

CHAPTER 11

In this chapter,

I. God by the prophet puts the people in mind of the covenant he had made with their fathers, and how much he had insisted upon it, as the condition of the covenant, that they should be obedient to him (v. 1-7).

II. He charges it upon them that they, in succession to their fathers, and in confederacy among themselves, had obstinately refused to obey him (v. 8-10).

III. He threatens to punish them with utter ruin for their disobedience, especially for their idolatry (v. 11, 13), and tells them that their idols should not save them (v. 12), that their prophets should not pray for them (v. 14); he also justifies his proceedings herein, they having brought all this mischief upon themselves by their own folly and wilfulness (v. 15-17).

IV. Here is an account of a conspiracy formed against Jeremiah by his fellow-citizens, the men of Anathoth; God's discovery of it to him (v. 18, 19), his prayer against them (v. 20), and a prediction of God's judgments upon them for it (v. 21-23).

◀2110▶ JEREMIAH 11:1-10

CHARGES AGAINST JUDAH

The prophet here, as prosecutor in God's name, draws up an indictment against the Jews for wilful disobedience to the commands of their rightful Sovereign. For the more solemn management of this charge,

I. He produces the commission he had to draw up the charge against them. He did not take pleasure in accusing the children of his people, but God commanded him to *speak it to the men of Judah*, v. 1, 2. In the original it is plural: *Speak you this*. For what he said to Jeremiah was the same that he gave in charge to all his servants the prophets. They none of them said any other than what Moses, in the law, had said; to that therefore they must refer themselves, and direct the people: "*Hear the words of this*

covenant; turn to your Bibles, be judged by them.” Jeremiah must now proclaim this in the cities of *Judah and the streets of Jerusalem*, that all may hear, for all are concerned. All the words of reproof and conviction which the prophets spoke were grounded upon the *words of the covenant*, and agreed with that; and therefore “*hear these words*, and understand by them upon what terms you stood with God at first; and then, by comparing yourselves with the covenant, you will soon be aware upon what terms you now stand with him.”

II. He opens the charter upon which their state was founded and by which they held their privileges. They had forgotten the tenour of it, and lived as if they thought that the grant was absolute and that they might do what they pleased and yet have what God had promised, or as if they thought that the keeping up of the ceremonial observances was all that God required of them. He therefore shows them, with all possible plainness, that the thing God insisted upon was *obedience*, which was *better than sacrifice*. He said, *Obey my voice*, v. 4 and again v. 7. “Own God for your Master; give up yourselves to him as his subjects and servants; attend to all the declarations of his mind and will, and make conscience of complying with them. *Do my commandments*, not only in some things, but *according to all which I command you*; make conscience of moral duties especially, and rest not in those that are merely ritual; hear the words of the covenant, and do them.”

1 This was the original contract between God and them, when he first formed them into a people. It was what he *commanded their fathers* when he first *brought them forth out of the land of Egypt*, v. 4 and v. 7. He never intended to take them under his guidance and protection upon any other terms. This was what he required from them in gratitude for the great things he did for them when he brought them *from the iron furnace*. He redeemed them out of the service of the Egyptians, which was perfect slavery, that he might take them into his own service, which is perfect freedom, ⁴¹⁷Luke 1:74, 75.

2. This was not only laid before them then, but it was with the greatest importunity imaginable pressed upon them, v. 7. God not only commanded it, but *earnestly protested it to their fathers*, when he brought them into covenant with himself. Moses inculcated it again and again, by precept upon precept and line upon line.

3. This was made the condition of the relation between and God, which was so much their honour and privilege: “*So shall you be my people and I will be your God; I will own you for mine, and you may call upon me as yours;*” this intimates that, if they refused to obey, they could no longer claim the benefit of the relation.

4. It was upon these terms that the land of Canaan was given them for a possession: *Obey my voice, that I may perform the oath sworn to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey*, v. 5. God was ready to fulfil the promise, but then they must fulfil the condition; if not, the promise is void, and it is just with God to turn them out of possession. Being brought in upon their good behaviour, they had no wrong done them if they were turned out upon their ill behaviour. Obedience was the rent reserved by the lease, with a power to re-enter for non-payment.

5. This obedience was not only made a condition of the blessing, but was required under the penalty of a curse. This is mentioned first here (v. 3), that they might, if possible, be awakened by the terrors of the Lord: *Cursed be the man*, though it were but a single person, *that obeys not the words of this covenant*, much more when it is the body of the nation that rebels. There are curses of the covenant as well as blessings: and Moses set before them not only *life and good*, but *death and evil* (^{CRIS}Deuteronomy 30:15), so that they had fair warning given them of the fatal consequences of disobedience.

6. Lest this covenant should be forgotten, and, because out of mind, should be thought out of date, God had from time to time called to them to remember it, and by his servants the prophets had made a continual claim of this rent, so that they could not plead, in excuse of their non-payment, that it had never been demanded; *from the day when he brought them out of Egypt to this day* (and that was nearly 1000 years) he had been, in one way or other, *at sundry times and in divers manners*, protesting to them the necessity of obedience. God keeps an account how long we have enjoyed the means of grace and how powerful those means have been, how often we have been not only spoken to, but protested to, concerning our duty.

7. This covenant was consented to (v. 5): *Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord!* These are the words of the prophet, expressing either,

(1.) His own consent to the covenant for himself, and his desire to have the benefit of it. God promised Canaan to the obedient: “Lord,” says he, “I take thee at thy word, I will be obedient; let me have my inheritance in the land of promise, of which Canaan is a type.” Or,

(2.) His good will, and good wish, that his people might have the benefit of it. “Amen; Lord, let them still be kept in possession of this good land, and not turned out of it; make good the promise to them.” Or,

(3.) His people's consent to the covenant: “*Then answered I, in the name of the people, So be it.*” Taking it in this sense, it refers to the declared consent which the people gave to the covenant, not only to the precepts of it when they said, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*, but to the penalties when they said *Amen* to all the curses upon Mount Ebal. The more solemnly we have engaged ourselves to God the more reason we have to hope that the engagement will be perpetual; and yet here it did not prove so.

III. He charges them with breach of covenant, such a breach as amounted to a forfeiture of their charter, v. 8. God had said again and again, by his law and by his prophets, “*Obey my voice, do as you are bidden, and all shall be well;*” yet they obeyed not; and, because they were resolved not to submit their souls to God's commandments, they would not so much as incline their ears to them, but got as far as they could out of call: *They walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart*, followed their own inventions; every man did as his fancy and humour led him, right or wrong, lawful or unlawful, both in their devotions and in their conversations; see ²⁴⁷²Jeremiah 7:24. What then could they expect, but to fall under the curse of the covenant, since they would not comply with the commands and conditions of it? *Therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant*, that is, all the threatenings contained in it, because *they did not what they were commanded*. Note, The words of the covenant shall not fall to the ground. If we do not by our obedience qualify ourselves for the blessings of it, we shall by our disobedience bring ourselves under the curses of it. That which aggravated their defection from God, and rebellion against him, was that it was general, and as it were *by consent*, v. 9, 10. Jeremiah himself saw that many lived in open disobedience to God, but the Lord told him that the matter was worse than he thought of: *A conspiracy is found among them*, by him whose eye is upon the hidden works of darkness. There is a combination against God

and religion, a dangerous design formed to overthrow God's government and bring in the pretenders, the counterfeit deities. This intimates that they were wilful and deliberate in wickedness (they rebelled against God, not through incogitancy, but presumptuously, and with a high hand), — that they were subtle and ingenious in wickedness, and carried on their plot against religion with a great deal of art and contrivance, — that they were linked together in the design, and, as is usual among conspirators, engaged to stand by one another in it and to live and die together; they were resolved to go through with it. A cursed conspiracy! O that there were not the like in our day! Observe,

1. What the conspiracy was. They designed to overthrow divine revelation, and set that aside, and persuade people not to hear, not to heed, the words of God. They did all they could to derogate from the authority of the scriptures and to lessen the value of them; they designed to draw people *after other gods to serve them*, to consult them as their oracles and make court to them as their benefactors. Human reason shall be their god, a light within their god, an infallible judge their god, saints and angels their gods, the god of this or the other nation shall be theirs; thus, under several disguises, they are in the same confederacy *against the Lord and against his anointed*.

2. Who were in conspiracy. One would have expected find some foreigners ring-leaders in it; but no,

(1.) *The inhabitants of Jerusalem* are in conspiracy with *the men of Judah*; city and country agree in this, however they may differ in other things.

(2.) Those of this generation seem to be in conspiracy with those of the foregoing generation, to carry on the war from age to age against religion: *They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers*, and have risen up in their stead, *a seed of evil-doers*, and *increase of sinful men*,

4634 Numbers 32:14. In Josiah's time there had been a reformation, but after this death the people returned to the idolatries which then they had renounced.

(3.) Judah and Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes and that of the two, that were often at daggers-drawing one with another, were yet *in a conspiracy to break the covenant God had made with their fathers*, even with the heads of all the twelve tribes. The house of Israel began the revolt, but the house of Judah soon came into the conspiracy. Now what else could be

expected but that god should take severe methods, both for the chastising of the conspirators and the crushing of this conspiracy; for none ever hardened his heart thus against God and prospered? He that rolls this stone will find it return upon him.

◀III▶ JEREMIAH 11:11-17

DEPLORABLE CONDITION OF JUDAH

This paragraph, which contains so much of God's wrath, might very well be expected to follow upon that which goes next before, which contained so much of his people's sin. When God found so much evil among them we cannot think it strange if it follows, *Therefore I will bring evil upon them* (v. 11), the evil of punishment for the evil of sin; and there is no remedy, no relief: the decree has gone forth and the sentence will be executed.

I. They cannot help themselves, but will be found too weak to contest with God's judgments: it is *evil which they shall not be able to escape*, or to *go forth out of*, by any evasion whatsoever. Note, Those that will not submit to God's government shall not be able to escape his wrath. There is no fleeing from his justice, no avoiding his cognizance. Evil pursues sinners and entangles them in snares out of which they cannot extricate themselves.

II. Their God will not help them; his providence shall no way favour them: *Though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken to them*. In their affliction they will seek the God whom before they slighted, and cry to him whom before they would not vouchsafe to speak to. But how can they expect to speed? For he has plainly told us that he that *turns away his ears from hearing the law*, as they did, for they *inclined not their ear* (v. 8), even his prayer shall be an abomination to him, as the word of the Lord was now to them a reproach.

III. Their idols shall not help them, v. 12. They shall *go, and cry to the gods to whom they now offer incense*, and put them in mind of the costly services wherewith they had honoured them, expecting they should now have relief from them, but in vain. They shall be sent to the *gods whom they served* (◀014▶ Judges 10:14; ▶52▶ Deuteronomy 32:37, 38), and what the

better? *They shall not save them at all*, shall do nothing towards their salvation, nor give them any prospect of it; they shall not afford them the least comfort, nor relief, nor mitigation of their trouble. It is God only that is a friend at need, *a present powerful help in time of trouble*. The idols cannot help themselves; how then should they help their worshippers? Those that make idols of the world and the flesh will in vain have recourse to them in a day of distress. If the idols could have done any real kindness to their worshippers, they would have done it for this people, who had renounced the true God to embrace them, had multiplied them *according to the number of their cities* (v. 13), nay, in Jerusalem, *according to the number of their streets*. Suspecting both their sufficiency and their readiness to help them, they must have many, lest a few would not serve; they must have them dispersed in every corner, lest they should be out of the way when they had occasion for them. In *Jerusalem*, the city which God had chosen to put his name there, publicly in the streets of Jerusalem, in every street, they had *altars to that shameful thing*, that *shame*, even to Baal, which they ought to have been ashamed of, with which they did reproach the Lord and bring confusion upon themselves. But now in their distress their many gods, and many altars, should stand them in stead. Note, Those that will not be ashamed of their commission of sin as a wicked thing will be ashamed of their expectations from sin as a fruitless thing.

IV. Jeremiah's prayers shall not help them, v. 14. What God had said to him before (²⁴⁷⁶Jeremiah 7:16) he here says again, *Pray not thou for this people*. This is not designed for a command to the prophet, so much as for a threatening to the people, that they should have no benefit by the prayers of their friends for them. God would give no encouragement to the prophets to pray for them, would not stir up the spirit of prayer, but cast a damp upon it, would put it into their hearts to pray, not for the body of the people, but for the remnant among them, to pray for their eternal salvation, not for their deliverance from the temporal judgments that were coming upon them; and what other prayers were put up for them should not be heard. Those are in a sad case indeed that are cut off from the benefit of prayer. *"I will not hear them when they cry, and therefore to not thou pray for them."* Note, Those that have so far thrown themselves out of God's favour that he will not hear their prayers cannot expect benefit by the prayers of others for them.

V. The profession they make of religion shall stand them in no stead, v. 15. They were originally God's *beloved*, his spouse, he was married to them by the covenant of peculiarity; even the unbelieving Jews are said to be *beloved for the fathers' sake*, ⁶¹²⁸Romans 11:28. As such they had a place *in God's house*; they were admitted to worship in the courts of his temple; they partook of God's altar; they ate of the flesh of their peace-offerings here called the *holy flesh*, which God had the honour of and they had the comfort of. This they gloried in, and trusted to. What harm could come to those who were God's beloved, who were under the protection of his house? Even when they *did evil yet they rejoiced* and gloried in this, made a mighty noise of this. And *when their evil was* (so the margin reads it), when trouble came upon them, *they rejoiced in this*, and made this their confidence; but their confidence would deceive them, for God has rejected it, they themselves having forfeited the privileges they so much boasted of. They have *wrought lewdness with many*, have been guilty of spiritual whoredom, have worshipped many idols; and therefore,

1. God's temple will *yield them no protection*; it is fit that the adulteress, especially when she has so often repeated her whoredoms and has grown so impudent in them and irreclaimable, should be *put away*, and turned out of doors: "*What has my beloved to do in my house? She is a scandal to it, and therefore it shall no longer be a shelter to her.*"

2. God's altar will yield them no satisfaction, nor can they expect any comfort from that: "*The holy flesh has passed from thee*, that is, an end will soon be put to thy sacrifices, when the temple shall be laid in ruins; and where then will the holy flesh be, that thou art so proud of?" A holy heart will be a comfort to us when the holy flesh has passed from us; an inward principle of grace will make up the want of the outward means of grace. But woe unto us if the departure of the holy flesh be accompanied with the departure of the Holy Spirit.

VI. God's former favours to them shall stand them in no stead, v. 16, 17. Their remembrance of them shall be no comfort to them under their troubles, and God's remembrance of them shall be no argument for their relief.

1. It is true God had done great things for them; that people had been favourites above any people under the sun; they had been the darlings of heaven. God had *called Israel's name a green olive-tree*, and had made

them so, for he miscalls nothing; he had *planted* them (v. 17), had formed them into a people, with all the advantages they could have to make them a fruitful and flourishing people, so good was their law and so good was their land. One would think no other than that a people so planted, so watered, so cultivated, should be, as the olive-tree is, ever green, in respect both of piety and prosperity, ^{<518>}Psalm 52:8. God called them *fair and of goodly fruit*, both good for food and pleasant to the eye, both amiable and serviceable to God and man, for which the greenness and fatness of the olive both are honoured, ^{<109>}Judges 9:9.

2. It is as true that they have done evil things against God. He had planted them a green olive, a good olive, but they had degenerated into a *wild olive*, ^{<517>}Romans 11:17. Both *the house of Israel*. and the *house of Judah* had *done evil*, had *provoked God to anger in burning incense unto Baal*, setting up other mediators between them and the supreme God besides the promised Messiah; nay, setting up other gods in competition with the true and living God, for they had *gods many*, as well as *lords many*.

3. When they have conducted themselves so ill they can expect no other than that, notwithstanding what good he has done to them and designed for them, he should now bring upon them the evil he has *pronounced against them*. He that planted this green olive-tree, and expected fruit from it, finding it barren and grown wild, *has kindled fire upon it*, to burn it as it stands; for, being without fruit, it is *twice dead, plucked up by the roots* (^{<512>}Jude 1:12), it is *cut down and cast into the fire*, the fittest place for trees that cumber the ground, ^{<430>}Matthew 3:10. The *branches of it*, the *high and lofty boughs* (so the word signifies), are *broken* are *broken down*, both princes and priests cut off. And thus it proves that the evil done against God, to *provoke him to anger*, is really done *against themselves*; they *wrong their own souls*; God is out of their reach, but they ruin themselves. See ^{<479>}Jeremiah 7:19. Note, Every sin against God is a sin against ourselves, and so it will be found sooner or later.

^{<418>}JEREMIAH 11:18-23

CONSPIRACY AGAINST JEREMIAH

The prophet Jeremiah has much in his writings concerning himself, much more than Isaiah had, the times he lived in being very troublesome. Here

we have (as it should seem) the beginning of his sorrows, which arose from the people of his own city, Anathoth, a priest's city, and yet a malignant one. Observe here,

I. Their plot against him, v. 19. They *devised devices against him*, laid their heads together to contrive how they might be in the most plausible and effectual manner the death of him. Malice is ingenious in its devices, as well as industrious in its prosecutions. They said concerning Jeremiah, *Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof* — a proverbial expression, meaning, “Let us utterly destroy him root and branch. Let us destroy both the father and the family” (as, when Naboth was put to death for treason, his sons were put to death with him), or rather “both the prophet and the prophecy; let us kill the one and defeat the other. *Let us cut him off from the land of the living*, as a false prophet, and load him with ignominy and disgrace, *that his name may be no more remembered* with respect. Let us sink his reputation, and so spoil the credit of his predictions.” This was their plot; and

1. It was a cruel one; but so cruel have the persecutors of God's prophets been. They *hunt for* no less than *the precious life*, and very precious the lives are that they hunt for. But,

(2.) It was a baffled one. They thought to put an end to his days, but he survived most of his enemies; they thought to blast his memory, but it lives to this day, and will be blessed while time lasts.

II. The information which God gave him of this conspiracy against him. He knew nothing of it himself, so artfully had they concealed it; he came to Anathoth, meaning no harm to them and therefore fearing no harm from them, *like a lamb or an ox*, that thinks he is driven as usual to the field, *when he is brought to the slaughter*; so little did poor Jeremiah dream of the design his citizens that hated him had upon him. None of his friends could, and none of his enemies would, give him any notice of his danger, that he might shift for his own safety, as Paul's sister's son gave him intelligence of the Jews that were lying in wait for him. There is but a step between Jeremiah and death; but then *the Lord gave him knowledge of it*, by dream or vision, or impression upon his spirit, that he might save himself, as the king of Israel did upon the notice Elisha gave him, ~~100~~2 Kings 6:10. Thus he came to *know it*. God *showed him their doings*; and such were their devices that the discovering of them was the defeating of

them. If God had not let him know his own danger, it would have been improved by unreasonable men against the reputation of his predictions, that he who foretold the ruin of his country could not foresee his own peril and avoid it. See what care God takes of his prophets: He *suffers no man to do them wrong*; all the rage of their enemies cannot prevail to take them off till they have finished their testimony. God knows all the secret designs of his and his people's enemies, and can, when he pleases, make them know. *A bird of the air shall carry the voice.*

III. His appeal to God hereupon, v. 20. His eye is to God as *the Lord of hosts, that judges righteously*. It is a matter of comfort to us, when men deal unjustly with us, that we have a God to go to who does and will plead the cause of injured innocency and appear against the injurious. God's justice, which is a terror to the wicked, is a comfort to the godly. His eye is towards him as the God that *tries the reins and the heart*, that perfectly sees what is in man, what are his thoughts and intents. He knew the integrity that was in Jeremiah's heart, and that he was not the man they represented him to be. He knew the wickedness that was in their hearts, though ever so cunningly concealed and disguised. Now,

1. Jeremiah prays judgment against them: "*Let me see thy vengeance on them*, that is, do justice between me and them in such a way as thou pleasest." Some think there was something of human frailty in this prayer; at least Christ has taught us another lesson, both by precept and by pattern, which is to pray for our persecutors. Others think it comes from a pure zeal for the glory of God and a pious and prophetic indignation against men that were by profession priests, the Lord's ministers, and yet were so desperately wicked as to fly out against one that did them no harm, merely for the service he did to God. This petition was a prediction that he should see God's vengeance on them.

2. He refers his cause entirely to the judgment of God: "*Unto thee have I revealed my cause*; to thee I have committed it, not desiring nor expecting to interest any other in it." Note, It is our comfort, when we are wronged, that we have a God to commit our cause to, and our duty to commit it to him, with a resolution to acquiesce in his definitive sentence, to subscribe, and not prescribe, to him.

IV. Judgment given against his persecutors, *the men of Anathoth*. It was to no purpose for him to appeal to the courts at Jerusalem, he could not

have justice done him there: the priests there would stand by the priests at Anathoth, and rather second them than discountenance them; but God will *therefore* take cognizance of the cause himself, and we are sure that *his judgment is according to truth*. Here is,

1. Their crime recited, on which the sentence is grounded, v. 21. They sought the prophet's life, for they forbid him to prophesy upon pain of death; they were resolved either to silence him or to slay him. The provocation he gave them was his prophesying *in the name of the Lord* without license from those that were the governors of the city which he was a member of, and not prophesying such smooth things as they always bespoke. Their forbidding him to prophesy was in effect seeking his life, for it was seeking to defeat the end and business of his life and to rob him of the comfort of it. It is as bad to God's faithful ministers to have their mouth stopped as to have their breath stopped. But especially when it was resolved that if he did prophesy, as certainly he would notwithstanding their inhibition, he should *die by their hand*; they would be accusers, judges, executioners, and all. It used to be said that *a prophet could not perish but at Jerusalem*, for there the great council sat; but so bitter were the men of Anathoth against Jeremiah that they would undertake to be the death of him themselves. A prophet then shall find not only no honour, but no favour, in his own country.

2. The sentence passed upon them for this crime, v. 22, 23. God says, *I will punish them*; let me alone to deal with them. *I will visit this upon them*; so the word is. God will enquire into it and reckon for it. Two of God's four sore judgments shall serve to ruin their town: — *The sword* shall devour their *young men*, though they were young priests, not men of war (their character shall not be their protection), and *famine* shall destroy the children, *sons and daughters*, that tarry at home, which is a more grievous death than that by the sword, ²⁰⁰⁹Lamentations 4:9. The destruction shall be final (v. 23): *There shall be no remnant of them left*, none to be the seed of another generation. They sought Jeremiah's life, and therefore they shall die; they would destroy him *root and branch*, that *his name* might be *no more remembered*, and therefore *there shall be no remnant of them*; and herein the Lord is righteous. Thus *evil is brought upon them, even the year of their visitation*, and that is evil enough, a recompence according to their deserts. Then shall Jeremiah *see his desire upon his enemies*. Note, Their condition is sad who have the prayers of good ministers and good people against them.