

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we have,

I. The sins with which the people of Israel are charged — covetousness and oppression, fraudulent and violent practices (v. 1, 2), dealing barbarously, even with women and children, and other harmless people (v. 8, 9). Opposition of God's prophets and silencing them (v. 6, 7), and delighting in false prophets (v. 11).

II. The judgments with which they are threatened for those sins, that they should be humbled, and impoverished (v. 3-5), and banished (v. 10).

III. Gracious promises of comfort, reserved for the good people among them, in the Messiah (v. 12, 13). And this is the sum and scope of most of the chapters of this and other prophecies.

⌄ MICAH 2:1-5

THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE

Here is,

I. The injustice of man contriving the evil of sin, v. 1, 2. God was coming forth against this people to destroy them, and here he shows what was the ground of his controversy with them; it is that which is often mentioned as a sin that hastens the ruin of nations and families as much as any, the sin of oppression. Let us see the steps of it.

1. They eagerly desire that which is not their own — that is the *root of bitterness*, the root of all evil, v. 2. They *covet fields and houses*, as Ahab did Naboth's vineyard. “Oh that such a one's field and house were mine! It lies convenient for me, and I would manage it better than he does; it is fitter for me than for him.”

2. They set their wits on work to invent ways of accomplishing their desire (v. 4); they devise iniquity with a great deal of cursed art and policy; they

plot how to do it effectually, and yet so as not to expose themselves, or bring themselves into danger, or under reproach, by it. This is called *working evil!* they are working it in their heads, in their families, and are as intent upon it, and with as much pleasure, as if they were doing it, and are as confident of their success (so wisely do they think they have laid the scheme) as if it were assuredly done. Note, It is bad to do mischief upon a sudden thought, but much worse to devise it, to do it with design and deliberation; when the craft and subtlety of the old serpent appear with his poison and venom, it is wickedness in perfection. They devised it *upon their beds*, when they should have been asleep; care to compass a mischievous design held their eyes waking. *Upon their beds*, where they should have been remembering God, and meditating upon him, where they should have been *communing with their own hearts* and examining them, they were *devising iniquity*. It is of great consequence to improve and employ the hours of our retirement and solitude in a proper manner.

3. They employ their power in executing what they have designed and contrived; they practise the iniquity they have devised, *because it is in the power of their hand*; they find that they can compass it by the help of their wealth, and the authority and interest they have, and that none dare control them, or call them to an account for it; and this, they think, will justify them and bear them out in it. Note, It is the mistake of many to think that as they can do they may do; whereas no power is given for destruction, but all for edification.

4. They are industrious and very expeditious in accomplishing the iniquity they have devised; when they have settled the matter in their thoughts, in their beds, they lose no time, but as soon as the *morning is light* they practice it; they are up early in the prosecution of their designs, and what ill their hand finds to do they do it *with all their might*, which shames our slothfulness and dilatoriness in doing good, and should shame us out of them. In the service of God, and our generation, let it never be said that we left that to be done to-morrow which we could do to-day.

5. They stick at nothing to compass their designs; what they *covet* they *take away*, if they can, and,

(1.) They care not what wrong they do, though it be ever so gross and open; they take away men's fields by violence, not only by fraud, and underhand practices and colour of law, but by force and with a high hand.

(2.) They care not to whom they do wrong nor how far the iniquity extends which they devise: They *oppress a man and his house*; they rob and ruin those that have numerous families to maintain, and are not concerned though they send them and their wives and children a begging. They *oppress a man and his heritage*; they take away from men that which they have an unquestionable title to, having received it from their ancestors, and which they have but in trust, to transmit it to their posterity; but those oppressors care not how many they impoverish, so they may but enrich themselves. Note, If covetousness reigns in the heart, commonly all compassion is banished from it; and if any man *love this world*, as the *love of the Father*, so the love of his neighbour *is not in him*.

II. The justice of God contriving the evil of punishment for this sin (v. 3): *Therefore thus saith the Lord*, the righteous God, that judges between man and man, and is an avenger on those that do wrong, *Behold, against this family do I devise an evil*, that is, against the whole kingdom, the *house of Israel*, and particularly those families in it that were cruel and oppressive. They unjustly devise evil against their brethren, and God will justly devise evil against them. Infinite Wisdom will so contrive the punishment of their sin that it shall be very sure, and such as cannot be avoided, very severe, and such as they cannot bear, very signal and remarkable, and such as shall be universally observed to answer to the sin. The more there appears of a wicked wit in the sin the more there shall appear of a holy wisdom and fitness in the punishment; for the Lord will be *known by the judgments he executes*; he will be owned by them.

1. He finds them very secure, and confident that they shall in some way or other escape the judgment, or, though they fall under it, shall soon throw it off and get clear of it, and therefore he tells them, It is *an evil from which they shall not remove their neck*. They were children of *Belial*, that would not endure the easy yoke of God's righteous commands, but *broke those bonds asunder, and cast away those cords from them*; and therefore God will lay upon them the heavy yoke of his righteous judgments, and they shall not be able to withdraw their necks from that; those that will not be overruled shall be overcome.

2. He finds them very proud and stately, and therefore he tells them that they shall not go haughtily, with *stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go* (²¹⁸⁶Isaiah 3:16); for *this time is evil*, and

the events of it are very humbling and mortifying, and such as will bring down the stoutest spirit.

3. He finds them very merry and jovial, and therefore tells them their note shall be changed, their laughter shall be turned into mourning and their joy into heaviness (v. 4): *In that day, when God comes to punish you for your oppression, shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, with a lamentation of lamentations* (so the word is), a most lamentable lamentation, as a song of songs is a most pleasing song. Their enemies shall insult over them, and make a jest of their griefs, for they shall *take up a parable against them*. Their friends shall mourn over them, and lay to heart their calamities, and this shall be the general cry, “*We are utterly spoiled; we are all undone.*” Note, Those that were most haughty and secure in their prosperity are commonly most dejected and most ready to despair in their adversity.

4. He finds them very rich in houses and lands, which they have gained by oppression, and therefore tells them that they shall be stripped of all.

(1.) They shall, in their despair, give it all up; they shall say, *We are utterly spoiled; he has changed the portion of my people*, so that it is now no longer theirs, but it is in the possession and occupation of their enemies: *How has he removed it from me!* How suddenly, how powerfully! What is unjustly got by us will not long continue with us; the righteous God will remove it. *Turning away from us in wrath, he has divided our fields*, and given them into the hands of strangers. Woe to those from whom God turns away. The margin reads it, “*Instead of restoring, he has divided our fields; instead of putting us again in the possession of our estates, he has confirmed those in the possession of them that have taken them from us.*” Note, It is just with God that those who have dealt fraudulently and violently with others should themselves be dealt fraudulently and violently with.

(2.) God shall ratify what they say in their despair (v. 5); so it shall be: *Thou shalt have none to cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the Lord*, none to divide inheritances, because there shall be no inheritances to divide, no courts to try titles to lands, or determine controversies about them, or cast lots upon them, as in Joshua's time, for all shall be in the enemies' hand. This land, which should be taken from them, they had not only an unquestionable title to, but a very comfortable enjoyment of, for it was *in the congregation of the Lord*, or rather the congregation of the Lord

was in it; it was God's land; it was a holy land, and therefore it was the more grievous to them to be turned out of it. Note, Those are to be considered the sorest calamities which cut us off from the congregation of the Lord, or cut us short in the enjoyment of the privileges of it.

316 MICAH 2:6-11

EXPOSTULATION WITH THE HOUSE OF JACOB

Here are two sins charged upon the people of Israel, and judgments denounced against them for each, such judgments as exactly answer the sin — persecuting God's prophets and oppressing God's poor.

I. Persecuting God's prophets, suppressing and silencing them, is a sin that provokes God as much as anything, for it not only spits in the face of his authority over us, but spurns at the bowels of his mercy to us; for his sending prophets to us is a sure and valuable token of his goodwill. Now observe here,

1. What the obstruction and opposition were which this people gave to God's prophets: They *said to those that prophesy, Prophecy ye not*, as 310 Isaiah 30:10. They *said to the seers, "See not; do not trouble us with accounts of what you have seen, nor bring us any such frightful messages."* They must either not prophesy at all or prophesy only what is pleasing. The word for *prophesying* here signifies *dropping*, for the words of the prophets dropped from heaven as the dew. Note, Those that hate to be reformed hate to be reprov'd, and do all they can to silence faithful ministers. Amos was forbidden to prophesy, 317 Amos 7:10, etc. *Therefore persecutors stop their breath, because they have no other way to stop their mouths; for, if they live, they will preach and torment those that dwell on the earth, as the two witnesses did,* 318 Revelation 11:10. Some read it, *Prophecy not; let these prophesy.* Let not those prophesy that tell us of our faults, and threaten us, but *let those prophesy* that will flatter us in our sins, and cry peace to us. They will not say that they will have no ministers at all, but they will have such as will say just what they would have them and go their way. This they are charged with (v. 11), that when they silenced and frowned upon the true prophets they countenanced and encouraged pretenders, and set them up, and made an interest for them, to confront God's faithful prophets: *If a man walk in the spirit of falsehood,*

pretend to have the Spirit of God, while really it is a spirit of error, a spirit of delusion, and he himself knows that he has no commission, no instruction, from God, yet, if he says, *I will prophesy unto thee of wine and strong drink*, if he will but assure them that they shall have wine and strong drink enough, that they need not fear the judgments of war and famine which the other prophets threatened them with, that they shall always have plenty of the delights of sense and never know the want of them, and if he will but tell them that it is lawful for them to drink as much as they please of their wine and strong drink, and they need not scruple being drunk, that they *shall have peace though they go on and add drunkenness to thirst*, such a prophet as this is a man after their own heart, who will tell them that there is neither sin nor danger in the wicked course of life they lead: *He shall even be the prophet of this people*; such a man they would have to be their prophet, that will not only associate with them in their rioting and revellings, but will pretend to consecrate their sensualities by his prophecies and so harden them in their security and sensuality. Note, It is not strange if people that are vicious and debauched covet to have ministers that are altogether such as themselves, for they are willing to believe God is so too, ^{}Psalm 50:21. But how are sacred things profaned when they are prostituted to such base purposes, when prophecy itself shall be pressed into the services of a lewd and profane crew! But thus that servant who said, *My Lord delays his coming*, by the spirit of falsehood, *smote his fellow servants and ate and drank with the drunken*.

2. How they are here expostulated with upon this matter (v. 7): “*O thou that art named the house of Jacob*, does it become thee to say and do thus? Wilt thou silence those that prophesy, and forbid them to speak in God's name?” Note, It is an honour and privilege to be *named of the house of Jacob*. Thou art *called a Jew*, ^{}Romans 2:17. But, when those who are called by that worthy name degenerate, they commonly prove the worst of men themselves and the worst enemies to God's prophets. The Jews who were *named of the house of Jacob* were the most violent persecutors of the first preachers of the gospel. Upon this the prophet here argues with these oppressors of the word of God, and shows them,

(1.) What an affront they hereby put upon God, the God of the holy prophets: “*Is the Lord's Spirit straitened?* In silencing the Lord's prophets you do what you can to silence his Spirit too; but do you think you can do it? Can you make the Spirit of God your prisoner and your servant? Will

you prescribe to him what he shall say, and forbid him to say what is displeasing to you? If you silence the prophets, yet cannot the Spirit of the Lord find out other ways to reach your consciences? Can your unbelief frustrate the divine counsels?"

(2.) What a scandal it was to their profession as Jews: "You are *named the house of Jacob*, and this is your honour; but *are these his doings*? Are these the doings of your father Jacob? Do you herein tread in his steps? No; if you were indeed his children you would do his works; but now you seek to kill and silence *a man that tells you the truth*, in God's name; *this did not Abraham* (⁴⁸⁸John 8:39, 40); *this did not Jacob*." Or, "*Are these God's doings*? Are these the doings that will please him? Are these the doings of his people? No, you know they are not, however some may be so strangely blinded and bigoted as to kill God's ministers and think that therein they *do him service*," ⁴⁹⁰John 16:2.

(3.) Let them consider how unreasonable and absurd the thing was in itself: *Do not my words do good to those that walk uprightly*? Yes; certainly they do; it is an appeal to the experiences of the *generation of the upright*: "*Call now if there be any of them that will answer you, and to which of the saints will you turn*? Turn to which you will, and you will find they all agree in this, that the word of God *does good to those that walk uprightly*; and will you then oppose that which does good, so much good as good preaching does? Herein you wrong God, who owns the words of the prophets to be his words (they are *my words*) and who by them aims and designs to do good to mankind (⁴⁹⁸Psalms 119:68); and will you hinder the great benefactor from doing good? Will you put the light of the world under a bushel: You might as well say to the sun, Shine not, as *say to the seers, See not*. Herein you wrong the souls of men, and deprive them of the benefit designed them by the word of God." Note, Those are enemies not only to God, but to the world, they are enemies to their country, that silence good ministers, and obstruct the means of knowledge and grace; for it is certainly for the public common good of states and kingdoms that religion should be encouraged. God's words do good to those *that walk uprightly*. It is the character of good people that they *walk uprightly* (⁴⁹⁸Psalms 15:2); and it is their comfort that the words of God are good and do good to them; they find comfort in them. God's words are good words to good people, and speak comfortably to them. But those that opposed the words of God, and silenced the prophets, pleaded, in justification of themselves, that God's words were unprofitable and

unpleasant to them, and did them no good, nor prophesied any good concerning them, but evil, as Ahab complained of Micaiah, in answer to which the prophet here tells them that it was their own fault; they might thank themselves. They might find it of good use to them if they were but disposed to make a good use of it; if they would but walk uprightly, as they should, and so qualify themselves for comfort, the word of God would speak comfortably to them. *Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise for the same.*

3. What they are threatened with for this sin; God also will choose their delusions, and,

(1.) They shall be deprived of the benefit of a faithful ministry. Since they say, *Prophecy not*, God will take them at their word, and *they shall not prophesy to them*; their sin shall be their punishment. If men will silence God's ministers, it is just with God to silence them, as he did Ezekiel, and to say, They shall *no more be reprovers* and monitors to them. Let the physician no longer attend the patient that will not be healed, for he will not be ruled. They shall *not prophesy to them*, and then they will not take shame. As it is the work of magistrates, so it is also of ministers, to put men to shame when they do amiss (~~CRUE~~ Judges 18:7), that, being made ashamed of their folly, they may not return again to it; but, when God gives men up to be impudent and shameless in sin, he says to his prophets, *They are joined to idols; let them alone.*

(2.) They shall be given up to the blind guidance of an unfaithful ministry. We may understand v. 11 as a threatening: *If a man be found walking in the spirit of falsehood*, having such a lying spirit as was in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, that will strengthen their hands in their wicked ways, he shall be the prophet of this people, that is, God will leave them to themselves to hearken to such; since they will be deceived, let them be deceived; since they will not admit the *truth in the love of it*, God will send them *strong delusions to believe a lie*, ~~SD~~ 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11. They shall have prophets that will prophesy to them for *wine and strong drink* (so some read it), that will give you a cast of their office to your mind for a bottle of wine of a flagon of ale, will soothe sinners in their sins if they will but feed them with the gratifications of their lusts; to have such prophets, and to be ridden by them, is as sad a judgment as any people can be under and as bad a preface of ruin approaching as it is to a particular person to be under the influence of a debauched conscience.

II. Oppressing God's poor is another sin they are charged with, as before (v. 1, 2), for it is a sin doubly hateful and provoking to God. Observe,

1. How the sin is described, v. 8, 9. When they contemned God's prophets and opposed them they broke out into all other wickedness; what bonds will hold those that have no reverence for God's word? Those who formerly rose up against the enemies of the nation, in defence of their country and therein behaved themselves bravely, now of late *rose up as enemies of the nation*, and, instead of defending it, destroyed it, and did it more mischief (as usually such vipers in the bowels of a state do) than a foreign enemy could do. They made a prey of men, women, and children,

(1.) Of men, that were travelling on the way, that *pass by securely as men averse from war*, that were far from any bad designs, but went peaceably about their lawful occasions; those they set upon, as if they had been dangerous obnoxious people, and *pulled off the robe with the garment from them*, that is, they stripped them both of the upper and the inner garment, took away *their cloak*, and would have *their coat also*; thus barbarously did they use those that were quiet in the land, who, being harmless, were fearless, and so the more easily make a prey of.

(2.) Of women, whose sex should have been their protection (v. 9): *The women of my people have you cast out from their pleasant houses. They devoured widows' houses* (⁴²³⁴Matthew 23:14), and so turned them out of the possession of them, because they were pleasant houses, and such as they had a mind for. It was inhuman to deal thus barbarously with women; but that which especially aggravated it was that they were the women of *God's people*, whom they knew to be under his protection.

(3.) Of children, whose age entitles them to a tender usage: *From their children have you taken away my glory for ever*. It was the glory of the Israelites' children that they were free, but they enslaved them — that they were born in God's house, and had a right to the privileges of it, but they sold them to strangers, sent them into idolatrous countries, where they were deprived for ever of that glory; at least the oppressors designed their captivity should be perpetual. Note, The righteous God will certainly reckon for injuries done to the widows and fatherless, who, being helpless and friendless, cannot otherwise expect to be righted.

2. What the sentence is that is passed upon them for it (v. 10): “*Arise ye, and depart*; prepare to quit this land, for you shall be forced out of it, as

you have forced the women and children of my people out of their possessions; it is not, it shall not, be your rest, as it was intended that Canaan should be, ^{<391>}Psalm 95:11. You shall have neither contentment nor continuance in it, *because it is polluted* by your wickedness.” Sin is defiling to a land, and sinners cannot expect to rest in a land which they have polluted, but it will spew them out, as this land spewed out the Canaanites of old when they had polluted it with their abominations, ^{<3827>}Leviticus 18:27, 28. “Nay, you shall not only be obliged to depart out of this land, but *it shall destroy you even with a sore destruction*; you shall either be turned out of it or (which is all one) you shall be ruined in it.” We may apply this to our state in this present world; it is polluted; there is a great deal of *corruption in the world, through lust*, and therefore we should *arise, and depart out of it*, keep at a distance from the corruption that is in it, and *keep ourselves unspotted* from it. *It is not our rest*; it was never intended to be so; it was designed for our passage, but not for our portion — our inn, but not our home. Here *we have no continuing city*; let us therefore *arise and depart*; let us sit loose to it and live above it, and think of leaving it and seek a continuing city above.

^{<3102>}MICAH 2:12-13

PROMISES OF MERCY

After threatenings of wrath, the chapter here concludes, as is usual in the prophets, with promises of mercy, which were in part fulfilled when the Jews returned out of Babylon, and had their full accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah. Their grievances shall be all redressed.

1. Whereas they were dispersed, they shall be brought together again, and shall jointly receive the tokens of God's favour to them, and shall have communion with each other and comfort in each other (v. 12): “*I will surely assemble, O Jacob! all of thee, all that belong to thee, all that are named of the house of Jacob* (v. 7) that are now expelled your country, v. 10. I will bring you together again, and not one of you shall be lost, not one of you shall be missing. *I will surely gather the remnant of Israel*, that remnant that is designed and reserved for salvation; they shall be brought to incorporate in one body. *I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah.*” Sheep are inoffensive and sociable creatures; they shall be *as the*

flock in the midst of their fold, where they are safe under the shepherd's eye and care; and *they shall make great noise* (as numerous flocks and herds do, with their bleating and lowing) *by reason of the multitude of men* (for the sheep are *men*, as the prophet explains this comparison, ²³⁸⁸Ezekiel 34:31), not by reason of their strifes and contentions, but by reason of their great numbers. This was accomplished when Christ by his gospel gathered together in one *all the children of God that were scattered abroad*, and united both Jews and Gentiles in one fold, and under one Shepherd, when all the complaint was that the *place was too strait* for them — that was *the noise, by reason of their multitude* (²³⁸⁹Isaiah 49:19, 20), when there were some added to the church from all parts of the world, and all men were drawn to Christ by the attractive power of his cross, which shall be done yet more and more, and perfectly done, when he shall send forth his angels to *gather in his elect from the four winds*.

2. Whereas God had seemed to desert them, and cast them off, now he will own them, and head them, and help them through all the difficulties that are in the way of their return and deliverance (v. 13): *the breaker has come up before them*, to break down all opposition, and clear the road for them; and under his guidance *they have broken up, and have passed through the gate*, the door of escape out of their captivity, and have *gone out by it* with courage and resolution, having Omnipotence for their van-guard. *Their King shall pass before them*, to head them in the way, even Jehovah (he was their king) *on the head of them*, as he was on the head of the armies of Israel when they followed the pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness and when he appeared to Joshua as *captain of the Lord's host*. Christ is the church's King; he is Jehovah; he heads them, passes before them, brings them out of the land of their captivity, brings them into the land of their rest. He is the *breaker*, that broke through them, that rent the veil, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The learned bishop Pearson applies it to the resurrection of Christ, by which he obtained the power and became the pattern of our resurrection. *The breaker has gone up before us* out of the grave, and has carried away its gates, as Samson did Gaza's, bar and all, and by that breach we go out. The learned Dr. Pocock mentions, as the sense which some of the ancient Jews give of it, that the breaker is Elias, and their *King* the *Messiah*, the Son of David; and he thinks we may apply it to Christ and his forerunner *John the Baptist*. John was the breaker; he broke the ice, prepared the way of the Lord by the baptism of repentance; in him the gospel began; from his time

the kingdom of heaven suffered violence; and so the Christian church is introduced, with Messiah the Prince before it, on the head of it, going forth conquering and to conquer.