

# CHAPTER 3

We now return to Jerusalem, and must again hear what God has to say to her,

**I.** By way of reproof and threatening, for the abundance of wickedness that was found in her, of which divers instances are given, with the aggravations of them (v. 1-7).

**II.** By way of promise of mercy and grace, which God had yet in reserve for them. Two general heads of promises here are: —

- 1.** That God would bring in a glorious work of reformation among them, cleanse them from their sins, and bring them home to himself; many promises of this kind here are (v. 8-13).
- 2.** That he would bring about a glorious work of salvation for them, when he had thus prepared them for it (v. 14-20). Thus the “Redeemer shall come to Zion,” and to clear his own way, shall “turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” These promises were to have their full accomplishment in gospel-times and gospel-graces.

## ~~300~~ ZEPHANIAH 3:1-7

### THE DEPRAVITY OF JERUSALEM

One would wonder that Jerusalem, the holy city, where God was known, and his name was great, should be the city of which this black character is here given, that a place which enjoyed such abundance of the means of grace should become so very corrupt and vicious, and that God should permit it to be so; yet so it is, to show that *the law made nothing perfect*; but if this be the true character of Jerusalem, as no doubt it is (for God's judgments will make none worse than they are), it is no wonder that the prophet begins with *woe to her*. For the holy God hates sin in those that are nearest to him, nay, in them he hates it most. A sinful state is, and will be, a woeful state.

**I.** Here is a very bad character given of the city in general. How has the faithful city become a harlot!

**1.** She shames herself; she is *filthy and polluted* (v. 1), has made herself *infamous* (so some read it), *the gluttonous city* (so the margin), always cramming, and making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it. Sin is the filthiness and pollution of persons and places, and makes them odious in the sight of the holy God.

**2.** She wrongs her neighbours and inhabitants; she is *the oppressing city*. Never any place had *statutes and judgments so righteous* as this city had, and yet, in the administration of the government, never was more unrighteousness.

**3.** She is very provoking to her God, and in every respect walks contrary to him, v. 2. He had given his law, and spoken to her by his servants the prophets, telling her what was the good she should do and what the evil she should avoid; but *she obeyed not his voice*, nor made conscience of doing as he commanded her, in any thing. He had taken her under an excellent discipline, both of the word and of the rod; but she did not receive the instruction of the one nor the correction of the other, did not submit to God's will nor answer his end in either. He encouraged her to depend upon him, and his power and promise, for deliverance from evil and supply with good; but she *trusted not in the Lord*; her confidence was placed in her alliances with the nations more than in her covenant with God. He gave her tokens of his presence, and instituted ordinances of communion for her with himself; but she *drew not near to her God*, did not meet him where he appointed and where he promised to meet her. She stood at a distance, and *said to the Almighty, Depart*.

**II.** Here is a very bad character of the leading men in it; those that should by their influence suppress vice and profaneness there are the great patterns and patrons of wickedness, and those that should be her physicians are really her worst disease.

**1.** *Her princes are ravenous and barbarous as roaring lions* that make a prey of all about them, and they are universally feared and hated; they use their power for destruction, and not for edification.

**2.** *Her judges, who should be the protectors of injured innocence, are evening wolves, rapacious and greedy, and their cruelty and covetousness both insatiable: They gnaw not the bones till the morrow;* they take so much delight and pleasure in cruelty and oppression that when they have

devoured a good man they reserve the bones, as it were, for a sweet morsel, to be gnawed the next morning, ~~1813~~ Job 31:31.

**3.** *Her prophets*, who pretend to be special messengers from heaven to them, *are light and treacherous persons*, fanciful, and of a vain imagination, frothy and airy, and of a loose conversation, men of no consistency with themselves, in whom one can put no confidence. They were so given to bantering that it was hard to say when they were serious. Their pretended prophecies were all a sham, and they secretly laughed at those that were deluded by them.

**4.** *Her priests*, who are teachers by office and have the charge of the holy things, are false to their trust and betray it. They were to preserve the purity of the *sanctuary*, but they did themselves *pollute* it, and the sacred offices of it, which they were to attend upon — such priests as Hophni and Phinehas, who by their wicked lives *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*. They were to expound and apply *the law*, and to judge according to it; but, in their explications and applications of it, they *did violence to the law*; they corrupted the sense of it, and perverted it to the patronising of that which was directly contrary to it. By forced constructions, they made the law to speak what they pleased, to serve a turn, and so, in effect, *made void the law*.

**III.** We have here the aggravations of this general corruption of all orders and degrees of men in Jerusalem.

**1.** They had the tokens of God's presence among them, and all the advantages that could be of knowing his will, with the strongest inducements possible to do it, and yet they persisted in their disobedience, v. 5.

**(1.)** They had the honour and privilege of the Shechinah, God's dwelling in their land, so as he dwelt not with any other people: “*The just Lord is in the midst of thee*, to take cognizance of all thou doest amiss and give countenance to all thou doest well; he is in the midst of thee as a holy God, and therefore thy pollutions are the more offensive, ~~1814~~ Deuteronomy 23:14. He is in the midst of you as a just God, and therefore will punish the affronts you put upon him, and the wrongs and injuries you do to one another.”

(2.) They had God's own example set before them, in the discovery he made of himself to them, that they might conform to it: "*He will not do iniquity, and therefore you should not;*" for this was the great rule of their institution, "*Be you holy, for I am holy. God will be true to you; be not you then false to him.*"

(3.) He sent to them his prophets, rising up early and sending them: *Every morning he brings his judgment to light*, as duly as the morning comes; *he fails not*. He shows them plainly what the good is which he requires of them, and puts them in mind of it; he *wakens morning by morning* (<sup>2380B</sup>Isaiah 50:4), wakens his prophets with the rising sun, to bring to light the things which belong to their peace. So that, upon the whole matter, what more could have been done to his vineyard, to make it fruitful? <sup>2380B</sup>Isaiah 5:4. And yet, after all, *the unjust know no shame*; those that have been unjust are unjust still, and are not ashamed of their unrighteousness, *neither can they blush*. If they had any sense of honour, any shame left in them, they would not go so directly contrary to their profession and to the instructions given them. But those that are past shame are past cure.

2. God had set before their eyes some remarkable monuments of his justice, which were designed for warning to them (v. 6): *I have cut off the nations*, the seven nations of Canaan, which the land spewed out for their wickedness, upon which they had this caution given them, to take heed lest it *spew them out also*, (<sup>2380B</sup>Leviticus 18:28). Or it may refer to some of the neighbouring nations that were made desolate for their wickedness, especially to the nations of Israel, the ten tribes. *Their towers were desolate*, their high towers, their strong towers, their pride and power broken; their *streets were wasted*, so that none passed along through them; *their cities were destroyed* and laid in ruins; *no man* was to be found in them, *no inhabitant*, all were slain or carried into captivity. The enemies did it, but God avows it: *I cut them off*, says he. And God designed this for an admonition to Jerusalem (<sup>2380B</sup>Ezekiel 23:9, 11): "*I said, Surely thou wilt fear me; surely these judgments upon others will deter thee from the like wicked practices; surely thou wilt receive instruction* by these providences; it ought to be expected that thou wouldst not continue to sin like the nations when thou seest the ruin which their sin brought upon them." They could not but see their own house in danger when their neighbour's was on fire; and, when we are frightened, God should be feared.

**3.** He had set before them life and death, good and evil, both in his word and in his providence.

**(1.)** He had assured them of the continuance of their prosperity if they would fear him and receive instruction, for so *their dwelling would not be cut off* as their neighbour's was; if they took the warning given them, and reformed, what was past should be pardoned, and their tranquility lengthened out.

**(2.)** He had made them feel the smart of the rod, though he reprieved them from the sword: *Howsoever I punished them*, that, being chastened, they might not be condemned. Such various methods did God take with them, to reclaim them, but all in vain; they were not won upon by gentle methods, nor had severe ones any effect, for *they rose early, and corrupted all their doings*; they were more resolute and eager in their wicked courses than ever, more studious and solicitous in making provision for their lusts, and let slip no opportunity for the gratification of them. God *rose up early*, to send them his *prophets*, to reduce and reclaim them, but they were *up before him*, to shut and bolt the door against them. Their wickedness was universal: *All their doings* were corrupted; and it was all owing to themselves; they could not lay the blame upon the tempter, but they alone must bear it; they themselves wilfully and designedly *corrupted all their doings*; for *every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed*.

## ~~<308>~~ ZEPHANIAH 3:8-13

### JUDGMENT AND MERCY

Things looked very bad with Jerusalem in the foregoing verses; she has got into a very bad name, and seems to be incorrigible, incurable, mercy-proof and judgment-proof. Now one would think it should follow, Therefore expect no other but that she should be utterly abandoned and rejected as *reprobate silver*; since they will not be wrought upon by prophets or providences, let them be made a desolation as their neighbours have been. But behold and wonder at the riches of divine grace, which takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious. They still grew worse and worse, *therefore wait you upon me, saith the Lord*, v. 8. "Since the *law*, it seems, will *make nothing perfect*, the

*bringing in of a better hope shall.* Let those that lament the corruptions of the church *wait upon God*, till he send his Son into the world, to *save his people from their sins*, till he send his gospel to reform and refine his church, and to purify to himself a peculiar people both of Jews and Gentiles.” And there were those who, according to this direction and encouragement, *waited for redemption*, for this redemption in Jerusalem; and long-looked-for came at last, <sup><4128></sup>Luke 2:38. *For judgment Christ will come into this world*, <sup><4139></sup>John 9:39.

**I.** To avenge what has been done amiss against his church, to bring down and destroy the enemies of it, its spiritual enemies, of which the destruction of Babylon, and other oppressors of God's people, in the Old-Testament times, was a type, and would be a happy presage. He will *rise up to the prey*, to *lead captivity captive* (<sup><360></sup>Psalm 67:18), to conquer and spoil the powers of darkness, and the powers on earth that set themselves *against the Lord and his anointed*; he will *break them with a rod of iron* (<sup><4115></sup>Psalm 2:5, 9; 11:5, 6); his *determination is to gather the nations* and to *assemble the kingdoms*. By the gospel of Christ preached to every creature all nations are summoned, as it were, to appear in a body before the Lord Jesus, who is about to set up his kingdom in the world. But, since the greatest part of mankind will not obey the summons, he will *pour upon them his indignation*, for he that *believes not is condemned already*. At the time of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, there shall be on earth *distress of nations with perplexity* (<sup><4225></sup>Luke 21:25), *great tribulation*, such as *never was, nor ever shall be*, <sup><4221></sup>Matthew 24:21. Then God pours upon the nations his indignation, even *all his fierce anger*, for their indignation and fierce anger against the Messiah and his kingdom, <sup><411></sup>Psalm 2:1, 2. Then *all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of his jealousy*; both Jews and Gentiles shall be reckoned with for their enmity to the gospel. Principalities and powers shall be spoiled, and *made a show of openly*, and the victorious Redeemer shall triumph over them. The end of those that continue to be of the earth, and to *mind earthly things*, after God has set up the *kingdom of heaven* among men, *shall be destruction* (<sup><3189></sup>Philippians 3:19); they shall be *devoured with the fire of God's jealousy*.

**II.** To amend what he finds amiss in his church. When God intends the restoration of Israel, and the revival of their peace and prosperity, he makes way for the accomplishment of his purpose by their reformation

and the revival of their virtue and piety; for this is God's method, both with particular persons and with communities, first to make them holy and then to make them happy. These promises were in part accomplished after the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when by their captivity they were thoroughly cured of their idolatry; and this was all the fruit, even the taking away of sin. But they look further, to the blessed effects of the gospel and the grace of it, to those *times of reformation* in which we live, <sup>390</sup>Hebrews 9:10.

**1.** It is promised that there shall be a reformation in men's discourse, which had been generally corrupt, but should now be with grace seasoned with salt (v. 9): “*Then will I turn to the people a pure language; I will turn the people to such a language from that evil communication which has almost ruined all good manners among them.*” Note, Converting grace refines the language, not by making the phrases witty, but the substance wise. Among the Jews, after the captivity, there needed a reformation of the dialect, for they had mingled the language of Canaan with that of Ashdod (<sup>463</sup>Nehemiah 13:24), and that grievance shall be redressed. But that is not all: their language shall be purified from all profaneness, filthiness, and falsehood. I will turn them to a *choice language* (so some read it); they shall not speak rashly, but with caution and deliberation; they shall *choose out their words*. Note, An air of purity and piety in common conversation is a very happy omen to any people; other graces, other blessings, shall be given where God gives a pure language to those who have been a *people of unclean lips*.

**2.** That the worship of God, according to his will, shall be more closely applied to, and more unanimously concurred in. Instead of sacrifice and incense, they shall *call upon the name of the Lord*. Prayer is the spiritual offering with which God must be honoured; and, to prepare and fit us for that duty, it is necessary that we have a *pure language*. We are utterly unfit to take God's name into our lips, unless they be pure lips. The purifying of the language in common conversation is necessary to the acceptableness of the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart on our devotion; for how can *sweet waters and bitter come out of the same fountain?*

<sup>509</sup>James 3:9-12. It is likewise promised that their language being thus purified they shall serve God *with one consent, with one shoulder* (so the word is), alluding to oxen in the yoke, that draw even. When Christians are unanimous in the service of God the work goes on cheerfully. This is the effect of the pure language, purified from passion, envy, and

ensoriousness. Note, Purity is the way to unity; the reformation of manners is the way to a comprehension. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable.*

**3.** That those that were driven from God shall return to him and be accepted of him (v. 10): *From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*, that is, from Egypt (so described, <sup>280E</sup>Isaiah 18:1) or from some other very remote country — *my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring my offering*. Those that by reason of their distance had almost forgotten God, their obligations to him, shall be put in mind of him, as the prodigal son was of his father's house, in the far country. Those that by reason of their dispersion, under the tokens of his displeasure, might be afraid of coming to him, yet even they shall be gathered under his wings; the *daughter of his dispersed*, that is *afar off*, will be found among those whom *the Lord our God shall call*; and, though they are dispersed, he will own them for his; his calling them *my dispersed* puts honour upon them, sufficient to counterbalance all the disgrace of their dispersion. These shall come,

**(1.)** With their humble petitions: They are *my suppliants*. Note, True converts are suppliants to God; they do not plead, but *make supplication to their Judge* (<sup>80E</sup>Job 9:15); and wherever they are, though *beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*, a great way off from his house of prayer, he has his eye upon them and his ear open to them; they are his suppliants.

**(2.)** With their spiritual sacrifices: *They shall bring my offering*, shall bring themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God (<sup>81E</sup>Romans 12:1); the conversion of the Gentiles is called *the offering up of the Gentiles* (<sup>85E</sup>Romans 15:16); and with themselves they shall bring the gospel-sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, with which God is well pleased.

**4.** That sin and sinners shall be purged out from among them, v. 11. God will take away,

**(1.)** Their just reproach: *In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings*. They shall be ashamed as penitents, and shall continue to be so (see <sup>36E</sup>Ezekiel 16:63), but they shall not be ashamed as sinners that return to folly again. "*Thou shalt not be ashamed*, that is, thou shalt no more do a shameful thing, as thou hast done." The guilt of sin being taken away by pardoning mercy, the reproach of it shall be rolled away from the sinner's own conscience, that being *purified*, and *pacified*, and *cleansed from dead*



works. When wickedness and wicked people abound in a nation those few in it that are good are ashamed of them and of their land; but when sinners are converted, and the land reformed, that shame and the cause of it are removed.

**(2.)** Their unjust glorying: *“I will take away out of the midst of thee, not only the profane, who are a shame to thy land, but the hypocrites, who appear beautiful outwardly, and rejoice in thy pride, in the holy city, the holy house.”* These were indeed Israel's glory, but they made them their pride, and rejoiced in them, as if they were an invincible bulwark to secure them in their sinful ways; they relied on them as their righteousness and strength, boasting of *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord* (<sup><2074></sup>Jeremiah 7:4); they were *haughty because of the holy mountain*, were conceited of themselves, scornful of others, and set even the judgments of God at defiance. Note, Church-privileges, when they are not duly improved as they ought to be, are often made the matter of men's pride and the ground of their security. But that haughtiness is the most offensive to God which is supported and fed by the pretensions of holiness. This God will silence and take away.

**5.** That God will have a remnant of holy, humble, serious people among them, that shall have the comfort of their relation to him and interest in him (v. 12): *I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people.* When the Chaldeans carried away the Jews into captivity they *left of the poor of the land for vine-dressers and husbandmen*, a type and figure of God's distinguished remnant, whom he sets apart for himself. They are *afflicted and poor*, low in the world; such *God has chosen*, <sup><3075></sup>James 2:5. The poor are evangelized, low in their own eyes, afflicted for sin, poor in spirit. They are God's leaving, for it is a *remnant according to the election of grace. I have reserved them to myself*, says God (<sup><5104></sup>Romans 11:4, 5), *and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.* Note, Those whom God designs for the glory of his name he enables to trust in his name; and the greater their affliction and poverty in the world are the more reason they see to trust in God, having nothing else to trust to, <sup><5075></sup>1 Timothy 5:5.

**6.** That this select remnant shall be blessed with purity and peace, v. 13.

**(1.)** They shall be blessed with purity, both in words and actions: They *shall neither do iniquity nor speak lies.* Justice and veracity shall command them and govern them, though they be ever so much against their secular interest. They shall not only not speak a direct deliberate lie,

but *there shall not be a deceitful tongue found in their mouth*, not in the mouth of any of them; not the least equivocation shall come from them.

**(2.)** They shall be blessed with peace. They shall, as the sheep of God's pasture, *feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid*. They shall not be fearful themselves, nor shall any about them be frightful to them. Note, Those that are careful not to do iniquity need not be afraid of any calamity, for it cannot hurt them, and therefore should not terrify them.

## ~~3174~~ ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20

### EVANGELICAL PREDICTIONS

After the promises of the taking away of sin, here follow promises of the taking away of trouble; for when the cause is removed the effect will cease. What makes a people holy will make them happy of course. The precious promises here made to the purified people were to have their full accomplishment in the comforts of the gospel, in the hope, and much more in the enjoyment, of which, they are here called upon,

**1.** To rejoice and sing (v. 14): *Sing, O daughter of Zion! sing for joy; Shout, O Israel!* in a holy transport and exultation; *be glad and rejoice with all the heart*; let the joy be inward, let it be great. Those that love God with all their heart have occasion with all their heart to rejoice in him. It was promised (v. 13) that their sins should be mortified and their fears silenced, and then follows, *Sing and rejoice*. Note, Those that reform have cause to rejoice, whereas Israel cannot rejoice for joy as other people, while she goes a whoring from her God. God's promises, applied by faith, furnish the saints with constant and abundant matter for joy; they are filled with joy and peace in believing them.

**2.** To throw off all their discouragements (v. 16): *In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem* (God will say it by his prophets, by his providences, their neighbours shall say it, they shall say it to one another), "*Fear thou not*, be not disposed to fear, do not easily admit the impressions of it; when things are bad, fear not their being worse, but hope they will mend; frighten not thyself upon every occasion. *Let not thy hands be slack or faint*; wring not thy hands in despair; drop not thy hands in despondence; disfit not thyself for thy work and warfare by giving way to doubts and

fears. Pluck up thy spirits, and, in token of that, lift up thy hands, the *hands that hung down*, <sup><822></sup>Hebrews 12:12; <sup><388></sup>Isaiah 35:3. Lift up thy hands in prayer to God; lift up thy hands to help thyself.” Fear makes the hands slack, but faith and hope make them vigorous, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength both for doing and suffering.

Let us now see what these precious promises are which are here made to the people of God, for the banishing of their griefs and fears and the encouraging of their hopes and joys; and to us are these promises made as well as to them.

**I.** An end shall be put to all their troubles and distresses (v. 15): “*The Lord has taken away thy judgments*, has removed all the calamities thou hast been groaning under, which were the punishments of thy sin; the noise of war shall be silenced, the reproach of famine done away, and the captivity brought back. Though some grievances remain, they shall be only afflictions, and not judgments, for sin shall be pardoned. *He has cast out thy enemy*, that has thrust himself into thy land, and triumphed over thee. He has *swept out thy enemy*” (so some read it), “as dirt is swept out of the house to the dunghill.” When they sweep out their sins with the besom of reformation God will sweep out their enemies with the besom of destruction. If they should need correction, they shall fall into the hands of the Lord, whose mercies are great, and shall not again fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel: “*Thou shalt not see evil any more*, not such evil days as thou hast seen.” Note, The way to get clear of the evil of trouble is to keep clear from the evil of sin; and to those that do so trouble has no real evil in it.

**II.** God will give them the tokens of his presence with them; though he has long seemed to stand at a distance (they having provoked him to withdraw), he will make it to appear that he is *with them of a truth*: “*The Lord is in the midst of thee, O Zion! of thee, O Jerusalem!* as the sun in the centre of the universe, to diffuse his light and influence upon every part. He is *in the midst of thee*, to preside in all thy affairs and to take care of all thy interests.” And,

**1.** “He is the *King of Israel* (v. 15) and is in the midst of thee as a king in the midst of his people.” With an eye to this, our Lord Jesus is called the *King of Israel* (<sup><414></sup>John 1:49); and he is, and will be, in the midst of his church always, even to the end of the world, to receive the homage of his

subjects, and to give out his favours to them, even *where but two or three are gathered together in his name.*

2. “He is the Lord thy God, thine in covenant, and he is in the midst of thee as thy God, whom thou hast an interest in and whose own thou art. He has put himself into dear relations to thee, laid himself by promise under obligations to thee, and, that thou mayest have abundant comfort in both, he *is in the midst of thee*, nigh at hand to answer both.”

3. “He that is in the midst of thee as thy God and King is *mighty*, is almighty, is able to do all that for thee that thou needest and canst desire.”

4. “He has engaged his power for thy succour: *He will save. He will be Jesus*, will answer the name, for he will save his people from their sins.”

**III.** God will take delight in them, and in doing them good. The expressions of this are very lively and affecting (v. 17): *He will rejoice over thee with joy*, will not only be well pleased with thee, upon thy repentance and reformation, and take thee into favour, but will take a complacency in thee, as the bridegroom does in his bride, or the bride in her ornaments, <sup>261B</sup> Isaiah 62:3-5. The conversion of sinners and the consolation of saints are the joy of angels, for they are the joy of God himself. The church should be the *joy of the whole earth* (<sup>261B</sup> Psalm 48:2), for it is the joy of the whole heaven. He will *rest in his love*, will be *silent in his love*, so the word is. “I will not rebuke thee as I have done, for thy sins; I will acquiesce in thee, and in my relation to thee.” I know not where there is the like expression of Christ's love to his church, unless in that song of songs, <sup>261B</sup> Song of Solomon 4:9, *Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of thy eyes*. O the condescensions of divine grace! The great God not only loves his saints, but he loves to love them, is pleased that he has pitched upon these objects of his love. He will *joy over them with singing*. He that is grieved for the sin of sinners rejoices in the graces and services of the saints, and is ready to express that joy by singing over them. *The Lord takes pleasure in those that fear him*, and in them Jesus Christ will shortly be glorified and admired.

**IV.** God will comfort Zion's mourners, who sympathize with her in her griefs, and will wipe away their tears (v. 18): *I will gather those who are sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, to whom the reproach of it was a burden*. See,

**1.** Who those are whom God will rejoice in and make to rejoice. They are such as are sorrowful. Those only must expect to reap in joy that sow in tears. The sorrowful now shall be for ever joyful.

**2.** What is the great matter of sorrow to Zion's mourners, when Zion is in mourning. Many are her calamities. The city is ruined, and the palaces are demolished; trade is at an end, and the administration of public justice; but all these are nothing to them in comparison with the desolations of the sanctuary, the destruction of the temple and the altar, to attend on which, in solemn feasts, all Israel used to come together three times a year. It is for those sacred solemn assemblies that they are sorrowful,

**(1.)** Because they are dispersed; there is no temple to come up to, or, if there were, no people to come up to it; so that the *solemn feasts and sabbaths are forgotten in Zion*, <sup>2016</sup>Lamentations 2:6. Note, The restraining of public assemblies for religious worship, the scattering of them by their enemies, or the forsaking of them by their friends, so that either there are no assemblies or not solemn ones, is a very sorrowful thing to all good people. If *the ways of Zion mourn*, the sons of Zion mourn too. And hereby they make it to appear that they are indeed of Zion, living members of that body with the grievances of which they are so sensibly affected.

**(2.)** Because they are despised; the reproach of the solemn assemblies is a burden to them. It had been the lot of the solemn assemblies to lie under a great deal of reproach. Satan and his instruments having a particular spite at them, as the great support of the interest of God's kingdom among men. Black and odious characters have been put upon those assemblies; and this is a burden to all those that have a cordial concern for the glory of God and the welfare of the souls of men. They reckon that the reproaches of those who reproach the solemn assemblies fall upon them, fall foul upon them.

**V.** God will recover the captives out of the hands of their oppressors, and bring home the banished that seemed to be expelled, v. 19, 20.

**1.** Their enemies shall be disabled to detain them in bondage: "*At that time I will undo all that afflict thee*, will break their power, and blast their counsels, so that they shall be forced to surrender the prey they have taken." *Conficiam* — *I will take them to task*; "I will be doing with them shortly, and so as to make an end of them." Note, Those that abuse and oppress God's people take the ready way to undo themselves.

2. They shall be enabled to assert and recover their liberty, and all the difficulties in the way of it shall be surmounted. Is the church weak and wounded? *I will save her that halts*, as was promised, <sup><304></sup>Micah 4:7. He will help her when she cannot help herself; even *the lame shall take the prey*, <sup><332></sup>Isaiah 33:23. Is she dispersed, and not likely to incorporate for her common benefit? I will *gather her that was driven out*, and *bring her again at the time that I gather her*. One act of mercy and grace shall serve both to collect them out of their dispersions and to conduct them to their own land. When the *people's hearts are prepared*, the work will be done suddenly; and who can hinder it if God undertake to effect it? "*I will turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord; you shall plainly discern the hand of God in it, and say, This is the Lord's doing.*"

**VI.** God will by all this put honour upon them and gain them respect from all about them. Israel was at first *made high above all nations in praise and fame*, <sup><153></sup>Deuteronomy 26:19. The reproach brought upon them was therefore one of the sorest of their grievances (nothing cuts deeper to those that are in honour than disgrace does); and therefore when God returns, in mercy, to his church, it is here promised that she shall regain her credit; all the reproach shall be for ever rolled away, as Israel's at Gilgal, <sup><167></sup>Joshua 5:9. The church shall be as honourable as ever she had been despicable.

1. Even those that reproached her shall be made to respect her: "*I will get them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame*, that the same who were the witnesses of their disgrace may see cause to change their mind concerning them." Those that said, "This is Zion whom no man looks after," shall say, "This is Zion whom the great God looks after." And she that was looked upon to be the *offscouring of the earth* now appears to be the darling of heaven.

2. Even those that never knew her shall be brought to honour her (v. 20): *I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth*. So the Jewish church was when *the fear of the Jews* fell upon their neighbours (<sup><107></sup>Esther 8:17), and some of all nations said, *we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, <sup><302></sup>Zechariah 8:23. So the Christian church was when it was made to flourish in the world, for there is that in it which may justly recommend it to the value and esteem of all the people of the earth. And so the universal church of the firstborn will be in the great day, when the saints shall be brought together to Christ, that he may be admired and glorified in them, and they admired and glorified in him

before angels and men. Then will God's Israel be *made a name and a praise* to eternity.