

# CHAPTER 51

This chapter is designed for the comfort and encouragement of those that fear God and keep his commandments, even when they walk in darkness and have no light. Whether it was intended primarily for the support of the captives in Babylon is not certain, probably it was; but comforts thus generally expressed ought not to be so confined. Whenever the church of God is in distress her friends and well-wishers may comfort themselves and one another with these words,

**I.** That God, who raised his church at first out of nothing, will take care that it shall not perish (v. 1-3).

**II.** That the righteousness and salvation he designs for his church are sure and near, very near and very sure (v. 4-6).

**III.** That the persecutors of the church are weak and dying creatures (v. 7, 8).

**IV.** That the same power which did wonders for the church formerly is now engaged and employed for her protection and deliverance (v. 9-11).

**V.** That God himself, the Maker of the world, had undertaken both to deliver his people out of their distress and to comfort them under it, and sent his prophet to assure them of it (v. 12-16).

**VI.** That, deplorable as the condition of the church now was (v. 17-20), to the same woeful circumstances her persecutors and oppressors should shortly be reduced, and worse (v. 21-23). The first three paragraphs of this chapter begin with, "Hearken unto me," and they are God's people that are all along called to hearken; for even when comforts are spoken to them sometimes they "hearken not, through anguish of spirit" (<sup>(188)</sup>Exodus 6:9); therefore they are again and again called to hearken (v. 1, 4, 7). The two other paragraphs of this chapter begin with "Awake, awake;" in the former (v. 9) God's people call upon him to awake and help them; in the latter (v. 17) God calls upon them to awake and help themselves.

## ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DISCONSOLATE

Observe,

1. How the people of God are here described, to whom the word of this consolation is sent and who are called upon to hearken to it, v. 1. They are such as *follow after righteousness*, such as are very desirous and solicitous both to be justified and to be sanctified, are pressing hard after this, to have the favour of God restored to them and the image of God renewed on them. These are those *that seek the Lord*, for it is only in the way of righteousness that we can seek him with any hope of finding him.
2. How they are here directed to look back to their original, and the smallness of their beginning: “*Look unto the rock whence you were hewn*” (the idolatrous family in Ur of the Chaldees, out of which Abraham was taken, the generation of slaves which the heads and fathers of their tribes were in Egypt); “*look unto the hole of the pit out of which you were digged*, as clay, when God formed you into a people.” Note, It is good for those that are privileged by a new birth to consider what they were by their first birth, how they were *conceived in iniquity and shapen in sin*. That which is *born of the flesh is flesh*. How hard was that rock out of which we were hewn, unapt to receive impressions, and how miserable *the hole of that pit out of which we were digged!* The consideration of this should fill us with low thoughts of ourselves and high thoughts of divine grace. Those that are now advanced would do well to remember how low they began (v. 2): “*Look unto Abraham your father*, the father of all the faithful, of all that follow after the righteousness of faith as he did (Romans 4:11), *and unto Sarah that bore you*, and whose daughters you all are as long as you do well. Think how Abraham was *called alone*, and yet was *blessed and multiplied*; and let that encourage you to depend upon the promise of God even when a sentence of death seems to be upon all the means that lead to the performance of it. Particularly let it encourage the captives in Babylon, though they are reduced to a small number, and few of them left, to hope that yet they shall increase so as to replenish their own land again.” When Jacob is very small, yet he is not so small as Abraham was, who yet became father of many nations. “Look

unto Abraham, and see what he got by trusting in the promise of God, and take example by him to follow God with an implicit faith.”

**3.** How they are here assured that their present seedness of tears should at length end in a harvest of joys, v. 3. The church of God on earth, even the gospel Zion, has sometimes had her deserts and waste places, many parts of the church, through either corruption or persecution, made like a wilderness, unfruitful to God or uncomfortable to the inhabitants; but God will find out a time and way to *comfort Zion*, not only by speaking comfortably to her, but by acting graciously for her. God has comforts in store even for the *waste places* of his church, for those parts of it that seem not regarded or valued.

**(1.)** He will make them fruitful, and so give them cause to rejoice; her wildernesses shall put on a new face, and look pleasant as Eden, and abound in all good fruits, *as the garden of the Lord*. Note, It is the greatest comfort of the church to be made serviceable to the glory of God, and to be as his garden in which he delights.

**(2.)** He will make them cheerful, and so give them hearts to rejoice. With the *fruits of righteousness, joy and gladness shall be found therein*; for the more holiness men have, and the more good they do, the more gladness they have. And where there is gladness, to their satisfaction, it is fit that there should be thanksgiving, to God's honour; for whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving; and the returns of God's favour ought to be celebrated with the voice of melody, which will be the more melodious when God gives *songs in the night*, songs in the desert.

## ~~2504~~ ISAIAH 51:4-8

### ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DISCONSOLATE

Both these proclamations, as I may call them, end alike with an assurance of the perpetuity of God's righteousness and his salvation; and therefore we put them together, both being designed for the comfort of God's people. Observe,

**I.** Who they are to whom this comfort belongs: “*My people, and my nation, that I have set apart for myself, that own me and are owned by me.*” Those are God's people and his nation who are subject to him as their King and their God, pay allegiance to him, and put themselves under his protection accordingly. They are a people who *know righteousness*, who not only have the means of knowledge, and to whom righteousness is made known, but who improve those means, and are able to form a right judgment of truth and falsehood, good and evil. And, as they have good heads, so they have good hearts, for they have the law of God in them, written and ruling there. Those God owns for his people *in whose hearts his law is*. Even those who know righteousness, and have the law of God in their hearts, may yet be in great distress and sorrow, and loaded with reproach and contempt; but their God will comfort them with the righteousness they know and the law they have in their hearts.

**II.** What the comfort is that belongs to God's people.

**1.** That the gospel of Christ shall be preached and published to the world: *A law shall proceed from me*, an evangelical law, the law of Christ, the law of faith, <sup>200</sup>Isaiah 2:3. This law is his judgment; for it is that law of liberty by which the world shall be governed and judged. This shall not only go forth, but shall continue and rest, it shall take firm footing and deep root in the world. It shall rest, not only for the benefit of the Jews, who had the first notice of it, but *for a light of the people* of other nations. It is this law, this judgment, that we are required to hearken and give ear to, at our peril; for how shall we escape if we neglect it and turn a deaf ear to it? When a law proceeds from God, *he that has ears to hear, let him hear*.

**2.** That this law and judgment shall bring with them righteousness and salvation, shall open a ready way to the children of men, that they may be justified and saved, v. 5. These are called *God's righteousness* and *his salvation*, because of his contriving and bringing them about. The former is a righteousness which he will accept for us and accept us for, and a righteousness which he will work in us and graciously accept of. The latter is the *salvation of the Lord*, for it arises from him and terminates in him. Observe, There is no salvation without righteousness; and, wherever there is the *righteousness of God*, there shall be his salvation. All those, and those only, that are justified and sanctified shall be glorified.

**3.** That this righteousness and salvation shall very shortly appear: *My righteousness is near*. It is near in time; behold, all things are now ready. It is near in place, not far to seek, but the word is nigh us, and Christ in the word, righteousness in the word, <sup><5108></sup>Romans 10:8. *My salvation has gone forth*. The decree has gone forth concerning it; it shall as certainly be introduced as if it had gone forth already, and the time for it is at hand.

**4.** That this evangelical righteousness and salvation shall not be confined to the Jewish nation, but shall be extended to the Gentiles; *My arms shall judge the people*. Those that will not yield to the judgments of God's mouth shall be crushed by the judgments of his hand. Some shall thus be judged by the gospel, for *for judgment Christ came into this world*; but others, and those of *the isles, shall wait upon him*, and bid his gospel, and the commands as well as the comforts of it, welcome. It was a comfort to God's people, to his nation, that multitudes should be added to them, and the increase of their number should be the increase of their strength and beauty. It is added, *And on my arm shall they trust, that arm of the Lord* which is revealed in Christ, <sup><2511></sup>Isaiah 53:1. Observe, God's arm shall judge the people that are impenitent, and yet on his arm shall others trust and be saved by it; for it is to us as we make it, a savour of life or of death.

**5.** That this righteousness and salvation *shall be for ever*, and shall never be abolished, v. 8. It is an everlasting righteousness that the Messiah brings in (<sup><2024></sup>Daniel 9:24), an eternal redemption that he is the author of, <sup><3309></sup>Hebrews 5:9. As it shall spread through all the nations of the earth, so it shall last through all the ages of the world. We must never expect any other way of salvation, any other covenant of peace or rule of righteousness, than what we have in the gospel, and what we have there shall continue to the end, <sup><4182></sup>Matthew 28:20. It is for ever; for the consequences of it shall be to eternity, and by this law of liberty men's everlasting state will be determined. This perpetuity of the gospel and the blessed things it brings in is illustrated by the fading and perishing of this world and all things in it. Look up to the visible heavens above, which have continued hitherto, and seem likely to continue, but they shall *vanish like smoke* that soon spends itself and disappears; they shall be rolled like a scroll, and their lights shall fall like leaves in autumn. Look down to the earth beneath; that abides too for a short *ever* (<sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 1:4), but it shall *wax old like a garment* that will be the worse for wearing; *and those that dwell therein*, all the inhabitants of the earth, even those that seem to have the best settlement in it, *shall die in like manner*: the soul shall, as to

this world, vanish like smoke, and the body be thrown by like a garment waxen old. They shall be easily crushed (<sup><1849></sup>Job 4:19), and no loss of them. But when *heaven and earth pass away*, when all flesh and the glory of it wither as grass, the *word of the Lord endures for ever*, and *not one iota or tittle of that shall fall to the ground*. Those whose happiness is bound up in Christ's righteousness and salvation will have the comfort of it when time and days shall be no more.

**III.** What use they are to make of this comfort. If God's righteousness and salvation are near to them, then let them *not fear the reproach of men*, of mortal miserable men, nor be *afraid of their revilings* or spiteful taunts, theirs who bid you sing them the songs of Zion, or who ask you, in scorn, *Where is now your God?* Let not those who embrace the gospel righteousness be afraid of those who will call them *Beelzebub*, and will say all manner of evil against them falsely. Let them not be afraid of them; let them not be disturbed by these opprobrious speeches, nor made uneasy by them, as if they would be the ruin of their reputation and honour and they must for ever lie under the load of them. Let them not be afraid of their executing their menaces, nor be deterred thereby from their duty, nor frightened into any sinful compliances, nor driven to take any indirect courses for their own safety. Those can bear but little for Christ that cannot bear a hard word for him. Let us not fear the reproach of men; for,

**1.** They will be quickly silenced (v. 8): *The moth shall eat them up like a garment*, <sup><2809></sup>Isaiah 50:9. *The worm shall eat them like wool*, or woollen cloth. If we have the approbation of a living God, we may despise the censure of dying men; the matter is not great what those say of us who must shortly be food for worms. Or it intimates the judgments of God with which they shall be visited, with which they shall be consumed, for their malice against the people of God; they shall be slowly and silently, but effectually destroyed, when God shall come to reckon with them *for all their hard speeches*, <sup><6114></sup>Jude 1:14, 15.

**2.** The cause we suffer for cannot be run down. The falsehood of their reproaches will be detected, but truth shall triumph, and the righteousness of religion's injured cause shall be for ever plain. Clouds darken the sun, but give no obstruction to his progress.

## ISAIAH 51:9-16

### ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In these verses we have,

**I.** A prayer that God would, in his providence, appear and act for the deliverance of his people and the mortification of his and their enemies. *Awake, awake! put on strength, O arm of the Lord!* v. 9. The arm of the Lord is Christ, or it is put for God himself, as <sup><1943></sup>Psalm 44:23. *Awake! why sleepest thou?* He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps; but, when we pray that he would awake, we mean that he would make it to appear that he watches over his people and is always awake to do them good. The arm of the Lord is said to awake when the power of God exerts itself with more than ordinary vigour on his people's behalf. When a hand or arm is benumbed we say, It is asleep; when it is stretched forth for action, It awakes. God needs not to be reminded nor excited by us, but he gives us leave thus to be humbly earnest with him for such appearances of his power as will be for his own praise. "*Put on strength,*" that is, "put forth strength: appear in thy strength, as we appear in the clothes we put on," <sup><4213></sup>Psalm 21:13. The church sees her case bad, her enemies many and mighty, her friends few and feeble; and therefore she depends purely upon the strength of God's arm for her relief. "*Awake, as in the ancient days,*" that is, "do for us now as thou didst for our fathers formerly, repeat *the wonders they told us of,*" <sup><1013></sup>Judges 6:13.

**II.** The pleas to enforce this prayer.

**1.** They plead precedents, the experiences of their ancestors, and the great things God had done for them. "Let the arm of the Lord be made bare on our behalf; for it has done great things formerly in defence of the same cause, and we are sure it is neither shortened nor weakened. It did wonders against the Egyptians, who enslaved and oppressed God's son, his first-born; it *cut Rahab* to pieces with one direful plague after another, and *wounded Pharaoh, the dragon, the Leviathan* (as he is called, <sup><1743></sup>Psalm 74:13, 14); it gave him his death's wound. It did wonders for Israel. *It dried up the sea, even the waters of the great deep,* as far as was requisite to open a way through the sea *for the ransomed to pass over,*" v. 10. God is never at a loss for a way to accomplish his purposes concerning his

people, but will either find one or make one. Past experiences, as they are great supports to faith and hope, so they are good pleas in prayer. *Thou hast; wilt thou not?* <sup><381></sup>Psalm 85:1-6.

**2.** They plead promises (v. 11): *And the redeemed of the Lord shall return*, that is (as it may be supplied), *thou hast said, They shall*, referring to <sup><350></sup>Isaiah 35:10, where we find this promise, that *the redeemed of the Lord*, when they are released out of their captivity in Babylon, *shall come with singing unto Zion*. Sinners, when they are brought out of the slavery of sin into the glorious liberty of God's children, may come singing, as a bird got loose out of the cage. The souls of believers, when they are delivered out of the prison of the body, come to the heavenly Zion with singing. Then this promise will have its full accomplishment, and we may plead it in the mean time. He that designs such joy for us at last will he not work such deliverances for us in the mean time as our case requires? When the saints come to heaven they *enter into the joy of their Lord*; it crowns their heads with immortal honour; it fills their hearts with complete satisfaction. *They shall obtain that joy and gladness* which they could never obtain in this vale of tears. In this world of changes it is a short step from joy to sorrow, but in that world *sorrow and mourning shall flee away*, never to return or come in view again.

**III.** The answer immediately given to this prayer (v. 12): *I, even, I, am he that comforteth you*. They prayed for the operations of his power; he answers them with the consolations of his grace, which may well be accepted as an equivalent. If God do not wound the dragon, and dry the sea, as formerly, yet, if he comfort us in soul under our afflictions, we have no reason to complain. If God do not answer immediately *with the saving strength of his right hand*, we must be thankful if he answer us, as an angel himself was answered (<sup><301></sup>Zechariah 1:13), *with good words and comfortable words*. See how God resolves to comfort his people: *I, even I, will do it*. He had ordered his ministers to do it (<sup><201></sup>Isaiah 40:1); but, because they cannot reach the heart, he takes the work into his own hands: *I, even I, will do it*. See how he glories in it; he takes it among the titles of his honour to be *the God that comforts those that are cast down*; he delights in being so. Those whom God comforts are comforted indeed; nay, his undertaking to comfort them is comfort enough to them.

**1.** He comforts those that were in fear; and fear has torment, which calls for comfort. The fear of man has a snare in it which we have need of



comfort to preserve us from. He comforts the timorous by chiding them, and that is no improper way of comforting either others or ourselves: *Why art thou cast down, and why disquieted?* v. 12, 13. God, who comforts his people, would not have them disquiet themselves with amazing perplexing fears of the reproach of men (v. 7), or of their growing threatening power and greatness, or of any mischief they may intend against us or our people. Observe,

**(1.)** The absurdity of those fears. It is a disparagement to us to give way to them: *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid?* In the original, the pronoun is feminine, *Who art thou, O woman!* unworthy the name of a man? Such a weak and womanish thing it is to give way to perplexing fears.

**[1.]** It is absurd to be in such dread of a dying man. What! *afraid of a man that shall die*, shall certainly and shortly die, *of the son of man who shall be made as grass*, shall wither and be trodden down or eaten up? The greatest men, and the most formidable, that are *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, are but men (<sup><581D></sup>Psalm 9:20) and shall *die like men* (<sup><581V></sup>Psalm 81:7), are but grass sprung out of the earth, cleaving to it, and retiring again into it. Note, We ought to look upon every man as a man that shall die. Those we admire, and love, and trust to, are men that shall die; let us not therefore delight too much in them nor depend too much upon them. Those we fear we must look upon as frail and mortal, and consider what a foolish thing it is for the servants of the living God to be afraid of dying men, that are here to-day and gone tomorrow.

**[2.]** It is absurd to *fear continually every day* (v. 13), to put ourselves upon a constant rack, so as never to be easy, nor to have any enjoyment of ourselves. Now and then a danger may be imminent and threatening, and it may be prudent to fear it; but to be always in a toss, jealous of dangers at every step, and to tremble at the shaking of every leaf, is to make ourselves all our lifetime *subject to bondage* (<sup><5825></sup>Hebrews 2:15), and to bring upon ourselves that sore judgment which is threatened, <sup><5826></sup>Deuteronomy 28:66, 67. *Thou shalt fear, day and night.*

**[3.]** It is absurd to fear beyond what there is cause: “Thou art *afraid of the fury of the oppressor*. It is true, there is an oppressor, and he is furious, and he designs, it may be, when he has an opportunity, to do thee a mischief, and it will be thy wisdom therefore to stand upon thy guard; but thou art afraid of him, *as if he were ready to destroy*, as if he were just

now going to cut thy throat, and as if there were no possibility of preventing it." A timorous spirit is thus apt to make the worst of every thing, and to apprehend the danger greater and nearer than really it is. Sometimes God is pleased at once to show us the folly of so doing: "*Where is the fury of the oppressor? It is gone in an instant, and the danger is over ere thou art aware.*" His heart is turned, or his hands are tied. *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise*, and the king of Babylon no more. What has become of all the furious oppressors of God's Israel, that hectorated them, and threatened them, and were a terror to them? they passed away, and, lo, they were not; and so shall these.

**(2.)** The impiety of those fears: "*Thou art afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who is also the Maker of all the world, who has stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and therefore has all the hosts and all the powers of both at his command and disposal.*" Note, Our inordinate fear of man is a tacit forgetfulness of God. When we disquiet ourselves with the fear of man we forget that there is a God above him, and that the greatest of men have no power but what is given them from above; we forget the providence of God, by which he orders and overrules all events according to the counsel of his own will; we forget the promises he has made to protect his people, and the experiences we have had of his care concerning us, and his seasonable interposition for our relief many a time, when we thought the oppressor ready to destroy; we forget our Jehovah-jirehs, monuments of mercy in the mount of the Lord. Did we remember to make God our fear and our dread, we should not be so much afraid as we are of the frowns of men, <sup><282></sup>Isaiah 8:12, 13. Happy is the man that fears God always, <sup><284></sup>Proverbs 28:14; <sup><283></sup>Luke 12:4, 5.

**2.** He comforts those that were in bonds, v. 14, 15. See here,

**(1.)** What they do for themselves: *The captives exile hastens that he may be loosed* and may return to his own country, from which he is banished; his care is *that he may not die in the pit* (not die a prisoner, through the inconveniences of his confinement), and that *his bread should not fail*, either the bread he should have to keep him alive in prison or that which should bear his charges home; his stock is low, and therefore he hastens to be loosed. Now some understand this as his fault. He is distrustfully impatient of delays, cannot wait God's time, but thinks he is undone and must die in the pit if he be not released immediately. Others take it to be

his praise, that when the doors are thrown open he does not linger, but applies himself with all diligence to procure his discharge. And then it follows, *But I am the Lord thy God*, which intimates,

**(2.)** What God will do for them, even that which they cannot do for themselves. God has all power in his hand to help the captive exiles; for he has *divided the sea*, when the roaring of its waves was more frightful than any of the impotent menaces of proud oppressors. He has *stilled or quieted the sea*, so some think it should be read, ~~BRB~~ Psalm 65:7; 89:9. This is not only a proof of what God can do, but a resemblance of what he has done, and will do, for his people; he will find out a way to still the threatening storm, and bring them safely into the harbour. *The Lord of hosts is his name*, his name for ever, the name by which his people have long known him. And, as he is able to help them, so he is willing and engaged to do it; for he is *thy God*, O captive-exile! thine in covenant. This is a check to the desponding captives. Let them not conclude that they must either be loosed immediately or die in the pit; for he that is the Lord of hosts can relieve them when they are brought ever so low. It is also an encouragement to the diligent captives, who, when liberty is proclaimed, are willing to lose no time; let them know that the Lord is their God, and, while they thus strive to help themselves, they may be sure he will help them.

**3.** He comforts all his people who depended upon what the prophets said to them in the name of the Lord, and built their hopes upon it. When the deliverances which the prophets spoke of either did not come so soon as they looked for them or did not come up to the height of their expectation they began to be cast down in their own eyes; but, as to this, they are encouraged (v. 16) by what God says to his prophet, not to this only, but to all his prophets, nor to this, or them, principally, but to Christ, the great prophet. It is a great satisfaction to those to whom the message is sent to hear the God of truth and power say to his messenger, as he does here, *I have put my words in thy mouth, that by them I may plant the heavens*. God undertook to comfort his people (v. 12); but still he does it by his prophets, by his gospel; and, that he may do it by these, he here tells us,

**(1.)** That his word in them is very true. He owns what they have said to be what he had directed and enjoined them to say: *“I have put my words in thy mouth, and therefore he that receives thee and them receives me.”* This is a great stay to our faith, that Christ's doctrine was not his, but his that

sent him, and that the words of the prophets and apostles were God's own words, which he put into their mouths. God's Spirit not only revealed to them the things themselves they spoke of, but dictated to them the words they should speak (<sup>602</sup>2 Peter 1:21; <sup>403</sup>1 Corinthians 2:13); so that these are the true sayings of God, of a God that cannot lie.

(2.) That it is very safe: I have *covered thee in the shadow of my hand* (as before, <sup>340</sup>Isaiah 49:2), which speaks the special protection not only of the prophets, but of their prophecies, not only of Christ, but of Christianity, of the gospel of Christ; it is not only the faithful word of God which the prophets deliver to us, but it shall be carefully preserved till it have its accomplishment for the use of the church, notwithstanding the restless endeavours of the powers of darkness to extinguish this light. They shall *prophesy again* (<sup>601</sup>Revelation 10:11), though not in their persons, yet in their writings, which God has always *covered in the shadow of his hand*, preserved by a special providence, else they would have been lost ere this.

(3.) That this word, when it comes to be accomplished, will be very great and will not fall short of the pomp and grandeur of the prophecy: *"I have put my words in thy mouth, not that by the performance of them I may plant a nation, or found a city, but that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth,* may do that for my people which will be a new creation." This must look as far forward as to the great work done by the gospel of Christ and the setting up of his holy religion in the world. As God by Christ made the world at first (<sup>302</sup>Hebrews 1:2), and by him formed the Old-Testament church (<sup>362</sup>Zechariah 6:12), so by him, and the words put into his mouth, he will set up,

[1.] A new world, will again plant the heavens and found the earth. Sin having put the whole creation into disorder, Christ's taking away the sin of the world put all into order again. *Old things have passed away, all things have become new;* things in heaven and things on earth are reconciled, and so put into a new posture, <sup>303</sup>Colossians 1:20. Through him, according to the promise, *we look for new heavens and a new earth* (<sup>603</sup>2 Peter 3:13), and to this the prophets bear witness.

[2.] He will set up a new church, a New-Testament church: *He will say unto Zion, Thou art my people.* The gospel church is called *Zion* (<sup>322</sup>Hebrews 12:22) and *Jerusalem* (<sup>405</sup>Galatians 4:26); and, when the Gentiles are brought into it, it shall be said unto them, *You are my people.* When God works great deliverances for his church, and especially when

he shall complete the salvation of it in the great day, he will thereby own that poor despised handful to be his people, whom he has chosen and loved.

## ISAIAH 51:17-23

### JERUSALEM'S AFFLICTION

God, having awoke for the comfort of his people, here calls upon them to awake, as afterwards, <sup><2517></sup>Isaiah 52:1. It is a call to awake not so much out of the sleep of sin (though that also is necessary in order to their being ready for deliverance) as out of the stupor of despair. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem were in captivity they, as well as those who remained upon the spot, were so overwhelmed with the sense of their troubles that they had no heart or spirit to mind any thing that tended to their comfort or relief; they were as the disciples in the garden, *sleeping for sorrow* (<sup><4225></sup>Luke 22:45), and therefore, when the deliverance came, they are said to have been *like those that dream*, <sup><4101></sup>Psalms 136:1. Nay, it is a call to awake, not only from sleep, but from death, like that to the dry bones to live, <sup><4509></sup>Ezekiel 37:9. “Awake, and look about thee, that thou mayest see the day of thy deliverance dawn, and mayest be ready to bid it welcome. Recover thy senses; sink not under thy load, but stand up, and bestir thyself for thy own help.” This may be applied to the Jerusalem that was in the apostle's time, which is said to have been *in bondage with her children* (<sup><4025></sup>Galatians 4:25), and to have been under the power of *a spirit of slumber* (<sup><5118></sup>Romans 11:8); they are called to awake, and mind the things that belonged to their everlasting peace, and then the cup of trembling should be taken out of their hands, peace should be spoken to them, and they should triumph over Satan, who had blinded their eyes and lulled them asleep. Now,

**I.** It is owned that Jerusalem had long been in a very deplorable condition, and sunk into the depths of misery.

**1.** She had lain under the tokens of God's displeasure. He had put into her hand *the cup of his fury*, that is, her share of his displeasure. The dispensations of his providence concerning her had been such that she had reason to think he was angry with her. She had provoked him to anger most bitterly, and was made to taste the bitter fruits of it. The cup of God's

fury is, and will be, a *cup of trembling* to all those that have it put into their hands: damned sinners will find it so to eternity. It is said (<sup>1578</sup>Psalm 75:8) that *the dregs of the cup*, the loathsome sediments in the bottom of it, *all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them*; but here Jerusalem, having made herself as the wicked of the earth, is compelled to wring them out and drink them; for wherever there has been a cup of fornication, as there had been in Jerusalem's hand when she was idolatrous, sooner or later there will be a cup of fury, a cup of trembling. Therefore *stand in awe and sin not*.

**2.** Those that should have helped her in her distress failed her, and were either unable or unwilling to help her, as might have been expected, v. 18. She is intoxicated with the cup of God's fury, and, being so, staggers, and is very unsteady in her counsels and attempts. She knows not what she says or does, much less knows she what to say or do; and, in this unhappy condition, *of all the sons that she has brought forth* and brought up, that she was borne and educated (and there were many famous ones, for of Zion it was said *that this and that man were born there*, <sup>1575</sup>Psalm 87:5), *there is none to guide her*, none to take her by the hand to keep her either from falling or from shaming herself, to lend either a hand to help her out of her trouble or a tongue to comfort her under it. Think it not strange if wise and good men are disappointed in their children, and have not that succour from them which they expected, but those that were arrows in their hand prove arrows in their heart, when Jerusalem herself has none of all her sons, prince, priest, nor prophet, that has such a sense either of duty or gratitude as to help her when she has most need of help. Thus they complain, <sup>1579</sup>Psalm 74:9. There is *none to tell us how long*. Now that which aggravated this disappointment was,

**(1.)** That her trouble was very great, and yet there was none to pity or help her: *These two things have come unto thee* (v. 19), to complete thy desolation and destruction, even *the famine and the sword*, two sore judgments, and very terrible. Or the two things were the *desolation and destruction* by which the city was wasted and the famine and sword by which the citizens perished. Or the two things were the trouble itself (made up of desolation, destruction, famine, and sword) and her being helpless, forlorn, and comfortless, under it. "Two sad things indeed, to be in this woeful case, and to have none to pity thee, to sympathize with thee in thy griefs, or to help to bear the burden of thy cares, to have none to comfort thee, by suggesting that to thee which might help to alleviate thy

grief or doing that for thee which might help to redress thy grievances.” Or these two things that had come upon Jerusalem are the same with the two things that were afterwards to come upon Babylon (<sup>240</sup>Isaiah 47:9), *loss of children and widowhood* — piteous case, and yet, “when thou hast brought it upon thyself by thy own sin and folly, *who shall be sorry for thee?* — a case that calls for comfort, and yet, when thou art froward under thy trouble, frettest, and makest thyself uneasy, *by whom shall I comfort thee?*” Those that will not be counselled cannot be helped.

(2.) That those who should have been her comforters were their own tormentors (v. 20): *They have fainted*, as quite dispirited and driven to despair; they have no patience in which to keep possession of their own souls and the enjoyment of themselves, nor any confidence in God's promise, by which to keep possession of the comfort of that. They throw themselves upon the ground, in vexation at their troubles, and there *they lie at the head of all the streets*, complaining to all that pass by (<sup>241</sup>Lamentations 1:12), pining away for want of necessary food; there they lie like *a wild bull in a net*, fretting and raging, struggling and pulling, to help themselves, but entangling themselves so much the more, and making their condition the worse by their own passions and discontents. Those that are of a meek and quiet spirit are, under affliction, like a dove in a net, mourning indeed, but silent and patient. Those that are of a froward peevish spirit are like a wild bull in a net, uneasy to themselves, vexatious to their friends, and provoking to their God: *They are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of our God*. God is angry with them, and contends with them, and they are full of that only, and take no notice of his wise and gracious designs in afflicting them, never enquire wherefore he contends with them, and therefore nothing appears in them but anger at God and quarrelling with him. They are displeased at God for the dispensations of his providence concerning them, and so they do but make bad worse. This had long been Jerusalem's woeful case, and God took cognizance of it. But,

**II.** It is promised that Jerusalem's troubles shall at length come to an end, and be transferred to her persecutors (v. 21): *Nevertheless hear this, thou afflicted*. It is often the lot of God's church to be afflicted, and God has always something to say to her then which she will do well to hearken to. “Thou art *drunken*, not as formerly *with wine*, not with the intoxicating cup of Babylon's whoredoms and idolatries, but with the cup of affliction. Know then, for thy comfort,”

**1.** “That the Lord Jehovah is thy Lord and thy God, for all this.” It is expressed emphatically (v. 22): “*Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord, and thy God* — the Lord, who is able to help thee, and has wherewithal to relieve thee, — *thy Lord*, who has an incontestable right to thee, and will not alienate it, — *thy God*, in covenant with thee, and who has undertaken to make thee happy.” Whatever the distresses of God's people may be, he will not disown his relation to them, nor have they lost their interest in him and in his promise.

**2.** “That he is the God *who pleads the cause of his people*, as their patron and protector, who takes what is done against them a done against himself.” The cause of God's people, and of that holy religion which they profess, is a righteous cause, otherwise the righteous God would not appear for it; yet it may for a time be run down, and seem as if it were lost. But God will plead it, either by convincing the consciences or confounding the mischievous projects of those that fight against it. He will plead it by clearing up the equity and excellency of it to the world and by giving success to those that act in defence of it. It is his own cause; he has espoused it, and therefore will plead it with jealousy.

**3.** That they should shortly take leave of their troubles and bid a final farewell to them: “*I will take out of thy hand the cup of trembling*, that bitter cup; it shall pass from thee.” Throwing away the cup of trembling will not do, nor saying, “We will not, we cannot, drink it;” but, if we patiently submit, he that put it into our hands will himself take it out of our hands. Nay, it is promised, “*Thou shalt no more drink it again*. God has let fall his controversy with thee, and will not revive the judgment.”

**4.** That their persecutors and oppressors should be made to drink of the same bitter cup of which they had drunk so deeply, v. 23. See here,

**(1.)** How insolently they had abused and trampled upon the people of God: *They have said to thy soul*, to thee, to thy life, *Bow down, that we may go over*. Nay, they have said it to thy conscience, taking a pride and pleasure in forcing thee to worship idols. Herein the New-Testament Babylon treads in the steps of that old oppressor, tyrannizing over men's consciences, giving law to them, putting them upon the rack, and compelling them to sinful compliances. Those that set up an infallible head and judge, requiring an implicit faith in his dictates and obedience to his commands, do in effect say to men's souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*, and they say it with delight.



(2.) How meanly the people of God (having by their sin lost much of their courage and sense of honour) truckled to them: *Thou hast laid thy body as the ground*. Observe, The oppressors required souls to be subjected to them, that every man should believe and worship just as they would have them. But all they could gain by their threats and violence was that people laid their bodies on the ground; they brought them to an external and hypocritical conformity, but conscience cannot be forced, nor is it mentioned to their praise that they yielded thus far. But observe,

(3.) How justly God will reckon with those who have carried it so imperiously towards his people: *The cup of trembling shall be put into their hand*. Babylon's case shall be as bad as ever Jerusalem's was. Daniel's persecutors shall be thrown into Daniel's den; let them see how they like it. And the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes.