

# CHAPTER 43

The contents of this chapter are much the same with those of the foregoing chapter, looking at the release of the Jews out of their captivity, but looking through that, and beyond that, to the great work of man's redemption by Jesus Christ, and the grace of the gospel, which through him believers partake of. Here are,

**I.** Precious promises made to God's people in their affliction, of his presence with them, for their support under it, and their deliverance out of it (v. 1-7).

**II.** A challenge to idols to vie with the omniscience and omnipotence of God (v. 8-13).

**III.** Encouragement given to the people of God to hope for their deliverance out of Babylon, from the consideration of what God did for their fathers when he brought them out of Egypt (v. 14-21).

**IV.** A method taken to prepare the people for their deliverance, by putting them in mind of their sins, by which they had provoked God to send them into captivity and continue them there, that they might repent and seek to God for pardoning mercy (v. 22-28).

## ISAIAH 43:1-7

### ENCOURAGEMENT TO GOD'S PEOPLE

This chapter has a plain connexion with the close of the foregoing chapter, but a very surprising one. It was there said that Jacob and Israel would not walk in God's ways, and that when he corrected them for their disobedience they were stubborn and laid it not to heart; and now one would think it should have followed that God would utterly abandon and destroy them; but no, the next words are, *But now, fear not, O Jacob! O Israel! I have redeemed thee, and thou art mine.* Though many among them were untractable and incorrigible, yet God would continue his love and care for his people, and the body of that nation should still be reserved for mercy. God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so

much the more illustrious. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound* (<sup><480></sup>Romans 5:20), and *mercy rejoices against judgment*, as having prevailed and carried the day, <sup><503></sup>James 2:13. Now the sun, breaking out thus of a sudden from behind a thick and dark cloud, shines the brighter, and with a pleasing surprise. The expressions of God's favour and goodwill to his people here are very high, and speak abundance of comfort to all the spiritual seed of upright Jacob and praying Israel; for *to us is this gospel preached as well as unto those* that were captives in Babylon, <sup><302></sup>Hebrews 4:2. Here we have,

**I.** The grounds of God's care and concern for his people and the interests of his church and kingdom among men. Jacob and Israel, though in a sinful miserable condition, shall be looked after; for,

**1.** They are God's *workmanship, created by him unto good works*, <sup><400></sup>Ephesians 2:10. He has created them and formed them, not only given them a being, but this being, formed them into a people, constituted their government, and incorporated them by the charter of his covenant. The new creature, wherever it is, is of God's forming, and *he will not forsake the work of his own hands*.

**2.** They are the people of his purchase: he has redeemed them. Out of the land of Egypt he first redeemed them, and out of many another bondage, *in his love, and in his pity* (<sup><2509></sup>Isaiah 63:9); much more will he take care of those who are redeemed with the blood of his Son.

**3.** They are his peculiar people, whom he has distinguished from others, and set apart for himself: he has called them by name, as those he has a particular intimacy with and concern for, and they are his, are appropriated to him and he has a special interest in them.

**4.** He is their God in covenant (v. 3): *I am the Lord thy God*, worshipped by thee and engaged by promise to thee, *the Holy One of Israel*, the God of Israel; for the true God is a holy one, and holiness becomes his house. And upon all these accounts he might justly say, *Fear not* (v. 1), and again v. 5, *Fear not*. Those that have God for them need not fear who or what can be against them.

**II.** The former instances of this care.

**1.** God has purchased them dearly: *I gave Egypt for thy ransom*; for Egypt was quite laid waste by one plague after another, all their first-born were

slain and all their men of war drowned; and all this to force a way for Israel's deliverance from them. Egypt shall be sacrificed rather than Israel shall continue in slavery, when the time has come for their release. The Ethiopians had invaded them in Asa's time; but they shall be destroyed rather than Israel shall be disturbed. And if this was reckoned so great a thing, to give Egypt for their ransom, what reason have we to admire God's love to us in giving his own Son to be a *ransom for us!* <sup><1041></sup>1 John 4:10. What are Ethiopia and Seba, all their lives and all their treasures, compared with the blood of Christ?

**2.** He had prized them accordingly, and they were very dear to him (v. 4): *Since thou hast been precious in my sight thou hast been honourable.* Note, True believers are precious in God's sight; they are his jewels, his peculiar treasure (<sup><1095></sup>Exodus 19:5); he loves them, his delight is in them, above any people. His church is his vineyard. And this makes God's people truly honourable, and their name great; for men are really what they are in God's eye. When the forces of Sennacherib, that they might be diverted from falling upon Israel, were directed by Providence to fall upon Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba, then God gave those countries for Israel, and showed how precious his people were in his sight. So some understand it.

**III.** The further instances God would yet give them of his care and kindness.

**1.** He would be present with them in their greatest difficulties and dangers (v. 2): *“When thou passest through the waters and the rivers, through the fire and the flame, I will be with thee, and that shall be thy security; when dangers are very imminent and threatening, thou shalt be delivered out of them.”* Did they, in their journey, pass through deep water? They should not perish in them: *“The rivers shall not overflow thee.”* Should they by their persecutors be cast into a fiery furnace, for their constant adherence to their God, yet then the flame should not kindle upon them, which was fulfilled in the letter in the wonderful preservation of the three children, Daniel 3. Though they went through fire and water, which would be to them as the *valley of the shadow of death*, yet, while they had God with them, they need fear no evil, they should be borne up, and *brought out into a wealthy place,* <sup><1062></sup>Psalms 66:12.

**2.** He would still, when there was occasion, make all the interests of the children of men give way to the interests of his own children: *“I will give*

*men for thee, great men, mighty men, and men of war, and people (men by wholesale) for thy life.* Nations shall be sacrificed to thy welfare.” All shall be cut off rather than God’s Israel shall, so precious are they in his sight. The affairs of the world shall all be ordered and directed so as to be most for the good of the church, <sup><446></sup>2 Chronicles 16:9.

**3.** Those of them that were scattered and dispersed in other nations should all be gathered in and share in the blessings of the public, v. 57. Some of the seed of Israel were dispersed into all countries, east, west, north, and south, or into all the parts of the country of Babylon; but those whose spirits God stirred up to go to Jerusalem should be fetched in from all parts; divine grace should reach those that lay most remote, and at the greatest distance from each other; and, when the time should come, nothing should prevent their coming together to return in a body, in answer to that prayer (<sup><146></sup>Psalm 106:47), *Gather us from among the heathen*, and in performance of that promise (<sup><150></sup>Deuteronomy 30:4), *If any of thine be driven to the utmost parts of heaven, thence will the Lord thy God gather thee*, which we find pleaded on behalf of the children of the captivity, <sup><151></sup>Nehemiah 1:9. But who are the seed of Israel that shall be thus carefully gathered in? He tells us (v. 7) they are such as God has marked for mercy; for,

**(1.)** They are called by his name; they make profession of religion, and are distinguished from the rest of the world by their covenant-relation to God and denomination from him.

**(2.)** They are created for his glory; the spirit of Israelites is created in them, and they are formed according to the will of God, and these shall be gathered in. Note, Those only are fit to be called by the name of God that are created by his grace for his glory; and those whom God has created and called shall be gathered in now to Christ as their head and hereafter to heaven as their home. *He shall gather in his elect from the four winds.* This promise points at the gathering in of the dispersed of the Gentiles, and the strangers scattered, by the gospel of Christ, who died to *gather together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad; for the promise was to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call and create. God is with the church, and therefore let her not fear; none that belong to her shall be lost.

## ISAIAH 43:8-13

### A CHALLENGE TO IDOLATERS

God here challenges the worshippers of idols to produce such proofs of the divinity of their false gods as even this very instance (to go no further) of the redemption of the Jews out of Babylon furnished the people of Israel with, to prove that their God is the true and living God, and he only.

**I.** The patrons of idolatry are here called to appear, and say what they have to say in defence of their idols, v. 8, 9. Their gods have *eyes and see not, ears and hear not*, and those that make them and trust in them are like unto them; so David had said (<sup>158</sup>Psalm 115:8), to which the prophet seems here to refer when he calls idolaters *blind people that have eyes, and deaf people that have ears*. They have the shape, capacities, and faculties, of men; but they are, in effect, destitute of reason and common sense, or they would never worship gods of their own making. “*Let all the nations therefore be gathered together, let them help one another, and with a combined force plead the cause of their dunghill gods; and, if they have nothing to say in their own justification, let them hear what the God of Israel has to say for their conviction and confutation.*”

**II.** God's witnesses are subpoenaed, or summoned to appear, and give in evidence for him (v. 10): “*You, O Israelites! all you that are called by my name, you are all my witnesses, and so is my servant whom I have chosen.*” It was Christ himself that was so described (<sup>201</sup>Isaiah 42:1), *My servant and my elect*. Observe,

**1.** All the prophets that testified to Christ, and Christ himself, the great prophet, are here appealed to as God's witnesses.

**(1.)** God's people are witnesses for him, and can attest, upon their own knowledge and experience, concerning the power of his grace, the sweetness of his comforts, the tenderness of his providence, and the truth of his promise. They will be forward to witness for him that he is gracious and that no word of his has fallen to the ground.

**(2.)** His prophets are in a particular manner witnesses for him, with whom his secret is, and who know more of him than others do. But the Messiah

especially is given to be a witness for him to the people; having lain in his bosom from eternity, he has declared him. Now,

**2.** Let us see what the point is which these witnesses are called to prove (v. 12): *You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.* Note, Those who do themselves acknowledge that the Lord is God should be ready to testify what they know of him to others, that they also may be brought to the acknowledgement of it. *I believed, therefore have I spoken.* Particularly, “Since you cannot but know, and believe, and understand, you must be ready to bear record,

**(1.)** That I am he, the only true God, that I am a being self-existent and self-sufficient; I am he whom you are to fear, and worship, and trust in. Nay (v. 13), *before the day was* (before the first day of time, before the creation of the light, and, consequently, from eternity) *I am he.*” The idols were but of yesterday, *new gods that came newly up* (<sup><4827></sup>Deuteronomy 32:17); but the God of Israel was from everlasting.

**(2.)** That *there was no God formed before me, nor shall be after me.* The idols were gods formed (*dii factimade gods*, or rather *fictitiifictitious*); *by nature they were no gods*, <sup><4808></sup>Galatians 4:8. But God has a being from eternity, yea, and a religion in this world before there were either idols or idolaters (truth is more ancient than error); and he will have a being to eternity, and will be worshipped and glorified when idols are famished and abolished and idolatry shall be no more. True religion will keep its ground, and survive all opposition and competition. *Great is the truth, and will prevail.*

**(3.)** That *I, even I, am the Lord*, the great Jehovah, who is, and was, and is to come; and *besides me there is no Saviour*, v. 11. See what it is that the great God glories in, not so much that he is the only ruler as that he is the only Saviour; for he *delights to do good*: he is the *Saviour of all men*, <sup><5010></sup>1 Timothy 4:10.

**3.** Let us see what the proofs are which are produced for the confirmation of this point. It appears,

**(1.)** That the Lord is God, by two proofs:

**[1.]** He has an infinite and infallible knowledge, as is evident from *the predictions of his word* (v. 12): *“I have declared and I have shown that which has without fail come to pass; nay, I never declared nor showed any*

thing but it has been accomplished. *I showed when there was no strange god among you*, that is, when you pretended not to consult any oracles but mine, nor to have any prophets but mine.” It is said, when they came out of Egypt, that *the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him*.

[2.] He has an infinite and irresistible power, as is evident from the performances of his providence. He pleads not only, I have *shown*, but, I have *saved*, not only foretold what none else could foresee, but done what none else could do; for (v. 13), “*None can deliver out of my hand those whom I will punish; not only no man can, but none of all the gods of the heathen can protect.*” It is therefore a *fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, because there is no getting out of them again. “I will work what I have designed, both in mercy and judgment, and who shall either oppose or retard it?”

(2.) That the gods of the heathen, who are rivals with him, are not only inferior to him, but no gods at all, which is proved (v. 9) by a challenge: *Who among them can declare this that I now declare? Who can foretel things to come? Nay, which of them can show us former things?* <sup><2412></sup> Isaiah 41:22. They cannot so much as inspire an historian, much less a prophet. They are challenged to join issue upon this: *Let them bring forth their witnesses*, to prove their omniscience and omnipotence. And,

[1.] If they do prove them, they shall be justified, the idols in demanding homage and the idolaters in paying it.

[2.] If they do not prove them, *let them say, It is truth*; let them own the true God, and receive the truth concerning him, that he is God alone. The cause of God is not afraid to stand a fair trial; but it may reasonably be expected that those who cannot justify themselves in their irreligion should submit to the power of the truth and true religion.

## ~~<2412>~~ ISAIAH 43:14-21

### PROMISES TO GOD'S PEOPLE

To so low an ebb were the faith and hope of God's people in Babylon brought that there needed line upon line to assure them that they should be released out of their captivity; and therefore, that they might have strong

consolation, the assurances of it are often repeated, and here very expressly and encouragingly.

**I.** God here takes to himself such titles of his honour as were very encouraging to them. He is *the Lord their Redeemer*, not only he will redeem them, but will take it upon him as his office and make it his business to do so. If he be their God, he will be all that to them which they need, and therefore, when they are in bondage, he will be their Redeemer. He is the *Holy One of Israel* (v. 14), and again (v. 15), *their Holy One*, and therefore will make good every word he has spoken to them. He is *the Creator of Israel*, that made them a people out of nothing (for that is creation), nay, worse than nothing; and he is their *King*, that owns them as his people and presides among them.

**II.** He assures them he will find out a way to break the power of their oppressors that held them captives and filled up the measure of their own iniquity by their resolution never to let them go, <sup><2447></sup>Isaiah 14:17. God will take care to send a victorious prince and army to Babylon, that shall *bring down all their nobles*, and lay their honour in the dust, and all their people too, even *the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships* (for seamen are apt to be noisy), or whose cry is *to the ships*, as their refuge when the city is taken, that they may escape by the benefit of their great river. Note, The destruction of Babylon must make way for the enlargement of God's people. And in the prediction of the fall of the New-Testament Babylon we meet with the cries and lamentations of the sailors, <sup><687></sup>Revelation 18:17, 18. And observe, It is for Israel's sake that Babylon is ruined, to make way for their deliverance.

**III.** He reminds them of the great things he did for their fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt; for so it may be read (v. 16, 17): *“Thus saith the Lord, who did make a way in the sea, the Red Sea, and did bring forth Pharaoh's chariot and horse, that they might lie down together in the bottom of the sea, and never rise, but be extinct. He that did this can, if he please, make a way for you in the sea when you return out of Babylon, and will do so rather than leave you there.”* Note, For the encouragement of our faith and hope, it is good for us often to remember what God has done formerly for his people against his and their enemies. Think particularly what he did at the Red Sea, how he made it,



1. A road to his people, a straight way, a near way, nay, a refuge to them, into which they fled and were safe the waters being a wall unto them.

2. A grave to his enemies. The chariot and horse were drawn out by him who is Lord of all hosts, on purpose that they might fall together; howbeit, *they meant not so*, <sup><3011></sup>Micah 4:11, 12.

**IV.** He promises to do yet greater things for them than he had done in the days of old; so that they should not have reason to ask, in a way of complaint, as Gideon did, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* for they should see them repeated, nay, they should see them outdone (v. 18): *“Remember not the former things*, from them to take occasion, as some do, to undervalue the present things, as if *the former days were better than these*; no, you may, if you will, comparatively forget them, and yet know enough by the events of your own day to convince you that the Lord is God alone; for, *behold, the Lord will do a new thing*, no way inferior, both for the wonder and the worth of the mercy, to the things of old.” The best exposition of this is, <sup><2164></sup>Jeremiah 16:14, 15; 23:7, 8. *It shall no more be said, The Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt*; that is an old thing, the remembrance of which will be in a manner lost in the new thing, in the new proof that the Lord liveth, for he *brought up the children of Israel out of the land of the north*. Though former mercies must not be forgotten, fresh mercies must in a special manner be improved. *Now it springs forth*, as it were a surprise upon you; you are like those that dream. *Shall you now know it?* And will you not own God's hand in it?

**V.** He promises not only to deliver them out of Babylon, but to conduct them safely and comfortably to their own land (v. 19, 20): *I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*; for, it seems, the way from Babylon to Canaan, as well as from Egypt, lay through a desert land, which, while the returning captives passed through, God would provide for them, that their camp should be both well victualled and under a good conduct. The same power that made *a way in the sea* (v. 16) can make a *way in the wilderness*, and will force its passage through the greatest difficulties. And he that made dry land in the waters can produce waters in the driest land, in such abundance as not only to *give drink to his people, his chosen*, but to the *beasts of the field*, also *the dragons and the ostriches*, who are therefore said to honour God for it; it is such a sensible refreshment, and yields them so much satisfaction, that, if they were

capable of doing it, they would praise God for it, and shame man, who is made capable of praising his benefactor and does not. Now,

**1.** This looks back to what God did for Israel when he led them through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan, and fetched water out of a rock to follow them; what God did for them formerly he would do again, for he is still the same. And, though we do not find that the miracle was repeated in their return out of Babylon, yet the mercy was, in the common course of Providence, for which it became them to be no less thankful to God.

**2.** It looks forward, not only to all the instances of God's care of the Jewish church in the latter ages of it, between their return from Babylon and the coming of Christ, but to the grace of the gospel, especially as it is manifested to the Gentile world, by which a way is opened in the wilderness and rivers in the desert; the world, which lay like a desert, in ignorance and unfruitfulness, was blessed with divine direction and divine comforts, and, in order to both, with a plentiful effusion of the Spirit. The sinners of the Gentiles, who had been as the beasts of the field, running wild, fierce as the dragons, stupid as the owls or ostriches, shall be brought to honour God for the extent of his grace to his chosen among them.

**VI.** He traces up all these promised blessings to their great original, the purposes and designs of his own glory (v. 21): *This people have I formed for myself*, and therefore I do all this for them, that they may *show forth my praise*. Note,

**1.** The church is of God's forming, and so are all the living members of it. The new heaven, the new earth, the new man, are the work of God's hand, and are no more, no better, than he makes them; they are fashioned according to his will.

**2.** He forms it for himself. He that is the first cause is the highest end both of the first and of the new creation. *The Lord has made all things for himself*, his Israel especially, to be to him for *a people, and for a name, and for a praise*; and no otherwise can they be for him, or serviceable to him, than as his grace is glorified in them, <sup><23></sup>Jeremiah 13:11; <sup><10></sup>Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14.

**3.** It is therefore our duty to show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service. As he formed us, so he feeds us, and keeps us, and leads us, and all for himself; for every

instance therefore of his goodness we must praise him, else we answer not the end of the beings and blessings we have.

## ISAIAH 43:22-28

### REPROOF TO GOD'S PEOPLE

This charge (and a high charge it is which is here exhibited against Jacob and Israel, God's professing people) comes in here,

**1.** To clear God's justice in bringing them into captivity, and to vindicate that. Were they not in covenant with him? Had they not his sanctuary among them? *Why then did the Lord deal thus with his land?*

<sup><524></sup>Deuteronomy 29:24. Here is a good reason given: they had neglected God and had cast him off, and therefore he justly rejected them and *gave them to the curse* (v. 28); and they must be brought to own this before they are prepared for deliverance; and they did so, <sup><2705></sup>Daniel 9:5; <sup><403></sup>Nehemiah 9:33.

**2.** To advance God's mercy in their deliverance and to make that appear more glorious. Many things are before observed to magnify the power of God in it; but this magnifies his goodness, that he should do such great and kind things for a people that had been so very provoking to him and were now suffering the just punishment of their iniquity. The pardoning of their sin was as great an instance of God's power (for so Moses reckons it, <sup><4447></sup>Numbers 14:17, etc.) as the breaking of the yoke of their captivity. Now observe here,

**I.** What the sins are which they are here charged with.

**1.** Omissions of the good which God had commanded; and this part of the charge is here much insisted upon. Observe how it comes in with a *but*; compare v. 21, where God tells them what favours he had bestowed upon them and what his just expectations were from them. He had formed them for himself, intending they should show forth his praise. But they had not done so; they had frustrated God's expectations from them, and made very ill returns to him for his favours. For,

**(1.)** They had cast off prayer: *Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob!* Jacob was a man famous for prayer (<sup><241></sup>Hosea 12:4); his seed bore his

name, but did not tread in his steps, and therefore are justly upbraided with it. God takes it ill when children degenerate from the virtue and devotion of their pious ancestors. To boast of the name of Jacob, and yet live without prayer, is to mock God and deceive ourselves. If Jacob does not call upon God, who will?

(2.) They had grown weary of their religion: “Thou art Israel, the seed not only of a praying but of a prevailing father, that was a prince with God; and yet, not valuing his experiences any more than his example, *thou hast been weary of me.*” They had been in relation to God, employed in his service and in communion with him; but they began to snuff at it, and to say, *Behold, what a weariness is it!* Note, Those who neglect to call upon God do in effect tell him they are weary of him and have a mind to change their Master.

(3.) They grudged the expense of their devotion, and were niggardly and penurious in it. They were for a cheap religion; and in those acts of devotion that were costly they desired to be excused. They had *not brought*, no, not their *small cattle*, the lambs and kids, which God required for *burnt-offerings* (v. 23), much less did they bring their greater cattle, pretending they could not spare them, they must have them for the maintenance of their families. So little sense had they of the greatness of God and their obligations to him that they could not find in their hearts to part with a lamb out of their flock for his honour, though he called for it and would graciously have accepted it. *Sweet cane*, or *calamus*, was used for the holy oil, incense, and perfume; but they were not willing to be at the charge of that, v. 24. What they had must serve, though it was old and good for nothing; they would not buy fresh. Perhaps it was usual for devout pious persons to bring free-will incense as well as other free-will offerings; but they were not so generous, nor did they fill the altar of God, nor moisten it abundantly, as they should have done, *with the fat of their sacrifices*; what sacrifices they did bring were of the lean and refuse of their cattle, that had no fat in them to regale the altar with.

(4.) What sacrifices they did offer they did not honour God with them, and so they were, in effect, as no sacrifices (v. 23): *Neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.* Some of them offered their sacrifices to false gods; others, who offered them to the true God, were either careless in the manner of offering them or hypocritical in their intentions, so that they

might be truly said not to honour God with them, but rather to dishonour him.

(5.) That which aggravated their neglect of sacrificing was that, as God had appointed it, it was no burdensome thing; it was not a service that they had any reason at all to complain of: “*I have not caused thee to serve with an offering; I have not made it a task and drudgery to you, whatever you, through the corruption of your natures, have made it yourselves. I have not wearied thee with incense.*” None of God's commandments are grievous, no, not those concerning sacrifice and incense. They were not more costly than might be afforded by those that lived in such a plentiful country, nor did their attendance on them require any more time than they could well spare. But that which especially forbade them to call it *a wearisome service* was that they were required to be cheerful and pleasant, and to rejoice before God in all their approaches to him, <sup>(482)</sup>Deuteronomy 12:12. They had many feasts and good days, but only one day in all the year in which they were to afflict their souls. The ordinances of the ceremonial law, though, in comparison with Christ's easy yoke, they are spoken of as heavy (<sup>(465)</sup>Acts 15:10), yet, in comparison with the service that idolaters did to their false gods, they were light, and not to be called *services* nor found fault with as wearisome. God did not require them to sacrifice their children, as Moloch did.

2. Commissions of the evil which God had forbidden; and omissions commonly make way for commissions: *Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins*. When we make God's gifts the food and fuel for our lusts, and his providence the patron of our wicked projects, especially when we encourage ourselves to continue in sin because grace has abounded, then we make God to serve with our sins. Or it may denote what a grief and burden sin is to God; it not only wearies men and makes the creation groan, but it *wearies my God also* (<sup>(237)</sup>Isaiah 7:13) and makes the Creator complain that he is *grieved* (<sup>(450)</sup>Psalms 95:10), that he is *broken* (<sup>(260)</sup>Ezekiel 6:9), that he is pressed with sinners *as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves* (<sup>(302)</sup>Amos 2:13), and to cry out, *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*, <sup>(202)</sup>Isaiah 1:24. The antithesis is observable: God had not made them to serve with their sacrifices, but they had made him to serve with their sins. The master had not tired the servants with his commands, but they had tired him with their disobedience. Those are wicked servants indeed that behave so ill to so good a Master. God is tender of our comfort, but we are careless of his honour. Let *this* engage us to keep

close to our duty, that it is easy and reasonable, and no disparagement to us, nor too hard for us.

## II. What were the aggravations of their sin, v. 27.

1. That they were children of disobedience; for their *first father* (that is, their forefathers) *had sinned*; and they had not only sinned in their loins, but sinned like them. Ezra confesses this: *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass*, <sup><300></sup>Ezra 9:7. But their forefathers are called their *first father* to put us in mind of the apostasy and rebellion of our first father Adam, to which corrupt fountain we must trace up the streams of all our transgressions.

2. That they were scholars of disobedience too: for *their teachers had transgressed against God*, were guilty of gross scandalous sins, and the people, no doubt, would learn to do as they did. It is ill with a people when their leaders cause them to err, and their teachers, who should reform them, corrupt them.

## III. What were the tokens of God's displeasure against them for their sins, v. 23. He brought ruin both upon church and state.

1. The honour of their church was laid in the dust and trampled on: *I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary*, that is, the priests and Levites who presided with great dignity and power in the temple-service; they profaned themselves, and made themselves vile, by their enormities, and then God profaned them and made them vile, by their calamities and the contempt they fell into, <sup><300></sup>Malachi 2:9.

2. The honour of their state was ruined likewise: *"I have given Jacob to the curse*, that is, to be cursed, and hated, and abused by all their neighbours, *and Israel to reproach*, to be insulted, ridiculed, and triumphed over by their enemies." They reproached them perhaps for that in them that was good; they *mocked at their sabbaths* (<sup><200></sup>Lamentations 1:7); but God gave them up to reproach, to correct them for what was amiss. Note, The dishonour which men at any time do us should humble us for the dishonour we have done to God; and we must bear it patiently because we suffer it justly, and must acknowledge that to us belongs confusion.

**IV.** What were the riches of God's mercy towards them notwithstanding (v. 25): *I even I, am he who notwithstanding all this blotteth out thy transgressions.*

**1.** This gracious declaration of God's readiness to pardon sin comes in very strangely. The charge ran very high: *Thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities*, v. 24. Now one would think it would follow: "*I, even I, am he that will destroy thee, and burden myself no longer with care about thee.*" No, *I, even I, am he that will forgive thee*; as if the great God would teach us that forgiving injuries is the best way to make ourselves easy and to keep ourselves from being wearied with them. This comes in here to encourage them to repent, because there is forgiveness with God, and to show the freeness of divine mercy; where sin has been exceedingly sinful grace appears exceedingly gracious. Apply this,

**(1.)** To the forgiving of the sins of Israel as a people, in their national capacity. When God stopped the course of threatening judgments, and saved them from utter ruin, even then when he had them under severe rebukes, then he might be said to *blot out their transgressions*. Though he corrected them, he was reconciled to them again, and did not cut them off from being a people. This he did many a time, till they rejected Christ and his gospel, which was a sin against the remedy, and then he would forgive them no more as a nation, but utterly destroyed them.

**(2.)** To the forgiving of the sins of every particular believing penitent *transgressions and sins*, infirmities though ever so numerous, backslidings though ever so heinous. Observe here,

**[1.]** How the pardon is expressed; he will *blot them out*, as a cloud is blotted out by the beams of the sun (<sup>242</sup>Isaiah 44:22), as a debt is blotted out not to appear against the debtor (the book is crossed as if the debt were paid, because it is pardoned upon the payment which the surety has made), or as a sentence is blotted out when it is reversed, as the curse was blotted out with the waters of jealousy, which made it of no effect to the innocent, <sup>423</sup>Numbers 5:23. He *will not remember* the sin, which intimates not only that he will remit the punishment of what is past, but that it shall be no diminution to his love for the future. When God forgives he forgets.

**[2.]** What is the ground and reason of the pardon. It is not for the sake of any thing in us, but for his own sake, for his mercies'-sake, his promise-

sake, and especially for his Son's sake, and that he may himself be glorified in it.

[3.] How God glories in it: *I, even I, am he*. He glories in it as his prerogative. None can forgive sin but God only, and he will do it; it is his settled resolution. He will do it willingly and with delight; it is his pleasure; it is his honour; so he is pleased to reckon it.

2. Those words (v. 26), *Put me in remembrance*, may be understood either

(1.) As a rebuke to a proud Pharisee, that stands upon his own justification before God, and expects to find favour for his merits and not to be beholden to free grace: “If you have any thing to say in your own justification, any thing to offer for the sake of which you should be pardoned, and not for my sake, put me in remembrance of it. I will give you leave to plead your own cause with me; declare what your merits are, that you may be justified by them:” but those who are thus challenged will be speechless. Or,

(2.) As a publican. Is God thus ready to pardon sin, and, when he pardons it, will he remember it no more? Let us then put him in remembrance, mention before him those sins which he has forgiven; for they must be ever before us, to humble us, though they are pardoned, <sup>PSALM</sup> Psalm 51:3. Put him in remembrance of the promises he has made to penitents, and the satisfaction his Son has made for them. Plead these with him in wrestling for pardon, and declare these things, in order that thou mayest be justified freely by his grace. This is the only way, and it is a sure way, to peace. *Only acknowledge thy transgression.*