

# CHAPTER 7

In this chapter we have,

- I.** A general charge drawn up against Israel for those high crimes and misdemeanors by which they had obstructed the course of God's favours to them (v. 1, 2).
- II.** A particular accusation,
  - 1.** Of the court — the king, princes, and judges (v. 3-7).
  - 2.** Of the country. Ephraim is here charged with conforming to the nations (v. 8), senselessness and stupidity under the judgments of God (v. 9-11), ingratitude to God for his mercies (v. 13), incorrigibleness under his judgments (v. 14), contempt of God (v. 15), and hypocrisy in their pretences to return to him (v. 16). They are also threatened with a severe chastisement, which shall humble them (v. 12), and, if that prevail not, then with an utter destruction (v. 13), particularly their princes (v. 16).

## HOSEA 7:1-7

### CHARGE DRAWN UP AGAINST ISRAEL

Some take away the last words of the foregoing chapter, and make them the beginning of this: “*When I returned, or would have returned, the captivity of my people, when I was about to come towards them in ways of mercy, even when I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim (the country and common people) was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria, the court and the chief city.*” Now, in these verses, we may observe,

- I.** A general idea given of the present state of Israel, v. 1, 2. See how the case now stood with them.
  - 1.** God graciously designed to do well for them: *I would have healed Israel.* Israel were sick and wounded; their disease was dangerous and malignant, and likely to be fatal, <sup>306</sup>Isaiah 1:6. But God offered to be their physician, to undertake the cure, and there was balm in Gilead sufficient to

recover the health of the daughter of his people; their case was bad, but it was not desperate, nay, it was hopeful, when God *would have healed Israel*.

(1.) He would have reformed them, would have separated between them and their sins, would have purged out the corruptions that were among them, by his laws and prophets.

(2.) He would have delivered them out of their troubles, and restored to them their peace and prosperity. Several healing attempts were made, and their declining state seemed sometimes to be in a hopeful way of recovery; but their own folly put them back again. Note, If sinful miserable souls be not healed and helped, but perish in their sin and misery, they cannot lay the blame on God, for he both could and *would have healed them*; he offered to take the ruin under his hand. And there are some special seasons when God manifests his readiness to heal a distempered church and nation, now and then a hopeful crisis, which, if carefully watched and improved, might, even when the case is very bad, turn the scale for life and health.

2. They stood in their own light and put a bar in their own door. When God *would have healed them*, when they bade fair for reformation and peace, then their *iniquity* was *discovered* and their *wickedness*, which stopped that current of God's favours, and undid all again.

(1.) *Then*, when their case came to be examined and enquired into, in order to their cure, that wickedness which had been concealed and palliated was *found out*; not that it was ever hid from God, but he speaks after the manner of men; as a surgeon, when he probes a wound in order to the cure of it and finds that it touches the vitals and is incurable, goes no further in his endeavour to cure it, so, when God *came down to see* the case of Israel (as the expression is, <sup><182></sup>Genesis 18:21), with kind intentions towards them, he found their wickedness so very flagrant, and them so hardened in it, so impudent and impenitent, that he could not in honour show them the favour he designed them. Note, Sinners are not healed because they would not be healed. Christ *would have gathered* them, and they *would not*.

(2.) *Then*, when some endeavours were used to reform and reclaim them, that wickedness which had been restrained and kept under *broke out*; and from God's steps towards the healing of them they took occasion to be so much the more provoking. When endeavours were used to reform them

vice grew more impetuous, more outrageous, and swelled so much the higher, as a stream when it is damned up. When they began to prosper they grew more proud, wanton, and secure, and so stopped the progress of their cure. Note, It is sin that turns away good things from us when they are coming towards us; and it is the folly and ruin of multitudes that, when God would do well for them, they do ill for themselves. And what was it that did them this mischief? In one word, *they commit falsehood*; they worship idols (so some), defraud one another (so others), or, rather, they dissemble with God in their professions of repentance and regard to him. They say that they are desirous to be healed by him, and, in order to that, willing to be ruled by him; but they *lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue*.

**3.** A practical disbelief of God's omniscience and government was at the bottom of all their wickedness (v. 2): "*They consider not in their hearts, they never say it to their own hearts, never think of this, that I remember all their wickedness.*" As if God could not see it, though he is all eye, or did not heed it, though his name is Jealous, or had forgotten it, though he is an eternal mind that can never be unmindful, or would not reckon for it, though he is the *Judge of heaven and earth*. This is the sinner's atheism; as good say that there is *no God* as say that he is either ignorant or forgetful, that there is *none that judges in the earth* as that he remembers not the things he is to give judgment upon. It is a high affront they put upon God; it is a damning cheat they put upon themselves; they say, *The Lord shall not see*, <sup>PSALM</sup> Psalm 94:7. They cannot but know that *God remembers all their works*; they have been told it many a time; nay, if you ask them, they cannot but own it, and yet they do not *consider it*; they do not think of it when they should, and with application to themselves and their own works, else they would not, they durst not, do as they do. But the time will come when those who thus deceive themselves shall be undeceived: "*Now their own doings have beset them about*, that is, they have come at length to such a pitch of wickedness that their sins appear on every side of them; all their neighbours see how bad they are, and can they think that God does not see it?" Or, rather, "The punishment of their doings besets them about; they are surrounded and embarrassed with troubles, so that they cannot get out, by which it appears that the sins they smart for are *before my face*, not only that I have seen them, but that I am displeased at them;" for, till God by pardoning our sins has cast them behind his back, they are

still before his face. Note, Sooner or later, God will convince those who do not now consider it that he *remembers all their works*.

**4.** God had begun to contend with them by his judgments, in earnest of what was further coming: *The thief comes in, and the troop of robbers spoils without*. Some take this as an instance of their wickedness, that they robbed and spoiled one another. *Nec hospes ab hospite tutus — The host and the guest stand in fear of each other*. It seems rather to be a punishment of their sin; they were infested with secret thieves among themselves, that robbed their houses and shops and picked their pockets, and *troops of robbers*, foreign invaders, that with open violence *spoiled abroad*; so far was Israel from being healed that they had fresh wounds given them daily by robbers and spoilers; and all this the effect of sin, all to punish them for robbing God, <sup><202></sup>Isaiah 42:24; <sup><308></sup>Malachi 3:8, 11.

**II.** A particular account of the sins of the court, of the king and princes, and those about them, and the tokens of God's displeasure that they were under for them.

**1.** Their king and princes were pleased with the wickedness and profaneness of their subjects, who were emboldened thereby to be so much the more wicked (v. 3): *They make the king and princes glad with their wickedness*. It pleased them to see the people conform to their wicked laws and examples, in the worship of their idols, and other instances of impiety and immorality, and to hear them flatter and applaud them in their wicked ways. When Herod saw that his wickedness pleased the people he proceeded further in it, much more will the people do so when they see that it pleases the prince, <sup><417></sup>Acts 12:3. Particularly, they made them glad *with their lies*, with the lying praises with which they crowned the favourites of the prince and the lying calumnies and censures with which they blackened those whom they knew the princes had a dislike to. Those who show themselves pleased with slanders and ill-natured stories shall never want those about them who will fill their ears with such stories. <sup><392></sup>Proverbs 29:12, *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked*, and will make him glad with their lies.

**2.** Drunkenness and revelling abound much at the court, v. 5. *The day of our king* was a merry day with them, either his birth-day or his inauguration-day, of which it is probable that they had an anniversary observation, or perhaps it was some holiday of his appointing, which was

therefore called *his day*; on that day the princes met to drink the king's health, and got him among them, to be merry, and *made him sick with bottles of wine*. It should seem the king did not ordinarily drink to excess, but he was not upon a high day brought to it by the artifices of the princes, tempted by the goodness of the wine, the gaiety of the company, or the healths they urged; and so little was he used to it that it *made him sick*; and it is justly charged as a crime, as *crimen laesae majestatis* — *treason*, upon those who thus imposed upon him and *made him sick*; nor would it serve for an excuse that it was *the day of their king*, but was rather an aggravation of the crime, that, when they pretended to do him honour, they dishonoured him to the highest degree. If it is a great affront and injury to a common person to make him drunk, and there is a woe to those that do it (<sup><3125></sup>Habakkuk 2:15), much more to a crowned head; for the greater any man's dignity is the greater disgrace it is to him to be drunk. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel! it is not for kings, to drink wine*, <sup><3104></sup>Proverbs 31:4, 5. See what a prejudice the sin of drunkenness is to a man, to a king.

**(1.)** In his health; it *made him sick*. It is a force upon nature; and strange it is by what charms men, otherwise rational enough, can be drawn to that which besides the offence it gives to God, and the damage it does to their spiritual and eternal welfare, is a present disorder and distemper to their own bodies.

**(2.)** In his honour; for, when he was thus intoxicated, he *stretched out his hand with scorers*; then he that was entrusted with the government of a kingdom lost the government of himself, and so far forgot,

**[1.]** The dignity of a king that he made himself familiar with players and buffoons, and those whose company was a scandal.

**[2.]** The duty of a king that he joined in confederacy with atheists, and the profane scoffers at religion, whom he ought to have silenced and put to shame; he *sat in the seat of the scornful*, of those that had arrived at the highest pitch of impiety; he struck in with them, said as they said, did as they did, and exerted his power, and *stretched forth the hand* of his government, in concurrence with them. Goodness and good men are often made *the song of the drunkards* (<sup><3892></sup>Psalms 69:12; 35:16); but *woe unto thee, O land!* when *thy king is such a child* as to *stretch forth his hand* with those that make them so, <sup><2106></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:16.

**3.** Adultery and uncleanness prevailed much among the courtiers. This is spoken of v. 4, 6, 7, and the charge of drunkenness comes in in the midst of this article; for wine is oil to the fire of lust, <sup><133></sup>Proverbs 23:33. Those that are inflamed with fleshly lusts, that are *adulterers* (v. 4), are here again and again compared to an oven heated by the baker (v. 4): *They have made ready their heart like an oven* (v. 6); *they are all hot as an oven*, v. 7. Note,

[1.] An unclean heart is like an oven heated; and the unclean lusts and affections of it are as the fuel that makes it hot. It is an inward fire, it keeps the heat within itself; so adulterers and fornicators secretly *burn in lust*, as the expression is, <sup><127></sup>Romans 1:27. The heat of the oven is an intense heat, especially as it is here described; he that heats it *stirs up* the fire, and *ceases not from raising* it up, till the bread is ready to be put in, being *kneaded* and *leavened*, all which only signifies that they are like an oven when it is at the hottest; nay, when it is *too hot for the baker* (so the learned Dr. Pocock), when it is *hotter than he would have it*, so that the raiser up of the fire ceases as long as while the dough that is kneaded is in the fermenting, that the heat may abate a little. Thus fiery hot are the lusts of an unclean heart.

(2.) The unclean wait for an opportunity to compass their wicked desires; having made ready their heart like an oven, they lie in wait to catch their prey. *The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, <sup><145></sup>Job 24:15. *Their baker sleeps all the night, but in the morning it burns as a flaming fire*. As the baker, having kindled a fire in his oven and laid sufficient fuel to it, goes to bed, and sleeps all night, and in the morning finds his oven well heated, and ready for his purpose, so these wicked people, when they have laid some wicked plot, and formed a design for the gratifying of some covetous, ambitious, revengeful, or unclean lusts, have their hearts so fully set in them to do evil that, though they may stifle them for a while, yet the fire of corrupt affections is still glowing within, and, as soon as ever there is an opportunity for it, their purposes which they have compassed and imagined break out into overt acts, as a fire flames out when it has vent given it. Thus *they are all hot as an oven*. Note, Lust in the heart is like fire in an oven, puts it into a heat; but the day is coming when those who thus make themselves like a fiery oven with their own vile affections, if that fire be not extinguished by divine grace, shall be made as a fiery oven by divine wrath (<sup><19></sup>Psalm 21:9), when *the day comes that shall burn as an oven*, <sup><301></sup>Malachi 4:1.

**4.** They resist the proper methods of reformation and redress: *They have devoured their judges*, those few good judges that were among them, that would have put out these fires with which they were heated; they fell foul upon them, and would not suffer them to do justice, but were ready to stone them, and perhaps did so; or, as some think, they provoked God to deprive them of the blessing of magistracy and to leave all in confusion: *All their kings have fallen* one after another, and their families with them, which could not but put the kingdom into confusion, crumble it into contending parties, and occasion a great deal of bloodshed. There are heart-burnings among them; they are *hot as an oven* with rage and malice at one another, and this occasions the *devouring of their judges*, the *falling of their kings*. *For the transgressions of a land many are the princes thereof*, <sup><31B></sup>Proverbs 28:2. But in the midst of all this trouble and disorder *there is none among them that calls unto God*, that sees his hand stretched out against them in these judgments, and deprecates the strokes of it, none, or next to none, that stir up themselves to take hold on God, <sup><36E></sup>Isaiah 64:7. Note, Those are not only heated with sin, but hardened in sin, that continue to live without prayer even when they are in trouble and distress.

## <31B> HOSEA 7:8-16

### THE CRIMES OF THE PEOPLE

Having seen how vicious and corrupt the court was, we now come to enquire how it is with the country, and we find that to be no better; and no marvel if the distemper that has so seized the head affect the whole body, so that there is *no soundness* in it; the *iniquity of Ephraim is discovered*, as well as *the sin of Samaria*, of the people as well as the princes, of which here are divers instances.

**I.** They were not peculiar and entire for God, as they should have been, v. 8.

**1.** They did not distinguish themselves from the heathen, as God had distinguished them: *Ephraim, he has mingled himself among the people*, has associated with them, and conformed himself to them, and has in a manner confounded himself with them and lost his character among them. God had said, *The people shall dwell alone*; but they *mingled themselves with the heathen and learned their works*, <sup><31B></sup>Psalms 16:35. They went up

and down among the heathen, to beg help of one of them against another (so some); whereas, if they had kept close to God, they would not have needed the help of any of them.

**2.** They were not entirely devoted to God: *Ephraim is a cake not turned*, and so is burnt on one side and dough on the other side, but good for nothing on either side. As in Ahab's time, so now, they *halted between God and Baal*; sometimes they seemed zealous for God, but at other times as hot for Baal. Note, It is sad to think how many, who, after a sort, profess religion, are made up of contraries and inconsistencies, *as a cake not turned*, a constant self-contradiction, and always in one extreme or the other.

**II.** They were strangely insensible of the judgments of God, which they were under, and which threatened their ruin, v. 9. Observe,

**1.** The condition they were in. God was not to them, in his judgments, as *a moth* and as *rottenness*; they were silently and slowly drawing towards the ruin of their state partly by the encroachments of foreigners upon them: *Strangers have devoured his strength*, and eaten him up; they have wasted his wealth and treasure, lessened his numbers, and consumed the fruits of the earth. Some devoured them by open wars (as <sup><216></sup>2 Kings 13:7, when the king of Syria made them *like the dust by threshing*), others by pretending treaties of peace and amity, in which they extorted abundance of wealth from them, and made them pay dearly for that which did them no good, but which afterwards they paid more dearly for, as <sup><216></sup>2 Kings 16:9. This Ephraim got by mingling with the heathen, and suffering them to mingle with him; they devoured that which he rested upon and supported himself with. Note, Those that make not God their strength (<sup><151></sup>Psalm 52:7) make that their strength which will soon be devoured by strangers. They were thus reduced partly by their own mal-administrations among themselves: *Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him* (are *sprinkled* upon him, so the word is), that is, the sad symptoms of a decaying declining state, which is *waxing old* and *ready to vanish away*, and the effects of trouble and vexation. *Cura facit canos* — *Care turns gray*. The *almond-tree* does not as yet *flourish*, but it begins to turn colour, which speaks aloud to him that the *evil days* are coming, and the *years of which he shall say, I have no pleasure in them*, <sup><211></sup>Ecclesiastes 12:1, 5.



2. Their regardlessness of these warnings: *He knows it not*; he is not aware of the hand of God gone out against him; it is lifted up, but he *will not see*, <sup><2311></sup>Isaiah 26:11. He does not know how near his ruin is, and takes no care to prevent it. Note, Stupidity under less judgments is a presage of greater coming.

**III.** They went on frowardly in their wicked ways, and were not reclaimed by the rebukes they were under (v. 10): *The pride of Israel still testifies to his face*, as it had done before (<sup><2315></sup>Hosea 5:5); under humbling providences their hearts were still unhumiliated, their lusts unmortified; and it is *through the pride of their countenance that they will not seek after God* (<sup><2304></sup>Psalms 10:4); they *do not return to the Lord their God* by repentance and reformation, *nor do they seek him* by faith and prayer *for all this*; though they suffer for going astray from him, though it can never be well with them till they come back to him, and though they have in vain sought to others for relief, yet they think not of applying to God.

**IV.** They were infatuated in their counsels, and took very wrong methods when they were in distress (v. 11, 12): *Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart*. To be harmless as a dove, without gall, and not to hurt or injure others, is commendable; but to be sottish as a dove, without heart, that knows not how to defend herself and provide for her own safety, is a shame.

1. The silliness of this dove is,

(1.) That she laments not the loss of her young that are taken from her, but will make her nest again in the same place; so they have their people carried away by the enemy, and are not affected with it, but continue their dealings with those that deal barbarously with them.

(2.) That she is easily enticed by the bait into the net, and has *no heart*, no understanding, to discern her danger, as many other fowls do, <sup><2117></sup>Proverbs 1:17. She *hastes to the snare, and knows not that it is for her life* (<sup><2123></sup>Proverbs 7:23); so they were drawn into leagues with neighbouring nations that were their ruin.

(3.) That, when she is frightened, she has not courage to stay in the dove-house, where she is safe, and under the careful protection of her owner, but flutters and hovers, seeking shelter first in one place, then in another, and thereby exposes herself so much the more; so this people, when they

were in distress, sought not to God, did not fly *like the doves to their windows* where they might have been secured from all the birds of prey that struck at them, but threw themselves out of God's protection, and then *called to Egypt* to help them, and went in all haste *to Assyria*, to seek for that aid in vain which they might, by repentance and prayer, have found nearer home, in their God. Note, It is a silly senseless thing for those who have a God in heaven to trust to creatures for the refuge and relief which are to be had in him only; and those that do so are a *people of no understanding*, they are *without heart*. Now,

**2.** See what becomes of this *silly dove* (v. 12): *When they shall go to Egypt and Assyria, I will spread my net upon them*. Note, Those that will not abide by the mercy of God must expect to be pursued by the justice of God. Here,

**(1.)** They are ensnared: *"I will spread my net upon them, bring them into straits, that they may see their folly and think of returning."* Note, It is common for those that go away from God to find snares where they expected shelters.

**(2.)** They are humbled; they soar upward, proud of their foreign alliances and confiding in them; but *I will bring them down*, let them fly ever so high, *as the fowls of heaven*, that are shot flying. Note, God can and will *bring those down that exalt themselves as the eagle*, <sup>301B</sup>Obadiah 1:3, 4.

**(3.)** They are made to smart for their folly: *I will chastise them*. Note, The disappointments we meet with in the creature, when we put a confidence in it, are a necessary chastisement, or discipline, that we may learn to be wiser another time.

**(4.)** In all this the scripture is fulfilled. It is *as their congregation has heard*; they have been many a time told by the word of God, read, and preached, and sung, in their religious assemblies, that *"vain is the help of man, that in the son of man there is no help*; they have heard both from the law and from the prophets what judgments God would bring upon them for their wickedness; and *as they have heard now they shall see*, they shall feel." Note, It concerns us to take notice of the word of God which we hear from time to time *in the congregation*, and to be governed by it, for we must shortly be judged by it; and it will justify God in the condemnation of sinners, and aggravate it to them, that they have had plain public warning given them of it; it is what their congregation has

heard many a time, but they would not take warning. “*Son, remember* thou wast told what would come of it; and now thou seest they were not vain words.” See <sup><306></sup>Zechariah 1:6.

**V.** They revolted from God and rebelled against him, notwithstanding the various methods he took to retain them in their allegiance, v. 13-15. Here observe,

**1.** How kindly and tenderly God had dealt with them, as a gracious sovereign towards a people dear unto him, and whose prosperity he had much at heart. He had *redeemed them* (v. 13), brought them, at first, out of the land of Egypt, and, since, delivered them out of many a distress. He had *bound and strengthened their arms*, v. 15. When their power was weakened, like an arm broken or out of joint, God set it again, and bound it, as a surgeon does a broken bone, to make it knit. God had given Israel victories over the Syrians (<sup><1236></sup>2 Kings 13:16, 17), had *restored their coast* (<sup><1245></sup>2 Kings 14:25, 26), had *girded them with strength for battle*. “Though *I have chastened them*” (so the margin reads it), “sometimes corrected them for their faults and thereby taught them, at other times *strengthened their arms* and relieved them, though I have used both fair means and foul to work upon them, it was all to no purpose; they were mercy-proof and judgment-proof.”

**2.** How impudent their conduct had been towards him notwithstanding, which is described here for the conviction and humiliation of all those who have gone on in any way of wickedness, that they may see how exceedingly sinful their sin is, how heinous, how the God of heaven interprets it, how he resents it.

**(1.)** He had courted them to him, and taken them into covenant with himself; but *they fled from him*, as if he had been their dangerous enemy who had always approved himself their faithful friend. They wandered from him, as the silly dove from her nest, for those who forsake God will find no rest nor settlement in the creature, but wander endlessly. They fled from God when they forsook the worship of him, and ran away from his service, and withdrew themselves from their allegiance to him.

**(2.)** He had given them his laws, which were all holy, just, and good, by which he designed to keep them in the right way; but they *transgressed against him*; they sinned with a high hand and a stiff neck, wilfully and

presumptuously (so the words signifies); they broke through the fence of the divine law, and therein thwarted the design of the divine love.

**(3.)** He had made known his truths to them, and given them all possible proofs of the sincerity of his good-will to them; and yet they *spoke lies against him*. They set up false gods in competition with him; they denied his providence and power; thus they *belied the Lord*, <sup><2482></sup>Jeremiah 5:12. They rejected his messages sent them by his prophets, and said that they should have peace, though they went on in sin, directly against what he said. In their hypocritical professions of religion, shows of devotion, and promises of amendment, they lied to the Lord, which he took as lying against him.

**(4.)** He was their rightful Lord and King, and had always ruled in Jacob with equity, and for the public good; and yet they *rebelled against him*, v. 14. They not only went off from him, but took up arms against him, would have deposed him if they could and set up another.

**(5.)** He designed well for them, but they *imagined mischief against him*, v. 15. Sin is a mischievous thin; it is mischief against God, for it is treason against his crown and dignity; not that the sinners can do any thing to hurt their Creator (as one of the ancients observes on these words), but *what they can they do*; and it is so much the worse when it is not done by surprise, or through inadvertency, but designedly and with contrivance. The Jews have a saying, which Dr. Pocock quotes here, *The thoughts of transgression are worse than the transgression*. The designing of mischief is doing it, in God's account. *Compassing and imagining* the death of the king is treason by our law. Those that imagine an evil thing, though it prove a vain thing (<sup><3011></sup>Psalm 2:1), will be reckoned with for the imagination.

**3.** How they shall be punished for this (v. 13): *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me*. Note, Those who flee from God have woes sent after them, and are, without doubt, in a woeful case. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them; the word of God says, *Woe to them!* And observe what follows immediately, *Destruction unto them!* Note, The woes of God's word have real effects; destruction makes them good. The judgments of his hand shall verify the judgments of his mouth. Those whom he curses, and pronounces woeful, they are cursed, they are woeful indeed.

**VI.** Their shows of devotion and reformation were but shows, and in them they did but mock God.

**1.** They pretended devotion, but it was not sincere, v. 14. When the hand of God had gone forth against them they made some sort of application to him. *When he slew them, then they sought him. Lord, in trouble have they visited thee.* But it was all in hypocrisy.

**(1.)** When they were under personal troubles, and called upon God in secret, they were not sincere in that: *They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.* When they were chastened with pain upon their beds, and the multitude of their bones with strong pains, perhaps ill of the wounds they received in war, they cried, and groaned, and complained in the forms of devotion, and, it may be, they used many good words, proper enough for the circumstances they were in; they cried, *God help us*, and, *Lord, look upon us*. But they did not cry with their heart, and therefore God reckons it as no crying to him. Moses is said to cry unto God when he spoke not a word, only his heart prayed with faith and fervency, <sup><045></sup>Exodus 14:15. These made a great noise, and said a great deal, and yet did not cry to God, because their hearts were not right with him, not subjected to his will, devoted to his honour, nor employed in his service. To pray is to lift up the soul to God, this is the essence of prayer. If this be not done, words, though ever so well chosen, are but wind; but, if it be, it is an acceptable prayer, though the groanings cannot be uttered. Note, Those do not pray to God at all that do not pray in the spirit. Nay, God is so far from approving their prayer and accepting it that he calls it howling. Some think it intimates the noisiness of their prayers (they cried to God as they used to cry to Baal, when they thought he must be awakened), or the brutish violent passions which they vented in their prayers; they snarled at the stone, and howled under the whip, but regarded not the hand. Or it denotes that their hypocritical prayers were so far from being pleasing to God that they were offensive to him; he was angry at their prayers. The songs of the temple shall be howlings, <sup><003></sup>Amos 8:3. God will be so far from pitying them that he will justly laugh at their calamity, who have so often laughed at his authority.

**(2.)** When they were under public troubles, and met together to implore God's favour, in that also they were hypocritical; they assembled themselves, for fashion-sake, because it was usual to call a solemn assembly in times of general mourning, <sup><011></sup>Zephaniah 2:1. But it was only

to pray *for corn and wine* that they came together, which were the things they wanted, and feared being deprived of by the want of rain, the judgment they now laboured under. They did not pray for the favour or grace of God, that God would give them repentance, pardon their sins, and turn away his wrath, but only that he would not take away from them *their corn and wine*. Note, Carnal hearts, in their prayers to God, covet temporal mercies only, and dread and deprecate no other but temporal judgments, for they have no sense of any other.

**2.** They pretended reformation, but neither was that sincere, v. 16. Here is,

**(1.)** The sin of Israel: *They return*, that is, they make as if they would return; they pretend to repent and amend their doings, but they make nothing of it; they do not come home to God nor return to their allegiance, whereas God says (~~200~~ Jeremiah 4:1), *If thou wilt return, O Israel! return to me; do not only turn towards me, but return to me*. This dissimulation of theirs makes them like a *deceitful bow*, which looks as if it were fit for business, and is bent and drawn accordingly, but, when strength comes to be laid to it, either the bow or the string breaks, and the arrow, instead of flying to the mark, drops at the archer's foot. Such were their essays towards repentance and reformation.

**(2.)** The sin of the princes of Israel. That which is charged upon them is *the rage of their tongue*, quarrelling with God and his providence and with all about them when they are crossed. Princes think they may say what they will, and that it is their prerogative to huff and bluster, to curse and rail, and to call names at their pleasure, but let them know there is a God above them that will call them to an account for the *rage of their tongues* and make *their own tongues to fall upon them*.

**(3.)** The punishment of Israel and their princes for their sin. As for the princes, they shall *fall by the sword* either of their enemies or of their own people, some by one and some by the other; and *this shall be their derision*, this is that for which they shall be derided *in the land of Egypt*, when they flee to the Egyptians for succour, v. 11. Their sin and punishment shall make them a laughing-stock to all about them. Note, Those that are treacherous and deceitful in their dealings with God, and passionate and outrageous in their conduct towards men, will justly be made a derision to their neighbours, for they make themselves ridiculous.