

CHAPTER 5

Reproof for sin and threatenings of judgment are intermixed in this chapter, and are set the one over against the other: judgments are threatened, that the reproofs of sin might be the more effectual to bring them to repentance; sin is discovered, that God might be justified in the judgments threatened.

I. The sins they are charged with are very great: — Injustice (v. 1), hypocrisy in religion (v. 2), incorrigibleness (v. 3), the corruption and debauchery of both poor and rich (v. 4, 5), idolatry and adultery (v. 7, 8), treacherous departures from God (v. 11), and impudent defiance of him (v. 12, 13), and, that which is at the bottom of all this, want of the fear of God, notwithstanding the frequent calls given them to fear him (v. 20-24). In the close of the chapter they are charged with violence and oppression (v. 26-28), and a combination of those to debauch the nation who should have been active to reform it (v. 30, 31).

II. The judgments they are threatened with are very terrible. In general, they shall be reckoned with (v. 9, 29). A foreign enemy shall be brought in upon them (v. 15-17), shall set guards upon them (v. 6), shall destroy their fortification (v. 10), shall carry them away into captivity (v. 19), and keep all good things from them (v. 25). Herein the words of God's prophets shall be fulfilled (v. 14). But,

III. Here is an intimation twice given that God would in the midst of wrath remember mercy, and not utterly destroy them (v. 10, 18). This was the scope and purport of Jeremiah's preaching in the latter end of Josiah's reign and the beginning of Jehoiakim's; but the success of it did not answer expectation.

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THE UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION OF THE AGE

Here is,

I. A challenge to produce any one right honest man, or at least any considerable number of such, in Jerusalem, v. 1. Jerusalem had become like the old world, in which *all flesh had corrupted their way*. There were some perhaps who flattered themselves with hopes that there were yet many good men in Jerusalem, who would stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God; and there might be others who boasted of its being the holy city and thought that this would save it. But God bids them search the town, and intimates that they should scarcely find a man in it who executed judgment and made conscience of what he said and did: “Look in *the streets*, where they make their appearance and converse together, and in *the broad places*, where they keep their markets; *see if you can find a man, a magistrate* (so some), *that executes judgment*, and administers justice impartially, that will put the laws in execution against vice and profaneness.” When the faithful thus cease and fail it is time to cry *Woe is me!* (³⁰¹Micah 7:1, 2), high time to cry, *Help Lord*, (³¹¹Psalms 12:1. “If there be here and there a man that is truly conscientious, and does at least *speak the truth*, yet you shall not find him *in the streets and broad places*; he dares not appear publicly, lest he should be abused and run down. *Truth has fallen in the street* (²⁵⁴Isaiah 59:14), and is forced to *seek for corners*.” So pleasing would it be to God to find any such that for their sake he would pardon the city; if there were but ten righteous men in Sodom, if but one of a thousand, of ten thousand, in Jerusalem, it should be spared. See how ready God is to forgive, how swift to show mercy. But it might be said, “What do you make of those in Jerusalem that continue to make profession of religion and relation to God? Are not they men for whose sakes Jerusalem may be spared?” No, for they are not sincere in their profession (v. 2): *They say, The Lord liveth*, and will swear by his name only, but they *swear falsely*, that is,

1. They are not sincere in the profession they make of respect to God, but are false to him; they *honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him*.

2. Though they appeal to God only, they make no conscience of calling him to witness to a lie. Though they do not swear by idols, they forswear themselves, which is no less an affront to God, as the God of truth, than the other is as the only true God.

II. A complaint which the prophet makes to God of the obstinacy and wilfulness of these people. God had appealed to their eyes (v. 1); but here

the prophet appeals to his eyes (v. 3): “*Are not thy eyes upon the truth? Dost thou not see every man's true character? And is not this the truth of their character, that they have made their faces harder than a rock?*” Or, “*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part; but where is it to be found among the men of this generation? For though they say, The Lord liveth, yet they never regard him; thou hast stricken them with one affliction after another, but they have not grieved for the affliction, they have been as stocks and stones under it, much less have they grieved for the sin by which they have brought it upon themselves. Thou hast gone further yet, hast consumed them, hast corrected them yet more severely; but they have refused to receive correction, to accommodate themselves to thy design in correcting them and to answer to it. They would not receive instruction by the correction. They have set themselves to outface the divine sentence and to outbrave the execution of it, for they have made their faces harder than a rock; they cannot change countenance, neither blush for shame nor look pale for fear, cannot be beaten back from the pursuit of their lusts, whatever check is given them; for, though often called to it, they have refused to return, and would go forward, right or wrong, as the horse into the battle.*”

III. The trial made both of rich and poor, and the bad character given of both.

1. The poor were ignorant, and therefore they were wicked. He found many that *refused to return*, for whom he was willing to make the best excuse their case would bear, and it was this (v. 4): “*Surely, these are poor, they are foolish.* They never had the advantage of a good education, nor have they wherewithal to help themselves now with the means of instruction. They are forced to work hard for their living, and have no time nor capacity for reading or hearing, so that *they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgments of their God; they understand neither the way in which God by his precepts will have them to walk towards him nor the way in which he by his providence is walking towards them.*” Note,

(1.) Prevailing ignorance is the lamentable cause of abounding impiety and iniquity. What can one expect but works of darkness from brutish sottish people that know nothing of God and religion, but choose to *sit in darkness?*

(2.) This is commonly a reigning sin among poor people. There are the devil's poor as well as God's, who, notwithstanding their poverty, might *know the way of the Lord*, so as to walk in it and do their duty, without being book-learned; but they are willingly ignorant, and therefore their ignorance will not be their excuse.

2. The rich were insolent and haughty, and therefore they were wicked (v. 5): "*I will get me to the great men*, and see if I can find them more pliable to the word and providence of God. I will *speak to them*, preach at court, in hopes to make some impression upon men of polite literature. But all in vain; for, though *they know the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God*, yet they are too stiff to stoop to his government: *These have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds*. They know their Master's will, but are resolved to have their own will, to *walk in the way of their heart and in the sight of their eyes*. They think themselves too goodly to be controlled, too big to be corrected, even by the sovereign Lord of all himself. They are for breaking even *his bands asunder*, ^{<HB>}Psalm 2:3. The poor are weak, the rich are wilful, and so neither do their duty."

IV. Some particular sins specified, which they were notoriously guilty of, and which cried most loudly to heaven for vengeance. *Their transgressions indeed were many*, of many kinds and often repeated, *and their backslidings were increased*; they added to the number of them and grew more and more impudent in them, v. 6. But two sins especially were justly to be looked upon as unpardonable crimes: —

1. Their spiritual whoredom, giving that honour to idols which is due to God only. "*Thy children have forsaken me*, to whom they were born and dedicated and under whom they have been brought up, *and they have sworn by those that are no gods*, have made their appeal to them as if they had been omniscient and their proper judges." This is here put for all acts of religious worship due to God only, but with which they had honoured their idols. *They have sworn to them* (so it may be read), have joined themselves to them and covenanted with them. Those that forsake God make a bad change for those that are no gods.

2. Their corporal whoredom. Because they had forsaken God and served idols, he gave them up to vile affections; and those that dishonoured him were left to dishonour themselves and their own families. They *committed adultery* most scandalously, without sense of shame or fear of punishment,

for they *assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses* and did not blush to be seen by one another in the most scandalous places. So impudent and violent was their lust, so impatient of check, and so eager to be gratified, that they became perfect beasts (v. 8); like high-fed horses, they *neighed every one after his neighbour's wife*, v. 8. Unbridled lusts make men *like natural brute beasts*, such monstrous odious things are they. And that which aggravated their sin was that it was the abuse of God's favours to them: *When they were fed to the full*, then their lusts grew thus furious. Fulness of bread was fuel to the fire of Sodom's lusts. *Sine Cerere et Bacchio friget Venu — Luxurious living feeds the flames of lust.* Fasting would help to tame the unruly evil that is *so full of deadly poison*, and bring the body into subjection.

V. A threatening of God's wrath against them for their wickedness and the universal debauchery of their land.

1. The particular judgment that is threatened, v. 6. A foreign enemy shall break in upon them, get dominion over them, and shall lay waste: their country shall be as if it were overrun and perfectly mastered by wild beasts. This enemy shall be,

(1.) Like *a lion of the forest*; so strong, so furious, so irresistible; and he *shall slay them*.

(2.) Like *a wolf of the evening*, which comes out at night, when he is hungry, to seek his prey, and is very fierce and ravenous; and the noise both of the lions' roaring and of the wolves' howling is very hideous.

(3.) Like *a leopard*, which is very swift and very cruel, and withal careful not to miss his prey. The army of the enemy shall *watch over their cities* so strictly as to put the inhabitants to this sad dilemma — if they stay in, they are starved; if they stir out, they are stabbed; *Every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces*, which intimates that in many places the enemy gave no quarter. And all this bloody work is owing to the *multitude of their transgressions*. It is sin that makes the great slaughter.

2. An appeal to themselves concerning the equity of it (v. 9); "*Shall I not visit for these things? Can you yourselves think that the God whose name is Jealous will let such idolatries go unpunished, or that a God of infinite purity will connive at such abominable uncleanness?*" These are things that must be reckoned for, else the honour of God's government cannot be

maintained, nor his laws saved from contempt; but sinners will be tempted to think him *altogether such a one as themselves*, contrary to that conviction of their own consciences concerning the judgment of God which is necessary to be supported, That *those who do such things are worthy of death*, ^{<413>}Romans 1:32. Observe, when God punishes sin, he is said to *visit* for it, or enquire into it; for he weighs the cause before he passes sentence. Sinners have reason to expect punishment upon the account of God's holiness, to which sin is highly offensive, as well as upon the account of his justice, to which it renders us obnoxious; this is intimated in that, *Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* It is not only the word of God, but his soul, that takes vengeance. And he has national judgments wherewith to take vengeance for national sins. *Such nations as this* was cannot long go unpunished. *How shall I pardon thee for this?* v. 7. Not but that those who have been guilty of these sins have found mercy with God, as to their eternal state (Manasseh himself did, though so much accessory to the iniquity of these times); but nations, *as such*, being rewardable and punishable only in this life, it would not be for the glory of God to let a nation so very wicked as this pass without some manifest tokens of his displeasure.

^{<250>}JEREMIAH 5:10-19

DIVINE JUDGMENTS THREATENED

We may observe in these verses, as before,

I. The sin of this people, upon which the commission signed against them is grounded. God disowns them and dooms them to destruction, v. 10. But *is there not a cause?* Yes; for,

1. They have deserted the law of God (v. 11): *The house of Israel and the house of Judah*, though at variance with one another, yet both agreed to *deal very treacherously against God*. They forsook the worship of him, and therein violated their covenants with him; they revolted from him, and played the hypocrite with him.

2. They have defied the judgments of God and given the lie to his threatenings in the mouth of his prophets, v. 12, 13. They were often told that evil would certainly come upon them; they must expect some

desolating judgment, *sword or famine*; but they were secure and said, *We shall have peace, though we go on*. For,

(1.) They did not fear what God is. They belied him, and confronted the dictates even of natural light concerning him; for they said, "*It is not he, that is, he is not such a one as we have been made to believe he is; he does not see, or not regard, or will not require it; and therefore no evil shall come upon us.*" Multitudes are ruined by being made to believe that God will not be so strict with them as his word says he will; nay, by this artifice Satan undid us all: *You shall not surely die*. So here: *Neither shall we see sword nor famine*. Vain hopes of impunity are the deceitful support of all impiety.

(2.) They did not fear what God said. The prophets gave them fair warning, but they turned it off with a jest: "They do but talk so, because it is their trade; they are words of course, and words are but wind. It is not the word of the Lord that is in them; it is only the language of their melancholy fancy or their ill-will to their country, because they are not preferred." Note, Impenitent sinners are not willing to own any thing to be the word of God that makes against them, that tends either to part them from, or disquiet them in, their sins. They threaten the prophets: "*They shall become wind, shall pass away unregarded, and thus shall it be done unto them; what they threaten against us we will inflict upon them. Do they frighten us with famine? Let them be fed with the bread of affliction.*" So Micaiah was, ^{<127>}1 Kings 22:27. "Do they tell us of the sword? Let them perish by the sword," ^{<243>}Jeremiah 2:30. Thus their mocking and misusing God's messengers filled the measure of their iniquity.

II. The punishment of this people for their sin.

1. The threatenings they laughed at shall be executed (v. 14): *Because you speak this word of contempt concerning the prophets, and the word in their mouths, therefore God will put honour upon them and their words, for not one iota or tittle of them shall fall to the ground,* ^{<989>}1 Samuel 3:19. Here God turns to the prophet Jeremiah, who had been thus bantered, and perhaps had been a little uneasy at it: *Behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire*. God owns them for his words, though men denied them, and will as surely make them to take effect as the fire consumes combustible material that is in its way. *The word shall be fire and the people wood.*

Sinners by sin make themselves fuel to that wrath of God which is *revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* in the scripture. The word of God will certainly be too hard for those that contend with it. Those shall break who will not bow before it.

2. The enemy they thought themselves in no danger of shall be brought upon them. God gives them their commission (v. 10): “*Go you up upon her walls, mount them, trample upon them, tread them down. Walls of stone, before the divine commission, shall be but mud walls. Having made yourselves masters of the walls, you may destroy at pleasure. You may take away her battlements, and leave the fenced fortified cities to lie open; for her battlements are not the Lord's he does not own them and therefore will not protect and fortify them.*” They were not erected in his fear, nor with a dependence upon him; the people have trusted to them more than to God, and therefore they are not his. When the city is filled with sin God will not patronise the fortifications of it, and then they are paper walls. What can defend us when he who is our defence, and the defender of all our defences, has *departed from us?* ⁽¹⁴⁴⁹⁾Numbers 14:9. What is not of God cannot stand, not stand long, nor stand us in any stead. What dreadful work these invaders should make is here described (v. 15): *Lo, I will bring a nation upon you, O house of Israel!* Note, God has all nations at his command, does what he pleases with them and makes what use he pleases of them. And sometimes he is pleased to make the nations of the earth, the heathen nations, a scourge to the house of Israel, when that has become a *hypocritical nation*. This nation of the Chaldeans is here said to be a remote nation; it is *brought upon them from afar*, and therefore will make the greater spoil and the longer stay, that the soldiers may pay themselves well for so long a march. “It is a nation that thou hast had no commerce with, by reason of their distance, and therefore canst not expect to find favour with.” God can bring trouble upon us from places and causes very remote. It is a *mighty nation*, that there is no making head against, an *ancient nation*, that value themselves upon their antiquity and will therefore be the more haughty and imperious. It is *a nation whose language thou knowest not*; they spoke the Syriac tongue, which the Jews at that time were not acquainted with, as appears, ⁽¹⁸⁸⁶⁾2 Kings 18:26. The difference of language would make it the more difficult to treat with them of peace. Compare this with the threatening, ⁽⁶³⁹⁾Deuteronomy 28:49, which it seems to have a reference to, for the law and the prophets exactly agree. They are well armed: *Their quiver is as an open sepulchre*; their

arrows shall fly so thick, hit so sure, and wound so deep, that they shall be reckoned to breathe nothing but death and slaughter: they are able-bodied, all effective, *mighty men*, v. 16. And, when they have made themselves masters of the country, they shall devour all before them, and reckon all their own that they can lay their hands on, v. 17.

(1.) They shall strip the country, shall not only sustain, but surfeit, their soldiers with the rich products of this fruitful land. “They shall not store up (then it might possibly be retrieved), but *eat up thy harvest* in the field *and thy bread* in the house, *which thy sons and thy daughters should eat.*” Note, What we have we have for our families, and it is a comfort to see our sons and daughters eating that which we have taken care and pains for. But it is a grievous vexation to see it devoured by strangers and enemies, to see their camps victualled with our stores, while those that are dear to us are perishing for want of it: this also is according to the curse of the law, ^(LXX)Deuteronomy 28:33. “*They shall eat up thy flocks and herds*, out of which thou hast taken sacrifices for thy idols; they shall not leave thee the fruit of *thy vines and fig-trees.*”

(2.) They shall starve the towns: “*They shall impoverish thy fenced cities*” (and what fence is there against poverty, when it comes like an armed man?), “those cities *wherein thou trustedst* to be a protection to the country.” Note, It is just with God to impoverish that which we make our confidence. They shall impoverish them *with the sword*, cutting off all provisions from coming to them and intercepting trade and commerce, which will impoverish even fenced cities.

III. An intimation of the tender compassion God has yet for them. The enemy is commissioned to destroy and lay waste, but must not *make a full end*, v. 10. Though they make a great slaughter, yet some must be left to live; though they make a great spoil, yet something must be left to live upon, for God has said it (v. 18) with a *non obstante* — *a nevertheless* to the present desolation: “*Even in those days*, dismal as they are, *I will not make a full end with you;*” and, if God will not, the enemy shall not. God has mercy in store for his people, and therefore will set bounds to this desolating judgment. *Hitherto it shall come, and no further.*

IV. The justification of God in these proceedings against them. As he will appear to be gracious in not making a full end with them, so he will appear

to be righteous in coming so near it, and will have it acknowledged that he has done them no wrong, v. 19. Observe,

1. A reason demanded, insolently demanded, by the people for these judgments. They *will say* “*Wherefore doth the Lord our God do all this unto us? What provocation have we given him, or what quarrel has he with us?*” As if against such a sinful nation there did not appear cause enough of action. Note, Unhumbled hearts are ready to charge God with injustice in their afflictions, and pretend they have to seek for the cause of them when it is written in the forehead of them. But,

2. Here is a reason immediately assigned. The prophet is instructed what answer to give them; for God *will be justified when he speaks*, though he speaks with ever so much terror. He must tell them that God does this against them for what they have done against him, and that they may, if they please, read their sin in their punishment. Do not they know very well that they have *forsaken God*, and therefore can they think it strange if he has forsaken them? Have they forgotten how often they *served gods in their own land*, that good land, in the abundance of the fruits of which they ought to have served God with gladness of heart? and therefore is it not just with God to make them *serve strangers* in a strange land, where they can call nothing their own, as he has threatened to do? ^{<15347>}Deuteronomy 28:47, 48. Those that are fond of strangers, to strangers let them go.

<2151> JEREMIAH 5:20-24

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

The prophet, having reproved them for sin and threatened the judgments of God against them, is here sent to them again upon another errand, which he must *publish in Judah*; the purport of it is to persuade them to fear God, which would be an effectual principle of their reformation, as the want of that fear had been at the bottom of their apostasy.

I. He complains of the shameful stupidity of this people, and their bent to backslide from God, speaking as if he knew not what course to take with them. For,

1. Their understandings were darkened and unapt to admit the rays of the divine light: They are a *foolish people and without understanding*; they apprehend not the mind of God, though ever so plainly declared to them by the written word, by his prophets, and by his providence (v. 21): *They have eyes, but they see not, ears, but they hear not*, like the idols which they made and worshipped, ^{<B85>}Psalm 115:5, 6, 8. One would have thought that they took notice of things, but really they did not; they had intellectual faculties and capacities, but they did not employ and improve them as they ought. Herein they disappointed the expectations of all their neighbours, who, observing what excellent means of knowledge they had, concluded, *Surely they are a wise and an understanding people* (^{<B16>}Deuteronomy 4:6), and yet really they are a *foolish people and without understanding*. Note, We cannot judge of men by the advantages and opportunities they enjoy: there are those that sit in darkness in a land of light, that live in sin even in a holy land, that are bad in the best places.

2. Their wills were stubborn and unapt to submit to the rules of the divine law (v. 23): *This people has a revolting and a rebellious heart*; and no wonder when they were *foolish and without understanding*, ^{<B85>}Psalm 82:5. Nay, it is the corrupt bias of the will that bribes and besots the understanding: none so blind as those that will not see. The character of this people is the true character of all people by nature, till the grace of God has wrought a change. We are *foolish*, slow of understanding, and apt to mistake and forget; yet that is not the worst. We have a *revolting and a rebellious heart*, a carnal mind, that is enmity against God, and is not in subjection to his law, not only revolting from him by a rooted aversion to that which is good, but rebellious against him by a strong inclination to that which is evil. Observe, The revolting heart is a rebellious one: those that withdraw from their allegiance to God do not stop there, but by siding in with sin and Satan take up arms against him. *They have revolted and gone*. The revolting heart will produce a revolting life. *They are gone*, and they *will go* (so it may be read); now *nothing will be restrained from them*, ^{<B16>}Genesis 11:6.

II. He ascribed this to the want of the fear of God. When he observes them to be without understanding he asks, "*Fear you not me, saith the Lord, and will you not tremble at my presence?*" v. 22. If you would but keep up an awe of God, you would be more observant of what he says to you: and, did you but understand your own interest better, you would be more under the commanding rule of God's fear." When he observes that

they have revolted and gone he adds this, as the root and cause of their apostasy (v. 24), *Neither say they in their hearts, Let us now fear the Lord our God.* Therefore so many bad thoughts come into their mind, and hurry them to that which is evil, because they will not admit and entertain good thoughts, and particularly not this good thought, *Let us now fear the Lord our God.* It is true it is God's work to put his fear into our hearts; but it is our work to stir up ourselves to fear him, and to fasten upon those considerations which are proper to affect us with a holy awe of him; and it is because we do not do this that our hearts are so destitute of his fear as they are, and so apt to revolt and rebel.

III. He suggests some of those things which are proper to possess us with a holy fear of God.

1. We must fear the Lord and his greatness, v. 22. Upon this account he demands our fear: *Shall we not tremble at his presence,* and not be afraid of affronting him, or trifling with him, who in the kingdom of nature and providence gives such incontestable proofs of his almighty power and sovereign dominion? Here is one instance given of very many that might be given: he keeps the sea within compass. Though the tides flow with a mighty strength twice every day, and if they should flow on awhile would drown the world, though in a storm the billows rise high and dash to the shore with incredible force and fury, yet they are under check, they return, they retire, and no harm is done. *This is the Lord's doing,* and, if it were not common, it would be *marvellous in our eyes.* He has *placed the sand for the bound of the sea,* not only for a *meer-stone,* to mark out how far it may come and where it must stop, but as a *mound,* or fence, to put a stop to it. A wall of sand shall be as effectual as a wall of brass to check the flowing waves, when God is pleased to make it so; nay, that is chosen rather, to teach us that a *soft answer,* like the soft sand, *turns away wrath,* and quiets a foaming rage, when *grievous words,* like hard rocks, do but exasperate, and make *the waters cast forth* so much the more *mire and dirt.* This bound is placed *by a perpetual decree,* by an ordinance of *antiquity* (so some read it), and then it sends us as far back as to the creation of the world, when God divided between the sea and dry land, and fixed marches between them, ^{<000>}Genesis 1:9, 10 (which is elegantly described, ^{<046>}Psalms 104:6, etc., and ^{<330>}Job 38:8, etc.), or to the period of Noah's flood, when God promised that he would never drown the world again, ^{<001>}Genesis 9:11. An ordinance of *perpetuity* — so our translation takes it. It is a *perpetual decree;* it has had its effect all along to this day

and shall still continue till day and night come to an end. This *perpetual decree* the waters of the sea *cannot pass over* nor break through. *Though the waves thereof toss themselves*, as the *troubled sea* does when it cannot rest, yet *can they not prevail*; though they roar and rage as if they were vexed at the check given them, yet *can they not pass over*. Now this is a good reason why we should fear God; for,

(1.) By this we see that he is a God of almighty power and universal sovereignty, and therefore to be feared and had in reverence.

(2.) This shows us how easily he could drown the world again and how much we continually lie at his mercy, and therefore we should be afraid of making him our enemy.

(3.) Even the unruly waves of the sea observe his decree and retreat at his check, and shall not we then? Why are our hearts revolting and rebellious, when the sea neither revolts nor rebels?

2. We must fear the Lord and his goodness, ^{<385>}Hosea 3:5. The instances of this, as of the former, are fetched from God's common providence, v. 24. We must *fear the Lord our God*, that is, we must worship him, and give him glory, and be always in care to keep ourselves in his love, because he is continually doing us good: he gives us both *the former and the latter rain*, the former a little after seed-time, the latter a little before harvest, and both *in their season*; and by this means *he reserves to us the appointed weeks of harvest*. Harvest is reckoned by weeks, because in a few weeks enough is gathered to serve for sustenance the year round. The weeks of the harvest are appointed us by the promise of God, that *seed-time and harvest shall not fail*. And in performance of that promise they are reserved to us by the divine providence, otherwise we should come short of them. In harvest mercies therefore God is to be acknowledged, his power, and goodness, and faithfulness, for they all come from him. And it is good reason why we should fear him, that we may keep ourselves in his love, because we have such a necessary dependence upon him. The fruitful seasons were witnesses for God, even to the heathen world, sufficient to leave them inexcusable in their contempt of him (^{<447>}Acts 14:17); and yet the Jews, who had the written word to explain their testimony by, were not wrought upon to fear the Lord, though it appears how much it is our interest to do so.

~~2155~~ JEREMIAH 5:25-31

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

Here,

I. The prophet shows them what mischief their sins had done them: They *have turned away these things* (v. 25), the *former and the latter rain*, which they used to have *in due season* (v. 24), but which had of late been withheld (~~2418~~ Jeremiah 3:3), by reason of which the appointed weeks of harvest had sometimes disappointed them. “It is *your sin that has withholden good from you*, when God was ready to bestow it upon you.” Note, It is sin that stops the current of God's favour to us, and deprives us of the blessings we used to receive. It is that which makes the heavens as brass and the earth as iron.

II. He shows them how great their sins were, how heinous and provoking. When they had forsaken the worship of the true God, even moral honesty was lost among them: *Among my people are found wicked men* (v. 26), some of the worst of men, and so much the worse they were for being found among God's people.

1. They were spiteful and malicious. Such are properly *wicked men*, men that delight in doing mischief. They were *found* (that is, caught) in the very act of their wickedness. As hunters or fowlers lay snares for their game, so did they *lie in wait to catch men*, and made a sport of it, and took as much pleasure in it as if they had been entrapping beasts or birds. They contrives ways of doing mischief to good people (whom they hated for their goodness), especially to those that faithfully reproved them (~~2301~~ Isaiah 29:21), or to those that stood in the way of their preferment or whom they supposed to have affronted them or done them a diskindness, or to those whose estates they coveted; so Jezebel ensnared Naboth for his vineyard. Nay, they did mischief for mischief's sake.

2. They were false and treacherous (v. 27): “*As a cage, or coop, is full of birds*, and of food for them to fatten them for the table, so are *their houses full of deceit*, of wealth obtained by fraudulent practices or of arts and methods of defrauding. All the business of their families is done with deceit; whoever deals with them, they will cheat him if they can, which is easily done by those who make no conscience of what they say and do.

Herein *they overpass the deed of the wicked*, v. 28. Those that act by deceit, with a colour of law and justice, do more mischief perhaps than those wicked men (v. 26) that carry all before them by open force and violence; or they are worse than the heathen themselves, yea, the worst of them. And (would you think it?) they prosper in these wicked courses and therefore their hearts are hardened in them. They are greedy of the world, because they find it flows in upon them, and they stick not at any wickedness in pursuit of it, because they find that it is so far from hindering their prosperity that it furthers it: *They have become great* in the world; *they have waxen rich*, and thrive upon it. They have wherewithal to make provision for the flesh to fulfill all the lusts of it, to which they are very indulgent, so that *they have waxen fat* with living at ease and bathing themselves in all the delights of sense. They are sleek and smooth: *The shine*; they look fair and gay; every body admires them. And they *pass by matters of evil* (so some read the following words); they escape the evils which one would expect their sins should bring upon them; *they are not in trouble as other men*, much less as we might expect bad men,” ^{<375>} Psalm 73:5, etc.

3. When they had grown great, and had got power in their hands, they did not do that good with it which they ought to have done: *They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, and the right of the needy*. The fatherless are often needy, always need assistance and advice, and advantage is taken of their helpless condition to do them an injury. Who should succour them then but the great and rich? What have men wealth for but to do good with it? But these would take no cognizance of any such distressed cases: they had not so much sense of justice, or compassion for the injured; or, if they did concern themselves in the cause, it was not to do right, but to protect those that did wrong. And *yet they prosper still; God layeth not folly to them*. Certainly then the things of this world are not the best things, for often-times the worst men have the most of them; yet we are not to think that, because they prosper, God allows of their practices. No; *though sentence against their evil works be not executed speedily*, it will be executed.

4. There was a general corruption of all orders and degrees of men among them (v. 30, 31); *A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land*. The degeneracy of such a people, so privileged and advanced, was a wonderful thing, and to be viewed with amazement. How could they ever break through so many obligations? It was a horrible thing, a thing to be

detested and the consequences of it dreaded. To frighten ourselves from sin, let us call it a horrible thing. What was the matter? In short, this:

(1.) The leaders misled the people: *The prophets prophesy falsely*, counterfeit a commission from heaven when they are factors for hell. Religion is never more dangerously attacked than under colour and pretence of divine revelation. But why did not the priests, who had power in their hands for that purpose, restrain these false prophets? Alas! instead of doing that they made use of them as the tools of their ambition and tyranny: *The priests bear rule by their means*; they supported themselves in their grandeur and wealth, their laziness and luxury, their impositions and oppressions, by the help of the false prophets and their interest in the people. Thus they were in a combination against every thing that was good, and strengthened one another's hands in evil.

(2.) The people were well enough pleased to be so misled: "They are *my people*," says God, "and should have stood up for me, and borne their testimony against the wickedness of their priests and prophets; but they *love to have it so*." If the priests and prophets will let them alone in their sins, they will give them no disturbance in theirs. They love to be ridden with a loose rein, and like those rulers very well that will not restrain their lusts and those teachers that will not reprove them.

III. He shows them how fatal the consequences of this would certainly be. Let them consider,

1. What the reckoning would be for their wickedness (v. 29): *Shall not I visit for these things?* as before, v. 9. Sometimes mercy rejoices against judgment: *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* Here, judgment is reasoning against mercy: *Shall I not visit?* We are sure that Infinite Wisdom knows how to accommodate the matter between them. The manner of expression is very emphatic, and denotes,

(1.) The certainty and necessity of God's judgments: *Shall not my soul be avenged?* Yes, without doubt, vengeance will come, it must come, if the sinner repent not.

(2.) The justice and equity of God's judgments; he appeals to the sinner's own conscience, Do not those deserve to be punished that have been guilty of such abominations? Shall he not be avenged on *such a nation*, such a wicked provoking nation as this?

2. What the direct tendency of their wickedness was: *What will you do in the end thereof?* That is,

(1.) “What a pitch of wickedness will you come to at last! *What will you do? What will you not do that is base and wicked. What will this grow to? You will certainly grow worse and worse, till you have filled up the measure of your iniquity.*”

(2.) “What a pit of destruction will you come to at last! When things are brought to such a pass as this, nothing can be expected from you but a deluge of sin, so nothing can be expected from God but a deluge of wrath; and what will you do when that shall come?” Note, Those that walk in bad ways would do well to consider the tendency of them both to greater sin and utter ruin. An end will come; the end of a wicked life will come, when it will be all called over again, and without doubt will be bitterness in the latter end.