

CHAPTER 5

The scope of this chapter is to prosecute the exhortation given to Israel in the close of the foregoing chapter to prepare to meet their God; the prophet here tells them,

I. What preparation they must make; they must “seek the Lord,” and not seek any more to idols (v. 4-8); they must seek good, and love it (v. 14, 15).

II. Why they must make this preparation to meet their God,

- 1.** Because of the present deplorable condition they were in (v. 1-3).
- 2.** Because it was by sin that they were brought into such a condition (v. 7, 10-12).
- 3.** Because it would be their happiness to seek God, and he was ready to be found of them (v. 8, 9, 14).
- 4.** Because he would proceed, in his wrath, to their utter ruin, if they did not seek him (v. 5, 6, 13, 16, 17).
- 5.** Because all their confidences would fail them if they did not seek unto God, and make him their friend.
 - (1.)** Their profane contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance, would not secure them (v. 18-20).
 - (2.)** Their external services in religion, and the shows of devotion, would not avail to turn away the wrath of God (v. 21-24).
 - (3.)** Their having been long in possession of church-privileges, and in a course of holy duties, would not be their protection, while all along they had kept up their idolatrous customs (v. 25-27). They have therefore no way left them to save themselves, but by repentance and reformation.

~~301~~ AMOS 5:1-3

INVITATIONS AND WARNINGS

This chapter begins, as those two next foregoing began, with, *Hear this word*. Where God has a mouth to speak we must have an ear to hear; it is our duty, it is our interest, yet so stupid are most men that they need to be

again and again called upon to *hear the word of the Lord*, to give audience, to give attention. *Hear this word*. this convincing awakening word must be heard and heeded, as well as words of comfort and peace; the word that is taken up against us, as well as that which makes for us; for, whether we hear or forbear, the word of God shall take effect, and not a tittle of it shall fall to the ground. It is the *word which I take up* — not the prophet only, but the God that sent him. It is *the word that the Lord has spoken*, ^{<BRE>}Amos 3:1. The word to be heard is *a lamentation*, a lamentable account of the present calamitous state of the kingdom of Israel, and a lamentable prediction of its utter destruction. Their condition is sad: *The virgin of Israel has fallen* (v. 2), has come down from what she was; that state, though not pure and chaste as a virgin, yet was beautiful and gay, and had its charms; she looked high herself, and was courted by many as a virgin; but *she has fallen* into contempt and poverty, and is universally slighted. Nay, and their condition is helpless: *She shall no more rise*, shall never recover her former dignity again. God had lately begun to *cut Israel short* (^{<RE>}2 Kings 10:32), and, because they repented not, it was not long before he *cut Israel down*.

1. Their princes, that should have helped them up, were disabled: *She is forsaken upon her land*. Not only those she was in alliance with abroad failed her, but her friends at home deserted her; she would not have been carried captive into a strange land if she had not first been *forsaken upon her own land* and *thrown to the ground* there, and all her true interests abandoned by those that should have had them at heart. *There is none to raise her up*, none that can do it, not that cares to lend her a hand.

2. Their people, that should have helped them up, were diminished, v. 3. “The city that had a militia, 1000 strong, and, in the beginning of the war, had furnished out 1000 effective men, able-bodied and well-armed, when they come to review their troops after the battle, shall find but 100 left; and, in proportion, the city that sent out 100 shall have but *ten* come back, so great a slaughter shall be made, and so few left to the house of Israel for the public service and safety.” Scarcely one in ten shall escape of the hands that should relieve this abject, this dejected, nation. Note, The lessening of the numbers of God's spiritual Israel, by death or desertion, is just a matter for lamentation; for *by whom shall Jacob arise*, by whom shall the decays of piety be repaired, when he is thus *made small*?

AMOS 5:4-15

GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL

This is a message from God to the house of Israel, in which,

I. They are told of their faults, that they might see what occasion there was for them to repent and reform, and that, when they were called to return, they might not need to ask, *Wherein shall we return?*

1. God tells them, in general (v. 12), "*I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins*; and you shall be made to know them too." In our penitent reflections upon our sins we must consider, as God does in his judicial remarks upon them, and will do in the great day,

(1.) That they are very numerous; they are our *manifold transgressions*, sins of various kinds and often repeated. Oh what a multitude of vain and vile thoughts lodge within us! What a multitude of idle, foolish, wicked words have been spoken by us! In what a multitude of instances have we gratified and indulged our corrupt appetites and passions! And how many our own omissions of duty and in duty! Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends? God knows how many, just how many, our transgressions are; none of them pass him unobserved; we know that they are to us innumerable; *more than the hairs of our head*; and we have reason to see what danger we have brought ourselves into, and what abundance of work we have made for repentance, by our *manifold transgressions*, by the numberless number of our sins of daily incursion.

(2.) That some of them are very heinous; they are *our mighty sins*; sins that are more exceedingly sinful in their own nature and by being committed presumptuously and with a high hand, sins against the light of nature, flagrant crimes, that are mighty to overpower your convictions and to pull down judgments upon you.

2. He specifies some of these mighty sins.

(1.) They corrupted the worship of God, and turned to idols; this is implied v. 5. They had *sought to Bethel*, where one of the golden calves was; they had frequented Gilgal, a place which they chose to set up idols in, because it had been made famous in the days of Joshua by God's wonderful

appearances to and for his people. Beer-sheba likewise, a place that had been famous in the days of the patriarchs, was now another rendezvous of idols; as we find also, ^{<308>}Amos 8:14. And thither *they passed*, though it lay at a distance, in the land of Judah. Now, having thus shamefully gone a whoring from God, no doubt they should have felt themselves concerned to return to him.

(2.) They perverted justice among themselves (v. 7): “*You turn judgment to wormwood*, that is, you make your administrations of justice bitter and nauseous, and highly displeasing both to God and man.” That fruit has become a *weed*, a weed in the garden; as nothing is more venerable, nothing more valuable, than justice duly administered, so nothing is more hurtful, nothing more abominable, than designedly doing wrong under colour and pretence of doing right. *Corruptio optimi est pessima — The best, when corrupted, becomes the worst.* “*You leave off righteousness in the earth*, as if those that do wrong were accountable to the God of heaven only, and not to the princes and *judges of the earth.*” Thus it was as before the flood, when the *earth was filled with violence.*

(3.) They were very oppressive to the poor, and made them poorer; they trod upon the poor (v. 11), trampled upon them, hectorated over them, made them their footstool, and were most imperious and barbarous to those that were most obsequious and submissive; they care not what shame and slavery they put those to who were poor and such as they could get nothing by. The judges aimed at nothing but to enrich themselves; and therefore they *took from the poor burdens of wheat*, took it by extortion, either by way of bribe or by usury. The poor had no other way to save themselves from being trodden upon, and trodden to dirt, by them, than by presenting to them horse-loads of that corn which they and their families should have had to subsist upon, and they forced them to do it. They took from the poor *debts of wheat*, so some read it. It was legally due either for rent or for corn lent, but they exacted it with rigour from those who were disabled by the providence of God to pay it, as ^{<309>}Nehemiah 5:2, 5. In demanding and recovering even a just debt we must take heed lest we act either unjustly or uncharitably. This sin of oppression by us again charged with (v. 12): *They afflict the just*, by turning the edge of the law and of the sword of justice against those that are the innocent and *quiet in the land*; they hated men because they were more righteous than themselves, and he that *departed from evil* thereby *made himself a prey* to them. They take a bribe from the rich to patronize and protect them in oppressing the poor,

so that he who has money in his hand is sure to have the judgment on his side, be his cause ever so bad. Thus they *turn aside the poor in the gate*, in the courts of justice, *from their right*. If the poor sue for their right, who cannot bribe them, or are so honest that they will not, though they have it ever so clear in view and ever so *near*, yet they are turned away from it by their unrighteous sentence and cannot come at it. And *therefore the prudent will keep silence*, v. 13. Men will reckon it their prudence, when they are wronged and injured, to be silent, and make no complaints to the magistrates, for it will be to no purpose; they shall not have justice done them.

(4.) They were malicious persecutors of God's faithful ministers and people, v. 10. Their hearts were so fully set in them to do evil that they could not bear to be reproved,

[1.] By the ministry of the word, by the reading and expounding of the law, and the messages which prophets delivered to them in the name of the Lord. *They hate him that rebukes in the gate*, in the gate of the Lord's house, or in their courts of justice, or in the places of concourse, where Wisdom is lifting up her voice, ~~and~~ Proverbs 1:21. Reprovers in the gate are reprovers by office; these they hated, counting them their *enemies because they told them the truth*, as Ahab hated Micaiah. They not only despised them, but had an enmity to them, and sought to do them mischief. Those that hate reproof love ruin.

[2.] By the conversation of their honest neighbours. Though things were generally very bad, yet there were some among them that *spoke uprightly* that made conscience of what they said, and, as it was their praise, so it was the shame of those that spoke deceitfully, and condemned them, as Noah's faith condemned the unbelief of the old world, and for that reason *they abhorred them*; they were such inveterate enemies to the thing called honesty that they could not endure the sight of an honest man. All that have any sense of the common interest of mankind will love and value such as speak uprightly, for veracity is the bond of human society; to what a pitch of folly and madness then have those arrived who, having banished all notions of justice out of their own hearts, would have them banished out of the world too, and so put mankind into a state of war, for the *abhor him that speaks uprightly!* And for this reason *the prudent shall keep silence in that time*, v. 13. Prophets cannot, dare not, keep silence; the impulse they are under will not allow them to act on prudential

considerations; they must *cry aloud, and not spare*. But as for other wise and good men they shall keep silence, and shall reckon it is their prudence to do so, because it is an evil time. *First*, They shall think it dangerous to complain, and therefore shall keep silence; this was one way in which they afflicted the just, that by false suggestions and strained innuendos they made men *offenders for a word* (²⁰²¹Isaiah 19:21); and therefore the *prudent*, who were *wise as serpents*, because they knew not how what they said might be misinterpreted and misrepresented, were so cautious as to say nothing, lest they should run themselves into a premunire, because it was an evil time. Note, Through the iniquity of the times, as good men are hidden, so good men are silent, and it is their wisdom to be so; *little said soon amended*. But it is their comfort that they may speak freely to God when they know not to whom else they can speak freely. *Secondly*, They shall think it fruitless to reprove. They see what wickedness is committed, and their spirits are stirred up, as Paul's at Athens; but they shall think it prudent not to bear an open testimony against it, because it is to no purpose. They are *joined to their idols; let them alone. Let no man strive or rebuke another*; for it is but *casting pearls before swine*. The cautious men will say to a bold reprover, as Erasmus to Luther, "*Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei, Domine — Away to they cell, and cry, Have mercy on me, O Lord!*" Let grave lessons and counsels be kept for better men and better times. And there is *a time to keep silence* as well as *a time to speak*, ²⁰²²Ecclesiastes 3:7. *Evil times* will not bear plain dealing, that is *evil men* will not; and the men the prophet here speaks of had reason to think themselves evil men indeed, when wise and good them thought it in vain to speak to them and were afraid of having any thing to do with them.

II. They are told of their danger and what judgments they lay exposed to for their sins.

1. The places of their idolatry are in danger of being ruined in the first place, v. 5. *Gilgal*, the head-quarters of idolatry, *shall go into captivity*, not only its inhabitants, but its images, and *Bethel*, with its golden calf *shall come to nought*. The victorious enemy shall make nothing of it, so easily shall it be spoiled, and shall bring it to nothing, so effectually shall it be spoiled. Idols were always vanity, and *things of nought*, and so they shall prove when God appears to abolish them.

2. The body of the kingdom is in danger of being ruined with them, v. 6. There is danger lest, if you seek him not in time, he *break out like a fire in*

the house of Joseph and devour it; for our God is a righteous Judge, is a consuming fire, and the men of Israel, as criminals, are stubble before him; woe to those that make themselves fuel to the fire of God's wrath. It follows, And there shall be none to quench it in Bethel. There their idols were, and their idolatrous priests; thither they brought their sacrifices, and there they offered up their prayers. But God tells them that when the fire of his judgments should kindle upon them all the gods they served at Bethel should not be able to quench it, should not turn away the judgment, nor be any relief to them under it. Thus those that make an idol of the world will find it insufficient to protect them when God comes to reckon with them for their spiritual idolatry.

3. What they have got by oppression and extortion shall be taken from them (v. 11): “*You have built houses of hewn stone, which you thought would be lasting; but you shall not dwell in them, for your enemies shall burn them down, or possess them for themselves, or take you into captivity. You have planted pleasant vineyards, have contrived how to make them every way agreeable, and have promised yourselves many a pleasant walk in them; but you shall be forced to walk off, and shall never drink wine of them.*” The law had tenderly provided that if a man had *built a house, or planted a vineyard*, he should be at his liberty to return from the wars, ⁽⁵¹⁸⁾Deuteronomy 20:5, 6. But now the necessity would be so urgent that it would not be allowed; all must go to the battle, and many of those who had lately been building and planting should fall in battle, and never enjoy what they had been labouring for. What is not honestly got is not likely to be long enjoyed.

III. They are told their duty, and have great encouragement to set about it in good earnest, and good reason. The duties here prescribed to them are godliness and honesty, seriousness in their applications to God and justice in their dealings with men; and each of these is here pressed upon them with proper arguments to enforce the exhortation.

1. They are here exhorted to be sincere and devout in their addresses to God, v. 4. God says to the *house of Israel, Seek you me*, and with good reason, for *should not a people seek unto their God?* ⁽²¹⁸⁾Isaiah 8:19. Whither else should they go but to their protector? Israel was a *prince with God*; let his descendants *seek the Lord*, as he did, and they shall be so too. Now, in order to their doing this, they must abandon their idolatries. God is not sought truly if he be not sought exclusively, for he will endure no

rivals: “*Seek you the Lord, and seek not Bethel* (v. 5), consult not your idol-oracles, nor ask at the mouth of the priests of Bethel; seek not to the golden calf there for protection, nor bring your prayers and sacrifices any longer thither, or to Gilgal, for you *forsake your own mercies* if you observe those *lying vanities*. But *seek the Lord* (v. 6, 8); enquire after him; enquire of him; seek to know his mind as your rule, to secure his favour as your felicity.” To press this exhortation we are told to consider,

(1.) What we shall get by seeking God; it will be *our life*; we shall find him, and shall be happy in him. So he tells them himself (v. 4): *Seek you me, and you shall live*. Those that seek perishing gods shall perish with them (v. 5), but those that seek the living God shall live with him: “You shall be delivered from the killing judgments which you are threatened with; your nation shall live, shall recover from its present languishings; your souls shall live; you shall be sanctified and comforted, and made for ever blessed. *You shall live*.”

(2.) What a God he is whom we are to *seek*, v. 8, 9.

[1.] He is a God of almighty power himself. The idols were impotent things, could do neither good nor evil, and therefore it was folly either to fear or trust them; but the God of Israel does every thing, and can do any thing, and therefore we ought to seek him; he challenges our homage who has all power in his hand, and it is our interest to have him on our side. Divers proofs and instances are here given of God's power, as Creator, in the kingdom of nature, as both founding and governing that kingdom. Compare ^{<3043>}Amos 4:13. *First*, The stars are the work of his hands; those stars which the heathens worshipped (v. 26), the *stars of your god*, those stars are God's creatures and servants. He *makes the seven stars and Orion*, two very remarkable constellations, which Amos, a herdsman, while he kept his cattle by night, had particularly observed the motions of. He made them at the first, he still makes them to be what they are to this earth and either *binds* or *looses* the *sweet influences of Peliades and Orion*, the two constellations here mentioned. See ^{<3033>}Job 38:31; 9:9, to which passages Amos seems here to refer, putting them in mind of those ancient discoveries of the glory of God before he was called the *God of Israel*. *Secondly*, The constant succession of day and night is under his direction, and is kept up by his power and providence. It is he that *turns* the night (which is dark as *the shadow of death*) *into the morning* by the rising of the sun, and by the setting of the sun *makes the day dark with*

night; and the same power can, for humble penitents, easily turn affliction and sorrow into prosperity and joy, but can as easily turn the prosperity of presumptuous sinners into darkness, into utter darkness. *Thirdly*, The rain rises and falls as he appoints. He *calls for the waters of the sea*; out of them vapours are drawn up by the heat of the sun, which gather into clouds, and are *poured out upon the face of the earth*, to water it and make it fruitful. This was the mercy that had been *withholden from them* of late (^{<3047>}Amos 4:7); and therefore to whom should they apply but to him who had power to give it? For all the *vanities of the heathen* could not *give rain*, nor could the *heavens* themselves *give showers* ^{<2442>}Jeremiah 14:22. It is God that has *made these things*; *Jehovah is his name*, the name by which the God of nature, the God of the whole earth, has made himself known to his people Israel and covenanted with them.

[2.] As he is God of almighty power himself, so he *gives strength and power unto his people* that seek him, and *renews strength* to those that had lost it, if they *wait upon him* for it; for (v. 9) he *strengthens the spoiled against the strong* to such a degree that the spoiled come *against the fortress* and make bold and brave attacks upon those that had spoiled them. This is an encouragement to the people to *seek the Lord*, that, if they do so, they shall find him above to retrieve their affairs, when they are brought to the lowest ebb; though they are the spoiled, and their enemies are the strong, if they can but engage God for them, they shall soon recruit so as the next time to be not only the aggressors, but the conquerors; they *come against the fortress*, to make reprisals and become masters of it.

2. They are here exhorted to be honest and just in their dealings with men, v. 14, 15, where observe,

(1.) The duty required: *Seek good, and not evil. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate*; re-establish it there, whence it has been banished, v. 7. Note, Things are not so bad but that they may be amended if the right course be taken; we must not despair but that grievances may be redressed and abuses rectified; justice may yet triumph where injustice tyrannizes. In order to this, good must be loved and sought, evil must be hated and no longer sought. We must love good principles and adhere to them, love to do good and abound in doing it, love good people, and good converse, and good duties; and, whatever good we do, we must do it from a principle of love, do it of choice and with delight. Those who thus *love good* will *seek it*, will contrive to do all

the good they can, enquire for opportunities of doing it, and endeavor to do it to the utmost of their power. They will also *hate evil*, will abhor the thought of doing an unjust thing, and abstain from all appearance of it. In vain do we pretend to seek God in our devotions if we do not seek good in our whole conversations.

(2.) The reasons annexed.

[1.] This is the sure way to be happy ourselves and to have the continual presence of God with us: “*Seek good, and not evil, that you may live*, may escape the punishment of the evil you have sought and loved (*righteousness delivereth from death*), that you may have the favour of God, which is your life, which is better than life itself, that you may have comfort in yourselves and may live to some good purpose. You shall live, for *so the Lord God of hosts shall be with you* and be your life.” Note, Those that keep in the way of duty have the presence of God with them, as the *God of hosts*, a God of almighty power. “He will be with you *as you have spoken*, that is, as you have *gloried*; you shall have that really which, while you went on in unrighteous ways, you only seemed to have and boasted of as if you had.” Those that truly repent and reform enter into the enjoyment of that comfort which before they had only flattered themselves with the imagination of. Or, “As you have prayed when *you sought the Lord*. Live up to your prayers, and you shall have what you pray for.”

[2.] This is the likeliest way to make the nation happy: “If you seek and love that which is good, you may contribute to the saving of the land from ruin.” *It may be, the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*; though there is but a remnant left, yet, if God be gracious to that remnant, it will rise to a great nation again; and if some among them turn from sin, especially if *judgment be established in the gate*, though we cannot be certain, yet there is a great probability that public affairs will take a new and happy turn, and every thing will mend if men mend their lives. Temporary promises are made with an *It may be*; and our prayers must be made accordingly.

THREATENINGS AND REPROOFS

Here is,

I. A very terrible threatening of destruction approaching, v. 16, 17. Since they would not take the right course to obtain the favour of God, God would take an effectual course to make them feel the weight of his displeasure. The threatening is introduced with more than ordinary solemnity, to strike an awe upon them; it is not the word of the prophet only (if so, it might be made light of) but it is the *Lord Jehovah*, who has an infinite eternal being; it is the *God of hosts*, who has a boundless irresistible power, and it is *Adonai — the Lord*, who has an absolute incontestable sovereignty, and a universal dominion; it is he who says it, who can and will make his words good, and he has said,

1. That the land of Israel shall be put in mourning, true mourning, that all places shall be filled with lamentation for the calamities coming upon them. Look into the cities, and *wailing shall be in all streets*, in the great streets, in the by-streets. Look into the country, and *they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! we are all undone!* The lamentation shall be so great as not to be confined within doors, nor kept within the bounds of decency, but it shall be proclaimed in the streets and highways, and shall run wild. The husbandman shall be called from the plough by the calamities of his country to the natural expressions of mourning; and, because those who will come short of the merits of the cause, such as are skilful of lamentation shall be called to artificial mourning, to put accents upon the lamentations of the real mourners with their *Ahona, ahona*. Even in all vineyards, where there used to be nothing but mirth and pleasure, there shall be general wailing, when a foreign force invades the country, lays all waste, and there is no making any head against it, no weapons left but prayers and tears.

2. That the land of Israel shall be brought to ruin, and the advances of that ruin are the occasion of all this wailing: *I will pass through thee*, as the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy the first-born, but then passed over the houses of the Israelites. God's judgments had

often passed by them, but now they shall pass through them, shall run them through.

II. A just and severe reproof to those who made light of these threatenings, and impudently bade defiance to the justice of God and his judgments, v. 18. Woe unto you that *desire the day of the Lord*, that really wish for times of war and confusion, as some do who have restless spirits, and long for changes, or who choose to *fish in troubled waters*, hoping to raise their families, as some had done, upon the ruins of their country; but the prophet tells them that this should be so great a desolation that nobody could get by it. Or it is spoken to those who, in their wailings and lamentations for the calamities they were in, wished they might die, and be delivered out of their misery, as Job did, with passion. The prophet shows them the folly of this. Do they know what death is to those who are unprepared for it, and how much more terrible it will be than any thing that can befall them in this life? Or, rather, it is spoken to those who speak jestingly of that day of the Lord which the prophet spoke so seriously of; they desired it, that is, they challenged it; they said, Let him do his worst; *let him make speed, and hasten his work*, ^{<39>}Isaiah 5:19. *Where is the promise of his coming?* ^{<40>}2 Peter 3:4. It intimates,

1. That they do not believe it. They say that they wish it would come because they do not believe it will ever come; nor will they believe it unless they see it.

2. That they do not fear it; though they may have some belief of it, yet they had so little consideration of it, and their mind is so intent upon other things, that they are under no apprehension at all of peril from it; instead of having the conscience to dread it, they have the curiosity to desire it. In answer to this,

(1.) He shows the folly of those who impudently wished for any of God's judgments, and made a jest of any of the terrors of the Lord: "*To what end is it for you that the day of the Lord should come? You will find it both certain and sad; not a thing to be bantered, for it is neither a thing to be questioned whether it will come or no nor a thing to be turned off with a slight when it does come. The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light*, v. 18. *Shall it not be so?* v. 20. Do not your own consciences tell you that it will be so, that it will be *very dark, and no brightness in it?*" Note, The *day of the Lord* will be a dark, dismal, gloomy day to all impenitent

sinner; the *day of judgment* will be so; and sometimes the day of their present trouble. And, when God makes a day dark, all the world cannot make it light.

(2.) He shows the folly of those who impatiently wished for a change of God's judgment, in hopes that the next would be better and more tolerable. They desire *the day of the Lord*, in hopes to better themselves (though their hearts and lives be not amended), or, at least, to know the worst. But the prophet tells them that they know not what they ask. ask, v. 19. It is *as if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him*, a beast of prey more cruel and ravenous than a lion, or as if a man, to escape all dangers abroad, *went into the house for security, and leaned his hand on the wall to rest himself, and there a serpent bit him*. Note, Those who are not reformed by the judgments of God will be pursued by them; and, if they escape one, another stands ready to seize them; *fear and the pit and snare* surround them, ~~2047~~ Isaiah 24:17, 18. It is madness therefore to *defy the day of the Lord*.

~~3012~~ AMOS 5:21-27

HYPOCRITICAL SERVICES REJECTED

The scope of these verses is to show how little God valued their shows of devotion, nay, how much he detested them, while they went on in their sins. Observe,

I. How displeasing, nay, how displeasing, their hypocritical services were to God. They had their *feast-days* at Bethel, in imitation of those at Jerusalem, in which they pretended to rejoice before God. They had their *solemn assemblies* for religious worship, in which they put on the gravity of those who *come before God as his people come, and sit before him as his people sit*. They offered to God *burnt-offerings*, to the honour of God, together with the *meat-offerings* which by the law were to be offered with them; they offered the *peace-offerings*, to implore the favour of God, and they offered them of the *fat beasts* that they had, v. 21, 22. In imitation likewise of the temple-music, they had the *noise of their songs* and the *melody of their viols* (v. 23), vocal and instrumental music, with which they praised God. With these services they hoped to make God amend for the sins they had committed, and to obtain leave to go on in sin; and

therefore they were so far from being acceptable to God that they were abominable. He *hated*, he *despised*, their *feast-days*, not only despised them as no valuable services done to him, but hated them as an affront and provocation to him, as we hate to see men dissemble with us, pretend a respect for us when really they have none. Nothing more hateful, more despicable, than hypocrisy. *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, it shall be counted a curse*, when it appears that his heart is not with him. God will not *smell* in *their solemn assemblies*, for there is nothing in them that is grateful to him, but a great deal that is offensive. Their sacrifices are not to him *of a sweet smelling savour*, as Noah's was, ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾Genesis 8:21. He will not accept them; he will not regard them, will not take any notice of them; he will not hear the melody of their viols; for, when sin is a jar in the harmony, it grates in his ears: "*Take it away*," says God, "I cannot bear it." Now this intimates,

1. That sacrifice itself is of small account with God in comparison with moral duties; to love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt offering and sacrifice*.

2. That the sacrifice of the wicked is really an abomination to him, ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾Proverbs 15:8. Dissembled piety is double iniquity, and so it will be found when, if any place in hell be hotter than another, that will be the hypocrite's portion.

II. What it was that he required in order to the acceptableness of their sacrifices and without which no sacrifice would be acceptable (v. 24): *Let judgment run down as waters*, among you, *and righteousness as a mighty stream*, that is

1. "Let there be a general reformation of manners among you; let religion (God's *judgment*) and *righteousness* have their due influence upon you; let your land be watered with it, and let it bear down all the opposition of vice and profaneness; let it run wide as overflowing waters, and yet run strong as might stream."

2. "In particular, let justice be duly administered by magistrates and rulers; let not the current of it be stopped by partiality and bribery, but let it come freely as waters do, in the natural course; let it be pure as running waters, not muddied with corruption or whatever may pervert justice; let it run *like a might stream*, and not suffer itself to be obstructed, or its course retarded, by the fear of man; let all have free access to it as a common

stream, and have benefit by it as *trees planted by the rivers of waters.*” The great thing laid to Israel's charge was *turning judgment into wormwood* (v. 7); in that matter therefore they must reform, ^{<3079>}Zechariah 7:9. This was what God desired *more than sacrifices*, ^{<3066>}Hosea 6:6; ^{<3052>}1 Samuel 15:22.

III. What little stress God had laid upon the law of sacrifices, though it was his own law, in comparison with the moral precepts (v. 25): “*Did you offer unto me sacrifices in the wilderness forty years?* No, you did not.” For the greatest part of that time sacrifice was very much neglected, because of the unsettledness of their state; after the second year, the passover was not kept till they came into Canaan, and other institutions were in like manner intermitted; and yet, because God will have mercy and not sacrifice, he never imputed the omission to them as their fault, but continued his care of them and kindness to them: it was not that, but their murmuring and unbelief, for which God was displeased with them. He that so owned his people, though they did not sacrifice, when in other things they kept close to him, will certainly disown them, though they do sacrifice, if in other things they depart from him. But, though ritual sacrifices may thus be dispensed with, spiritual sacrifices will not; even justice and honesty will not excuse for the want of prayer and praise, a broken heart and the love of God. Stephen quotes this passage (^{<4072>}Acts 7:42), to show the Jews that they ought not to think it strange that ceremonial law was repealed when from the beginning it was comparatively made light of. Compare ^{<4072>}Jeremiah 7:22, 23.

II. What little reason they had to expect that their sacrifices should be acceptable to God, when they and their fathers had been all along addicted to the worship of other gods. So some take v. 25, “*Did you offer to me sacrifices*, that is, to me only? No, and therefore not at all to me acceptably;” for the law of worshipping the Lord our God is, *Him only we must serve.* “*But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch* (v. 26), little shrines that you made to carry about with you, pocket-idols for your private superstition, when you durst not be seen to do it publicly. You have had the images of your *Moloch — your king*” (probably representing *the sun*, that sits king among the heavenly bodies), “and *Chiun*, or *Remphan*” (as Stephen calls it, ^{<4072>}Acts 7:43, after the Septuagint), which it is supposed, represented Saturn, the highest of the seven planets. The worship of the sun, moon, and stars, was the most ancient, most general,

and most plausible idolatry. They *made to themselves the star of their God*, some particular star which they took to be their god, or the name of which they gave to their god. This idolatry Israel was from the beginning prone to (³⁰⁰⁹Deuteronomy 4:19); and those that retain an affection for false gods cannot expect the favour of the true God.

V. What punishment God would inflict upon them for their persisting in idolatry (v. 27): *I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus*. They were led captive by Satan into idolatry, and therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters, and hurried them into a strange land, since they were so fond of strange gods. They were carried *beyond Damascus*. Their captivity by the Assyrians was far beyond that by the Syrians; for, if less judgments do not work that for which they were sent, God will send greater. Or the captivity of Israel under Shalmaneser was far beyond that of Damascus under Tiglath-pileser, and much more grievous and destructive, which was foretold (³⁰⁰⁵Amos 1:5). For, as the sins of God's professing people are greater than the sins of others, so it may be expected that their punishments will be proportionable. We find the spoil of Damascus and that of Samaria carried off together by the king of Assyria, (²⁰⁰⁰Isaiah 8:4. Stephen reads it, *I will carry you away beyond Babylon* (⁴⁰⁷⁸Acts 7:43), further than Judah shall be carried, so far further as not to return. And, to make this sentence appear both the more certain and the more dreadful, he that passes it calls himself *the Lord, whose name is, The God of hosts*, and who is therefore able to execute the sentence, having hosts at command.