

CHAPTER 2

It is probable that this chapter was Jeremiah's first sermon after his ordination; and a most lively pathetic sermon it is as any we have is all the books of the prophets. Let him not say, "I cannot speak, for I am a child;" for, God having touched his mouth and put his words into it, none can speak better. The scope of the chapter is to show God's people their transgressions, even the house of Jacob their sins; it is all by way of reproof and conviction, that they might be brought to repent of their sins and so prevent the ruin that was coming upon them. The charge drawn up against them is very high, the aggravations are black, the arguments used for their conviction very close and pressing, and the expostulations very pungent and affecting. The sin which they are most particularly charged with here is idolatry, forsaking the true God, their own God, for other false gods. Now they are told,

- I.** That this was ungrateful to God, who had been so kind to them (v. 1-8).
- II.** That it was without precedent, that a nation should change their god (v. 9-13).
- III.** That hereby they had disparaged and ruined themselves (v. 14-19).
- IV.** That they had broken their covenants and degenerated from their good beginnings (v. 20, 21).
- V.** That their wickedness was too plain to be concealed and too bad to be excused (v. 22, 23, 35).
- VI.** That they persisted wilfully and obstinately in it, and were irreclaimable and indefatigable in their idolatries (v. 24, 25, 33, 36).
- VII.** That they shamed themselves by their idolatry and should shortly be made ashamed of it when they should find their idols unable to help them (v. 26-29, 37).
- VIII.** That they had not been convinced and reformed by the rebukes of Providence that had been under (v. 30).
- IX.** That they had put a great contempt upon God (v. 31, 32).

X. That with their idolatries they had mixed the most unnatural murders, shedding the blood of the poor innocents (v. 34). Those hearts were hard indeed that were untouched and unhumbled when their sins were thus set in order before them. O that by meditating on this chapter we might be brought to repent of our spiritual idolatries, giving that place in our souls to the world and the flesh which should have been reserved for God only!

~~311~~ JEREMIAH 2:1-8

JEREMIAH'S FIRST MESSAGE

Here is,

I. A command given to Jeremiah to go and carry a message from God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was charged in general (~~311~~ Jeremiah 1:17) to go and *speak to them*; here he is particularly charged to go and speak *this* to them. Note, It is good for ministers by faith and prayer to take out a fresh commission when they address themselves solemnly to any part of their work. Let a minister carefully compare what he has to deliver with the word of God, and see that it agrees with it, that he may be able to say, not only, *The Lord sent me*, but, He sent me to *speak this*. He must go from Anathoth, where he lived in a pleasant retirement, spending his time (it is likely) among a few friends and in the study of the law, and must make his appearance at Jerusalem, that noisy tumultuous city, and *cry in their ears*, as a man in earnest and that would be heard: “Cry aloud, that all may hear, and none may plead ignorance. Go close to them, and *cry in the ears* of those that have stopped their ears.”

II. The message he was commanded to deliver. He must upbraid them with their horrid ingratitude in forsaking a God who had been of old so kind to them, that this might either make them ashamed and bring them to repentance, or might justify God in turning his hand against them.

1. God here puts them in mind of the favours he had of old bestowed upon them, when they were first formed into a people (v. 2): “*I remember for thy sake*, and I would have thee to remember it, and improve the remembrance of it for thy good; I cannot forget *the kindness of thy youth and the love of thy espousals*.”

(1.) This may be understood of the kindness they had for God; it was not such indeed as they had any reason to boast of, or to plead with God for favour to be shown them (for many of them were very unkind and provoking, and, when they did return and enquire early after God, they did but flatter him), yet God is pleased to mention it, and plead it with them; for, though it was but little love that they showed him, he took it kindly. When *they believed the Lord and his servant Moses*, when they *sang God's praise at the Red Sea*, when at the foot of Mount Sinai they promised, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*, then was the *kindness of their youth and the love of their espousals*. When they seemed so forward for God he said, *Surely they are my people, and will be faithful to me, children that will not lie*. Note, Those that begin well and promise fair, but do not perform and persevere, will justly be upbraided with their hopeful and promising beginnings. God remembers the *kindness of our youth and the love of our espousals*, the zeal we then seemed to have for him and the affection wherewith we made our covenants with him, the buds and blossoms that never came to perfection; and it is good for us to remember them, that we may remember whence we have fallen, and return to our first love, ^{<66>}Revelation 2:4, 5; ^{<4015>}Galatians 4:15. In two things appeared the *kindness of their youth*: —

[1.] That they followed the direction of the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness; and though sometimes they spoke of returning into Egypt, or pushing forward into Canaan, yet they did neither, but for forty years together *went after God in the wilderness*, and trusted him to provide for them, though it was *a land that was not sown*. This God took kindly, and took notice of it to their praise long after, that, though much was amiss among them, yet they never forsook the guidance they were under. Thus, though Christ often chid his disciples, yet he commended them, at parting, for continuing with him, ^{<4228>}Luke 22:28. It must be the strong affection of the youth, and the espousals, that will carry us on to follow God in a wilderness, with an implicit faith and an entire resignation; and it is a pity that those who have so followed him should ever leave him.

[2.] That they entertained divine institutions, set up the tabernacle among them, and attended the service of it. *Israel was then holiness to the Lord*; they joined themselves to him in covenant as a peculiar people. Thus they began in the spirit, and God puts them in mind of it, that they might be ashamed of ending *in the flesh*.

(2.) Or it may be understood of God's kindness to them; of that he afterwards speaks largely. *When Israel was a child, then I loved him,* ^{<301>}Hosea 11:1. He then espoused that people to himself with all the affection with which a *young man marries a virgin* (^{<231>}Isaiah 62:5), for the time was *a time of love,* ^{<268>}Ezekiel 16:8.

[1.] God appropriated them to himself. Though they were a sinful people, yet, by virtue of the covenant made with them and the church set up among them, they were *holiness to the Lord*, dedicated to his honour and taken under his special tuition; they were the *first fruits of his increase*, the first constituted church he had in the world; they were the first-fruits, but the full harvest was to be gathered from among the Gentiles. The *first-fruits of the increase* were God's part of it, were offered to him, and he was honoured with them; so were the people of the Jews; what little tribute, rent, and homage, God had from the world, he had it chiefly from them; and it was their honour to be thus set apart for God. This honour have all the saints; they are the *first-fruits of his creatures,* ^{<301>}James 1:18.

[2.] Having espoused them, he espoused their cause, and became an *enemy to their enemies,* ^{<232>}Exodus 23:22. Being the *first-fruits of his increase, all that devoured him* (so it should be read) *did offend;* they *trespassed,* they contracted guilt, and evil befel them, as those were reckoned *offenders* that *devoured the first-fruits,* or any thing else that was *holy to the Lord,* that embezzled them, or converted them to their own use, ^{<855>}Leviticus 5:15. Whoever offered any injury to the people of God did so at their peril; their God was ready to avenge their quarrel, and said to the proudest of kings, *Touch not my anointed,* ^{<454>}Psalms 105:14, 15; ^{<274>}Exodus 17:14. He had in a special manner a controversy with those that attempted to debauch them and draw them off from being *holiness to the Lord;* witness his *quarrel with the Midianites about the matter of Peor,* ^{<257>}Numbers 25:17, 18.

[3.] He *brought them out of Egypt* with a high hand and great terror (^{<84>}Deuteronomy 4:34), and yet with a kind hand and great tenderness led them through a vast howling wilderness (v. 6), *a land of deserts and pits,* or of *graves, terram sepulchralem* — *a sepulchral land,* where there was ground, not to feed them, but to bury them, where there was no good to be expected, for it was a *land of drought,* but all manner of evil to be feared, for it was *the shadow of death.* In that darksome valley they walked forty years; but *God was with them; his rod,* in Moses's hand, *and his staff, comforted them,* and even there God *prepared a table for them* (^{<234>}Psalms

23:4, 5), gave them bread out of the clouds and drink out of the rocks. It was a land abandoned by all mankind, as yielding neither road nor rest. It was no thoroughfare, for *no man passed through it* — no settlement, for *no man dwelt there*. For God will teach his people to tread untrodden paths, to dwell alone, and to be singular. The difficulties of the journey are thus insisted on, to magnify the power and goodness of God in bringing them, through all, safely to their journey's end at last. All God's spiritual Israel must own their obligations to him for a safe conduct through the wilderness of this world, no less dangerous to the soul than that was to the body.

[4.] At length he settled them in Canaan (v. 7): *I brought you into a plentiful country*, which would be the more acceptable after they had been for so many years in *a land of drought*. They did *eat the fruit thereof* and the *goodness thereof*, and were allowed so to do. I brought you *into a land of Carmel* (so the word is); Carmel was a place of extraordinary fruitfulness, and Canaan was as one great fruitful field, ^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 8:7.

[5.] God gave them the means of knowledge and grace, and communion with him; this is implied, v. 8. They had priests that *handled the law*, read it, and expounded it to them; that was part of their business, ^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 33:8. They had pastors, to guide them and take care of their affairs, magistrates and judges; they had prophets to consult God for them and to make known his mind to them.

2. He upbraids them with their horrid ingratitude, and the ill returns they had made him for these favours; let them all come and answer to this charge (v. 4); it is exhibited in the name of God against *all the families of the house of Israel*, for they can none of them plead, *Not guilty*.

(1.) He challenges them to produce any instance of his being unjust and unkind to them. Though he had conferred favours upon them in some things, yet, if in other things he had dealt hardly with them, they would not have been altogether without excuse. He therefore puts it fairly to them to show cause for their deserting him (v. 5): "*What iniquity have your fathers found in me, or you either? Have you, upon trial, found God a hard master? Have his commands put any hardship upon you or obliged you to any thing unfit, unfair, or unbecoming you? Have his promises put any cheats upon you, or raised your expectations of things which you were afterwards disappointed of? You that have renounced your covenant with*

God, can you say that it was a hard bargain and that which you could not live upon? You that have forsaken the ordinances of God, can you say that it was because they were a wearisome service, or work that there was nothing to be got by? No; the disappointments you have met with were owing to yourselves, not to God. The yoke of his commandments if easy, and in the *keeping of them there is great reward.*” Note, Those that forsake God cannot say that he has ever given them any provocation to do so: for this we may safely appeal to the consciences of sinners; the slothful servant that offered such a plea as this had it overruled *out of his own mouth*, ^{<D12>}Luke 19:22. Though he afflicts us, we cannot say that there is iniquity in him; he does us no wrong. The ways of the Lord are undoubtedly equal; all the iniquity is in our ways.

(2.) He charges them with being very unjust and unkind to him notwithstanding.

[1.] They had quitted his service: “*They have gone from me*, nay, they have gone *far from me.*” They studied how to estrange themselves from God and their duty, and got as far as they could out of the reach of his commandments and their own convictions. Those that have deserted religion commonly set themselves at a greater distance from it, and in a greater opposition to it, than those that never knew it.

[2.] They had quitted it for the service of idols, which was so much the greater reproach to God and his service; they went from him, not to better themselves, but to cheat themselves: *They have walked after vanity*, that is, idolatry; for an idol is a vain thing; it is *nothing in the world*, ^{<A14>}1 Corinthians 8:4; ^{<D21>}Deuteronomy 32:21; ^{<A22>}Jeremiah 14:22. Idolatrous worships are vanities, ^{<A45>}Acts 14:15. Idolaters are vain, for those that make idols *are like unto them* (^{<B18>}Psalm 115:8), as much stocks and stones as the images they worship, and good for as little.

[3.] They had with idolatry introduced all manner of wickedness. When they entered into the good land which God gave them they defiled it (v. 7), by defiling themselves and disfitting themselves for the service of God. It was God's land; they were but tenants to him, sojourners in it, ^{<B23>}Leviticus 25:23. It was his heritage, for it was a holy land, Immanuel's land; but they *made it an abomination*, even to God himself, who was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel.

[4.] Having forsaken God, though they soon found that they had changed for the worse, yet they had no thoughts of returning to him again, nor took any steps towards it. Neither the people nor the priests made any enquiry after him, took any thought about their duty to him, nor expressed any desire to recover his favour. *First*, The *people* said not, *Where is the Lord?* v. 6. Though they were trained up in an observance of him as their God, and had been often told that he *brought them out of the land of Egypt*, to be a people peculiar to himself, yet they never asked after him nor desired the *knowledge of his ways*. *Secondly*, The *priests* said not, *Where is the Lord?* v. 8. Those whose office it was to attend immediately upon him were in no concern to acquaint themselves with him, or approve themselves to him. Those who should have instructed the people in the knowledge of God took no care to get the knowledge of him themselves. The scribes, who *handled the law*, did not know God nor his will, could not expound the scriptures at all, or not aright. The pastors, who should have kept the flock from transgressing, were themselves ringleaders in transgression: *They have transgressed against me*. The pretenders to prophecy prophesied by Baal, in his name, to his honour, being backed and supported by the wicked kings to confront the Lord's prophets. Baal's prophets joined with Baal's priests, and walked after the *things which do not profit*, that is, after the idols which can be no way helpful to their worshippers. See how the best characters are usurped, and the best offices liable to corruption; and wonder not at the sin and ruin of a people when the *blind are leaders of the blind*.

~~2419~~ JEREMIAH 2:9-13

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

The prophet, having shown their base ingratitude in forsaking God, here shows their unparalleled fickleness and folly (v. 9): *I will yet plead with you*. Note, Before God punishes sinners he pleads with them, to bring them to repentance. Note, further, When much has been said of the evil of sin, still there is more to be said; when one article of the charge is made good, there is another to be urged; when we have said a great deal, still *we have yet to speak on God's behalf*, ~~2419~~ Job 36:2. Those that deal with sinners, for their conviction, must urge a variety of arguments and follow their blow. God had before pleaded with their fathers, and asked why they

walked after vanity and became vain, v. 5. Now he pleads with those who persisted in that *vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers*, and *with their children's children*, that is, with all that in every age tread in their steps. Let those that forsake God know that he is willing to argue the case fairly with them, that he may be *justified when he speaks*. He pleads that with us which we should plead with ourselves.

I. He shows that they acted contrary to the usage of all nations. Their neighbours were more firm and faithful to their false gods than they were to the true God. They were ambitious of being *like the nations*, and yet in this they were unlike them. He challenges them to produce an instance of any nation that had *changed their gods* (v. 10, 11) or were apt to change them. Let them survey either the old records or the present state of the isles of Chittim, Greece, and the European islands, the countries that were more polite and learned, and of Kedar, that lay south-east (as the other north-west from them), which were more rude and barbarous; and they should not find an instance of a nation that had *changed their gods*, though they had never done them any kindness, nor could do, for *they were no gods*. Such a veneration had they for their gods, so good an opinion of them, and such a respect for the choice their fathers had made, that though they were gods of wood and stone they would not change them for gods of silver and gold, no, not for the living and true God. *Shall we praise them for this? We praise them not.* But it may well be urged, to the reproach of Israel, that they, who were the only people that had no cause to change their God, were yet the only people that had changed him. Note, Men are with difficulty brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, though ever so absurd and grossly false. The zeal and constancy of idolaters should shame Christians out of their coldness and inconstancy.

II. He shows that they acted contrary to the dictates of common sense, in that they not only changed (it may sometimes be our duty and wisdom to do so), but that they changed for the worse, and made a bad bargain for themselves.

1. They parted from a God who was their glory, who made them truly glorious and every way put honour upon them, one whom they might with a humble confidence glory in as theirs, who is himself a glorious God and the glory of those whose God he is; he was particularly the glory of his people Israel, for his glory had often appeared on their tabernacle.

2. They closed with gods that could do them no good, gods that *do not profit* their worshippers. Idolaters change God's glory into shame (^{<R12>}Romans 1:23) and so they do their own; in dishonouring him, they disgrace and disparage themselves, and are enemies to their own interest. Note, Whatever those turn to who forsake God, it will never do them any good; it will flatter them and please them, but it *cannot profit them*. Heaven itself is here called upon to stand amazed at the sin and folly of these apostates from God (v. 12, 13): *Be astonished, O you heavens! at this*. The earth is so universally corrupt that it will take no notice of it; but let the heavens and heavenly bodies be astonished at it. Let the sun blush to see such ingratitude and be afraid to shine upon such ungrateful wretches. Those that forsook God worshipped *the host of heaven*, the sun, moon, and stars; but these, instead of being pleased with the adorations that were paid to them, *were astonished and horribly afraid*; and would rather have been *very desolate, utterly exhausted* (as the word is) and deprived of their light, than that it should have given occasion to any to worship them. Some refer it to the *angels of heaven*; if they rejoice at the return of souls to God, we may suppose that they are astonished and horribly afraid at the revolt of souls from him. The meaning is that the conduct of this people towards God was,

(1.) Such as we may well be astonished and wonder at, that ever men, who pretend to reason, should do a thing so very absurd.

(2.) Such as we ought to have a holy indignation at as impious, and a high affront to our Maker, whose honour every good man is jealous for.

(3.) Such as we may tremble to think of the consequences of. What will be in the end hereof? Be horribly afraid to think of the wrath and curse which will be the portion of those who thus throw themselves out of God's grace and favour. Now what is it that is to be thought of with all this horror? It is this: "*My people*, whom I have taught and should have ruled, *have committed two* great evils, ingratitude and folly; they have acted contrary both to their duty and to their interest."

[1.] They have *affronted their God*, by turning their back upon him, as if he were not worthy their notice: "*They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters*, in whom they have an abundant and constant supply of all the comfort and relief they stand in need of, and have it freely." God is their *fountain of life*, ^{<R19>}Psalms 36:9. There is in him an all-sufficiency of grace and strength; all our springs are in him and our streams from him; to

forsake him is, in effect, to deny this. He has been to us a bountiful benefactor, a *fountain of living waters*, over-flowing, ever-flowing, in the gifts of his favour; to forsake him is to refuse to acknowledge his kindness and to withhold that tribute of love and praise which his kindness calls for.

[2.] They have cheated themselves, they forsook *their own mercies*, but it was for lying vanities. They took a great deal of pains to *hew themselves out cisterns*, to dig pits or pools in the earth or rock which they would carry water to, or which should receive the rain; but they proved *broken cisterns*, false at the bottom, so that they could *hold no water*. When they came to quench their thirst there they found nothing but mud and mire, and the filthy sediments of a standing lake. Such idols were to their worshippers, and such a change did those experience who turned from God to them. If we make an idol of any creature — wealth, or pleasure, or honour, — if we place our happiness in it, and promise ourselves the comfort and satisfaction in it which are to be had in God only, — if we make it our joy and love, our hope and confidence, we shall find it a cistern, which we take a great deal of pains to hew out and fill, and at the best it will hold but a little water, and that dead and flat, and soon corrupting and becoming nauseous. Nay, it is a broken cistern, that cracks and cleaves in hot weather, so that the water is lost when we have most need of it, ^{<8165>}Job 6:15. Let us therefore with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord only, for whither else *shall we go?* He has *the words of eternal life*.

^{<2114>}JEREMIAH 2:14-19

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

The prophet, further to evince the folly of their forsaking God, shows them what mischiefs they had already brought upon themselves by so doing; it had already cost them dear, for to this were owing all the calamities their country was now groaning under, which were but an earnest of more and greater if they repented not. See how they smarted for their folly.

I. Their neighbours, who were their professed enemies, prevailed against them, and this was owing to their sin.

1. They were enslaved and lost their liberty (v. 14): *Is Israel a servant?* No; *Israel is my son, my first-born*, ^{<112>}Exodus 4:22. They are children;

they are heirs. Nay, their extraction is noble; they are the seed of Abraham, God's friend, and of Jacob his chosen. *Is he a home-born slave?* No; he is not the *son of the bond-woman*, but of the free. They were designed for dominion, not for servitude. Every thing in their constitution carried about it the marks of freedom and honour. *Why then is he spoiled of his liberty?* Why is he used as a servant, as a *home-born slave?* Why does he *make himself a slave* to his lusts, to his idols, to that which does not profit? v.

11. What a thing is this, that such a birthright should be sold for a mess of pottage, such a crown profaned and laid in the dust! Why is he made a slave to the oppressor? God provided that a Hebrew servant should be free the seventh year, and that their slaves should be *of the heathen*, not of their brethren, ^{<R54>}Leviticus 25:44, 46. But, notwithstanding this, the princes made slaves of their subjects, and masters made slaves of their servants (ch. 34:11), and so made their country mean and miserable, which God had made happy and honourable. The neighbouring princes and powers broke in upon them, and made some of them slaves even in their own country, and perhaps sold others for slaves into foreign countries. And how came they thus to lose their liberties? For *their iniquities they sold themselves*, ^{<R10>}Isaiah 50:1. We may apply this spiritually. Is the soul of man a *servant*? *Is it a home-born slave?* No, it is not. Why then is it spoiled? It is because it has sold its own liberty and enslaved itself to divers lusts and passions, which is a lamentation, and should be for a lamentation.

2. They were impoverished and had lost their wealth. God brought them into a plentiful country (v. 7), but all their neighbours made a prey of it (v. 15): *Young lions roar aloud over him and yell; they are a continual terror to him.* Sometimes one potent enemy, and sometimes another, and sometimes many in confederacy, fall upon him, and triumph over him. They carry off the fruits of his land, and make that *waste*, and *burn his cities*, when first they have plundered them, so that they remain *without inhabitant*, either because there are no houses to dwell in or because those that should dwell in them are carried into captivity.

3. They were abused, and insulted over, and beaten by every body (v. 16): “*Even the children of Noph and Tahapanes, despicable people, not famed for military courage nor strength, have broken the crown of thy head, or fed upon it.* In all their struggles with thee they have been too hard for thee, and thou hast always come off with a broken head. The principal part of thy country, that which lay next Jerusalem, has been and is a prey to

them.” How calamitous the condition of Judah had been of late in the reign of Manasseh we find, ^{<491>}2 Chronicles 33:11, and perhaps it had not now much recovered itself.

4. All this was owing to their sin (v. 17): *Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?* By their sinful confederacies with the nations, and especially their conformity to them in their idolatrous customs and usages, they had made themselves very mean and contemptible, as all those do that have made a profession of religion and afterwards throw it off. Nothing now appeared of that which, by their constitution, made them both honourable and formidable, and therefore nobody either respected them or feared them. But this was not all; they had provoked God to give them up into the hands of their enemies, and to make them a scourge to them and give them success against them; and “thus thou hast *procured it to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God*, revolted from thy allegiance to him and so thrown thyself out of his protection; for protection and allegiance go together.” Whatever trouble we are in at any time we may thank ourselves for it; for we bring it upon our own head by our forsaking God: “*Thou hast forsaken thy God at the time that he was leading thee by the way*” (so it should be read); “Then when he was leading thee on to a happy peace and settlement, and thou wast within a step of it, then thou forsookest him, and so didst put a bar in thy own door.”

II. Their neighbours, that were their pretended friends, deceived them, distressed them, and helped them not, and this also was owing to their sin.

1. They did in vain seek to Egypt and Assyria for help (v. 18): “*What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt?* When thou art under apprehensions of danger thou art running to Egypt for help, ^{<201>}Isaiah 30:1, 2; 31:1. Thou art for *drinking the waters of Sihor*,” that is, *Nilus*. “Thou reliest upon their multitude, and refreshest thy self with the fair promises they make thee. At other times thou art *in the way of Assyria*, sending or going with all speed to fetch recruits thence, and thinkest to satisfy thyself with the *waters of the river Euphrates*; what *hast thou to do* there? What wilt thou get by applying to them? They shall *help in vain*, shall be broken reeds to thee, and what thou thoughtest would be to thee as a river will be but a broken cistern.”

2. This also was because of their sin. The judgment shall unavoidably come upon them which their sin has deserved; and then to what purpose is

it to call in help against it? v. 19. “*Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and then it is impossible for them to save thee; know and see therefore, upon the whole matter, that it is an evil thing that thou hast forsaken God, for it is that which makes thy enemies enemies indeed, and thy friends friends in vain.*” Observe here,

(1.) The nature of sin; it is *forsaking the Lord* as our God; it is the soul's alienation from him and aversion to him. Cleaving to sin is leaving God.

(2.) The cause of sin; it is because *his fear is not in us*. It is for want of a good principle in us, particularly for want of the fear of God; this is at the bottom of our apostasy from him; men forsake their duty to God because they stand in no awe of him nor have any dread of his displeasure.

(3.) The malignity of sin; it is *an evil thing and a bitter*. Sin is an evil thing, only evil, an evil that has no good in it, an evil that is the root and cause of all other evil; it is evil indeed, for it is not only the greatest contrariety to the divine nature, but the greatest corruption of the human nature. It is *bitter*; a state of sin is the *gall of bitterness*, and every sinful way will be *bitterness in the latter end*; the wages of it is death, and death is bitter.

(4.) The fatal consequences of sin; as it is in itself evil and bitter, so it has a direct tendency to make us miserable: “*Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee, not only destroy and ruin thee hereafter, but correct and reprove thee now; they will certainly bring trouble upon thee; and punishment will so inevitably follow the sin that the sin shall itself be said to punish thee. Nay, the punishment, in its kind and circumstances, shall so directly answer to the sin, that thou mayest read the sin in the punishment; and the justice of the punishment shall be so plain that thou shalt not have a word to say for thyself; thy own wickedness shall convince thee and stop thy mouth for ever and thou shalt be forced to own that the Lord is righteous.*”

(5.) The use and application of all this: “*Know therefore, and see it, and repent of thy sin, that so the iniquity which is thy correction may not be thy ruin.*”

20 JEREMIAH 2:20-28

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

In these verses the prophet goes on with his charge against this backsliding people. Observe here,

I. The sin itself that he charges them with — idolatry, that great provocation which they were so notoriously guilty of.

1. They frequented the places of idol-worship (v. 20): “*Upon every high hill and under every green tree*, in the high places and the groves, such as the heathen had a foolish fondness and veneration for, *thou wanderest*, first to one and then to another, like one unsettled, and still uneasy and unsatisfied; but in all *playing the harlot*,” worshipping false gods, which is spiritual whoredom, and was commonly accompanied with corporal whoredom too. Note, Those that leave God wander endlessly, and a vagrant lust is insatiable.

2. They made images for themselves, and gave divine honour to them (v. 26, 27); not only the common people, but even the kings and princes, who should have restrained the people from doing ill, and the priests and prophets, who should have taught them to do well, were themselves so wretchedly sottish and stupid, and under the power of such a strong delusion, as to *say to a stock*, “*Thou art my father* (that is, Thou art my god, the author of my being, to whom I owe duty and on whom I have a dependence),” and *to a stone*, to an idol made of stone, “*Thou hast begotten me, or brought me forth*; therefore protect me, provide for me, and bring me up.” What greater affront could men put upon God, who is our Father that has made us? It was a downright disowning of their obligations to him. What greater affront could men put upon themselves and their own reason than to acknowledge that which is in itself absurd and impossible, and, by making stocks and stones their parents, to make themselves no better than stocks and stones? When these were first made the objects of worship they were supposed to be animated by some celestial power or spirit; but by degrees the thought of this was lost, and so vain did idolaters become *in their imagination*, even the princes and priests themselves, that the very idol, though made of wood and stone, was supposed to be their father, and adored accordingly.

3. They multiplied these dunghill deities endlessly (v. 28): *According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah!* When they had forsaken that God who is one, and all-sufficient for all,

(1.) They were not satisfied with any gods they had, but still desired more, that idolatry being in this respect of the same nature with covetousness, which is spiritual idolatry (for the more men have the more they would have), which is a plain evidence that what men make an idol of they find to be insufficient and unsatisfying, and that it cannot *make the comers thereunto perfect.*

(2.) They could not agree in the same god. Having left the centre of unity, they fell into endless discord; one city fancied one deity and another another, and each was anxious to have one of its own to be near them and to take special care of them. Thus did they in vain seek that in many gods which is to be found in one God only.

II. The proof of this. No witnesses need be called; it is proved by the notorious evidence of the facts.

1. They went about to deny it, and were ready to plead, *Not guilty.* They pretended that they would acquit themselves from this guilt, they *washed themselves with nitre*, and *took much soap*, offered many things in excuse and extenuation of it, v. 22. They pretended that they did not worship these as gods, but as demons, and mediators between the immortal God and mortal men, or that it was not divine honour that they gave them, but civil respect; thus they sought to evade the convictions of God's word and to screen themselves from the dread of his wrath. Nay, some of them had the impudence to deny the thing itself; they said, *I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim*, v. 23. Because it was done secretly, and industriously concealed ([Ⓢ]Ezekiel 8:12), they thought it could never be proved upon them, and they had impudence enough to deny it. In this, as in other things, their way was like that of *the adulterous woman, that says, I have done no wickedness*, [Ⓢ]Proverbs 30:20.

2. Notwithstanding all their evasions, they are convicted of it and found guilty: "*How canst thou deny the fact, and say, I have not gone after Baalim? How canst thou deny the fault, and say, I am not polluted?*" The prophet speaks with wonder at their impudence: "*How canst thou put on a face to say so, when it is certain?*"

(1.) “God's omniscience is a witness against thee: *Thy iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God*; it is laid up and hidden, to be produced against thee in the day of judgment, *sealed up among his treasures,*” ^{<679>}Deuteronomy 32:34; ^{<871>}Job 21:19; ^{<332>}Hosea 13:12. “It is *imprinted deeply and stained* before me;” so some read it. “Though thou endeavour to wash it out, as murderers to get the stain of the blood of the person slain out of their clothes, yet it will never be got out.” God's eye is upon it, and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth.

(2.) “Thy own conscience is a witness against thee. *See thy way in the valley*” (they had worshipped idols, not only on the high hills, but in the valleys, ^{<251>}Isaiah 57:5, 6), in the *valley over-against Beth-peor* (so some), where they worshipped Baal-peor (^{<546>}Deuteronomy 34:6, ^{<423>}Numbers 25:3), as if the prophet looked as far back as the *iniquity of Peor*; but, if it mean any particular valley, surely it is the *valley of the son of Hinnom*, for that was the place where they sacrificed their children to Moloch and which therefore witnessed against them more than any other: “look into that valley, and thou canst not but *know what thou hast done.*”

III. The aggravations of this sin with which they are charged, which made it exceedingly sinful.

1. God had done great things for them, and yet they revolted from him and rebelled against him (v. 20): *Of old time I have broken thy yoke and burst thy bonds*; this refers to the bringing of them out of the *land of Egypt* and the *house of bondage*, which they would not remember (v. 6), but God did; for, when he told them that they should have no other gods before him, he prefixed this as a reason: *I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out of the land of Egypt!* These bonds of theirs which God had loosed should have bound them for ever to him; but they had ungratefully broken the bonds of duty to that God who had broken the bonds of their slavery.

2. They had promised fair, but had not made good their promise: “*Thou saidst, I will not transgress*; then, when the mercy of thy deliverance was fresh, thou wast so sensible of it that thou wast willing to lay thyself under the most sacred ties to continue faithful to thy God and never to forsake him.” Then they said, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord,* ^{<621>}Joshua 24:21. How often have we said that we *would not transgress*, we would not offend any more, and yet we have *started aside, like a deceitful bow*, and repeated and multiplied our transgressions!

3. They had wretchedly degenerated from what they were when God first formed them into a people (v. 21). *I had planted thee a noble vine*. The constitution of their government both in church and state was excellent, their laws were righteous, and all the ordinances instructive and very significant; and a generation of good men there was among them when they first settled in Canaan. *Israel served the Lord*, and kept close to him *all the days of Joshua, and the elders that out-lived Joshua*, ^(~~123~~)Joshua 24:31. They were then *wholly a right seed*, likely to replenish the vineyard they were planted in with choice vines. But it proved otherwise; they very next generation *knew not the Lord, nor the works which he had done* (^(~~100~~)Judges 2:10), and so they were worse and worse till they became *the degenerate plants of a strange vine*. They were now the reverse of what they were at first. Their constitution was quite broken, and there was nothing in them of that good which one might have expected from a people so happily formed, nothing of the purity and piety of their ancestors. *Their vine is as the vine of Sodom*, ^(~~152~~)Deuteronomy 32:32. This may fitly be applied to the nature of man; it was planted by its great author *a noble vine, a right seed* (God made man upright); but it is so universally corrupt that it has become the *degenerate plant of a strange vine, that bears gall and wormwood*, and it is so to God, it is highly distasteful and offensive to him.

4. They were violent and eager in the pursuit of their idolatries, doted on their idols, and were fond of new ones, and they would not be restrained from them either by the word of God or by his providence, so strong was the *impetus* with which they were carried out after this sin. They are here compared to a *swift dromedary traversing her ways*, a female of that species of creatures hunting about for a male (v. 23), and, to the same purport, *a wild ass used to the wilderness* (v. 24), not tamed by labour, and therefore very wanton, *snuffing up the wind at her pleasure* when she comes near the he-ass, and on such an *occasion who can turn her away?* Who can hinder her from that which she lusts after? *Those that seek her then will not weary themselves for her*, for they know it is to no purpose; but will have a little patience till she is big with young, till that month comes which is the last of *the months that she fulfils* (^(~~130~~)Job 39:2), when she is heavy and unwieldy, and then *they shall find her*, and she cannot out-run them. Note,

(1.) Eager lust is a brutish thing, and those that will not be turned away from the gratifying and indulging of it by reason, and conscience, and

honour, are to be reckoned as brute-beasts and no better, such as were born, and still are, *like the wild ass's colt*; let them not be looked upon as rational creatures.

(2.) Idolatry is strangely intoxicating, and those that are addicted to it will with great difficulty be cured of it. That lust is as headstrong as any.

(3.) There are some so violently set upon the prosecution of their lusts that it is to no purpose to attempt to give check to them: those that do so weary themselves in vain. *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.*

(4.) The time will come when the most fierce will be tamed and the most wanton will be manageable; when distress and anguish come upon them, then their ears will be open to discipline, that is the month in which you may find them, ~~HEB~~ Psalm 141:5, 6.

5. They were obstinate in their sin, and, as they could not be restrained, so they would not be reformed, v. 25. Here is,

(1.) Fair warning given them of the ruin that this wicked course of life would certainly bring them to at last, with a caution therefore not to persist in it, but to break off from it. He would certainly bring them into a miserable captivity, when their feet should be unshod, and they should be forced to travel barefoot, and when they would be denied fair water by their oppressors, so that their throat should be dried with thirst; this will be in the end hereof. Those that affect strange gods, and strange ways of worship, will justly be made prisoners to a strange king in a strange land. "Take up in time therefore; thy running after thy idols will run the *shoes off thy feet*, and thy panting after them will bring thy throat to thirst; withhold therefore thy foot from these violent pursuits, and thy throat from these violent desires." One would think that it should effectually check us in the career of sin to consider what it will bring us to at last.

(2.) Their rejecting this fair warning. They said to those that would have persuaded them to repent and reform, "*There is no hope; no, never expect to work upon us, or prevail with us to cast away our idols, for we have loved strangers, and after them we will go; we are resolved we will, and therefore trouble not yourselves nor us any more with your admonitions; it is to no purpose. There is no hope that we should ever break the corrupt habit and disposition we have got, and therefore we may as well yield to it as go about to get the mastery of it.*" Note, Their case is very miserable

who have brought themselves to such a pass that their corruptions triumph over their convictions; they know they should reform, but own they cannot, and therefore resolve they will not. But, as we must not despair of the mercy of God, but believe that sufficient for the pardon of our sins, though ever so heinous, if we repent and sue for that mercy, so neither must we despair of the grace of God, but believe that able to subdue our corruptions, though ever so strong, if we pray for and improve that grace. A man must never say *There is no hope*, as long as he is on this side hell.

6. They had shamed themselves by their sin, in putting confidence in that which would certainly deceive them in the day of their distress, and putting him away that would have helped them, v. 26-28. *As the thief is ashamed* when, notwithstanding all his arts and tricks to conceal his theft, he is found, and brought to punishment, *so are the house of Israel ashamed*, not with a penitent shame for the sin they had been guilty of, but with a penal shame for the disappointment they met with in that sin. They will be ashamed when they find,

(1.) That they are forced to cry to the God whom they had put contempt upon. In their prosperity they had turned the back to God and not the face; they had slighted him, acted as if they had forgotten him, or did what they could to forget him, would not look towards him, but looked another way; they went from him as fast and as far as they could; but in the time of their trouble they will find no satisfaction but in applying to him; then *they will say, Arise, and save us*. Their fathers had many a time taken this shame to themselves (^{<088>}Judges 3:9, 4:3, 10:10), yet they would not be persuaded to cleave to God, that they might come to him in their trouble with the more confidence.

(2.) That they have no relief from the gods they have made their court to. They will be ashamed when they perceive that the gods they have made cannot serve them, and that the God who made them will not serve them. To bring them to this shame, if so be they might hereby be brought to repentance, they are here sent *to the gods whom they served*, ^{<014>}Judges 10:14. They cried to God, *Arise, and save us*. God says of the idols, “*Let them arise, and save thee*, for thou hast no reason to expect that I should Let them arise, if they can, from the places where they are fixed; let them try whether they can save thee: but thou wilt be ashamed when thou findest that they can do thee no good, for, though thou hadst a god for every city, yet *thy cities are burnt without inhabitant*,” v. 15. Thus it is the

folly of sinners to please themselves with that which will certainly be their grief, and pride themselves in that which will certainly be their shame.

~~212~~ JEREMIAH 2:29-37

EXPOSTULATION WITH ISRAEL

The prophet here goes on in the same strain, aiming to bring a sinful people to repentance, that their destruction might be prevented.

I. He avers the truth of the charge. It was evident beyond contradiction; it was the greatest absurdity imaginable in them to think of denying it (v. 29): “*Wherefore will you plead with me, and put me upon the proof of it, or wherefore will you go about to plead any thing in excuse of the crime or to obtain a mitigation of the sentence? Your plea will certainly be overruled, and judgment given against you: you know you have all transgressed, one as well as another; why then to you quarrel with me for contending with you?*”

II. He heightens it from the consideration both of their incorrigibleness and of their ingratitude.

1. They had not been wrought upon by the judgments of God which they had been under (v. 30): *In vain have I smitten your children*, that is, the children or people of Judah. They had been under divine rebukes of many kinds. God therein designed to bring them to repentance; but it was *in vain*. They did not answer God's end in afflicting them; their consciences were not awakened, nor their hearts softened and humbled, nor were they driven to seek unto God; *they received no instruction by the correction*, were not made the better by it; and it is a great loss thus to lose an affliction. *They did not receive*, they did not submit to, or comply with, the correction, but their hearts fretted against the Lord, and so they were *smitten in vain*. Even *the children, the young people*, among them (so it may be taken), were *smitten in vain*; they were so soon prejudiced against repentance that they were as untractable as the old ones that had been long *accustomed to do evil*.

2. They had not been wrought upon by the word of God which he had sent them in the mouth of his servants the prophets; nay, they had killed the

messengers for the sake of the message: “*Your own sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion; you have put them to death for their faithfulness with as much rage and fury, and with as much greediness and pleasure, as a lion devours his prey.*” Their prophets, who were their greatest blessings, were treated by them as if they had been the plagues of their generation, and this was their measure-filling sin, ^{<1836>}2 Chronicles 36:16. They *killed their own prophets*, ^{<1835>}1 Thessalonians 2:15.

3. They had not been wrought upon by the favours God had bestowed upon them (v. 31): “*O generation!*” (he does not call them, as he might, *O faithless and perverse generation! O generation of vipers!* but speaks gently, *O you men of this generation!*) “*see the word of the Lord, do not only hear it, but consider it diligently, apply your minds closely to it.*” As we are bidden to *hear the rod* (^{<3169>}Micah 6:9), for that has its voice, so we are bidden to *see the word*, for that has its visions, its views. It intimates that what is here said is plain and undeniable; you may see it to be very evident; it is written as with a sun-beam, so that he that runs may read it: *Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness.* Note, None of those who have had any dealings with God ever had reason to complain of him as *a wilderness* or a *land of darkness*. He has blessed us with the fruits of the earth, and therefore we cannot say that he has been a wilderness to us, a dry and barren land, that (as Mr. Gataker expresses it) he has held us to *hard meat*, as cattle fed upon the common. No; his sheep have been led into green pastures. He has also blessed us with the lights of heaven, and has not withheld them, so that we cannot say, He has been to us a land of darkness. He has caused his sun to shine, as well as his rain to fall, upon the evil and unthankful. Or the meaning is, in general, that the service of God has not been to any either an unpleasant or an unprofitable service. God sometimes has led his people *through a wilderness* and a *land of darkness*, but he himself was then to them all that which they needed; he so fed them with manna, and led them by a pillar of fire, that it was to them a fruitful field and a land of light. The world is, to those who make it their home and their portion, a wilderness and a land of darkness, vanity and vexation of spirit; but those that dwell in God have the *lines fallen to them in pleasant places*.

4. Instead of being wrought upon by these, they had grown intolerably insolent and imperious. They say, *We are lords; we will come no more unto thee.* Now that they had become a potent kingdom, or thought themselves such, they set up for themselves, and shook off their

dependence upon God. This is the language of presumptuous sinners, and it is not only very impious and profane, but very unreasonable and foolish.

(1.) It is absurd for us who are subjects to say, *We are lords* (that is, *rulers*) and we will come no more to *God* to receive commands from him; for, as he is King of old, so he is King for ever, and we can never pretend to be from under his authority.

(2.) It is absurd for us who are beggars to say, *We are lords*, that is, *We are rich*, and we will come no more to *God*, to receive favours from him, as if we could live without him and need not be beholden to him. *God* justly takes it ill when those to whom he has been a bountiful benefactor care not either for hearing from him or speaking to him.

III. He lays the blame of all their wickedness upon their forgetting *God* (v. 32): *They have forgotten me*; they have industriously banished the thoughts of *God* out of their minds, jostled those thoughts out with thoughts of their idols, and avoided all those things that would put them in mind of *God*.

1. Though they were his own people, in covenant with him and professing relation to him, and had the tokens of his presence in the midst of them and of his favour to them, yet they forgot him.

2. They had long neglected him, *days without number*, time out of mind, as we say. They had not for a great while entertained any serious thoughts of him; so that they seem quite to have forgotten him, and resolved never to remember him again. How many days of our lives have passed without suitable remembrance of *God*! Who can number those empty days? 3. They had not had such a regard and affection to him as young ladies generally have to their fine clothes: *Can a maid forget her ornaments or a bride her attire*? No; their hearts are upon them; they value them so much, and themselves upon them, that they are ever and anon thinking and speaking of them. When they are to appear in public they do not forget any of *their ornaments*, but put every one in its place, as they are described, ²³⁸⁸Isaiah 3:18, etc. And *yet my people have forgotten me*. It is sad that any should be more in love with their fine clothes than with their *God*, and should rather leave their religion behind them, or part with that, than leave any of their ornaments behind them, or part with them. Is not *God* our ornament? Is he not *a crown of glory* and *a diadem of beauty* to his people? Did we look upon him to be so, and upon our religion as an

ornament of grace to our head and chains about our neck (³⁰⁹Proverbs 1:9), we should be as mindful of them as ever any maid was of her ornaments, or a bride of her attire, we should be as careful to preserve them and as fond to appear in them.

IV. He shows them what a bad influence their sins had had upon others. The sins of God's professing people harden and encourage those about them in their evil ways, especially when they appear forward and ringleaders in sin (v. 33): *Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?* There is an allusion here to the practice of lewd women who strive to recommend themselves by their ogling looks and gay dress, as Jezebel, who *painted her face and tired her head*. Thus had they courted their neighbours into sinful confederacies with them and communion in their idolatries, and had *taught the wicked ones their ways*, their ways of mixing God's institutions with their idolatrous customs and usages, which was a great profanation of that which was sacred and made the ways of their idolatry worse than that of others. Those have a great deal to answer for who, by their fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, make wicked ones more wicked than otherwise they would be.

V. He charges them with the guilt of murder added to the guilt of their idolatry (v. 34): *Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls, the life-blood of the poor innocents*, which cried to heaven, and for which God was now *making inquisition*. The reference is to the children that were offered in sacrifice to Moloch; or it may be taken more generally for all the *innocent blood* which Manasseh shed, and with which he had *filled Jerusalem* (⁴²¹⁶2 Kings 21:16), the *righteous blood*, especially the blood of the prophets and others that witnessed against their impieties. This blood was found *not by secret search, not by diggings* (so the word is), but *upon all these*; it was above ground. This intimates that the guilt of this kind which they had contracted was certain and evident, not doubtful or which would bear a dispute; and that it was avowed and barefaced, and which they had not so much sense either of shame or fear as to endeavour to conceal, which was a great aggravation of it.

VI. He overrules their plea of, *Not guilty*. Though this matter be so plain, yet thou sayest, *Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me*; and again, *Thou sayest, I have not sinned* (v. 35); therefore *I will plead with thee*, and will convince thee of thy mistake. Because they deny the charge, and stand upon their own justification, therefore God will join

issue with them and plead with them, both by his word and by his rod. Those shall be made to know how much they deceive themselves,

1. Who say that they have not offended God, that they are innocent, though they have been guilty of the grossest enormities.

2. Who expect that God will be reconciled to them though they do not repent and reform. They own that they had been under the tokens of God's anger, but they think that it was causeless, and that they by pleading innocency had proved it to be so, and therefore they conclude that God will immediately let fall his action and *his anger shall be turned from them*. This is very provoking, and God will plead with them, and convince them that his anger is just, for they have sinned, and he will never cease his controversy till they, instead of justifying themselves thus, humble, and judge, and condemn themselves.

VII. He upbraids them with the shameful disappointments they met with, in making creatures their confidence, while they made God their enemy, v. 36, 37. It was a piece of spiritual idolatry they were often guilty of that they trusted in *an arm of flesh* and their hearts therein *departed from the Lord*. Now here he shows them the folly of it.

1. They were restless, and unsatisfied in the choice of their confidences: "*Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?*" Doubtless it is because thou meetest not with that in those thou didst confide in which thou promisedst thyself." Those that make God their hope, and walk in a continual dependence upon him, need not *gad about to change their way*; for their souls may return to him, and repose in him, as their rest: but those that trust in creatures will be perpetually uneasy, like Noah's dove, that found no rest for the sole of her foot. Every thing they trust to fails them, and then they think to change for the better, but they will be still disappointed. They first trusted to Assyria, and, when that proved a broken reed, they depended upon Egypt, and that proved no better. Creatures being vanity, they will be vexation of spirit to all those that put their confidence in them; they *gad about, seeking rest* and finding none.

2. They were quite disappointed in the confidences they made choice of; so the prophet tells them they should be: *Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt, which thou now trustest in, as formerly thou wast of Assyria, who distressed them and helped them not,* ^{<403>}2 Chronicles 28:20. The Jews were a peculiar people in their profession of religion, and for that reason

none of the neighbouring nations cared for them, nor could heartily love them; and yet the Jews were still courting them, and confiding in them, and were well enough served when deceived by them. See what will come of it (v. 37): *Thou shalt go forth from him*, thy ambassadors or envoys shall return from Egypt *re infecta* — *disappointed*, and therefore *with their hands upon their heads*, lamenting the desperate condition of their people. Or, *Thou shalt go forth hence*, that is, into captivity in a strange land, *with thy hands upon thy head*, holding it because it aches (*ubi dolor ibi digitus* — *where the pain is the finger will be applied*), or as people ashamed, for Tamar, in the height of her confusion, *laid her hand on her head*, ¹¹⁹2 Samuel 13:19. “And Egypt, that thou reliest on, shall not be able to prevent it nor to rescue thee out of captivity.” Those that will not lay their hand on their heart in godly sorrow, which works life, shall be made to lay their hand on their head in the sorrow of the world, which works death. And no wonder that Egypt cannot help them, when God will not, If the Lord do not help thee, whence should I? The Egyptians are broken reeds, for *the Lord has rejected thy confidences*; he will not make use of them for thy relief, will neither so far honour them, nor so far give countenance to thy confidence in them, as to appoint them to be the instruments of any good to thee, and therefore *thou shalt not prosper in them*; they shall not stand thee in any stead nor give thee any satisfaction. As *there is no counsel or wisdom* that can prevail against the Lord, so there is none that can prevail without him. Some read it, *The Lord has rejected thee for thy confidences*; because thou hast dealt so unfaithfully with him as to trust in his creatures, nay, in his enemies when thou shouldst have trusted in him only, he has abandoned thee to that destruction from which thou thoughtest thus to shelter thyself; and then thou *canst not prosper*, for none ever either hardened himself against God or estranged himself from God and prospered.