour; let them remember their former days, their first days, when they were formed into a people, and the great things God did for them.

[1.] When he brought them out of Egypt, the land of their bondage, v. 4. They were content with their slavery, and almost in love with their chains, for the sake of the garlic and onions they had plenty of; but God brought them up, inspired them with an ambition of liberty, and animated them with a resolution by a bold effort to shake off their fetters. The Egyptians held them fast, and would not let the people go; but God redeemed them, not by force, but by force; out of the house of servants, or, rather, the house of bondage, for it is the same word that is used in the preface of the ten commandments; which insinuates that the considerations which are arguments for duty, if they be not improved by us, will be improved to shame and aggravations of sin. When he brought them out of Egypt into a vast howling wilderness, as he left not himself without witness, so he left not them without guides, for he sent before them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, three prophets, says the Chaldee Paraphrase; Moses the great prophet of the Old Testament, Aaron his prophet, (Exod. vii. 1.) and Miriam a prophetess, (Exod. xv. 20.) Note, When we are calling to mind God's former mercies to us, we must not forget the mercy of good teachers and governors when we were young, let those be made mention of, to the glory of God who went before us, saying, This is the way, walk in it; it was God that
sent them before us, to prepare the way of the Lord, and to prepare a people for him.

[2.] When he brought them into Canaan, God no less glorified himself, and honoured them, in what he did for them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Where Moses, Joshua, and Miriam were dead, yet they found God the same. Let them remember now what God did for them, First, In buffeting and defeating the designs of Balak and Balaam against them, which he did by the power he has over the hearts and tongues of men, vs. 5. Let them remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, what mischief he devised, and Israel was to do to Israel; which he consulted was, to curse Israel, to divide between them and their God, and to disencage him from the protection of them. Among the heathen, when they made war upon any people, they endeavoured by magic charms or otherwise to get from them their tutelar gods, as to rob Troy of its Palladium. Macrobius has a chapter, de ritu exuendae Dossis, or the solemnity of calling out the Gods. Balak would try this against Israel; but remember what Balaam the son of Beer answered him, how contrary to his own intention and inclination; instead of cursing Israel, he blessed them, to the extreme confusion and vexation of Balak. Let them remember the malice of the heathen against them, and for that reason never vent the enmity of the heathen, or associate with them; let them remember the kindness of their God to them, how he turned the curse into a blessing; (because the Lord thy God loved thee, as it is, Deut. xxiii. 5.) and for that reason never forsake him. Note, The disappointing of the devices of the church's enemies ought always to be remembered to the glory of the church's Protector, who can make the answer of the tongue directly to contradict the preparation and consultation of the heart, Prov. xvi. 1. Secondly, In bringing them from Shittim, their last lodgement, out of Canaan, unto Gilgal, their first lodgement in Canaan. There it was, between Shittim and Gilgal, that, upon the death of Moses, Joshua, a type of Christ, was raised up to put Israel in possession of the land of promise, and to fight their battles thenceforth. There it was, he divided the land through the divided waters, and renewed the covenant of circumcision; these mercies of God to their fathers they must now remember, that they may know the righteousness of the Lord, his righteousness, so the word is, his justice in destroying the Canaanites, his goodness in giving rest to his people Israel, and his faithfulness to his promise made unto the fathers. The remembrance of what God had done to them might convince them of all this, and engage them for ever to his service. Or, they may refer to the controversy now pleaded between God and Israel; let them remember God's many favours to them and their fathers, and compare with them their unworthy, ungrateful conduct toward him, that they may know the righteousness of the Lord in contending with them, and it may appear that in his controversy he has right on his side; his ways are equal, for he will be justified when he speaks, and clea when he judges.

6. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and how myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? 7. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgres-sion, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
II. They make proposals, such as they are, in order to it; their inquiry was very good and right, and what we are all concerned to make; but their proposals betray their ignorance, though they show their zeal; let us examine them:

1. They bid high. They offer, (1.) That which is very rich and costly, thousands of rams. God required one ram for a sin-offering; they profere flocks of them, their whole stock, and be content to make themselves baggers, so that they may be at peace with God. They will bring the best they have, the rams, and the most of them, till it come to thousands. (2.) That which is very dear to them, and which they would be most loath to part with. They could be content to part with their first-born for their transgressions, if that would be accepted in sacrifice, and there set free from the burden of sin of their soul. To them that were become vain in their imaginations this seemed a probable expedient of making satisfaction for sin, because our children are pieces of ourselves; and therefore they then sacrificed their children to appease their offended deities. Note, Those that are thoroughly convinced of sin, of the malignity of it, and of their moral corruption, they will, if possible, give all the world, if they had it, for peace and pardon.

2. Yet they do not bid right. It is true, some of these things were instituted by the ceremonial law, as the bringing of burnt-offerings to God's altar, and calves of a year old, rams for sin-offerings, and oil for the meat-offerings; but these alone would not remove their sin, nor appease God's justice. (1.) Some of them that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams; that sacrifice and offering he would not; the legal sacrifices had their virtue and value from the institution, and the reference they had to Christ the great Propitiation; but otherwise, of themselves, it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin. And as to the other things here mentioned, (2.) Some of them are impracticable things, as rivers of oil, which nature has not provided, to feed men's luxury, but rivers of water, to supply men's necessity. All the proposals of peace but those that are according to the gospel, are absurd. One stream of the blood of Christ is worth ten thousand rivers of oil. (3.) Some of them are wicked things, as to give our first-born and our fruit of the womb, and thus to increase the transgression, and the sin of the soul. He that hates robbery for burnt-offerings, much more hates murder, such murder, what right have we to our first-born, and the fruit of our body? Do they not belong to God? Are they not his already, and born to him? Are they not sinners by nature, and their lives forfeited upon their own account? How then can they be a ransom for sin?

(3.) They are all external things, parts of the bodily exercise which profiteth little, and which could not make the corners thereof unto perfect. (4.) They are all insignificant, and insufficient to attain the end proposed; they could not answer the demands of divine justice, nor satisfy the wrong done to God in his honour, nor he would be content to die, which would but add to the transgression, and the sin of the soul. He that hates robbery for burnt-offerings, much more hates murder, such murder, what right have we to our first-born, and the fruit of our body? Do they not belong to God? Are they not his already, and born to him? Are they not sinners by nature, and their lives forfeited upon their own account? How then can they be a ransom for sin?

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

1. God has made a discovery of his mind and will to us, for the rectifying of our mistakes, and the directing of our practice. (1.) It is God himself that has showed us what we must do. We need not trouble ourselves to make proposals, the terms are already settled and laid down. He, whom we have offended, and to whom we are accountable, has told us upon what conditions he will be reconciled to us. (2.) It is to man that he has showed it; not only to thee, O Israel, but to thee, O man, Gentiles as well as Jews. To men, who are rational creatures, and capable of receiving the discovery, and not to brutes; men, for whom a remedy is provided, not to devils, whose case is desperate. What is spoken to all men everywhere in general, must by faith be applied to ourselves in particular, as if it were spoken to thee, O man, by name, and to no other. (3.) It is a discovery of that which is good, and which the Lord requires of us. He has showed us our end, which we should aim at, in showing us what our happiness does consist; he has showed us our way in which we must walk toward that end, in showing us what he requires of us. There is something which God requires we should do for him, and devote to him; and it is good; it is good in itself.

There is an innate goodness in moral duties, antecedent to the command; they are not, as ceremonial duties, the mere survivals of the sacrifices, and the tokens of the pardon purchased, and the duty, which is the condition of our interest in the pardon purchased. (1.) We must do justly, must render to all their due, according as our relation and obligation to them are; we must do wrong to none, but do right to all, in their bodies, goods, and name. (2.) We must love mercy; not only be just to all we deal with, but kind to all that need kindness, and their friends, and ourselves. Nor must we only show mercy, but we must love mercy, we must delight in it, as our God does, must be glad of an opportunity to do good, and do it cheerfully. Justice is put before mercy, for we must not give that in alms, which is wrongfully got, or with which our debts should be paid. God hates mercy for a burnt-offering. (3.) We must walk humbly with our God; this includes all the duties of the first table. We must take the Lord for our God in covenant, must attend on him, and adhere to him, as ours, and must make it our constant care and business to please him. Enoch's walking with God is interpreted, (Heb. x. 35.) his pleasing God; we must, in the whole course of our conversation, conform ourselves to the will of God, keep up our communion with God, and study to appoint ourselves to him in our integrity; and this we must do humbly; (submitting our understandings to the truths of God, and our wills to his precepts and provisions;) we must humble ourselves to walk with God; (so the margin reads it;) every thought within us must be brought down, to be brought into obedience to God. If we would walk comfortably with him. This is that which God requires, and we would set before us, which the most costly services are vain oblations; this is more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.
hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.
10. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? 11. Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? 12. For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. 13. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins. 14. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. 15. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. 16. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing: therefore shall ye bear the reproach of my people.

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

Observe,
1. How the action is entered against them, v. 9. God speaks to the city, to Jerusalem, to Samaria; his voice cries to it by his servants the prophets, who were to cry aloud, and not spare. Note, The voice of the prophets is the Lord's voice, and that cries to the city, cries to the country; Doth not Wisdom cry? Prov. viii. 1. When the sin of a city cries to God, his voice cries against the city; and when the judgments of God are coming upon a city, his voice first cries unto it; he warns before he wounds, because he is not willing that any should perish. Not see (v. 1.) How the voice of God is despised by some; The man of wisdom will see thy name. When the voice of God cries to us, we may by it see his name, may discern and perceive that by which he makes himself known. Yet many see it not, are not aware of it, because they do not regard it. God speaks once, yea, twice, and they perceive it not; (Job xxxiii. 14.) but they that are men of wisdom, will see and perceive it, and make a good use of it. Note, It is a point of true wisdom to discover the name of God in the voice of God, and to learn what he is, from what he says; Wisdom shall see thy name, for the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 2. What this voice of God says to all; “Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. Hear the rod when it is coming, hear it at a distance before you can hear the voice of the rod; they go forth to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments. Hear the rod when it is come, and is actually upon you, and you are sensible of the smart of it; hear what it says to you, what convictions, what counsels, what cautions, it speaks to you.” Note, Every rod has a voice, and it is the voice of God that is to be heard in the rod of God; and it is well for them that understand the language of it; if we would do, we must have an eye to him that appointed it. Note, Every rod is appointed, of what kind it shall be, where it shall light, and how long it shall lie. God never appointed a rod for the punishment of his people, but for ours, (Job xxviii. 14.) and to him therefore we must have an eye, to him we must have an ear; we must hear what he says to us by the affliction, hear it, and know it for thy good, Job v. 6. The work of ministers is to explain the providences of God, and to quicken and direct men to learn the lessons that are taught by them.

III. What are the grounds of the action, and what are the things that are laid to their charge.
1. They are charged with injustice, a sin against the second table. Are there yet to be found among them the marks and means of fraudulent dealing? What, after all the methods that God has taken to teach them to do justly, will they yet deal unjustly? It seems they will, v. 10. And shall I count them pure? v. 11. Those that have weighed and measured, this means consist with a profession of purity. Those that are dishonest in their dealings, have not the spots of God's children, and shall never be reckoned pure, whatever shows of devotion they may make. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. When a man is suspected of theft, or fraud, the justice of peace will send a warrant to search his house. God forsook them, and sent the rod, the vials, the voice of the Lord, his kinsman and glory, and there he finds, (1.) Treasures of wickedness; abundance of wealth, but it is ill got, and not likely to prosper; for treasures of wickedness profit nothing. (2.) A scant measure, by which they sold to the poor, and so exacted upon them, and cheated them. (3.) They had wicked balances and a bag of false weights, by which, under a pretence of weighing what they sold, and giving the buyer what was right, did them the greatest wrong, v. 11. (4.) Those that had wealth and power in their hands, abused it to oppression and extortion; The rich men thereof are full of violence; for they that have much, would have more, and are in a capacity of making it more, by the power which their abundance of wealth gives them. They are full of violence, they have their houses full of that which is got by violence. (5.) Those that had not advantage of doing wrong by their wealth, yet found means of defrauding those they dealt with; The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies; if they are not able to use force and violence, they use fraud and deceit; the inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth; they do not stick at a deliberate lie, to make a good bargain. Such a business as is here directed concerning God, saying, The Lord seeth not, he hath forsaken the earth, Ezek. viii. 12.

2. They are charged with idolatry; (v. 6.) The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the work of the house of Ahab; both these kings were wicked, and did evil in the sight of the Lord; but the wickedness which they established by a law, concerning which they had prescribed, and the work of that house, was idolatry. Omri walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin of provoking God to anger with their vanities, 1 Kings xvi. 26. and v. 31. Ahab introduced the worship of Baal. These reigns were some ages before the time when this prophet lived, and yet the wickedness which they established by their laws and examples, required the punishment thereof; the ax was not kept and that work was still done; and the princes and people still walked in their counsels, took the same measures, and governed themselves and the people by the same politics. Observe, (1.) The same wickedness continued from one generation to another. Sin is a root of bitterness soon planted, but not so soon plucked up again. The iniquity of former ages is on a man, and remained untill upon, the succeeding ones. Those that make cor-
rupt laws, and bring in corrupt usages, are doing that which perhaps may prove the ruin of the child unborn. (2.) It was nevertheless evil in itself, provoking to God, and dangerous to the sinners, for its having been established and confirmed by the laws of princes, the examples of great men, and a long prescription. Though the worship of idols is enacted by the statutes of Omri, recommended by the practice of the house of Ahab, and pleads that it is not proscribed, yet it is a standing wrong, still displeasing to God, and destructive to Israel; for no laws or customs are of force against the divine command.

III. What is the judgment given upon this. Being found guilty of these crimes, the sentence is, that, on such which God had given them warning of, (v. 9.) shall be their doom: [Isa. 1:27.] Then shall I make thee sick, in smiting thee. As they had smitten the poor with the rod of their oppressions, so would God in like manner smite them, so as to make them sick, sick of the gains they had unjustly gotten, so that though they had swallowed down riches, they should vomit them up again, Job xx. 13. Their doom is,

1. That what they have, they shall not have any comfortable enjoyment of, it shall do them no good; they grasped at more than enough, but when they have it, it shall not be enough to make them easy and happy; what is got by fraud and oppression cannot be kept or enjoyed with any satisfaction. (1.) Their food shall not nourish them: Thou shalt eat but not be satisfied; and their joy and other things of which they are so proud shall be in vain, for want of God's blessing going along with it, or because the appetite shall by disease be made insatiable and still craving, the just punishment of those that were greedy of gain, and enlarged their desires as hell. Men may be surfeited with the good things of this world, and yet not satisfied, Eccl. v. 10. Isa. v. 2. (2.) Their country shall not delight them; [Deut. 28:58.] that food shall be in the midst of thee, shalt be broken and ruined by intestine troubles, miscarriages at home enough to cast thee down, though thou shouldst not be invaded by a foreign force. For God can cast a nation down by that which is in the midst of them, can consume them by a fire in their own houses, v. 13. (3.) They shall not be able to provide what they have from a foreign force, or to recover what they have lost; [2 Chron. 1:12.] Thou shalt take hold of what is about to be taken from thee, but thou shalt not hold it fast, shalt catch at it, but shalt not deliver it, shall not retrieve it. It is meant of their wives and children, that were very dear to them, which they took hold of, as resolved not to part with them, but there is no remedy, they must go into captivity. Note, What we hold closest we commonly lose soonest, and that proves least safe which is most dear. (4.) What they save for a time, shall be reserved for a future and sorier stroke; That which thou deliverest out of the hand of one enemy, will I give up to the sword of another enemy; for God has many arrows in his quiver, if one miss the other shall strike, v. 14. (5.) What they have laboured for, they shall not enjoy; [Micah 3:12.] Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; either it shall be blasted and withered, and there shall be nothing to reap, or an enemy shall come, and reap it for himself, or thou shalt be carried into captivity, and leave it to be reaped by thou knowest not whom; thou shalt tread the olive, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; having no heart to make use of ornaments and refreshments, when all is going to ruin. Thou shalt tread out the sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine, for many things may fall between the cup and the lip. Note, It is very grievous to be disappointed of our expectations, and not to have the pleasure of that which we have taken pains for; and this will be the just punishment of those that frustrate God's expectations from them, and answer not the cost he has been at upon them. See this threatened in the law; (Lev. xxvi. 16. Deut. xxxi. 38, &c.) and compare Isa. Ixii. 8, 9.

2. That all they have, shall at length be taken from them; [v. 13.] Thou shalt be made desolate because of thy sins; and v. 16, a desolation and a hissing. Sin makes a nation desolate; and when a people that have been famous and flourishing, are made desolate, it is the astonishment of some and the triumph of others; some lament it, and others hiss at it. Thus ye shall hear the reproach of my people. Their being the people of God, in name and profession, while they kept close to their duty, and kept themselves in his love, was an honour to them, and all their neighbours; but the pernicious consequences of their having corrupted and ruined themselves, now that their sins and God's judgments have made their land desolate, their having been once the people of God does but turn so much the more to their reproach; their enemies will say, These are the people of the Lord, Ezek. xxxvi. 20. Note, If professors of religion ruin themselves, their ruin will be the most reproachful of any other; and they in a special manner will rise at the last day to everlasting shame and contempt.

CHAP. VII.

In this chapter, I. The prophet, in the name of the church, solemnly laments the woeful decay of religion in the age wherein he lived, and the decline of its prosperity, which was chiefly occasioned by the corruption of the nation, which revealed the differences, and broke down the fences, of all that is just and sacred, v. 1. 6. II. The prophet, for the sake of the church, prescribes comforts, which may be of use at such a time, and gives counsel what to do. 1. They must have an eye to God, v. 7. 2. They must courageously bear up against the insolence of the enemy, v. 8. 10. 3. They must patiently bear the mischievous and ruinous judgments of God, v. 9. 4. They must expect no other than what the trouble would continue long, and must endeavour to make the best of it, v. 11. 13. 5. They must encourage themselves with God's promises, in answer to the prophet's prayers, v. 14. 15. 6. They must foresee the fall of their enemies, that now triumph over them, v. 16. 17. 7. They must themselves triumph in the mercy and power of God, and his faithfulness to his covenant; (v. 18., 30,) and with that comfortable word the prophecy concludes.

1. W O is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first-ripe fruit. 2. The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. 3. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up. 4. The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge: the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity. 5. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. 6. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,
a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

This is such a description of bad times, as, some think, could scarcely agree to the times of Hezekiah, when this prophet prophesied; and therefore they rather take it as a prediction of what should be in the reign of Manasseh. But we may rather suppose it to be in the reign of Ahaz, (and in that reign he prophesied, ch. 1. 1.) or in the beginning of Hezekiah's time, before the reformation he was instrumental in; nay, in the best of his days, and when he had done his best to purge out corruptions, still there was much sin. The prophet cries out, This is me! He bemoans himself that his lot was cast in such a degenerate age, and thinks it his great unhappiness that he lived among a people that were ripening for a ruin which many a good man would unavoidably be involved in. Thus David cries out, Wo is me, that I sojourn in Mesopotamia; He laments it, 1. That there was so few good people to be found, even among those that were called God's people; and this was their reproach. The good man is perished out of the earth, or out of the land, the land of Canaan, it was a good land, and a land of uprightness, (Isa. xxxvi. 10.) but there were few good men in it, none upright among them, v. 2. The good man is a godly man, and a merciful man; the word signifies both. Those are completely good, who are zealous, and tender, and passionate and beneficent toward men; that love mercy and walk with God. These are perished; those few honest men that some time ago enriched and adorned our country, are now dead and gone, and there are none risen up in their stead, that tread in their steps; honesty is banished, and there is no such thing as a good man to be met with. Those that would have prospered, are now dispersed, and become as bad as the worst; the godly man ceases, Ps. xii. 1. This is illustrated by a comparison, (v. 1.) They were as when they have gathered the summer-fruits; it was as hard a thing to find a good man as to find any of the summer-fruits, (which were the choicest and best, and therefore must carefully be gathered in,) when the harvest is over. The prophet is ready to say, as Elijah in his time, (1 Kings xix. 16,) I, even I only, am left. Good men, who used to hang in clusters, are now as the grape-gleanings of the vintage, here and there a berry, Isa. xxvi. 6. You can find no societies of them as bunches of grapes, but those that are, are single persons, there is no cluster to eat; and the best and fullest grapes are those that grow in large clusters. Some think that this intimates not only that good people were few, but that those few who remained, who went for good people, were good for little; like the small withered grapes, the refuse that were left behind, not only by the gatherer, but by the gleaner. When the prophet observed this universal degeneracy, it made him desire the first-ripe fruit; he wished to see such worthy, good men as were in the times of his predecessors, and in the primitive times, and as far excelled the best of all the present age as the first and full-ripe fruits do those of the latter growth, that never come to maturity. When we read and hear of the wisdom and zeal, the strictness and conscientiousness, the devotion and charity, of the professors of religion in former ages, and see the reverse of this in those of the present age, and compare the two, we sit down and dwell with a sigh, O for primitive Christianity again! Where are the plainness and integrity of those that went before us? Where are the Israelites indeed, without guile? Our souls desire them; but in vain. The golden age is gone, and past recall; we must make the best of what is, for we are not likely to see such times as have been.

2. That there were so many wicked, mischievous people among them; not only none that did any good, but multitudes that did all the hurt they could; They all lie in wait for blood, and hunt every man his brother. To get wealth to themselves, they were not only wretched, and poor, but they did all they could to throw their neighbours and nearest relations into misery. They act as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey, they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as rich as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey, they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as rich as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey, they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as rich as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey, they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as rich as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey, they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as rich as
that have any sense of honour, or sparks of virtue, remaining in them, have a firm regard to the laws of friendship; they would not discover what passed in private conversation, nor divulge secrets, to the prejudice of a friend; but these things are now made a jest of, you will not meet with a friend that you dare trust, whose word you dare take, or who will have any tenderness or concern for you; so that wise men shall give it and take it for a rule, 

**Trust ye not in a friend, for you will find him false, you can trust him no farther than you can see him; and even him that passes for an honest man you will find to be so only with good-will to deceive you.** 

As Noah undertakes to be your guide, to lead you into any business which he professes to understand better than you, you cannot put a confidence in him, for he will be sure to mislead you if he can get any thing by it." Some by a guide understand a husband, who is called the guide of thy youth; and that agrees well enough with what follows, *Keep the doors of thy life from her that lieth in thy bosom, from thy own wife; take heed what thou seest before her, lest she betray thee, as Delilah did Samson; lest she be the bird of the air, that carries the voice of that which thou seest in thy bed-chamber,* Excl. x. 20. It is an evil time indeed, when the prudent are obliged even thus far to keep silence. 

My children were abusive, to their parents, and men have ceased to be satisfied in their own families, and their nearest relations, v. 6. The times are bad indeed, when the son dishonours the father, gives him bad language, exposes him, threatens him, and studies to do him a mischief, when the daughter rises up in rebellion against her own mother, having no sense of duty, or natural affection; and no respect for God; for she dishonours her mother-in-law, and is vexatious to her. Either they cannot agree about their property and interest, or their humours and passions clash, or, from a spirit of bigotry and persecution, the father shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, Matt. x. 4. Luke xxi. 16. It is sad when a man's betrayers and worst enemies are the men of his own house, his own children and servants, that should be his guard and his best friends. Note, The contempt and violation of the laws of domestic duties are a sad symptom of universal corruption of manners. These are never likely to come to good, that are unfaithful to their parents, and study to be provoking to them, and cross them. 

7. Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. 8. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. 9. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. 10. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets. 11. In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. 12. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. 13. Notwithstanding, the land shall be desolate, because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings. 

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

1. Though God be now displeased, he shall be reconciled to us, and then all will be well, v. 7, 9. We are now under the indignation of the Lord, God is angry with us, and justly, because we have sinned against him. Note, It is our sin against God that provokes his indignation against us; and we must see it, and own it, whenever we are under divine rebukes, that we may justify God, and may study to answer his end in afflicting us, by repenting of sin, and breaking off from it. Now, at such a time, 

1. We must have recourse to God under our troubles; (v. 7) Therefore I will look unto the Lord. When a child of God has ever so much occasion to say, 'Ho! Ho!' (as the prophet here, v. 1.) yet it may be a comfort to him, that he has a God to look to, a God to come to, to fly to, in whom he may rejoice, and have satisfaction. All may look bright above him, when all looks black and dark about him. The prophet had been complaining that there was no comfort to be had, no confidence to be put, in friends and relations on earth, and this drives him to his God, therefore he may be trusting in him. The less reason we have to delight in any creature, the more reason we have to delight in God. If princes are not to be trusted, we may say, Happy is the man that has the God of Jacob for his Help, and happy am I, even in the midst of my present woes, if he be my Help. If men be false, this is our comfort, that God is faithful; if relations be unkind, he is and will be gracious. Let us therefore look above and beyond them, and overlook our disappointment in them, and look unto the Lord. 

2. We must submit to the will of God in our troubles; "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, will bear it patiently, without murmuring and repining, because I have sinned against him." Note, Those that are truly penitent for sin, will see a great deal of reason to patient under the rod. Wherefore should a man complain, for the punishment of his sin? When we complain to God of the badness of the times, we ought to complain against ourselves for the badness of our own hearts. 

3. We must depend upon God to work deliverance for us, and put a good issue to our troubles in due time; we must not outwear our patience with him; "I will wait for the God of my salvation, and for his gracious returns to me." In our greatest distresses, we shall see no reason to despair of salvation, if by faith we eye God as the God of our salvation, who is able to save the weakest, upon their humble petition, and willing to save the worst, upon their true repentance. And if we depend on God in due time; we must not outwear our patience with him, but look for him; "I will wait for the God of my salvation, and for his gracious returns to me."
When I sit in darkness, desolate and disconsolate, melancholy and perplexed, and not knowing what to do, or which way to look for relief, yet then the Lord shall be a Light to me, to comfort and revive me, to instruct and teach me, to direct and guide me, as a Light to mine eyes, a Light to my feet, a Light in a dark place. (4.) He will plead my cause, and execute judgment for me, v. 9. If we heartily repent of our sins, and sincerely turn away from the injured cause of religion and virtue, and make it our cause, we may hope he will own our cause, and plead it. The church's cause, though it seem for a time to go against her, will at length be pleaded with jealously, and judgment not only given against, but executed upon, the enemies of it. (5.) He will bring me forth to the light, make me shine eminently against the objects of obscurity, and become conspicuous; will make my righteousness shine evidently from under the dark cloud of calumny, Ps. xxxvii. 6. Isa. lviii. 10. The morning of comfort shall shine forth, out of the long and dark night of trouble. (6.) I shall behold his righteousness; I shall see the equity of his proceedings concerning me, and the performance of his promises to me.

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

1. How proudly the enemies of God's people trampled upon them in their distress; they said, Where is the Lord their God? As if because they were afflicted, God had forsaken them, and they knew not where to find him with their prayers, and he knew not how to help them with his favours. This.mockery was said to him, and it was a sword in his bones; (Ps. xlix. 10.) and see Ps. cxv. 2. Thus, in reproaching Israel as an abandoned people, they reflected on the God of Israel, as an unkind, unfatherly God.

2. How comfortably the people of God by faith bear up themselves under these insults; (v. 8.) "Refuse not against me, O mine enemy; I am now down, but shall not be always so, and when my God appears for me, then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and be ashamed." (not only being disappointed in her expectations of the church's utter ruin, but having the same cup of trembling put into her hand,) "then mine eyes shall behold her in the same deplorable condition that I am now in; now shall she be trodden down." Note, The deliverance of the church will be the confusion of her enemies; and they shall be made ashamed, when evil shall trample upon God's people, so they shall themselves be trampled upon.

III. Though the land continue a great while desolate, yet it shall at length be replenished again, when the time, even the set time, of its deliverance comes. 1. Its salvation shall not come till after it has been desolate; so the margin reads it, v. 13. God who has controversies with the land, and it must lie long under his rebukes, because of them that dwell therein; it is their iniquity that makes their land desolate; (Ps. civi. 34.) it is for the fruit of their doings, their evil doings which they have been themselves guilty of, and the evil fruit of them, the sins of others, which they have been accessible to by their bad influence and example. For this they must expect to smart a great while, for the word shall know no time; and it will be not without sin upon people. 2. When it does come, it shall be a complete salvation; and it seems to refer to their deliverance out of Babylon by Cyrus, which Isaiah about this time prophesied of, as a type of our redemption by Christ. (L.) The decree shall be far removed. God's decree concerning their captivity, and Nebuchadnezzar's decree concerning the perpetuity of it, his resolution never to release them; these shall be set aside and revoked, and you shall hear no more of them; they shall no more lie as a yoke upon thy neck. (2.) Jerusalem and the cities of Judah shall be again reared; Then thy walls shall be built; walls for habitation, walls for defence, house-walls, town-walls, temple-walls: it is in order to these, that the decree is repeated, Is. xlv. 28. Though Zion's walls may lie long in ruins, there will come a day when they shall be repaired. (3.) All that belong to the land of Israel, whithersoever you go, they shall be dispersed from Mount Pharaoh will not let the people go, God will fetch them out with a high hand. They shall come from all the remote parts, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain, not turning back for fear of your discouragements, but they shall go from strength to strength till they come to Zion. Thus in the great day of redemption, God will gather his elect from the four winds.

14. Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thy heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. 15. According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things. 16. The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. 17. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee. 18. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. 19. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us: he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. 20. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.
peculiar people that dwelt alone, and was not reckoned among the nations, like a flock of sheep in a wood. They were now a desolate people, (v. 13.) were in the land of their captivity, where God had brought them, but there were not many of them, and made a prey of to the beasts of the forest. They are scattered upon the mountains as sheep having no shepherd. 3. He prays that God would feed them there with his rod, that he would take care of them in their captivity, would protect them, and provide for them, and do the part of a good Shepherd to them; Let thy rod and thy staff, be with me, even in that darksome valley, and even there let them want nothing that is good for them. Let them be governed by thy rod, not the rod of their enemies, for they are thy people. 4. He prays that God would in due time bring them back to feed in the plains of Bashan and Gilead, no longer to be fed in the woods and mountains. Let them feed in their own country again, as in the days of old. Some apply this spiritually, and make it either the prophet's prayer to Christ, or his Father's charge to him, to take care of his church, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and to go in and out before them while they are here in this world as in a wood, that they may find pasture as in Carmel, as in Bashan and Gilead.

II. God's promise, in answer to this prayer; and we may well take God's promises as real answers to the prayers of faith, and embrace them accordingly, for with him saying and doing are not two things. The prophet prayed that God would feed them, and do kind things for them; but God answers that he will show them marvellous things, (v. 15.) will do for them more than they are able to ask or think, will out-do their hopes and expectations; he will show them his marvellous loving-kindness, Ps. xlii. 7.

1. He will do that for them, which shall be the repetition of the wonders and miracles of former ages; according to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt. Their deliverance out of Babylon shall be a work of wonder and grace, not inferior to their deliverance out of Egypt, nay, it should eclipse the lustre of that, (Jer. xlv. 14, 15.) much more should the work of redemption by Christ be so. Note, God's former favours to his church are patterns of future favours, and shall again be copied out as there is occasion.

2. He will do that for them, which shall be matter of wonder and amazement to the present age, v. 16, 17. The nations about shall take notice of it, and shall be astonished, The nations about it shall be amazed. By God's doing great things for them, Ps. cxxxvi. 2. The impression which the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon shall make upon the neighbouring nations, shall be very much for the honour both of God and his church. (1.) Those that had insulted over the people of God in their distress, and gloated that when they had them down, they would keep them down, shall be confounded, when they see them thus surprisingly rising up; they shall be confounded at all the might with which the captives shall now exert themselves, whom they thought for ever disabled. They shall now lay their hand upon their mouths, as being ashamed of what they have said, and not able to say any more, by way of triumph over Israel. Nay, their ears shall be deaf, too, to hear of their own work upon themselves; for God shall show his marvellous deliverance, they shall stop their ears, as being not willing to hear any more of God's wonders wrought for them, which they had so despised and insulted over. (2.) Those that had impudently confronted God himself, shall now be struck with a fear of him, and thereby brought, in profession at least, to submit to him; (v. 17.) They shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall be so mortified, as if they were sentenced to the same curse the serpent was laid under; (Gen. iii. 14.) Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat. They shall be brought to the lowest abasement imaginable, and must ever be so deterred, that they shall never again lift up their eyes to them. His enemies shall lick the dust, Ps. lxxxi. 9. Nay, they shall lick the dust of the church's feet, Isa. lxi. 23. Proud oppressors shall now be made sensible how mean, how little they are, before the great God, and they shall with trembling and the lowest submission move out of the holes into which they had crept, (Isa. ii. 21.) like worms in the earth. The lowest that have been despised shall be desirous to show their heads; so low shall they be brought, and such objects shall they be, when they are abased. When God did wonders for his church, many of the people of the land became Jews, because the fear of the Jews, and of their God, fell upon them, Esth. vii. 17. So it is promised here; They shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee, O Lord. Forced submissions are often but feigned submissions; yet they redound to the glory of God and the church, though not to the benefit of the dissemblers themselves.

III. The prophet's thankful acknowledgment of God's mercy, in the name of the church, with a believing dependence upon his promise, v. 18.—20. We are here taught, To give God the glory of his pardoning mercy, v. 18. God having promised to bring back the captivity of his people, the prophet, on that occasion, admires pardoning mercy, as that which was at the bottom of it. As it was their sin that brought them into bondage, so it was God's pardoning their sin that brought them out of it; Ps. lxxxi. 1, 2. and Isa. xxxiii. 24.—xxxviii. 17.—31, 1, 2. The pardon of sin is the foundation of all other covenant mercies, Heb. viii. 12. This the prophet stands amazed at, while the nations about stood amazed only at those deliverances which were but the fruits of this. Note, (1.) God's people, who are the remnant of his heritage, stand charged with many transgressions; being but a remnant, a very few, one would hope they should all be very good, but they are not so; God's children have their spots, and often offend their Father. (2.) The gracious God is ready to pass by and pardon the iniquity and transgression of his people, upon their repentance and return to him. God's people are pardoned people, and to this they owe their all. When God pardons sin, he passes it by, does not punish it as justly he might, nor deal with the sinner according to his deserts. He will not take the case of his own children, lay his own people under the tokens of his displeasure, yet he will not retain his anger for ever, but though he cause grief, he will have compassion; he is not implacable; yet against those that are not of the remnant of his heritage that are unpardoned, he will keep his anger for ever. (4.) The reasons why God pardons sin, and keeps not his anger for ever, in this his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours; are all taken from within himself; it is because he has experienced pardoning mercy, cannot but admire that mercy; it is what we have reason to stand amazed at, if we know what it is. Has God forgiven us our transgressions? We may well say, Who is a God like unto thee? Our holy wonder of pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it.
God’s people here, as they look back with thankfulness upon God’s pardoning their sins, so they look forward with assurance upon what he would yet further do for them. His mercy endures for ever, and therefore as he has showed mercy, so he will, v. 19, 20. (1.) He will renew his favours to us, he will turn again, he will have compassion, he will again have compassion upon us, as formerly he had; his compassions shall be new every morning: he seemed to be departing from us in anger, but he will turn again, and pity us. He will turn us to himself, and then will turn to us, and have mercy upon us. (2.) He will renew, to prepare and qualify us for his favour; He will subdue our iniquities; when he takes away the guilt of sin, that it may not damn us, he will break the power of sin, that it may not have dominion over us; that we may not fear sin, or be led captive by it. Sin is an enemy that fights against us, a tyrant that oppresses us; nothing less than almighty grace can subdue it, so great is its power in fallen man, and so long has it kept possession. But if God forgive the sin that has been committed by us, he will subdue the sin that dwells in us, and in that, there is none like him in forgiving; and all those whose sins are pardoned, earnestly desire and hope to have their corruptions mortified, and their iniquities subdued, and please themselves with the hopes of it. If we be left to ourselves, our iniquities will be too hard for us; but God’s grace, we trust, shall be sufficient for us to subdue them, so that they shall not rule us, and then they shall not ruin us. (3.) He will confirm this good work, and effectually provide that his act of grace shall never be repealed; Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea; as when he brought them out of Egypt, (to which he has an eye in the promises here, v. 15.) he subdued Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and cast them into the depth of the sea. It intimates that when God forgives sin, he remembers it no more, and takes care that it never be remembered more against the sinner; (Ezek. xviii. 22.) His transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him, they are blotted out as a cloud which never appears more. He casts them into the sea, not near the shore-side, where they may appear again next low water, but into the depth of the sea, never to rise again. All their sins shall be cast there without exception, for when God forgives sin, he forgives all. (4.) He will perfect that which concerns us, and with this good work will do all that for us, which our case requires, and which he has promised; (v. 20.) They will thou perform thy truth to Jacob, and thy mercy to Abraham. It is in pursuance of the covenant, that our sins are pardoned, and our lusts mortified; from that spring all these streams flow, and with these he shall freely give us all things. The promise is said to be mercy to Abraham, because, as made to him first, it was mere mercy, preventing mercy, considering what state it found him in. But it was truth to Jacob, because the faithfulness of God was engaged to make good to him and his seed, as heirs to Abraham, all that was graciously promised to Abraham. See here, [1.] With what solemnity the covenant of grace is ratified to us; it was not only spoken, written, and sealed, but, which is the highest confirmation, it was sworn to our fathers; nor is it a modern project, but is confirmed by antiquity too, it was sworn from the days of old; it is an ancient charter. [2.] With what satisfaction it may be applied and relied upon by us; we may say with the highest assurance, Thou wilt perform the truth and mercy, not one iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground; faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it.