

# CHAPTER 5

In this chapter the prophet, in God's name, shows the people of God their transgressions, even the house of Jacob their sins, and the judgments which were likely to be brought upon them for their sins,

**I.** By a parable, under the similitude of an unfruitful vineyard, representing the great favours God had bestowed upon them, their disappointing his expectations from them, and the ruin they had thereby deserved (v. 1-7).

**II.** By an enumeration of the sins that did abound among them, with a threatening of punishments that should answer to the sins.

- 1.** Covetousness, and greediness of worldly wealth, which shall be punished with famine (v. 8-10)
- 2.** Rioting, revelling, and drunkenness (v. 11, 12, 22, 23), which shall be punished with captivity and all the miseries that attend it (v. 13-17).
- 3.** Presumption in sin, and defying the justice of God (v. 18, 19).
- 4.** Confounding the distinctions between virtue and vice, and so undermining the principles of religion (v. 20).
- 5.** Self-conceit (v. 21).
- 6.** Perverting justice, for which, and the other instances of reigning wickedness among them, a great and general desolation is threatened, which should lay all waste (v. 24, 25), and which should be effected by a foreign invasion (v. 26-30), referring perhaps to the havoc made not long after by Sennacherib's army.

## ISAIAH 5:1-7

### ISRAEL COMPARED TO A VINEYARD

See what variety of methods the great God takes to awaken sinners to repentance by convincing them of sin, and showing them their misery and danger by reason of it. To this purport he speaks sometimes in plain terms and sometimes in parables, sometimes in prose and sometimes in verse, as

here. “We have tried to *reason with you* (<sup><2118></sup>Isaiah 1:18); now let us put your case into a poem, inscribed to the honour of my well beloved.” God the Father dictates it to the honour of Christ his well beloved Son, whom he has constituted Lord of the vineyard. The prophet sings it to the honour of Christ too, for he is his well beloved. The Old-Testament prophets were friends of the bridegroom. Christ is God's beloved Son and our beloved Saviour. Whatever is said or sung of the church must be intended to his praise, even that which (like this) tends to our shame. This parable was put into a song that it might be the more moving and affecting, might be the more easily learned and exactly remembered, and the better transmitted to posterity; and it is an exposition of the song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), showing that what he then foretold was now fulfilled. Jerome says, Christ the well-beloved did in effect sing this mournful song when he beheld Jerusalem *and wept over it* (<sup><404></sup>Luke 19:41), and had reference to it in the parable of the vineyard (<sup><413></sup>Matthew 21:33, etc.), only here the fault was in the vines, there in the husbandmen. Here we have,

**I.** The great things which God had done for the Jewish church and nation. When all the rest of the world lay in common, not cultivated by divine revelation, that was his vineyard, they were his peculiar people. He acknowledged them as his own, set them apart for himself. The soil they were planted in was extraordinary; it was *a very fruitful hill, the horn of the son of oil*; so it is in the margin. There was plenty, a cornucopia; and there was dainty: they did there eat the fat and drink the sweet, and so were furnished with abundance of good things to honour God with in sacrifices and free-will offerings. The advantages of our situation will be brought into the account another day. Observe further what God did for this vineyard.

**1.** He fenced it, took it under his special protection, kept it night and day under his own eye, lest any should hurt it, <sup><270></sup>Isaiah 27:2, 3. If they had not themselves thrown down their fence, no inroad could have been made upon them, <sup><437></sup>Psalms 125:2; 131:4.

**2.** He gathered the stones out of it, that, as nothing from without might damage it, so nothing within might obstruct its fruitfulness. He proffered his grace to take away the stony heart.

3. He planted it with the choicest vine, set up a pure religion among them, gave them a most excellent law, instituted ordinances very proper for the keeping up of their acquaintance with God, <sup><247></sup>Jeremiah 2:21.

4. He built a tower in the midst of it, either for defence against violence or for the dressers of the vineyard to lodge in; or rather it was for the owner of the vineyard to sit in, to take a view of the vines (<sup><277></sup>Song of Solomon 7:12) — a summer-house. The temple was this tower, about which the priests lodged, and where God promised to meet his people, and gave them the tokens of his presence among them and pleasure in them.

5. He made a wine-press therein, set up his altar, to which the sacrifices, as the fruits of the vineyard, should be brought.

**II.** The disappointment of his just expectations from them: *He looked that it should bring forth grapes*, and a great deal of reason he had for that expectation. Note, God expects vineyard-fruit from those that enjoy vineyard-privileges, not leaves only, as <sup><411></sup>Mark 11:12. A bare profession, though ever so green, will not serve: there must be more than buds and blossoms. Good purposes and good beginnings are good things, but not enough; there must be fruit, a good heart and a good life, vineyard fruit, thoughts and affections, words and actions, agreeable to the Spirit, which is the fatness of the vineyard (<sup><452></sup>Galatians 5:22, 23), *answerable to the ordinances*, which are the dressings of the vineyard, acceptable to God, the Lord of the vineyard, and fruit according to the season. Such fruit as this God expects from us, grapes, the fruit of the vine, with which they honour God and man (<sup><493></sup>Judges 9:13); and his expectations are neither high nor hard, but righteous and very reasonable. Yet see how his expectations are frustrated: *It brought forth wild grapes*; not only no fruit at all, but bad fruit, worse than none, grapes of Sodom, <sup><633></sup>Deuteronomy 32:32.

1. Wild grapes are the fruits of the corrupt nature, fruit according to the crabstock, not according to the engrafted branch, from the root of bitterness, <sup><825></sup>Hebrews 12:15. Where grace does not work corruption will.

2. Wild grapes are hypocritical performances in religion, that look like grapes, but are sour or bitter, and are so far from being pleasing to God that they are provoking, as theirs mentioned in <sup><2911></sup>Isaiah 1:11. Counterfeit graces are wild grapes.

**III.** An appeal to themselves whether upon the whole matter God must not be justified and they condemned, v. 3, 4. And now the case is plainly stated: *O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah! judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.* This implies that God was blamed about them. There was a controversy between them and him; but the equity was so plain on his side that he could venture to put the decision of the controversy to their own consciences. “Let any inhabitant of Jerusalem, any man of Judah, that has but the use of his reason and a common sense of equity and justice, speak his mind impartially in this matter.” Here is a challenge to any man to show,

**1.** Any instance wherein God had been wanting to them: *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* He speaks of the external means of fruitfulness, and such as might be expected from the dresser of a vineyard, from whom it is not required that he should change the nature of the vine. *What ought to have been done more?* so it may be read. They had everything requisite for instruction and direction in their duty, for quickening them to it and putting them in mind of it. No inducements were wanting to persuade them to it, but all arguments were used that were proper to work either upon hope or fear; and they had all the opportunities they could desire for the performance of their duty, the new moons, and the sabbaths, and solemn feasts; They had the scriptures, the lively oracles, a standing ministry in the priests and Levites, besides what was extraordinary in the prophets. No nation had statutes and judgments so righteous.

**2.** Nor could any tolerable excuse be offered for their walking thus contrary to God. “Wherefore, what reason can be given why it should bring forth wild grapes, when I looked for grapes?” Note, The wickedness of those that profess religion, and enjoy the means of grace, is the most unreasonable unaccountable thing in the world, and the whole blame of it must lie upon the sinners themselves. “*If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it,* and shalt not have a word to say for thyself in the judgment of the great day.” God will prove his own ways equal and the sinner's ways unequal.

**IV.** Their doom read, and a righteous sentence passed upon them for their bad conduct towards God (v. 5, 6): “*And now go to,* since nothing can be offered in excuse of the crime or arrest of the judgement, *I will tell you what I am now determined to do to my vineyard.* I will be vexed and

troubled with it no more; since it will be good for nothing, it *shall* be good for nothing; in short, it shall cease to be a vineyard, and be turned into a wilderness: the church of the Jews shall be unchurched; their charter shall be taken away, and they shall become *lo-ammi* — *not my people*.”

1. “They shall no longer be distinguished as a peculiar people, but be laid in common: *I will take away the hedge thereof*, and then it will soon be eaten up and become as bare as other ground.” They mingled with the nations and therefore were justly scattered among them.
2. “They shall no longer be protected as God's people, but left exposed. God will not only suffer the wall to go to decay, but he will break it down, will remove all their defences from them, and then they will become an easy prey to their enemies, who have long waited for an opportunity to do them a mischief, and will now tread them down and trample upon them.”
3. “They shall no longer have the face of a vineyard, and the form and shape of a church and commonwealth, but shall be levelled and laid waste.” This was fulfilled when *Jerusalem for their sakes was ploughed as a field*, <sup><332></sup>Micah 3:12.
4. “No more pains shall be taken with them by magistrates or ministers, the dressers and keepers of their vineyard; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but every thing shall run wild, and nothing shall come up but briars and thorns, the products of sin and the curse,” <sup><333></sup>Genesis 3:18. When errors and corruptions, vice and immorality, go without check or control, no testimony borne against them, no rebuke given them or restraint put upon them, the vineyard is unpruned, is not dressed, or ridded; and then it will soon be like the vineyard of the man void of understanding, all grown over with thorns.
5. “That which completes its woe is that the dews of heaven shall be withheld; he that has the key of the clouds will command them that they rain no rain upon it, and that alone is sufficient to run it into a desert.” Note, God in a way of righteous judgment, denies his grace to those that have long received it in vain. The sum of all is that those who would not bring forth good fruit should bring forth none. The curse of barrenness is the punishment of the sin of barrenness, as <sup><4114></sup>Mark 11:14. This had its partial accomplishment in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, its full accomplishment in the final rejection of the Jews, and has its frequent accomplishment in the departure of God's Spirit from those

persons who have long resisted him and striven against him, and the removal of his gospel from those places that have been long a reproach to it, while it has been an honour to them. It is no loss to God to lay his vineyard waste; for he can, when he please, turn a wilderness into a fruitful field; and when he does thus dismantle a vineyard, it is but as he did by the garden of Eden, which, when man had by sin forfeited his place in it, was soon levelled with common soil.

**V.** The explanation of this parable, or a key to it (v. 7), where we are told,

**1.** What is meant by the vineyard (it is *the house of Israel*, the body of the people, incorporated in one church and commonwealth), and what by the vines, the pleasant plants, the plants of God's pleasure, which he had been pleased in and delighted in doing good to; they are *the men of Judah*; these he had dealt graciously with, and from them he expected suitable returns.

**2.** What is meant by the grapes that were expected and the wild grapes that were produces: *He looked for judgment and righteousness*, that the people should be honest in all their dealings and the magistrates should strictly administer justice. This might reasonably be expected among a people that had such excellent laws and rules of justice given them (<sup>1704B</sup>Deuteronomy 4:8); but the fact was quite otherwise; instead of judgment there was the cruelty of the oppressors, and instead of righteousness the cry of the oppressed. Every thing was carried by clamour and noise, and not by equity and according to the merits of the cause. It is sad with a people when wickedness has usurped the place of judgment, <sup>2116B</sup>Ecclesiastes 3:16. It is very sad with a soul when instead of the grapes of humility, meekness, patience, love, and contempt of the world, which God looks for, there are the wild grapes of pride, passion, discontent, malice, and contempt of God — instead of the grapes of praying and praising, the wild grapes of cursing and swearing, which are a great offence to God. Some of the ancients apply this to the Jews in Christ's time, among whom God looked for righteousness (that is, that they should receive and embrace Christ), but behold a cry, that cry, *Crucify him, crucify him*.

## THE PUNISHMENT OF THE SENSUAL

The world and the flesh are the two great enemies that we are in danger of being overpowered by; yet we are in no danger if we do not ourselves yield to them. Eagerness of the world, and indulgence of the flesh, are the two sins against which the prophet, in God's name, here denounces woes. These were sins which then abounded among the men of Judah, some of the wild grapes they brought forth (v. 4), and for which God threatens to bring ruin upon them. They are sins which we have all need to stand upon our guard against and dread the consequences of.

**I.** Here is a woe to those who set their hearts upon the wealth of the world, and place their happiness in that, and increase it to themselves by indirect and unlawful means (v. 8), who *join house to house and lay field to field, till there be no place, no room for anybody to live by them..* them. If they could succeed, they would be placed alone in the midst of the earth, would monopolize possessions and preferments, and engross all profits and employments to themselves. Not that it is a sin for those who have a house and a field, of they have wherewithal, to purchase another; but

**1.** Their fault is,

**(1.)** That they are inordinate in their desires to enrich themselves, and make it their whole care and business to raise an estate, as if they had nothing to mind, nothing to seek, nothing to do, in this world, but that. They never know when they have enough, but the more they have the more they would have; and, like the *daughters of the horseleech*, they cry, *Give, give*. They cannot enjoy what they have, nor do good with it, but are constantly contriving and studying to make it more. They must have variety of houses, a winter-house, and a summer-house, and if another man's house or field lie convenient to theirs, as Naboth's vineyard to Ahab's, they must have that too, or they cannot be easy.

**(2.)** That they are herein careless of others, nay, and injurious to them. They would live so as to let nobody live but themselves. So that their insatiable covetings may be gratified, they care not what becomes of all about them, what encroachments they make upon their neighbours' rights, what hardships they put upon those that they have power over or

advantage against, nor what base and wicked arts they use to heap up treasure to themselves. They would swell so big as to fill all space, and yet are still unsatisfied (<sup><260></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:10), as Alexander, who, when he fancied he had conquered the world, wept because he had not another world to conquer. *Deficiente terrf, non impletur avaritia* — *If the whole earth were monopolized, avarice would thirst for more.* What! will you be placed alone in the midst of the earth? (so some read it); will you be so foolish as to desire it, when we have so much need of the service of others and so much comfort in their society? Will you be so foolish as to expect that the *earth shall be forsaken for us* (<sup><389></sup>Job 18:4), when it is by multitudes that the earth is to be replenished? *An propter vos solos tanta terra creata est?* — *Was the wide world created merely for you?* Lyra.

**2.** That which is threatened as the punishment of this sin is that neither the houses nor the fields they were thus greedy of should turn to any account, v. 9, 10. God whispered it to the prophet in his ear, as he speaks in a like case (<sup><224></sup>Isaiah 22:14): *It was revealed in my ears by the Lord of hosts* (as God told Samuel a thing *in his ear*, <sup><995></sup>1 Samuel 9:15); he thought he heard it still sounding in his ears; but he proclaimed it, as he ought, *upon the house-tops*, <sup><417></sup>Matthew 10:27.

**(1.)** That the houses they were so fond of should be untenanted, should stand long empty, and should yield them no rent, and go out of repair: *Many houses shall be desolate*, the people that should dwell in them, being cut off by sword, famine, or pestilence, or carried into captivity; or trade being dead, and poverty coming upon the country like an armed man, those that had been housekeepers were forced to become lodgers, or shift for themselves elsewhere. Even great and fair houses, that would invite tenants, and (there being a scarcity of tenants) might be taken at low rates, shall stand empty without inhabitants. God created not the earth in vain; he *formed it to be inhabited*, <sup><358></sup>Isaiah 45:18. But men's projects are often frustrated, and what they frame answers not the intention. We have a saying, That fools build houses for wise men to live in; but sometimes, as the event proves, they are built for no man to live in. God has many ways to empty the most populous cities.

**(2.)** That the fields they were so fond of should be unfruitful (v. 10): *Ten acres of vineyard shall yield* only such a quantity of grapes as will make but *one bath* of wine (which was about eight gallons), *and the seed of a homer*, a bushel's sowing of ground, shall yield but an ephah, which was



the tenth part of a homer; so that through the barrenness of the ground, or the unreasonableness of the weather, they should not have more than a tenth part of their seed again. Note, Those that set their hearts upon the world will justly be disappointed in their expectations from it.

**II.** Here is a woe to those that dote upon the pleasures and delights of sense, v. 11, 12. Sensuality ruins men as certainly as worldliness and oppression. As Christ pronounces a woe against those that are rich, so also against those that laugh now and are full (<sup>4124</sup>Luke 6:24, 25), and fare sumptuously, <sup>4123</sup>Luke 16:19. Observe,

**1.** Who the sinners are against whom this woe is denounced.

**(1.)** They are such as are given to drink; they make their drinking their business, have their hearts upon it, and overcharge themselves with it. They rise early to follow strong drink, as husbandmen and tradesmen do to follow their employments; as if they were afraid of losing time from that which is the greatest misspending of time. Whereas commonly those that are drunken are drunken in the night, when they have despatched the business of the day, these neglect business, abandon it, and give up themselves to the service of the flesh; for they sit at their cups all day, *and continue till night, till wine inflame them* — inflame their lusts (chambering and wantonness follow upon rioting and drunkenness) — inflame their passions; for who but such have *contentions and wounds without cause?* <sup>4122</sup>Proverbs 23:29-35. They make a perfect trade of drinking; nor do they seek the shelter of the night for this work of darkness, as men ashamed of it, but *count it a pleasure to riot in the day-time*. See <sup>4123</sup>2 Peter 2:13.

**(2.)** They are such as are given to mirth. They have their feasts, and they are so merrily disposed that they cannot dine or sup without music, musical instruments of all sorts, like David (<sup>3185</sup>Amos 6:5), like Solomon (<sup>4128</sup>Ecclesiastes 2:8); *the harp and the viol, the tarbet and pipe*, must accompany the wine, that every sense may be gratified to a nicety; they *take the timbrel and harp*, <sup>4812</sup>Job 21:12. The use of music is lawful in itself; but when it is excessive, when we set our hearts upon it, misspend time in it, so that it crowds our spiritual and divine pleasures and draws away the heart from God, then it turns into sin for us.

**(3.)** They are such as never give their mind to any thing that is serious: *They regard not the work of the Lord*; they observe not his power,

wisdom, and goodness, in those creatures which they abuse and subject to vanity, nor the bounty of his providence in giving them those good things which they make the food and fuel of their lusts. God's judgments have already seized them, and they are under the tokens of his displeasure, but they regard not; they consider not the hand of God in all these things; his hand is lifted up, but they will not see, because they will not disturb themselves in their pleasures nor think what God is doing with them.

**2.** What the judgments are which are denounced against them, and in part executed. It is here foretold,

**(1.)** that they should be dislodged; the land should spue out these drunkards (v. 13): *My people* (so they call themselves, and were proud of it) have therefore *gone into captivity*, are as sure to go as if they were gone already, *because they have no knowledge*; how should they have knowledge when by their excessive drinking they make sots and fools of themselves? They set up for wits; but because they regard not God's controversy with them, nor take any care to make their peace with him, they may truly be said to have no knowledge; and the reason is because they will have none; they are inconsiderate and wilful, and are therefore destroyed for lack of knowledge.

**(2.)** That they should be impoverished, and come to want that which they had wasted and abused to excess: *Even their glory are men of famine*, subject to it and slain by it; and *their multitude are dried up with thirst*. Both the great men and the common people are ready to perish for want of bread and water. This is the effect of the failure of the corn (v. 10), for *the king himself is served of the field*, <sup><2019></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:9. And when the vintage fails the drunkards are called upon to weep, because *the new wine is cut off from their mouth* (<sup><2015></sup>Joel 1:5), and not so much because now they want it as because when they had it they abused it. It is just with God to make men want that for necessity which they have abused to excess.

**(3.)** What multitudes should be cut off by famine and sword (v. 14): *Therefore hell has enlarged herself*. Tophet, the common burying-place, proves too little; so many are there to be buried that they shall be forced to enlarge it. The grave has opened her mouth without measure, *never saying, It is enough*, <sup><2015></sup>Proverbs 30:15, 16. It may be understood of the place of the damned; luxury and sensuality fill these regions of darkness and horror; there those are tormented who made a god of their belly, <sup><2015></sup>Luke 16:25; <sup><2019></sup>Philippians 3:19.

(4.) That they should be humbled and abased, and all their honours laid in the dust. This will be done effectually by death and the grave: *Their glory shall descend*, not only to the earth, but into it; it shall not *descend after them* (<sup>1907</sup>Psalm 49:17), to stand them in any stead on the other side death, but it shall die and be buried with them — poor glory, which will thus wither! Did they glory in their numbers? Their multitude shall go down to the pit, <sup>1918</sup>Ezekiel 31:18; 32:32. Did they glory in the figure they made? Their pomp shall be at an end; their shouts with which they triumphed, and were attended. Did they glory in their mirth? Death will turn it into mourning; he that rejoices and revels, and never knows what it is to be serious, shall go thither where there are weeping and wailing. Thus the mean man and the mighty man meet together in the grave and under mortifying judgments. Let a man be ever so high, death will bring him low — ever so mean, death will bring him lower, in the prospect of which the eyes of the lofty should now be humbled, v. 15. It becomes those to look low that must shortly be laid low.

3. What the fruit of these judgments shall be.

(1.) God shall be glorified, v. 16. He that is the Lord of hosts, and the holy God, shall be exalted and sanctified in the judgment and righteousness of these dispensations. His justice must be owned in bringing those low what exalted themselves; and herein he is glorified,

[1.] As a God is irresistible power. He will herein be exalted as the Lord of hosts, that is able to break the strongest, humble the proudest, and tame the most unruly. Power is not exalted but in judgment. It is the honour of God that, though he has a mighty arm, yet *judgment and justice are always the habitation of his throne*, <sup>1913</sup>Psalm 89:13, 14.

[2.] As a God of unspotted purity. He that is holy, infinitely holy, shall be sanctified (that is, shall be owned and declared to be holy) in the righteous punishment of proud men. Note, When proud men are humbled the great God is honoured, and ought to be honoured by us.

(2.) Good people shall be relieved and succoured (v. 17): *Then shall the lambs feed after their manner*; the meek ones of the earth, who followed the Lamb, who were persecuted, and put into fear by those proud oppressors, shall feed quietly, feed in the green pastures, and there shall be none to make them afraid. See <sup>1914</sup>Ezekiel 34:14. When the enemies of the church are cut off then have the churches rest. *They shall feed at their*

pleasure; so some read it. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*, and delight themselves in abundant peace. *They shall feed according to their order or capacity* (so others read it), as they are able to hear the word, that bread of life.

**(3.)** The country shall be laid waste, and become a prey to the neighbours: *The waste places of the fats ones*, the possessions of those rich men that lived at their ease, shall be eaten by strangers that were nothing akin to them. In the captivity the poor of the land were left for *vine-dressers and husbandmen* (~~1252~~ 2 Kings 25:12); these were the lambs that fed in the pastures of the fats ones, which were laid in common for strangers to eat. When the church of the Jews, those fat ones, was laid waste, their privileges were transferred to the Gentiles, who had been long strangers, and the lambs of Christ's flock were welcome to them.

## ~~2188~~ ISAIAH 5:18-30

### DENUNCIATIONS AGAINST SIN

Here are,

**I.** Sins described which will bring judgments upon a people: and this perhaps is not only a charge drawn up against the men of Judah who lived at that time, and the particular articles of that charge, though it may relate primarily to them, but is rather intended for warning to all people, in all ages, to take heed of these sins, as destructive both to particular persons and to communities, and exposing men to God's wrath and his righteous judgments. Those are here said to be in a woeful condition,

**1.** Who are eagerly set upon sin, and violent in their sinful pursuits (v. 18), who *draw iniquity with cords of vanity*, who take as much pains to sin as the cattle do that draw a team, who put themselves to the stretch for the gratifying of their inordinate appetites, and, to humour a base lust, offer violence to nature itself. They think themselves as sure of compassing their wicked project as if they were pulling it towards them with strong cart-ropes; but they will find themselves disappointed, for they will prove cords of vanity, which will break when they come to any stress. For *the righteous Lord will cut in sunder the cords of the wicked*, ~~1294~~ Psalm 129:4; ~~1308~~ Job 4:8; ~~1218~~ Proverbs 22:8. They are by long custom and confirmed

habits so hardened in sin that they cannot get clear of it. Those that sin through infirmity are drawn away by sin; those that sin presumptuously draw iniquity to them, in spite of the oppositions of Providence and the checks of conscience. Some by sin understand the punishment of sin: they pull God's judgments upon their own heads as it were, with cart-ropes.

**2.** Who set the justice of God at defiance, and challenge the Almighty to do his worst (v. 19): *They say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work;* this is the same language with that of the scoffers of the last days, who say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* and therefore it is that, like them, they *draw iniquity with cords of vanity*, are violent and daring in sin, and walk after their own lusts, <sup>6008</sup>2 Peter 3:3, 4.

**(1.)** They ridicule the prophets, and banter them. It is in scorn that they call God *the Holy One of Israel*, because the prophets used with great veneration to call him so.

**(2.)** They will not believe the revelation of God's wrath from heaven against their ungodliness and unrighteousness; unless they see it executed, they will not know it, as if the curse were *brutum fulmen* — *a mere flash*, and all the threatenings of the word bugbears to frighten fools and children.

**(3.)** If God should appear against them, as he has threatened, yet they think themselves able to make their part good with him, and provoke him to jealousy, as if they were stronger than he, <sup>6102</sup>1 Corinthians 10:22. “We have heard his word, but it is all talk; let him hasten his work, we shall shift for ourselves well enough.” Note, Those that wilfully persist in sin consider not the power of God's anger.

**3.** Who confound and overthrow the distinctions between moral good and evil, *who call evil good and moral evil* (v. 20), who not only live in the omission of that which is good, but condemn it, argue against it, and, because they will not practise it themselves, run it down in others, and fasten invidious epithets upon it — not only do that which is evil, but justify it, and applaud it, and recommend it to others as safe and good. Note,

**(1.)** Virtue and piety are good, for they are light and sweet, they are pleasant and right; but sin and wickedness are evil; they are darkness, all the fruit of ignorance and mistake, and will be bitterness in the latter end.

**(2.)** Those do a great deal of wrong to God, and religion, and conscience, to their own souls, and to the souls of others, who misrepresent these, and put false colours upon them — who call drunkenness good fellowship, and covetousness good husbandry, and, when they persecute the people of God, think they do him good service — and, on the other hand, who call seriousness ill-nature, and sober singularity ill-breeding, who say all manner of evil falsely concerning the ways of godliness, and do what they can to form in men's minds prejudices against them, and this in defiance of evidence as plain and convincing as that of sense, by which we distinguish, beyond contradiction, between light and darkness, and between that which to the taste is sweet and that which is bitter.

**4.** Who though they are guilty of such gross mistakes as these have a great opinion of their own judgments, and value themselves mightily upon their understanding (v. 21): They are *wise in their own eyes*; they think themselves able to disprove and baffle the reproofs and convictions of God's word, and to evade and elude both the searches and the reaches of his judgments; they think they can outwit Infinite Wisdom and countermine Providence itself. Or it may be taken more generally: God resists the proud, those particularly who are conceited of their own wisdom and lean to their own understanding; such must become fools, that they may be truly wise, or else, at their end they shall appear to be fools before all the world.

**5.** Who glory in it as a great accomplishment that they are able to bear a great deal of strong liquor without being overcome by it (v. 22), *who are mighty to drink wine*, and use their strength and vigour, not in the service of their country, but in the service of their lusts. Let drunkards know from this scripture that,

**(1.)** They ungratefully abuse their bodily strength, which God has given them for good purposes, and by degrees cannot but weaken it.

**(2.)** It will not excuse them from the guilt of drunkenness that they can drink hard and yet keep their feet.

**(3.)** Those who boast of their drinking down others glory in their shame.

**(4.)** How light soever men make of their drunkenness, it is a sin which will certainly lay them open to the wrath and curse of God.

**6.** Who, as judges, pervert justice, and go counter to all rules of equity, v. 23. This follows upon the former; they *drink and forget the law* (~~1818~~ Proverbs 31:5), and *err through wine* (ch. 28:7), and take bribes, that they may have wherewithal to maintain their luxury. They *justify the wicked for reward*, and find some pretence or other to clear him from his guilt and shelter him from punishment; and they condemn the innocent, and *take away their righteousness from them*, that is, overrule their pleas, deprive them of the means of clearing up their innocency, and give judgment against them. In causes between man and man, might and money would at any time prevail against right and justice; and he who was ever so plainly in the wrong would with a small bribe carry the cause and recover the costs. In criminal causes, though the prisoner ever so plainly appeared to be guilty, yet for a reward they would acquit him; if he were innocent, yet if he did not fee them well, nay, if they were feed by the malicious prosecutor, or if they themselves had spleen against him, they would condemn him.

**II.** The judgments described, which these sins would bring upon them. Let not those expect to live easily who live thus wickedly; for the righteous God will take vengeance, v. 24-30. Here we may observe,

**1.** How complete this ruin will be, and how necessarily and unavoidably it will follow upon their sins. He had compared this people to a vine (v. 7), well fixed, and which, it was hoped, would be flourishing and fruitful; but the grace of God towards it was received in vain, and then the root became rottenness, being dried up from beneath, and the blossom would of course blow off as dust, as a light and worthless thing, ~~1818~~ Job 18:16. Sin weakens the strength, the root, of a people, so that they are easily rooted up; it defaces the beauty, the blossoms, of a people, and takes away the hopes of fruit. The sin of unfruitfulness is punished with the plague of unfruitfulness. Sinners make themselves as stubble and chaff, combustible matter, proper fuel to the fire of God's wrath, which then of course devours and consumes them, *as the fire devours the stubble*, and nobody can hinder it, or cares to hinder it. Chaff is consumed, unhelped and unpitied.

**2.** How just the ruin will be: *Because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts*, and would not have him to reign over them; and, as the law of Moses was rejected and thrown off, so *the word of the Holy One of Israel* by his servants the prophets, putting them in mind of his law and

calling them to obedience, was despised and disregarded. God does not reject men for every transgression of his law and word; but, when his word is despised and his law cast away, what can they expect but that God should utterly abandon them?

**3.** Whence this ruin should come (v. 25): it is destruction from the Almighty.

**(1.)** The justice of God appoints it; for that is *the anger of the Lord* which is *kindled against his people*, his necessary vindication of the honour of his holiness and authority.

**(2.)** The power of God effects it: *He has stretched forth his hand against them*. That hand which had many a time been stretched out for them against their enemies is now stretched out against them at full length and in its full vigour; and *who knows the power of his anger?* Whether they are sensible of it or no, it is God that has smitten them, has blasted their vine and made it wither.

**4.** The consequences and continuance of this ruin. When God comes forth in wrath against a people the hills tremble, fear seizes even their great men, who are strong and high, the earth shakes under men and is ready to sink; and as this feels dreadful (what does more so than an earthquake?) so what sight can be more frightful than the carcasses of men torn with dogs, or thrown *as dung* (so the margin reads it) *in the midst of the streets?* This intimates that great multitudes should be slain, not only soldiers in the field of battle, but the inhabitants of their cities put to the sword in cold blood, and that the survivors should neither have hands nor hearts to bury them. This is very dreadful, and yet such is the merit of sin that, *for all this, God's anger is not turned away*; that fire will burn as long as there remains any of the stubble and chaff to be fuel for it; *and his hand*, which he stretched forth against his people to smite them, because they do not by prayer take hold of it, nor by reformation submit themselves to it, *is stretched out still*.

**5.** The instruments that should be employed in bringing this ruin upon them: it should be done by the incursions of a foreign enemy, that should lay all waste. No particular enemy is named, and therefore we are to take it as a prediction of all the several judgments of this kind which God brought upon the Jews, Sennacherib's invasion soon after, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans first and at last by the Romans; and I think it



is to be looked upon also as a threatening of the like desolation of those countries which harbour and countenance those sins mentioned in the foregoing verses; it is an exposition of those woes. When God designs the ruin of a provoking people,

(1.) He can send a great way off for instruments to be employed in effecting it; he can raise forces from afar, and summon them from the end of the earth to attend his service, v. 26. Those who know him not are made use of to fulfil his counsel, when, by reason of their distance, they can scarcely be supposed to have any ends of their own to serve. If God set up his standard, he can incline men's hearts to enlist themselves under it, though perhaps they know not why or wherefore. When the Lord of hosts is pleased to make a general muster of the forces he has at his command, he has a great army in an instant, ~~and~~ Joel 2:2, 11. He needs not sound a trumpet, nor beat a drum, to give them notice or to animate them; no, he does but hiss to them, or rather whistle to them, and that is enough; they hear that, and that puts courage into them. Note, God has all the creatures at his beck.

(2.) He can make them come into the service with incredible expedition: *Behold, they shall come with speed swiftly.* Note,

[1.] Those who will do God's work must not loiter, must not linger, nor shall they when his time has come.

[2.] Those who defy God's judgments will be ashamed of their insolence when it is too late; they said scornfully (v. 19), *Let him make speed, let him hasten his work,* and they shall find, to their terror and confusion, that he will; *in one hour has the judgment come.*

(3.) He can carry them on in the service with amazing forwardness and fury. This is described here in very elegant and lofty expressions, v. 27-30.

[1.] Though their marches be very long, yet *none among them shall be weary*; so desirous they be to engage that they shall forget their weariness, and make no complaints of it.

[2.] Though the way be rough, and perhaps embarrassed by the usual policies of war, yet none among them shall *stumble*, but all the difficulties in their way shall easily be got over.

[3.] Though they be forced to keep constant watch, yet *none shall slumber nor sleep*, so intent shall they be upon their work, in prospect of having the plunder of the city for their pains.

[4.] They shall not desire any rest of relaxation; they shall not put off their clothes, nor *loose the girdle of their loins*, but shall always have their belts on and swords by their sides.

[5.] They shall not meet with the least hindrance to retard their march or oblige them to halt; not a *latchet of their shoes shall be broken* which they must stay to mend, as <sup><003></sup>Joshua 9:13.

[6.] Their arms and ammunition shall all be fixed, and in good posture; *their arrows sharp*, to wound deep, *and all their bows bent*, none unstrung, for they expect to be soon in action.

[7.] Their horses and chariots of war shall all be fit for service; their horses so strong, so hardy, that *their hoofs shall be like flint*, far from being beaten, or made tender, by their long march; and the wheels of their chariots not broken, or battered, or out of repair, but swift *like a whirlwind*, turning round so strongly upon their axle-trees.

[8.] All the soldiers shall be bold and daring (v. 29): *Their roaring*, or shouting, before a battle, *shall be like a lion*, who with his roaring animates himself, and terrifies all about him. Those who would not hear the voice of God speaking to them by his prophets, but stopped their ears against their charms, shall be made to hear the voice of their enemies roaring against them and shall not be able to turn a deaf ear to it. *They shall roar like the roaring of the sea* in a storm; it roars and threatens to swallow up, as the lion roars and threatens to tear in pieces.

[9.] There shall not be the least prospect of relief or succour. The enemy shall come in like a flood, and there shall be none to lift up a standard against him. He shall seize the prey, and none shall deliver it, none shall be able to deliver it, nay, none shall so much as dare to attempt the deliverance of it, but shall give it up for lost. Let the distressed look which way they will, every thing appears dismal; for, if God frowns upon us, how can any creature smile? *First*, Look round to the earth, to the land, to that land that used to be the land of light and the joy of the whole earth, and *behold darkness and sorrow*, all frightful, all mournful, nothing hopeful. *Secondly*, Look up to heaven, and there the light is darkened,

where one would expect to have found it. If the light is darkened in the heavens, how great is that darkness! If God hide his face, no marvel the heavens hide theirs and appear gloomy, ~~1349~~ Job 34:29. It is our wisdom, by keeping a good conscience, to keep all clear between us and heaven, that we may have light from above even when clouds and darkness are round about us.