

CHAPTER 29

This woe to Ariel, which we have in this chapter, is the same with the “burden of the valley of vision” (Isa. 22: 1), and (it is very probable) points at the same event — the besieging of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army, which was cut off there by an angel; yet it is applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and its last desolations by the Romans. Here is,

I. The event itself foretold, that Jerusalem should be greatly distressed (v. 1-4, 6), but that their enemies, who distressed them, should be baffled and defeated (v. 5, 7, 8).

II. A reproof to three sorts of sinners: —

1. Those that were stupid, and regardless of the warnings which the prophet gave them (v. 9-12).

2. Those that were formal and hypocritical in their religious performances (v. 13, 14).

3. Those politicians that atheistically and profanely despised God’s providence, and set up their own projects in competition with it (v. 15, 16). **III.** Precious promises of grace and mercy to a distinguished remnant whom God would sanctify, and in whom he would be sanctified, when their enemies and persecutors should be cut off (v. 17-24).

ISA. 29: 1-8

That it is Jerusalem which is here called *Ariel* is agreed, for that was the city where David dwelt; that part of it which was called *Zion* was in a particular manner the city of David, in which both the temple and the palace were. But why it is so called is very uncertain: probably the name and the reason were then well known. Cities, as well as persons, get surnames and nicknames. *Ariel* signifies *the lion of God*, or *the strong lion*: as the lion is king among beasts, so was Jerusalem among the cities, giving law to all about her; it was *the city of the great King* (Psa. 48: 1, 2); it was the head-city of Judah, who is called *a lion’s whelp* (Gen. 49: 9) and whose ensign was a lion; and he that is the lion of the tribe of Judah was the glory of it. Jerusalem was a terror sometimes to the neighbouring nations, and, while she was a righteous city, was bold as a lion. Some make *Ariel* to signify *the altar of burnt-offerings*, which devoured the beasts offered in sacrifice as the lion does his prey. Woe to that altar in the city where David dwelt; that was destroyed with the temple by the Chaldeans. I rather take it as a woe to Jerusalem, Jerusalem; it is repeated here, as it is Mat. 23:37, that it might be the more awakening. Here is,

I. The distress of Jerusalem foretold. Though Jerusalem be a strong city, as a lion, though a holy city, as a lion of God, yet, if iniquity be found there, woe be to it. It was *the city where David dwelt*; it was he that brought that to it which was its glory, and which made it a type of the gospel church, and his dwelling in it was typical of Christ's residence in his church. This mentioned as an aggravation of Jerusalem's sin, that in it were set both the testimony of Israel and the *thrones of the house of David*.

1. Let Jerusalem know that her external performance of religious services will not serve as an exemption from the judgments of God (v. 1): "*Add year to year*; go on in the road of your annual feasts, let all your males appear there three times a year before the Lord, and none empty, according to the law and custom, and let them never miss any of these solemnities: *let them kill the sacrifices*, as they used to do; but, as long as their lives are unreformed and their hearts unhumiliated, let them not think thus to pacify an offended God and to turn away his wrath." Note, Hypocrites may be found in a constant track of devout exercises, and treading around in them, and with these they may flatter themselves, but can never please God nor make their peace with him.

2. Let her know that God is coming forth against her in displeasure, that she shall be *visited of the Lord of hosts* (v. 6); her sins shall be enquired into and punished: God will reckon for them with terrible judgments, with the frightful alarms and rueful desolations of war, which shall be like *thunder and earthquakes, storms and tempests, and devouring fire*, especially upon the account of the *great noise*. When a foreign enemy was not in the borders, but in the bowels of their country, roaring and ravaging, and laying all waste (especially such an army as that of the Assyrians, whose commanders being so very insolent, as appears by the conduct of Rabshakeh, the common soldiers, no doubt, were much more rude), they might see the Lord of those hosts visiting them with thunder and storm. Yet, this being here said to be *a great noise*, perhaps it is intimated that they shall be worse frightened than hurt. Particularly,

(1.) Jerusalem shall be besieged, straitly besieged. He does not say, *I will destroy Ariel*, but *I will distress Ariel*; and she is *therefore* brought into distress, that, being thereby awakened to repent and reform, she may not be brought to destruction. *I will* (v. 3) encamp against thee round about. It was the enemy's army that encamped against it; but God says that he will do it, for they are his hand, he does it by them. God had often and long, by a host of angels, encamped for them round about them for their protection and deliverance; but now he was *turned to be their enemy* and fought against them. The siege laid against them was of his laying, and the forts raised against them were of his raising. Note, When men fight against us we must, in them, see God contending with us.

(2.) She shall be in grief to see the country laid waste and all the fenced cities of Judah in the enemies' hand: *There shall be heaviness and sorrow* (v. 2), *mourning and lamentation* — so these two words are sometimes rendered. Those that are most merry and jovial are commonly, when they come to be in distress, most overwhelmed with heaviness and sorrow; their laughter is then turned into mourning. “All Jerusalem *shall then be unto me as Ariel*, as the altar, with fire upon it and slain victims about it:” so it was when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans; and many, no doubt, were slain when it was besieged by the Assyrians. “the whole city shall be an altar, in which sinners, falling by the judgments that are abroad, shall be as victims to divine justice.” Or thus: — “*There shall be heaviness and sorrow; they shall repent, and reform, and return to God, and then it shall be to me as Ariel. Jerusalem shall be like itself, shall become to me a Jerusalem again, a holy city,*” Isa. 1:26.

(3.) She shall be humbled, and mortified, and made submissive (v. 4): “*Thou shalt be brought down* from the height of arrogancy and insolence to which thou hast arrived: the proud looks and the proud language shall be brought down by one humbling providence after another.” Those that despise God's judgments shall be humbled by them; for the proudest sinners shall either bend or break before him. They had talked big, had *lifted up the horn on high*, and had *spoken with a stiff neck* (Psa. 75: 5); but now *thou shalt speak out of the ground, out of the dust, as one that has a familiar spirit, whispering out of the dust*. This intimates,

[1.] That they should be faint and feeble, not able to speak up, nor to say all they would say; but as those who are sick, or whose spirits are ready to fail, their speech shall be low and interrupted.

[2.] That they should be fearful, and in consternation, forced to speak low as being afraid lest their enemies should overhear them and take advantage against them.

[3.] That they should be tame, and obliged to submit to the conquerors. When Hezekiah submitted to the king of Assyria, saying, *I have offended, that which thou puttest on me I will bear* (2Ki. 18:14), then his speech was low, out of the dust. God can make those to crouch that have been most daring, and quite dispirit them.

II. The destruction of Jerusalem's enemies is foretold, for the comfort of all that were her friends and well-wishers in this distress (v. 5, 7): “*Thou shalt be brought down* (v. 4), *to speak out of the dust; so low thou shalt be reduced. But*” (so it may be rendered) “*the multitude of thy strangers and thy terrible ones, the numerous armies of the enemy, shall themselves be like small dust, not able to speak at all, or as much as whisper, but as chaff that passes away.*”

Thou shalt be abased, but they shall be quite dispersed, smitten and slain after another manner (Isa. 27: 7); they shall pass away, *yea it shall be in an instant, suddenly*: the enemy shall be surprised with the destruction, and you with the salvation.” The army of the Assyrians was by an angel laid dead upon the spot, in an instant, suddenly. Such will be the destruction of the enemies of the gospel Jerusalem. *In one hour shall their judgment come*, Rev. 18:10. Again (v. 6), “*Thou shalt be visited*, or (as it used to be rendered) *She shall be visited with thunder and a great noise*. Thou shalt be put into a fright which thou shalt soon recover. But (v. 7) *the multitude of the nations that fight against her shall be as a dream of a night-vision*; they and their prosperity and success shall soon vanish past recall.” *The multitude of the nations that fight against Zion shall be as a hungry man who dreams that he eats*, but still is hungry; that is,

1. Whereas they hoped to make a prey of Jerusalem, and to enrich themselves with the plunder of that opulent city, their hopes shall prove vain dreams, with which their fancies may please and sport themselves for a while, but they shall be disappointed. They fancied themselves masters of Jerusalem, but shall never be so.

2. They themselves, and all their pomp, and power, and prosperity, shall vanish like a dream when one awakes, shall be of as little value and as short continuance. Psa. 73:20. He shall *fly away as a dream* Job. 20: 8. The army of Sennacherib vanished and was gone quickly, though it had filled the country as a dream fills a man’s head, especially as a dream of meat fills the head of him that went to bed hungry. Many understand these verses as part of the threatening of wrath, when God comes to distress Jerusalem, and lay siege to her.

(1.) The multitude of her friends, whom she relies upon for help shall do her no good; for, though they are terrible ones, they shall be like the small dust, and shall pass away.

(2.) The multitude of her enemies shall never think they can do her mischief enough; but, when they have devoured her much, still they shall be but like a man who dreams he eats, hungry, and greedy to devour her more.

ISA. 29: 9-16

Here,

I. The prophet stands amazed at the stupidity of the greatest part of the Jewish nation. They had Levites, who taught *the good knowledge of the Lord* and had encouragement from Hezekiah in doing so, 2Ch. 30:22. They had prophets,

who brought them messages immediately from God, and signified to them what were the causes and what would be the effects of God's displeasure against them. Now, one would think, *surely this great nation*, that has all the advantages of divine revelation, is *a wise and understanding people*, Deu. 4: 6. But, alas! it was quite otherwise, v. 9. The prophet addresses himself to the sober thinking part of them, calling upon them to be affected with the general carelessness of their neighbours. It may be read, "They delay, they put off, their repentance, but wonder you that they should be so sottish. They sport themselves with their own deceivings; they riot and revel; but do you *cry out*, lament their folly, cry to God by prayer for them. The more insensible they are of the hand of God gone out against them the more do you lay to heart these things." Note, The security of sinners in their sinful way is just matter of lamentation and wonder to all serious people, who should think themselves concerned to pray for those that do not pray for themselves. But what is the matter? What are we thus to wonder at?

1. We may well wonder that the generality of the people should be so sottish and brutish, and so infatuated, as if they were intoxicated: *They are drunken, but not with wine* (not with wine only, though with that they were often drunk), and they *erred through wine*, Isa. 28: 7. They were drunk with the love of pleasures, with prejudices against religion, and with the corrupt principles they had imbibed. Like drunken men, they know not what they do or say, nor whither they go. They are not sensible of the divine rebukes they are under. *They have beaten me, and I felt it not*, says the drunkard, Pro. 23:35. God speaks to them once, yea, twice; but, like men drunk, they perceive it not, they understand it not, but forget the law. *They stagger* in their counsels, are unstable and unsteady, and stumble at every thing that lies in their way. There is such a thing as spiritual drunkenness.

2. It is yet more strange that God himself should have *poured out upon them a spirit of deep sleep, and closed their eyes* (v. 10), that he who bids them awake and open their eyes should yet lay them to sleep and shut their eyes; but it is in a way of righteous judgment, to punish them for their *loving darkness rather than light*, their loving sleep. When God by his prophets called them they said, *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber*; and therefore he gave them up to strong delusions, and said, *Sleep on now*. This is applied to the unbelieving Jews, who rejected the gospel of Christ, and were justly hardened in their infidelity, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Rom. 11: 8, *God has given them the spirit of slumber*. And we have reason to fear it is the woeful case of many who live in the midst of gospel light.

3. It is very sad that this should be the case with those who were their prophets, and rulers, and seers, that those who should have been their guides were

themselves blindfolded; and it is easy to tell what the fatal consequences will be when the blind lead the blind. This was fulfilled when, in the latter days of the Jewish church, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, were the great opposers of Christ and his gospel, and brought themselves under a judicial infatuation.

4. The sad effect of this was that all the means of conviction, knowledge, and grace, which they enjoyed, were ineffectual, and did not answer the end (v. 11, 12): “*The vision of all the prophets, true and false, has become to you as the words of a book, or letter, that is sealed up; you cannot discern the truth of the real visions and the falsehood of the pretended ones.*” Or, every vision particularly that this prophet had seen for them, and published to them, had become unintelligible; they had it among them, but were never the wiser for it, any more than a man (though a good scholar) is for a book delivered to him sealed up, and which he must not open the seals of. He sees it is a book, and that is all; he knows nothing of what is in it. So they knew that what Isaiah said was a vision and prophecy, but the meaning of it was hidden from them; it was only a sound of words to them, which they were not at all alarmed by, nor affected with; it answered not the intention, for it made no impression at all upon them. Neither the learned nor the unlearned were the better for all the messages God sent them by his servants the prophets, nor desired to be so. The ordinary sort of people excused themselves from regarding what the prophets said with their want of learning and a liberal education, as if they were not concerned to know and do the will of God because they were not bred scholars: *It is nothing to me, I am not learned.* Those of better rank pretended that the prophet had a peculiar way of speaking, which was obscure to them, and which, though they were men of letters, they had not been used to; and, *Si non vis intelligi, debes negligi* — *If you wish not to be understood, you deserve to be neglected.* Both these are groundless pretences; for God’s prophets have been no unfaithful debtors either to the wise or to the unwise, Rom. 1:14. Or we may take it thus: — The book of prophecy was given to them sealed, so that they could not read it, as a just judgment upon them; because it had often been delivered to them unsealed, and they would not take pains to learn the language of it, and then made excuse for their not reading it because they were not learned. But observe, “The vision has become thus to you whose minds the god of this world has blinded; but it is not so in itself, it is not so to all; the same vision which to you is a *savour of death unto death* to others is and shall be a *savour of life unto life.*” Knowledge is easy to him that understands.

II. The prophet, in God’s name, threatens those that were formal and hypocritical in their exercises of devotion, v. 13, 14. Observe here,

1. The sin that is here charged upon them — dissembling with God in their religious performances, v. 13. He that knows the heart, and cannot be imposed upon with shows and pretences, charges it upon them, whether their hearts condemn them for it or no. He that is greater than the heart, and knows all things, knows that though they *draw nigh to him with their mouth*, and *honour him with their lips*, yet they are not sincere worshippers. To worship God is to make our approaches to him, and to present our adorations of him; it is to draw nigh to him as those that have business with him, with an intention therein to honour him. This we are to do with our mouth and our lips, in speaking of him and in speaking to him; we must *render to him the calves of our lips*, Hos. 14: 2. And, if the heart be full of his love and fear, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak. But there are many whose religion is lip-labour only. They say that which expresses an approach to God and an adoration of him, but it is only from the teeth outward. For,

(1.) They do not apply their minds to the service. When they pretend to be speaking to God they are thinking of a thousand impertinences: *The have removed their hearts far from me*, that they might not be employed in prayer, nor come within reach of the word. When work was to be done for God, which required the heart, that was sent out of the way on purpose, with the fool's eyes, into the ends of the earth.

(2.) They do not make the word of God the rule of their worship, nor his will their reason: *Their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men*. They worshipped the God of Israel, not according to his appointment, but their own inventions, the directions of their false prophets or their idolatrous kings, or the usages of the nations that were round about them. The tradition of the elders was of more value and validity with them than the laws which God commanded Moses. Or, if they did worship God in a way conformable to his institution in the days of Hezekiah, a great reformer, they had more an eye to the precept of the king than to God's command. This our Saviour applies to the Jews in his time, who were formal in their devotions and wedded to their own inventions, and pronounces concerning them that in vain they did worship God, Mat. 15: 8, 9.

2. It is a spiritual judgment with which God threatens to punish them for their spiritual wickedness (v. 14): *I will proceed to do a marvellous work*. They did one strange thing; they removed all sincerity from their hearts. Now God will go on and do another; he will remove all sagacity from their heads. *The wisdom of their wise men shall perish*. They played the hypocrite, and thought to put a cheat upon God, and now they are left to themselves to play the fool, and not only to put a cheat upon themselves, but to be easily cheated by all about them. Those that make religion no more than a pretence, to serve a turn, are out in

their politics; and it is just with God to deprive those of their understanding who part with their uprightness. This was fulfilled in the wretched infatuation which the Jewish nation were manifestly under, after they had rejected the gospel of Christ; they removed their hearts far from God, and therefore God justly removed wisdom far from them, and hid from their eyes the things that belonged even to their temporal peace. This is a marvelous work; it is surprising, it is astonishing, that wise men should of a sudden lose their wisdom and be given up to strong delusions. Judgments on the mind, though least taken notice of, are to be most wondered at.

III. He shows the folly of those that thought to act separately and secretly from God, and were carrying on designs independent upon God and which they projected to conceal from his all-seeing eye. Here we have,

1. Their politics described (v. 15): They *seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord*, that he may not know either what they do or what they design; they say, “Who sees us? No man, and therefore not God himself.” The consultations they had about their own safety they kept to themselves, and never asked God’s advice concerning them; nay, they knew they were displeasing to him, but thought they could conceal them from him; and, if he did not know them, he could not baffle and defeat them. See what foolish fruitless pains sinners take in their sinful ways; they seek deep, they sink deep, to hide their counsel from the Lord, who sits in heaven and laughs at them. Note, A practical disbelief of God’s omniscience is at the bottom both of the carnal worships and of the carnal confidences of hypocrites; Psa. 94: 7; Eze. 8:12; 9: 9.

2. The absurdity of their politics demonstrated (v. 16): “*Surely your turning of things upside down* thus, your various projects, turning your affairs this and that way to make them shape as you would have them — or rather your inverting the order of things, and thinking to make God’s providence give attendance to your projects, and that God must know no more than you think fit, which is perfectly turning things upside down and beginning at the wrong end — *shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay*. God will turn and manage you, and all your counsels, with as much ease and as absolute a power as the potter forms and fashions his clay.” See how God despises, and therefore what little reason we have to dread, those contrivances of men that are carried on without God, particularly those against him.

(1.) Those that think to hide their counsels from God do in effect deny him to be their Creator. It is as if the work should say of him that made it, “He made me not; I made myself.” If God made us, he certainly knows us as the Psalmist shows, (Psa. 139: 1, 13-16); so that those who say that he does not see them

might as well say that he did not make them. Much of the wickedness of the wicked arises from this, they forget that God formed them, Deu. 32:18. Or,

(2.) Which comes to the same thing, they deny him to be a wise Creator: *The thing framed saith of him that framed it, He had no understanding*; for if he had understanding to make us so curiously, especially to make us intelligent beings and to *put understanding into the inward part* (Job. 38:36), no doubt he has understanding to know us and all we say and do. As those that quarrel with God, so those that think to conceal themselves from him, do in effect charge him with folly; but *he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* Psa. 94: 9.

ISA. 29:17-24

Those that thought to hide their counsels from the Lord were said to turn things upside down (v. 16), and they intended to do it unknown to God; but God here tells them that he will turn things upside down his way; and let us see whose word shall stand, his or theirs. They disbelieve Providence: “Wait awhile,” says God, “and you shall be convinced by ocular demonstration that there is a God who governs the world, and that he governs it and orders all the changes that are in it for the good of his church.” The wonderful revolution here foretold may refer primarily to the happy settlement of the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem after the defeat of Sennacherib’s attempt, and the repose which good people then enjoyed, when they were delivered from the alarms of the sword both of war and persecution. But it may look further, to the rejection of the Jews at the first planting of the gospel (for their hypocrisy and infidelity were here foretold, v. 13) and the admission of the Gentiles into the church.

I. In general, it is a great and surprising change that is here foretold, v. 17. *Lebanon*, that was a forest, *shall be turned into a fruitful field*; and *Carmel*, that was a fruitful field, shall become a forest. It is a counterchange. Note, Great changes, both for the better and for the worse, are often made in a very little while. It was a sign given them of the defeat of Sennacherib that the ground should be more than ordinarily fruitful (Isa. 37:30): *You shall eat this year such as grows of itself*; food for man shall be (as food for beasts is) the spontaneous product of the soil. Then *Lebanon* became a fruitful field, so fruitful that that which used to be reckoned a fruitful field in comparison with it was looked upon but as a forest. When a great harvest of souls was gathered in to Christ from among the Gentiles then the wilderness was turned into a fruitful field; and the Jewish church, that had long been a fruitful field, became a desolate and deserted forest, Isa. 54: 1.

II. In particular,

1. Those that were ignorant shall become intelligent, v. 18. Those that understood not this prophecy (but it was to them as a sealed book, v. 11) shall, when it is accomplished, understand it, and shall acknowledge, not only the hand of God in the event, but the voice of God in the prediction of it: *The deaf shall then hear the words of the book*. The fulfilling of prophecy is the best exposition of it. The poor Gentiles shall then have divine revelation brought among them; and those that sat in darkness shall see a great light, those that were blind shall see out of obscurity; for the gospel was sent to them to *open their eyes*, Act. 26:18. Observe, In order to the making of men fruitful in good affections and actions, the course God's grace takes with them is to open their understandings and make them hear the words of God's book.

2. Those that were erroneous shall become orthodox (v. 24): *Those that erred in spirit*, that were under mistakes and misapprehensions concerning the words of the book and the meaning of them, shall come to understanding, to a right understanding of things; the Spirit of truth shall rectify their mistakes and lead them into all truth. This should encourage us to pray for *those that have erred and are deceived*, that God can, and often does, bring such to understanding. Those that murmured at the truths of God as hard sayings, and loved to pick quarrels with them, shall learn the true meaning of these doctrines, and then they will be better reconciled to them. Those that erred concerning the providence of God as to public affairs, and murmured at the disposals of it, when they shall see the issue of things shall better understand them and be aware of what God was designing in all, Hos. 14: 9.

3. Those that were melancholy shall become cheerful and pleasant (v. 19): *The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord*. Those who are poor in the world and poor in spirit, who, being in affliction, accommodate themselves to their affliction, are purely passive and not passionate, when they see God appearing for them, they shall *add, or repeat, joy in the Lord*. This intimates that even in their distress they kept up their joy in the Lord, but now they increased it. Note, Those who, when they are in trouble, can truly rejoice in God, shall soon have cause given them greatly to rejoice in him. When joy in the world is decreasing and fading joy in God is increasing and getting round. This shining light shall shine more and more; for that which is aimed at is that *this joy may be full*. Even *the poor among men* may rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, and their poverty needs not deprive them of that joy, Hab. 3:17, 18. And the meek, the humble, the patient, and dispassionate, shall grow in this joy. Note, The grace of meekness will contribute very much to the increase of our holy joy.

4. The enemies, that were formidable, shall become despicable. Sennacherib, that *terrible one*, and his great army, that put the country into such a consternation, shall be *brought to nought* (v. 20), shall be quite disabled to do

any further mischief. The power of Satan, that terrible one indeed, shall be broken by the prevalency of Christ's gospel; and those that were subject to bondage through fear of him that had the power of death shall be delivered, Heb. 2:14, 15.

5. The persecutors, that were vexatious, shall be quieted, and so those they were troublesome to shall be quiet from the fear of them. To complete the repose of God's people, not only the terrible one from abroad shall be brought to nought, but the scorers at home too shall be consumed and cut off by Hezekiah's reformation. Those are a happy people, and likely to be so, who, when God gives them victory and success against their terrible enemies abroad, take care to suppress vice, and profaneness, and the spirit of persecution, those more dangerous enemies at home. Or, They shall be consumed and cut off by the judgments of God, shall be singled out to be made examples of. Or, They shall insensibly waste away, being put to confusion by the fulfilling of those predictions which they had made a jest of. Observe what had been the wickedness of these scorers, for which they should be cut off. They had been persecutors of God's people and prophets, probably of the prophet Isaiah particularly, and therefore he complains thus feelingly of them and of their subtle malice. Some as informers and persecutors, others as judges, did all they could to take away his life, or at least his liberty. And this is very applicable to the chief priests and Pharisees, who persecuted Christ and his apostles, and for that sin they and their nation of scorers were cut off and consumed.

(1.) They ridiculed the prophets and the serious professors of religion; they despised them, and did their utmost to bring them into contempt; they were scorers, and sat in the seat of the scornful.

(2.) They lay in wait for an occasion against them. By their spies they *watch for iniquity*, to see if they can lay hold of any thing that is said or done that may be called an iniquity. Or they themselves watch for an opportunity to do mischief, as Judas did to betray our Lord Jesus.

(3.) They took advantage against them for the least slip of the tongue; and, if a thing were ever so little said amiss, it served them to ground an indictment upon. They *made a man*, though he were ever so wise and good a man, though he were a man of God, *an offender for a word*, a word mischosen or misplaced, when they could not but know that it was well meant, v. 21. They cavilled at every word that the prophets spoke to them by way of admonition, though ever so innocently spoken, and without any design to affront them. They put the worst construction upon what was said, and made it criminal by strained innuendoes. Those who consider how apt we all are to speak unadvisedly, and

to mistake what we hear, will think it very unjust and unfair to *make a man an offender for a word*.

(4.) They did all they could to bring those into trouble that dealt faithfully with them and told them of their faults. Those that *reprove in the gates*, reprovers by office, that were bound by the duty of their place, as prophets, as judges, and magistrates, to show people their transgressions, they hated these, and laid snares for them, as the Pharisees' emissaries, who were sent to watch our Saviour that they might *entangle him in his talk* (Mat. 22:15), that they might have something to lay to his charge which might render him odious to the people or obnoxious to the government. *So persecuted they the prophets*; and it is next to impossible for the most cautious to place their words so warily as to escape such snares. See how base wicked people are, who bear ill-will to those who, out of good-will to them, seek to save their souls from death; and see what need reprovers have both of courage to do their duty and of prudence to avoid the snare.

(5.) They pervert judgment, and will never let an honest man carry an honest cause: *They turn aside the just for a thing of nought*; they condemn him, or give the cause against him, upon no evidence, no colour or pretence whatsoever. They run a man down, and misrepresent him, by all the little arts and tricks they can devise, as they did our Saviour. We must not think it strange if we see the best of men thus treated; *the disciple is not greater than his Master*. But wait awhile, and God will not only *bring forth their righteousness*, but cut off and consume these scorers.

6. Jacob, who was made to blush by the reproaches, and made to tremble by the threatenings, of his enemies, shall now be relieved both against his shame and against his fear, by the rolling away of those reproaches and the defeating of those threatenings (v. 22): *Thus the Lord saith who redeemed Abraham*, that is, called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and so rescued him from the idolatry of his fathers and plucked him as a *brand out of the fire*. He that redeemed Abraham out of his snares and troubles will redeem all that are by faith his genuine seed out of theirs. He that began his care of his church in the redemption of Abraham, when it and its Redeemer were in his loins, will not now cast off the care of it. Because the enemies of his people are so industrious both to blacken them and to frighten them, therefore he will appear for the house of Jacob, and they shall not be ashamed as they have been, but shall have wherewith to answer those that reproach them, nor shall *their faces now wax pale*; but they shall gather courage, and look their enemies in the face without change of countenance, as those have reason to do who have the God of Abraham on their side.

7. Jacob, who thought his family would be extinct and the entail of religion quite cut off, shall have the satisfaction of seeing a numerous progeny devoted to God for a generation, v. 23.

(1.) He shall see his children, multitudes of believers and praying people, the spiritual seed of faithful Abraham and wrestling Jacob. Having his quiver full of these arrows, he *shall not be ashamed* (v. 22) but shall speak with his enemy in the gate, Psa. 127: 5. Christ shall *not be ashamed* (Isa. 50: 7), for *he shall see his seed* (Isa. 53:10); he sees some, and foresees more, *in the midst of him*, flocking to the church, and residing there.

(2.) His children are the work of God's hands; being formed by him, they are formed for him, his *workmanship, created unto good works*. It is some comfort to parents to think that their children are God's creatures, the work of the hands of his grace.

(3.) He and his children shall sanctify the name of God as their God, as *the Holy One of Jacob*, and shall fear and worship the God of Israel. This is opposed to his being ashamed and waxing pale; when he is delivered from his contempts and dangers he shall not magnify himself, but *sanctify the Holy One of Jacob*. If God make our condition easy, we must endeavour to make his name glorious. Parents and children are ornaments and comforts indeed to each other when they join in sanctifying the name of God. When parents give up their children, and children give up themselves, to God, to be *to him for a name and a praise*, then the forest will soon become a fruitful field.