

CHAPTER 28

In this chapter,

I. The Ephraimites are reprov'd and threaten'd for their pride and drunkenness, their security and sensuality (v. 1-8). But, in the midst of this, here is a gracious promise of God's favour to the remnant of his people (v. 5, 6).

II. They are likewise reprov'd and threaten'd for their dulness and stupidity, and unaptness to profit by the instructions which the prophets gave them in God's name (v. 9-13).

III. The rulers of Jerusalem are reprov'd and threaten'd for their insolent contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance; and, after a gracious promise of Christ and his grace, they are made to know that the vain hopes of escaping the judgments of God with which they flattered themselves would certainly deceive them (v. 14-22).

IV. All this is confirm'd by a comparison borrow'd from the method which the husbandman takes with his ground and grain, according to which they must expect God would proceed with his people, whom he had lately call'd his threshing and the corn of his floor (Isa. 21:10) (v. 23-29). This is written for our admonition, and is profitable for reproof and warning to us.

ISA. 28: 1-8

Here,

I. The prophet warns the kingdom of the ten tribes of the judgments that were coming upon them for their sins, which were soon after executed by the king of Assyria, who laid their country waste, and carried the people into captivity. Ephraim had his name from *fruitfulness*, their soil being very fertile and the products of it abundant and the best of the kind; they had a great many *fat valleys* (v. 1, 4), and Samaria, which was situated on a hill, was, as it were, *on the head of the fat valleys*. Their country was rich and pleasant, and as the garden of the Lord: it was the glory of Canaan, as that was the glory of all lands; their harvest and vintage were the *glorious beauty* on the head of their valleys, which were covered over with corn and vines. Now observe,

1. What an ill use they made of their plenty. What God gave them to serve him with they perverted, and abused, by making it the food and fuel of their lusts.

(1.) They were puffed up with pride by it. The goodness with which God crown'd their years, which should have been to him a crown of praise, was to them a *crown of pride*. Those that are rich in the world are apt to be high-minded, 1Ti. 6:17. Their king, who wore the crown, was proud that he ruled

over so rich a country; Samaria, their royal city, was notorious for pride. Perhaps it was usual at their festivals, or revels, to wear garlands made up of flowers and ears of corn, which they wore in honour of their fruitful country. Pride was a sin that generally prevailed among them, and therefore the prophet, in his name who resists the proud, boldly proclaims a *woe to the crown of pride*. If those who wear crowns be proud of them, let them not think to escape this woe. What men are proud of, be it ever so mean, is to them as a crown; he that is proud thinks himself as great as a king. But woe to those who thus exalt themselves, for they shall be abased; their pride is the preface to their destruction.

(2.) They indulged themselves in sensuality. Ephraim was notorious for drunkenness, and excess of riot; Samaria, the head of the fat valleys, was full of those that were *overcome with wine, were broken with it*, so the margin. See how foolishly drunkards act, and no marvel when, in the very commission of the sin, they make fools and brutes of themselves; they yield,

[1.] To be conquered by the sin; it overcomes them, and *brings them into bondage* (2Pe. 2:19); they are led captive by it, and the captivity is the more shameful and inglorious because it is voluntary. Some of these wretched slaves have themselves owned that there is not a greater drudgery in the world than hard drinking. They are overcome not with the wine, but with the love of it.

[2.] To be ruined by it. They are broken by wine. Their constitution is broken by it, and their health ruined. They are broken in the callings and estates, and their souls are in danger of being eternally undone, and all this for the gratification of a base lust. Woe to these *drunkards of Ephraim!* Ministers must bring the general woes of the word home to particular places and persons. We must say, *Woe to this or that person*, if he be a drunkard. There is a particular woe to the drunkards of Ephraim, for they are of God's professing people, and it becomes them worse than any other; they know better, and therefore should give a better example. Some make the *crown of pride* to belong to the drunkards, and to mean the garlands with which those were crowned that got the victory in their wicked drinking matches and drank down the rest of the company. They were proud of their being mighty to drink wine; but woe to those who thus glory in their shame.

2. The justice of God in taking away their plenty from them, which they thus abused. Their *glorious beauty*, the plenty they were proud of, *is but a fading flower*; it is meat that perishes. The most substantial fruits, if God blast them and blow upon them, are but fading flowers, v. 1. God can easily *take away their corn in the season thereof* (Hos. 2: 9), and recover *locum vastatum* — *ground that has been alienated and has run to waste*, those goods of his which

they prepared for Baal. God has an officer ready to make a seizure for him, has one at his beck, *a mighty and strong one*, who is able to do the business, even the king of Assyria, who *shall cast down to the earth with the hand*, shall easily and effectually, and with the turn of a hand, destroy all that which they are proud of and pleased with, v. 2. He shall throw it down to the ground, to be broken to pieces with a strong hand, with a hand that they cannot oppose. Then *the crown of pride*, and *the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under foot* (v. 3); they shall lie exposed to contempt, and shall not be able to recover themselves. Drunkards, in their folly, are apt to talk proudly, and vaunt themselves most when they most shame themselves; but they thereby render themselves the more ridiculous. The beauty of their valleys, which they gloried in, will be,

(1.) Like *a fading flower* (as before, v. 1); it will wither of itself, and has in itself the principles of its own corruption; it will perish in time by its own moth and rust.

(2.) Like *the hasty fruit*, which, as soon as it is discovered, is plucked and eaten up; so the wealth of this world, besides that it is apt to decay of itself, is subject to be devoured by others as greedily as the first-ripe fruit, which is earnestly desired, Mic. 7: 1. *Thieves break through and steal*. The harvest which the worldling is proud of *the hungry eat up* (Job. 5: 5); no sooner do they see the prey but they catch at it, and swallow up all they can lay their hands on. It is likewise easily devoured, as that fruit which, being ripe before it has grown, is very small, and is soon eaten up; and there being little of it, and that of little worth, it is not reserved, but used immediately.

II. He next turns to the kingdom of Judah, whom he calls the *residue of his people* (v. 5), for they were but two tribes to the other ten.

1. He promises them God's favours, and that they shall be taken under his guidance and protection when the beauty of Ephraim shall be left exposed to be trodden down and eaten up, v. 5, 6. *In that day*, when the Assyrian army is laying Israel waste, and Judah might think that their neighbour's house being on fire their own was in danger, in that day of treading down and perplexity, then God will be to the residue of his people all they need and can desire; not only to the kingdom of Judah, but to those of Israel who had kept their integrity, and, as was probably the case with some, betook themselves to the land of Judah, to be sheltered by good king Hezekiah. When the Assyrian, that mighty one, was in Israel as *a tempest of hail*, noisy and battering, as *a destroying storm* bearing down all before it, especially at sea, and *as a flood of mighty waters overflowing* the country (v. 2), then *in that day will the Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, distinguish by peculiar favours his people who have distinguished

themselves by a steady and singular adherence to him, and that which they most need he will himself be to them. This very much enhances the worth of the promises that God, covenanting to be to his people a God all-sufficient, undertakes to be himself all that to them which they can desire.

(1.) He will put all the credit and honour upon them which are requisite, not only to rescue them from contempt, but to gain them esteem and reputation. He will be to them *for a crown of glory and for a diadem of beauty*. Those that wore the crown of pride looked upon God's people with disdain, and trampled upon them, for they were the song of the drunkards of Ephraim; but God will so appear for them by his providence as to make it evident that they have his favour towards them, and that shall be to them a crown of glory; for what greater glory can any people have than for God to acknowledge them as his own? And he will so appear in them, by his grace, as to make it evident that they have his image renewed on them, and that shall be to them a diadem of beauty; for what greater beauty can any person have than the beauty of holiness? Note, Those that have God for their God have him for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty; for they are made to him kings and priests.

(2.) He will give them all the wisdom and grace necessary to the due discharge of the duty of their place. He will himself be *a spirit of judgment to those that sit in judgment*; the privy counsellors shall be guided by wisdom and discretion and the judges shall govern by justice and equity. It is a great mercy to any people when those that are called to places of power and public trust are qualified for their places, when those that sit in judgment have a spirit of judgment, a spirit of government.

(3.) He will give them all the courage and boldness requisite to carry them resolutely through the difficulties and oppositions they are likely to meet with. He will be *for strength to those that turn the battle to the gate*, to the gates of the enemy whose cities they besiege, or to their own gates, when they sally out upon the enemies that besiege them. The strength of the soldiery depends as much upon God as the wisdom of the magistracy; and where God gives both these he is to that people a crown of glory. This may well be supposed to refer to Christ, and so the Chaldee paraphrast understands it: *In that day shall the Messiah be a crown of glory*. Simeon calls him the *glory of his people Israel*; and he is made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, and strength.

2. He complains of the corruptions that were found among them, and the many corrupt ones (v. 7): *But they also, many of those of Judah, have erred through wine*. There are drunkards of Jerusalem, as well as drunkards of Ephraim; and therefore the mercy of God is to be so much the more admired that he has not blasted the glory of Judah as he has done that of Ephraim. Sparing mercy lays

us under peculiar obligations when it is thus distinguishing. Ephraim's sins are found in Judah, and yet not Ephraim's ruins. *They have erred through wine.* Their drinking to excess is itself a practical error; they think to raise their fancy by it, but they ruin their judgment, and so put a cheat upon themselves; they think to preserve their health by it and help digestion, but they spoil their constitution and hasten diseases and deaths. It is also the occasion of a great many errors in principle; their understanding is clouded and their conscience debauched by it; and therefore, to support themselves in it, they espouse corrupt notions, and form their minds in favour of their lusts. Probably some were drawn in to worship idols by their love of the wine and strong drink which there was plenty of at their idolatrous festivals; and so they erred through wine, as Israel, for love of the daughters of Moab, joined themselves to Baal-peor. Three things are here observed as aggravations of this sin: —

(1.) That those were guilty of it whose business it was to warn others against it and to teach them better, and therefore who ought to have set a better example: *The priest and the prophet are swallowed up of wine;* their office is quite drowned and lost in it. The priests, as sacrificers, were obliged by a particular law to be temperate (Lev. 10: 9), and, as rulers and magistrates, it was not for them to drink wine, Pro. 31: 4. The prophets were a kind of Nazarites (as appears by Amo. 2:11), and, as reprovers by office, were concerned to keep at the utmost distance from the sins they reprov'd in others; yet there were many of them ensnared in this sin. What! a priest, a prophet, a minister, and yet drunk! *Tell it not in Gath.* Such a scandal are they to their coat.

(2.) That the consequences of it were very pernicious, not only by the ill influence of their example, but the prophet, when he was drunk, *erred in vision;* the false prophets plainly discovered themselves to be so when they were in drink. The priest *stumbled in judgment and forgot the law* (Pro. 31: 5); he reeled and staggered as much in the operations of his mind as in the motions of his body. What wisdom or justice can be expected from those that sacrifice reason, and virtue, and conscience, and all that is valuable to such a base lust as the love of strong drink is? Happy art thou, O land! when *thy princes eat and drink for strength, and not for drunkenness,* Ecc. 10:17.

(3.) That the disease was epidemic, and the generality of those that kept any thing of a table were infected with it: *All tables are full of vomit,* v. 8. See what an odious thing the sin of drunkenness is, what an affront it is to human society; it is rude and ill-mannered enough to sicken the beholders, for the tables where they eat their meat are filthily stained with the marks of this sin, which the sinners declare as Sodom. Their tables are full of vomit, so that the victor, instead of being proud of his crown, ought rather to be ashamed of it. It bodes ill to any people when so sottish a sin as drunkenness has become national.

ISA. 28: 9-13

The prophet here complains of the wretched stupidity of this people, that they were unteachable and made no improvement of the means of grace which they possessed; they still continued as they were, their mistakes not rectified, their hearts not renewed, nor their lives reformed. Observe,

I. What it was that their prophets and ministers designed and aimed at. It was to *teach* them *knowledge*, the knowledge of God and his will, and to *make them understand doctrine*, v. 9. This is God's way of dealing with men, to enlighten men's minds first with the knowledge of his truth, and thus to gain their affections, and bring their wills into a compliance with his laws; thus he enters in by the door, whereas the thief and the robber climb up another way.

II. What method they took, in pursuance of this design. They left no means untried to do them good, but taught them as children are taught, little children that are beginning to learn, that are taken from the breast to the book (v. 9), for among the Jews it was common for mothers to nurse their children till they were three years old, and almost ready to go to school. And it is good to begin betimes with children, to teach them, as they are capable, the good knowledge of the Lord, and to instruct them even when they are but newly weaned from the milk. The prophets taught them as children are taught; for,

1. They were constant and industrious in teaching them. They took great pains with them, and with great prudence, teaching them as they needed it and were able to bear it (v. 10): *Precept upon precept. It must be so*, or (as some read) *it has been so*. They have been taught, as children are taught to read, by *precept upon precept*, and taught to write by *line upon line, a little here and a little there*, a little of one thing and a little of another, that the variety of instructions might be pleasing and inviting, — a little at one time and a little at another, that they might not have their memories overcharged, — a little from one prophet and a little from another, that every one might be pleased with his friend and him whom he admired. Note, For our instruction in the things of God it is requisite that we have precept upon precept and line upon line, that one precept and line should be followed, and so enforced by another; the precept of justice must be upon the precept of piety, and the precept of charity upon that of justice. Nay, it is necessary that the same precept and the same line should be often repeated and inculcated upon us, that we may the better understand them and the more easily recollect them when we have occasion for them. Teachers should accommodate themselves to the capacity of the learners, give them what they most need and can best bear, and a little at a time, Deu. 6: 6, 7.

2. They courted and persuaded them to learn, v. 12. God, by his prophets, said to them, “*This way that we are directing you to, and directing you in, is the rest, the only rest, wherewith you may cause the weary to rest; and this will be the refreshing of your own souls, and will bring rest to your country from the wars and other calamities with which it has been long harassed.*” Note, God by his word calls us to nothing but what is really for our advantage; for the service of God is the only true rest for those that are weary of the service of sin and there is no refreshing but under the easy yoke of the Lord Jesus.

III. What little effect all this had upon the people. They were as unapt to learn as young children newly weaned from the milk, and it was as impossible to fasten any thing upon them (v. 9): nay, one would choose rather to teach a child of two years old than undertake to teach them; for they have not only (like such a child) no capacity to receive what is taught them, but they are prejudiced against it. As children, they have *need of milk, and cannot bear strong meat*, Heb. 5:12.

1. They *would not hear* (v. 12), no, not that which would be rest and refreshing to them. They had no mind to hear it. The word of God commanded their serious attention, but could not gain it; they were where it was preached, but they turned a deaf ear to it, or as it came in at one ear it went out at the other.

2. They would not heed. It was unto them *precept upon precept, and line upon line* (v. 13); they went on in a road of external performances; they kept up the old custom of attending upon the prophet’s preaching and it was continually sounding in their ears, but that was all; it made no impression upon them; they had the letter of the precept, but no experience of the power and spirit of it; it was continually beating upon them, but it beat nothing into them. Nay,

3. It should seem, they ridiculed the prophet’s preaching, and bantered it. The word of the Lord was unto them לְצִוּוֹתָם, לְהִלָּלוֹתָם; in the original it is in rhyme; they made a song of the prophet’s words, and sang it when they were merry over their wine. David was the song of the drunkards. It is great impiety, and a high affront to God, thus to make a jest of sacred things, to speak of that vainly which should make us serious.

IV. How severely God would reckon with them for this.

1. He would deprive them of the privilege of plain preaching, and speak to them *with stammering lips and another tongue*, v. 11. Those that will not understand what is plain and level to their capacity, but despise it as mean and trifling, are justly amused with that which is above them. Or God will send foreign armies among them, whose language they understand not, to lay their country waste. Those that will not hear the comfortable voice of God’s word shall be made to

hear the dreadful voice of his rod. Or these words may be taken as denoting God's gracious condescension to their capacity in his dealing with them; he lisped to them in their own language, as nurses do to their children, with stammering lips, to humor them; he changed his voice, tried first one way and then another; the apostle quotes it as a favour (1Co. 14:21), applying it to the gift of tongues, and complaining that yet for all this they would not hear.

2. He would bring utter ruin upon them. By their profane contempt of God and his word they are but hastening on their own ruin, and ripening themselves for it; it is *that they may go and fall backward*, may grow worse and worse, may depart further and further from God, and proceed from one sin to another, till they be quite *broken, and snared, and taken*, and ruined, v. 13. They have here a little and there a little of the word of God; they think it too much, and *say to the seers, See not*; but it proves too little to convert them, and will prove enough to condemn them. If it be not a *savour of life unto life*, it will be a *savour of death unto death*.

ISA. 28:14-22

The prophet, having reproved those that made a jest of the word of God, here goes on to reprove those that made a jest of the judgments of God, and set them at defiance; for he is a jealous God, and will not suffer either his ordinances or his providences to be brought into contempt. He addressed himself to *the scornful men who ruled in Jerusalem*, who were the magistrates of the city, v. 14. It is bad with a people when their thrones of judgment become the seats of the scornful, when rulers are scorers; but that the rulers of Jerusalem should be men of such a character, that they should make light of God's judgments and scorn to take notice of the tokens of his displeasure, is very sad. Who will be mourners in Zion if they are scorers? Observe,

I. How these scornful men lulled themselves asleep in carnal security, and even challenged God Almighty to do his worst (v. 15) *You have said, We have made a covenant with death and the grave*. They thought themselves as sure of their lives, even when the most destroying judgments were abroad, as if they had made a bargain with death, upon a valuable consideration, not to come till they sent for him or not to take them away by any violence, but by old age. If we be at peace with God, and have made a covenant with him, we have in effect made a covenant with death that it shall come in the fittest time, that whenever it comes, it shall be no terror to us, nor do us any real damage; death is ours if we be Christ's (1Co. 3:22, 23): but to think of making death our friend, or being in league with it, while by sin we are making God our enemy and are at war with

him, is the greatest absurdity that can be. It was fond conceit which these scornors had, “*When the overflowing scourge shall pass through our country, and others shall fall under it, yet it shall not come to us, not reach us, though it extend far, not bear us down, though it is an overflowing scourge.*” It is the greatest folly imaginable for impenitent sinners to think that either in this world or the other they shall fare better than their neighbours. But what is the ground of their confidence? Why, truly, *We have made lies our refuge.* Either,

1. Those things which the prophets told them would be lies and falsehood to them and would deceive, but which they themselves looked upon as substantial fences. The protection of their idols, the promises with which their false prophets soothed them, their policy, their wealth, their interest in the people; these they confided in, and not in God; nay, these they confided in against God. Or,

2. Those things which should be lies and falsehood to the enemy, who was *flagellum Dei — the scourge of God*, the overflowing scourge; they would secure themselves by imposing upon the enemy with their stratagems of war, or their feigned submissions in treaties of peace. The rest of the cities of Judah were taken because they made an obstinate defence; but the rulers of Jerusalem hope to succeed better. They think themselves greater politicians than those of the country towns; they will compliment the king of Assyria with a promise to surrender their city, or to become tributaries to him, with a purpose at the same time to shake off his yoke as soon as the danger is over, not caring though they be found liars to him, as the expression is, Deu. 33:29. Note, Those put a cheat upon themselves that think to gain their point by putting cheats upon those they deal with. Those that pursue their designs by trick and fraud, by mean and paltry shifts, may perhaps compass them, but cannot expect comfort in them. Honesty is the best policy. But such refuges as these are those driven to that depart from God, and throw themselves out of his protection.

II. How God, by the prophet, awakens them out of this sleep, and shows them the folly of their security.

1. He tells them upon what grounds they might be secure. He does not disturb their false confidences, till he has first shown them a firm bottom on which they may repose themselves (v. 16): *Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone.* This foundation is,

(1.) The promises of God in general — his word, upon which he has caused his people to hope — his covenant with Abraham, that he would be a God to him and his; this is a foundation, a foundation of stone, firm and lasting, for faith to build upon; it is *a tried stone*, for all the saints have stayed themselves upon it and it never failed them.

(2.) The promise of Christ in particular; for to him this is expressly applied in the New Testament, 1Pe. 2: 6-8. He is that stone which has become *the head of the corner*. The great promise of the Messiah and his kingdom, which was to begin at Jerusalem, was sufficient to make God's people easy in the worst of times; for they knew well that till he came *the sceptre should not depart from Judah*. Zion shall continue while this foundation is yet to be laid there. "*Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, for the comfort of those that dare not make lies their refuge, Behold, and look upon me as one that has undertaken to lay in Zion a Stone,*" Jesus Christ is a foundation of God's laying. *This is the Lord's doing*. He is laid in Zion, in the church, in the holy hill. He is a tried stone, a trying stone (so some), a touch-stone, that shall distinguish between true and counterfeit. He is a precious stone, for such are the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:19), a corner-stone, in whom the sides of the building are united, the *head-stone of the corner*. And *he that believes* these promises, and rests upon them, *shall not make haste*, shall not run to and fro in a hurry, as men at their wits' end, shall not be shifting hither and thither for his own safety, nor be driven to his feet by any terrors, as the wicked man is said to be (Job. 18:11), but with a fixed heart shall quietly wait the event, saying, *Welcome the will of God*. He *shall not make haste* in his expectations, so as to anticipate the time set in the divine counsels, but, though it tarry, will wait the appointed hour, knowing that *he that shall come will come, and will not tarry*. He that believes will not make more haste than good speed, but be satisfied that God's time is the best time, and wait with patience for it. The apostle from the Septuagint explains this, 1Pe. 2: 6. *He that believes on him shall not be confounded*; his expectations shall not be frustrated, but far out-done.

2. He tells them that upon the grounds which they now built on they could not be safe, but their confidences would certainly fail them (v. 17): *Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet*. This denotes,

(1.) The building up of his church; having laid the foundation (v. 16), he will raise the structure, as builders do, by line and plummet, *Zec. 4:10*. Righteousness shall be the line and judgment the plummet. The church, being grounded on Christ, shall be formed and reformed by the scripture, the standing rule of judgment and righteousness. *Judgment shall return unto righteousness*, Psa. 94:15. Or,

(2.) The punishing of the church's enemies, against whom he will proceed in strict justice, according to the threatenings of the law. He will give them their deserts, and bring upon them the judgments they have challenged, but in wisdom too, and by an exact rule, that the tares may not be plucked up with the wheat. And when God comes thus to execute judgment,

[1.] These scornful men will be made ashamed of the vain hopes with which they had deluded themselves. *First*, They designed to make lies their refuge; but it will indeed prove a refuge of lies, which *the hail shall sweep away*, that tempest of hail spoken of v. 2. Those that make lies their refuge build upon the sand, and the building will fall when the storm comes, and bury the builder in the ruins of it. Those that make any thing their hiding place but Christ shall find that the waters will overflow it, as every shelter but the ark was over-topped and overthrown by the waters of the deluge. Such is the hope of the hypocrite; this will come of all his confidences. *Secondly*, They boasted of a covenant with death, and an agreement with the grave; but it shall be *disannulled*, as made without his consent who has the keys and sovereign command of hell and death. Those do but delude themselves that think by any wiles to evade the judgments of God. *Thirdly*, They fancied that when the overflowing scourge should pass through the land it should not come near them; but the prophet tells them that then, when others were falling by the common calamity, they should not only share in it, but should be trodden down by it: “You shall be to it for a treading down; it shall triumph over you as much as over any other, and you shall become its easy prey.” They are further told (v. 19),

1. That it shall begin with them; they shall be so far from escaping it that they shall be the first that shall fall by it: “*From the time it goes forth it shall take you*, as if it came on purpose to seize you.”

2. That it shall pursue them closely: “*Morning by morning shall it pass over*; as duly as the day returns you shall hear of some desolation or other made by it; for divine justice will follow its blow; you shall never be safe nor easy by day nor by night; there shall be a pestilence walking in darkness and a destruction wasting at noonday.”

3. That there shall be no avoiding it: “The understanding of the report of its approach shall not give you any opportunity to make your escape, for there shall be no way of escape open; but it shall be only a vexation, you shall see it coming, and not see how to help yourselves.” Or, “The very report of it at a distance will be a terror to you; what then will the thing itself be?” Evil tidings are a terror and vexation to scorners, but he whose heart is fixed, *trusting in God, is not afraid of them*; whereas, when the *overflowing scourge* comes, then all the comforts and confidences of scorners fail them, v. 20.

(1.) That in which they thought to repose themselves reaches not to the length of their expectations: *The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon it*, so that he is forced to cramp and contract himself.

(2.) That in which they thought to shelter themselves proves insufficient to answer the intention: *The covering is narrower than that a man can wrap*

himself in it. Those that do not build upon Christ as their foundation, but rest in a righteousness of their own, will prove in the end thus to have deceived themselves; they can never be easy, safe, nor warm; the bed is too short, the covering is too narrow; like our first parents' fig-leaves, the shame of their nakedness will still appear.

[2.] God will be glorified in the accomplishment of his counsels, v. 21. When God comes to contend with these scorers, *First, He will do his work, and bring to pass his act*, he will work for his own honour and glory, according to his own purpose; the work shall appear to all that see it to be the work of God as the righteous Judge of the earth. *Secondly*, He will do it now against his people, as formerly he did it against their enemies, by which his justice will appear to be impartial; he will now *rise up against Jerusalem as*, in David's time, against the Philistines *in Mount Perazim* (2Sa. 5:20), and as, in Joshua's time, against the Canaanites *in the valley of Gibeon*. If those that profess themselves members of God's church by their pride and scornfulness make themselves like Philistines and Canaanites, they must expect to be dealt with as such. *Thirdly*, This will be *his strange work, his strange act*, his foreign deed. It is work that he is backward to: he rather delights in showing mercy, and *does not afflict willingly*. It is work that he is not used to as to his own people; he protects and favours them. It is a strange work indeed if he *turn to be their enemy and fight against them*, Isa. 63:10. It is a work that all the neighbours will stand amazed at (Deu. 29:24), and therefore the ruins of Jerusalem are said to be *an astonishment*, Jer. 25:18.

Lastly, We have the use and application of all this (v. 22): "*Therefore be you not mockers; dare not to ridicule either the reproofs of God's word or the approaches of his judgments.*" *Mocking the messengers of the Lord* was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin. The consideration of the judgments of God that are coming upon hypocritical professors should effectually silence mockers, and make them serious: "*Be you not mockers, lest your bands be made strong*, both the bands by which you are bound under the dominion of sin" (for there is little hope of the conversion of mockers) "and the bands by which you are bound over to the judgments of God." God has bands of justice strong enough to hold those that break all the bonds of his law asunder and cast away all his cord from them. Let not these mockers make light of divine threatenings, for the prophet (who is one of those with whom the secret of the Lord is) assures them that the Lord God of hosts has, in his hearing, *determined a consumption upon the whole earth*; and can they think to escape? or shall their unbelief invalidate the threatening?

ISA. 28:23-29

This parable, which (like many of our Saviour's parables) is borrowed from the husbandman's calling, is ushered in with a solemn preface demanding attention, *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*, hear and understand, v. 23.

I. The parable here is plain enough, that the husbandman applies himself to the business of his calling with a great deal of pains and prudence, *secundum artem* — *according to rule*, and, as his judgment directs him, observes a method and order in his work.

1. In his ploughing and sowing: *Does the ploughman plough all day to sow?* Yes, he does, and he *ploughs in hope* and *sows in hope*, 1Co. 9:10. *Does he open and break the clods?* Yes, he does, that the land may be fit to receive the seed. And *when he has thus made plain the face thereof* does he not sow his seed, seed suitable to the soil? For the husbandman knows what grain is fit for clayey ground and what for sandy ground, and, accordingly, he sows each in its place — *wheat in the principal place* (so the margin reads it), for it is the principal grain, and was a staple commodity of Canaan (Eze. 27:17), *and barley in the appointed place*. The wisdom and goodness of the God of nature are to be observed in this, that, to oblige his creatures with a grateful variety of productions, he has suited to them an agreeable variety of earths.

2. In his threshing, v. 27, 28. This also he proportions to the grain that is to be threshed out. *The fitches and the cummin*, being easily got out of their husk or ear, are only threshed with *a staff and a rod*; but *the bread-corn* requires more force, and therefore that must be bruised with *a threshing instrument*, a sledge shod with iron, that was drawn to and fro over it, to beat out the corn; and yet *he will not be ever threshing it*, nor any longer than is necessary to loosen the corn from the chaff; *he will not break it*, or crush it, into the ground *with the wheel of his cart*, nor *bruise it to pieces with his horsemen*; the grinding of it is reserved for another operation. Observe, by the way, what pains are to be taken, not only for the earning, but for the preparing of our necessary food; and yet, after all, it is *meat that perishes*. Shall we then grudge to labour much more for the *meat which endures to everlasting life*? *Bread-corn is bruised*. Christ was so; *it pleased the Lord to bruise him*, that he might be the bread of life to us.

II. The interpretation of the parable is not so plain. Most interpreters make it a further answer to those who set the judgments of God at defiance: "Let them know that as the husbandman will not be always ploughing, but will at length sow his seed, so God will not be always threatening, but will at length execute

his threatenings and bring upon sinners the judgments they have deserved; but in wisdom, and in proportion to their strength, not that they may be ruined, but that they may be reformed and brought to repentance by them.” But I think we may give this parable a greater latitude in the exposition of it.

1. In general, that God who gives the husbandman this wisdom is, doubtless, himself infinitely wise. It is God that *instructs the husbandman to discretion*, as *his God*, v. 26. Husbandmen have need of discretion wherewith to order their affairs, and ought not undertake that business unless they do in some measure understand it; and they should by observation and experience endeavour to improve themselves in the knowledge of it. Since *the king himself is served of the field*, the advancing of the art of husbandry is a common service to mankind more than the cultivating of most other arts. The skill of the husbandman is from God, as every good and perfect gift is. This takes off somewhat of the weight and terror of the sentence passed on man for sin, that when God, in execution of it, sent man to till the ground, he taught him how to do it most to his advantage, otherwise, in the greatness of his folly, he might have been for ever *tilling the sand of the sea*, labouring to no purpose. It is he that gives men capacity for this business, an inclination to it, and a delight in it; and if some were not by Providence cut out for it, and mad to rejoice (as Issachar, that tribe of husbandmen) in their tents, notwithstanding the toil and fatigue of this business, we should soon want the supports of life. If some are more discreet and judicious in managing these or any other affairs than others are, God must be acknowledged in it; and to him husbandmen must seek for direction in their business, for they, above other men, have an immediate dependence upon the divine Providence. As to the other instance of the husbandman’s conduct in threshing his corn, it is said, *This also comes forth from the Lord of hosts*, v. 29. Even the plainest dictate of sense and reason must be acknowledged to *come forth from the Lord of hosts*. And, if it is from him that men do things wisely and discreetly, we must needs acknowledge him to be *wise in counsel and excellent in working*. God’s working is according to his will; he never acts against his own mind, as men often do, and there is a counsel in his whole will: he is *therefore* excellent in working, because he is wonderful in counsel.

2. God’s church is his husbandry, 1Co. 3: 9 If Christ is the true vine, his Father is the husbandman (Joh. 15: 1), and he is continually by his word and ordinances cultivating it. *Does the ploughman plough all day, and break the clods of his ground, that it may receive the seed, and does not God by his ministers break up the fallow ground? Does not the ploughman, when the ground is fitted for the seed, cast in the seed in its proper soil? He does so, and so the great God sows his word by the hand of his ministers (Mat. 13:19), who are to divide the word of truth and give every one his portion. Whatever the soil of the heart is, there is some seed or other in the word proper for it. And, as the*

word of God, so the rod of God is thus wisely made use of. Afflictions are God's threshing-instruments, designed to loosen us from the world, to separate between us and our chaff, and to prepare us for use. And, as to these, God will make use of them as there is occasion; but he will proportion them to our strength; they shall be no heavier than there is need. If the rod and the staff will answer the end, he will not make use of his cart-wheel and his horsemen. And where these are necessary, as for the bruising of the bread-corn (which will not otherwise be got clean from the straw), yet he will not be ever threshing it, will not always chide, but his anger shall endure but for a moment; nor will he *crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth*. And herein we must acknowledge him *wonderful in counsel and excellent in working*.