

CHAPTER 57

The prophet, in this chapter, makes his observations,

- I. Upon the deaths of good men, comforting those that were taken away in their integrity and reproving those that did not make a due improvement of such providences (v. 1, 2).
- II. Upon the gross idolatries and spiritual whoredoms which the Jews were guilty of, and the destroying judgments they were thereby bringing upon themselves (v. 3-12).
- III. Upon the gracious returns of God to his people to put an end to their captivity and re-establish their prosperity (v. 13-21).

ISAIAH 57:1-2

DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The prophet, in the close of the foregoing chapter, had condemned the watchmen for their ignorance and sottishness; here he shows the general stupidity and senselessness of the people likewise. No wonder they were inconsiderate when their watchmen were so, who should have awakened them to consideration. We may observe here,

- I. The providence of God removing good men apace out of this world. *The righteous*, as to this world, *perish*; they are gone and their place knows them no more. Piety exempts none from the arrests of death, nay, in persecuting times, the most righteous are most exposed to the violences of bloody men. The first that died died a martyr. Righteousness delivers from the sting of death, but not from the stroke of it. They are said to *perish* because they are utterly removed from us, and to express the great loss which this world sustains by the removal of them, not that their death is their undoing, but it often proves an undoing to the places where they lived and were useful. Nay, even *merciful men are taken away*, those good men that are distinguished from the righteous, for whom *some would even dare to die*, Romans 5:7. Those are often removed that could be worst spared; the fruitful trees are cut down by death and the barren left still to cumber the ground. Merciful men are often taken away by the hands of

men's malice. Many good works they have done, and for some of them they are stoned. Before the captivity in Babylon perhaps there was a more than ordinary mortality of good men, so that there were scarcely any left, ^{<18>}Jeremiah 5:1. The godly ceased, and the faithful failed, ^{<19>}Psalms 12:1.

II. The careless world slighting these providences, and disregarding them: *No man lays it to heart, none considers it.* There are very few that lament it as a public loss, very few that take notice of it as a public warning. The death of good men is a thing to be laid to heart and considered more than common deaths. Serious enquiries ought to be made, wherefore God contends with us, what good lessons are to be learned by such providences, what we may do to help to make up the breach and to fill up the room of those that are removed. God is justly displeased when such events are not laid to heart, when the voice of the rod is not heard nor the intentions of it answered, much more when it is rejoiced in, as the slaying of the witnesses is, ^{<20>}Revelation 11:10. Some of God's choicest blessings to mankind, being thus easily parted with, are really undervalued; and it is an evidence of very great incogitancy. Little children, when they are little, least lament the death of their parents, because they know not what a loss it is to them.

III. The happiness of the righteous in their removal.

1. They are taken away from the evil to come, then when it is just coming,

(1.) In compassion to them, that they may not see the evil (^{<21>}2 Kings 22:20), nor share in it, nor be in temptation by it. When the deluge is coming they are called into the ark, and have a hiding-place and rest in heaven when there was none for them under heaven.

(2.) In wrath to the world, to punish them for all the injuries they have done to the righteous and merciful ones; those are taken away that stood in the gap to turn away the judgments of God, and then what can be expected but a deluge of them? It is a sign that God intends war when he calls home his ambassadors.

2. They go to be easy out of the reach of that evil. The righteous man, who while he lived walked in his uprightness, when he dies enters into peace and rests in his bed. Note,

(1.) Death is gain, and rest, and bliss, to those only who walked in their uprightness, and who, when they die, can appeal to God concerning it, as Hezekiah (²¹⁰⁸2 Kings 20:3). *Now, Lord, remember it.*

(2.) Those that practised uprightness, and persevered in it to the end, shall find it well with them when they die. Their souls then enter into peace, into the world of peace, where peace is in perfection and where there is no trouble. *Enter thou into the joy of the Lord.* Their bodies rest in their beds. Note, The grave is a bed of rest to all the Lord's people; there they rest from all their labours, ⁶⁴⁴³Revelation 14:13. And the more weary they were the more welcome will that rest be to them, ⁴⁸⁷⁷Job 3:17. This bed is made in the darkness, but that makes it the more quiet; it is a bed out of which they shall rise refreshed in the morning of the resurrection.

²⁵⁰⁸ISAIAH 57:3-12

A CHARGE AGAINST THE PEOPLE

We have here a high charge, but a just one no doubt, drawn up against that wicked generation out of which God's righteous ones were removed, because the world was not worthy of them. Observe,

I. The general character here given of them, or the name and title by which they stand indicted, v. 3. They are told to draw near and hear the charge, are set to the bar, and arraigned there as *sons of the sorceress*, or of a witch, *the seed of an adulterer and a whore*, that is, they were such themselves, they were strongly inclined to be such, and their ancestors were such before them. Sin is sorcery and adultery, for it is departing from God and dealing with the devil. They were *children of disobedience*. "Come," says the prophet, "draw near hither, and I will read you your doom; to the righteous death will bring peace and rest, but not to you; you are *children of transgression* and *a seed of falsehood* (v. 4), that have it by kind, and have it woven into your very nature, to backslide from God and to deal treacherously with him," ²³⁸⁸Isaiah 48:8.

II. The particular crimes laid to their charge.

1. Scoffing at God and his word. They were a generation of scorers (v. 4): "*Against whom do you sport yourselves?* You think it is only against

the poor prophets whom you trample upon as contemptible men, but really it is against God himself, who sends them, and whose message they deliver.” Mocking the messengers of the Lord was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin, for what was done to them God took as done to himself. When they were reproved for their sins, and threatened with the judgments of God, they ridiculed the word of God with the rudest and most indecent gestures and expressions of disdain. They sported themselves, and made themselves merry, with that which should have made them serious, and under which they should have humbled themselves. They made wry mouths at the prophets, and drew out the tongue, contrary to all the laws of good breeding; nor did they treat God's prophets with the common civility with which they would have treated a gentleman's servant that had been sent to them on an errand. Note, Those who mock at God, and bid defiance to his judgments, had best consider who it is towards whom they conduct themselves so insolently.

2. Idolatry. This was that sin which the people of the Jews were most notoriously guilty of before the captivity; but that affliction cured them of it. In Isaiah's time it abounded, witness the abominable idolatries of Ahaz (which some think are particularly referred to here) and of Manasseh.

(1.) They were dotingly fond of their idols, were inflamed with them, as those that burn in unlawful unnatural lusts, ^{<417>}Romans 1:27. They were *mad upon their idols*, ^{<248>}Jeremiah 50:38. They inflamed themselves with them by their violent passions in the worship of them, as those of Baal's prophets that *leaped upon the altar, and cut themselves*, ^{<186>}1 Kings 18:26, 28. Note, Vile corruptions, the more they are gratified the more they are inflamed. They worshipped their idols *under every green tree*, in the open air, and in the shade; yet that did not cool the heat of their impetuous lusts, but rather the charming beauty of the green trees made them the more fond of their idols which they worshipped there. Thus that in nature which is pleasing, instead of drawing them to the God of nature, drew them from him. The flame of their zeal in the worship of false gods may shame us for our coldness and indifference in the worship of the true God. They strove to inflame themselves, but we distract and deaden ourselves.

(2.) They were barbarous and unnaturally cruel in the worship of their idols. They slew their children, and offered them in sacrifice to their idols, not only in the valley of the son of Hinnom, the headquarters of that monstrous idolatry, but in other valleys, in imitation of that, and *under the*

cliffs of the rock, in dark and solitary places, the fittest for such works of darkness.

(3.) They were abundant and insatiable in their idolatries. They never thought they could have idols enough, nor could spend enough upon them and do enough in their service. The Syrians had once a notion of the God of Israel that he was a God of the hills, but not a *God of the valleys* (¹¹¹⁸1 Kings 20:28); but these idolaters, to make sure work, had both.

[1.] They had gods of the valleys, which they worshipped in the low places by the water side (v. 6): *Among the smooth stones of the valley*, or brook, *is thy portion*. If they saw a smooth carved stone, though set up but for a way-mark or a mere-stone, they were ready to worship it, as the papists do crosses. Or in stony valleys they set up their gods, which they called their *portion*, and took for their lot, as God's people take him for their lot and portion. But these gods of stone would really be no better a portion for them, no better a lot, than the smooth stones of the stream near which they were set up, for sometimes they worshipped their rivers. “*They, they, are the lot* which thou trustest to and art pleased with, but thou shalt be put off with it for thy lot, and miserable will thy case be.” See the folly of sinners, who take the smooth stones of the stream for their portion, when they might have the precious stones of God's Jerusalem, and the high priest's ephod, to portion themselves with. Having taken these idols for their lot and portion, they stick at no charge in doing honour to them: “*To them hast thou poured a drink-offering, and offered a meat-offering*, as if they had given thee thy meat and drink.” They loved their idols better than their children, for their own tables must be robbed to replenish the altars of their idols. Have we taken the true God for our portion? Is he, even he, our lot? Let us then serve him with our meat and drink, not, as they did, by depriving ourselves of the use of them, but by eating and drinking to his glory. Here, in a parenthesis, comes in an expression of God's just resentment of this wickedness of theirs: *Should I receive comfort in these* — in such a people as this? Can those expect that God will take any pleasure in them, or accept their devotions at his altar, who thus serve Baal with the gifts of his providence? God takes comfort in his people, while they are faithful to him; but what comfort can he take in them when those that should be his witnesses against the idolatries of the world do themselves fall in with them? *Should I have compassion on these?* (so some), or *should I repent me concerning these?* so others. “How can they expect that I should spare them, and either adjourn or abate their

punishment, when they are so very provoking? *Shall I not visit for these things?*" ^{<240>}Jeremiah 5:7, 9.

[2.] They had gods of the hills too (v. 7): "*Upon a lofty and high mountain* (as if thou wouldst vie with the high and lofty One himself, v. 15) *hast thou set thy bed*, thy idol, thy idol's temple and altar, the bed of thy uncleanness, where thou committest spiritual whoredom, with all the wantonness of an idolatrous fancy, and in direct violation of the covenant of thy God. *Thither wentest thou up* readily enough, though it was up-hill, *to offer sacrifice.*" Some think this bespeaks the impudence they arrived at in their idolatries; at first they had some sense of shame, when they worshipped their idols in the valleys, in obscure places; but they soon conquered that, and came to do it upon the lofty high mountains. They were not ashamed, neither could they blush.

[3.] As if these were not enough, they had household-gods too, their *lares* and *penates*. *Behind the doors and the posts* (v. 8), where the law of God should be written for a memorandum to them of their duty, they set up the remembrance of their idols, not so much to keep up their own remembrance of them (they were so fond of them that they could not forget them), but to show to others how mindful they were of them, and to put their children in mind of them, and possess them betimes with a veneration for these dunghill deities.

[4.] As they were insatiable in their idolatries, so they were inseparable from them. They were hardened in their wickedness; they worshipped their idols openly and in public view, as being neither ashamed of the sin nor afraid of the punishment; they went as publicly, and in as great crowds, to the idol-temples, as ever they had gone to God's house. This was like an impudent harlot, *discovering themselves to another than God*, making profession of another than the true religion. They took a pride in making proselytes to their idolatries, and not only went up themselves to their high places, but *enlarged their bed*, that is, their idol-temples, and (as the margin reads the following words) *thou hewedst it for thyself larger than theirs*, than theirs from whom thou copiedst it, and tookest the platform of it, as Ahaz of his altar from that which he saw at Damascus, ^{<260>}2 Kings 16:10. And being thus involved over head and ears, as it were, in their idolatries, there is no parting them from them. Ephraim is now joined to idols both in love and league. *First*, In league: "*Thou hast made a covenant with them*, with the idols, with the idol-worshippers, to live

and die together.” This was a complete renunciation of their covenant with God and an avowed resolution to persist in their apostasy from him. *Secondly*, In love: “*Thou lovedst their bed*, that is, the temple of an idol, wherever thou sawest it.” Justly therefore were they given up to their own hearts' lusts.

3. Another sin charged upon them is their trusting in and seeking to foreign aids and succours, and contracting a communion with the Gentile powers (v. 9): *Thou wentest to the king*, which some understand of the idol they worshipped, particularly *Moloch*, which signifies *a king*. “Thou didst every thing to ingratiate thyself with those idols, didst offer incense and sweet ointments at their altars.” Or it may be meant of the king of Assyria, whom Ahaz made his court to, or of the king of Babylon, whose ambassadors Hezekiah caressed, or of other kings of the nations whose idolatrous usages they admired and were desirous to learn and imitate, and for that end went and sent to cultivate an acquaintance and correspondence with them, that they might be like them and strengthen themselves by an alliance with them. See here,

(1.) What an expense they were at in forming and procuring this grand alliance. They went *with ointments and perfumes*, either bestowed upon themselves, to beautify their own faces and so make themselves considerable and worthy the friendship of the greatest king, or to be presented to those whose favour they were ambitious of, because a man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men. “When the first present of rich perfumes was thought too little, thou didst increase them;” and thus many seek the ruler's favour, forgetting that, after all, every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord. So fond were they of those heathen princes that they not only went themselves, in all their airs, to those that were near them, but sent messengers to those that were afar off, ^{280D} *Isaiah* 18:2.

(2.) How much they hereby disparaged themselves and laid the honour of their crown and nation in the dust: *Thou didst debase thyself even unto hell*. They did so by their idolatries. It is a dishonour to the children of men, who are endued with the powers of reason, to worship that as their god which is the creature of their own fancy and the work of their own hands, to bow down to the stock of a tree. It is much more a dishonour to the children of God, who are blessed with the privilege of divine revelation, to forsake such a God as they know theirs to be for a thing of

nought, their own mercies for lying vanities. They likewise debased themselves by truckling to their heathen neighbours, and depending upon them, when they had a God to go to who is all-sufficient and in covenant with them. How did those shame themselves to the highest degree, and sink themselves to the lowest, that forsook the fountain of life for broken cisterns and the rock of ages for broken reeds! Note, Sinners disparage and debase themselves; the service of sin is an ignominious slavery; and those who thus debase themselves to hell will justly have their portion there.

III. The aggravations of their sin.

1. They had been tired with disappointments in their wicked courses, and yet they would not be convinced of the folly of them (v. 10): “*Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way*; thou hast undertaken a mighty task, to find out true satisfaction and happiness in that which is vanity and a lie.” Those that set up idols, instead of God, for the object of their worship, and princes, instead of God, for the object of their hope and confidence, and think thus to better themselves and make themselves easy, go a great way about, and will never come to their journey's end: *Thou art wearied in the multitude, or multiplicity, of thy ways* (so some read it): those that forsake the only right way wander endlessly in a thousand by-paths, and lose themselves in the many inventions which they have sought out. They weary themselves with fresh chases and fierce ones, but never gain their point, like the Sodomites, that *wearied themselves to find the door* (~~Gen~~ Genesis 19:11) and could not find it at last. The pleasures of sin will soon surfeit, but never satisfy; a man may quickly tire himself in the pursuit of them, but can never repose himself in the enjoyment of them. They found this by experience. The idols they had often worshipped never did them any kindness; the kings they courted distressed them, and helped them not; and yet they were so wretchedly besotted that they could not say, “*There is no hope*; it is in vain any longer to expect that satisfaction in creature-confidences, and in the worship of idols, which we have so often looked for, and never met with.” Note, Despair of happiness in the creature, and of satisfaction in the service of sin, is the first step towards a well-grounded hope of happiness in God and a well-fixed resolution to keep to his service; and those are inexcusable who have had sensible convictions of the vanity of the creature, and yet will not be brought to say, “There is no hope to be happy short of the Creator.”

2. Though they were convinced that the way they were in was a sinful way, yet, because they had found some present sensual pleasure and worldly profit by it, they could not persuade themselves to be sorry for it: *“Thou hast found the life of thy hand”* (or *the living of it*); thou boastest how fortune smiles upon thee, and therefore thou art not grieved, any more than Ephraim when he said (~~3018~~ Hosea 12:8), *“I have become rich; I have found out substance.”* Note, Prosperity in sin is a great bar to conversion from sin. Those that live at ease in their sinful projects, are tempted to think God favours them, and therefore they have nothing to repent of. Some read it ironically, or by way of question: *“Thou hast found the life of thy hand, hast found true satisfaction and happiness, no doubt thou hast; hast thou not? And therefore thou art so far from being grieved that thou blessest thyself in thy own evil way; but review thy gains once more, and come to a balance of profit and loss, and then say, What fruit hast thou of those things whereof thou art ashamed and for which God shall bring thee into judgment?”* ~~4021~~ Romans 6:21.

3. They had dealt very unworthily with God by their sin; for,

(1.) It should seem they pretended that the reason why they left God was because he was too terrible a majesty for them to deal with; they must have gods that they could be more free and familiar with. “But,” says God, *“of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, that thou hast dealt falsely and treacherously with me, and dissembled in thy covenants with me and prayers to me? What did I ever do to frighten thee from me? What occasion have I given thee to think hardly of me, that thou hast gone to seek a kinder master?”*

(2.) However, it is certain that they had no true reverence of God nor any serious regard to him. So that question is commonly understood, *“Of whom hast thou been afraid, or feared? Of none; for thou hast not feared me whom thou shouldst fear; for thou hast lied to me.”* Those that dissemble with God make it to appear they stand in no awe of him. *“Thou hast not remembered me, neither what I have said nor what I have done, neither the promises nor the threatenings, nor the performances of either; thou hast not laid them to thy heart, as thou wouldst have done if thou hadst feared me.”* Note, Those who lay not the word of God and his providences to their hearts do thereby show that they have not the fear of God before their eyes. And multitudes are ruined by fearlessness, forgetfulness, and mere carelessness; they do not aright nor to good

purpose fear any thing, remember any thing, nor lay any thing to heart.
Nay,

(3.) They were hardened in their sin by the patience and forbearance of God. “*Have not I held my peace of old, and for a long time? These things thou hast done and I kept silence. And therefore, as it follows here, thou fearest me not;*” as if because God had spared long he would never punish, ^{<281>}Ecclesiastes 8:11. Because he kept silence the sinner thought him altogether such a one as himself, and stood in no awe of him.

IV. Here is God's resolution to call them to an account, though he had long borne with them (v. 12): “*I will declare (like that, ^{<382>}Psalms 50:21, But I will reprove thee), I will declare thy righteousness, which thou makest thy boast of, and let the world see, and thyself too, to thy confusion, that it is all a sham, all a cheat, it is not what it pretends to be. When thy righteousness comes to be examined it will be found that it was unrighteousness, and that there was no sincerity in all thy pretensions. I will declare thy works, what they have been and what the gain thou pretendest to have gotten by them, and it will appear that at long-run they shall not profit thee, nor turn to any account.*” Note, Sinful works, as they are works of darkness, and there is no reason nor righteousness in them, so they are unfruitful works and there is nothing got by them; and, however they look now, it will be made to appear so another day. Sin profits not, nay, it ruins and destroys.

^{<257>}ISAIAH 57:13-16

DIVINE GREATNESS AND CONDESCENSION

Here,

I. God shows how insufficient idols and creatures were to relieve and succour those that worshipped them and confided in them (v. 13): “*When thou criest in thy distress and anguish, lamentest thy misery and callest for help, let thy companies deliver thee, thy idol-gods which thou hast heaped to thyself companies of, the troops of the confederate forces which thou hast relied so much upon, let them deliver thee if they can; expect no other relief than what they can give.*” Thus God said to Israel, when in their trouble they called upon him (^{<704>}Judges 10:14), *Go, and cry to the gods*

which you have chosen, let them deliver you. But in vain is salvation hoped for from them: *The wind shall carry them all away*, the wind of God's wrath, that breath of his mouth which shall slay the wicked; they have made themselves as chaff, and therefore the wind will of course hurry them away. Vanity they are, and *vanity shall take them away*, to vanity they shall be reduced, and vanity shall be their recompence. Both the idols and their worshippers shall come to nothing.

II. He shows that there was a sufficiency, an all-sufficiency, in him for the comfort and deliverance of all those that put their confidence in him and made their application to him. Their safety and satisfaction appear the more comfortable because their hopes are crowned with fruition, when those that seek to other helpers have their hopes frustrated: "*He that puts his trust in me, and in me only, he shall be happy, both for soul and body, for this world and the other.*"

1. Observe, in general,

(1.) Those that trust in God's providence take the best course to secure their secular interests. They *shall possess the land*, as much of it as is good for them, and what they have they shall have it from a good hand and hold it by a good title. ^{<230B>}Psalm 37:3, *They shall dwell in the land, and verily they shall be fed.*

(2.) Those that trust in God's grace take the best course to secure their sacred interests. They *shall inherit my holy mountain*. They shall enjoy the privileges of the church on earth, and be brought at length to the joys of heaven; and no wind shall carry them away.

2. More particularly,

(1.) The captives, that trust in God, shall be released (v. 14): *They shall say* (that is, the messengers of his providence, in that great event shall say), *Cast you up, cast you up, prepare the way*. When God's time shall have come for their deliverance the way of bringing it about shall be made plain and easy, obstacles shall be removed, difficulties that seemed insuperable shall be speedily got over, and all things shall concur both to accelerate and facilitate their return. See ^{<230B>}Isaiah 40:3, 4. This refers to the provision which the gospel, and the grace of it, have made for our ready passage through this world to a better. The way of religion is now cast up; it is a highway; ministers' business is to direct people in it, and to

help them over the discouragements they meet with, that nothing may offend them.

(2.) The contrite, that trust in God, shall be *revived*, v. 15. Those that trusted to idols and creatures for help went with their *ointments and perfumes* (v. 9); but here God shows that those who may expect help from him are such as are destitute of, and set themselves at a distance from, the gaieties of the world and the delights of sense. God's glory appears here very bright,

[1.] In his greatness and majesty: He is *the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity*. Let this inspire us with very high and honourable thoughts of the God with whom we have to do, *First*, That his being and perfections are exalted infinitely above every creature, not only above what they have themselves, but above what they can conceive concerning him, *far above all their blessing and praise*, ^{<495>}Nehemiah 9:5. He is *the high and lofty One*, and there is no creature like him, nor any to be compared with him. The language likewise intimates his sovereign dominion over all and the incontestable right he has to give both law and judgment to all. He is *higher than the highest* (^{<208>}Ecclesiastes 5:8), than the *highest heavens*, ^{<130>}Psalms 113:4. *Secondly*, That with him there is neither beginning of days nor end of life, nor change of time; he is both immortal and immutable. He only *has immortality*, ^{<416>}1 Timothy 6:16. He has it of himself, and he has it constantly; he inhabits it, and cannot be dispossessed of it. We must shortly remove into eternity, but God always inhabits it. *Thirdly*, That there is an infinite rectitude in his nature, and an exact conformity with himself and a steady design of his own glory in all that he does; and this appears in every thing by which he has made himself known, for his name is *holy*, and all that desire to be acquainted with him must know him as a holy God. *Fourthly*, That the peculiar residence and manifestation of his glory are in the mansions of light and bliss above: "*I dwell in the high and holy place*, and will have all the world to know it." Whoever have any business with God must direct to him as their Father in heaven, for there he dwells. These great things are here said of God to inspire us with a holy reverence of him, to encourage our confidence in him, and to magnify his compassion and condescension to us, that though he is thus high yet he has respect unto the lowly; he that rides on the heavens by his name JAH stoops to concern himself for poor *widows and fatherless*, ^{<130>}Psalms 68:4, 5.

[2.] In his grace and mercy. He has a tender pity for the humble and contrite, for those that are so in respect of their state. If they be his people, he will not overlook them though they are poor and low in the world, and despised and trampled upon by men; but he here refers to the temper of their mind; he will have a tender regard to those who, being in affliction, accommodate themselves to their affliction, and bring their mind to their condition, be it ever so low and ever so sad and sorely broken — those that are truly penitent for sin, who mourn in secret for it, and have a dread of the wrath of God, which they have made themselves obnoxious to, and are submissive under all his rebukes. Now, *First*, With these God will dwell. He will visit them graciously, will converse familiarly with them by his word and Spirit, as a man does with those of his own family; he will be always nigh to them and present with them. He that dwells in the highest heavens dwells in the lowest hearts and inhabits sincerity as surely as he inhabits eternity. In these he delights. *Secondly*, He will revive their heart and spirit, will speak that to them, and work that in them by the word and Spirit of his grace, which will be reviving to them, as a cordial to one that is ready to faint. He will give them reviving joys and hopes sufficient to counterbalance all the griefs and fears that break their spirits. He dwells with them, and his presence is reviving.

(3.) Those with whom he contends, if they trust in him, shall be relieved, and received into favour, v. 16. He will *revive the heart of the contrite ones*, for he will not contend for ever. Nothing makes a soul contrite so much as God's contending, and therefore nothing revives it so much as his ceasing his controversy. Here is,

[1.] A gracious promise. It is not promised that he will never be angry with his people, for their sins are displeasing to him, or that he will never contend with them, for they must expect the rod; but he *will not contend for ever*, nor be always wroth. As he is not soon angry, so he is not long angry. He will not always chide. Though he contend with them by convictions of sin, he will not contend for ever; but, instead of the spirit of bondage, they shall receive the Spirit of adoption. He has torn, but he will heal. Though he contend with them by the rebukes of providence, yet the correction shall not last always, shall not last long, shall last no longer than there is need (~~1~~ 1 Peter 1:6), no longer than they can bear, no longer than till it has done its work. Though their whole life be calamitous, yet their end will be peace, and so will their eternity be.

[2.] A very compassionate consideration, upon which this promise is grounded: “If I should contend for ever, *the spirit would fail before me, ever the souls which I have made.*” Note, *First*, God is the Father of spirits, ^{<579>}Hebrews 12:9. Those with whom he will not always contend are the souls that he has made, that he gave being to by creation and a new being to by regeneration. *Secondly*, Though the Lord is for the body, yet he concerns himself chiefly for the souls of his people, that the spirit do not fail, and its graces and comforts. *Thirdly*, When troubles last long, the spirit even of good men is apt to fail. They are tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God, to think it in vain to serve him; they are ready to put comfort away from them, and to despair of relief, and then the spirit fails. *Fourthly*, It is in consideration of this that God will not contend for ever; for he will not forsake the work of his own hands nor defeat the purchase of his Son's blood. The reason is taken not from our merit, but from our weakness and infirmity; for *he remembers that we are flesh* (^{<1989>}Psalm 78:39) and that flesh is weak.

^{<2517>}ISAIAH 57:17-21

THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE AND MERCY

The body of the people of Israel, in this account of God's dealings with them, is spoken of as a particular person (v. 17, 18), but divided into two sorts, differently dealt with — some who were sons of peace, to whom peace is spoken (v. 19), and others who were not, who have nothing to do with peace, v. 20, 21. Observe here,

I. The just rebukes which that people were brought under for their sin:

For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and smote him.

Covetousness was a sin that abounded very much among that people.

^{<2463>}Jeremiah 6:13, *From the least to the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness.* Those that did not worship images were yet carried away by this spiritual idolatry: for such is covetousness; it is making money the god, ^{<5085>}Colossians 3:5. No marvel that the people were covetous when their watchmen themselves were notoriously so, ^{<2541>}Isaiah 56:11, Yet, covetous as they were, in the service of their idols they were prodigal, v. 6. And it is hard to say whether their profuseness in that or their covetousness in every thing else was more provoking. But for this

iniquity, among others, God was angry with them, and brought one judgment after another upon them, and their destruction at last by the Chaldeans.

1. God was wroth. He resented it, took it very ill that a people who were devoted to himself, and portioned in himself, should be so entirely given up to the world and choose that for their portion. Note, Covetousness is an iniquity that is very displeasing to the God of heaven. It is a heart-sin, but he sees it, and *therefore* hates it, and looks upon it with jealousy, because it sets up a rival with him in the soul. It is a sin which men *bleſs themſelves in* (³⁹⁸Psalm 49:18) and in which their neighbours *bleſs them* (³⁰⁰Psalm 10:3); but God abhors it.

2. He notes him, reprov'd him for it by his prophets, corrected him by his providence, puniſhed him in thoſe very things he ſo doted upon and was covetous of. Note, Sinners ſhall be made to feel from the anger of God. Thoſe whom he is wroth with he ſmites; and covetouſneſs particularly lays men under the tokens of God's diſpleaſure. Thoſe that ſet their hearts upon the wealth of this world are diſappointed of it or it is embittered to them; it is either clogged with a croſs or turned into a curſe.

3. God hid himſelf from him when he was under theſe rebukes, and continued wroth with him. When we are under the rod, if God manifeſt himſelf to us, we may bear it the better; but if he both ſmite us and hide himſelf from us, ſend us no prophets, ſpeak to us no comfortable word, ſhow us no token for good, if he *tear and go away* (³⁸⁴Hoſea 5:14), we are very miſerable.

II. Their obſtinacy and incorrigible neſs under theſe rebukes: *He went on frowardly in the way of his heart*, in his evil way. He was not ſenſible of the diſpleaſure of God that he was under. He felt the ſmart of the rod, but had no regard at all to the hand; the more he was croſſed in his worldly purſuits the more eager he was in them. He either would not ſee his error or if he ſaw it would not amend it. Covetouſneſs was the way of his heart; it was what he was inclin'd to and intent upon, and he would not be reclaim'd, but *in his diſtreſs he trespaſſed yet more*, (⁴³²2 Chronicles 28:22. See the ſtrength of the corruption of men's hearts, and the ſinfulneſs of ſin, which will take its courſe in deſpite of God himſelf and all the flames of his wrath. See alſo how inſufficient afflictions of themſelves are to reform men, unleſs God's grace work with them.

III. God's wonderful return in mercy to them, notwithstanding the obstinacy of the generality of them.

1. The greater part of them went on frowardly, but there were some among them that were mourners for the obstinacy of the rest; and with an eye to them, or rather for his own name's sake, God determines not to contend for ever with them. *With the froward* God may justly *show himself froward* (~~1828~~ Psalm 18:26), and *walk contrary* to those that *walk contrary* to him, ~~1828~~ Leviticus 26:24. When this sinner here went on frowardly in the way of his heart, one would think it should have followed, "I have seen his ways and will destroy him, will abandon him, will never have any thing more to do with him." But such are the riches of divine mercy and grace, and so do they rejoice against judgment, that it follows, *I have seen his ways and will heal him*. See how God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious; and where sin has abounded grace much more abounds. God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself, for in us there appears nothing but what is provoking: "I have seen his ways, and yet I will heal him for my own name's sake." God knew how bad the people were, and yet would not cast them off. But observe the method. God will first give him grace, and then, and not till then, give him peace: "I have seen his way, that he will never turn to me of himself, and therefore I will turn him." Those whom God has mercy in store for he has grace in readiness for, to prepare and qualify them for that mercy which they were running from as fast as they could.

(1.) God will heal him of his corrupt and vicious disposition, will cure him of his covetousness, though it be ever so deeply rooted in him and his heart have been long exercised to covetous practices. There is no spiritual disease so inveterate, but almighty grace can conquer it.

(2.) God *will lead him also*; not only amend what was amiss in him, that he may cease to do evil, but direct him into the way of duty, that he may learn to do well. He goes on frowardly, as Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter, but God will lead him into a better mind, a better path. And them,

(3.) He will restore those comforts to him which he had forfeited and lost, and for the return of which he had thus prepared him. There was a wonderful reformation wrought upon captives in Babylon, and then a wonderful redemption wrought for them, which brought comfort to them,

to their mourners, to those among them that mourned for their own sins, the sins of their people, and the desolations of the sanctuary. To those mourners the mercy would be most comfortable, and to them God had an eye in working it out. Blessed are those that mourn, for to them comfort belongs, and they shall have it.

2. Now, as when that people went into captivity some of them were good figs, very good, others of them bad figs, very bad, and accordingly their captivity was to them for their good or for *their hurt* (²²⁴⁸Jeremiah 24:8, 9), so, when they came out of captivity, still some of them were good, others bad, and the deliverance was to them accordingly.

(1.) To those among them that were good their return out of captivity was peace, such peace as was a type and earnest of the peace which should be preached by Jesus Christ (v. 19): *I create the fruit of the lips, peace.*

[1.] God designed to give them matter for praise and thanksgiving, for that is the *fruit of the lips* (³³³⁵Hebrews 13:15), the *calves of the lips*, ³⁴⁴⁰Hosea 14:2. *I create this.* Creation is out of nothing, and this is surely out of worse than nothing, when God creates matter of praise for those that went on frowardly in the way of their heart.

[2.] In order to this, peace shall be published: *Peace, peace* (perfect peace, all kinds of peace) *to him that is afar off* from the general rendezvous, or from the head-quarters, as well as *to him that is near*. Peace with God; though he has contended with them, he will be reconciled and will let fall his controversy. Peace of conscience, a holy security and serenity of mind, after the many reproaches of conscience and agitations of spirit they had been under their captivity. Thus God creates the fruit of the lips, fresh matter for thanksgiving; for, when he speaks peace to us, we must speak praises to him. This peace is itself of God's creating. He, and he only, can work it; it is the fruit of the lips, of his lips — he commands it, of the minister's lips — he speaks it by them, ³⁴⁰¹Isaiah 40:1. It is the fruit of preaching lips and praying lips; it is the fruit of Christ's lips, whose lips drop as a honeycomb; for to him this is applied, ⁴⁰²⁷Ephesians 2:17: *He came and preached peace to you who were afar off*, you Gentiles as well as to the Jews, who were nigh — to after-ages, who were afar off in time, as well as to those of the present age.

(2.) To those among them that were wicked, though they might return with the rest, their return was no peace, v. 20. The wicked, wherever he is, in

Babylon or in Jerusalem, carries about with him the principle of his own uneasiness, and is like the troubled sea. God healed those to whom he spoke peace (v. 19): *I will heal them*; all shall be well again and set to rights; but the wicked would not be healed by the grace of God and therefore shall not be healed by his comforts. They are always like the sea in a storm, for they carry about with them,

[1.] Unmortified corruptions. They are not cured and conquered, and their ungoverned lusts and passions make them like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, vexatious to all about them and therefore uneasy to themselves, noisy and dangerous. When the intemperate heats of the spirit break out in scurrilous and abusive language, then the troubled sea casts forth mire and dirt.

[2.] Unpacified consciences. They are under a frightful apprehension of guilt and wrath, that they cannot enjoy themselves; when they seem settled they are in disquietude, when they seem merry they are in heaviness; like Cain, who always dwelt in the land of shaking. The terrors of conscience disturb all their enjoyments, and cast forth such mire and dirt as make them a burden to themselves. Though this does not appear (it may be) at present, yet it is a certain truth, what this prophet had said before (~~282~~ Isaiah 48:22), and here repeats (v. 21), *There is no peace to the wicked*, no reconciliation to God (nor can they be upon good terms with him, while they go on still in their trespasses), no quietness or satisfaction in their own mind, no real good, no peace in death, because no hope. *My God hath said it*, and all the world cannot unsay it, That there is no peace to those that allow themselves in any sin. What have they to do with peace?