AN

EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

ZEPHANIAH.

This prophet is placed last, as he was last in time, of all the minor prophets before the captivity, and not long before Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the captivity. He foretells the general destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and sets their sins in order before them, which had provoked God to bring their ruin upon them; calls them to repentance; threatens the neighbouring nations with the like destructions, and gives encouraging promises of their joyful return out of captivity in due time, which have a reference to the grace of the gospel. We have, in the first verse, an account of the prophet, and the date of his prophecy, which supersedes our inquiry concerning them here.

ZEPHANIAH, I.

CHAP. I.

After the title of the book, (v. 1.) here is, 1. A threatening of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, an utter destruction, by the Chaldeans, v. 2. 4. II. A charge against them for their gross sin, which provoked God to bring that destruction upon them; (v. 5, 6.) and so he goes on in the rest of the chapter, setting both the judgments before them, that they might prevent them or prepare for them; and the sins that destroy them, that they might judge themselves, and justify God in what was brought upon them. 1. They must hold their peace because they had greatly sinned, v. 7. 9. But, 2. They shall howl because the trouble will be great. The day of the Lord is near, and it will be a terrible day, v. 10. 11. Such fair and timely warning as this did God give to the Jews of the approaching captivity; but they hardened their neck, which made their destruction remediless.

1. THE word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Anon king of Judah. 2. I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. 3. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea; and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord. 4. I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; 5. And them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops; and them that worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham; 6. And them that are turned back from the Lord; and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.

Here is,

I. The title-page of this book, (v. 1.) in which we observe, 1. What authority it has, and who gave it that authority; it is from heaven and not of men. It is the word of the Lord. 2. Who was the instrument of conveying it to the church. His name Zephaniah, which signifies the servant of the Lord, for God revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets. The pedigree of other prophets, whose extraction we have an account of, goes no further back than their father, except Zecharias, whose grandfather also is named. But this of Zephaniah goes back four generations, and the highest mentioned is Hizkiah; it is the very same name in the original with that of Hezekiah king of Judah, (2 Kings xviii. 1.) and refers, probably, to him; if so, our prophet, being lineally descended from that pious prince, and being of the royal family, could with the better grace reprove the folly of the king's children as he does, v. 8. 9. When this prophet prophesied; in the days of Josiah king of Judah, who reigned well, and in the twelfth year of his reign,
began vigorously, and carried on a work of reformation, in which he destroyed idols and idolatry. Now it does not appear whether Zephaniah prophesied in the reign of Josiah, or the reign of Jehoiakim. It is probable his prophesying had a great and good influence in that reformation. When he, as God's messenger, reproved the idolatries of Jerusalem, Josiah, as God's vicegerent, removed them; and reformation is likely then to go on and prosper, when both magistrates and ministers do their part towards it. If it were toward the latter end of his reign that he prophesied, we say of his reign so, if we suppose his prophesying to bring the people relapse into their former distempers. The idolatries Josiah had abolished, it should seem, returned in his own time, when the heat of the reformation began a little to abate and wear off. What good can the best reformers do with a people that hate to be reformed, as if they longed to be ruined?

II. The summary, or contents, of this book; the general proposition contained in it, is, that utter destruction is coming apace upon Judah and Jerusalem for sin. Without preamble, or apology, he begins abruptly, (v. 2.) By taking away I will make an end of all things from off the face of the land, saith the Lord. Ruin is coming, utter ruin; destruction from the Almighty; he has said it, who can, and will, make good what he has said; I will utterly consume this land, and all things, of them, (see Jer. 11. 8.) "I will recall all the blessings I have bestowed, because they have abused them, and so forfeited them."

The consumption determined shall take away,

1. The inferior creatures; I will consume the beasts, the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea; (v. 3.) as, in the deluge, every living substance was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground, Gen. vii. 33. The creatures were for man's use, and therefore when he has perverted the use of them, and made them subject to vanity, God, to show the greatness of his displeasure against the sin of man, involves them in his punishment. The expressions are figurative, speaking universal desolation. Those that fly ever so high, as the fowls of heaven, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' hand; those that live ever so close, as the fishes of the sea, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' eye, shall yet become a prey to them, and be utterly consumed.

2. The children of men; "I will consume man, I will cut off man from the land. The land shall be despoiled and left uninhabited; I will destroy, not only Israel, but man. The land shall enjoy her sabbaths. I will cut off, not only the wicked men, but all men; even the few among them that are good, shall be involved in this common calamity. Though they shall not be cut off from the Lord, yet they shall be cut off from the land." It is with Judah and Jerusalem that God has this quarrel, both city and country, and upon them he will stretch out his hand, the hand of his power, the hand of his justice, and cut them off from the land, (v. 4.) They that will not humble themselves under God's mighty hand, shall be humbled and brought down by it. Note, Even Judah, where God is known, and Jerusalem, where his dwelling-place is, if they revolt from him, and rebel against him, shall have his hand stretched out against them.

3. All wicked people, and all those things that are the substance of idolatry, Zeph. i. 3.) I will consume the stumbling-blocks with the wicked, the idols with the idolaters, the offenses with the offenders. Josiah had taken away the stumbling-blocks, and, as far as he could, had purged the land of the monuments of idolatry, hoping that there would be no more idolatry; but the wicked will do wickedly, the dog will return to his vomit, and therefore, since the sin will not otherwise be cured, the sinners must themselves be consumed; even the wicked with the stumbling-blocks of their iniquity. Ezek. xiv. 3. Since it was not done by the sword of justice, it shall be done by the sword of war. See who the sinners are, that shall be consumed.

1. The professed idolaters, who avowed idolatry, and were wedded to it. The remnant of Baal shall be cut off, the images of Baal, and the worshippers of those images. Josiah cut off a great deal of Baal; but that which was so close as to escape the eye, or so bold as to escape the hand, of his justice, it shall be done by the sword of war.

2. The idolaters; The widows shall be cut off; we read of them in the history of Josiah's reformation; (2 Kings xxiii. 5.) He put down the idolatrous priests, the word is the Chemarim. The word signifies black men; some think because they were black clothes, after to appear grave; others, because their faces were black with attending the altars, or the fires in which they burnt their children to Moloch. They seem to have been immediate attendants upon the service of Baal; they shall be cut off with the priests, the regulars with the seculars. The very name of them shall be cut off; the order shall be quite abolished, so as to be forgotten, or remembered with abhorrence. And some have thought that the most specious and plausible idolatry, yet it will appear as great an offence to God, to give divine honours to a star, as to give them to a stone or a stock. Even the worshippers of the host of heaven shall be consumed as well as the worshippers of the beasts of the earth, or the fends of hell. The sin of the adulteress is not the less sinful for the gaiety of the adulterer. Those also that consume other idolaters, to compound the matter between God and idols, and keep an even hand between them; that halt between God and Baal, and worship between Jehovah and Moloch, and swear by both; or, as it might better be read, swear to the Lord, and to Molcham. They bind themselves by oath and covenant to the service both of God and idols, they have a good opinion of the worship of the God of Israel, it is the religion of their country, and has been long so, and therefore they will by no means quit it; but they think it will be very much improved and beautified if they join with it the worship of Moloch, for that also is much used in other countries, and travellers admire it, there is a great deal of good fancy and strong flame in it. They cannot keep always to the worship of Moses, they will bring into it the images of, and therefore they must have an image; and what better than the image of Moloch—a king? They think they shall effectually atone for their sin, if they swear to Moloch, and, pursuant to that oath, burn their children in sacrifice to that idol; and yet if they do amiss in that, they hope to atone for it in worshiping the God of Israel too. Note, None that think to join with idolaters, and no divinity and associations between God and idols, will not only come short of acceptance with God, but will have their doom with the worst of idolaters; for what common can there be between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, God and Mammon? She whose own child is not, pleads for the dividing of it, for if Satan have half, he will have all; but the true mother says, Divide it not, for if God have but
half, he will have none. Such waters will not be long sweet, it come from a fountain that sends forth bitter water too; what have they to do to swear by the Lord, that swear by Malcham? 1077

(3.) Those also shall be consumed, that have apostatized from God, together with those that never gave up their names to him, v. 6. I will cut off, [1.] Them that are turned back from the Lord; that were well taught, and began well, that had given up their names to him, and set out at first in the worship of him, but have flown off, and turned aside, and fallen in with idolaters, but deserted these good ways of God, which they had been brought up in, and despised them; thus God will be sure to reckon with, who are renegades from his service, who began in the Spirit, and ended in the flesh; they shall be treated as despisers, to whom no mercy is showed. [2.] Those that have not sought the Lord, nor ever inquired for him, never made any profession of religion, and think to excuse themselves with that, shall find that this will not excuse them; nay, that is the thing laid to their charge: they are atheistical, careless people, that live without God in the world; and those that do so, are certainly unworthy to live upon God in the world.

7. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. 8. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. 9. In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. 10. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish-gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. 11. Howl, ye inhabitants of Makketh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. 12. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil. 13. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

Notice is here given to Judah and Jerusalem, that God is coming forth against them, and will be with them shortly; his presence, as a just Avenger, his day, the day of his judgment, and his wrath, are not far off, v. 7. Those that improve not the presence of God with them as a Father, but sin away that presence, may expect his presence with them as a Judge, to call them to an account for the contempt put upon his grace. The day of the Lord will come; men have their day now, when they take a liberty to do what they please, but God's day is at hand; it is here called his sacrifice, a sacrifice of his preparing; for the punishing of presumptuous sinners is a sacrifice to the justice of God, some reparation to his injured honour; they that brought their offerings to other gods, were justly made themselves victims to the true God. On a day of sacrifice great slaughter was made; so shall there be in Jerusalem, men shall be killed up as fast as lambs for the altar, with as little regret, with as much pleasure; The slain of the Lord shall be many. On a day of sacrifice great feasts were made upon the sacrifices; so the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem shall be feasted upon by their enemies the Chaldeans; these are the guests God has prepared and invited to come and glut themselves—their revenge with slaughter, and their covetousness with plunder. Note, obser

1. The royal family, because of the dignity of their place, shall be first reckoned with for their pride, and vanity, and affectation; (v. 8.) I will punish the princes, and the king's children, who think themselves exempt from punishment; they shall find themselves accountable to God, and that, high as they are, he is above them. They shall be punished, and all such as, like them, are clothed with strange apparel, such as, in contempt of their own country, (where, probably, it was the custom to go in a very plain dress, as became the seed of Jacob that plain man,) affected to appear in the fashion of nations, and lived in a court, and affectation that shall be visited and punished in this day of reckoning, and what it is they shall be called to an account for.

2. The noblemen, and their stewards and servants, come next to be reckoned with; (v. 9.) In the same day will I punish those that leap on the thresholds; a phrase, no doubt, well understood then, which probably signified the invading of their neighbours' rights; entering their houses by force and violence, and seizing their possessions, they leap on the threshold; as much as to say, the house is their own, and they will keep their hold of it; and, accordingly, they make all in it their own that they can lay their hands on, and so fill their masters' houses with goods gotten by violence and deceit, and with all the goods thereby contracted. Nor shall it suffice them to say, that the ill-gotten gains were not for themselves, but for their masters, and that what they did was by their order; for the obligations we lie under to keep God's commandments, are prior and superior to the obligations we lie under to serve the interests of any master on earth.

3. The trading people, and the rich merchants, are next called to account; iniquity is found in their end of the town, among the inhabitants of Makketh, a low part of Jerusalem, deep like a mortar; (for so the word signifies;) the goldsmiths lived there, (Neh. iii. 32.) and the merchants; and they are now cut down, they are broken, and have shut up their houses, and are become bondservants. And they that bear silver are cut off, in the first place, by the invaders, for the sake of the silver they carry, which is so far from being a protection to them, that it will expose and betray them. The conquerors aimed at the wealthy men, and carried them off first, while the poor of the land escaped. Or, it may be meant of a general decay of trade, which was a pre
face and introduction to the general destruction of the land. It is the token of a declining state, when great dealers are cut down, and great bankers are cut off, and become bankrupts, who cannot fall alone, but with themselves ruin many.

4. All the secure and careless people, the sons of pleasure, that live a loose, idle life, are next reckoned with; (v. 12.) they come from all parts of the country, to take up their quarters in the head-quarters of the kingdom, where they take private lodgings, and indulge themselves in ease and luxury; but God will find them out, who he will then, at the time I will search Jerusalem with candles, to discover them, that they may be brought out to confign punishment. This intimates that they conceal themselves, as being either ashamed of the sin, or afraid of the punishment of it; when the judgments of God are abroad, they hope to escape by absconding, and getting out of the way; but God will search Jerusalem, as search is made for a murderer in disguise, that is harboured by his accomplices; God's hand will find out all his enemies, wherever they lie hid, and will punish not only the secret idolaters, but the secret epicures and profane; and those are they that are here described, and marks are given by which they will be discovered when strict search is made for them. (1.) Their dispositions are sensual; they are settled on the pleasures; in- tense, sensual desires, strengthen them in themselves in their wealth and wickedness, they are secure and easy, and, because they have had no changes, they fear none, as Moab, Jer. xlviii. 11. They had not been empliited from vessel to vessel. They fill themselves with wine and strong drink, and banish all thought, saying, To-morrow shall be as this day, Isa. liv. 12. Their being settled on their lusts, signifies the same concerning them; Their own lot, Ps. xvii. 10. (2.) Their notions are atheistical; they could not live such loose lives, but that they say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil; that is, He will do nothing. They deny his providential government in the world; "What good and evil there is in the world, comes by the wheel of fortune, and not by the disposal of a wise and supreme Director." They deny both the justice and mercy, and his dispensing of rewards and punishments; "The Lord will not do good to those that serve him, nor do evil to those that rebel against him; and therefore there is nothing got by religion, nor lost by sin." This is the effect of their sensuality; if they were not drowned in sense, they could not be thus senseless, nor could they be so stupid, if they had not stupefied themselves with the love of pleasure. It was also the cause of their sensuality; men would not make a god of their belly, if they had not at first become so vain, so vile in their imaginations, as to think the God that made them altogether such a one as themselves. But God will punish them, their end is destruction, Phil. iii. 19.

11. What the destruction will be, with which God will punish the sinners, and what course he will take with them. 1. He will silence them; (v. 7.) Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord. He will force them to hold their peace, will strike them dumb with horror and amazement: they shall be speechless, all the excuses of their sin, and exceptions against the sentence, will be overruled, and they shall not have a word to say for themselves. 2. He will prepare them for the sword; (v. 8.) he will give them into the hands of their enemies, and glorify himself thereby. 3. He will fill both city and country with lamentations; (v. 10.) In that day there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish-gate, so called because near either to the fish-ponds or to the fish-market. It belonged to the city of David; (2 Chron. xxxiii. 14. Neh. in 3.) perhaps the same with that which is called the first-gate, (Zech. xiv. 10.) and if so, it will explain what follows here, And a howling from the second, that is, the second gate, which leads next to that fish-gate. The alarm shall go round the walls of Jerusalem, from gate to gate; and there shall be a great crashing from the hills, a mighty noise from the mountains round about Jerusalem, either from the acclamations of the victorious invaders, or from the lamentations of the timorous invaded, or from both. The inhabitants of the city, even of the choicest, will be hewn down, and kept possession of them. And the vineyards they have planted they shall not drink the wine of, but instead of having it for the relief of their friends that faint among them, they shall part with it for the animating of their foes that fight against them, Deut. xxviii. 30.

14. The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress a day of wasteness and desolation a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. 16. A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. 17. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. 18. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Nothing could be expressed with more spirit and life, nor in words more proper to startle and awaken a secure and careless people, than the warning here given to Judah and Jerusalem, of the approaching destruction by the Chaldeans. That is enough to make the sinners in Zion tremble—that it is the day of the Lord, the day in which he will manifest himself by taking vengeance upon them. It is the day of doom's-day, a specimen of the day of judgment, a kind of doom's-day, as the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is represented to be in our Saviour's prediction concerning it, Matt. xxiv. 27.

1. This day of the Lord is here spoken of as very near; the vision is not for a great while to come, as those imagine who put the evil day far from them; they deceive themselves by taking it at a distance; for it is near, it is near, it hastens greatly. The prophet gives the alarm like one that is in earnest, like one that awakens a family with the cry of, Fire, fire, when it is at next door that the danger is; "It is near, it is near, and therefore it is high time to bestir yourselves, and do what you can for your own safety before it be too late." It is madness for those to elude, whose
In this chapter we have, I. An earnest exhortation to the nation of the Jews to repent and make their peace with God, and so prevent the judgments threatened before it was too late, (v. 1–3.) and this inferred from the revelation of God's wrath against them in the foregoing chapter. II. A denunciation of the judgments of God against them for the sins which the nation had so long persistently, or rejoiced, in the calamity of Israel. 1. The Pubbilises, v. 4–7. 2. The Moabites and Ammonites, v. 8–11. 3. The Ethiopians and Assyrians, v. 12–15. All these were a mark of the Lord's trembling, that is put into the hands of God's people, as also was foretold by other prophets before and after.

1. Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; 2. Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. 3. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

Here we see what the prophet meant in that terrible description of the approaching judgments, which we had in the foregoing chapter, from first to last; his design was, not to drive the people to despair, but to move them to God and to their duty, not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins. In pursuance of that, he here calls them to repentance, national repentance, as the only way to prevent national ruin.

Observe, 1. The summons given to a national assembly; (v. 1.) Gather yourselves together. He had told them, in the last words of the foregoing chapter, that God would make a speedy riddance of all that dwelt in the land, upon which, one would think, it should follow, "Disperse yourselves, and flee for shelter where you can find a place." When the decree was absolutely gone forth for the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that was the advice given, (Matt. xxiv. 16.) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains; but here it is otherwise. God warns, that he may not wound, threatens, that he may not strike, and therefore calls to the people to use means for the turning away of his wrath. The summons is given to a nation not desired. The word signifies either, (1.) Not desiring, that has not any desires toward God, or the remembrance of his name, is not desirous of his favour and grace, or very indifferent to it, has no mind to repent and reform; "Yet come together, and see if you can stir up desires in one another." Thus God is often found of those that sought him not, nor asked for him, Isa. lv. 1. Or, (2.) Not desirable, no way lovely, nor having any thing in them amiable, or which might recommend them to God. The product had been such of men, a land of delights; (Dan. xi. 41.) but now it is unlovely, it is a nation not desired, to which God might justly say, Depart from me; but he says, "Gather together to me, and let us see if any expedient can be found out for the preventing of the ruin. Gather together, that you may in a body humble yourselves before God, may fast, and pray, and seek his face. Gather together, to consult among yourselves what is to be done in this critical
juncture, that every one may consider of it, may give and take advice, and speak his mind; and that while the sin may be done up, and not appear to be a national act. Some read it, "Inquire into yourselves, you inquire into yourselves; examine your consciences, look into your hearts, search and try your ways; inquire into yourselves, that you may find out the sin by which God has been provoked to this displeasure against you, and may find out the way of returning to him." Note, When God is dealing with us, it concerns us to inquire into ourselves.

2. Arguments urged to press them to the utmost seriousness and expedition herein; (v. 2.) "Do it in earnest, do it with all speed before it be too late, before the decree bring forth, before the day pass." The manner of speaking here is very lively and awakening, designed to make them apprehensive, (as all sinners are concerned to be.) (1.) That their danger is very great, that their all lies at stake, that it is a matter of life and death, which therefore well requires and well deserves the closest application of mind that can be. It is not a trifle, and therefore is not a thing to be trifled about. It is the fierce anger of the Lord that is kindled against them, and is just ready to kindle upon them; that devouring fire which none can quench, and which, when once kindled, will hold their head under till it consume them. "It is the day of the Lord's anger, the day set for the pouring out of the full vials of it, that you are threatened with, that great day of the Lord," spoken of, ch. i. 14. "Are you not concerned to prepare for that day?" (2.) That it is very imminent; "Bestir yourselves now quickly, before the decree bring forth, and then it will be too late; the opportunity will be lost, and never retrieved. The decree is as it were big with child, and it will bring forth the day, the terrible day, which shall pass as chaff, which shall hurry you away into captivity, as chaff before the wind." We know not what a day may bring forth, (Prov. xxvii. 1.) but we do know what the decree will bring forth against impenitent sinners, whom therefore it highly concerns to repent in time, in the accepted time. Note, It is the wisdom of those whom God has a controversy with, to agree with him quickly, while they are in the way, before his fierce anger comes upon them, not to be turned away. In a case of this nature delays are highly dangerous, and may be fatal; they will be so by them the heart is hardened. How solicitous should we all be to make our peace with God before the night comes in upon them, before the day of grace be over, or the day of life; before our everlasting state shall be determined on the other side the great gulf fixed!

3. Directions prescribed for the doing of this effectually. It is not enough to gather together in a congregation, but they must seriously and calmly apply themselves to the duty of the day; (v. 3.) "Seek ye the Lord: that they may inquire and seek for; for so is the rule, Seek, and ye shall find." A general call was given to the whole nation, to gather together, but little good is to be expected from the far greater part of them; if the land be saved, it must be by the interest and intercession of the house few, and therefore to them the exhortation here is particularly directed and imposed. "Look therefore to your own house; before the day of grace be over, or the day of life; before our everlasting state shall be determined on the other side the great gulf fixed!"

4. Encouragements given to take these directions. It may be, you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. (1.) "You particularly that are the meek of the earth; though the day of the Lord's anger do come upon the land, yet you shall be safe, you shall be taken under special protection; verily it shall be well with thy remnant, Jer. xv. 11. They, life will I give unto thee for a prey, Jer. xlv. 5. I will deliver thee in that day, Jer. xxxix. 17. It may be, you shall be hid; if any be hid, you shall." Good men cannot be sure of temporal preservation, for all things come alike to all, but they are most likely to be hid under the great care and tenderest care of Providence. It is expressed thus doubtfully, to try if they will trust the goodness of God's nature, though they have but the "it may be" of a promise; and to keep up in them a holy fear and watchfulness, lest they should seem to come short, and should do anything to throw themselves out of the divine protection. Note, Those that hold fast integrity, integrity of heart and outwardly, have reason to hope that God will find out a hiding-place for them, where they shall be safe and easy in times of common calamity. They shall be hid (as Luther says) aut in celo, aut sub celo—either in heaven, or under heaven, either in the possession of heaven, or under the protection of heaven. Or, (2.) "You of this nation, though it be a nation not deserving yet, in the day of God's anger, the hour of his wrath, if his judgments are abroad, you shall be hid, your land shall be preserved for the sake of those few meek ones that stand in the gap, to turn away the wrath of God." It concerns us all to make sure to ourselves, that we shall be hid in the great day of God's wrath; and if we hide ourselves in chambers of safety, God will hide himself in chambers of safety. Isa. xxxv. 20. If we prepare an ark, that shall be our hiding-place, Gen. vii. 1.
4. For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ash- 
dod at the noon-day, and Ekron shall be rooted up. 5. Wo unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Chemethites! 6. the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabi-
tant. 7. And the sea-coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. 8. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ash-
kelon shall they lie down in the evening; for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

The prophet here comes to foretell what share the neighbouring nations should have in the destruc-
tions made upon those parts of the world by Nebu-
chadnezzar and his victorious Chaldees, as other of the prophets did at that time; which is designed,
(1.) To awaken the people of the Jews, by making them sensible how strong, how deep, how large, the inundation of these calamities should be, that the day of the Lord, which was near, might appear the more dreadful, and they might thereby be quick-
ened to prepare for it as for a general deluge. (2.) To comfort them with this thought, that their case, though sad, should not be singular; (Solamem miseriae seors habuisse doloris—the wretched find it consolatory to have companions of their woe;) and much more with this, that though God had sworn to be their Enemy, and to fight against them, yet he was still so far their Friend, and an Enemy to their enemies, that he resented, and would revenge, the indignities done them.

In these verses, we have the doom of the Philis-
tines, who were near neighbours, and old enemies, to the people of Israel. 9. Five lordships there were in that country: only four are here named, Gaza and Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron; Gath, the fifth, is not named; some think, because it was now sub-
ject to Judah. They were the inhabitants of the sea-coasts, (v. 5.) for their country lay upon the Great sea. The nation of the Chemethites is here joined with them, which bordered upon them, (1 Sam. xxx. 14.) and fell with them, as is foretold above. The land of the Philistines, which was called Canaan, for it belonged to that country which God gave to his people Israel, and was inserted in the grant made to them, Josh. xiii. 3. This land is yet to be possessed, (five lords of the Philistines,) so that they wrongfully kept Israel out of the pos-
session of it, (Judg. iii. 3.) which is now remem-
bered against them. For though the rights of others may be holden up by the righteous God will at length avenge the wrong.

1. It is here foretold that the Philistines, the usurpers, shall be dispossessed and quite extinguished. In general, here is a wo to them, (v. 5.) which, coming from God, speaks all misery; The word of the LORD is against them,—the word of the former prophets, which, though without the prophesying, will be in its season, Is. xlv. 31. This word, now by this prophet, is against them. Note, Those are really in a woful condition that have the word of the Lord against them, for no word of his shall fall to the ground That they rebel against the pre-
ccepts of God’s word shall have the threatenings of the word against them. The effect will be no less than their destruction. (1.) God himself will be the Author of it: “I will even destroy thee, who can make good what I say and will.” (2.) It shall be a universal destruction, it shall extend itself to all parts of the land, both city and country. Gaza shall be forsaken, though now a populous city; it was forsook, (Jer. xlvi. 6.) that baldness should come upon Gaza; Alexander the great razed it to the sea, and we find, (Acts viii. 26.) that Gaza was a desert. Ashkelon shall be a desolation, a pattern of desolation. Ashdod shall be driven out at noon-
day; in the extremity of the scorching heat they shall have no shade, no shelter to protect them; but then, when most incommode by the weather, they shall be forced away into captivity, which will bring an aggravating circumstance of it, Ekron likewise shall be rooted up, that had been long taking root. The land of the Philistines shall be dispeo-
piled, there shall be no inhabitant, v. 5. God made the earth to be inhabited, (Isa. xlv. 18.) otherwise he had made it in vain; but if men do not answer the end of their creation, in serving God, it is just with God that the earth should not answer the end of its creation, in serving them for a habitation; man’s sin has sometimes subjected it to this vanity. (3.) It shall be an utter destruction. The sea-coast, which used to be a harbour for ships, and a habita-
tion for merchants, shall now be deserted, and be only cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks, (v. 6.) and then perhaps put to better use than when it was possessed by the lords of the Philis-
tines.

2. It is here foretold that the house of Judah, the rightful owners, shall recover the possession of it, v. 7. The remnant of them that shall return out of captivity, when God visits them, shall be made to lie down in safety in the houses of Ashkelon; to lie down in the evening, when they are weary and asleep. There they shall feed themselves and their flocks. Note, God will at length restore his people to their rights, though they may be long kept out from them.

3. I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. 9. Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Am-
non as Gomorrah, even the breeding of net-
tles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desola-
tion: the residue of my people shall spoil
them, and the remnant of my people shall pos-
sess them. 10. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts. 11. The Lord will be terrible unto them: for he will famine all the gods of the earth; and men shall wor-
ship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.

The Moabites and Ammonites were both of the posterity of Lot; their countries joined; and, both adjoining to Israel, they are here put together in the prophecy against them. 1. They are both charged with the same crime, and that was, reproaching and reviling the people of God, and triumphing in their calamities; (v. 8.) They have reproached my people; while God’s people kept close to their duty, it is probable that they reproached them for the singularities of their religion; and now that they had revolted from God,
and were fallen under his displeasure, they reproached them for that too. It has been the common lot of God’s people in all ages, to be reproached and reviled upon one account or other; thus the old serpent spits his venom; and pride is at the bottom of it, it is in their pride that they have magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts, thinking themselves as good as they, as great, and even as rulers, and to this they are led on by the thought that God’s people are filled with Ps. cx. 4. They have spoken big (so some read it, magna locuti sunt—they have spoken great things) against their border; (v. 8) against those of them that bordered upon their country, whom upon all occasions they insulted; or against the prosperity which they claimed, which they disputed, or the protection they boasted of, on whom they looked with disdain; these are the people of the Lord of hosts as a deserted, abandoned people; great swelling words of vanity are the genuine language of the church’s enemies. “But I have heard them,” (says God,) “and will let you know that I have heard them, I have heard, and I will reckon for them,) Jude 15. And if God hears the reproaches and revilings we are under, it is a great presumption to think he will not hear our prayers, Ps. xxxviii. 14, 15. Nay, God not only takes notice of, but interests himself in, the reproaches cast on his people, because they are his; and it is certain, that they who look with disdain upon the people of the Lord of hosts, thereby dishonour the Lord of hosts himself. See this very thing charged on Moab and Ammon, Ezek. xxx. 3, &c.

2. They are both laid under the same dire accusation. Sovereignty in dignity may expect to be sore in desolation. Sec with what solemnity sentence is pronounced upon them, v. 9. It is the Lord of hosts, the sovereign Lord of all, who has authority to pass this sentence, and ability to execute it; it is the God of Israel who is jealous for their honour, it is he that has said it, nay, he has sworn it. As I live, said the Lord. The sentence is, (1.) That the Moabites and Ammonites shall be quite destroyed; they shall be as Sodom and as Gomorrah, the marks of whose rains in the Dead sea lay near adjoining to the countries of Moab and Ammon; they shall, though not by the same means, (even fire from heaven,) yet almost in the same manner, be laid waste; not again to be inhabited, or not of a long time. The country shall produce nothing but nettles, instead of corn; and there shall be beggars, instead of the pleasant fountains of water, with which the country had abounded. (2.) That Israel shall be too hard for them; shall spoil them of their goods, and possess their country by lawful war. Note, Proud men sometimes, by the just judgment of God, fall under the mortification of being trampled upon themselves by those whom once they haughtily trampled upon. And this shall they have for their fraud.

3. Other nations shall in like manner be humbled, that the Lord alone may be exalted; (v. 11.) The Lord will be terrible unto the Moabites and Ammonites in particular, who have made themselves a terror to his Israel. (1.) Heathen gods must be abolished; they have long had possession, and their worshippers have both glorified them, and gloried in them. But the Lord will abolish all the gods of the earth, will starve them out of their strong holds. The Pagans had a fond conceit, that their idols were regaled by their offerings, and did eat the fat of their sacrifices, Deut. xxviii. 38. Omnia comest a Belo—Bel has eaten all. But it is here promised, that when the Christian religion is set up in the world, such a one, and such a one, and such a one, shall forsake their altars, and bring no more sacrifices to them, and thus they shall be, shall be, or made lean, as the word is; their priests shall. This speaks the vanity of these idols, it lies in the power of their worshippers to make them; whereas the true God says, If I were hungry, I would not tell thee. It speaks also the victory of the God of Israel over them; Now know we, that he is greater than all gods. (2.) Heathen nations must be converted; when the gospel gets ground, by it men shall be brought to worship him who lives for ever, (for that is the command of the everlasting gospel, Rev. xx. 10.) every one of them that is not just shall not need to go up to Jerusalem, to worship the God of Israel, but, wherever they are, they may have access to him. I will that men pray everywhere. God shall be worshipped, not only by all the tribes of Israel, and the strangers who join themselves to them, but by all the isles of the heathen; this is a promise which looks favourably upon our native country, for it is one of the most considerable of the isles of the Gentiles, by which God will be glorified.

12. Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword. 13. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. 14. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the coromant and the bittren shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar-work. 15. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly: that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

The cup is going round, when Nebuchadnezzar is going on conquering and to conquer; and not only Israel’s near neighbours, but those that lay more remote, must be reckoned with for the wrongs they had done to God’s people; the Ethiopians and the Assyrians are here taken to task. The Ethiopians, or Arabsians, that had sometimes been a terror to Israel, (as in Assy’s time, 2 Chron. xiv. 9,) must now be reckoned with. They shall be slain by my sword, v. 12. Nebuchadnezzar was God’s sword, the instrument in his hand, with which these and other enemies were subdued and punished, Ps. xvii. 14.

2. The Assyrians, and Nineveh the head city of their monarch, are next set to the bar, to receive their doom. He that is God’s sword, will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria, and make himself master of it. Assyria had been the rod of God’s anger against Israel, and now Babylon is the rod of God’s anger against Assyria, Isa. x. 5. He will make Nineveh a desolation, as has been lately and largely foretold by the prophet Nahum. Obscure, are next set to the bar, to receive their doom. (1.) How flourishing Nineveh’s estate had formerly been, (v. 15.) This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly. Nineveh was so strong, that she feared no evil, and therefore dwelt carelessly, and set danger at defiance; she was so rich, that she thought herself sure of all good, and therefore was a rejoicing city, full of mirth and glory; and she took with a disdain, and she deemed no那样, but she said in her heart, “I am, and there is none beside me that can compare with me, no city in the world that can pretend to be equal with me.” God
can with his judgments frighten the most secure, humble the most haughty, and mar the mirth of those that most laugh now.

(2.) How complete Nineveh's ruin shall now be; it shall be made, a desolation, v. 13. Such a heap of ruins shall this once pompous city be, that it shall be, [1.] A receptacle for beasts, such a wilderness, that flocks shall lie down in it; yea, such a waste, desolate, frightful place, that wild beasts, the beasts of the nations, all kinds of beasts, shall take up their abode there; the melancholy birds, as the coromants and bitterns, shall make their nests in what remains of the ruined walls of this once glorious city; but desolate buildings that are uninhabited and unfrequented. The lintels, or chapters of the pillars, the windows and thresholds, and all the fine cedarwork curiously engraven, shall be exposed; and on them these rufell, ominous birds shall perch, and their voice shall sing. How are the songs of mirth turned into horrors, horrid noises! What little reason have men to be proud of stately buildings, and rich furniture, when they know not what all the pomp of them may come to at last. [2.] A derision to travellers. They that had come to gratify their curiosity with the sight of Nineveh's splendour, shall now look on her with as much contempt as ever they looked upon her with admiration; (as it is said) they shall laugh in her, and wag her hand, making light of her desolations, may, and making sport with them: "There is an end of proud Nineveh." They shall not weep, and wring their hands, (their adversaries are unpitied and unmanned, who were insolent and haughty in their prosperity,) but they shall hiss and wag their hands, forgetting that perhaps their own ruin is not far off.

CHAP. III.

We now return to Jerusalem, and must again hear what God has to say to her. 1. By way of reproof and threatening, for the abundance of wickedness that was found in her; of which divers instances are given, with the aggravations of them, v. 1-7. 2. By way of promise of mercy and grace, which God had yet in reserve for them. Two general heads of promises here are, 1. That God would bring in a glorious work of reformation among them, cleanse them from their sins, and bring them home to himself; many promises of this kind here are, v. 8-13. 2. That he would bring about a glorious work of salvation for them, when he had thus prepared them; and this the Prophet shall say of Zion, and, to clear his own way, shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. These promises were to have their full accomplishment in gospel-times and gospel-ages.

1. WOE to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! 2. She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction: she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God. 3. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. 4. Her prophets are liars and treacherous persons; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. 5. The just Lord is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity; every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. 6. I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. 7. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction: so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them; but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

One would wonder that Jerusalem, the holy city where God was known, and his name was great, should be the city of which this black character is here given; that a place which enjoyed such piquity of the means of grace should become so very corrupt and vicious, and that God should permit it to be so; yet so it is, to show that the law made nothing perfect; but if this be the true character of Jerusalem, as no doubt it is, (for God's judgments will make none worse than they are,) it is no wonder that the prophet begins with wo to her. For the holy God hates sin in those that are nearest to him, nay, in them he hates it most. A sinful state is, and will be, a woful state.

1. Here is a very bad character given of the city in general; how is the faithful city become a harlot! 1. She shames herself; she is filthy and polluted, has made herself infamous; (so some read it; v. 1.) the glutinous city, (so the margin,) always cramming, and glutting, and glutting herself, for the benefit of the lusts of it. Sin is the filthiness and pollution of persons and places, and makes them odious in the sight of the holy God. 2. She wrongs her neighbours and inhabitants; she is the oppressing city; never any place had statutes and judgments so righteous as this city had, and yet, in the administration of the government, never was more unrighteousness committed by her. She is very farakok, to God, and in every respect walks contrary to him, v. 2. He has given his law, and spoken to her by his servants the prophets, telling her what is the good she should do, and what the evil she should avoid; but she obeyed not his voice, nor made conscience of doing as he commanded her, in any thing. He has taken her under an excellent discipline, both of the word and of the rod; but she did not receive the instruction of the one, or the correction of the other; did not submit to God's will, nor answer his end in either. He encouraged her to depend upon him, and his power and promise, for delivery from evil, and supply with good; but she trusted not in the Lord; her confidence was placed in her alliances with the nations more than in her covenant with God. He gave her tokens of his presence, and instituted ordinances of communion for her with himself; but she drew not near to her God, did not meet him where he appointed, and where he promised to meet her. She stood at a distance, and said to the Almighty, Depart. 2. Here is a very bad character of the leading men in it; those that should by their influence suppress vice and promiscuity there: she is not the rising of the man, but the ruin of the man. This the Prophet shall say of Zion, and, to clear his own way, shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. These promises were to have their full accomplishment in gospel-times and gospel-ages.
ZEPHANIAH, III.

frothy and airy, and of a loose conversation, men of no consistency with themselves, in whom one could put no confidence; they were so given to bantering, that it was hard to say when they were serious. Their pretended prophecies were all a sham, and they secretly laughed at those that were deluded by them. 4. They pretended to be teachers by office, and had the charge of the holy things, were false to their trust, and betrayed it: they were to preserve the purity of the sanctuary, but they did themselves pollute it, and the sacred offices of it, which they were to attend upon; such priests as Hophni and Phinehas, who by their wicked lives made the sacrifice of the Lord to be abhorred. They were to execute justice, and to judge all according to truth; but in their explications and applications of it, they did violence to the law; they corrupted the sense of it, and perverted it to the patronizing of that which was directly contrary to it; by forced constructions, they made the law to speak what they pleased, to serve a turn, and so, in effect, made void the law.

III. We have here the aggravations of this general corruption of all orders and degrees of men in Jerusalem.

1. They had the tokens of God's presence among them, and all the advantages that could be of knowing his will, with the strongest inducements possible to do it, and yet they persisted in their disobedience, v. 3. (1.) They had the honour and privilege of the Shechinah, God dwelt in the midst of them, so as not with any other people; "The just Lord is in the midst of thee, to take cognizance of all thy doings, and give countenance to all thou dost well; he is in the midst of thee as a holy God, and therefore thy pollutions are the more offensive, Deut. xxxiii. 14. He is in the midst of thee as a just God, and therefore will punish the affronts you put upon him, and the wrongs you do one another." (2.) They had God's own example set before them, in the discovery he made of himself to them, that they might conform to it; "He will not do iniquity, and therefore you should not; for this was the great rule of their institution, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." God will be true to you, be not you then false to him." (3.) He sent to them his prophets, rising up early and sending them: Every morning he brings forth his justice, and as the coming comes, he fails not; he shows them plainly what the good is which he requires of them, and puts them in mind of it; he wakens morning by morning, (Isa. 1. 4.) wakens his prophets with the rising sun, to bring to light the things which belong to their peace. So that upon the whole matter, what more could have been done to his vineyard, to make it fruitful? Isa. v. 4. And yet all, the unjust know no shame, that have been unjust are unjust still, and are not ashamed of their unrighteousness, neither can they blush. If they had any sense of honour, any shame left in them, they would not so directly contrary to their profession, and to the instructions given them. But they that are past shame are past cure.

2. God has set before their eyes some remarkable monuments of his just judgment, which were designed for warning to them; (v. 6.) I have cut off the nations, the seven nations of Canaan, which the land spewed out for their wickedness; upon which they had this caution given them, to take heed lest it shew them out also, Lev. xviii. 28. Or, it may refer to some of the neighbouring nations that were made desolate for their wickedness, especially to the nation of Israel, their ancient tribes; their towers were desolate, their high towers, their strong towers, their pride and power broken, their streets wasted, so that none passed along through them; the cities were destroyed and laid in ruins, no man was to be found in them, no inhabitant, all were slain, or carried into captivity. The enemies did it, but God avows it; I cut them off, says he. And God designed this for an admonition to Jerusalem; (Ezek. xxiii. 9, 11.) "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, surely these judgments upon others will deter thee from the like wicked practices; surely thou wilt receive instruction by these provocations; it ought reasonably to be expected, that thou wouldst not continue to sin like the nations, when thou seest the ruin which their sin brought upon them." They could not but see their own house in danger, when their neighbour's was on fire: and when we are frightened God should be feared.

3. He had set before them life and death, good and evil, both in his word and in his providence. (1.) He had assured them of the continuance of their prosperity, if they would fear him and receive instruction, for so their dwelling would not be cut off as their neighbour's was; if they took the warning given them, and reformed, what was past should be pardoned, and their tranquillity lengthened out. (2.) He had made them feel the smart of the rod, though he reprehended them from the sword; However I punish them, that, being chastened, they might not be condemned: such various methods did God take with them, to reclaim them, but all in vain; they were not won upon by gentle methods, nor had severe ones any effect, for they rose early, and corrupted all their doings; they were more rebellious and Canturable than ever; more studious and solicitous in making provision for their lusts, and let slip no opportunity for the gratification of them. God rose up early to send them his prophets, to reduce and reclaim them, but they were up before him, to shut and bolt the door against them. Their wickedness was universal; all their doings were corrupted, and it was all owing to themselves, they could not lay the blame upon the tempter, but they alone must hear it; they themselves wilfully and designedly corrupted all their doings; for every man is temptet, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed.

8. Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

9. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. 10. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.

11. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoiced in thy pride; and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. 12. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. 13. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.
Things looked very bad with Jerusalem in the foregoing verses; she is got into a very bad name, and seems to be incorrigible, incurable, meretricious, and justly rejected. Now one would think it should follow, therefore expect no other but that she should be utterly abandoned and rejected, as refuted silver; since they will not be wrought upon by prophets or providences, let them be made a desolation as their neighbours have been: but he, who proceeds from the spirit of God, discerns that which takes occasion from man's badness, to appear so much the more illustrious. They still grew worse and worse; therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, v. 8. Since the law, it seems, will make nothing perfect, the bringing in of a better hope shall; let those that lament the corruptions of the church, wait upon God, till he send his Son into the world, to save his people from their sins, v. 9. Then will I send his gospel to refine and reform his church, and to purify to himself a peculiar people both of Jews and Gentiles. And there were those who, according to this direction and encouragement, waited for redemption, for this redemption in Jerusalem; and long Looked for came at last, Luke ii. 38. For judgment Christ will come into this world, John ix. 39. I. God's house shall be broken down, and his church, to bring down and destroy the enemies of it, its spiritual enemies; of which the destruction of Babylon, and other the oppressors of God's people, in the Old Testament times, was a type, and would be a happy presage. He will rise up to the prey, to lead captivity captive, (Ps. lxxxvii. 16.) to conquer and spoil the powers of darkness, and the powers on earth, that he includes all Hebreos, Lord and his anointed; he will break them with a rod of iron, (Ps. ii. v. 9.-xi. 5, 6.) his determination is to gather the nations, and to assemble the kingdoms. By the gospel of Christ preached to every creature all nations are summoned, as it were, to appear in a holy before the Lord Jesus, who is about to set up his kingdom in the world. But since the greatest part of mankind will not obey the summons, he will pour upon them his indignation, for he that believes not is condemned already. At the time of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, there shall be on earth distress of nations with perplexity, (Luke xxi. 25.) great tribulation, such as never was, or ever shall be, Matth. xxiv. 21. Then God pours upon the nations his indignation, even as the pouring of the latter rain upon the earth, shall drive away and destroy against the Messiah and his kingdom, Ps. ii. 1. 2. Then all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of his jealousy. Both Jews and Gentiles shall be reckoned with for their enmity to the gospel. Principalities and powers shall be appointed, and made a show of strength, and the victorious Redeemer shall triumph over them. The end of those that contend to be of the earth, and to mind earthly things, after God has set up the kingdom of heaven, among men shall be destruction, (Phil. iii. 19.) they shall be devoured with the fire of God's jealousy. II. To amend what he finds amiss in his church. When God intends the restoration of Israel, and the revival of their peace and prosperity, he makes way for it by their reformation, and the revival of their virtue and piety; for this is God's method, both with particular persons and whole communities, first, to make them holy, and then to make them happy. These promises were in part accomplished after the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when by their captivity they were thoroughly cured of their idolatry; and this was all the fruit, even the taking away of sin but it looks further, to the blessed effects of the gospel grace. II. 1. Grace of times of reformation in which we live, Heb. ix. 10. 1. It is promised that there shall be a reformation in men's discourse, which had been generally cor-rupt, but should now be with grace seasoned with salt; (v. 9.) Then will I turn to the people a pure language; I will turn the people to such a language, from that evil communication which had almost ruined all good manners among them. Note, Converting grace refines the language, not by making the phrases witty, but the substance wise. Among the Jews, after the captivity, there needed a reformation of the dialect, for they had mingled the Gentile words and terms; hence grace given to them (cf. 24) and that grievance shall be redressed. But that is not all; their language shall be purified from all profaneness, filthiness and falsehood; I will turn them to a choice language; so some read it; they shall not speak rashly, but with caution and deliberation; they shall choose out their words. Note, An air of purity and piety in common conversation is a thing greatly to be desired, either as a display of grace, or as a convenience to them that are about to share the blessings, shall be given where God gives a pure language to those that have been people of unclean lips. 2. That the worship of God, according to his will, shall be more closely applied to, and more uni mously concurred in. Instead of sacrifice and in cense, they shall call upon the name of the Lord, prayer is the spiritual offering with which God must be propitiated, with heavenly sacrifices, the offerings of old, are wholly abrogated; and it is necessary that we have a pure language. We are utterly unfit to take God's name into our lips, unless they be pure lips. The purifying of the language in common conversation, is necessary to the acceptableness of the words of our mouth, and the meditation of our heart in our devotion; for how can sweet waters and bitter come out of the same fountain? (Matt. x. 11.) Note, If they are to have that their language being thus purified, they shall serve God with one consent; with one shoulder, so the word is; alluding to oxen in the yoke, that draw even; when Christians are unanimous in the service of God, the work goes on cheerfully. This is the effect of the pure language, purified from passion, envy, and censoriousness. Note, Purity is the way to unity; the reformation of manners the way to a comprehension; the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable. 3. That those that were driven from God, shall return to him, and be accepted of him; (v. 10.) From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia; from Egypt, so described, (Isa. xvii. 1.) or from some other very remote country, my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed shall bring strong cries against the Messiah and his kingdom, Ps. ii. 1. 2. Then all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of his jealousy. Both Jews and Gentiles shall be reckoned with for their enmity to the gospel. Principalities and powers shall be appointed, and made a show of strength, and the victorious Redeemer shall triumph over them. The end of those that contend to be of the earth, and to mind earthly things, after God has set up the kingdom of heaven, among men shall be destruction, (Phil. iii. 19.) they shall be devoured with the fire of God's jealousy. II. To amend what he finds amiss in his church. When God intends the restoration of Israel, and the revival of their peace and prosperity, he makes way for it by their reformation, and the revival of their virtue and piety; for this is God's method, both with particular persons and whole communities, first, to make them holy, and then to make them happy. These promises were in part accomplished after the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when by their captivity they were thoroughly cured of their idolatry; and this was all the fruit, even the taking away of sin but it looks further, to the blessed effects of the gospel grace. II. 1. Grace of times of reformation in which we live, Heb. ix. 10.
4. That sin and sinners shall be purged out from among them, v. 11. God will take away, (1.) Their just reproach; In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings. They shall be ashamed as penitents, and shall continue to be so, (see Ezek. xvi. 63.) but they shall not be ashamed as sinners that rebel against God. They shall not trouble thee, thou shalt no more do a shameful thing, as thou hast done. The guilt of sin being taken away by pardoning mercy, the reproach of it shall be rolled away from the sinner's own conscience, that being purified, and pacified, and cleansed from dead works. When wickedness and wicked people abound in a nation, those few in it that are good, are afraid of their land; but when sinners are converted, and the land reformed, that shame and the cause of it are removed. (2.) Their unjust glorifying; “I will take away out of the midst of thee, not only the profane, who are a shame to thy land, but the hypocrites, who appear beautiful outwardly, and rejoice in thy pride, in the holy city, the holy house;” these were indeed Israel's glory, but they made them their pride, and rejoiced in them, as if they were an invincible bulk, secure in their sinful ways; they relied on them as their righteousness and strength, boasting of the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord; (Jer. vii. 4.) they were haughty because of the holy mountain; were conceited of themselves, scornful of others, and set even the judgments of God at defiance. Note, Church-privileges, when they are not duly regarded, they ought not to make the matter of men's pride, and the ground of their security. But that haughtiness is of all other the most offensive to God, which is supported and fed by the pretensions of holiness. This God will silence and take away. 5. That God will have a remnant of holy, humble, serious people among them, that shall have the comfort of their relation to him, and interest in him. (v. 12.) I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people. When the Chaldeans carried away the Jews into captivity, they left the poor of the land for vine-dressers and husbandmen, a type and figure of God's distinguished remnant, whom he sets apart for himself; they are afflicted and poor, low in the world; such God has chosen, James ii. 5. The poor are evangelized, low in the world, chosen, and afflicted for sin, poor in spirit. They are God's leaving, for it is a remnant according to the election of grace. I have reserved them to myself, says God, (Rom. xi. 4, 5.) and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. Note, Those whom God designs for the glory of his name, he enables to trust in his name. And the greater their affliction and poverty in the world are, the more reason the see to trust in God, having nothing else to trust to, 1 Tim. v. 3. 6. That this select remnant shall be blessed with purity and peace, v. 13. (1.) They shall be blessed with purity, both in words and actions; they shall neither do iniquity, nor speak lies. Justice and rectitude shall command them, and govern them, though it be ever so much against their secular interest. They shall not only not speak a direct, deliberate lie, but there shall not be a blemish, or a tongue found in their mouth, not in the mouth of any of them; not the least equivocation shall come from them. (2.) They shall be blessed with peace. They shall, as the sheep of God's pasture, feed, and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. They shall not be fearful themselves, nor shall any about them be frightful to them. Note, Those that are cast out of the way need not be afraid of any calamity, for it cannot hurt them, and therefore should not terrify them. 14. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 15. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy; the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack. 17. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing. 18. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. 19. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee; and I will save her that haleth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. 20. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord. After the promises of taking away of sin, here follow promises of the taking away of trouble; for when the cause is removed, the effect will cease. What makes a people holy, will make them happy of course. The precious promises here made to the purified people, were to have their full accomplishment in the comforts of the gospel; in the hope, and much more in the enjoyment, of which, they are here called upon, (1.) To rejoice and sing: (v. 14.) Sing, O daughter of Zion, sing for joy, shout, O Israel, in a holy transport and exultation; be glad and rejoice with all the heart; let the joy be inward, let it be great; those that love God with all their heart have occasion with all their heart to rejoice in him. Note, Those that love God with all their heart, and apply themselves to him in every season, will be happy in the satisfaction of their desires. (v. 15.) That their sins should be blotted, and the remembrance of them should be taken away. Note, Sing and rejoice. Note, Those that reform, have cause to rejoice; whereas Israel cannot rejoice for joy as other people, while she goes a whoring from her God. God's promises, applied by faith, furnish the saints with constant and abundant matter for joy; they are filled with joy and peace in believing them. (2.) To throw off all their discouragements; (v. 16.) In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, God will say it by his prophets, by his proceedings, their neighbours shall say it, they shall say it to one another, “Fear thou not, be not disposed to fear, do not easily admit the impressions of it; when things are bad, fear not their being worse, but hope they will mend; frighten not thyself upon every occasion. Let not thy hands be slack or faint; wring not thy hands; and let thine eyes shed no tears for thine iniquity, disfist not thyself for thy work and warfare, by giving way to doubts and fears. Pluck up thy spirits, and, in token of that, lift up thy hands, the hands that hang down, Heb. xii. 12. Isa. xxxv. 2. Lift up thy hands in prayer to God, lift up thy hands to help thyself.” Fear makes the hands slack, but faith and hope make them vigorous, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength both for doing and suffering. Let us now see what these precious promises are, which are here made to the people of God, for the banishing of their griefs and fears, and the encourag-
ing of their hopes and joys; and to us are these promises made as well as to them.

1. An end shall be put to all their troubles and distresses; (v. 15.) "The Lord has taken away thy judgments; has removed all the calamities thou hast been groaning under, which were the punishments of thy sins; the noise of war shall be silenced, the reproach of famine done away, and the captivity brought back. Though some grievances remain, they shall be only venial, and slight, and shall not of any considerable moment. The sin shall be pardoned. He has cast out thine enemy, that has thrust himself into thy land, and triumphed over thee. He has swept out thine enemy, (so some read it,) "as dirt is swept out of the house to the dunghill." When they sweep out their sins with the besom of reformation, God will sweep out their enemies with the besom of destruction. If they should need correction, they shall fall with the humble members of the Lord, whose mercies are great, and shall not again fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel; Thou shalt not see evil any more, not such evil days as thou hast seen. Note, The way to get clear of the evil of trouble, is to keep clear from the evil of sin; and to them that do so, trouble has no real evil in it.

2. "He has given them the tokens of his presence with them; though he has long seemed to stand at a distance, (they having provoked him to withdraw,) he will make it to appear that he is with them of a truth; "The Lord is in the midst of thee, O Zion, of thee, O Jerusalem, as the sun in the centre of the universe, to diffuse his light and influence upon every part. He is in the midst of thee, to preside in all thy conduct, and to procure thee peace, and to incline the judgments of all the children of men. And, (1.) "He is the King of Israel, (v. 15.) and is in the midst of thee as a King in the midst of his people." With an eye to this, our Lord Jesus is called the King of Israel; (John i. 49.) and he is, and will be, in the midst of his church always, even to the end of the world, to receive the homage of his subjects, and to give out his favours to them, even where but two or three are gathered together in his name. (2.) "He is the Lord thy God, thine in covenant, and he is in the midst of thee as thy God, whom thou hast an interest in, and whose own thou art. He has put himself into dear relations to thee, laid himself by promise under obligations to thee, and, that thou mayest have abundant comfort in both, he is in the midst of thee, nigh at hand to thee. But so is the Lord in the midst of thee as thy God and King, is mighty, is almighty, is able to do all that thee that thou needest, and cannot desire." (4.) "He has engaged his power for thy succour; He will save; he will be Jesus; will answer the name, for he will save his people from their sins."

3. God will take delight in them, and in doing them good. The expressions of this are very lively and affecting; (v. 17.) He will rejoice over thee with joy, will not only be well pleased with thee upon thy repentance and reformation, and take thee into favour, but will take a complacency in thee, as the bridegroom does in his bride, or the bride in her ornaments, Isa. lxxii. 3—5. The conversion of sinners and the consolation of saints are the joy of angels, for they have a right to share in them. (3.) "There is no passion in the heart of God himself. The church should be the joy of the whole earth, (Ps. lxxxv. 2.) for it is the joy of the whole heaven. He will rest in his love, will be silent in his love; so the word is, I will not rebuke thee as I have done, for thy sins; I will acquiesce in thee, and in my relation to thee. I know not where there is the like expression of Christ in his church, unless in that song of songs, Cant. iv. 9. They know not the manner of my love, says my husband. There is no love, my sister, my spouse, with one of thine eyes. O the condescensions of divine grace! The great God not only loves his saints, but he loves to love them, is pleased that he has pitched upon these objects of his love. He will joy over them with singing. He that is grieved for the sin of sinners, rejoices in the graces and services of the saints, and is ready to express that joy, by singing over them. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, and in them Jesus Christ will shortly be glorified and admired."

4. God will comfort Zion's mourners, who sympathize with her in her griefs, and will wipe away their tears. They shall be comforted, and the Lord will be merciful to them, and will show himself rich in mercy, ready for the solemn assemblies, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen. See, (1.) Who are they whom God will rejoice in, and make to rejoice: they are such as are sorrowful. They only must expect to reap in joy, that sow in tears. The sorrowful now shall be for ever joyful. (2.) What is the great matter of sorrow to Zion's mourners, when they say, We are in distress; and is it not that the city is mined, and the palaces are demolished; trade is at an end, and the administration of public justice; but all these are nothing to them, in comparison with the desolations of the sanctuary, the destruction of the temple and the altar; to attend on which, in solemn feasts, all Israel used to come together three times a year. It is for their own good, and to the glory of God, to be thus in distress until the city be built. (3.) Because they are dispersed; there is no temple to come up to, or, if there were, no people to come up to it; so that the solemn feasts and sabbaths are forgotten in Zion, Lam. ii. 6. Note, The restraining of public assemblies for religious worship, the scattering of them by their enemies, or the forsaking of them by their friends, so that either there are no friends, or no public assemblies, is a very sorrowful thing to all good people. If the ways of Zion mourn, the sons of Zion mourn too. And hereby they make it to appear that they are indeed of Zion, living members of that body with the grievances of which they are so sensibly affected. (2.) Because they are dispersed; the reproach of the solemn assemblies is a burthen to them. It had been the lot of the solemn assemblies to lie under a great deal of reproach. Satan and his instruments having a particular spite at them, as the great support of the interest of God's kingdom among men. Black and odious characters have been put upon those assemblies; and this is a burthen to all those that have a cordial concern for the glory of God, and the welfare of the souls of men. They reckon that the reproaches of those who reproach the church, and the solemn assemblies, fall upon them, fall foul upon them.

5. God will recover the captives out of the hands of their oppressors, and bring home the banished that seemed to be expelled, v. 19, 20. (1.) Their enemies shall be disabled to detain them in bondage. At that time I will undo all that afflict thee, will break their power, and blast their counsels, so that they shall be forced to surrender the captives they have taken. Confessam—"I will take them to task, I will be doing with them shortly, and so as to make an end of them." Note, Those that abuse and oppress God's people, take the ready way to undo themselves. (2.) They shall be enabled to assert and recover their liberty, and all the difficulties in the way of it shall be surmounted. Is the church weak and distressed? God will make the church strong and prosperous, and give her her crown, Mic. iv. 7. He will help her when she cannot help herself, even the lame shall take the Vale, Isa. xxxiii. 22. Is she dispersed, and not likely to incorporate for her common benefit? I will gather her that was driven out, and bring her again, at the time that I gather her. One act of mercy and grace shall serve both to collect them of their dispersed parts and to effect them in their own land. When the people's hearts are prepared, the work will be done suddenly; and who can hinder it, if God undertake to effect it? "I will turn back your
Captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord; you shall plainly discern the hand of God in it, and say, This is the Lord's doing."

6. God will by all this put honour upon them, and gain them respect from all about them. Israel was at first made high above all nations in praise and fame, Deut. xxvi. 19. The reproach brought upon them was therefore one of the sorest of their grievances; (nothing cuts deeper to those that are in honour, than disgrace does;) and therefore, when God returns in mercy to his church, it is here promised that she shall regain her credit; all the reproach shall be for ever rolled away, as Israel's at Gilgal, Josh. v. 9. The church shall be as honourable as ever she has been despicable. (1.) Even those that have reproached her, shall be made to respect her; I will give them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame; that the same who were the witnesses of their disgrace, may see cause to change their mind concerning them. They that said, "This is Zion whom no man looks after," shall say, "This is Zion whom the great God looks after." And she that was looked upon to be the offscouring of the earth, now appears to be the darling of heaven. (2.) Even those that never knew her, shall be brought to honour her; (v. 20.) I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth; so the Jewish church was, when the fear of the Jews fell upon their neighbours, (Esth. vii. 17.) and some of all nations said, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you, Zech viii. 23. So the Christian church was, when it was made to flourish in the world, for there is that in it, which may justly recommend it to the value and esteem of all the people of the earth. And so the universal church of the first-born will be in the great day; when the saints shall be brought together to Christ, that he may be admired and glorified in them, and they admired and glorified in him before angels and men. Then will God's Israel be made a name and a praise to eternity.