

CHAPTER 5

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the foregoing chapter, to discover the sin both of Israel and Judah, and to denounce the judgments of God against them.

I. They are called to hearken to the charge (v. 1, 8).

II. They are accused of many sins, which are here aggravated.

1. Persecution (v. 1, 2).
2. Spiritual whoredom (v. 3, 4).
3. Pride (v. 5).
4. Apostasy from God (v. 7).
5. The tyranny of the princes, and the tameness of the people in submitting to it (v. 10, 11).

III. They are threatened with God's displeasure for their sins; he knows all their wickedness (v. 3) and makes known his wrath against them for it (v. 9).

1. They shall fall in their iniquity (v. 5).
2. God will forsake them (v. 6).
3. Their portions shall be devoured (v. 7).
4. God will rebuke them, and pour out his wrath upon them (v. 9, 10).
5. They shall be oppressed (v. 11).
6. God will be as a moth to them in secret judgments (v. 12) and as a lion in public judgments (v. 14).

IV. They are blamed for the wrong course they took under their afflictions (v. 13).

V. It is intimated that they shall at length take a right course (v. 15). The more generally these things are expressed of so much the more general use they are for our learning, and particularly for our admonition.

CHARGES AGAINST ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Here,

I. All orders and degrees of men are cited to appear and answer to such things as shall be laid to their charge (v. 1): *Hear you this, O priests!* whether *in holy orders* (as those in Judah, and perhaps many in Israel too, for in the ten tribes there were divers cities of priests and Levites, who, it is probable, staid in their own lot after the revolt of the ten tribes and did so much of their office as might be done at a distance from the temple) or *pretending holy orders*, as the priests of the calves, who, some think, are included here. “Hearken, *you house of Israel*, the common people, and *give ear, O house of the king!*” let them all take notice, for they have all contributed to the national guilt, and they shall all share in the national judgments. Note, If neither the sanctity of the priesthood nor the dignity of the royal family will prevail to keep out sin, it cannot be expected that they should avail to keep out wrath. If the priests, and the house of the king, though they bear such noble characters, sin like others, their noble characters will not excuse them, but they must smart like others. Nor shall it be any plea for *the house of Israel* that they were misled by their priests and princes, but they shall receive their doom with them, and neither their meanness nor their multitude shall be their exemption.

II. Witness is produced against them, one instead of a thousand; it is God's omniscience (v. 3): *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me.* They have *not known the Lord* (v. 4), but the Lord has known them, knows their true character however disguised, knows their secret wickedness however concealed. Note, Men's rejecting the knowledge of God will not secure them from his knowledge of them; and when he contends with them he will prove their sins upon them by his own knowledge, so that it will be in vain to plead *Not guilty*.

III. Very bad things are laid to their charge.

1. They had been very ingenious and very industrious to draw people either into sin or into trouble: You have been *a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor* (v. 1), that is, such snares and nets as the huntsmen used to lay upon those mountains in pursuit of their game. When the

worship of the calves was set up in Israel the patrons of that idolatry, and sticklers for it, contrived by all possible arts and wiles to draw men into it and reconcile those to it that at first had a dread of it. Note, Those that allure and entice men to sin, however they may pretend friendship and good-will, are to be looked upon as *snares and nets* to them, and *their hands as bands*, ²⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 7:26. But to those whom they could not seduce into sin they were as a net and a snare to bring them into trouble. Some think it was their practice to set spies in the road, and particularly upon the mountains of Mizpah and Tabor, at the times of the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, to watch if any of their people who were piously affected went thither, and to inform against them, that they might be prosecuted for it, thus doing the devil's work, who disquiets those whom he cannot debauch.

2. They had been both very crafty and very cruel in carrying on their designs (v. 2): *The revolters are profound to make slaughter*. Note, Those who have themselves apostatized from the truths of God are often the most subtle and barbarous persecutors of those who still adhere to them. Nothing will serve them but to *make slaughter* (it is the blood of the saints that they thirst after): and with the serpent's sting they have his head; they are *profound* to do it. O the depth of *the depths of Satan*, of the wickedness of his agents, of those that have *deeply revolted!* ²³¹⁶Isaiah 31:6. Now that which aggravated this was the many reproofs and warnings that had been given them: *Though I have been a rebuker of them all*. The prophet had been so, a reprover by office. He had many a time told them of the evil of their ways and doings, had dealt plainly *with them all*, and had not spared either the priests or the house of the king. God himself had been *a rebuker of them all* by their own consciences and by his providences. Note, Sins against reproof are doubly sinful, ²⁹¹Proverbs 29:1.

3. They had *committed whoredom*, had defiled their own bodies with fleshly lusts, had defiled their own souls with the worship of idols, v. 3. This God was a witness to, though secretly committed and artfully palliated. Nay, the piercing eye of God saw *the spirit of whoredom* that was *in the midst of them*, their secret inclination and disposition to those sins, the love they had to their sins, and the dominion their sins had over them, how much they were under the power of a *spirit of whoredom*, that *root of bitterness* which bore all this gall and wormwood, that corrupt and poisoned fountain.

4. They had no disposition at all to come into acquaintance and communion with God. The *spirit of whoredoms*, having *caused them to err* from him, keeps them wandering endlessly, v. 4.

(1.) They *have not known the Lord*, nor desire to know him, but have rather declined, nay dreaded, the knowledge of him, for that would disturb them in their sinful ways.

(2.) Therefore *they will not frame their doings to turn to their God*, by which it appeared that they did not know him aright. This intimates their obstinate persistence in their apostasy from God; they would not *turn to God*, though he was *their God*, theirs in covenant, by whose name they had been called, and whom they were bound to *serve*. They would not return to the worship of him, from which they had turned aside. Nay, *they would not frame their doings to turn to God*. They would not *consider their ways*, nor dispose themselves into a serious temper, nor apply their minds to think of those things that would bring them to God. It is true we cannot by our own power, without the special grace of God, turn to him; but we may by the due improvement of our faculties, and the common aids of his Spirit, *frame our doings to turn to him*. Those that will not do this, that *prepare not their hearts to seek the Lord* (~~4124~~ 2 Chronicles 12:14), owe it to themselves that they are not turned; they die because they will die; and to those that will do this further grace shall not be wanting.

(5.) They were guilty of notorious arrogance, and insolence in sin (v. 5): *The pride of Israel doth testify to his face*, doth witness against him that he is a rebel to God and his government. The *spirit of whoredoms* which was *in the midst of them* showed itself in the gaiety and gaudiness of their worship, as a harlot is known by her attire, ~~2100~~ Proverbs 7:10. The wantonness of her dress testifies to her face that she is not a modest woman. Or their pride in confronting the prophets God sent them and the message they brought (~~2480~~ Jeremiah 43:2), or a haughty scornful conduct towards their brethren and those that were under them, *witnessed against* them that they were not God's people and justified God in all the humbling judgments he brought upon them. His pride testifies *in his face*; so some read it, agreeing with ~~2189~~ Isaiah 3:9, *The show of their countenance doth witness against them*. They have that *proud look* which *the Lord hates*.

(6.) They departed from God to idols, and bred up their children in idolatry (v. 7): *They have dealt treacherously against the Lord*, as a wife, who, in contempt of the marriage covenant, forsakes her husband, and lives in

adultery with another. Thus those who are guilty of spiritual idolatry, whose god is their money, whose god is their belly, *deal treacherously against the Lord*; they violate their engagements to him and frustrate his expectations from them. Note, Wilful sinners are treacherous dealers. *They have begotten strange children*, that is, their children which they have begotten are estranged from God, and trained up in a false way of worship; they are a spurious brood, as *children of fornication* (~~John~~ John 8:41), whom God will disown. Note, Those deal treacherously with God indeed who not only turn from following him themselves but train up their children in wicked ways.

IV. Very sad things are made to be their doom. In general (v. 1), “*Judgment is towards you*. God is coming forth to contend with you, and to testify his displeasure against you for your sins.” It is time to hearken when judgment is towards us. In particular,

1. They shall *fall in their iniquity*. This follows upon their *pride testifying to their face* (v. 5) *Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity*. Note, Pride will have a fall; it is the certain presage and forerunner of it. Those that exalt themselves shall be abased. The face in which pride testifies shall be filled with confusion. They shall not only fall, but fall in their iniquity, the saddest fall of any. Their pride kept them from repenting of their iniquity, and therefore they shall fall in it. Note, Those that are not humbled for their sins are likely to perish for ever in their sins. it is added, *Judah also shall fall with them* in her iniquity. As the ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria, for their idolatry, so the two tribes, in process of time, were carried into Babylon for following their bad example; but the former fell and were utterly cast down, the latter fell and were raised up again. Judah had the temple and priesthood, and yet these shall not secure them, but, if they sin with Israel and Ephraim, with them they shall fall.

2. They shall fall short of God's favour when they profess to seek it (v. 6): *They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord*, but in vain; *they shall not find him*. This seems to be spoken principally of Judah, when they fell into their iniquity, and when they fell in their iniquity.

(1.) When they fell into their iniquity they *sought the Lord*; but they did not *seek him only*, and therefore he was not *found of them*. When they worshipped strange gods, yet they kept up the show and shadow of the

worship of the true God; they went as usual, at the solemn feasts, *with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord*; but their hearts were not *upright with him*, because they were not *entire for him*, and therefore he would not accept them; for *then only shall we find him when we seek him with our whole heart*, not divided between God and Baal, ^{<348>}Ezekiel 14:3.

(2.) When they fell in their iniquity, or found themselves falling by it, they *sought the Lord*; but they did not seek him *early*, and therefore he will not be found of them. They shall see ruin coming upon them, and shall then, in their distress, flee to God, and think to make him their friend with burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but it will be too late then to turn away his wrath when *the decree has gone forth*. Even Josiah's reformation did not prevail to *turn away the wrath of God*, ^{<1235>}2 Kings 23:25, 26. Those that go *with their flocks and their herds* only to seek the Lord, and not with their hearts and souls, cannot expect to find him, for his favour is not to be purchased with *thousands of rams*. Nor shall those speed who do not seek the Lord *while he may be found*, for there is a time when he will not be found. They shall not find him, for he has withdrawn himself; he will not be enquired of by them, but will turn a deaf ear to their sacrifices. See how much it is our concern to seek God early, now while the accepted time is, and the day of salvation.

3. They and their portions shall all be swallowed up. They have *dealt treacherously against the Lord*, and have thought to strengthen themselves in it by their alliances with strange children; but *now shall a month devour them with their portions*, that is, their estates and inheritances, all those things which they have taken, and taken up with, as their portion; or by their *portions* is meant their idols, whom they chose for their portion instead of God. Note, Those that make an idol of the world, by taking it for their portion, will themselves perish with it. A *month* shall *devour* them, or eat them up — a certain time prefixed, and a short time. When God's judgments begin with them they shall soon make an end; one month will do their business. How much may a body be weakened by one month's sickness, or a kingdom wasted by one month's war! *Three shepherds* (says God) *I cut off in one month*, ^{<3118>}Zechariah 11:8. Note, The judgments of God sometimes make quick work with a sinful people. A month devours more, and more portions, than many years can repair.

HOSEA 5:8-15

THREATENINGS OF JUDGMENT

Here is,

I. A loud alarm sounded, giving notice of judgments coming (v. 8): *Blow you the cornet in Gibeah and in Ramah*, two cities near together in the confines of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, Gibeah a frontier-town of the kingdom of Judah, Ramah of Israel; so that the warning is hereby sent into both kingdoms. “*Cry aloud at Beth-aven*, or Bethel, which place seems to be already seized upon by the enemy, and therefore the trumpet is not sounded there, but you hear the outcries of those that shout for mastery, mixed with theirs that are overcome.” Let them *cry aloud*, “*After thee, O Benjamin!* comes the enemy. The tribe of Ephraim is already vanquished, and the enemy will be upon thy back, O Benjamin! in a little time; thy turn comes next. The cup of trembling shall go round.” The prophet had described God's controversy with them as a trial at law (~~301B~~ Hosea 4:1); here he describes it as a trial by battle; and here also *when he judges he will overcome*. Let all therefore prepare to meet their God. He had before spoken of the judgments as certain; here he speaks of them as near; and, when they are apprehended as just at the door, they are very startling and awakening. The blowing of this cornet is explained, v. 9. *Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be*, that which is *true* or *certain*, so the word is. Note, The destruction of impenitent sinners is a thing which shall surely be; it is not mere talk, to frighten them, but it is an irrevocable sentence. And it is a mercy to us that it is *made known* to us, that we have timely warning given us of it, that we may *flee from the wrath to come*. It is the privilege of the tribes of Israel that, as they are told their duty, so they are told their danger, by the oracles of God committed to them.

II. The ground of God's controversy with them.

1. He has a quarrel with *the princes of Judah*, because they were daring leaders in sin, v. 10. They are *like those that remove the bound*, or the ancient land-marks. God has given them his law, to be a fence about his own property; but they have sacrilegiously broken through it, and set it aside; they have encroached even upon God's rights, have trampled upon

the distinctions between good and evil, and the most sacred obligations of reason and equity, thinking, because they were princes, that they might do any thing, *Quicquid libet, licet* — Their will was a law. Or it may be understood of their invading the liberty and property of the subject for the advancing of the prerogative, which was like removing the ancient landmarks. Some have observed that the princes of Judah were more absolute, and assumed a more arbitrary power, than the princes of Israel did; now, for this, God has a controversy with them: *I will pour out my wrath upon them like water*, in great abundance, like the waters of the flood, which were poured upon the *giants* of the *old world*, for the violence which the earth was filled with through them, ^{408B}Genesis 6:13. Note, There are *bounds* which even princes themselves must not remove, bounds both of religion and justice, which they are limited by, and, if they break through them, they must know that there is a God above them that will call them to account for it.

2. He has a quarrel with the *people of Ephraim*, because they were sneaking followers in sin (v. 11): *He willingly walked after the commandment*, that is, the commandment of Jeroboam and the succeeding kings of Israel, who obliged all their subjects by a law to worship the calves at Dan and Bethel, and never to go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was *the commandment*; it was the law of the land, and backed with reasons of state; and the people not only walked after it in a blind implicit obedience to authority, but they willingly walked after it, from a secret antipathy they had to the worship of idols. Note, An easy compliance with the commandments of men that thwart the commandments of God ripens a people for ruin as much as any thing. And the punishment of the sequacious disobedience (if I may so call it) answers to the sin; for it is for this that *Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment*, has all his civil rights and liberties broken in upon and trodden down; and,

(1.) It is just with God that it should be so, that those who betray God's property should lose their own, that those who subject their consciences to an infallible judge, and an arbitrary power, should have enough of both.

(2.) There is a natural tendency in the thing itself towards it. *Those that willingly walk after the commandment*, even when it walks contrary to the command of God, will find the commandment an encroaching thing, and that the more power is given it the more it will claim. Note, Nothing gives greater advantage to a mastiff-like tyranny, that is fierce and furious, than

a spaniel-like submission, that is fawning and flattering. Thus is *Ephraim oppressed and broken in judgment*, that is, he is wronged under a face and colour of right. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment upon any people to be oppressed under pretence of having justice done them. This explains the threatening v. 9, *Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke*. Note, Daring sinners must expect that a day of rebuke will come, and such a day of rebuke as will make them desolate, will deprive them of the comfort of all they have and all they hope for.

III. The different methods that God would take both with Judah and Ephraim, sometimes one method and sometimes the other, and sometimes both together, or rather by which, first the one and then the other, he would advance towards their complete ruin.

1. He would begin with less judgments, which should sometimes work silently and insensibly (v. 12): *I will be* (that is, my providences shall be) *unto Ephraim as a moth*; nay (as it might better be supplied), they are *unto Ephraim as a moth*, for it is such a *sickness* as Ephraim now sees, v. 13. Note, The judgments of God are sometimes to a sinful people *as a moth*, and *as rottenness*, or as a *worm*. The former signifies the little animals that breed in clothes, the latter those that breed in wood; as these consume the clothes and the wood, so shall the judgments of God consume them.

(1.) Silently, so as not to make any noise in the world, nay, so as they themselves shall not be sensible of it; they shall think themselves safe and thriving, but, when they come to look more narrowly into their state, shall find themselves wasting and decaying.

(2.) Slowly, and with long delays and intervals, that he may give them *space to repent*. Many a nation, as well as many a person, in the prime of its time, dies of a consumption.

(3.) Gradually. God comes upon sinners with less judgments, so to prevent greater, if they will be wise and take warning; he comes upon them step by step, to show he is not willing that they should perish.

(4.) The moth breeds in the clothes, and the worm or rottenness in the wood; thus sinners are consumed by a fire of their own kindling.

2. When it appeared that those had not done their work he would come upon them with greater (v. 14): *I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and to the house of Judah as a young lion*, though Judah is himself, in Jacob's

blessing, a *lion's whelp*. Lest any should think his power weakened, because he was said to be *as a moth* to them, he says that he will now be *as a lion* to them, not only to frighten them with his roaring, but to pull them to pieces. Note, If less judgments prevail not to do their work, it may be expected that God will send greater. *Christ* is sometimes a lion of the tribe of Judah, here he is a lion against that tribe. See what God will do to a people that are secure in sin: *Even I will tear*. He seems to glory in it, as his prerogative, to be able to *destroy*, as the *alone lawgiver*, ^{<3042>}James 4:12. "*I, even I, will take the work into my own hands; I say it that will do it.*" There is a more immediate work of God in some judgments than in others. *I will tear, and go away*. He will go away,

(1.) As not fearing them; he will go away in state, and with a majestic face, as the lion from his prey.

(2.) As not helping them. If God tear by afflicting providences, and yet by his graces and comforts stays with us, it is well enough; but our condition is sad indeed if he *tear and go away*, if, when he deprives us of our creature comforts, he does himself depart from us. When he goes away he will take away all that is valuable and dear, for, when God goes, all good goes along with him. He will take away, *and none shall rescue him*, as the prey cannot be rescued from the lion, ^{<3088>}Micah 5:8. Note, None can be delivered out of the hands of God's justice but those that are delivered into the hands of his grace. It is in vain for a man to strive with his Maker.

IV. The different effects of those different methods.

1. When God contended with them by less judgments they neglected him, and sought to creatures for relief, but sought in vain, v. 13. When God was to them *as a moth*, and *as rottenness*, they perceived *their sickness and their wound*; after a while they found themselves going down the hill, and that they were behind-hand in their affairs, their estate was sensibly decaying, and then they sent *to the Assyrian*, to come in to their assistance, made their court to king Jareb, which some think, was one of the names of Pul, or Tiglathpileser, kings of Assyria, to whom both Israel and Judah applied for relief in their distress, hoping by an alliance with them to repair and re-establish their declining interests. Note, Carnal hearts, in time of trouble, see their sickness and see their wound, but do not see the sin that is the cause of it, nor will be brought to acknowledge that, no, nor to acknowledge the hand of God, his *mighty hand*, much less his righteous

hand, in their trouble; and therefore, instead of going the next way to the Creator, who could relieve them, they take a great deal of pains to go about to creatures, who can do them no service. Those who repent not that they have offended God by their sins are loth to be beholden to him in their afflictions, but would rather seek relief any where than with him. And what is the consequence? *Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.* Note, Those who neglect God, and seek to creatures for help, will certainly be disappointed; those who depend upon them for support will find them, not *foundations*, but *broken reeds*; those who depend upon them for supply will find them, not *fountains*, but *broken cisterns*; those who depend upon them for comfort and a cure will find them *miserable comforters*, and *physicians of no value*. The kings of Assyria, whom Judah and Israel sought unto, *distressed them and helped them not*, ^{<4336>}2 Chronicles 28:16, 28. Some make king *Jareb* to signify the *great, potent, or magnificent king*, for they built much upon his power; others *the king that will plead, or should plead*, for they built much upon his wisdom and eloquence, and in his interesting himself in their affairs. They had sent him *a present* (^{<3016>}Hosea 10:6), a good fee, and, having so retained him of counsel for them, they doubted not of his fidelity to them; but he deceived them, as an arm of flesh does those that trust in it, ^{<2475>}Jeremiah 17:5, 6.

2. When, to convince them of their folly, God brought greater judgments upon them, then they would at length be forced to apply to him, v. 15. When he has *torn* as a *lion*,

(1.) He will leave them: *I will go and return to my place*, to heaven, or to the mercy-seat, the throne of grace, which is his glory. When God punishes sinners he *comes out of his place* (^{<2371>}Isaiah 26:21); but, when he designs them favour, he *returns to his place*, where he *waits to be gracious*, upon their submission. Or he will *return to his place* when he has corrected them, as not regarding them, hiding his face from them, and not taking notice of their troubles or prayers; and this for their further humiliation, till they are qualified in some measure for the returns of his favour.

(2.) He will at length work upon them, and bring them home to himself, by their afflictions, which is the thing he waits for; and then he will no longer withdraw from them. Two things are here mentioned as instances of their return: —

[1.] Their penitent confession of sin: *Till they acknowledge their offence;* marg. *Till they be guilty*, that is, till they be sensible of their guilt, and be brought to own it, and humble themselves before God for it. Note, When men begin to complain more of their sins than of their afflictions then there begins to be some hope of them; and this is that which God requires of us, when we are under his correcting hand, that we own ourselves in a fault and justly corrected.

[2.] Their humble petition for the favour of God: Till they *seek my face*, which, it may be expected, they will do when they are brought to the last extremity, and they have tried other helpers in vain. *In their affliction they will seek me early*, that is, diligently and earnestly, and with great importunity; and if they seek him thus, and be sincere in it, though it might be called seeking him late, because it was long ere they were brought to it, yet it is not too late, nay, he is pleased to call it seeking him early, so willing is he to make the best of true penitents in their return to him. Note, When we are under the convictions of sin, and the corrections of the rod, our business is to seek God's face; we must desire the knowledge of him, and an acquaintance with him, that he may manifest himself to us, and for us, in token of his being at peace with us. And it may reasonably be expected that affliction will bring those to God that had long gone astray from him, and kept at a distance. *Therefore* God for a time turns away from us, that he may turn us to himself, and then return to us. *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.*