

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 23

This chapter contains threatenings to the Jewish governors, and to their priests and prophets, on account of their manifold sins; intermixed with gracious promises to the Lord's people, and particularly with a famous promise of the Messiah. The pastors or governors of Israel are charged with scattering and driving away the Lord's flock, for which they are threatened, (²²⁷⁰Jeremiah 23:1,2); and a promise is made of the gathering of the remnant of them, and of setting up other shepherds over them, under whom they should increase, and be comfortable, (²²⁷⁵Jeremiah 23:3,4); particularly the Messiah is promised; as David's righteous Branch; as a prosperous and righteous King; as the author of righteousness to his people, under whom they should have salvation and safety, (²²⁷⁵Jeremiah 23:5,6); so that in comparison of this salvation, the deliverance out of Egypt should not be spoken of, (²²⁷⁵Jeremiah 23:7,8); and then follows a sad complaint of the priests and prophets; of their profaneness, their adultery, swearing, lying, hypocrisy, and deception of the people; for all which they are severely threatened, (²²⁷⁵Jeremiah 23:9-15); wherefore the people are exhorted not to hearken to them, promising them peace and safety; whereas, by attending to the word of God, it might easily be seen that a storm of wrath was gone forth, and was ready to break, and would fall upon the head of the wicked, to the executing of the thoughts and purposes of God's heart, (²²⁷⁶Jeremiah 23:16-20); and the Lord declares he had not sent these prophets, as might be known from their not turning the people from their evil ways, (²²⁷¹Jeremiah 23:21,22); whose conduct and behaviour could not be hid from the sight of the Lord, nor their prophecies from his ears, which were no other than dreams, and the deceits of their own hearts; and there was as great a difference between them and the word of the Lord, as between chaff and wheat; seeing his word in his hand is of great virtue and efficacy, whereas there was none in theirs, (²²⁷³Jeremiah 23:23-29); wherefore the Lord declares himself to be against these prophets, for stealing his word from their neighbour; for making use of his name, when they were not sent by him; and for causing the people to err by their lies, (²²³¹Jeremiah 23:30-32); and both people, priest, and prophet, are

severely threatened for jeering and scoffing at the word of the Lord, calling it the burden of the Lord; which phrase they are forbid to use in a sneering way; and should they persist in it, they are told that God would forsake and forget them, and cast them out, and everlastingly punish them, (^(2E23)Jeremiah 23:39,40).

Ver. 1. *Woe be unto the pastors*, etc.] Or, “O ye shepherds” or “governors”, as the Targum; the civil rulers and magistrates, kings and princes of the land of Israel; since ecclesiastical rulers, the priests and prophets, are mentioned as distinct from them in (^(2E23)Jeremiah 23:9); whose business it was to rule and guide, protect and defend, the people: but, instead of that, they were such

that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, saith the Lord God; set them bad examples, led them into idolatry and other sins, which were the cause of their ruin, and of their being carried captive, and scattered in other countries; and their sin was the more aggravated, inasmuch as these people were the Lord’s pasture sheep, whom he had an interest in, and a regard unto, and had committed them to the care and charge of these pastors or governors, to be particularly taken care of.

Ver. 2. *Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, etc.] The covenant God of that people, who are Called his sheep, and the sheep of his pasture; having made a covenant with their fathers, and provided a good pasture for them, the land of Israel, where they enjoyed all blessings, civil and religious, and appointed persons over them to feed them; but these did not do their duty, and therefore the Lord was against them, as follows:

against the pastors that feed my people; whose office it was to feed, rule, and defend them; and who pretended to do it, but did it not;

ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; they had been the means of their being driven out of their dwellings, and out of their own land, and of their being among the nations of the world, and took no care for the return of them, any more than they concerned themselves for their welfare when over them; or they suffered the enemy, like beasts of prey, to come in among them, which scattered them, and drove them from their pasture, as sheep are by bears, dogs, and wolves; and took no care to preserve them from them, or to gather them together again to their pasture. The people of the Jews, at the time when Christ came, hereafter prophesied of, were scattered as sheep without a

shepherd, and are called the lost sheep of the house of Israel, (~~4086~~ Matthew 9:36 10:6 15:24);

behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord; that is, punish them for their iniquities; since they visited not the flock in a way of mercy and kindness, as the duty of their office required, the Lord would visit them in a way of justice, and punish them according to their deserts.

Ver. 3. *And I will gather the remnant of my flock, out of all countries,* etc.] Such of them as did not perish by the sword, famine, and pestilence, or died not in captivity, and chose not to remain in the kingdom where they were; for all did not return upon the edict of Cyrus: though some think this is to be understood of the gathering of God's elect, the remnant according to the election of grace, the children of God that were scattered abroad, by the sufferings and death of Christ, the Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be, hereafter prophesied of:

whither I have driven them; this, which is before charged upon the pastors, is taken by the Lord to himself; because this was not only permitted by him, namely, the dispersion and captivity of the Jews, but was inflicted by him as a punishment upon them for their sins, and the sins of their governors; but yet such was the mercy and goodness of God, as to return a remnant of them:

and will bring them again to their folds; to the city of Jerusalem, and their dwelling houses there, and in other places; an emblem of the Lord's bringing his chosen remnant, whether Jews or Gentiles, into a good fold and good pastures, to a Gospel church state, and the ordinances of it, (~~4106~~ John 10:16);

and they shall be fruitful and increase; the remnant of the flock returned to their own land and dwellings, and there grow numerous, and increase in wealth and riches; as Christ's spiritual sheep, gathered into his fold, become fruitful in grace and good works, and increase with the increase of God.

Ver. 4. *And I will set shepherds over them, which shall feed them,* etc.] Good shepherds, rulers and governors, that shall rule them with wholesome laws, and protect and defend them; such as Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and others, after the captivity: or Christian kings and princes, when the Gospel came to be published and established in many kingdoms and provinces, and the sheep of Christ were gathered out of them. Jerom

interprets these shepherds of the apostles of Christ; and it may include other ministers of the Gospel, who feed Christ's sheep with knowledge and understanding; (see ^{<3485>}Jeremiah 3:15);

and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed; not the shepherds, as Jerom understands it, but the sheep. This looks as if this prophecy had respect to more future times than those immediately following the return from the Babylonish captivity; since the Jews were made to fear, and were dismayed by Sanballat and Tobiah, and, in later times, by the Greeks and Romans; even to the times of Christ, and the Gospel dispensation; in which the saints receive not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but, through the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, of Christ, have much spiritual peace and boldness of faith, and fear no enemy;

neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord; not one of the sheep brought back, or of the remnant gathered, shall be missing or lost; this is exactly true of Christ's sheep, (^{<4108>}John 10:28).

Ver. 5. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord*, etc.] Or, “are coming”^{f462}; and will soon be here, a few days, months, and years more; so it was usual with the prophets to represent the coming of Christ as near at hand, to comfort the saints, and keep up their faith and expectation of him, and especially the latter prophets; (see ^{<5006>}Haggai 2:6,7 ^{<3000>}Zechariah 9:9) (^{<3000>}Malachi 3:1); as also to usher in their prophecies of this sort with a behold, as a note of admiration, attention, and asseveration; (see ^{<2074>}Isaiah 7:14 ^{<3008>}Zechariah 3:8 6:12);

that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch; the Messiah; so it is explained by the Targum, which calls him the Messiah of the righteous; and by Kimchi and Ben Melech; and by the ancient Jews^{f463} also; who is frequently by the prophets spoken of as a branch, (^{<2000>}Isaiah 4:2 11:1) (^{<3000>}Zechariah 3:8 6:12); which respects his incarnation, his springing up and appearance in the earth, and the meanness and weakness of it; and here, his descent from the family of David, when that was in a low and mean condition, to be his successor in his throne and kingdom, not in a temporal, but in a spiritual sense; and is a branch and plant not of man's raising, but of the Lord's, his human nature being formed without the help of man; and is that tabernacle which God pitched, and not man; and is therefore elsewhere called the Branch of the Lord, and said to be brought forth by him, (^{<2000>}Isaiah 4:2 ^{<3008>}Zechariah 3:8); the epithet of “righteous” is given him, because righteous in himself, and the author of righteousness to

others; a branch that brings forth and bears the fruits of righteousness, from whence all those that are ingrafted in him come to have righteousness;

and a King shall reign and prosper; the King Messiah, the same with David's righteous Branch, his son and offspring; who was appointed by God the Father "King" over Zion, the church, from all eternity; was always promised and spoken of as a King, and came as such, though his kingdom was not with observation, it being not of this world; and when he ascended to heaven, he was declared Lord and Christ; and now "reigns" on the same throne with his Father, and will till all enemies are put under his footstool: and as he prospered in his priestly office, by obtaining the redemption and salvation of his people, which is the "pleasure of the Lord" that was to "prosper in his hand", (^{<2530>}Isaiah 53:10); so likewise in his kingly and prophetic offices, by going forth in his Gospel conquering and to conquer; riding forth therein prosperously, and subduing his enemies, and causing his ministers to triumph in him: or, "shall deal prudently"^{f464}, as the word is rendered in (^{<2523>}Isaiah 52:13); (see Gill on "^{<2523>}Isaiah 52:13");

and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth: in his church, and among his people, by governing them with righteous laws, and by protecting and defending them from their enemies; for "all judgment [is] committed to the Son"; who will judge one day the whole world in righteousness; (see ^{<4152>}John 5:22 ^{<4473>}Acts 17:31 ^{<2307>}Isaiah 9:7).

Ver. 6. *In his days Judah shall be saved*, etc.] In the days of the Messiah, the righteous Branch, and reigning prosperous King, not only the people of the Jews, God's elect among them, but all that truly embrace him, and confess him, as Judah's name signifies, shall be saved from all their sins; from the law, its curse and condemnation; and from wrath to come; and from all their spiritual enemies. In the latter part of his days all Israel shall be saved, (^{<5125>}Romans 11:26);

and Israel shall dwell safely; without any fear of enemies, being saved from them; being in that city, the church, which has salvation for walls and bulwarks; angels encamping about them; the Lord as a wall of fire around them; the Spirit lifting up a standard against their enemies, when they come in like a flood; and the Messiah their rock and refuge, and strong tower, their strength and righteousness; as follows: for all the salvation and safety of the Lord's people are owing to the righteousness of Christ; the effect of which is peace, quietness, and assurance for ever:

and this [is] his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS; because he is the author of righteousness to his people, and is only so; no creature could be the author of it; unrighteous man cannot be the author of righteousness; and the righteousness of an angel is of no advantage to man; and indeed neither of the other divine Persons is the Lord our righteousness; for though they are both Jehovah, the Father and the Spirit, yet not our righteousness: the Father appointed and sent Christ to work it out; he approved and accepted of it, when wrought out; and imputes it to his people; but is not the author of it: so the Spirit convinces of the need of it; reveals it, and brings it near; works faith to receive it; and applies it, and pronounces a person justified by it; but is not the author of it; that the Son of God only is; who is become so by his obedience to the law, and by bearing the penalty of it; and who, having been delivered for our offences, rose again for our justification: and this righteousness, which he has wrought out to the satisfaction of law and justice, becomes “ours”; it being signed for us, and wrought out for us, by a free gift of it is given to us; ours through the imputation of it to us by the Father, and in virtue of our union to Christ, and interest in him; and through the application of it to us by the Spirit of God; who puts it upon us, and clothes us with it, and enables us to lay hold upon it, and claim interest in it; and which may be meant by Christ being “called our righteousness”; for the meaning is, not that he should commonly go by this name; but only that he should be that unto us which it signifies; and that we should by faith, even every true Israelite, every believer, call him our righteousness; say that we have righteousness in him make mention of that continually, and express our desires to be found atone in it; for so the words may be rendered, “and this is the name whereby he shall call him^{f465}, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”; and a sweet name to a sensible sinner it is; to one that has felt the guilt of sin in his conscience; seen his need of a righteousness, and the worth of it. That the Messiah is here meant is acknowledged by the Jews, ancient and modern^{f466}.

Ver. 7. *Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord,* etc.] Or, “are coming”^{f467}; and will begin to take place in a little time, even upon the Jews’ return from Babylon; and reached to the times of Christ, to which they have a special regard; and include the whole Gospel dispensation, even the latter day glory, when the Jews shall return to, and dwell in, their own land; as (²²⁷⁸Jeremiah 23:8); shows:

that they shall no more say, the Lord liveth: the people of Israel in particular, or the Lord's people in general, shall no more swear by the living God, described as follows; or, as the Targum, declare no more the power of God, in the instance next mentioned, they had been used to do:

which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: which, though a wonderful deliverance, and never to be forgotten; yet not to be named with the redemption and salvation wrought out by Christ the Lord our righteousness; that being a deliverance from far greater and more powerful enemies, and from the far greater bondage of sin, Satan, and the law; nor with the restoration of the Jews in the latter day, which will be a most wonderful and amazing event, (^{f4115}Romans 11:15,25,26).

Ver. 8. *But, the Lord liveth*, etc.] Or they shall swear by the living God; or declare the power of the Lord, as the Targum, in their redemption by the Messiah:

which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them: which respects not only the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, which lay north of Judea; but the conversion of many of the ten tribes, through the preaching of the Gospel in the several countries where they were, to which the apostles of Christ were sent with it; and also the gathering of them together at the latter day, when they shall turn to the Lord, and return to their own land; as follows:

and they shall dwell in their own land: which has never been fulfilled as yet of the seed of the house of Israel, or of the ten tribes; but will be when all Israel shall be saved.^{f468} This passage is applied in the Talmud^{f469} to the days of the Messiah; (see Gill on "^{f464}Jeremiah 16:14-15").

Ver. 9. *Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets*, etc.] The false prophets, as the Targum rightly interprets it. The Vulgate Latin version renders it, "to the prophets"; and makes a stop there; which agrees with the original^{f470}; so that it may be considered as the title of what follows; it being directed to them by the prophet, to let them know his concern for them; to expose their sin, and reclaim them; who was so affected with their case, that his "heart" within him was "broken" with grief and sorrow, because of their false doctrines and wicked lives; and because of the mischief they did the people, and the ruin they brought upon them, and themselves also:

all my bones shake; with dread and horror at the iniquities committed and the judgments approaching. The word, as Jarchi says, signifies such a fluttering motion as is made by the wings of a bird hovering over its nest. The same word is used in (^{<1000>}Genesis 1:2); which Ben Melech refers to here. The prophet shuddered at their dreadful impiety, and at the thoughts of what was coming upon them on that account:

I am like a drunken man; that can neither speak nor stand; that knows not what to say, or which way to go; so confused and astonished was the prophet at what he saw was doing by them, and was likely to befall them:

and like a man whom wine hath overcome; or, “has passed over”^{f471}; like waves and billows, so that he is drowned in it, and mastered by it:

because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness: because of the dishonour done to his holy name, and holy truths; because of the profanation of both in the mouths of these false prophets; they pretending to come in the name of the Lord, and to speak his words; and because of the dreadful judgments which he, the prophet, was sent to denounce against them from the Lord.

Ver. 10. *For the land is full of adulterers*, etc.] Of such as were guilty of corporeal adultery, and of spiritual adultery, which is idolatry. Now, though in this, and in the following verses, the prophet describes the men of his generation, both ecclesiastics and laics; yet also so as to have regard to the Jews in the times of Christ, to which this prophecy has respect; between whom there was a great resemblance; adulteries were so frequent in Christ’s time, that the Jews left off the use of the bitter waters^{f472}; and our Lord sometimes calls the generation in which he lived an adulterous one, (^{<1029>}Matthew 12:39 16:4);

for because of swearing the land mourneth; because of false swearing and cursing; because of the oaths and imprecations of men; or because of the curse of God, for the sins of men, the land was desert or desolate, as the Targum; it became barren and unfruitful, the land of Judea; just as the earth was cursed for the sin of man originally; though it seems rather to signify perjury or false swearing, which, and adultery, were the reigning vices of the age; (see ^{<1033>}Matthew 5:33-37);

the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up; or the pastures of the wilderness, where cattle used to feed, were dried up for want of rain, and so were unfruitful, and produced no grass for the beasts of the field:

and yet their course is evil; the course of their ministry or prophesying was bad; and the course of their lives and conversations was one continued series of iniquity; the race they ran, both prophet and people, was a wicked one; they ran and made haste to commit sin; though a professing people, their conversation was according to “the course of this world”, (^{<411D>}Ephesians 2:2); and not according to the rule of God’s word:

and their force [is] not right; or, “is not so”^{f473}; as it ought to be, or employed in the manner it should: the power and authority of the prophets over the people was not used, as it might have been, for the preserving of the people from sin; nor their courage and valour shown for truth, as it ought to have been; and they used their power to hurt and oppress, and not to relieve and help: so the Pharisees in Christ’s time laid heavy burdens on others, but would not move them themselves; and, through a pretence of devotion, devoured widows’ houses, (^{<4120>}Matthew 23:4,14). So some render the words here, “and their violence is not right”^{f474}; their rapine and oppression were very unjust; so that, besides adultery and swearing, they are charged with violence in particular, and with a wicked course of life in general.

Ver. 11. *For both prophet and priest are profane*, etc.] Being guilty of the afore mentioned sins. The Targum is,

“the scribe and the priest;”

and such were the scribes and priests in the time of our Lord; they played “the hypocrite”^{f475}, as some render the word here; and are often charged with the sin of hypocrisy, and called hypocrites, (^{<4128>}Matthew 22:18 23:13-15,23,25,27,29);

yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord; where they officiated in holy things, or should have done so; where the one should have instructed the people, and the other offered sacrifices for them, according to the will of God; there they committed wickedness, which was an aggravation of their sin, as was the case of Eli’s sons, (^{<4122>}1 Samuel 2:22-24); perhaps the same sin was committed by these men; or idolatry may be meant; setting up images, and building altars for them in the house of God; (see ^{<4173>}Jeremiah 7:30); or carrying on traffic and merchandise, whereby the temple was made a house of merchandise, as it was in the times of Christ, (^{<4124>}John 2:14-16).

Ver. 12. *Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery [ways] in the darkness*, etc.] Their course of life may fitly be compared, and in the issue will prove to be like to a man's walking in a dark night without any lamp or lantern to light him, and in a slippery way, scarce able to stand upon his legs, and cannot see to pick his way, nor where to step next, which is very uncomfortable and dangerous; such are blind leaders of the blind, and both in danger of slipping and falling into a ditch, (^{<4154>}Matthew 15:14);

they shall be driven on, and fall therein; hurried on by Satan, and their own lusts, in their sinful ways to their ruin; or forced on into captivity and destruction; their enemies and the just judgments of God pursuing them, like a man pursued by others in a dark and slippery way; who cannot stand to feel his way, but is obliged to go on, though he can scarce keep upon his legs, and knows not where to set his foot next; (see ^{<4886>}Psalm 35:6);

for I will bring evil upon them: the evil of punishment, which is from the Lord; as sword, famine, pestilence, or captivity:

[even] the year of their visitation, saith the Lord: the precise and exact time appointed by the Lord to visit them in a way of judgment for their iniquities; which was a set time that would certainly come, and they could not escape; and which may not only respect the time of the Babylonish captivity, but the destruction of the Jews by the Romans, which was the time of their visitation, (^{<4194>}Luke 19:44).

Ver. 13. *And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria*, etc.] The ten tribes of Israel, among whom, in Ahab's time there were many false prophets, Baal's prophets, even four hundred and fifty; whose "folly" the Lord had formerly taken notice of; even their idolatry and impiety for giving into which the ten tribes had been carried captive years ago. The word ^{f476} here used signifies that which is "unsavoury": something very unsavoury in their doctrines, and in their lives; they were as salt which has lost its savour and is good for nothing; to which bad ministers are compared, (^{<4153>}Matthew 5:13). These words are to be read in connection with the following, and may be rendered, "indeed I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria"; of Israel in times past; "but I have seen in the prophets of Jerusalem"^{f477} that which is far worse; and therefore they must not expect to escape; or, as the Syriac version, "as I have seen in the prophets of Samaria--so have I seen in the prophets of Jerusalem", etc. so that here is a comparison run between them; and the latter are represented as worse than the former, though they were bad enough; as follows: for

they prophesied in Baal; in the name of Baal, whose prophets they were; so the Targum,

“they prophesied in the name of idols:”

or, “they prophesied by Baal”, as the Septuagint version^{f478}; they pretended to be inspired by him, and to receive their prophecies from him: or, “they prophesied concerning Baal”; what he would do for them, for those that worshipped him. The Arabic version is, “they prophesied in my name to Baal”; which seems to be foreign from the sense of the place:

and caused my people Israel to err; by following their directions and instructions, and worshipping Baal.

Ver. 14. *I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing*, etc.] Or “but”, or “so have I seen”, etc. as before observed; even in the prophets of Jerusalem, where the temple was, and where the pure worship of God was professed to be observed, and that now, at the present time; as he had formerly seen and observed what was foolish, ridiculous, and impious, in the prophets of the ten tribes, and had punished them for it; so now at this instant he sees that in the prophets of Judea which was enough to make a man’s hair stand an end, as the word^{f479} signifies; or, as it may be derived from another root, what was “filthy”,^{f480} and obscene; as follows:

they commit adultery; or, “in committing adultery”,^{f481}; with their neighbours’ wives; for this rather than idolatry or spiritual adultery seems to be meant:

and walk in lies; or, “walking in lies”,^{f482}; constantly speaking lies in their common talk and conversation; so that they were not to be believed in anything they said; which was monstrous; and delivering out false doctrines in the name of the Lord, pretending they received them from him; which was worse than prophesying in the name of Baal:

they strengthen also the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness; they hardened them in sin; partly by their false doctrines, extenuating their sins, putting a false gloss upon them, and promising them peace, though they lived in sin; and partly by their own wicked examples; the people concluding that what the prophets did they might do also; so that they never thought of repentance for their sins, or amendment of their lives; but went on in sin without remorse or reformation; not thinking anything about it, and not seeing any need of it; (see ³¹³²Ezekiel 13:22);

they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah; the prophets were all of them in God's account as the men of Sodom; who were exceeding great sinners before the Lord, daring and impudent in sinning; and the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that were led by them into the same wicked sentiments and practices, were like unto Gomorrah; and as they were like to them in sinning, So they would be in punishment; or a like punishment would be inflicted upon the prophets and people of Jerusalem as were upon Sodom and Gomorrah; (see ²¹⁰⁹Isaiah 1:9,10).

Ver. 15. *Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets,* etc.] Concerning the false prophets, as the Targum; their sin is before declared, and now their punishment:

behold, I will feed them with wormwood; with some bitter affliction and calamity; so the Targum,

“behold, I will bring upon them distress bitter as wormwood;”

they that have been fed with dainties, and lived upon the fat of the land; their views in pleasing the people with their lies being to serve their own bellies; now they shall fare after another manner:

and make them drink the water of gall: or, “the juice of hemlock”, as some; or “poison”, as others; “the savour of death”, so Kimchi; as they poisoned the people with their false doctrines, they shall drink poison themselves; they shall not only have that which is bitter and unpleasant, but that which is noxious and hurtful; not only a bitter potion, but a destructive one. The Targum is,

“I will cause them to drink a cup of the curse, bad as the heads of serpents;”

as pernicious as poison; (see ²¹⁸⁴Jeremiah 8:14 9:15);

for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land; by their false doctrines, and bad examples, debauchery, irreligion, and wickedness of all kinds, were encouraged, and spread all over the land; Jerusalem, the metropolis of the nation, being infected by them, the contagion spread from thence throughout the country. Evil teachers have a bad influence all around them; from whom, and from whence, true doctrine and real religion should have been propagated; from them, and thence, was

the source of all impiety and pollution. Some render it, “hypocrisy”^{f483}, or “flattery”; as if by means of the hypocrisy and flattery of these false prophets, all manner of sin was countenanced; and the like hypocritical spirit and behaviour everywhere prevailed.

Ver. 16. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you*, etc.] Do not hear them; stop your ears at what they say; give no credit to them. The Targum is,

“do not receive the words of the false prophets that prophesy unto you:”

they make you vain; they filled their heads with vain and empty things, and their hearts with vain hopes, which deceived them; so the Targum,

“they deceive you;”

they taught them vain things, and made them vain and sinful in their lives and conversations; and therefore were not to be hearkened to:

they speak a vision of their own heart, [and] not out of the mouth of the Lord; what they imagined they saw was a device of their own hearts, and what was agreeable to them, which must be bad enough; a produce of their own brains; an invention of their own; mere doctrines of men, and not such as come from the mouth of God, are his revealed will, and according to his word; and therefore not to be hearkened to; for nothing is to be heard and received, in matters of religion, but what is according to the revelation of God’s will in his word; (see ^{<218D>}Isaiah 8:20). The Targum is,

“they speak to you the wickedness of their hearts, and not by the word of the Lord.”

Ver. 17. *They say still unto them that despise me*, etc.] That despised the word, worship, and ordinances of the Lord; with such mockers and scoffers at religion, such abandoned creatures, they associated themselves; finding that their prophecies and doctrines met with approbation and success among them. The Septuagint version is, “they say to them that put away the word of the Lord”; reject it, and cast it behind their backs; (see ^{<4136>}Acts 13:46);

the Lord hath said, ye shall have peace; all manner of prosperity; that they should dwell in their own land, and not go into captivity, and enjoy the good things of it in peace and prosperity; this they pretended they had from

the Lord; which was an aggravation of their sins; not only to tell a lie, but to tell it in the name of the Lord, and in direct opposition to what the true prophets said from the mouth of the Lord, particularly Jeremiah:

and they say unto everyone that walketh after the imagination of his own heart; which is evil, and that continually, (^{<0005>}Genesis 6:5); whose course of life is after the lusts of his own wicked heart; and a worse guide than these a man cannot well have: and this is a true character and description of an unregenerate man, who walks after the flesh, and not after the Spirit; after his own carnal heart, and the dictates of it; and not according to the will and word of God: and yet to such, to whom the Lord says, “there is no peace”, the false prophets said,

no evil shall come upon you; no evil of punishment for the evil of sin, as the prophets of the Lord had threatened; such as the sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity.

Ver. 18. *For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord*, etc.] These are either the words of the Prophet Jeremiah; signifying that none of the false prophets were of God’s privy council, or were acquainted with his secrets, that they could tell the people they should have peace, and no evil come upon them; this they said, not from divine revelation, but from the imagination of their own hearts; for though the Lord does nothing but he reveals it to his servants, the prophets; yet not to men of such bad principles and wicked lives as they were: or rather these are the words of the false prophets; either taking this to themselves, that they were of God’s privy council, and knew his secrets, and ask who were besides themselves; or else insulting the prophets of the Lord, as though they took too much upon them to threaten the people with captivity and destruction, as if they were in the secret of the most High, and his privy counsellors; but that they thought themselves in such a situation seems to be the sense, from (^{<2272>}Jeremiah 23:22);

and hath perceived and heard his word? or, “hath seen and heard his word?”^{f484} seen a vision from him, and “heard” the word from his mouth, declaring the above things? or “seen” what was in his heart, what he purposed and designed to do; and “heard” what he said he would do?

who hath marked his word, and heard [it]? listened and attended to it, and obeyed it? not the false prophets, but the true ones; as the Targum of the whole is,

“for they stood not (or rose not up) that the secret from before the Lord might be revealed to them; and they saw not, nor heard his words; nor did they hearken to his word, nor receive;”

or obey; understanding this of the false prophets.

Ver. 19. *Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury*, etc.] Or, “behold, a whirlwind of the Lord, of the fury is gone forth”^{f485}; which latter clause explains the former; and, hews, that by “the whirlwind of the Lord” is meant his “fury” or “wrath”; which, like a whirlwind, would come suddenly, and at an unawares, and be very boisterous and powerful, and carry all before it; and which was gone forth from the Lord in the decree and commission; and would quickly break out and appear in the Chaldean army that would invade Judea and besiege Jerusalem, compared to a full and fanning wind, and its chariots to a whirlwind, (^{<2011>}Jeremiah 4:11-13); from whence it would appear, that these men, the false prophets, were not in the counsel of God; had seen no vision from him, nor had marked his word: since they prophesied of peace and prosperity, when a blustering storm was coming:

even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked; or “rest”^{f486} thereon; even on the head of the wicked prophets, and all such wicked persons as give heed unto them; on them it would fall with its full weight, and give excessive pain, and there continue to their utter ruin. Kimchi says this refers to the days of the Messiah, when all the wicked shall be consumed. It may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, at least include it; which was a grievous whirlwind indeed.

Ver. 20. *The anger of the Lord shall not return*, etc.] Having a commission from him, and being sent forth on an errand to do business for him, it shall not return to him, without having done it; as a servant sent by his master does not return till he has finished what he was sent about:

until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart; all his counsels, purposes, and designs, respecting those his anger kindled against, the false prophets and wicked Jews:

in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly; when too late to avert it by repentance and reformation when all this shall be fulfilled, and the seventy years captivity take place; or, “in the end of days”^{f487}; in the latter part off time, when the Jews shall be converted, and seek the Lord their God, (^{<2015>}Hosea 3:5); then “shall [they] understand it with an understanding”^{f488},

as it may be rendered; when they shall have the veil removed from them, and turn to the Lord; then they shall have a true and thorough understanding of these things; of the cause and reason of them; and of the mind of God in them, and the ends to be answered by them. Kimchi says this will be in the times of the Messiah.

Ver. 21. *I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran*, etc.] They might be sent of men, and be encouraged by them; but they were not sent of God: it is not only necessary that men employed in religious affairs should have an external call, in an orderly way, from the church of God; but also an internal call from the Lord himself; he qualifying them with gifts, putting his word into their mouths, and inclining their hearts to publish it; (see ^{<3874>}Hebrews 5:4,5); but these false prophets had no mission nor commission from the Lord, nor were they sent on any errand, or with any message from him; and

yet they ran; showed great diligence and zeal, and made haste to tell the people what the Lord had never said to them, but what were the warm imaginations of their own heads and hearts; they ran a race or course of ministry, but it was not good, as in (^{<2230>}Jeremiah 23:10). The Targum adds,

“to do evil:”

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied; wherefore what they prophesied was not the word of the Lord, but what they themselves devised; and so was what was false, as the Targum adds: it is a sad character of men when they speak in public neither by the will of God, nor according to the word of God.

Ver. 22. *But if they had stood in my counsel*, etc.] As they boasted they did; or, as they reproached the true prophets, and charged them with vanity and arrogance, in talking as if they had; had this been truly their case, as it was that of the prophets of the Lord:

and had caused my people to hear my words; or, “then they would have caused my people to hear my words”; had it been so, they would have heard first the words of the Lord themselves in secret and privately, and then they would have caused the people to have heard them; they would not have gone to them with their own lies; they would not have dared to have done that; they would have delivered nothing but what they had heard from the Lord:

then they should, or, “and they would”,

have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings; and not have strengthened their hands, and hardened them in their wickedness, and so kept them from repentance and reformation, (⁽²²³⁴⁾Jeremiah 23:14). The Lord argues from the efficacy and success of the ministry of the word to the truth of it, and their miss:, on from him; for though a good ministry is not always successful, at least so successful as could be wished for, and as it might reasonably be expected it would; yet it is more or less so; and at least it has a tendency to bring men off from their evil practices; and it attempts to do it, though it may fail in the execution; whereas a wicked ministry, such as this of the false prophets, had no tendency hereunto; nor was it the design of it; nor did they attempt it; but, on the contrary, encouraged and hardened men in sin.

Ver. 23. [*Am*] *I a God at hand, saith the Lord*, etc.] Or “near”^{f489}; that is, in heaven; and only sees, and hears, and observes persons and things there, being near unto him:

and not a God afar off? that sees, and hears, and takes notice of persons and things at a distance, even on earth. The meaning is, that he certainly was; and that persons and things on earth were as much under his cognizance and notice, as persons and things in heaven; which was quite contrary to the notions of these atheistical prophets and people; who, like Heathens, thought that God did not concern himself about persons and things on earth. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, without the interrogative, “I am a God near, saith the Lord, and not afar off”. The meaning is, that God is alike near in one place as in another; which is a very great truth; and a very comfortable one it is to the people of God, to whom he is near in all places, and at all times; he is a present help in time of trouble; he is near them, to hear their cries, and grant their requests; he is near to give them assistance in a time of need, and to deliver them out of all their troubles; to afford them his gracious presence, and to indulge them with communion with himself; to communicate all good things to them; to speak comfortably to them; to take them by the hand, and lead them in the way everlasting: he is at their right hand to uphold them with his, and to strengthen them with strength in their souls; to advise and counsel, and direct them; to rebuke their enemies, and save them from them that condemn them; and indeed there are no people like them, who have God so nigh unto them, in all things they call upon him for, (⁽²⁰⁴⁷⁾Deuteronomy 4:7);

and though he may seem at times to be afar off, and stand at a distance from them; when he hides his face; withdraws his gracious influences; does not appear at once for their relief in distress; but suffers them to be afflicted in one way or another; yet in reality he is not; but is nigh unto them when they call upon him: and this truth is as uncomfortable and dreadful to wicked men, who cannot go from his spirit, or flee from his presence; which is everywhere, in heaven and hell, in the earth and seas, even in the uttermost parts of them; there his eye is upon them, and his right hand can reach them: he is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. The Targum is,

“I God have created the world from the beginning, saith the Lord; and I God will renew the world for the righteous;”

(see ^{<G1B>}2 Peter 3:13); and some interpret the words of time, as well as of place; as if the sense was this, am I a God of late date, as the gods of the Heathens are? no, I am not: am I not a God from eternity who was before the world was, and the Creator of it, which they are not? verily I am: but the former sense is best, and most agreeable with the context, and what follows.

Ver. 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord,* etc.] If a man should hide himself in the most secret and hidden places of the earth, and do his works in the most private manner, so that no human eye can see him, he cannot hide himself or his actions from the Lord, who can see from heaven to earth, and through the darkest and thickest clouds, and into the very bowels of the earth, and the most hidden and secret recesses and caverns of it. The darkness and the light are both alike to him; and also near and distant, open and secret places:

do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord; not only with inhabitants, and with other effects of his power and providence; but with his essence, which is everywhere, and is infinite and immense, and cannot be contained in either, or be limited and circumscribed by space and place; (see ^{<1K27>}1 Kings 8:27). The Targum is,

“does not my glory fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord;”

both of them are full of his glory; and every person and thing in either must be seen and known by him; and so the false prophets and their lies; in order to convince of the truth of which, all this is said, as appears by the following words.

Ver. 25. *I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name*, etc.] Or, “I hear what the prophets say”^{f490}, etc. though they thought God was at a distance from them, in the highest heavens, and neither saw, nor heard, nor took any notice of what was done on earth, they were greatly mistaken; he heard and observed with indignation the false doctrines and lying prophecies which they delivered out in his name to the people, whether in public or in private; for he is the Lord God omniscient and omnipresent; and therefore, though they deceived the people, they could not deceive him; who knew all their schemes and all their designs, from what principles they acted, and with what views;

saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed; not a common dream, but a divine dream; this was one way in which the Lord formerly made known his mind and will to his servants, (⁴⁹²⁶Numbers 12:6); wherefore these false prophets, in imitation of the true ones, and in order to gain credit from the people, pretended they had a dream from the Lord, in which such and such things were revealed to them; and this is repeated by them for the greater certainty of it, and to raise the people’s attention as to something very uncommon and extraordinary. So the Targum,

“saying, a word of prophecy has been shown to me in a dream.”

Now, though the people could not contradict them, or know any otherwise than as they might observe that they agreed not with the word of God, or with his will, as made known by the true prophets of the Lord; for if a man says he has dreamed so and so, another cannot say he has not; because no man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him; yet God, that knows all things, knew that these were all lies and impostures, and that they had never had a dream from him, or any revelation of his will in that way.

Ver. 26. *How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies?* etc.] To invent such lies, and deceive the people, and turn them away from God; agreeably to the preceding and following verses: this shows that this was not through ignorance and inadvertence; it was a meditated and studied thing by them; they contrived it in their hearts, and they were resolute and bent upon it, and took much delight and pleasure in it; their hearts were in it, and it was in them to do as they did; and in this way they had been long, but should continue no longer. Or the words may be rendered, “how long?”^{f491} and a stop be put there, being a short abrupt expression, like that in (⁴⁹⁸³Psalm 6:3); and the sense be, how long shall

they go on thus, pretending to dreams, and visions, and revelations from the Lord, and so impose upon the people? shall they always go on after this manner? no, they shall not: and then the next words may be read, “is there any thing in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies?”^{f492} nothing that is good; truth is not there; nothing but lies and deceit; the word of God is not there, as it is with the true prophet of the Lord, “he that hath my word”, as in (^{2P38}Jeremiah 23:28); there is no fear of God, nor knowledge of him and his will, nor faith in him, nor love to him, or any regard to his honour and glory;

yea, [they are] prophets of the deceit of their own hearts; they prophesy nothing but what their own deceitful hearts suggest to them, whereby they are deceived themselves, and deceive others, (^{2T13}2 Timothy 3:13).

Ver. 27. *Which think to cause my people to forget my name*, etc.] The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “my law”. The word and worship of God; from which men are drawn off by false teachers, and are in a fair way to be brought to atheism, and to forget that there is a God; for when once men are turned from the word of God to believe lies, and from the pure worship of God to a false religion, there is no knowing where things will end; and, indeed, it was the design of these false prophets, a scheme and device of theirs, in which they hoped to succeed

by their dreams; which, says the Lord,

they tell every man to his neighbour; privately from house to house, as well as publicly, to take off the people from all thoughts of God and his worship:

as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal: or, by Baal^{f493}; by means of Baal’s prophets in Samaria before mentioned; who seduced Israel from the pure worship of God, and made them forget him; having the name of Baal more in their minds and mouths than the name of God. The Syriac version is, “as their fathers forgot my name, and worshipped Baal”; and so the Targum,

“as their fathers forsook the worship of my name, and swore by the name of idols.”

Ver. 28. *The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream*, etc.] These words are directed not to a true prophet of the Lord, that has a dream from him, or something communicated to him in a dream by the Lord, which he

is to deliver as such; but to a false prophet, that says he has dreamed; and if he has dreamed a dream, let him tell it as a “dream”^{f494}; so some supply it, as the fruit of his own roving fancy and imagination in sleep; and not call it a revelation from the Lord, and impose it upon the people as such. The Septuagint version is, “let him tell his dream”; let him tell it as his own, and not as a dream from the Lord;

and he that hath my word; the word of prophecy by revelation, and under the influence of the Spirit of God, as the true prophets: “my word”; not the word of men, or the word spoken by angels, or the Scriptures in general; but the word of the Gospel, the word of peace and reconciliation, of righteousness, life, and salvation; the evangelical part of the word, though not to the exclusion of all the rest, but this chiefly: “he that hath it”; or “with whom”, or “in whom it is”^{f495}; who has it not only in his hands to read, nor merely in his head, so as to have speculative notions of it; but has it in his heart, where it is come with power, and is become the ingrafted word; and who has a large share of spiritual and experimental knowledge of it, and an ability and capacity to express it to the edification of others;

let him speak my word faithfully; or “truly”^{f496}; as it is. Ministers of the word are stewards, and it is required of such that they be faithful, and a more honourable character they cannot well have; and then may the word of the Lord be said to be spoken faithfully, when nothing else is spoken but that; when there is no mixture of man’s with it; and when the whole of it is spoken, and nothing kept back or concealed; when a man’s views in it are sincere and upright, and he aims only at the glory of God; and the good of immortal souls; when it is spoken out, openly and boldly, not as pleasing men, but God, and as in his sight, to whom the account must be given: or, “let him speak my word, truth”^{f497}; which is truth; or, for it is truth, as Kimchi; so this is a reason why it should be spoken freely, fully, publicly, and boldly, because it is truth, and nothing but truth: or, “let him speak my word as truth”; or as it is^{f498}; it comes from the God of truth; if lies in the Scriptures of truth; the subject matter of it is truth, Christ, who is truth itself, and those doctrines, relative to his person, office, and grace, and salvation by him; and it is the Spirit of truth that directs into it, owns it, and makes it useful;

what [is] the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord; there is no comparison between the one and the other; the one is greatly preferable to the other; there is as much difference between the dreams and lies of the false

prophets and the word of God, as there is between chaff and wheat. False doctrine is as “chaff”, light; when put into the balance of the sanctuary it is found wanting; it is of no value; it is as wood, hay, and stubble, in comparison of gold, silver, and precious stones; it is not fit for food, and has no nourishment in it, but the contrary, and its end is to be burned. Some doctrine is as “wheat”, choice and excellent, pure, solid, substantial, and of a nourishing and strengthening nature. And what is the one to the other? or what have they to do with one another? they should not be mixed together, but separated. So the Syriac version, “why do ye mix the chaff with the wheat?” (see ^{<4127>}2 Corinthians 2:17). The Targum interprets this of persons, paraphrasing the words thus,

“behold, as one separates between the chaff and the wheat, so I separate between the righteous and the wicked, saith the Lord.”

Wicked men are as “chaff”; such were the false prophets, and all ungodly men, for their emptiness, lightness, unprofitableness, and for their being fit fuel for everlasting burnings; (see ^{<506>}Psalm 1:5 ^{<4182>}Matthew 3:12); and good men, and true prophets of the Lord, and all the righteous, are as “wheat” for choiceness and excellency, purity and solidity; and these are not to be mixed together, should not now, nor will they be hereafter, (^{<4182>}Matthew 3:12 13:30).

Ver. 29. [*Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord*, etc.] The legal part of it is as fire; it is called a “fiery law”, (^{<6312>}Deuteronomy 33:2); like fire, it is quick and piercing, and penetrating into the hearts and consciences of men; and works wrath there, and raises a fearful expectation of fiery indignation; it threatens with everlasting fire; it sentences men to the fire of hell; and the righteous Judge, in the execution of it, will be a consuming fire to wicked men. The Gospel part of the word is like fire, on account of the light the entrance of it gives to sinners; by which they see their own impurity, impotence, and the insufficiency of their own righteousness, and the way of life and salvation by Christ; and by the light of this fire saints are directed in their walk and conversation; and by it immoralities, errors, and superstition, are detected: also on account of the heat of it; it is the means of a vital heat to sinners, the savour of life to them; and is warming and comforting to saints, and causes their hearts to burn within them; it inflames them with love to God, Christ, and one another, and with zeal for truth and the interest of a Redeemer; though it has a scorching and tormenting heat to wicked men, and fills them with

burning malice and envy, (^{<4116>} Revelation 11:5,10); and, through the corruption of human nature, is the occasion of contention and discord, for which reason Christ calls it fire, (^{<4124>} Luke 12:49); and indeed it has different effects on different objects, as fire, which hardens some things and softens others; (see ^{<4126>} 2 Corinthians 2:16); moreover, it may be compared to fire for its purifying, separating, and trying nature: as fire purifies gold and silver, and separates the dross, and tries the metal, and shows it what it is; so the Gospel tries men's principles, and discovers what they are, and separates one from another: and also for its consuming nature; it opposes, weakens, and burns up the worst in man, his lusts and corruptions, which it teaches him to deny; and the best in man, all his holiness and righteousness he depended upon; and it burns up the chaff of false doctrine and human inventions before mentioned.

and like a hammer [that] breaketh the rock in pieces? to which the heart of man may be compared, being hardened by sin, confirmed in it; destitute of spiritual life; stupid and senseless; stubborn and inflexible; on which no impressions are made, and is impenitent and inflexible; (see ^{<3072>} Zechariah 7:12); now the word of the Lord, in the hand of the Spirit, is a means of breaking such hard hearts, and taking away the Obduracy and hardness of them; there is a legal contrition of it, through the law part of the word, by which there is a knowledge of sin, and the soul is wounded with a sense of it, and sore broken, but without any view of pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and there is an evangelical contrition or brokenness of heart, through the Gospel part of the word, by means of which the stony heart is not only broken, but melted and dissolved into true evangelical repentance for sin, through the discoveries of a Saviour bruised and broken for its sin, and through a view of free and full pardon by his blood, and justification by his righteousness. Now the word is only an instrument; it is not the efficient cause of all this; as a hammer is but an instrument, and a passive one, can do nothing of itself; it must be taken up and used by a powerful hand, or it can do no execution; what is a hammer without a hand? so the Gospel is only an instrument in the hand of, he Lord; but when he takes it into his own hand, and strikes with it, it will break the hardest heart in pieces, and make a stony heart a heart of flesh, (^{<3065>} Ezekiel 36:26 ^{<4112>} Acts 11:2 ^{<4116>} Romans 1:16 ^{<3105>} 1 Thessalonians 1:5 ^{<4104>} 2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

Ver. 30. *Therefore, behold, I [am] against the prophets, saith the Lord,* etc.] The false prophets, with whom the Lord was displeased; he set

himself against them, and was determined to bring wrath and ruin on them. So the Targum,

“therefore, behold, I send my fury against the false prophets;”

that steal my word, or “words”^{f499},

everyone from his neighbour; either from the true prophets; beginning their prophecies as they did, with a “thus saith the Lord”; and mingling some words and phrases used by them, the better to ingratiate themselves among the people, and that they might be taken for the prophets of the Lord; as Pelagius, Austin says, used the word “grace”, the better to hide his sentiments, and cause them the more easily to be received by the people: or from the false prophets; they privately meeting, and consulting, and agreeing together what they should say to the people, as if they were the words of the Lord: or else from the people themselves; lessening their esteem for the words of the Lord; making them negligent of them and indifferent to them; and causing them to forget what they had heard and received.

Ver. 31. *Behold, I [am] against the prophets, saith the Lord*, etc.] Not another sort of prophets distinct from the former, or those that follow; but the same under another character, and against whom he was, and set his face on another occasion;

that use their tongues; at their pleasure, their lips being their own. So the Targum,

“who prophesy according to the will of their own hearts;”

talk in a haughty and insolent manner, speaking bold and daring things of the divine Being; or in a boasting bragging manner, extolling themselves, and speaking highly in their own commendations; or rather in a flattering way to the people: so some read it, by a transposition of a radical letter^{f500}, “that smooth their tongues”, as Kimchi; or speak smooth things with their tongues, to please the people:

and say, he saith; that is, “the Lord”, as the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions express it; that so they, might be the more easily believed by the people; but this was highly provoking to God, to father their lies and falsehoods upon him.

Ver. 32. *Behold, I [am] against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord*, etc.] And not true ones, such as the Lord spoke in to his prophets, and which they communicated from him to his people; (see ^{<01126>}Numbers 12:6);

and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; by the false doctrines and prophecies which they delivered, and by their loose and disorderly lives which they led; so that they debauched the principles of the people by the former, and their practices by the latter. Kimchi interprets the word translated “lightness” of lightness of their knowledge; as if it was through the shallowness of their judgments, and want of capacity in teaching, that the people were made to err by their false doctrines. The Targum interprets it of their temerity or rashness; and Schultens^{f501}, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, explains it of their pride and false glorying;

yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; wherefore they lied, and acted a vainglorious part, when they pretended they were sent by him, and had their orders from him what they should say; (see ^{<2227>}Jeremiah 23:21);

therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord; so far from it, that they did them a great deal of hurt by their lies and flatteries; seducing them from the ways and worship of God, and leading them on in such as would issue in their destruction, and did.

Ver. 33. *And when this people, or a prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee*, etc.] Any of the people, who were grown very profane; or any of the false prophets, who encouraged them in their irreligion and impiety; or any of the priests, who were in combination with them against the true prophets of the Lord; when any of these, in a scoffing jeering manner, should ask the Prophet Jeremiah,

saying, what [is] the burden of the Lord? or prophesy in the name of the Lord, as the Targum; and because some of the prophecies are called “burdens”, (see ^{<2310>}Isaiah 13:1); hence, by way of derision, they called every one so; and because many of these, though not all, were predictions of judgments and calamities that were to come on men; therefore they accounted all that the true prophets brought from the Lord as such, and sneering asked, what bad news do you bring now? what calamities are now to befall us? as if he was always a bringer of evil tidings;

thou shalt then say unto [them], what burden? making as if he was ignorant of what they meant; or rather as expressing indignation and resentment at the question; do you ask me such a question? I will tell you what it is, as follows: though the words may be rendered without an interrogation, “thou shalt then say unto [them], that which is a burden”^{f502}; which will fall heavy upon them, and be a burden unto them, and sink them down into ruin and destruction;

I will even forsake you, saith the Lord; so that they should have no more of his presence among them, or of prophecy with them, or of his protection of them.

Ver. 34. *And [as for] the prophet, and the priest, and the people,* etc.] Be they one or the other, or all of them; no regard will be had to their character and office, rank and dignity:

that shall say, the burden of the Lord; using that phrase in a bantering and ludicrous manner:

I will even punish that man and his house; not only he, but his family, shall suffer for it. This shows how much it is resented by the Lord, and what a dangerous thing it is to lampoon the word of God, to make a jest of Scripture phrases, or to joke with them; this is foolish jesting, which is not convenient, yea, impious and abominable. It is also hard jesting with edge tools.

Ver. 35. *Thus shall ye say everyone to his neighbour, and everyone to his brother,* etc.] When conferring about religious things, and the word of God in particular; when any inquiry is made of another, whether any message from the Lord by his prophets? or what is it? that it should not be put in such deriding and calumniating words, “what is the burden of the Lord?” but in more decent and becoming language, thus,

what hath the Lord answered? and what hath the Lord spoken? they might lawfully and laudably inquire of the prophet what answer he had received from the Lord, and what it was that he had said to him, provided they were serious in it, and asked with meekness and fear: the word of God should be reverently spoken of, and attended to.

Ver. 36. *And the burden of the Lord shall be mentioned no more,* etc.] Or the word of the Lord under that name, speaking of it in a ludicrous and scoffing manner:

for every man's word shall be his burden; every flout, scoff, and jeer of his, at the word of God, shall fall heavily upon him, with weight upon his conscience, and press him with guilt to the lowest hell; or, however, a heavy punishment for his sin shall light upon him: or, as the words may be rendered, “for his word is a burden to everyone”^{f503}; that is, the word of the Lord is reckoned by everyone a burden; and with them a burden and the word of the Lord are synonymous terms; which ought not to be, and was offensive to the Lord; and therefore he forbids the use of such a phrase, and threatens to punish for it;

for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts, our God; derided them, and put a wrong sense upon them; and which is aggravated by their being the words of “the living God”, who is the true God and his words true; and he lives and is able to resent and punish any ill usage of him, and ill treatment of his words; and not the oracles of lifeless idols: and they are the words of “the Lord of hosts”, of all armies above and below, and so was able to make them good: and besides, they were the words of “our God”, the God of Israel; who had in all ages kept his covenant with them, performed his promises to them, and had done great and good things for them.

Ver. 37. *Thus shall thou say to the prophet*, etc.] To Jeremiah, or any true prophet of the Lord; after the following manner should everyone address him, that made any inquiry of the will of the Lord by him:

what hath the Lord answered thee? and what hath the Lord spoken? this is repeated from (²⁰³⁵Jeremiah 23:35); for the confirmation of it, and for the direction of the people, and to show how much the Lord approved of such a way of behaving towards his prophet, and himself by him.

Ver. 38. *But since ye say, the burden of the Lord*, etc.] Seeing, notwithstanding all prohibitions of it, and directions to the contrary, they still persisted to call prophecy by this name, and that in a jocose and bantering way, and asked for it, and what it was, in a scoffing manner:

therefore thus saith the Lord, because you say this word, the burden of the Lord; will continue to use it, though so displeasing to me:

and I have sent unto you, saying, ye shall not say, the burden of the Lord; and therefore could not plead ignorance of his will, or excuse themselves, by saying they would have avoided it, had they known it was disagreeable to him: this was an aggravation of their impiety, that they should

obstinately persist in it, after he had remonstrated against it by his messages to them.

Ver. 39. *Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you*, etc.] That is, so behave towards them, as though they were entirely out of his sight and mind; show no affection to them; take no care of them; bestow no favours upon them; and no more have them under his protection. In the word here used, and rendered “forget”, and the word before used for a “burden”, there is an elegant play on words^{f504}, which another language will not easily express; no doubt there is an allusion to that word in this;

and I will forsake you; neither vouchsafe them his gracious presence, nor his powerful protecting presence, but give them up to the enemy:

and the city that I gave you and your fathers; the city of Jerusalem, which he had given to them to dwell in, and their fathers before them; but now they having sinned against him, and provoked him; therefore, notwithstanding this grant of the place to them, and which is mentioned that they might not depend upon it, and buoy up themselves with hopes that they should be in safety on that account; as he had forsaken them, he would forsake that, and the temple in it, and give it up into the hand of the Chaldeans:

[and cast you] out of my presence; as useless and loathsome. The Targum is,

“I will remove you far away, and the city which I save you and your fathers from my word.”

it signifies their going into captivity.

Ver. 40. *And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you*, etc.] Which was a just retaliation for reproaching, vilifying, and bantering his word: they who had been honoured so much and so long as the people of God, and their city counted the glory of the earth; yet now both they and that should be the byword of the people, and had in the utmost contempt, and that for ever, or at least a long time, even for a series of ages; which has been their case ever since their destruction by the Romans, and still is; for this cannot be restrained to the short captivity of seventy years in Babylon; though this reproach began then, and they never recovered their former honour and glory;

and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten; the same thing in different words, to heighten their disgrace, and confirm the perpetuity of it.