

CHAPTER 2

The scope of this chapter seems to be much the same with that of the foregoing chapter, and to point at the same events, and the causes of them. As there, so here,

I. God, by the prophet, discovers sin to them, and charges it home upon them, the sin of their idolatry, their spiritual whoredom, their serving idols and forgetting God and their obligations to him (v. 1, 2, 5, 8).

II. He threatens to take away from them that plenty of all good things with which they had served their idols, and to abandon them to ruin without remedy (v. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9-13).

III. Yet he promises at last to return in ways of mercy to them for his own sake (v. 14), to restore them to their former plenty (v. 15), to cure them of their inclination to idolatry (v. 16, 17), to renew his covenant with them (v. 18-20), and to bless them with all good things (v. 21-23).

HOSEA 2:1-5

THE SINFULNESS OF ISRAEL

The first words of this chapter some make the close of the foregoing chapter, and add them to the promises which we have here of the great things God would do for them. When they shall have appointed Christ their head, and centered in him, then let them say to one another, with triumph and exultation (*let the prophets say it to them, so the Chaldee — Comfort you, comfort you, my people, is now their commission*), “say to them, *Ammi*, and *Ruhamah*; call them so again, for they shall no longer lie under the reproach and doom of *Lo-ammi* and *Lo-ruhamah*; they shall now be *my people* again, and shall *obtain mercy*.” God's spiritual Israel, made up of Jews and Gentiles without distinction, shall call one another brethren and sisters, shall own one another for the people of God and beloved of him, and, for that reason, shall embrace one another, and stir up one another both to give thanks for and to walk worthy of this *common salvation* which they partake of. Or rather, because the following words

seem to have a coherence with these, these also are designed for conviction and humiliation. The *mother* (v. 2) seems to be the same with the *brethren* and *sisters* (v. 1), the church of the ten tribes, the body of the people, who were brethren, and in a special manner with the heads and leaders, who were as the mother by whom the rest were brought up and nursed. But who are the children that must *plead with their mother* thus? Either,

1. The godly that were among them, that witnessed against the iniquities of the times, let them boldly go on to bear their testimony against the idolatries and gross corruptions that prevail among them. Let those that had not bowed the knee to Baal reason the case with those that had, and endeavour to convince them with such arguments as are here put into their mouths. Note, Private persons may, and ought in their places, to appear and plead against the public profanations of God's name and worship. Children may humbly and modestly argue with their parents when they do amiss: *Plead with your mother, plead*, as Jonathan with Saul concerning David. Or,

2. The sufferers among them, that shared in the calamities of the times, let them not complain of God, let them not quarrel with him, nor lay the blame on him, as if he had dealt hardly with them, and not like a tender father. No; let them *plead with their mother*, and lay the fault on her, where it ought to be laid; compare ²⁸⁰Isaiah 50:1. "*For her transgressions is your mother put away*; she may thank herself, and you may thank her for all your miseries." Let us see now how they must plead with her.

I. They must put here in mind of the relation wherein she had stood to God, the kindness he had had for her, the many favours he had bestowed upon her, and the further favours he had designed her. Let them tell their *brethren* and *sisters* that they had been *Ammi* and *Ruhamah*, that they had been God's people and vessels of his mercy, and might have been so still if it had not been their own fault, v. 1. Note, Our relation to God and dependence on him are a great aggravation of our revolts from him and rebellions against him.

II. They must, in God's name, charge her with the violation of the marriage-covenant between her and God. Let them tell her that God does not look upon her as his wife, nor upon himself as her husband any longer. Tell her (v. 2) that *she is not my wife, neither am I her husband*, that by

her spiritual whoredom she has forfeited all the honour and comfort of her relation to God, and provoked him to give her a bill of divorce. Note, No consideration can be more powerful to awaken us to repentance than the provocation we have by sin given to God to disown and cast us off. It is time to look about us, and to think what course we must take, when God threatens to reject us; for woe unto us if he be not *our husband*. They must charge this home upon her (v. 5): *Their mother has played the harlot; their congregation has run a whoring after false prophets* (so the Chaldee), or, rather, *after idols*, wherein they were encouraged by their false prophets; *she that conceived them has done shamefully*, in making and worshipping idols. An idol is called a *shame* (^{<390>}Hosea 9:10) and idolatry is a *shameful thing*. It is not only an affront to God, but a reproach to men, to *fall down to the stock of a tree*, as the prophet speaks. Or it denotes that the sinner was shameless, impudent in sin, and could not blush; ^{<2465>}Jeremiah 6:15. Or, *She has made ashamed*, has made all that see her ashamed of her; her own children are ashamed of their relation to her.

III. They must upbraid her with her horrid ingratitude to God her benefactor, in ascribing to her idols the glory of the gifts he had given her, and then giving that for a reason why she paid them the homage due to him only, v. 5. In this she *did shamefully* indeed, that *she said, I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water*. Observe here,

1. Her wicked resolution to persist in idolatry, notwithstanding all that God said, both by his prophets and by his providences, to draw her from it. *She said*, Whatever is offered to the contrary, *I will go after my lovers*, or *those that cause me to love them*, whom I cannot but be in love with. The Chaldee understands it of the nations whose alliance Israel courted and depended upon, who supplied them with what they needed. But it is rather to be understood of the idols they worshipped, to justify their love of which they called them their lovers. See who do shamefully; those that are wilful and resolute in sin, and those that openly profess and own their resolution to go on in it. See the folly of idolaters, to call those their lovers that had not so much as life; yet let us learn to call our God our lover; let us keep up good thoughts of him, and put a high value upon our interest in him and in his love.

2. The gross mistake upon which this resolution was grounded: “I will go after my lovers, because they give me my *bread and my water*, which are necessary to sustain the body, *my wool and my flax*, which are necessary to

clothe the body, and pleasant things, *my oil*, and *my drink*, my liquors” (so the word is), “wine and strong drink.” Note,

(1.) The things of sense are the best things with carnal hearts, and the most powerful attractives, in pursuit of which they care not what they follow after. The God of Israel set before them his *statutes* and *judgments* (^{<5048>}Deuteronomy 4:8), *more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey* (^{<5B30>}Psalm 119:10), promised them his favour, which would *put gladness in their hearts more than corn, wine, and oil* (^{<5047>}Psalm 4:7); but they had no relish at all for these things. Whence they thought their oil and their drink came, thither they would return their best affections. *O curvae in terram animae et coelestium inanes! — O degenerate minds, bending towards the earth, and devoid of every thing heavenly!*

(2.) It is a great abuse and injury to God, in pursuance of the pleasures and delights of sense to forsake him, who not only gives us better things, but gives us even those things too. The idolaters made Ceres the goddess of their corn, Bacchus the god of their wine, etc., and then foolishly fancied they had their corn and wine from these, forgetting the Lord their God, who both gave them that good land and *gave them power to get wealth* out of it.

(3.) Many are hardened in sin by their worldly prosperity. They had an abundance of those things when they served their idols, and then imagined them to be given them by their idols, which kept them to their service; thus they argued (^{<2447>}Jeremiah 44:17, 18), *While we burnt incense to the queen of heaven we had plenty of victuals.*

IV. They must persuade her to repent and reform. God will disown her if she persist in her whoredoms; *let her therefore put away her whoredoms*, v. 2. Let her be convinced that it is possible for her to reform; the idols, dear as they are, may yet be parted with; and it will certainly be well with her if she do reform. Note, Our pleading with sinners must be to drive them to repentance, not to drive them to despair. Let her *put away her whoredoms and her adulteries*; the doubling of words to the same purport, and both plural, denotes the abundance of idolatries they were guilty of, all which must be abandoned ere God would be reconciled to them. Let her put them *out of her sight*, as detestable things which she cannot endure to look upon; let her say unto them, *Get you hence*, ^{<2312>}Isaiah 30:22. Let her put them *from her face* and from *between her breasts*, that is, let her not

do as harlots use to do, that both discover their own wicked disposition, and allure others to wickedness, by painting their faces, and exposing their naked breasts, and adorning them; let her not thus, by annexing all possible gaieties and pleasures to the worship of idols, engage herself and allure others to it. let her put away all these. Every sinful course, persisted in, is an adulterous departure from God. And here we may see what it is truly to repent of it and turn from it.

1. True penitents will forsake both open sins, will put away not only the whoredoms that lie in sight, but those that lie in secret *between their breasts*, the sin that is *rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel*.

2. They will both avoid the outward occasions of sin and mortify the inward disposition to it. Idolaters walked after their own eyes, which *went a whoring* after their idols (²⁰⁰⁹Ezekiel 6:9, ²⁰⁰⁹Deuteronomy 4:19), and *therefore* they must put them away *out of their sight*, lest they should be tempted to worship them. *Look not upon the wine when it is red*. But that is not enough: the axe must be *laid to the root*; the corrupt bent and inclination of the heart must be changed, and it must be put away *from between the breasts*, that Christ alone may have the innermost and uppermost place there. ²⁰¹³Song of Solomon 1:13.

V. They must show her the utter ruin that will certainly be the fatal consequence of her sin if she do not repent and reform (v. 3): *Lest I strip her naked*. This comes in here not by way of sentence passed upon her, but by way of warning given to her, that she may prevent it: *Let her put away her whoredoms, that I may not strip her naked* (so it may be read), intimating that God waits to show mercy to sinners, if they would but qualify themselves for that mercy. It is here threatened that God will deal with her as the just and jealous husband at length does with an adulterous wife, that has filled his house with a spurious brood, and will not be reclaimed; he turns her and her children out of doors and sends them a begging; *I will not have mercy upon her children* (v. 4); the particular persons that share in the calamity of the nation, and the rising generation, shall be ruined by it, for they are *children of whoredoms*, and keep up the *vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers*. Now it is here threatened that they shall be both stripped and starved. They thought their idols gave them *their bread and their water, their wool and their flax*; but God, by taking them away, will let them know that it was he that gave them.

1. She shall be stripped: *Lest I strip her* of all her ornaments which she is proud of, and with which she courts her lovers, *strip her* and set her *as in the day that she was born*, send her as naked out of the world as she came into it; this death does, ^{<K12>}Job 1:21. *I will strip her*, and so expose her to cold, and expose her to shame; and justly is she exposed to shame that *did shamefully*, v. 5. The day when God brought them out of Egypt, where they were no better than slaves and beggars, was *the day in which they were born*; and God threatens to bring them back to as low and miserable a condition as he then found them in. Whatever they had that either gained them respect or screened them from contempt, among their neighbours, should be taken from them. See ^{<K69>}Ezekiel 16:4, 39.

2. She shall be starved, shall be deprived not only of her honours, but of her comforts and necessary supports. She shall be famished, shall be made *as a wilderness and a dry land*, and *slain with thirst*. She that boasted so much of her bread and water, her oil and her drinks, which her lovers had *given her*, shall not have so much as necessary food. The land shall not afford subsistence for the inhabitants, for want of the rain of heaven; or, if it do, it shall be taken from them by the enemy, so that the rightful owners shall perish for want of it. Some understand it thus: *I will make her as she was in the wilderness*, and set her as she was *in the desert land*, where she was sometimes ready to perish *for thirst*. So it explains the former part of the verse: *I will set her as in the day that she was born*; for it was in the vast howling wilderness that Israel was first formed into a people. They shall be in as deplorable a condition as their fathers were, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, and in this respect, worse, that then the children were reserved to be heirs of the land of promise, but now *I will not have mercy upon her children*, for *their mother has played the harlot*.

^{<K16>}HOSEA 2:6-13

THREATENINGS OF JUDGMENT

God here goes on to threaten what he would do with this treacherous idolatrous people; and he warns that he may not wound, he threatens that he may not strike. *If he turn not, he will whet his sword* (^{<K72>}Psalm 7:12); but, if he turn, he will sheathe it. They did not turn, and therefore all this came upon them: and its being threatened before shows that it was the

execution of a divine sentence upon them for their wickedness; and it is written for admonition to us.

I. They shall be perplexed and embarrassed in all their counsels, and disappointed in all their expectations. This is threatened v. 6, 7. But to the threatening is annexed a promise that this shall be a means to convince them of their folly, and bring them home to their duty; and so good shall be brought out of evil, in token of the mercy God has yet in reserve for them. And, this being the happy fruit and effect of the distress, it is hard to say whether the prediction, or the distress itself, should be called a threatening or a promise.

1. God will raise up difficulties and troubles in their way, so that their public counsels and affairs shall have no success, nor shall they be able to get forward in them: *I will hedge up thy way with thorns*, with such crosses as, like thorns and briars, are the product of sin and the curse, and are scratching, and tearing, and vexing, and, when the way we are in is hedged up with them, stop our progress, and force us to turn back. She said, *“I will go after my lovers; I will pursue my leagues and alliances with foreign powers, and depend upon them.”* But God says, *“She shall be frustrated in these projects, and not be able to proceed in them. I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and, if that do not serve, I will make a wall.”* If some smaller difficulties be got over, and prevail not to break her measures, God will raise greater, for he will overcome when he judges. It shall be such a hedge, and such a wall, that *she shall not find her paths*. The change of the person here, *I will hedge up thy way*, and then, *She shall not find it*, is usual in scripture, especially in an earnest way of speaking. *“Sinner, do thou take notice, I will hedge up thy way, and all you that are bystanders take notice what will be the effect of this, you may observe that she cannot find her paths.”* She shall be as a traveller that not only knows not which way to go, of many that are before him, but that finds no way at all to go forward. And then *she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them*; she shall endeavour to make an interest in the Assyrians and Egyptians, and to have them for her protectors, but she shall not gain her point; they shall either not come into confederacy with her or not do her any service, shall *help in vain* and be as the *staff of a broken reed*. *She shall seek them, but shall not find them*, shall seek to her idols, but shall not find that satisfaction in them which she promised herself; the gods whom she trusted and courted not only can do nothing for her, but have nothing to say to her to encourage her. Now,

(1.) This is such a just judgment as the Sodomites met with, that were *struck with blindness*, and *wearied themselves to find the door* (^{<1191>}Genesis 19:11), and the Syrians, ^{<1188>}2 Kings 6:18. Note, Those that are most resolute in their sinful pursuits are commonly most crossed in them. *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward* (^{<1215>}Proverbs 22:5); and thus with them God *shows himself froward* (^{<1836>}Psalms 18:26), and *walks contrary to those that walk contrary to him*, ^{<1823>}Leviticus 26:23, 24. The lamenting prophet complains, *He has enclosed my ways*, ^{<2107>}Lamentations 3:7, 9. The way of God and duty is often hedged about with thorns, but we have reason to think it is a sinful way that is hedged up with thorns.

(2.) This is such a kind rebuke, and indeed such a mercy, as Balaam met with, when the angel stood in his way, to hinder his going forward to *curse Israel*, ^{<1022>}Numbers 22:22. Note, Crosses and obstacles in an evil course are great blessings, and are so to be accounted. They are God's hedges, to keep us from transgressing, to restrain us from wandering out of the green pastures, to *withdraw man from his purpose* (^{<1837>}Job 33:17), to make the way of sin difficult, that we may not go on in it, and to keep us from it whether we will or not. We have reason to bless God both for restraining grace and for restraining providences.

2. These difficulties that God raises up in their way shall raise up in their minds thoughts of turning back: “*Then shall she say*, Since I cannot overtake my lovers, I will even *go and return to my first husband*, that is, will return to God, and humble myself to him, and desire him to take me in again; for, when I kept close to him, it was every way *better with me than now*.” Two things are here extorted from this degenerate apostate people: —

(1.) A just acknowledgement of the folly of their apostasy. They are now brought to own that it was better with them while they kept close to their God than ever it was since they forsook him. Note, Whoever have exchanged the service of God for the services of the world and the flesh have, sooner or later, been made to own that they *changed for the worse*, and that while they continued in good company, and went on in the way of good duties, and made conscience how they spent their time and what they said or did, it was better with them; they had more true comfort and enjoyment of themselves than ever they had since they went astray.

(2.) A good purpose, to come back again to their duty: *I will go, and return to my first husband*; and she knows so much of his goodness and

readiness to forgive that she speaks without any doubt of his receiving her again into favour and making her condition as good as ever. Note, The disappointments we meet with in our pursuits of satisfaction in the creature should, if nothing else will do it, drive us at length to the Creator, in whom alone it is to be had. When Moab is *weary of the high place* he shall *go to the sanctuary*, ^{<2362>}Isaiah 16:12. And when the prodigal son is reduced to husks, short allowance indeed, and remembers that *in his father's house there is bread enough*, then he says, *I will arise and go to my father's house*, ^{<257>}Luke 15:17, 18.

II. The necessary supports and comforts of life shall be taken from them, because they had dishonoured God with them, v. 8, 9. Their land was plenteous. Now see here,

1. How graciously their plenty was given to them. God gave them not only corn for necessity, but wine for delight, and oil for ornament. Nay, he *multiplied their silver and gold*, wherewith to traffic with other nations and bring home their products, and which they might hoard up for posterity. *Silver and gold* will keep longer than *corn, and wine, and oil*. He gave them *wool and flax* too, to *cover their nakedness*, and to serve for ornament enough to them, ^{<260>}Ezekiel 16:10. Note, God is a bountiful benefactor even to those who, he foresees, will be ungrateful and unthankful to him.

2. How basely their plenty was abused by them.

(1.) They robbed God of the honour of his gifts: *She did not know that I gave her corn and wine*; she did not remember it. The law and the prophets had told them, again and again, that all their comforts they received from God's bountiful providence; but they were so often told by their false prophets and idolatrous priests that they had their corn from such an idol, and their wine from such an idol, etc., that they had quite forgotten their relation to their great benefactor and their obligations to him. She did not consider it; she would not acknowledge it. This they were *willingly ignorant of*, and more brutish than the ox, that *knows his owner*, and the *ass, that knows his master's crib*. *She did not know it*, for she did not return thanks to him for his gifts, nor study what she should render; nor did she give him his dues out of them, but acted as if she were ignorant who was the donor.

(2.) They served and honoured his enemies with them: *They prepared them for Baal*; they adorned their images with *gold and silver* (~~240B~~ Jeremiah 10:4), and adorned themselves for the worship of their images, v. 13. See ~~2367~~ Ezekiel 16:17-19. *Wherewith they made Baal* (so the margin reads it), that is, the image of Baal. Note, It is a very great dishonour to the God of heaven to make those gifts of his providence the food and fuel of our lusts which he gave us for our support in his service, and to be oil to the wheels of our obedience.

3. How justly their plenty should be taken from them: *“Therefore will I return; I will alter my dealings with them, will take another course, and will take away my corn* and other good things that I gave her.” I will *recover* them, a law term, as a man by due course of law recovers what is unjustly detained from him, or as, when the tenant has committed waste, the landlord recovers *locum vastatum* — *dilapidations*. Observe, God calls their abundance *my corn* and *my wine, my wool* and *my flax*. They called it theirs (*my bread* and *my water*, v. 5), but God lets them know that it is not theirs; he only allowed them the use of it as tenants, entrusted them with the management of it as stewards, but still reserved the property in himself. *“It is my corn and my wine.”* God will have us to know, not only that we have all our creature-comforts and enjoyments from him, but that he has still an incontestable right and title to them, that they are more his than ours, and therefore are to be used for him, and accounted for to him. He will therefore take their plenty away from them, because they have forfeited it by disowning his right, as a tenant by copy of court-roll, who holds at the will of his lord, forfeits his estate if he makes a feoffment of it as though he were a freeholder. He will *recover* it, will *free* or *deliver* it, that it may be no longer abused, as the creature is said to be *delivered from the bondage of corruption* under which it groans, ~~812~~ Romans 8:21. He will take it away *in the time thereof*, and *in the season thereof*, just when they expected it, and thought that they were sure of it. It shall suffer shipwreck in the harbour; and *the harvest shall be a heap*. He will take it away by unseasonable weather or by unreasonable men. Note, Those that abuse the mercies God gives them, to his dishonour, cannot expect to enjoy them long.

III. They shall lose *all their honour*, and be exposed to contempt (v. 10): *“I will discover her lewdness*, will bring to light all her secret wickedness, and make it public, to her shame; I will show by the punishment of it how heinous, how odious, how offensive it is. The fact has been denied, but

now it shall appear; the fault has been diminished, but now it shall appear exceedingly sinful. And this *in the sight of her lovers*, in the sight of the neighbouring nations, with whom she courted an alliance, and on whom she had a dependence; they shall despise her and be ashamed of her because of her weakness, and poverty, and ill conduct; they shall not think her any longer worthy of their friendship.” See this fulfilled,

²⁰⁰⁸Lamentations 1:8, *All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness. Or in the sight of the sun and moon, which she worshipped as her lovers; before them shall her lewdness be discovered.* Compare this with ²⁰⁰¹Jeremiah 7:1, 2, *They shall bring out the bones of their kings and princes, and spread them before the sun and moon, whom they have loved and served.* Note, Sin will have shame; let those expect it that have done shamefully. What other lot can this impudent adulteress expect but that of a common harlot, to be carted through the town? And, when God comes to deal thus with her, *none shall deliver her out of his hands*, neither the gods nor the men they confide in. Note, Those who will not deliver themselves into the hand of God's mercy cannot be delivered out of the hand of his justice.

IV. They shall lose all their pleasure, and shall be left melancholy (v. 11): *I will cause her mirth to cease.* It seems, then, though they had *gone a whoring from their God*, yet they could find in their hearts to *rejoice as other people*, which is forbidden, ²⁰⁰¹Hosea 9:1. Note, Many who lie under guilt and wrath are yet very jocund and merry, and live jovially; but, whether in their laughter their hearts be sad or no, it is certain that the *end of their mirth* will be *heaviness*; for *God will cause all their mirth to cease.* It is as Mr. Burroughs observes here, *Sin and mirth can never hold long together; but, if men will not take away sin from their mirth, God will take away mirth from their sin.*

1. God will take away the occasions of their sacred mirth — *their feast-days, their new moons, their sabbaths, and all their solemn feasts.* These God instituted to be observed in a religious manner, and they were to be observed with rejoicing; and, it seems, though they had departed from the pure worship of God, yet they kept up the observance of these, not at God's temple at Jerusalem, for they had long since forsaken that, but probably at Dan and Bethel, where the calves were, or in some other places of meeting that they had. They observed them, not for the honour of God, nor with any true devotion towards him, but only because they were times of mirth and feasting, music and dancing, and meeting of friends,

received by tradition from their fathers. Thus, when they had lost the power of godliness, and denied that, yet, for the pleasing of a vain and carnal mind, they kept up the form of it; and by this means their new-moons and their sabbaths became an iniquity which God *could not away with*, ^{<21B>}Isaiah 1:13. Now observe,

(1.) God calls them their new-moons and their sabbaths, not his (he disowns them), but theirs.

(2.) He will *cause them to cease*. Note, When men by their sins have caused the life and substance of ordinances to cease it is just with God by his judgments to cause the remaining show and shadow of them to cease.

2. He will take away the supports of their carnal mind. They loved the new-moons and the sabbaths only for the sake of the good cheer that was stirring then, not for the sake of any religious exercises then performed; these they had dropped long ago; and now God will take away their provisions for these solemnities (v. 12): *I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees*. Note, If men destroy God's words and ordinances, by which he should be honoured on their feast-days, it is just with him to destroy their vines and fig-trees, with which they regale themselves. While they took the pleasure of these, they gave their lovers the praise of them: "*These are my rewards which my lovers have given me; I may thank my stars for these, and my worship of them; I may thank my neighbours for these, and my alliance with them.*" And therefore God will destroy them, will wither them with a blast, or bring in a foreign enemy that shall lay the country waste, so that their vineyards shall become *a forest*; the enclosures shall be thrown down, as is usual in war; all shall be laid in common, so that the *beasts of the field* shall eat their grapes and their figs. Or they shall be so blasted with the east wind that fruit-trees shall be of no more use than forest-trees; but, being withered and good for nothing, what fruit there is shall be left to the *beasts of the field*. Or it shall be devoured by their enemies, by men as barbarous as wild beasts. Now,

(1.) This shall be the ruin of their mirth: God will *cause all her mirth to cease*. How will he do it? Taking away the new-moons and the sabbaths will not do it; they can very easily part with them, and find no loss; but "*I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees*, will take away her sensual pleasures, and then she will think herself undone indeed." Note, The destruction of the vines and the fig-trees causes all the mirth of a carnal

heart to cease; it will say, as Micah, You have *taken away my gods, and what have I more?*

(2.) This shall be the punishment of her idolatry (v. 13): “*I will visit upon her the days of Baalim*; I will reckon with her for all the worship of all the Baals they have made gods of, from the days of their fathers unto this day.” We read of their worshipping Baal as long ago as the time of the Judges, and, for aught I know, this may look as far back as those times, those *days of Baalim*; for it is in the second commandment, which forbids idolatry, that God threatens to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*; and justly is that sin so visited, more than any other, because it commonly supports itself by prescription and long usage. Now that the measure of the iniquity of Israel was full all their former sins came into the account, and shall be *required of this generation*. Or the *days of Baalim* are the solemn festival days which they kept in honour of their idols. Days of sinful mirth must be visited in days of mourning. These were the days wherein she *burnt incense* to idols, and, to grace the solemnity, *decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels*, that, appearing honourable, the honour she did to Baal might be thought the greater. Or she was as a wife that decks herself with the ear-rings and jewels that her husband gave her, to make herself amiable to her lovers, whom she follows after, and is ever mindful of. But *she forgot me, saith the Lord*. Note, Our treacherous departures from God are owing to our forgetfulness of him, of his nature and attributes, his relation to us and our obligations to him. Many who plead that they have weak memories, and forget the things of God, can remember other things well enough; nay, it is because they are so mindful of lying vanities that they are so forgetful of their own mercies.

HOSEA 2:14-23

PROMISES OF MERCY

The state of Israel ruined by their own sin did not look so black and dismal in the former part of the chapter, but that the state of Israel, restrained by the divine grace, looks as bright and pleasant here in the latter part of the chapter, and the more surprisingly so as the promises follow thus close upon the threatenings; nay, which is very strange, they are by a note of connexion joined to, and inferred from, that declaration of their sinfulness

upon which the threatenings of their ruin are grounded: *She went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord; therefore I will allure her.* Fitly therefore is that *therefore* which is the note of connexion immediately followed with a note of admiration: *Behold I will allure her!* When it was said, *She forgot me*, one would think it should have followed, "Therefore I will abandon her, I will forget her, I will never look after her more." No, *Therefore I will allure her.* Note, God's thoughts and ways of mercy are infinitely above ours; his reasons are all fetched from within himself, and not from any thing in us; nay, his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious, ^{<2517>}Isaiah 57:17, 18. *Therefore*, because she will not be restrained by the denunciations of wrath, God will try whether she will be wrought upon by the offers of mercy. Some think it may be translated, *Afterwards*, or *nevertheless*, I will allure her. It comes all to one; the design is plainly to magnify free grace to those on whom God will have mercy purely for mercy's sake. Now that which is here promised to Israel is,

I. That though now they were disconsolate, and ready to despair, they should again be revived with comforts and hopes, v. 14, 15. This is expressed here with an allusion to God's dealings with that people when he brought them out of Egypt, through the wilderness to Canaan, as their forlorn and deplorable condition in their captivity was compared to their state in *Egypt in the day that they were born*, v. 3. They shall be new-formed by such miracles of love and mercy as they were first-formed by, and such a transport of joy shall they be in as they were in then. It is hard to say when this had its accomplishment in the kingdom of the ten tribes; but it principally aims, no doubt, at the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles into the church by the gospel of Christ; and it is applicable, nay, we have reason to think it was designed that it should be applied, to the conversion of particular souls to God. Now observe,

1. The gracious methods God will take with them.

(1.) He will *bring them into the wilderness*, as he did at first when he brought them out of Egypt, where he instructed them, and took them into covenant with himself. The land of their captivity shall be to them now, as that wilderness was then, the *furnace of affliction*, in which God will *choose them*. See ^{<2516>}Ezekiel 20:35, 36, *I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you.* God had said that he would *make them as a wilderness* (v. 3), which was a threatening; now, when it is

here made part of a promise that he would bring them into the wilderness, the meaning may be that he would by his grace bring their minds to their condition: “They shall have humble hearts under humbling providences; being poor, they shall be poor in spirit, shall *accept of the punishment of their iniquity*, and then they are prepared to have comfort spoken to them.” When God delivered Israel out of Egypt he led them into the wilderness, to *humble them and prove them, that he might do them good* (~~180~~Deuteronomy 8:2, 3, 15, 16), and so he will do again. Note, Those whom God has mercy in store for he first *brings into a wilderness* — into solitude and retirement, that they may the more freely converse with him out of the noise of this world, — into distress of mind, through sense of guilt and dread of wrath, which brings a soul to be quite at a loss in itself and bewildered, and by those convictions he prepares for consolations, — and sometimes into outward distress and trouble, thereby to open the ear to discipline.

(2.) He will then *allure them and speak comfortably to them*, will *persuade them* and *speak to their hearts*, that is, he will by his word and Spirit incline their hearts to return to him, and encourage them to do so. He will allure them with the promises of his favour, as before he had terrified them with the threatenings of his wrath, will speak friendly to them, both by his prophets and by his providences, as before he had spoken roughly, ~~200~~Isaiah 40:1, 2. *By the hand of my servants the prophets I will speak comfort to her heart*; so the Chaldee. This refers to the gospel of Christ, and the offers of divine grace in the gospel, by which we are allured to forsake our sins and to turn to God, and which speaks to the heart of a convinced sinner that which is every way suited to his case, speaks abundant consolation to those that sorrow for sin and lament after the Lord. And when by the Spirit it is indeed spoken to the heart effectually, and so as to reach the conscience (which it is God's prerogative to do), O what a blessed change is wrought by it! Note, The best way of reducing wandering souls to God is by fair means. By the promise of rest in Christ we are invited to take his yoke upon us; and the work of conversion may be forwarded by comforts as well as by convictions.

(3.) *He will give her her vineyards thence*. From that time and from that place where he has afflicted her, and brought her to see her folly and to humble herself, thenceforward he will *do her good*; not only speak comfortably to her, but do well for her, and undo what he had done against

her. He had *destroyed her vines* (v. 12), but now he will give her whole *vineyards*, as if for every vine destroyed she should have a vineyard restored, and so be repaid with interest; she shall not only have corn for necessity, but vineyards for delight. These denote the privileges and comforts of the gospel, which are prepared for those that *come up out of the wilderness leaning upon Christ as their beloved*, ²¹⁰⁵Song of Solomon 8:5. Note, God has vineyards of consolation ready to bestow on those who repent and return to him; and he can give vineyards *out of a wilderness*, which are of all others the most welcome, as rest to the weary.

(4.) He will give her *the valley of Achor for a door of hope*. *The valley of Achor* was that in which Achan was stoned; it signifies *the valley of trouble*, because he troubled Israel, and there God troubled him. This was the beginning of the wars of Canaan; and their putting away the accursed thing in that place gave them ground to hope that God would continue his presence with them and complete their victories. So when God returns to his people in mercy, and they to him in duty, it will be to them as happy an omen as any thing. If they put away the accursed thing from among them, if by mortifying sin they stone the Achan that has troubled their camp, their subduing that enemy within themselves is an earnest to them of victory over all the kings of Canaan. Or, if the allusion be to the name, it intimates that trouble for sin, if it be sincere, opens a door of hope; for that sin which truly troubles us shall not ruin us. *The valley of Achor* was a very fruitful pleasant valley, some think the same with the valley of Engedi, famous for vineyards, ²¹¹⁴Song of Solomon 1:14. This God gave to Israel as a pattern and pledge of the whole land of Canaan; so “God will by his gospel give to all believers such gifts, graces, and comforts in this life, as shall be a taste of those more perfect good things of the kingdom of heaven, and shall give them as assured hope of a full possession of them in due time.” So the learned Dr. Pocock expounds it; and, to the same purport, this whole context.

2. The great rejoicing with which they shall receive God's gracious returns towards them: *She shall sing there as in the days of her youth*. This plainly refers to that triumphant and prophetic song which Moses and the children of Israel sang at the *Red Sea*, ²¹⁵¹Exodus 15:1. When they are delivered out of captivity they shall repeat that song, and to them it shall be a new song, because sung upon a new occasion, not inferior to the former. God had said (v. 11) that he would *cause all her mirth to cease*, but now he would cause it to revive: *She shall sing as in the day that she came out of Egypt*.

Note, When God repeats former mercies we must repeat former praises; we find the song of Moses sung in the New Testament, ^{<667B>}Revelation 15:3. This promise of Israel's singing has its accomplishment in the gospel of Christ, which furnishes us with abundant matter for joy and praise, and wherever it is received in its power enlarges the heart in joy and praise; and this is that land flowing with milk and honey which *the valley of Achor* opens a door of hope to. *We rejoice in tribulation.*

II. That, though they had been much addicted to the worship of Baal, they should now be perfectly weaned from it, should relinquish and abandon all appearances of idolatry and approaches towards it, and cleave to God only, and worship him as he appoints, v. 16, 17. Note, The surest pledge and token of God's favour to any people is his effectual parting between them and their beloved sins. The worship of Baal was the sin that did most easily beset the people of Israel; it was their own iniquity, the sin that had dominion over them; but now that idolatry shall be quite abolished, and there shall not be the least remains of it among them.

1. The idols of Baal shall not be mentioned, not any of the Baals that *in the days of Baalim* had made so great a noise with, *O Baal! hear us; O Baal! hear us.* The very *names of Baalim* shall be *taken out of their mouths*; they shall be so disused that they shall be quite forgotten, as if their names had never been known in Israel; they shall be so detested that people will not bear to mention them themselves, nor to hear others mention them, so that posterity shall scarcely know that ever there were such things. They shall be so ashamed of their former love to Baal that they shall do all they can to blot out the remembrance of it. They shall tie themselves up to the strictest literal meaning of that law against idolatry (^{<123B>}Exodus 23:13), *Make no mention of the names of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth*, as David, ^{<90B>}Psalms 16:4. Thus the apostle expresses the abhorrence we ought to have of all fleshly lusts: *Let them not be once named among you*, ^{<48B>}Ephesians 5:3. But how can such a change of the Ethiopian's skin be wrought? It is answered, The power of God can do it, and will. *I will take away the names of Baalim*; as ^{<31D>}Zechariah 13:2, *I will cut off the names of the idols.* Note, God's grace in the heart will change the language by making that iniquity to be loathed which was beloved. ^{<30D>}Zephaniah 3:9, *I will turn to the people a pure language.* One of the rabbins says, This promise relates to the Gentiles, by the gospel of Christ, from the idolatries which they had been wedded to, ^{<10D>}1 Thessalonians 1:9.

2. The very word Baal shall be laid aside, even in its innocent signification. God says, *Thou shalt call me Ishi, and call me no more Baali*; both signify *my husband*, and both had been made use of concerning God. ^{280B}Isaiah 54:5, *Thy Maker is thy husband, thy Baal* (so the word is), thy owner, patron, and protector. It is probable that many good people had, accordingly, made use of the word *Baali* in worshipping the God of Israel; when their wicked neighbours bowed the knee to Baal they gloried in this, that God was their Baal. “But,” says God, “you shall call me so no more, because I will have the very names of Baalim taken away.” Note, That which is very innocent in itself should, when it has been abused to idolatry, be abolished, and the very use of it taken away, that nothing may be done to keep idols in remembrance, much less to keep them in reputation. When calling God *Ishi* will do as well, and signify as much, as *Baali*, let that word be chosen rather, lest, by calling him *Baali*, others should be put in mind of their *quondam* Baals. Some think that there is another reason intimated why God would be called *Ishi* and not *Baali*; they both signify *my husband*, but *Ishi* is a compellation of love, and sweetness, and familiarity, *Baali* of reverence and subjection. *Ishi* is *vir meus* — *my man*; *Baali* is *dominus meus* — *my lord*. In gospel-times God has so revealed himself to us as to encourage us to come boldly to the throne of his grace, and to use a holy humble freedom there; we ought to call God our Master, for so he is, but we are more taught to call him our Father. *Ishi* is *a man the Lord* (^{000C}Genesis 4:1), and intimates that in gospel-times the church's husband shall be *the man Christ Jesus*, made like unto his brethren, and therefore they shall call him *Ishi*, not *Baali*.

III. That though they had been in continual troubles, as if the whole creation had been at war with them, now they shall enjoy perfect peace and tranquillity, as if they were in a league of friendship with the whole creation (v. 18): *In that day*, when they have forsaken their idols, and put themselves under the divine protection, *I will make a covenant for them*.

1. They shall be protected from evil; nothing shall hurt them, nor do them any mischief. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat amnia* — *When God is at peace with us he makes every creature to be so too*. The inferior creatures shall do them no harm, as they had done when the *beasts of the field* ate up their vineyards (v. 12) and when the *noisome beasts* were one of God's *sore judgments*, ^{344B}Ezekiel 14:15. The *fowl* and the *creeping things* are taken into this covenant; for they also, when God makes use of them as the instruments of his justice, may be come very hurtful, but they shall be no

more so; nay, by virtue of this covenant, they shall be made serviceable to them and brought into their interests. Note, God has the command of the inferior creatures, and brings them into what covenant he pleases; he can make *the beasts of the field* to honour him (so he has promised, ^{<386D>}Isaiah 43:20) and to contribute to his people's comfort. And, if the inferior creatures are thus laid under an engagement to serve us, it is our part of the covenant not to abuse them, but to serve God with them. Some think that this had its accomplishment in the miraculous power Christ gave his disciples to *take up serpents*, ^{<4167>}Mark 16:17, 18. It agrees with the promises made particularly to Israel, in their return out of captivity (^{<386E>}Ezekiel 34:25, *I will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land*), and the more general ones to all the saints. ^{<386F>}Job 5:22, 23, *The beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee*; and ^{<4913>}Psalms 91:13, *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder*. But this is not all; men are more in danger from one another than from the brute beast, and therefore it is further promised that God will *make wars to cease*, will disarm the enemy: *I will break the bow, and sword, and battle*. He can do it when he pleases (^{<3449>}Psalms 44:9), and will do it for those whose *ways please him*, for he *makes even their enemies to be at peace with them*, ^{<3167>}Proverbs 16:7. This agrees with the promise that in gospel-times *swords shall be beaten into plough-shares*, ^{<3114>}Isaiah 2:4.

2. They shall be quiet from the fear of evil. God will not only keep them safe, but *make them to lie down safely*, as those that know themselves to be under the protection of Heaven, and therefore are not afraid of the powers of hell.

IV. That, though God had given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms, yet, upon their repentance, he would again take them into covenant with himself, into a marriage-covenant, v. 19, 20. God's making a covenant for them with the inferior creatures was a great favour; but it was nothing to this, that he took them into covenant with himself and engaged himself to do them good. Observe,

1. The nature of this covenant; it is a *marriage-covenant*, founded in choice and love, and founding the nearest relation: *I will betroth thee unto me*; and again, and a third time, *I will betroth thee*. Note, All that are sincerely devoted to God are betrothed to him; God gives them the most sacred and inviolable security imaginable that he will love them, protect them, and provide for them, that he will do the part of a husband to them,

and that he will incline their hearts to join themselves to him and will graciously accept of them in so doing. Believing souls are espoused to Christ, ¹2 Corinthians 11:2. The gospel-church is *the bride, the Lamb's wife*; and they would never come into that relation to him if he did not by the power of his grace betroth them to himself. The separation begins on our side; we alienate ourselves from God. The coalition begins on his side; he betroths us to himself.

2. The duration of this covenant: *“I will betroth thee for ever. The covenant itself shall be inviolable; God will not break it on his part, and you shall not on yours; and the blessings of it shall be everlasting.”* One of the Jewish rabbins says, This is a promise that *she shall attain to the life of the world to come, which is absolute eternity or perpetuity.*

3. The manner in which this covenant shall be made.

(1.) *In righteousness and judgment*, that is, God will deal sincerely and uprightly in covenant with them; they have broken covenant, and God is righteous. “But,” says God, “I will renew the covenant *in righteousness.*” The matter shall be so ordered that God may receive even these backsliding children into his family again, without any reflection upon his justice, nay, his justice being satisfied by the Mediator of this covenant very much to the honour of it. But what reason can there be why God should take a people into covenant with him that had so often dealt treacherously? Will it not reflect upon his wisdom? “No,” says God; “I will do it *in judgment*, not rashly, but upon due consideration; let me alone to give a reason for it and to justify my own conduct.”

(2.) *In lovingkindness and in mercies.* God will deal tenderly and graciously in covenanting with them; and will be not only as good as his word, but better; and, as he will be just in keeping covenant with them, so he will be merciful in keeping them in the covenant. They are subject to many infirmities, and, if he be extreme to mark what they do amiss, they will soon lose the benefit of the covenant. He therefore promises that it shall be a covenant of grace, made in a compassionate consideration of their infirmities, so that every transgression in the covenant shall not throw them out of covenant; he will *gather with everlasting lovingkindness.*

(3.) *In faithfulness.* Every article of the covenant shall be punctually performed. *Faithful is he that has called them, who also will do it; he cannot deny himself.*

4. The means by which they shall be kept tight and faithful to the covenant on their part: *Thou shalt know the Lord*. This is not only a promise that God will reveal himself to them more fully and clearly than ever, but that he will give them *a heart to know him*; they shall know more of him, and shall know him in another manner than ever yet. The ground of their apostasy was their not knowing God to be their benefactor (v. 8); therefore, to prevent the like, they shall all be *taught of God* to know him. Note, God keeps up his interest in men's souls by giving them a good understanding and a right knowledge of things, ^{<881>}Hebrews 8:11.

V. That, though the heavens had been to them as brass, and the earth as iron, now the heavens shall yield their dews, and by that means the earth its fruits, v. 21, 22. God having betrothed the gospel-church and in it all believers to himself, how shall he not with himself and with his Son freely *give them all things*, all things pertaining both to life and godliness, all things they need or can desire? *All is theirs*, for they are *Christ's*, betrothed to him; and with the righteousness of the kingdom of God, which they *seek first*, all *other things* shall be *added unto them*. And yet this promise of *corn and wine* is to be taken also in a spiritual sense (so the learned Dr. Pocock thinks): it is an effusion of those blessings and graces which relate to the soul that is here promised under the metaphor of temporal blessings, the dew of heaven, as well as the fatness of the earth, and that put first, as in the blessing of Jacob, ^{<178>}Genesis 27:28. God had threatened (v. 9) that he would *take away the corn and the wine*; but now he promises to restore them, and that in the common course and order of nature. While they lay under the judgment of famine they called to the earth for *corn and wine* for the support of themselves and their families. Very gladly would the earth have supplied them, but she cannot give unless she receive, cannot produce *corn and wine* unless she be *enriched with the river of God* (^{<889>}Psalm 65:9); and therefore she calls to the heavens for rain, the former and latter rain in their season, grapes for it, and by her melancholy aspect when rain is denied pleads for it. "But," say the heavens, "we have no rain to give unless he who has the key of the clouds unlock them, and open these bottles; so that, *if the Lord do not help you*, we cannot." But, when God takes them into covenant with himself, then the wheel of nature shall be set a-going again in favour of them, and the streams of mercy shall flow in the usual channel: Then *I will hear, saith the Lord; I will receive your prayers* (so the Chaldee interprets the first *hearing*); God will graciously take notice of their addresses to him. And then *I will hear the heavens; I*

will *answer* them (so it may be read); and then they shall *hear and answer the earth*, and pour down seasonable rain upon it; and then the *earth* shall *hear the corn and vines*, and supply them with moisture, and *they shall hear Jezreel*, and be nourishment and refreshment for those that inhabit Jezreel. See here the coherence of second causes with one another, as links in a chain, and the necessary dependence they all have upon God, the first Cause. Note, We must expect all our comforts from God in the usual method and by the appointed means; and, when we are at any time disappointed in them, we must look up to God, *above the hills and the mountains*, ¹⁰¹Psalm 121:1, 2. See how ready the creatures are to serve the people of God, how desirous of the honour: the corn cries to the earth, the earth to the heavens, the heavens to God, and all that they may supply them. And see how ready God is to give relief: *I will hear*, saith the Lord, *yea, I will hear*. And, if God will hear the cry of the heavens for his people, much more will he hear the intercession of his Son for them, who is made *higher than the heavens*. See what a peculiar delight those that are in covenant with God may take in their creature-comforts, as seeing them all come to them from the hand of God; they can trace up all the streams to the fountain, and taste covenant-love in common mercies, which makes them doubly sweet.

VI. That whereas they were now dispersed, not only, as Simeon and Levi, divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel, but divided and scattered all the world over, God will turn this curse, as he did that, into a blessing: “I will not only water the earth for her, but will *sow her unto me in the earth*; her dispersion shall be not like that of the chaff in the floor, which *the wind drives away*, but like that of the seed in the field, in order to its greater increase; wherever they are scattered they shall *take root downward and bear fruit upward*. *The good seed are the children of the kingdom*. *I will sow her unto me*.” This alludes to the name of Jezreel, which signifies *sown of God, or for God*; as she was scattered of him (which is one signification of the words) so she shall be sown of him; and to what he sows he will give the increase. When in all parts of the world Christianity got footing, and every where there were professors of it, then this promise was fulfilled, *I will sow her unto me in the earth*. Note, The greatest blessing of this earth is that God has a church in it, and from that arises all the tribute of glory which he has out of it; it is what he has sown to himself, and what he will therefore secure to himself.

VII. That, whereas they had been *Lo-ammi* — *not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah* — *not finding mercy* with God, now they shall be restored to his favour and taken again into covenant with him (v. 23): They *had not obtained mercy*, but seemed to be abandoned; they were *not my people*, not distinguished, not dealt with, as my people, but left to lie in common with the nations. This was the case with the rejected Jews; and the same, or more deplorable, was that of the Gentile world (to whom the apostle applies this, ~~ROM~~Romans 9:24, 25), that had *no hope*, and was *without God in the world*; but when great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were, upon their believing in Christ, incorporated into a Christian church, then,

1. God had mercy on those who *had not obtained mercy*. Those found favour with God, and became the children of his love, who had been long out of favour and the children of his wrath, and, if infinite mercy had not interposed, would have been for ever so. Note, God's mercy must not be despaired of any where on this side hell.

2. He took those into a covenant-relation to himself who had been strangers and foreigners. He says to them, "*Thou art my people*, whom I will own and bless, protect and provide for;" and they shall say, "*Thou art my God*, whom I will serve and worship, and to whose honour I will be entirely and for ever devoted." Note,

(1.) The sum total of the happiness of believers is the mutual relation that is between them and God, that he is theirs and they are his; this is the crown of all the promises.

(2.) This relation is founded in free grace. We have not chosen him, but he has chosen us. He first says, They are my people, and makes them willing to be so in the day of his power, and then they avouch him to be theirs.

(3.) As we need desire no more to make us happy than to be the people of God, so we need desire no more to make us easy and cheerful than to have him to assure us that we are so, to say unto us, by his Spirit witnessing with ours, *Thou art my people*.

(4.) Those that have accepted the Lord for their God must avouch him to be so, must go to him in prayer and tell him so, *Thou art my God*, and must be ready to make profession before men.

(5.) It adds to the comfort of our covenant with God that in it there is a communion of saints, who, though they *are many*, yet here are one. It is

not, I will *say to them, You are my people*, but, *Thou art*; for he looks upon them as all *one in Christ*, and, as such in him, he speaks to them and covenants with them; and they also do not say, *Thou art our God*, for they look upon themselves as one body, and desire with one mind and one mouth to glorify him, and therefore say, *Thou art my God*. Or it intimates that such a covenant as God made of old with his people Israel, in general, now under the gospel he makes with particular believers, and says to *each of them*, even the meanest, with as much pleasure as he did of old to the *thousands of Israel, Thou art my people*, and invites and encourages each of them to say, *Thou art my God*, and to triumph therein, as Moses and all Israel did. ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 15:2, He is *my God*, and my *father's God*.