

CHAPTER 23

In this chapter the prophet, in God's name, is dealing his reproofs and threatenings,

I. Among the careless princes, or pastors of the people (v. 1, 2), yet promising to take care of the flock, which they had been wanting in their duty to (v. 3-8).

II. Among the wicked prophets and priests, whose bad character is here given at large in divers instances, especially their imposing upon the people with their pretended inspirations, at which the prophet is astonished, and for which they must expect to be punished (v. 9-32).

III. Among the profane people, who ridiculed God's prophets and bantered them (v. 33-40). When all have thus corrupted their way they must all expect to be told faithfully of it.

◀▶ JEREMIAH 23:1-8

EVANGELICAL PREDICTIONS

I. Here is a word of terror to the negligent shepherds. The day is at hand when God will reckon with them concerning the trust and charge committed to them: *Woe be to the pastors* (to the rulers, both in church and state) who should be to those they are set over as pastors to lead them, feed them, protect them, and take care of them. They are not owners of the sheep. God here calls them *the sheep of my pasture*, whom I am interested in, and have provided good pasture for. Woe be to those therefore who are commanded to feed God's people, and pretend to do it, but who, instead of that, *scatter the flock*, and *drive them away* by their violence and oppression, and *have not visited them*, nor taken any care for their welfare, nor concerned themselves at all to do them good. In not visiting them, and doing their duty to them, they did in effect scatter them and drive them away. The beasts of prey scattered them, and the shepherds are in the fault, who should have kept them together. *Woe be to them* when God will visit upon them the evil of their doings and deal with them as they deserve.

They would not visit the flock in a way of duty, and therefore God will visit them in a way of vengeance.

II. Here is a word of comfort to the neglected sheep. Though the under-shepherds take no care of them, no pains with them, but betray them, the chief Shepherd will look after them. *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord taketh me up.* Though the interests of God's church in the world are neglected by those who should take care of them, and postponed to their own private secular interests, yet they shall not therefore sink. God will perform his promise, though those he employs do not perform their duty.

1. The dispersed Jews shall at length return to their own land, and be happily settled there under a good government, v. 3, 4. Though there be but a remnant of God's flock left, a little remnant, that has narrowly escaped destruction, he will gather that remnant, will find them out wherever they are and find out ways and means to bring them back out of all countries *whither he had driven them.* It was the justice of God, for the sin of their shepherds, that dispersed them; but the mercy of God shall gather in the sheep, when the shepherds that betrayed them are cut off. *They shall be brought* to their former habitations, as sheep to their folds, and there *they shall be fruitful, and increase* in numbers. And, though their former shepherds took no care of them, it does not therefore follow that they shall have no more. If some have abused a sacred office, that is no good reason why it should be abolished. "They destroyed the sheep, but I will set shepherds over them who shall make it their business to feed them." Formerly they were continually exposed and disturbed with some alarm or other; but now *they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed;* they shall be in no danger from without, in no fright from within. Formerly some or other of them were ever and anon picked up by the beasts of prey; but now *none of them shall be lacking,* none of them missing. Though the times may have been long bad with the church, it does not follow that they will be ever so. Such pastors as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, though they lived not in the pomp that Jehoiakim and Jeconiah did, nor made such a figure, were as great blessings to the people as the others were plagues to them. The church's peace is not bound up in the pomp of her rulers.

2. Messiah the Prince, that great and good Shepherd of the sheep, shall in the latter days be raised up to bless his church, and to be *the glory of his people Israel,* v. 5, 6. The house of David seemed to be quite sunk and

ruined by that threatening against Jeconiah (²⁰²³Jeremiah 22:30), that none of his seed should ever *sit upon the throne of David*. But here is a promise which effectually secures the honour of the covenant made with David notwithstanding; for by it the house will be raised out of its ruins to a greater lustre than ever, and shine brighter far than it did in Solomon himself. We have not so many prophecies of Christ in this book as we had in that of the prophet Isaiah; but here we have one, and a very illustrious one; of him doubtless the prophet here speaks, of him, and of no other man. The first words intimate that it would be long ere this promise should have its accomplishment: *The days come, but they are not yet. I shall see him, but not now*. But all the rest intimate that the accomplishment of it will be glorious.

(1.) Christ is here spoken of as a *branch from David, the man the branch* (³⁰⁸⁸Zechariah 3:8), his appearance mean, his beginnings small, like those of a bud or sprout, and his rise seemingly out of the earth, but growing to be green, to be great, to be loaded with fruits. A branch from David's family, when it seemed to be a *root in a dry ground*, buried, and not likely to revive. Christ is the *root and offspring of David*, ⁶²⁶Revelation 22:16. In him doth the *horn of David bud*, ⁴¹²⁷Psalms 132:17, 18. He is a branch of God's raising up; he sanctified him, and sent him into the world, gave him his commission and qualifications. He is a *righteous branch*, for he is righteous himself, and through him many, even all that are his, are made righteous. As an advocate, he is *Jesus Christ the righteous*.

(2.) He is here spoken of as his church's King. This branch shall be raised as high as the throne of his father David, and there *he shall reign and prosper*, not as the kings that now were of the house of David, who went backward in all their affairs. No; he shall set up a kingdom in the world that shall be victorious over all opposition. In the chariot of the everlasting gospel he shall go forth, he shall go on *conquering and to conquer*. If God raise him up, he will prosper him, for he will own the work of his own hands; what is *the good pleasure of the Lord* shall *prosper in the hands* of those to whom it is committed. He shall prosper; for *he shall execute judgment and justice in the earth*, all the world over, ¹⁹¹³Psalms 96:13. The present kings of the house of David were unjust and oppressive, and therefore it is no wonder that they did not prosper. But Christ shall, by his gospel, break the usurped power of Satan, institute a perfect rule of holy living, and, as far as it prevails, make all the world righteous. The effect of this shall be a holy security and serenity of mind in all his faithful loyal

subjects. *In his days*, under his dominion, *Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely*; that is, all the spiritual seed of believing Abraham and praying Jacob shall be protected from the curse of heaven and the malice of hell, shall be privileged from the arrests of God's law and delivered from the attempts of Satan's power, shall be saved from sin, the guilt and dominion of it, and then shall *dwell safely*, and be quiet from the fear of all evil. See ~~4174~~ Luke 1:74, 75. Those that shall be saved hereafter from the wrath to come may dwell safely now; for, *if God be for us, who can be against us?* In the days of Christ's government in the soul, when he is uppermost there, the soul *dwells at ease*.

(3.) He is here spoken of as *The Lord our righteousness*. Observe,

[1.] Who and what he is. As God, he is *Jehovah*, the incommunicable name of God, denoting his eternity and self-existence. As Mediator, he is *our righteousness*. By making satisfaction to the justice of God for the sin of man, he has brought in an everlasting righteousness, and so made it over to us in the covenant of grace that, upon our believing consent to that covenant, it becomes ours. His being *Jehovah our righteousness* implies that he is so our righteousness as no creature could be. He is a sovereign, all-sufficient, eternal righteousness. All our righteousness has its being from him, and by him it subsists, and we are made *the righteousness of God in him*.

[2.] The profession and declaration of this: *This is the name whereby he shall be called*, not only he shall be so, but he shall be known to be so. God shall call him by this name, for he shall appoint him to be *our righteousness*. By this name Israel shall call him, every true believer shall call him, and call upon him. That is our righteousness by which, as an allowed plea, we are justified before God, acquitted from guilt, and accepted into favour; and nothing else have we to plead but this, "Christ has died, yea, rather has risen again;" and we have taken him for our Lord.

3. This great salvation, which will come to the Jews in the latter days of their state, after their return out of Babylon, shall be so illustrious as far to outshine the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (v. 7, 8): *They shall no more say, The Lord liveth that brought up Israel out of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth that brought them up out of the north*. This we had before, ~~2114~~ Jeremiah 16:14, 15. But here it seems to point more plainly than it did there to the days of the Messiah, and to compare not so much the two deliverances themselves (giving the preference to the latter) as the two

states to which the church by degrees grew after those deliverances. Observe the proportion: Just 480 years after they had come out of Egypt Solomon's temple was built (^{<100>}1 Kings 6:1); and at that time that nation, which was so wonderfully brought up out of Egypt, had gradually arrived to its height, to its zenith. Just 490 years (70 weeks) after they came out of Babylon Messiah the Prince set up the gospel temple, which was the greatest glory of that nation that was so wonderfully brought out of Babylon; see ^{<202>}Daniel 9:24, 25. Now the spiritual glory of the second part of that nation, especially as transferred to the gospel church, is much more admirable and illustrious than all the temporal glory of the first part of it in the days of Solomon; for that was no glory compared with the glory which excelleth.

^{<202>}JEREMIAH 23:9-32

GUILT OF THE FALSE PROPHETS

Here is a long lesson for the false prophets. As none were more bitter and spiteful against God's true prophets than they, so there were none on whom the true prophets were more severe, and justly. The prophet had complained to God of those false prophets (^{<2443>}Jeremiah 14:13), and had often foretold that they should be involved in the common ruin; but here they have woes of their own.

I. He expresses the deep concern that he was under upon this account, and what a trouble it was to him to see men who pretended to a divine commission and inspiration ruining themselves, and the people among whom they dwelt, by their falsehood and treachery (v. 9): *My heart within me is broken; I am like a drunken man*. His head was in confusion with wonder and astonishment; his heart was under oppression with grief and vexation. Jeremiah was a man that laid things much to heart, and what was any way threatening to his country made a deep impression upon his spirits. He is here in trouble,

1. *Because of the prophets* and their sin, the false doctrine they preached, the wicked lives they lived; especially it filled him with horror to hear them making use of God's name and pretending to have their instruction from him. Never was the Lord so abused, and *the words of his holiness*, as by these men. Note, The dishonour done to God's name, and the

profanation of his holy word, are the greatest grief imaginable to a gracious soul.

2. “*Because of the Lord*, and his judgments, which by this means are brought in upon us like a deluge.” He trembled to think of the ruin and desolation which were coming *from the face of the Lord* (so the word is) *and from the face of the word of his holiness*, which will be inflicted by the power of God's wrath, according to the threatenings of his word, confirmed by *his holiness*. Note, Even those that have God for them cannot but tremble to think of the misery of those that have God against them.

II. He laments the abounding abominable wickedness of the land and the present tokens of God's displeasure they were under for it (v. 10): *The land is full of adulterers*; it is full both of spiritual and corporal whoredom. They go a whoring from God, and, having cast off the fear of him, no marvel that they abandon themselves to all manner of lewdness; and, having dishonoured themselves and their own bodies, they dishonour God and his name by rash and false swearing, *because of which the land mourns*. Both perjury and common swearing are sins for which a land must mourn in true repentance or it will be made to mourn under the judgments of God. Their land mourned now under the judgment of famine; the *pleasant places*, or rather *the pastures*, or (as some read it) *the habitations of the wilderness*, are dried up for want of rain, and yet we see no signs of repentance. They answer not the end of the correction. The tenour and tendency of men's conversations are sinful, *their course continues evil*, as bad as ever, and they will not be diverted from it. They have a great deal of resolution, but it is turned the wrong way; they are *zealously affected*, but not *in a good thing*: *Their force is not right*; their *heart is fully set in them to do evil*, and they are not valiant for the truth, have not courage enough to break off their evil courses, though they see God thus contending with them.

III. He charges it all upon the prophets and priests, especially the prophets. They are *both profane* (v. 11); the priests profane the ordinances of God they pretend to administer; the prophets profane the word of God they pretend to deliver; their converse and all their conversation are profane, and then it is not strange that the people are so debauched. They both *play the hypocrite* (so some read it); under sacred pretensions they carry on the vilest designs; yea, not only in their own houses, and the bad

houses they frequent, but *in my house have I found their wickedness*; in the temple, where the priests ministered, where the prophets prophesied, there were they guilty both of idolatry and immorality. See a woeful instance in Hophni and Phinehas, ¹⁰²²1 Samuel 2:22. God searches his house, and what wickedness is there he will find it out; and the nearer it is to him the more offensive it is. Two things are charged upon them: —

1. That they taught people to sin by their examples. He compares them with the prophets of Samaria, the head city of the kingdom of the ten tribes, which had been long since laid waste. It was the folly of the prophets of Samaria that *they prophesied in Baal*, in Baal's name; so Ahab's prophets did, and so *they caused my people Israel to err*, to forsake the service of the true God and to worship Baal, v. 13. Now the prophets of Jerusalem did not do so; they prophesied in the name of the true God, and valued themselves upon that, that they were not like the prophets of Samaria, who prophesied in Baal; but what the better, when they debauched the nation as much by their immoralities as the other had done by their idolatries? It is a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem that they make use of the name of the holy God, and yet wallow in all manner of impurity; they make nothing of committing adultery. They make use of the name of the God of truth, and yet *walk in lies*; they not only prophesy lies, but in their common conversation one cannot believe a word they say. It is all either jest and banter or fraud and design. Thus they encourage sinners to go on in their wicked ways; for every one will say, “Surely we may do as the prophets do; who can expect that we should be better than our teachers?” By this means it is that none returns from his wickedness; but they all say that they shall have *peace*, though they go on, for their prophets tell them so. By this means Judah and Jerusalem have become *as Sodom and Gomorrah*, that were wicked, *and sinners before the Lord exceedingly*; and God looked upon them accordingly as fit for nothing but to be destroyed, as they were, with fire and brimstone.

2. That they encouraged people in sin by their false prophecies. They made themselves believe that there was no harm, no danger in sin, and practiced accordingly; and then no marvel that they made others believe so too (v. 16): *They speak a vision of their own heart*; it is the product of their own invention, and agrees with their own inclination, but it is *not out of the mouth of the Lord*; he never dictated it to them, nor did it agree either with the law of Moses or with what God has spoken by other prophets. They tell sinners that it shall be well with them though they persist in their sins,

v. 17. See here who those are that they encourage — those that *despise God*, that slight his authority, and have low and mean thoughts of his institutions, and those that *walk after the imagination of their own heart*, that are worshippers of idols and slaves to their own lusts; those that are devoted to their pleasures put contempt upon their God. Yet see how these prophets caressed and flattered them: they should have been still saying, There is no peace to those that go on in their evil ways — *Those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed* — Woe, and a thousand woes, to them; but they still said, *You shall have peace; no evil shall come upon you*. And, which was worst of all, they told them, *God has said so*, so making him to patronize sin, and to contradict himself. Note, Those that are resolved to go on in their evil ways will justly be given up to believe the strong delusions of those who tell them that they shall have peace though they go on.

IV. God disowns all that these false prophets said to sooth people up in their sins (v. 21): *I have not sent these prophets*; they never had any mission from God. They were not only not sent by him on this errand, but they were never sent by him on any errand; he never had employed them in any service or business for him; and, as to this matter, whereas they pretended to have instructions from him to assure this people of peace, he declares that he never gave them any such instructions. Yet they were very forward — *they ran*; they were very bold — *they prophesied* without any of that difficulty with which the true prophets sometimes struggled. They said to sinners, *You shall have peace*. But (v. 18): “*Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord? Who of you has, that are so confident of this? You deliver this message with a great deal of assurance; but have you consulted God about it? No; you never considered whether it be agreeable to the discoveries God has made of himself, whether it will consist with the honour of his holiness and justice, to let sinners go unpunished. You have not perceived and heard his word, nor marked that; you have not compared this with the scripture; if you had taken notice of that, and of the constant tenour of it, you would never have delivered such a message.*” The prophets themselves must try the spirits by the touchstone of the law and of the testimony, as well as those to whom they prophesy; but which of those did so that prophesied of peace? That they did not *stand in God's counsel* nor *hear his word* is proved afterwards, v. 22. *If they had stood in my counsel*, as they pretend, 1. They would have made the scriptures their standard: *They would have caused my people to hear my words*, and would

have conscientiously kept closely to them. But, not speaking according to that rule, it is a plain evidence that there is no light in them.

2. They would have made the conversion of souls their business, and would have aimed at that in all their preaching. They would have done all they could to *turn people from their evil way* in general and from all the particular *evil of their doings*. They would have encouraged and assisted the reformation of manners, would have made this their scope in all their preaching, to part between men and their sins; but it appeared that this was a thing they never aimed at, but, on the contrary, to encourage sinners in their sins.

3. They would have had some seals of their ministry. This sense our translation gives it: *If they had stood in my counsel*, and the words they had preached had been *my words*, then they should *have turned them from their evil way*; a divine power should have gone along with the word for the conviction of sinners. God will bless his own institutions. Yet this is no certain rule; Jeremiah himself, though God sent him, prevailed with but few to *turn from their evil way*.

V. God threatens to punish these prophets for their wickedness. They promised the people *peace*; and to show them the folly of that God tells them that they should have no peace themselves. They were very unfit to warrant the people, and pass their word to them that no evil shall come upon them, when all evil is coming upon themselves and they are not aware of it, v. 12. Because the prophets and priests are profane, *therefore their ways shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness*. Those that undertake to lead others, because they mislead them, and know they do so, shall themselves have no comfort in their way.

1. They pretend to show others the way, but they shall themselves be in the dark, or in a mist; their light or sight shall fail, so that they shall not be able to look before them, shall have no forecast for themselves.

2. They pretend to give assurances to others, but they themselves shall find no firm footing: *Their ways shall be to them as slippery ways*, in which they shall not go with any steadiness, safety, or satisfaction.

3. They pretend to make the people easy with their flatteries, but they shall themselves be uneasy: *They shall be driven*, forced forward as captives, or

making their escape as those that are pursued, and *they shall fall in the way* by which they hoped to escape, and so fall into the enemies' hands.

4. They pretend to prevent the evil that threatens others, but God will *bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation*, the time fixed for calling them to an account; such a time is fixed concerning all that do not judge themselves, and it will be an evil time. *The year of visitation* is the year of recompenses. It is further threatened (v. 15), *I will feed them with wormwood*, or poison, with that which is not only nauseous, but noxious, and *make them drink waters of gall*, or (as some read it) *juice of hemlock*; see chapter 9:15. Justly is the cup of trembling put into their hand first, for *from the prophets of Jerusalem*, who should have been patterns of piety and every thing that is praiseworthy, even *from them has profaneness gone forth into all the lands*. Nothing more effectually debauches a nation than the debauchery of ministers.

VI. The people are here warned not to give any credit to these false prophets; for, though they flattered them with hopes of impunity, the judgments of God would certainly break out against them, unless they repented (v. 16): “Take notice of what God says, and *hearken not to the words of these prophets*; for you will find, in the issue, that God's word shall stand, and not theirs. God's word will make you serious, but *they make you vain*, feed you with vain hopes, which will fail you at last. They tell you, *No evil shall come upon you*; but hear what God says (v. 19), *Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury*. They tell you, All shall be calm and serene; but God tells you, There is a storm coming, a *whirlwind of the Lord*, of his sending, and therefore there is no standing before it. It is a whirlwind raised by divine wrath; it has *gone forth in fury*, a wind that is brought forth out of the treasuries of divine vengeance; and therefore it is a *grievous whirlwind*, and shall light heavily, with rain and hail, *upon the head of the wicked*, which they cannot avoid nor find any shelter from.” It shall *fall upon the wicked* prophets themselves who deceived the people, and the wicked people who suffered themselves to be deceived. A *horrible tempest* shall be *the portion of their cup*, ⁴¹¹⁶ Psalm 11:6. This sentence is bound on as irreversible (v. 20): *The anger of the Lord shall not return*, for the decree has gone forth. God will not alter his mind, nor suffer his anger to be turned away, *till he have executed* the sentence and *performed the thoughts of his heart*. God's whirlwind, when it comes *down from heaven*, *returns not thither*, but *accomplishes that for which he sent it*, ²⁵⁵¹ Isaiah 55:11. This they will not consider now; but in

the latter days you shall consider it perfectly, consider it with understanding (so the word is) or *with consideration*. Note, Those that will not fear the threatenings shall feel the execution of them, and will then perfectly understand what they will not now admit the evidence of, what a *fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of* a just and jealous God. Those that will not consider in time will be made to consider when it is too late. *Son, remember.*

VII. Several things are here offered to the consideration of these false prophets for their conviction, that, if possible, they might be brought to recant their error and acknowledge the cheat they had put upon God's people.

1. Let them consider that though they may impose upon men God is too wise to be imposed upon. Men cannot see through their fallacies, but God can and does. Here,

(1.) God asserts his own omnipresence and omniscience in general, v. 23, 24. When they told the people that no evil should befall them though they went on in their evil ways they went upon atheistical principles, that the Lord doth not see their sin, that he cannot judge through the dark cloud, that he will not require it; and therefore they must be taught the first principles of their religion, and confronted with the most incontestable self-evident truths.

[1.] That though God's throne is prepared in the heavens, and this earth seems to be at a distance from him, yet he is a God here in this lower world, which seems to be afar off, as well as in the upper world, which seems to be at hand, v. 23. The eye of God is the same on earth that it is in heaven. Here it *runs to and fro* as well as there (⁴⁴⁶2 Chronicles 16:9); and what is in the minds of men, whose spirits are veiled in flesh, is as clearly seen by him as what is in the mind of angels, those unveiled spirits above that surround his throne. The power of God is the same on earth among its inhabitants that it is in heaven among its armies. With us nearness and distance make a great difference both in our observations and in our operations, but it is not so with God; to him darkness and light, at hand and afar off, are both alike.

[2.] That, how ingenious and industrious soever men are to disguise themselves and their own characters and counsels, they cannot possibly be concealed from God's all-seeing eye (v. 24): "*Can any hide himself in the*

secret places of the earth, *that I shall not see him?* Can any hide his projects and intentions in the secret places of the heart, that I shall not see them?" No arts of concealment can hide men from the eye of God, nor deceive his judgment of them.

[3.] That he is every where present; he does not only rule heaven and earth, and uphold both by his universal providence, but he *fills heaven and earth* by his essential presence, ~~130~~ Psalm 139:7, 8, etc. No place can either include him or exclude him.

(2.) He applies this to these prophets, who had a notable art of disguising themselves (v. 25, 26): *I have heard what the prophets said that prophesy lies in my name.* They thought that he was so wholly taken up with the other world that he had no leisure to take cognizance of what passed in this. But God will make them know that he knows all their impostures, all the shams they have put upon the world, under colour of divine revelation. What they intended to humour the people with they pretended to have had from God in a dream, when there was no such thing. This they could not discover. If a man tell me that he dreamed so and so, I cannot contradict him; he knows I cannot. But God discovered the fraud. Perhaps the false prophets whispered what they had to say in the ears of such as were their confidants, saying, So and so *I have dreamed*; but God overheard them. The heart-searching eye of God traced them in all the methods they took to deceive the people, and he cries out, *How long? Shall I always bear with them? Is it in the hearts of those prophets (so some read it) to be ever prophesying lies and prophesying the deceits of their own hearts? Will they never see what an affront they put upon God, what an abuse they put upon the people, and what judgments they are preparing for themselves?*

2. Let them consider that their palming upon people counterfeit revelations, and fathering their own fancies upon divine inspiration, was the ready way to bring all religion into contempt and make men turn atheists and infidels; and this was the thing they really intended, though they frequently made mention of the name of God, and prefaced all they said with, *Thus saith the Lord.* Yet, says God, *They think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams.* They designed to draw people off from the worship of God, from all regard to God's laws and ordinances and the true prophets, as their fathers *forgot God's name for Baal.* Note, The great thing Satan aims at is to make people forget God, and all that whereby he has made himself known; and he has many subtle methods to

bring them to this. Sometimes he does it by setting up false gods (bring men in love with Baal, and they soon forget the name of God), sometimes by misrepresenting the true God, as if he were altogether such a one as ourselves. Pretenses to new revelation may prove as dangerous to religion as the denying of all revelation; and false prophets in God's name may perhaps do more mischief to the power of godliness than false prophets in Baal's name, as being less guarded against.

3. Let them consider what a vast difference there was between their prophecies and those that were delivered by the true prophets of the Lord (v. 28): *The prophet that has a dream*, which was the way of inspiration that the false prophets most pretended to, if he has a dream, *let him tell it as a dream*; so Mr. Gataker reads it. “Let him lay no more stress upon it than men do upon their dreams, nor expect any more regard to be had to it. Let them not say that it is from God, nor call their foolish dreams divine oracles. But let the true prophet, that *has my word, speak my word faithfully, speak it as a truth*” (so some read it): “let him keep closely to his instructions, and you will soon perceive a vast difference between the dreams that the false prophets tell and the divine dictates which the true prophets deliver. He that pretends to have a message from God, whether by dream or voice, let him declare it, and it will easily appear which is of God and which is not. Those that have spiritual senses exercised will be able to distinguish; for *what is the chaff to the wheat?* The promises of peace which these prophets make to you are no more to be compared to God's promises than chaff to wheat.” Men's fancies are light, and vain, and worthless, as the chaff *which the wind drives away*. But the word of God has substance in it; it is of value, is food for the soul, the bread of life. Wheat was the staple commodity of Canaan, that valley of vision, ^{<688>}Deuteronomy 8:8; ^{<670>}Ezekiel 27:17. There is as much difference between the vain fancies of men and the pure word of God as between the chaff and the wheat. It follows (v. 29), *Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord?* Is their word so? Has it the power and efficacy that the word of God has? No; nothing like it; there is no more comparison than between painted fire and real fire. Theirs is like an *ignis fatuus* — a *deceiving meteor*, leading men into by-paths and dangerous precipices. Note, The word of God is like fire. The law was a fiery law (^{<682>}Deuteronomy 33:2), and of the gospel Christ says, *I have come to send fire on the earth*, ^{<679>}Luke 12:49. Fire has different effects, according as the matter is on which it works; it hardens clay, but softens wax; it consumes the dross, but

purifies the gold. So the word of God is to some *a savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death*. God appeals here to the consciences of those to whom the word was sent: “*Is not my word like fire? Has it not been so to you?*” ³⁰¹⁶Zechariah 1:6. Speak as you have found.” It is compared likewise to a *hammer breaking the rock in pieces*. The unhumbled heart of man is like a rock; if it will not be melted by the word of God as the fire, it will be broken to pieces by it as the hammer. Whatever opposition is given to the word, it will be borne down and broken to pieces.

4. Let them consider that while they went on in this course God was against them. Three times they are told this, v. 30, 31, 32. *Behold, I am against the prophets*. They pretended to be for God, and made use of his name, but were really against him; he looks upon them as they were really, and is against them. How can they be long safe, or at all easy, that have a God of almighty power against them? While these prophets were promising peace to the people God was proclaiming war against them. They stand indicted here,

(1.) For robbery: *They steal my word every one from his neighbour*. Some understand it of that word of God which the good prophets preached; they stole their sermons, their expressions, and mingled them with their own, as hucksters mingle bad wares with some that are good, to make them vendible. Those that were strangers to the spirit of the true prophets mimicked their language, picked up some good sayings of theirs, and delivered them to the people as if they had been their own, but with an ill grace; they were not of a piece with the rest of their discourses. *The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools,* ³¹⁰⁷Proverbs 26:7. Others understand it of the word of God as it was received and entertained by some of the people; they stole it out of their hearts, as the wicked one in the parable is said to steal the good seed of the word, ⁴¹³⁹Matthew 13:19. By their insinuations they diminished the authority, and so weakened the efficacy, of the word of God upon the minds of those that seemed to be under convictions by it.

(2.) They stand indicted for counterfeiting the broad seal. *Therefore God is against them* (v. 31), because they *use their tongues* at their pleasure in their discourses to the people; they say what they themselves think fit, and then father it upon God, pretend they had it from him, and say, He saith it. Some read it, *They smooth their tongues*; they are very complaisant to the people, and say nothing but what is pleasing and plausible; they never

reprove them nor threaten them, but *their words are smoother than butter*. Thus they ingratiate themselves with them, and get money by them; and they have the impudence and impiety to make God the patron of their lies; they say, “He saith so.” What greater indignity can be done to the God of truth than to lay the brats of the father of lies at his door?

(3.) They stand indicted as common cheats (v. 32): *I am against them*, for they *prophesy false dreams*, pretending that to be a divine inspiration which is but an invention of their own. This is a horrid fraud; nor will it excuse them to say, *Caveat emptor — Let the buyer take care of himself*, and *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur — If people will be deceived, let them*. No; it is the people's fault that they err, that they take things upon trust, and do not try the spirits; but it is much more the prophets' fault that they cause God's people *to err by their lies and by their lightness*, by the flatteries of their preaching soothing them up in their sins, and by the looseness and lewdness of their conversation encouraging them to persist in them.

[1.] God disowns their having any commission from him: *I sent them not, nor commanded them*; they are not God's messengers, nor is what they say his message.

[2.] He therefore justly denies his blessing with them: *Therefore they shall not profit this people at all*. All the profit they aim at is to make them easy; but they shall not so much as do that, for God's providences will at the same time be making them uneasy. They *do not profit this people* (so some read it); and more is implied than is expressed; they not only do them no good, but do them a great deal of hurt. Note, Those that corrupt the word of God, while they pretend to preach it, are so far from edifying the church that they do it the greatest mischief imaginable.

JEREMIAH 23:33-40

PROFANENESS OF THE PEOPLE

The profaneness of the people, with that of the priests and prophets, is here reprov'd in a particular instance, which may seem of small moment in comparison of their greater crimes; but profaneness in common discourse, and the debauching of the language of a nation, being a

notorious evidence of the prevalency of wickedness in it, we are not to think it strange that this matter was so largely and warmly insisted upon here. Observe,

I. The sin here charged upon them is bantering God's prophets and dialect they used, and jesting with sacred things. They asked, *What is the burden of the Lord?* v. 33 and v. 34. They say, *The burden of the Lord*, v. 38. This was the word that gave great offence to God, that, whenever they spoke of *the word of the Lord*, they called it, in scorn and derision, *the burden of the Lord*. Now, 1. This was a word that the prophets much used, and used it seriously, to show what a weight the word of God was upon their spirits, of what importance it was, and how pressingly it should come upon those that heard it. The words of the false prophets had nothing ponderous in them, but God's words had; those were as chaff, these as wheat. Now the profane scoffers took this word, and made a jest and a byword of it; they made people merry with it, that so, when the prophets used it, they might not make people serious with it. Note, It has been the artifice of Satan, in all ages, to obstruct the efficacy of sacred things by turning them into matter of sport and ridicule; the mocking of God's messengers was the baffling of his messages.

2. Perhaps this word was caught at and reproached by the scoffers as an improper word, newly-coined by the prophets, and not used in that sense by any classic author. It was only in this and the last age that the *word of the Lord* was called the *burden of the Lord*, and it could not be found in their lexicons to have that signification. But if men take a liberty, as we see they do, to form new phrases which they think more expressive and significant in other parts of learning, why not in divinity? But especially we must observe it as a rule that the Spirit of God is not tied to our rules of speaking.

3. Some think that because when the *word of the Lord* is called a *burden* it signifies some word of reproof and threatening, which would lay a load upon the hearers (yet I know not whether that observation will always hold), therefore in using this word *the burden of the Lord* in a canting way they reflected upon God as always bearing hard upon them, always teasing them, always frightening them, and so making the word of God a perpetual uneasiness to them. They make the word of God a burden to themselves, and then quarrel with the ministers for making it a burden to them. Thus the scoffers of the latter days, while they slight heaven and

salvation, reproach faithful ministers for preaching hell and damnation. Upon the whole we may observe that, how light soever men may make of it, the great God takes notice of, and is much displeas'd with, those who burlesque sacred things, and who, that they may make a jest of scripture truths and laws, put jests upon scripture language. In such wit as this I am sure there is no wisdom, and so it will appear at last. *Be you not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.* Those that were here guilty of this sin were some of the false prophets, who perhaps came to steal the word of God from the true prophets, some of the priests, who perhaps came to seek occasions against them on which to ground an information, and some of the people, who had learned of the profane priests and prophets to play with the things of God. The people would not have affronted the prophet and his God thus if the priests and the prophets, those ringleaders of mischief, had not shown them the way.

II. When they are reprov'd for this profane way of speaking they are directed how to express themselves more decently. We do not find that the prophets are directed to make no more use of this word; we find it used long after this (³⁰⁰Zechariah 9:1; ³⁰⁰Malachi 1:1; ³⁰⁰Nahum 1:1; ³⁰⁰Habakkuk 1:1); and we do not find it once used in this sense by Jeremiah either before or after. It is true indeed that in many cases it is advisable to make no use of such words and things as some have made a bad use of, and it may be prudent to avoid such phrases as, though innocent enough, are in danger of being perverted and made stumbling-blocks. But here God will have the prophet keep to his rule (²¹⁵⁹Jeremiah 15:19), *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them.* Do not thou leave off using this word, but let them leave off abusing it. You *shall not mention the burden of the Lord any more* in this profane careless manner (v. 36), for it is *perverting the words of the living God* and making a bad use of them, which is an impious dangerous thing; for, consider, he is *the Lord of hosts our God.* Note, If we will but look upon God as we ought to do in his greatness and goodness, and be but duly sensible of our relation and obligation to him, it may be hoped that we shall not dare to affront him by making a jest of his words. It is an impudent thing to abuse him that is the *living God, the Lord of hosts, and our God.* How then must they express themselves? He tells them (v. 37): *Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, when thou art enquiring of him, What hath the Lord answered thee? And what hath the Lord spoken?* And they must say thus when they enquire of *their neighbours*, v. 35. Note, We must always speak of the

things of God reverently and seriously, and as becomes the oracles of God. It is a commendable practice to enquire after the mind of God, to enquire of our brethren what they have heard, to enquire of our prophets what they have to say from God; but then, to show that we enquire for a right end, we must do it after a right manner. Ministers may learn here, when they reprove people for what they say and do amiss, to teach them how to say and do better.

III. Because they would not leave off this bad way of speaking, though they were admonished of it, God threatens them here with utter ruin. They would still say, *The burden of the Lord*, though God had sent to them to forbid them, v. 38. What little regard have those to the divine authority that will not be persuaded by it to leave an idle word! But see what will come of it.

1. Those shall be severely reckoned with that thus *pervert the words of God*, that put a wrong construction on them and make a bad use of them; and it shall be made to appear that it is a great provocation to God to mock his messengers: *I will even punish that man and his house*; whether he be prophet or priest, or one of the common people, it shall be visited upon him, v. 34. Perverting God's word, and ridiculing the preachers of it, are sins that bring ruining judgments upon families and entail a curse upon a house. Another threatening we have v. 36. *Every man's word shall be his own burden*; that is, the guilt of this sin shall be so heavy upon him as to sink him into the pit of destruction. God *shall make their own tongue to fall upon them*, ³⁶¹⁸Psalm 64:8. God will give them enough of their jest, so that *the burden of the Lord* they shall have no heart to mention any more; it will be too heavy to make a jest of. They are as *the madman that casts firebrands, arrows, and death*, while they pretend to be *in sport*.

2. The words of God, though thus perverted, shall be accomplished. Do they ask, *What is the burden of the Lord?* Let the prophet ask them, *What burden* do you mean? Is it this: *I will even forsake you?* v. 33. This is the burden that shall be laid and bound upon them (v. 39, 40): "*Behold I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you. I will leave you, and have no thoughts of returning to you.*" Those are miserable indeed that are forsaken and forgotten of God; and men's bantering God's judgments will not baffle them. Jerusalem was the city God had taken to himself as a holy city, and then *given to them and their fathers*; but that shall now be forsaken and forgotten. God had taken them to be a people near to him;

but they shall now be *cast out of his presence*. They had been great and honourable among the nations; but now God will bring upon them an *everlasting reproach* and a *perpetual shame*. Both their sin and their punishment shall be their lasting disgrace. It is here upon record, to their infamy, and will remain so to the world's end. Note, God's word will be magnified and made honourable when those that mock at it shall be vilified and made contemptible. *Those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*