

CHAPTER 17

In this chapter,

I. God convicts the Jews of the sin of idolatry by the notorious evidence of the fact, and condemns them to captivity for it (v. 1-4).

II. He shows them the folly of all their carnal confidences, which should stand them in no stead when God's time came to contend with them, and that this was one of the sins upon which his controversy with them was grounded (v. 5-11).

III. The prophet makes his appeal and address to God upon occasion of the malice of his enemies against him, committing himself to the divine protection, and begging of God to appear for him (v. 12-18).

IV. God, by the prophet, warns the people to keep holy the sabbath day, assuring them that, if they did, it should be the lengthening out of their tranquility, but that, if not, God would by some desolating judgment assert the honour of his sabbaths (v. 19-27).

~~247~~ JEREMIAH 17:1-4

THE GUILT OF JUDAH

The people had asked (~~246~~ Jeremiah 16:10), *What is our iniquity, and what is our sin?* as if they could not be charged with any thing worth speaking of, for which God should enter into judgment with them; their challenge was answered there, but here we have a further reply to it, in which,

I. The indictment is fully proved upon the prisoners, both the fact and the fault; their sin is too plain to be denied and too bad to be excused, and they have nothing to plead either in extenuation of the crime or in arrest and mitigation of the judgment.

1. They cannot plead, *Not guilty*, for their sins are upon record in the book of God's omniscience and their own conscience; nay, and they are obvious to the eye and observation of the world, v. 1, 2. They are *written* before

God in the most legible and indelible characters, and *sealed among his treasures*, never to be forgotten, ⁽¹⁵²⁴⁾Deuteronomy 32:34. They are written there with *a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond*; what is so written will not be worn out by time, but is, as Job speaks, *graven in the rock for ever*. Note, The sin of sinners is never forgotten till it is forgiven. It is ever before God, till by repentance it comes to be ever before us. *It is graven upon the table of their heart*; their own consciences witness against them, and are instead of a thousand witnesses. What is *graven on the heart*, though it may be covered and closed up for a time, yet, being graven, it cannot be erased, but will be produced in evidence when the books shall be opened. Nay, we need not appeal to the tables of the heart, perhaps they will not own the convictions of their consciences. We need go no further, for proof of the charge, than *the horns of their altars*, on which the blood of their idolatrous sacrifices was sprinkled, and perhaps the names of the idols to whose honour they were erected were inscribed. Their neighbours will witness against them, and all the creatures they have abused by using them in the service of their lusts. To complete the evidence, their own children shall be witnesses against them; they will tell truth when their fathers dissemble and prevaricate; they *remember the altars and the groves* to which their parents took them when they were little, v. 2. It appears that they were full of them, and acquainted with them betimes, they talked of them so frequently, so familiarly, and with so much delight.

2. They cannot plead that they repent, or are brought to a better mind. No, as the guilt of their sin is undeniable, so their inclination to sin is invincible and incurable. In this sense many understand v. 1, 2. Their sin is deeply *engraven* as with *a pen of iron in the tables of their hearts*. They have a rooted affection to it; it is woven into their very nature; their sin is dear to them, as that is dear to us of which we say, It is *engraven on our hearts*. The bias of their minds is still as strong as ever towards their idols, and they are not wrought upon either by the word or rod of God to forget them and abate their affection to them. It is written *upon the horns of their altars*, for they have given up their names to their idols and resolve to abide by what they have done; they have bound themselves, as with cords, to the horns of their altars. And v. 2 may be read fully to this sense: *As they remember their children, so remember they their altars and their groves*; they are as fond of them and take as much pleasure in them as men do in their own children, and are as loth to part with them; they will live

and die with their idols, and can no more forget them than *a woman can forget her sucking child*.

II. The indictment being thus fully proved, the judgment is affirmed and the sentence ratified, v. 3, 4. Forasmuch as they are thus wedded to their sins, and will not part with them,

1. They shall be made to part with their treasures, and those shall be given into the hands of strangers. Jerusalem is God's *mountain in the field*; it was built on a hill in the midst of a plain. *All the treasures* of that wealthy city will God *give to the spoil*. Or, *My mountains with the fields, thy wealth and all thy treasures will I expose to spoil*; both the products of the country and the stores of the city shall be seized by the Chaldeans. Justly are men stripped of that which they have served their idols with and have made the food and the fuel of their lusts. *My mountain* (so the whole land was, ^{<PS>}Psalm 78:54, ^{<DE>}Deuteronomy 11:11) you have turned into *your high places for sin*, have worshipped your idols upon *the high hills* (v. 2), and now they shall be *give for a spoil in all your borders*. What we make for a sin God will make for a spoil; for what comfort can we expect in that wherewith God is dishonoured?

2. They shall be made to part with their inheritance, and shall be carried captives into a strange land (v. 4): *Thou, even thyself* (or *thou thyself and those that are in thee*, all the inhabitants), *shall discontinue from thy heritage that I gave thee*. God owns that it was their heritage, and that he gave it to them; they had an unquestionable title to it, which was an aggravation of their folly in throwing themselves out of the possession of it. It is *through thyself* (so some read it), through thy own default, that thou art disseised. *Thou shalt discontinue, or intermit*, the occupation of thy land. The law appointed them to *let their land rest* (it is the word here used) one year in seven, ^{<EX>}Exodus 23:11. They did not observe that law, and now God would compel them to *let it rest* (the land shall *enjoy her sabbaths*, ^{<LE>}Leviticus 26:34); and yet it shall be not rest to them; they shall *serve their enemies in a land they know not*. Observe,

(1.) Sin works a discontinuance of our comforts and deprives us of the enjoyment of that which God has given us. Yet,

(2.) A discontinuance of the possession is not a defeasance of the right, but it is intimated that upon their repentance they shall recover possession again. For the present, *you have kindled a fire in my anger*, which burns so

fiercely that it seems as if it would burn *for ever*; and so it will unless you repent, for it is the anger of an everlasting God fastening upon the immortal souls, and *who knows the power of that anger?*

2175 JEREMIAH 17:5-11

TRUE AND FALSE CONFIDENCE

It is excellent doctrine that is preached in these verses, and of general concern and use to us all, and it does not appear to have any particular reference to the present state of Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet's sermons were not all prophetic, but some of them practical; yet this discourse, which probably we have here only the heads of, would be of singular use to them by way of caution not to misplace their confidence in the day of their distress. Let us all learn what we are taught here,

I. Concerning the disappointment and vexation those will certainly meet with who depend upon creatures for success and relief when they are in trouble (v. 5, 6): *Cursed be the man that trusts in man*. God pronounces him cursed for the affront he thereby puts upon him. Or, *Cursed* (that is, miserable) *is the man* that does so, for he leans upon a broken reed, which will not only fail him, but will *run into his hand and pierce it*. Observe,

1. The sin here condemned; it is *trusting in man*, putting that confidence in the wisdom and power, the kindness and faithfulness, of men, which should be placed in those attributes of God only, making our applications to men and raising our expectations from them as principal agents, whereas they are but instruments in the hand of Providence. It is *making flesh the arm* we stay upon, the arm we work with and with which we hope to work our point, the arm under which we shelter ourselves and on which we depend for protection. God is his people's *arm*, 2318 Isaiah 32:2. We must not think to make any creature to be that to us which God has undertaken to be. Man is called *flesh*, to show the folly of those that make him their confidence; he is flesh, weak and feeble as flesh without bones or sinews, that has no strength at all in it; he is inactive as flesh without spirit, which is a dead thing; he is mortal and dying as flesh, which soon putrefies and corrupts, and is continually wasting. Nay, he is false and sinful, and has lost his integrity; so his being flesh signifies, 1008 Genesis 6:3. The great malignity there is in this sin; it is the *departure of the evil*

heart of unbelief from the living God. Those that trust in man perhaps draw nigh to God with their mouth and honour him with their lips, they call him their hope and say that they trust in him, but really *their heart departs from him*; they distrust him, despise him, and decline a correspondence with him. Cleaving to the cistern is leaving the fountain, and is resented accordingly.

3. The fatal consequences of this sin. He that puts a confidence in man puts a cheat upon himself; for (v. 6) *he shall be like the heath in the desert*, a sorry shrub, the product of barren ground, sapless, useless, and worthless; his comforts shall all fail him and his hopes be blasted; he shall wither, be dejected in himself and trampled on by all about him. *When good comes he shall not see it*, he shall not share in it; when the times mend they shall not mend with him, but he shall *inhabit the parched places in the wilderness*; his expectation shall be continually frustrated; when others have a harvest he shall have none. Those that trust to their own righteousness and strength, and think they can do well enough without the merit and grace of Christ, thus *make flesh their arm*, and their souls cannot prosper in graces or comforts; they can neither produce the fruits of acceptable services to God nor reap the fruits of saving blessings from him; they *dwell in a dry land*.

II. Concerning the abundant satisfaction which those have, and will have, who make God their confidence, who live by faith in his providence and promise, who refer themselves to him and his guidance at all times and repose themselves in him and his love in the most unquiet times, v. 7, 8. Observe,

1. The duty required of us — to *trust in the Lord*, to do our duty to him and then depend upon him to bear us out in doing it — when creatures and second causes either deceive or threaten us, either are false to us or fierce against us, to commit ourselves to God as all-sufficient both to fill up the place of those who fail us and to protect us from those who set upon us. It is to *make the Lord our hope*, his favour the good we hope for and his power the strength we hope in.

2. The comfort that attends the doing of this duty. He that does so shall be *as a tree planted by the waters*, a choice tree, about which great care has been taken to set it in the best soil, so far from being like *the heath in the wilderness*; he shall be like a tree that *spreads out its roots*, and thereby is

firmly fixed, spreads them out *by the rivers*, whence it draws abundance of sap, which denotes both the establishment and the comfort which those have who make God their hope; they are easy, they are pleasant, and enjoy a continual security and serenity of mind. A tree thus planted, thus watered, shall *not see when heat comes*, shall not sustain any damage from the most scorching heats of summer; it is so well moistened from its roots that it shall be sufficiently guarded against drought. Those that make God their hope,

(1.) They shall flourish in credit and comfort, like a tree that is *always green*, whose leaf does not wither; they shall be cheerful to themselves and beautiful in the eyes of others. Those who thus give honour to God by giving him credit God will put honour upon, and make them the ornament and delight of the places where they live, as green trees are.

(2.) They shall be fixed in an inward peace and satisfaction: They *shall not be careful in a year of drought*, when there is want of rain; for, as the tree has *seed in itself*, so it has *its moisture*. Those who make God their hope have enough in him to make up the want of all creature-comforts. We need not be solicitous about the breaking of a cistern as long as we have the fountain.

(3.) They shall be fruitful in holiness, and in all good works. Those who trust in God, and by faith derive strength and grace from him, *shall not cease from yielding fruit*; they shall still be enabled to do that which will redound to the glory of God, the benefit of others, and their own account.

III. Concerning the sinfulness of man's heart, and the divine inspection it is always under, v. 9, 10. It is folly to trust in man, for he is not only frail, but false and deceitful. We are apt to think that we trust in God, and are entitled to the blessings here promised to those who do so. But this is a thing about which our own hearts deceive us as much as any thing. We think that we trust in God when really we do not, as appears by this, that our hopes and fears rise or fall according as second causes smile or frown.

1. It is true in general.

(1.) There is that wickedness in our hearts which we ourselves are not aware of and do not suspect to be there; nay, it is a common mistake among the children of men to think themselves, their own hearts at least, a great deal better than they really are. *The heart*, the conscience of man, in

his corrupt and fallen state, *is deceitful above all things*. It is subtle and false; it is apt to *supplant* (so the word properly signifies); it is that from which Jacob had his name, a *supplanter*. It calls evil good and good evil, puts false colours upon things, and cries peace to those to whom peace does not belong. When men say in their hearts (that is, suffer their hearts to whisper to them) that there is no God, or he does not see, or he will not require, or they shall have peace though they go on; in these, and a thousand similar suggestions the heart is deceitful. It cheats men into their own ruin; and this will be the aggravation of it, that they are self-deceivers, self-destroyers. Herein the heart is *desperately wicked*; it is deadly, it is desperate. The case is bad indeed, and in a manner deplorable and past relief, if the conscience which should rectify the errors of the other faculties is itself a mother of falsehood and a ring-leader in the delusion. What will become of a man if that in him which should be *the candle of the Lord* give a false light, if God's deputy in the soul, that is entrusted to support his interests, betrays them? Such is the deceitfulness of the heart that we may truly say, *Who can know it?* Who can describe how bad the heart is? We cannot know our own hearts, not what they will do in an hour of temptation (Hezekiah did not, Peter did not), not what corrupt dispositions there are in them, nor in how many things they have turned aside; who can understand his errors? Much less can we know the hearts of others, or have any dependence upon them. But,

(2.) Whatever wickedness there is in the heart God sees it, and knows it, is perfectly acquainted with it and apprised of it: *I the Lord search the heart*. This is true of all that is in the heart, all the thoughts of it, the quickest, and those that are most carelessly overlooked by ourselves — all the intents of it, the closest, and those that are most artfully disguised, and industriously concealed from others. Men may be imposed upon, but God cannot. He not only searches the heart with a piercing eye, but he tries the reins, to pass a judgment upon what he discovers, to give every thing its true character and due weight. He tries it, as the gold is tried whether it be standard or no, as the prisoner is tried whether he be guilty or no. And this judgment which he makes of the heart is in order to his passing judgment upon the man; it is *to give to every man according to his ways* (according to the desert and the tendency of them, life to those that walked in the ways of life, and death to those that persisted in *the paths of the destroyer*) *and according to the fruit of his doings*, the effect and influence his doings have had upon others, or according to what is settled by the word of God

to be the fruit of men's doings, blessings to the obedient and curses to the disobedient. Note, *Therefore* God is *Judge himself*, and he alone, because he, and none besides, knows the hearts of the children of men.

2. It is true especially of all the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart, all its corrupt devices, desires, and designs. God observes and discerns them; and (which is more than any man can do) he judges of the overt act by the heart. Note, God knows more evil of us than we do of ourselves, which is a good reason why we should not flatter ourselves, but always stand in awe of the judgment of God.

IV. Concerning the curse that attends wealth unjustly gotten. Fraud and violence had been reigning crying sins in Judah and Jerusalem; now the prophet would have those who had been guilty of these sins, and were now stripped of all they had, to read their sin in their punishment (v. 11): *He that gets riches and not by right*, though he may make them his hope, shall never have joy of them. Observe, It is possible that those who use unlawful means to get wealth may succeed therein and prosper for a time; and it is a temptation to many to defraud and oppress their neighbours when there is money to be got by it. He who has got *treasures by vanity* and a *lying tongue* may hug himself in his success, and say, *I am rich*; nay, and I am innocent too (^{<3218>}Hosea 12:8), but *he shall leave them in the midst of his days*; they shall be taken from him, or he from them; God shall cut him off with some surprising stroke then when he says, *Soul, take thy ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years*, ^{<4219>}Luke 12:19, 20. He shall leave them to he knows not whom, and shall not be able to take any of his riches away with him. It intimates what a great vexation it is to a worldly man at death that he must leave his riches behind him; and justly may it be a terror to those who got them unjustly, for, though the wealth will not follow them to another world, the guilt will, and the torment of an everlasting, *Son, remember*, ^{<465>}Luke 16:25. Thus, *at his end, he shall be a fool*, a Nabal, whose wealth did him no good, which he had so sordidly hoarded, when *his heart became dead as a stone*. He was a fool all along; sometimes perhaps his own conscience told him so, but *at his end* he will appear to be so. Those are fools indeed who are fools in *their latter end*; and such multitudes will prove who were applauded as *wise men*, that did *well for themselves*, ^{<4913>}Psalm 49:13, 18. Those that get grace will be wise *in the latter end*, will have the comfort of it in death and the benefit of it to eternity (^{<1121>}Proverbs 19:20); but those that place their happiness in the wealth of the world, and, right or wrong, *will be rich*, will rue the folly of

it when it is too late to rectify the fatal mistake. This is like *the partridge that sits on eggs and hatches them not*, but they are broken (as ^{<39:15>} Job 39:15), or stolen (as ^{<29:14>} Isaiah 10:14), or they become addle: some sort of fowl there was, well known among the Jews, whose case this commonly was. The rich man takes a great deal of pains to get an estate together, and sits brooding upon it, but never has any comfort nor satisfaction in it; his projects to enrich himself by sinful courses miscarry and come to nothing. Let us therefore be wise in time — what we get to get it honestly, and what we have to use it charitably, that we may lay up in store a good foundation and be wise for eternity.

^{<24:12>} JEREMIAH 17:12-18

THE PROPHET'S APPEAL TO GOD

Here, as often before, we have the prophet retired for private meditation, and *alone with God*. Those ministers that would have comfort in their work must be much so. In his converse here with God and his own heart he takes the liberty which devout souls sometimes use in their soliloquies, to pass from one thing to another, without tying themselves too strictly to the laws of method and coherence.

I. He acknowledges the great favour of God to his people in setting up a revealed religion among them, and dignifying them with divine institutions (v. 12): *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary*. The temple at Jerusalem, where God manifested his special presence, where the lively oracles were lodged, where the people paid their homage to their Sovereign, and whither they fled for refuge in distress, was the *place of their sanctuary*. That was a *glorious high throne*. It was a throne of holiness, which made it truly glorious; it was God's throne, which made it truly high. Jerusalem is called *the city of the great King*, not only Israel's King, but the King of the whole earth, so that it might justly be deemed the metropolis, or royal city, of the world. It was *from the beginning*, so, from the first projecting of it by David and building of it by Solomon, ^{<44:9>} 2 Chronicles 2:9. It was the honour of Israel that God set up such a glorious throne among them. *As the glorious and high throne* (that is, heaven) *is the place of our sanctuary*; so some read it. Note, All good men have a high value and veneration for the ordinances of

God, and reckon the place of the sanctuary a glorious high throne. Jeremiah here mentions this either as a plea with God for mercy to their land, in honour of the *throne of his glory* (^{244D}Jeremiah 14:21), or as an aggravation of the sin of his people in forsaking God though his throne was among them, and so profaning his crown and the place of his sanctuary.

II. He acknowledges the righteousness of God in abandoning those to ruin that forsook him and revolted from their allegiance to him, v. 13. He speaks it to God, as subscribing both to the certainty and to the equity of it: *O Lord! the hope of those in Israel that adhere to thee, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed.* They must of necessity be so, for they forsake thee for lying vanities, which will deceive them and make them ashamed. They will be ashamed, for they shame themselves. They will justly be put to shame, for they have forsaken him who alone can keep them in countenance when troubles come. *Let them be ashamed* (so some read it); and so it is a pious imprecation of the wrath of God upon them, or a petition for his grace, to make them penitently ashamed. “*Those that depart from me, from the word of God which I have preached, do in effect depart from God;*” as those that return to God are said to return to the prophet, ^{245D}Jeremiah 15:19. *Those that depart from thee* (so some read it) shall be *written in the earth.* They shall soon be blotted out, as that is which is written in the dust. They shall be trampled upon and exposed to contempt. They belong to the earth, and shall be numbered among earthly people, who lay up their treasure on earth and whose names are not *written in heaven.* And they deserve to be thus written with the fools in Israel, that their folly may be made manifest unto all, because they have *forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters* (that is, spring waters), and that for broken cisterns. Note, God is to all that are his a *fountain of living waters.* There is a fulness of comfort in him, an over-flowing ever-flowing fulness, like that of a fountain; it is always fresh, and clear, and clean, like spring water, while the pleasures of sin are puddle-waters. They are free to it; it is not a *fountain sealed.* They deserve therefore to be condemned, as Adam, to *red earth*, to which by the corruption of their nature they are allied, because they have forsaken the *garden of the Lord*, which is so well-watered. Those that depart from God are *written in the earth.*

III. He prays to God for healing saving mercy for himself. “If the case of those that depart from God be so miserable, let me always draw nigh to

him (⁴⁹⁷²Psalm 73:27, 28), and, in order to do that, Lord, *heal me*, and *save me*, v. 14. Heal my backslidings, my bent to backslide, and save me from being carried away by the strength of the stream to forsake thee.” He was wounded in spirit with grief upon many accounts. “Lord, *heal me* with thy comforts, and make me easy.” He was continually exposed to the malice of unreasonable men. “Lord, *save me* from them, and let me not fall into their wicked hands. *Heal me*, that is, sanctify me by thy grace; *save me*, that is, bring me to thy glory.” All that shall be saved hereafter are sanctified now; unless the disease of sin be purged out the soul cannot live. To enforce this petition he pleads,

1. The firm belief he had of God's power: *Heal thou me, and then I shall be healed*; the cure will certainly be wrought if thou undertake it; it will be a thorough cure and not a palliative one. Those that come to God to be healed ought to be abundantly satisfied in the all-sufficiency of their physician. *Save me, and then I shall certainly be saved*, be my dangers and enemies ever so threatening. If God hold us up, we shall live; if he protect us, we shall be safe.

2. The sincere regard he had to God's glory: “*For thou art my praise, and for that reason I desire to be healed and saved, that I may live and praise thee,*” ⁴⁹⁷⁵Psalm 119:175. Thou art he whom I praise, and the praise due to thee I never gave to another. Thou art he whom I glory in, and boast of, for on thee do I depend. Thou art he that furnishes me with continual matter for praise, and I have given thee the praise of the favours already bestowed upon me. *Thou shalt be my praise*” (so some read it); “*heal me, and save me, and thou shalt have the glory of it. My praise shall be continually of thee,*” ⁴⁹⁷⁶Psalm 71:6; 79:13.

IV. He complains of the infidelity and daring impiety of the people to whom he preached. It greatly troubled him, and he shows before God this trouble, as the servant that had slights put upon him by the guests he was sent to invite *came and showed his Lord these things*. He had faithfully delivered God's message to them; and what answer has he to return to him that sent him? *Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now,* v. 15, ⁴⁹⁷⁹Isaiah 5:19. They bantered the prophet, and made a jest of that which he delivered with the greatest seriousness.

1. They denied the truth of what he said: “If that be the *word of the Lord* which thou speakest to us, *where is it?* Why is it not fulfilled?” Thus the

patience of God was impudently abused as a ground to question his veracity.

2. They defied the terror of what he said. “Let God Almighty do his worst; let all he has said come to pass; we shall do well enough; the lion is not so fierce as he is painted,” ^{<4058>}Amos 5:18. “Lord, to what purpose is it to speak to men that will neither believe nor fear?”

V. He appeals to God concerning his faithful discharge of the duty to which he was called, v. 16. The people did all they could to make him weary of his work, to exasperate him and make him uneasy, and to tempt him to prevaricate and alter his message for fear of displeasing them; but, “Lord,” says he, “*thou knowest I have not yielded to them.*”

1. He continued constant to his work. His office, instead of being his credit and protection, exposed him to reproach, contempt, and injury. “Yet,” says he, “*I have not hastened from being a pastor after thee; I have not left my work, nor sued for a discharge or a quietus.*” Prophets were pastors to the people, to feed them with the good word of God; but they were to be *pastors after God*, and all ministers must be so, *according to his heart* (^{<2485>}Jeremiah 3:15), to follow him and the directions and instructions he gives. Such a pastor Jeremiah was; and, though he met with as much difficulty and discouragement as ever any man did, yet he did not fly off as Jonah did, nor desire to be excused from going any more on God's errands. Note, Those that are employed for God, though their success answer nor their expectations, must not therefore throw up their commission. but continue to follow God, though the storm be in their faces.

2. He kept up his affection to the people. Though they were very abusive to him, he was compassionate to them: *I have not desired the woeful day.* The day of the accomplishment of his prophecies would be a woeful day indeed to Jerusalem, and therefore he deprecated it, and wished it might never come, though, as to himself, it would be the avenging of him upon his persecutors and the proving of him a true prophet (which they had questioned, v. 15), and upon those accounts he might be tempted to desire it. Note, God does not, and therefore ministers must not, desire the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn and live. Though we warn of the woeful day, we must not wish for it, but rather weep because of it, as Jeremiah did.

3. He kept closely to his instructions. Though he might have curried favour with the people, or at least have avoided their displeasure, if he had not been so sharp in his reproofs and severe in his threatenings, yet he would deliver his message faithfully; and that he had done so was a comfort to him. “Lord, *thou knowest that that which came out of my lips was right before thee*; it exactly agreed with what I received from thee, and therefore thou art reflected upon in their quarrelling with me.” Note, If what we say and do be right before God, we may easily despise the reproaches and censures of men. *It is a small thing to be judged of their judgment.*

VI. He humbly begs of God that he would own him, and protect him, and carry him on cheerfully in that work to which God had so plainly called him and to which he had so sincerely devoted himself. Two things he here desires: —

1. That he might have comfort in serving the God that sent him (v. 17): *Be not thou a terror to me.* Surely more is implied than is expressed. “Be thou a comfort to me, and let thy favour rejoice my heart and encourage me, when my enemies do all they can to terrify me and either to drive me from my work or to make me drive on heavily in it.” Note, The best have that in them which might justly make God a terror to them, as he was for some time to Job (^{246b}Jeremiah 6:4), to Asaph (^{377b}Psalm 77:3), to Heman, ⁴⁸⁵Psalm 88:15. And this is that which good men, *knowing the terrors of the Lord*, dread and deprecate more than any thing; nay, whatever frightful accidents may befall them, or how formidable soever their enemies may appear to them, they can do well enough so long as God is not a terror to them. He pleads, “*Thou art my hope*; and then nothing else is my fear, no, not *in the day of evil*, when it is most threatening, most pressing. My dependence is upon thee; and therefore *be not a terror to me.*” Note, Those that by faith make God their confidence shall have him for their comfort in the worst of times, if it be not their own fault: if we make him our trust, we shall not find him our terror.

2. That he might have courage in dealing with the people to whom he was sent, v. 18. Those persecuted him who should have entertained and encouraged him. “Lord,” says he, “*let them be confounded* (let them be overpowered by the convictions of the word and made ashamed of their obstinacy, or else let the judgments threatened be at length executed upon them), *but let not me confounded*, let not me be terrified by their menaces,

so as to betray my trust.” Note, God's ministers have work to do which they need not be either ashamed or afraid to go on in, but they do need to be helped by the divine grace to go on in it without shame or fear. Jeremiah had not desired the woeful day upon his country in general; but as to his persecutors, in a just and holy indignation at their malice, he prays, *Bring upon them the day of evil*, in hope that the bringing of it upon them might prevent the bringing of it upon the country; if they were taken away, the people would be better; “therefore *destroy them with a double destruction*; let them be utterly destroyed, root and branch, and let the prospect of that destruction be their present confusion.” This the prophet prays, not at all that he might be avenged, nor so much that he might be eased, but that *the Lord may be known by the judgments which he executes*.

~~24179~~ JEREMIAH 17:19-27

SABBATH-SANCTIFICATION

These verses are a sermon concerning sabbath-sanctification. It is a word which the prophet *received from the Lord*, and was ordered to deliver in the most solemn and public manner to the people; for they were sent not only to reprove sin, and to press obedience, in general, but they must descend to particulars. This message concerning the sabbath was probably sent in the days of Josiah, for the furtherance of that work of reformation which he set on foot; for the promises here (v. 25, 26) are such as I think we scarcely find when things come nearer to the extremity. This message must be proclaimed in all the places of concourse, and therefore in *the gates*, not only because through them people were continually passing and repassing, but because in them they kept their courts and laid up their stores. It must be proclaimed (as the king or queen is usually proclaimed) at the court-gate first, the gate *by which the kings of Judah come in and go out*, v. 19. Let them be told their duty first, particularly this duty; for, if sabbaths be not sanctified as they should be, *the rulers of Judah are to be contended with* (so they were, ~~13137~~ Nehemiah 13:17), for they are certainly wanting in their duty. He must also preach it *in all the gates of Jerusalem*. It is a matter of great and general concern; therefore let all take notice of it. Let the *kings of Judah* hear the *word of the Lord* (for, high as they are, he is above them), *and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, for, mean as they are,

he takes notice of them, and of what they say and do on sabbath days. Observe,

I. How the sabbath is to be sanctified, and what is the law concerning it, v. 21, 11.

1. They must rest from their worldly employment on the sabbath day, must do no servile work. They must *bear no burden* into the city nor out of it, into their houses nor out of them; husbandmen's burdens of corn must not be carried in, nor manure carried out; nor must tradesmen's burdens of wares or merchandises be imported or exported. There must not a loaded horse, or cart, or wagon, be seen on the sabbath day either in the streets or in the roads; the porters must not ply on that day, nor must the servants be suffered to fetch in provisions or fuel. It is a day of rest, and must not be made a day of labour, unless in case of necessity.

2. They must apply themselves to that which is the proper work and business of the day: "*Hallow you the sabbath*, that is, consecrate it to the honour of God and spend it in his service and worship." It is in order to this that worldly business must be laid aside, that we may be entire for, and intent upon, that work, which requires and deserves the whole man.

3. They must herein be very circumspect: "*Take heed to yourselves*, watch against every thing that borders upon the profanation of the sabbath." Where God is jealous we must be cautious. "*Take heed to yourselves*, for it is at your peril if you rob God of that part of your time which he has reserved to himself." *Take heed to your souls* (so the word is); in order to the right sanctifying of sabbaths, we must look well to the frame of our spirits and have a watchful eye upon all the motions of the inward man. Let not the soul be burdened with the cares of this world on sabbath days, but let that be employed, even all that is within us, in the work of the day. And, 4. He refers them to the law, the statute in this case made and provided: "This is no new imposition upon you, but is what *I commanded your fathers*; it is an ancient law; it was an article of the original contract; nay, it was a command to the patriarchs."

II. How the sabbath had been profaned (v. 23): "Your fathers were required to keep holy the sabbath day, *but they obeyed not*; they *hardened their necks* against this as well as other commands that were given them." This is mentioned to show that there needed a reformation in this matter, and that God had a just controversy with them for the long transgression of

this law which they had been guilty of. They hardened their necks against this command, that they might not hear and receive instruction concerning other commands. Where sabbaths are neglected all religion sensibly goes to decay.

III. What blessings God had in store for them if they would make conscience of sabbath-sanctification. Though their fathers had been guilty of the profanation of the sabbath they should not only not smart for it, but their city and nation should recover its ancient glory, if they would keep sabbaths better, v. 24-26. Let them take care to *hallow the sabbath and do no work therein*; and then,

1. The court shall flourish. *Kings* in succession, or the many branches of the royal family at the same time, all as great as kings, with the other *princes that sit upon the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David* (~~cc~~ Psalm 122:5), shall ride in great pomp *through the gates of Jerusalem*, some in chariots and some on horses, attended with a numerous retinue of the men of Judah. Note, The honour of the government is the joy of the kingdom; and the support of religion would contribute greatly to both.

2. The city shall flourish. Let there be a face of religion kept up in Jerusalem, by sabbath-sanctification, that it may answer to its title, *the holy city*, and then it *shall remain for ever, shall for ever be inhabited* (so the word may be rendered); it shall not be destroyed and dispeopled, as it is threatened to be. Whatever supports religion tends to establish the civil interests of a land.

3. The country shall flourish: *The cities of Judah and the land of Benjamin* shall be replenished with vast numbers of inhabitants, and those abounding in plenty and living in peace, which will appear by the multitude and value of their offerings, which they shall present to God. By this the flourishing of a country may be judged of, What does it do for the honour of God? Those that starve their religion either are poor or are in a fair way to be so.

4. The church shall flourish: *Meat-offerings, and incense, and sacrifices of praise*, shall be brought *to the house of the Lord*, for the maintenance of the service of that house and the servants that attend it. God's institutions shall be conscientiously observed; no sacrifice nor incense shall be offered to idols, nor alienated from God, but every thing shall go in the right

channel. They shall have both occasion and hearts to bring sacrifices of praise to God. This is made an instance of their prosperity. Then a people truly flourish when religion flourishes among them. And this is the effect of sabbath-sanctification; when that branch of religion is kept up other instances of it are kept up likewise; but, when that is lost, devotion is lost either in superstition or in profaneness. It is a true observation, which some have made, that the streams of all religion run either deep or shallow according as the banks of the sabbath are kept up or neglected.

IV. What judgments they must expect would come upon them if they persisted in the profanation of the sabbath (v. 27): “*If you will not hearken to me in this matter, to keep the gates shut on sabbath days, so that there may be no unnecessary entering in, or going out, on that day — if you will break through the enclosure of the divine law, and lay that day in common with other days — know that God will kindle a fire in the gates of your city,*” intimating that it shall be kindled by an enemy besieging the city and assaulting the gates, who shall take this course to force an entrance. Justly shall those gates be fired that are not used as they ought to be to shut out sin and to keep people in to an attendance on their duty. This fire shall devour even *the palaces of Jerusalem*, where the princes and nobles dwelt, who did not use their power and interest as they ought to have done to keep up the honour of God's sabbaths; but *it shall not be quenched* until it has laid the whole city in ruins. This was fulfilled by the army of the Chaldeans, ^{<2613>}Jeremiah 52:13. The profanation of the sabbath is a sin for which God has often contended with a people by fire.