

# CHAPTER 4

It should seem that the first two verses of this chapter might better have been joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, for they are directed to Israel, the ten tribes, by way of reply to their compliance with God's call, directing and encouraging them to hold their resolution (v. 1, 2). The rest of the chapter concerns Judah and Jerusalem.

**I.** They are called to repent and reform (v. 3, 4).

**II.** They are warned of the advance of Nebuchadnezzar and his forces against them, and are told that it is for their sins, from which they are again exhorted to wash themselves (v. 5-18).

**III.** To affect them the more with the greatness of the desolation that was coming, the prophet does himself bitterly lament it, and sympathize with his people in the calamities it brought upon them, and the plunge it brought them to, representing it as a reduction of the world to its first chaos (v. 19-31).

## ⤵ JEREMIAH 4:1-2

### ISRAEL ENCOURAGED IN THEIR RETURN

When God called to backsliding Israel to return (~~2182~~Jeremiah 3:22) they immediately answered, *Lord, we return*; now God here takes notice of their answer, and, by way of reply to it,

**I.** He directs them how to pursue their good resolutions: “Dost thou say, *I will return?*”

**1.** “Then thou must *return unto me*; make a thorough work of it. Do not only turn from thy idolatries, but return to the instituted worship of the God of Israel.” Or, “Thou must return speedily and not delay (as ~~2110~~Isaiah 21:12, *If you will enquire, enquire you*); if you will return unto me, return you: do not talk of it, but do it.”

2. “Thou must utterly abandon all sin, and not retain any of the relics of idolatry: *Put away thy abominations out of my sight,*” that is, out of all places (for every place is under the eye of God), especially out of the temple, the house which he had in a particular manner his eye upon, to see that it was kept clean. It intimates that their idolatries were not only obvious, but offensive, to the eye of God. They were abominations which he could not endure the sight of; therefore they must be *put away out of his sight*, because they were a provocation to the pure eyes of God's glory. Sin must be put away out of the heart, else it is not put away out of God's sight, for the heart and all that is in it lie open before his eye.

3. They must not return to sin again; so some understand that, *Thou shalt not remove*, reading it, *Thou shalt not, or must not, wander*. “*If thou wilt put away thy abominations, and wilt not wander after them again, as thou hast done, all shall be well.*”

4. They must give unto God the glory due unto his name (v. 2): “*Thou shalt sear, The Lord liveth*. His existence shall be with thee the most sacred fact, than which nothing can be more sure, and his judgment the supreme court to which thou shalt appeal, than which nothing can be more awful.” Swearing is an act of religious worship, in which we are to give honour to God three ways: —

(1.) We must swear by the true God only, and not by creatures, or any false gods, — by the God that liveth, not by the gods that are deaf and dumb and dead, — by him only, and not *by the Lord and by Malcham*, as <sup><305></sup>Zechariah 1:5.

(2.) We must swear that only which is true, *in truth and in righteousness*, not daring to assert that which is false, or which we do not know to be true, nor to assert that as certain which is doubtful, nor to promise that which we mean not to perform, nor to violate the promise we have made. To say that which is untrue, or to do that which is unrighteous, is bad, but to back either with an oath is much worse.

(3.) We must do it solemnly, swear *in judgment*, that is, when judicially called to it, and not in common conversation. Rash swearing is as great a profanation of God's name as solemn swearing is an honour to it. See <sup><502></sup>Deuteronomy 10:20; <sup><4051></sup>Matthew 5:34, 37.

**II.** He encourages them to keep in this good mind and adhere to their resolutions. If the scattered Israelites will thus return to God,

**1.** They shall be blessed themselves; for to that sense the first words may be read: “*If thou wilt return to me, then thou shalt return*, that is, thou shalt be brought back out of thy captivity into thy own land again, as was of old promised,” <sup><689></sup>Deuteronomy 4:29; 30:2. Or, “Then *thou shalt rest in me*, shalt return to me as they rest, even while thou art in the land of thy captivity.”

**2.** They shall be blessings to others; for their returning to God again will be a means of others turning to him who never new him. If thou wilt own the living Lord, thou wilt thereby influence the nations among whom thou art to bless themselves in him, to place their happiness in his favour and to think themselves happy in being brought to the fear of him. See <sup><356></sup>Isaiah 65:16. They shall bless themselves *in the God of truth*, and not in false gods, shall do themselves the honour, and give themselves the satisfaction, to join themselves to him; and then *in him shall they glory*; they shall make him their glory, and shall please, nay, shall pride, themselves in the blessed change they have made. Those that part with their sins to return to God, however they scrupled at the bargain at first, *when they go away, then they boast*.

## <sup><200></sup>JEREMIAH 4:3-4

### EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE

The prophet here turns his speech, in God's name, to the men of the place where he lived. We have heard what words he proclaimed *towards the north* (<sup><312></sup>Jeremiah 3:12), for the comfort of those that were now in captivity and were humbled under the hand of God; let us now see what he says to the *men of Judah and Jerusalem*, who were now in prosperity, for their conviction and awakening. In these two verses he exhorts them to repentance and reformation, as the only way left them to prevent the desolating judgments that were ready to break in upon them. Observe,

**I.** The duties required of them, which they are concerned to do.

**1.** They must do by their hearts as they do by their ground that they expect any good of; they must plough it up (v. 3): “*Break up your fallow-ground. Plough to yourselves a ploughing (or plough up your plough land), that you sow not among thorns, that you may not labour in vain, for your own safety and welfare, as those do that sow good seed among thorns and as you have been doing a great while. Put yourselves into a frame fit to receive mercy from God, and put away all that which keeps it from you, and then you may expect to receive mercy and to prosper in your endeavours to help yourselves.*” Note,

**(1.)** An unconvinced unhumiliated heart is like fallow-ground, ground untilled, unoccupied. It is ground capable of improvement; it is our ground, let out to us, and we must be accountable for it; but it is fallow; it is unfenced and lies common; it is unfruitful and of no advantage to the owner, and (which is principally intended) it is overgrown with thorns and weeds, which are the natural product of the corrupt heart; and, if it be not renewed with grace, rain and sunshine are lost upon it, <sup><SMD></sup>Hebrews 6:7, 8.

**(2.)** We are concerned to get this fallow-ground ploughed up. We must search into our own hearts, let the word of God divide (as the plough does) *between the joints and the marrow*, <sup><SMD></sup>Hebrews 4:12. We must *rend our hearts*, <sup><SMD></sup>Joel 2:13. We must pluck up by the roots those corruptions which, as thorns, choke both our endeavours and our expectations, <sup><SMD></sup>Hosea 10:12.

**2.** They must do that to their souls which was done to their bodies when they were taken into covenant with God (v. 4): “*Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your heart. Mortify the flesh and the lusts of it. Pare off that superfluity of naughtiness which hinders your receiving with meekness the engrafted word*, <sup><SMD></sup>James 1:21. Boast not of, and rest not in, the circumcision of the body, for that is but a sign, and will not serve without the thing signified. It is a dedicating sign. Do that in sincerity which was done in profession by your circumcision; devote and consecrate yourselves unto the Lord, to be to him a peculiar people. Circumcision is an *obligation to keep the law*; lay yourselves afresh under that obligation. It is a *seal of the righteousness of faith*; lay hold then of that righteousness, and so *circumcise yourselves to the Lord.*”

**II.** The danger they are threatened with, which they are concerned to avoid. Repent and reform, *lest my fury come forth like fire*, which it is now

ready to do, as that fire which came forth from the Lord and consumed the sacrifices, and which was always kept burning upon the altar and none might quench it; such is God's wrath against impenitent sinners, *because of the evil of their doings*. Note,

1. That which is to be dreaded by us more than any thing else is the wrath of God; for that is the spring and bitterness of all present miseries and will be the quintessence and perfection of everlasting misery.
2. It is the *evil of our doings* that kindles the fire of God's wrath against us.
3. The consideration of the imminent danger we are in of falling and perishing under this wrath should awaken us with all possible care to *sanctify ourselves to God's glory* and to see to it that we be *sanctified by his grace*.

## ☞ JEREMIAH 4:5-18

### PUNISHMENT PREDICTED

God's usual method is to warn before he wounds. In these verses, accordingly, God gives notice to the Jews of the general desolation that would shortly be brought upon them by a foreign invasion. This must be declared and published in all the cities of Judah and streets of Jerusalem, that all might hear and fear, and by this loud alarm be either brought to repentance or left inexcusable. The prediction of this calamity is here given very largely, and in lively expressions, which one would think should have awakened and affected the most stupid. Observe,

1. The war proclaimed, and general notice given of the advance of the enemy. It is published now, some years before, by the prophet; but, since this will be slighted, it shall be published after another manner when the judgment is actually breaking in, v. 5, 6. The *trumpet* must be *blown*, the *standard* must be *set up*, a summons must be issued out to the people to *gather together* and to draw *towards Zion*, either to guard it or expecting to be guarded by it. There must be a general rendezvous. The militia must be raised and all the forces mustered. Those that are able men, and fit for service, must *go into the defenced cities*, to garrison them; those that are

weak, and would lessen their provisions, but not increase their strength, must *retire*, and *not stay*.

**II.** An express arrived with intelligence of the approach of the king of Babylon and his army. It is an evil that God will *bring from the north* (as he had said, <sup>2115</sup>Jeremiah 1:15), *even a great destruction*, beyond all that had yet come upon the nation of the Jews. The enemy is here compared,

**1.** To a lion that *comes up from his thicket*, when he is hungry, to seek his prey, v. 7. The helpless beasts are so terrified with his roaring (as some report) that they cannot flee from him, and so become an easy prey to him. Nebuchadnezzar is this roaring tearing lion, *the destroyer of the nations*, that has laid many countries waste, and now is *on his way* in full speed towards the land of Judah. The *destroyer of the Gentiles* shall be the *destroyer of the Jews* too, when they have by their idolatry made themselves like the Gentiles. “He has *gone forth from his place*, from Babylon, or the place of the rendezvous of his army, on purpose against *this land*; that is the prey he has now his eye upon, not to plunder it only, but to make it desolate, and herein he shall succeed to such a degree that the cities shall be *laid waste, without inhabitants*, shall be *overgrown with grass* as a field;” so some read it.

**2.** To a *drying blasting wind* (v. 11), a parching scorching wind, which spoils the fruits of the earth and withers them, not a wind which brings rain, but such as comes *out of the north*, which *drives away rain* (<sup>2123</sup>Proverbs 25:23), but brings something worse instead of it; such shall this evil out of the north be to this people, a *black freezing wind*, which they can neither fence against nor flee from, but, wherever they go, it shall surround and pursue them; and they cannot see it before it comes, but, when it comes, they shall feel it. It is a *wind of the high places in the wilderness*, or *plain*, that beats upon the tops of the hills or that carries all before it in the plain, where there is no shelter, but the ground is all champaign. It shall come in its full force *towards the daughters of my people*, that have been brought up so tenderly and delicately that they could not endure to have the wind blow upon them. Now this fierce wind shall come against them, *not to fan, nor cleanse* them, not such a gentle wind as is used in winnowing corn, but a *full wind* (v. 12), a strong and violent wind, blowing full upon them. This shall come *to me*, or rather *for me*; it shall come with commission from God and shall accomplish that for which he sends it; for this, as other *stormy winds*, *fulfills his word*.

**3.** To clouds and whirlwinds for swiftness, v. 13. The Chaldean army shall *come up as clouds* driven with the wind, so thick shall they stand, so fast shall they march, and it shall be to no purpose to offer to stop them or make head against them, any more than to arrest a cloud or give check to a whirlwind. The horses are *swifter than eagles* when they fly upon their prey; it is in vain to think either of opposing them or of outrunning them.

**4.** To watchers and the keepers of a field, v. 15-17. *The voice declares from Dan*, a city which lay furthest north of all the cities of Canaan, and therefore received the first tidings of this *evil from the north* and hastened it to Mount Ephraim, that part of the land of Israel which lay next to Judea; they received the news of the affliction and transmitted it to Jerusalem. Ill news flies apace; and an impenitent people, that hates to be reformed, can expect no other than ill news. Now, what is the news? “*Tell the nations*, those mixed nations that now inhabit the cities of the ten tribes, mention it to them, that they may provide for their own safety; but publish it *against Jerusalem*, that is the place aimed at, the game shot at, let them know that *watchers have come from a far country*, that is, soldiers, that will watch all opportunities to do mischief.” Private soldiers we call *private sentinels*, or *watchmen*. “They are coming in full career, and *give out their voice against the cities of Judah*; they design to invest them, to make themselves masters of them, and to attack them with loud shouts, as sure of victory. As *keepers of a field* surround it, to keep all out from it, so shall they surround the cities of Judah, to keep all in them, till they be constrained to surrender at discretion; they are *against her round about, compassing her in on every side*.” See <sup><DB></sup>Luke 19:43. As formerly the good angels, *those watchers*, and *holy ones*, were like *keepers of a field* to Jerusalem, watching about it, that nothing might go in to its prejudice, so now their enemies were as watchers and keepers of a field, surrounding it that nothing might go in to its relief and succour.

**III.** The lamentable cause of this judgment. How is it that Judah and Jerusalem come to be thus abandoned to ruin? See how it came to this.

**1.** They sinned against God; it was all owing to themselves: *She has been rebellious against me, saith the Lord*, v. 17. Their enemies surrounded them as keepers of a field, because they had taken up arms against their rightful Lord and sovereign, and were to be seized as rebels. The Chaldeans were breaking in upon them, and it was sin that opened the gap at which they entered: *Thy way and thy doings have procured these things*

*unto thee* (v. 18), thy evil way and thy doings that have not been good. It was not a false step or two that did them this mischief, but their way and course of living were bad. Note, Sin is the procuring cause of all our troubles. Those that go on in sin while they are endeavouring to ward off mischiefs with one hand are at the same time pulling them upon their own heads with the other.

**2.** God was angry with them for their sin. It is the *fierce anger of the Lord* that makes the army of the Chaldeans thus fierce, thus furious; that is kindled against us, and is *not turned back from us*, v. 8. Note, In men's anger against us, and the violence of that, we must see and own God's anger and the power of that. If that were turned back from us, our enemies could not come forward against us.

**3.** In his just and holy anger he condemned them to this dreadful punishment: *Now also will I give sentence against them*, v. 12. The execution was done, not in a heat, but in pursuance of a sentence solemnly passed, according to equity, and upon mature deliberation. Some read it, *Now will I do execution upon them*, according to the doom formerly passed; and *we are sure that the judgment of God is according to the truth*, and the execution of that judgment.

**IV.** The lamentable effects of this judgment, upon the first alarm given of it.

**1.** The people that should fight shall quite despair and shall not have a heart to make the least stand against the enemy (v. 8): *“For this gird yourself with sackcloth, lament and howl,”* that is, “you will do so. When the cry is made through the kingdom, *Arm, arm!* all will be seized with a consternation, and all put into confusion. Instead of girding on the sword, they will gird on the sackcloth; instead of animating one another to a vigorous resistance, they will *lament and howl*, and so dishearten one another. While the enemy is yet at a distance they will give up all for gone, and cry, *Woe unto us! for we are spoiled*, v. 13. We are all undone, the spoilers will certainly carry the day, and it is in vain to make head against them.” Judah and Jerusalem had been famed for valiant men; but see what is the effect of sin: by depriving men of their confidence towards God, it deprives them of their courage towards men.

**2.** Their great men, who should contrive for the public safety, shall be at their wits' end (v. 9): *At that day the heart of the king shall perish*, both his



wisdom and his courage. Despairing of success, he shall have no spirit to do any thing, and, if he had, he will not know what to do. His princes and privy-counselors, who should animate and advise him, shall be as much at a loss and as much in despair as he. See how easily, how effectually, God can bring ruin upon a people that are doomed to it, merely by dispiriting them, *taking away the heart of the chief* of them (<sup>4820</sup>Job 12:20, 24), *cutting off the spirit of princes*, <sup>4962</sup>Psalm 76:12. The business of the priests was to encourage the people in the time of war; they were to say to the people, *Fear not, and let not your hearts faint*, <sup>6502</sup>Deuteronomy 20:2, 3. They were to blow the trumpets, for an assurance to them that in the day of battle they should be *remembered before the Lord their God*, <sup>4109</sup>Numbers 10:9. But now *the priests* themselves *shall be astonished*, and shall have no heart themselves to do their office, and therefore shall not be likely to put spirit into the people. *The prophets* too, the false prophets, who had cried *peace* to them, shall be put into the greatest amazement imaginable, seeing their own guilty blood ready to be shed by that sword which they had often told the people there was no danger of. Note, God's judgments come with the greatest terror upon those that have been most secure. Our Saviour foretels that at the last destruction of Jerusalem *men's hearts* should *fail them for fear*, <sup>4215</sup>Luke 21:26. And it is common for those who have cheated and flattered people into a carnal security not only to fail them, but to discourage them, when the trouble comes.

**V.** The prophet's complaint of the people's being deceived, v. 10. It is expressed strangely, as we read it: *Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people, saying, You shall have peace.* We are sure that God deceives none. *Let no man say, when he is tempted* or deluded, that God has tempted or deluded him. But,

**1.** The people deceived themselves with the promises that God had made in general of his favour to that nation, and the many peculiar privileges with which they were dignified, building upon them, though they took no care to perform the conditions on which the accomplishment of those promises and the continuance of those privileges did depend; and they had no regard to the threatenings which in the law were set over-against those promises. Thus they cheated themselves and then wickedly complained that God had cheated them.

**2.** The false prophets deceived them with promises of peace, which they made them in God's name. <sup>4247</sup>Jeremiah 23:17; 27:9. If God had sent them,

he had indeed greatly deceived the people, but he had not. It was the people's fault that they gave them credit; and here also they deceived themselves.

**3.** God had permitted the false prophets to deceive, and the people to be deceived by them, giving both up to *strong delusions*, to punish them for *not receiving the truth in the love of it*. Herein the Lord was righteous; but the prophet complains of it as the sorest judgment of all, for by this means they had been hardened in their sins.

**4.** It may be read with an interrogation, "*Hast thou indeed thus deceived this people?*" It is plain that they are greatly deceived, for they expect *peace*, whereas *the sword reaches unto the soul*; that is, it is a killing sword, abundance of lives are lost, and more likely to be." Now, was it God that deceived them? No, he had often given them warning of judgments in general and of this in particular; but their own prophets deceive them, and cry peace to those to whom the God of heaven does not speak peace. It is a pitiable thing, and that which every good man greatly laments, to see people flattered into their own ruin, and promising themselves peace when war is at the door; and this we should complain of to God, who alone can prevent such a fatal delusion.

**VI.** The prophet's endeavour to undeceive them. When the prophets they loved and caressed dealt falsely with them, he whom they hated and persecuted dealt faithfully.

**1.** He shows them their wound. They were loth to see it, very loth to have it searched into; but, if they will allow themselves the liberty of a free thought, they might discover their punishment in their sin (v. 18): "*This is thy wickedness because it is bitter*. Now thou seest that it is a bitter thing to depart from God, and will certainly be *bitterness in the latter end*, <sup>2419</sup>Jeremiah 2:19. It produces bitter effects, and grief that *reaches unto the heart*, touches to the quick, and in the most tender part; the sword *reaches to the soul*," v. 10. God can make trouble reach the heart even of those that would lay nothing to heart. "And by this thou mayest see *what is thy wickedness*, that it is a bitter thing, *a root of bitterness, that bears gall and wormwood*, and that it has *reached to the heart*; it is the corruption of the soul, of the *imagination of the thought of the heart*." If the heart were not polluted with sin, it would not be disturbed and disquieted as it is with trouble.

2. He shows them the cure, v. 14. “Since *thy wickedness reaches to the heart*, there the application must be made. *O Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.*” By Jerusalem he means each one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; for every man has a heart of his own to take care of, and it is personal reformation that must help the public. Every one must return from *his own evil way*, and, in order to that, cleanse *his own evil heart*. “And let *the heart of the city* too be purified, not the suburbs only, the outskirts of it.” The vitals of a state must be amended by the reformation of those that have the commanding influence upon it. Note,

(1.) Reformation is absolutely necessary to salvation. There is no other way of preventing judgments, or turning them away when we are threatened with them, but taking away the sin by which we have procured them to ourselves.

(2.) No reformation is saving but that which reaches the heart. There is heart-wickedness that is defiling to the soul, from which we must wash ourselves. By repentance and faith we must wash our hearts from the guilt we have contracted by spiritual wickedness, by those sins which begin and end in the heart and go no further; and by mortification and watchfulness we must suppress and prevent this heart-wickedness for the future. The tree must be made good, else the fruit will not. Jerusalem was all overspread with the leprosy of sin. Now as the physicians agree with respect to the body when afflicted with leprosy that external applications will do no good, unless physic be taken inwardly to carry off the humours that lurk there and to change the mass of the blood, so it is with the soul, so it is with the state: there will be no effectual reformation of the manners without a reformation of the mind; the mistakes there must be rectified, the corruptions there must be mortified, and the evil dispositions there changed. “Though thou art Jerusalem, called a *holy city*, that will not save thee, unless thou *wash thy heart from wickedness.*” In the latter part of the verse he reasons with them: *How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?* He complains here

[1.] Of the delays of their reformation: “*How long shall that filthy heart of thine continue unwashed? When shall it once be?*” Note, The God of heaven thinks the time long that his room is usurped, and his interest opposed, in our souls, <sup>24137</sup>Jeremiah 13:27.

[2.] Of the root of their corruption, the *vain thoughts that lodged within them* and defiled their hearts, from which they must wash their hearts. *Thoughts of iniquity or mischief*, these are the evil thoughts that are the spawn of the evil *heart*, from which all other wickedness is produced, <sup><469></sup>Matthew 15:19. These are our own, the conceptions of our own lusts (<sup><3015></sup>James 1:15), and they are the most dangerous when they lodge within us, when they are admitted and entertained as guests, and are suffered to continue. Some read it *thoughts of affliction*, such thoughts as will bring nothing but affliction and misery. Some by the vain thoughts here understand all those frivolous pleas and excuses with which they turned off the reproofs and calls of the word and rendered them ineffectual, and bolstered themselves up in their wickedness. *Wash thy heart from wickedness*, and think not to say, *We are not polluted* (<sup><2423></sup>Jeremiah 2:23), or, “We are Jerusalem; *we have Abraham to our father*,” <sup><4088></sup>Matthew 3:8, 9.

## <sup><2419></sup>JEREMIAH 4:19-31

### PUNISHMENT PREDICTED

The prophet is here in an agony, and cries out like one upon the rack of pain with some acute distemper, or as a woman in travail. The expressions are very pathetic and moving, enough to melt a heart of stone into compassion: *My bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart*; and yet well, and in health himself, and nothing ails him. Note, A good man, in such a bad world as this is, cannot but be a *man of sorrows*. *My heart makes a noise in me*, through the tumult of my spirits, and *I cannot hold my peace*. Note, The grievance and the grief sometimes may be such that the most prudent patient man cannot forbear complaining.

Now, what is the matter? What is it that puts the good man into such agitation? It is not for himself, or any affliction in his family that he grieves thus; but it is purely upon the public account, it is his people's case that he lays to heart thus.

**I.** They are very sinful and will not be reformed, v. 22. These are the words of God himself, for so the prophet chose to give this character of the people, rather than in his own words, or as from himself: *My people are foolish*. God calls them his people, though they are foolish. They have

cast him off, but he has not cast them off, <sup><511></sup>Romans 11:1. “They are *my people*, whom I have been in covenant with, and still have mercy in store for. They are *foolish*, for *they have not known me*.” Note, Those are foolish indeed that have not known God, especially that call themselves his people, and have the advantages of coming into acquaintance with him, and yet have not known him. They are *sottish children*, stupid and senseless, and have *no understanding*. They cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil; they cannot discern the mind of God either in his word or in his providence; they do not understand what their true interest is, nor on which side it lies. They are *wise to do evil*, to plot mischief against the quiet in the land, wise to contrive the gratification of their lusts, and then to conceal and palliate them. But *to do good they have no knowledge*, no contrivance, no application of mind; they know not how to make a good use either of the ordinances or of the providences of God, nor how to bring about any design for the good of their country. Contrary to this should be our character. <sup><512></sup>Romans 16:19, *I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil*.

## II. They are miserable, and cannot be relieved.

**1.** He cries out, *Because thou hast heard, O my soul! the sound of the trumpet, and seen the standard, both giving the alarm of war*, v. 19, 21. He does not say, *Thou hast heard, O my ear!* but, *O my soul!* because the event was yet future, and it is by the spirit of prophecy that he see it and receives the impression of it. His *soul* heard it from the words of God, and therefore he was as well assured of it, and as much affected with it, as if he had heard it with his bodily ears. He expresses this deep concern,

**(1.)** To show that, though he foretold this calamity, yet he was far from *desiring the woeful day*; for a woeful day it would be to him. It becomes us to tremble at the thought of the misery that sinners are running themselves into, though we have good hopes, through grace, that we ourselves are *delivered from the wrath to come*.

**(2.)** To awaken them to a holy fear, and so to a care to prevent so great a judgment by a true and timely repentance. Note, Those that would affect other with the word of God should evidence that they are themselves affected with it. Now,

**2.** Let us see what there is in the destruction here foreseen and foretold that is so very affecting.

(1.) It is a swift and *sudden* destruction; it comes upon Judah and Jerusalem ere they are aware, and pours in so fast upon them that they have not the east breathing time. They have no time to recollect their thoughts, much less to recruit or recover their strength: *Destruction upon destruction is cried* (v. 20), *breach upon breach*, one sad calamity, like Job's messengers, treading upon the heels of another. The death of Josiah breaks the ice, and plucks up the flood-gates; within three months after that his son and successor Jehoahaz is deposed by the king of Egypt; within two or three years after Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and took it, and thenceforward he was continually making descents upon the land of Judah with his armies during the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, till about nineteen years after he completed their ruin in the destruction of Jerusalem: but *suddenly were their tents spoiled and their curtains in a moment*. Though the cities held out for some time, the country was laid waste at the very first. The shepherds and all that lived in tents were plundered immediately; they and their effects fell into the enemies' hands; therefore we find the Rechabites, who dwelt in tents, upon the first coming of the army of the Chaldees into the land retiring to Jerusalem, <sup>(~~251~~)</sup>Jeremiah 35:11. The inhabitants of the villages soon ceased: *Suddenly were the tents spoiled*. The plain men that dwelt in tents were first made a prey of.

(2.) This dreadful war continued a great while, not in the borders, but in the bowels of the country; for the people were very obstinate, and would not submit to the king of Babylon, but took all opportunities to rebel against him, which did but lengthen out the calamity; they might as well have yielded at first as at last. This is complained of (v. 21): *How long shall I see the standard? Shall the sword devour for ever? Good men are none of those that delight in war*, for they know not how to fish in troubled waters; they are *for peace* (<sup>(~~107~~)</sup>Psalm 120:7), and will heartily say *Amen* to that prayer, "Give peace in our time, O Lord!" *O thou sword of the Lord! when wilt thou be quiet?*

(3.) The desolations made by it in the land were general and universal: *The whole land is spoiled*, or plundered (v. 20); so it was at first, and at length it became a perfect chaos. It was such a desolation as amounted in a manner to a dissolution; not only the superstructure, but even the foundations, were all *out of course*. The prophet in vision saw the extent and extremity of this destruction, and he here gives a most lively description of it, which one would think might have made those uneasy in

their sins who dwelt in a land doomed to such a ruin, which might yet have been prevented by their repentance.

[1.] The earth is *without form, and void* (v. 23), as it was <sup><002></sup>Genesis 1:2. It is *Tohu* and *Bohu*, the words there used, as far as the land of Judea goes. It is *confusion* and *emptiness*, stripped of all its beauty, void of all its wealth, and, compared with what it was, every thing out of place and out of shape. To a worse chaos than this will the earth be reduced at the end of time, when it, *and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*.

[2.] The *heavens* too are *without light*, as the earth is without fruits. This alludes to the *darkness* that was *upon the face of the deep* (<sup><002></sup>Genesis 1:2), and represents God's displeasure against them, as the eclipse of the sun did at our Saviour's death. It was not only the earth that failed them, but heaven also frowned upon them; and with their trouble they had darkness, for they could not see through their troubles. The smoke of their houses and cities which the enemy burnt, and the dust which their army raised in its march, even darkened the sun, so that *the heavens had no light*. Or it may be taken figuratively: *The earth* (that is, the common people) was impoverished and in confusion; and the *heavens* (that is, the princes and rulers) *had no light*, no wisdom in themselves, nor were any comfort to the people, nor a guide to them. Comp. <sup><402></sup>Matthew 24:29.

[3.] *The mountains trembled, and the hills moved lightly*, v. 24. So formidable were the appearances of God against his people, as in the days of old they had been for them, that *the mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs*, <sup><404></sup>Psalms 114:4. *The everlasting mountains* seemed to be *scattered*, <sup><306></sup>Habakkuk 3:6. The mountains on which they had worshipped their idols, the mountains over which they had looked for succours, all trembled, as if they had been conscious of the people's guilt. The mountains, those among them that seemed to the highest and strongest, and of the firmest resolution, trembled at the approach of the Chaldean army. The hills moved lightly, as being eased of the burden of a sinful nation, <sup><212></sup>Isaiah 1:24.

[4.] Not the earth only, but the air, was dispeopled, and left uninhabited (v. 25): *I beheld* the cities, the countries that used to be populous, *and, lo, there was no man* to be seen; all the inhabitants were either killed, or fled, or taken captives, such a ruining depopulating thing is sin: nay, even *the birds of the heavens*, that used to fly about and *sing among the branches*, had now *fled* away, and were no more to be seen or heard. The *land of*

Judah had now become like the *lake of Sodom*, over which (they say) no bird flies; see <sup><1523></sup>Deuteronomy 29:23. The enemies shall make such havoc of the country that they shall not so much as leave a bird alive in it.

[5.] Both the ground and the houses shall be laid waste (v. 26): *Lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness*, being deserted by the inhabitants that should cultivate it, and then soon overgrown with thorns and briars, or being trodden down by the destroying army of the enemy. The *cities* also and their gates and walls are *broken down* and levelled with the ground. Those that look no further than second causes impute it to the policy and fury of the invaders; but the prophet, who looks to the first cause, says that it is *at the presence of the Lord*, at *his face* (that is, the anger of his countenance), even *by his fierce anger*, that this was done. Even angry men cannot do us any real hurt, unless God be angry with us. If our *ways please him*, all is well.

[6.] The meaning of all this is that the nation shall be entirely ruined, and every part of it shall share in the destruction; neither town nor country shall escape. *First*, Not the country, for *the whole land shall be desolate*, corn land and pasture land, both common and enclosed, it shall be laid waste (v. 27); the conquerors will have occasion for it all. *Secondly*, Not the men, for (v. 29) *the whole city shall flee*, all the inhabitants of the town shall quit their habitations by consent, *for fear of the horsemen and bowmen*. Rather than lie exposed to their fury, they shall *go into the thickets*, where they are in danger of being torn by briars, nay, to be torn in pieces by wild beasts; and they shall *climb up upon the rocks*, where their lodging will be hard and cold, and the precipice dangerous. Let us not be over-fond of our houses and cities; for the time may come when rocks and thickets may be preferable, and chosen rather. This shall be the common case, for *every city shall be forsaken*, and *not a man* shall be left that dares  *dwell therein*. Both government and trade shall be at an end, and all civil societies and incorporations dissolved. It is a very dismal idea which this gives of the approaching desolation; but in the midst of all these threatenings comes in one comfortable word (v. 27): *Yet will not I make a full end* — not a total consumption, for God will reserve a remnant to himself, that shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger — not a final consumption, for Jerusalem shall again be built and the land inhabited. This comes in here, in the midst of the threatenings, for the comfort of those that *trembled at God's word*; and it intimates to us the changeableness of God's providence; as it breaks down, so it raises up



again; every end of our comforts is not a full end, however we may be ready to think it so. It also intimates the unchangeableness of God's covenant, which stands so firmly, that, though he may correct his people severely, yet he will not *cast them off*, <sup>2411</sup>Jeremiah 30:11.

(4.) Their case was helpless and without remedy.

[1.] God would not help them; so he tells them plainly, v. 28. And, if the Lord do not help them, who can? This is that which makes their case deplorable. "*For this the earth mourns and the heavens above are black* (there are no prospects but what are very dismal), *because I have spoken it; I have given the word which shall not be called back; I have purposed it* (it is a consumption decreed, determined) *and I will not repent*, not change this way, but proceed in it, and will not *turn back from it*." They would not repent and turn back from the way of their sins (<sup>2412</sup>Jeremiah 2:25), and therefore God will not repent and turn back from the way of his judgments.

[2.] They could not help themselves, v. 30, 31. When the thing appeared at a distance they flattered themselves with hopes that, though God should not appear for them as he had done for Hezekiah against the Assyrian army, yet they should find some means or other to secure themselves and give check to the forces of the enemy. But the prophet tells them that, when it comes to the setting to, they will be quite at a loss: "*When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?*" What course wilt thou take? Sit down now, and consider this in time." He assures them that, whatever were now their contrivances and confidences, *First*, They will then be despised by their allies whom they depended upon for assistance. He had often compared the sin of Jerusalem to whoredom, not only her idolatry, but her trust in creatures, in the neighbouring powers. Now here he compares her to a harlot abandoned by all the lewd ones that used to make court to her. She is supposed to do all she can to keep up her interest in their affections. She does what she can to make herself appear considerable among the nations, and a valuable ally. She compliments them by her ambassadors to the highest degree, to engage them to stand by her now in her distress. She *clothes herself with crimson*, as if she were rich, and *decks herself with ornaments of gold*, as if her treasuries were still as full as ever they had been. She *rents her face with painting*, puts the best colours she can upon her present distresses and does her utmost to palliate and extenuate her losses, sets a good face upon them. But this painting, though it beautifies

the face for the present, really rends it; the frequent use of paint spoils the skin, cracks it, and makes it rough; so the case which by false colours has been made to appear better than really it was, when truth comes to light, will look so much the worse. “And, after all, *in vain shalt thou make thyself fair*; all thy neighbours are sensible how low thou art brought; the Chaldeans will strip thee of thy crimson and ornaments, and then thy confederates will not only slight thee and refuse to give thee any succour, but they will join with those that *seek thy life*, that they may come in for a share in the prey of so rich a country.” Here seems to be an allusion to the story of Jezebel, who thought, by making herself look fair and fine, to outface her doom, but in vain, <sup>(1218)</sup>2 Kings 9:30, 33. See what creatures prove when we confide in them, how treacherous they are; instead of saving the life, they seek the life; they often change, so that they will sooner do us an ill turn than any service. And see to how little purpose it is for those that have by sin deformed themselves in God's eyes to think by any arts they can use to beautify themselves in the eye of the world.

*Secondly*, They will then be themselves in despair; they will find their troubles to be like the pains of a woman in travail, which she cannot escape: *I have heard the voice of the daughter of Zion*, her groans echoing to the triumphal shouts of the Chaldean army, which he heard, v. 15. It is like the *voice of a woman in travail*, whose pain is exquisite, and the fruit of sin and the curse too (<sup>(1219)</sup>Genesis 3:16), and exhorts lamentable outcries, especially of a *woman in travail of her first child*, who, having never known before what that pain is, is the more terrified by it. Troubles are most grievous to those that have not been used to them. Zion, in this distress, since her neighbours refuse to pity her, *bewails herself*, fetching *deep sighs* (so the word signifies), and she *spreads her hands*, either wringing them for grief or reaching them forth for succour. All the cry is, *Woe is me now!* (now that the decree has gone forth against her and is past recall), for *my soul is wearied because of murderers*. The Chaldean soldiers put all to the sword that gave them any opposition, so that the land was full of murders. Zion was weary of hearing tragical stories from all parts of the country, and cried out, *Woe is me!* It was well if their sufferings put them in mind of their sins, the murders committed upon them of the murders committed by them; for God was now making inquisition for the *innocent blood* shed in Jerusalem, *which the Lord would not pardon*, <sup>(1220)</sup>2 Kings 24:4. Note, As sin will find out the sinner, so sorrow will, sooner or later, find out the secure.