

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO JOB 12

In this and the two following chapter Job makes answer to Zophar's discourse in the former; who having represented him as an ignorant man, he resents it, and begins his defence with a biting sarcasm on him and his friends, as being self-conceited, and having an high opinion of their own wisdom, as if none had any but themselves, (~~Job~~ Job 12:1,2); and puts in his claim for a share with them, as being not at all inferior to them, (~~Job~~ Job 12:3); and then refutes their notions, that it always goes well with good men, and ill with bad men; whereas the reverse is the truth, (~~Job~~ Job 12:4-6); and which they might learn from the brute creatures; or he sends them to them, to observe to them, that the best things they had knowledge of concerning God and his providence, and of his wisdom therein, were common notions that everyone had, and might be learned from beasts, birds, and fishes; particularly, that all things in the whole universe are made by God, and sustained by him, and are under his direction, and at his disposal, (~~Job~~ Job 12:7-10); and such things might as easily be searched, examined, and judged of, as sounds are tried by the ear, and food by the mouth, (~~Job~~ Job 12:11); and seeing it is usual among men, at least it may be expected that men in years should have a considerable share of wisdom and knowledge, it might be strongly inferred from thence, without any difficulty, that the most perfect and consummate wisdom was in God, (~~Job~~ Job 12:12,13); whence he passes on to discourse most admirably and excellently of the wisdom and power of God in the dispensations of his providence, in a variety of instances; which shows his knowledge of his perfections, ways, and works, was not inferior to that of his friends, (~~Job~~ Job 12:14-25).

Ver. 1. *And Job answered and said.*] In reply to Zophar, and in defence of himself; what is recorded in this and the two following chapters.

Ver. 2. *No doubt but ye [are] the people,* etc.] Which is said not seriously, meaning that they were but of the common people, that are generally ignorant, and have but little knowledge, at least of things sublime, especially in matters of religion; wherefore, though they took upon them to

be his teachers and dictators to him, and censors of him, they were not above the rank, but in the class of people of low and mean understandings; (see ~~John 7:49~~ John 7:49); this sense indeed agrees with what is after said, “who knoweth not such things as these?” but since Job compares himself with them, and asserts he is not inferior to them, it supposes them to have a degree of knowledge and understanding of things somewhat above the common people; wherefore these words are to be taken ironically, exposing their vanity and self-conceit: “ye are the people”; the only, and all the people in the world of importance and consequence for good sense and wisdom; the only wise and knowing folk, the men of reason and understanding; all the rest are but fools and asses, or like the wild ass’s colt, as Zophar had said, and which Job took as pointing to him; so the word in the Arabic language ^{f504} signifies the more excellent and better sort of people; or, ye are the only people of God, his covenant people, his servants; that are made acquainted with the secrets of wisdom, as none else are:

and wisdom shall die with you; you have all the wisdom of the world, and when you die it will be all gone; there will be none left in the world: thus he represents them as monopolizers and engrossers of wisdom and knowledge, full of it in their conceit, allowing none to have any share with them: and by all this he not only upbraids them with their vanity and self-conceit, but puts them in mind, that, as wise as they were, they must die; and that, though their wisdom with respect to them, or any use they could make of it in the grave, where there is none, would die too; or that their wisdom was but the wisdom of the world, which comes to nought; yet there would be wisdom still in the world, and that which is true, which God makes known to men, even the wisdom of God in a mystery, the wisdom hid in himself; and who has the residue of the Spirit and his gifts to instruct men in it, and qualify them to be teachers of others; by which means, though men, even the best of men, die, yet the word of God, the means of true wisdom and knowledge, will always abide.

Ver. 3. *But I have understanding as well as you*, etc.] A natural understanding, or an understanding of natural things, which distinguishes a man from a brute; and a spiritual understanding, an understanding enlightened by the spirit of God, which is naturally dark as to divine things; but he had an understanding given him, to know himself, his state and condition by nature; to know God, his love and grace to men, and, as his covenant God, to know Christ his living Redeemer, who should stand on

the earth in the latter day, both to be his Redeemer and his Judge; to know his interest in him, and in the blessings of grace and glory by him: or, “I have an heart as well as you” ^{f505}; a wise and an understanding one; a new heart, and a right spirit; an heart to fear and serve the Lord, a sincere and upright one, and devoid of hypocrisy and deceit; and as good an one as theirs:

I [am] not inferior unto you: he was indeed as to estate and substance, being now reduced; though he had been, in that sense, the greatest man in all the east; but in wisdom and knowledge, in gifts and grace: thus a modest man, when oppressed and insulted by the speeches of overbearing men, may be obliged and see it necessary to say some things of himself, in his own vindication, which he otherwise would not; (see ^{<471115>}2 Corinthians 11:15 12:11); or, “I am not falling before you”; or “by you” ^{f506}; as one intimidated, conquered, and yielding; I stand my ground, and will not give way or submit to you, or allow you to have the superiority of me: or, “I am falling [no more] than you”; they took him for an apostate from God, and the fear of him, and the true religion he had professed, which Job denies; he held fast his integrity; and though he was fallen into calamities and afflictions, he was not fallen from God; from his fear of him, faith in him, and love and obedience to him; he was a holy, good man, a persevering saint; and though he had slips and falls in common with good men, yet fell not finally and totally, or was an apostate from the faith:

yea, who knoweth not such things as these? or, “with whom are not as these” ^{f507}? the things you have been discoursing of, which you would fain have pass for the secrets of wisdom, deep and mysterious things, hid from vulgar eyes, which none have and know but yourselves, are common things, what everyone is possessed of, and understands as well as you; that there is a God that has made the world, and governs it; that he himself is unsearchable, infinite and incomprehensible; a sovereign Being that does according to his will and pleasure, and sees and knows all things, and does all things well and wisely, and according to the counsel of his will: though some think Job has reference not to what Zophar had been discoursing concerning the infinity and wisdom of God, but to the thing or things in dispute between them, or to the assertions of his friends; that it is always well with good men, and ill with bad men, or that wicked men only are punished and afflicted, and particularly what Zophar concluded his speech with, (^{<481111>}Job 11:20). Now these were vulgar notions, which the common people had taken up, and were vulgar errors, as he proves in the following

verses, by giving instances of good men, being afflicted, and of bad men being in prosperity.

Ver. 4. *I am [as] one mocked of his neighbour*, etc.] That is, according to Saphorno, if I knew not, or denied those things you have been speaking of concerning God, his immensity, sovereignty, and wisdom, I should be derided by all my friends and acquaintance; but rather the sense is, Job instances in himself as a proof that good men are afflicted by God in this life; he was once in a very prosperous condition, when he was caressed by all, but now was fallen into such low and miserable circumstances as to be the scorn and contempt of his friends and neighbours; and even his being mocked was no small part of his afflictions; to endure cruel mockings has been the common lot of good men in all ages, and is reckoned one part of their distresses and sufferings for righteousness sake, (^{<81136>}Hebrews 11:36); and to be mocked by a neighbour, or a “friend” ^{f508}, as it may be rendered, greatly aggravates the affliction, (see ^{<45512>}Psalm 55:12,13); which was Job’s case; his friends that came to comfort him mocked at him, at least so he understood them, and interpreted what they said unto him, (see ^{<43151>}Job 16:20); and what made it still the heavier to bear, he was mocked by such a neighbour or friend,

who calleth upon God, and he answereth him; he was mocked at not by profane men only, but by a professor of religion, one that made it his constant business to pray to God, and by the prosperity he was in, and the good things he enjoyed, he seems to be answered; or rather Job means himself who was mocked, and so this is introduced to aggravate the sin of his friends, as well as to prove his point, and also to throw off a charge that had been brought against him. It was an aggravation of their sin in mocking him, that he was a praying man; one that made a conscience of daily calling upon God for the constant supplies of life, for his gracious presence, for help in time of need, for discoveries of pardoning grace and mercy, and for deliverance out of his troubles; and who had in many instances received answers of prayer from God; and this being his character, and this the constant work and business of his life, and being heard and answered of God in times past, showed him to be a good man, and yet an afflicted one; and this also served to wipe off the reproach, and remove the charge which they tacitly insinuated, and sometimes spoke out, that he restrained prayer before God; but he was so far from it, that the scornful usage of his friends made him ply the throne of grace the more frequently, (see ^{<431520>}Job 18:20);

and from this single instance of himself he passes on to consider it as a general case, as what usually befalls good and gracious men:

the just upright [man is] laughed to scorn; or “the just perfect man” ^{f509}; that is, perfectly just; no man is so of himself; none of Adam’s posterity, are righteous, no, not one; nor is any man truly just, perfectly righteous in himself, but in Christ; and even such a man does not do good without sinning; only the man Christ Jesus is righteous in such sense; but then all that are made righteous, by the imputation of his righteousness to them, are perfectly justified from all things, and are become the spirits of just men made perfect and complete in him: the character here designs such who are really righteous, truly gracious, are upright in heart, sincere souls, who have the truth of grace in them, and walk uprightly; these become a prey, a laughing stock to wicked men, as Noah, Lot, and others, before the times of Job, had been, which he may have respect unto.

Ver. 5. *He that is ready to slip with [his] feet*, etc.] Not into sin, though this is often the case of good men, but into calamities and afflictions; and Job means himself, and every just upright man in the like circumstances: or he that is “prepared” or “destined” to be among them, that “totter” and stagger in their “feet” ^{f510}; that cannot stand upon their feet, but fall to the ground; which may describe man in declining and distressing circumstances; or that is appointed to be the laughing stock of such as are unstable in the word and ways of God; double minded men, hypocrites, and formal professors, that totter and stagger at everything they meet with disagreeable to the flesh: with such, a poor afflicted saint is laughed to scorn; he

[is as] a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease; who are in affluent circumstances, enjoy great prosperity, live in plenty, and are not in trouble as others; their hearts are at ease: now with such, poor good men are had in great contempt; they are despised at heart, in the thoughts of such persons, if they do not in words express it; they are like a lamp just going out, which is neglected, and looked upon as useless; or like a torch burnt to the end, when it is thrown away; and thus it is with men, while the lamp of prosperity burns clear and bright, they are valued and had in esteem, but when their lamp becomes dim, and is almost, or quite extinguished, they are despised, (see ^{BC3B} Psalm 123:3,4); some apply this to Christ, who was a lamp or light, a great one, but despised of men, and even as a light; they loved darkness rather than light; and especially by the

Pharisees, who were at ease, settled on their lees, that trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; and this is true of Gospel ministers, though bright and burning lights, and even of every good man, in whom the true light of grace, and of the Gospel, shines, and especially when under afflictive circumstances. Some, instead of a “lamp despised”, read, “for” or “because of calamity despised”^{f511}; so Aben Ezra, which conveys the same sense, that an afflicted man is despised for his affliction; and this being the case of good men confutes the notion of Job’s friends, that it always goes well with such; and their other notion of its going ill with bad men is refuted in (^{<1812b>}Job 12:6).

Ver. 6. *The tabernacles of robbers prosper*, etc.] Such as the Chaldeans and Sabeans, who had robbed Job of his substance, and filled their houses with the spoils of others, and lived in the greatest fulness and prosperity, and whom he might have in his view; and the like is what has been since observed by good men, and has been a trial and temptation to them, not knowing well how to reconcile this to the justice and wisdom of God in providence, yet so it is, a fact that cannot be denied, (see ^{<1970>}Psalm 73:2,3,12 ^{<4120>}Jeremiah 12:1,2);

and they that provoke God are secure; all sin is abominable to God, contrary to his nature, will, and law, and so provoking; yet there are some sins that are more provoking than others, as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, robbery, rapine, and oppression, and the like, as well as attended with more aggravating circumstances; and yet many who are guilty of such enormous crimes, and God provoking iniquities, are “secure”, live in the greatest tranquillity and safety, free from the incursions, invasions, and insults of others: “their houses”, as Job elsewhere says, “are safe from fear”, (^{<1810>}Job 21:9);

into whose hand God bringeth [abundantly]; an abundance of the good things of this world, who have as much or more than heart can wish; whose belly is filled with hid treasure, whose grounds and fields bring forth plentifully, that they have no room to bestow their fruits; this, as it is an aggravation of their sin in provoking the God of their mercies, who is so liberal and bountiful to them, so it is the more full and express for the point in hand Job is confuting. Some, as Aben Ezra and Ben Gersom, understand this of idol makers and idol worshippers, and render the words, “who makes a god with his hand”, or “carries a god in his hand”^{f512}, and worships it; which others interpret of his doing what he will with God,

having him, as it were, in his hand, or reckoning his hands his god, and thinks to do what he pleases^{f513}.

Ver. 7. *But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee*, etc.] And so the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, in this and (~~812B~~ Job 12:8); from those instructions may be learned, of instances taken, and examples given, which may illustrate and confirm the same things that had been treated of: either what had been just now confuted, that it is always well with good men, and ill with bad men; the reverse of which had been affirmed and proved, that good men are afflicted, and wicked men prosper; something like to which may be seen in the creatures, and learned of them; thus those creatures that are the most harmless and innocent, and most useful and beneficial, are a prey to others, as sheep and lambs to lions, wolves, and bears, while they range about forests, fields, and plains, fearless and unmolested; and doves and turtles to hawks and vultures; and the lesser fish to the greater, by whom they are devoured, (see ~~813B~~ Habakkuk 1:13,14); and moreover, these creatures which are most useful and profitable, or are for pleasure and delight, fall more to the share of wicked men than good men; when droves of cattle and flocks of sheep are observed, and the question is put, to whom do they belong? the answer for the most part must be given, to such and such wicked men; and if the gold and silver, and other valuable things the earth produces, should be inquired about whose they are, it must be said, that they are, generally speaking, the property of the men of the world, the profane part of it; or if the fowls of the air, and fishes of the sea, could speak, when asked the question, whose food they commonly were? the answer would be, of the carnal, sensual, and voluptuous men: or rather this may refer to what Job first takes notice of in this answer of his, that his friends represented what they said as uncommon things, deep mysteries, and out of the reach of the vulgar, and which did not fall under common observation; whereas Job suggests he was as well acquainted with them as they were, yea, they were such that almost everybody knew; nay, they might be learnt from the creatures, to which Job here sends them for instruction; the beasts, birds, and fishes, all proclaim that they did not make themselves, nor did their fellow creatures, but some first cause, who is God: that they are sustained, supported, and provided for by him, and are governed, directed, and disposed of as he pleases, and so furnishes out documents of his sovereignty, wisdom, power, and providence:

and the fowls of the air, and they will tell thee: the same things; that God made them, and that they are dependent on him, and are fed and cared for by him, (see ^{<408>}Matthew 6:26).

Ver. 8. *Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee,* etc.] Or ask “a sprig of the earth” ^{f514}, any shrub, or tree, or whatsoever grows out of it, and they will all unite in this doctrine, that they are raised and preserved by the power of God, and are so many instances of his wisdom, power, and goodness:

and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee; as mute as they are, they will proclaim this truth, that God is the mighty Maker and wise Disposer of them.

Ver. 9. *Who knoweth not in all these,* etc.] Or “by” or “from all these” ^{f515} creatures; what man is there so stupid and senseless, that does not discern, or cannot learn, even from irrational creatures, the above things, even what Zophar had discoursed concerning God and his perfections, his power, wisdom and providence? for, by the things that are made, the invisible things of God are clearly seen and understood, even his eternal power and Godhead, (^{<410>}Romans 1:20); particularly it may be known by these, and who is it that does not know thereby,

that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? made this visible world, and all things in it, to which Job then pointed as it were with his finger, meaning the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that in them are, which were all created by him: hence he is called the Former and Maker of all things; and which are all the works of his hand, that is, of his power, which is meant by his hand, that being the instrument of action. This is the only place where the word “Jehovah” is used in this book by the disputants.

Ver. 10. *In whose hand [is] the soul of every living thing,* etc.] Of every animal, of every brute creature, as distinct from man, in the next clause: the life of everyone of them is from him, and it is continued by him as long as he pleases, nor can it be taken away without his leave; two sparrows, which are not worth more than a farthing, not one of them falls to the ground, or dies without the knowledge and will of God, (^{<409>}Matthew 10:29); of the soul or spirit of beasts, (see ^{<2082>}Ecclesiastes 3:21);

and the breath of all mankind; the breath of man is originally from God, he at first breathed into man the breath of life; and though this is in his nostrils, which makes him of little account, yet it would not continue there

long, was it not in the hand, and under the care and providence of God; the breath of a king, as well as the heart of a king, is in the hand of the Lord: the breath of that great monarch Belshazzar, king of Babylon, was in the hand of God, (²¹⁵³Daniel 5:23); and so is the breath of every peasant; and as when he takes away the breath of other creatures, they die and return to the dust; such is the case of man when God takes away his breath; all our times are in his hand, to be born, to live and die, all is at his dispose: or “the spirit of all the flesh of men”^{f516}, or of all men’s flesh; his rational soul, as distinguished from his flesh or body, this is from God, supported in its being by him, and ever will be, being immortal, and will never die.

Ver. 11. *Doth not the ear try words?* etc.] Articulate sounds; and the mind by them judges whether what is expressed and designed by them is right or wrong, true or false, to be received or rejected; so such that have spiritual ears to hear, try the words of God and men, the wholesome words of Christ, and those of false teachers, which eat as a canker; and by their spiritual judgment can distinguish between the one and the other, discern those that differ, and approve those that are excellent, by bringing them to the standard of the word, the balance of the sanctuary, the Scriptures of truth:

and the mouth taste his meat? and judge of it, whether good or bad, or savoury or unsavoury, and so receive or reject it: thus such who have their taste changed, and relish spiritual things, can distinguish between the meat that perishes, and that which endures to everlasting life, even Christ, whose flesh is meat indeed; and those that have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and to whose taste the fruits of Christ and the doctrines of grace are sweet; these will desire the sincere milk of the word, and that strong meat in it, which belongs to discerning and experienced souls; and will feed by faith upon the pure word of the Gospel, and mix it with it, and reject all others. Job by this would signify, that the things his friends had been discoursing of, and which they thought were such deep and wonderful things, were as easy to be searched and found out, tried and judged of, as sounds by the ear, or food by the taste; and it may be also that hereby he suggests, that his doctrine, if it was impartially examined and tried by proper judges, it would appear as plain as anything tried by the ear, or tasted by the mouth. Some think that Job intends by this, that from the senses of hearing and tasting in men might be inferred the omniscience of God, his knowledge of all things, and his quick discernment of men, and their actions, since “he that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall not he

see?” (^{<1891D>}Psalm 94:9). Some versions read the whole, “doth not the ear try words, as the mouth tastes his meat” ^{f517}? as in (^{<1834B>}Job 34:3). Saadiah Gaon connects these words “as the ear tries words”, etc. with (^{<1812D>}Job 12:12), “so with the ancient is wisdom”.

Ver. 12. *With the ancient [is] wisdom*, etc.] Meaning not himself, who was not very ancient; though some think Eliphaz so understood him; hence those words of his, in (^{<1815D>}Job 15:9,10); rather, as others, Job tacitly wishes that some ancient man, with whom wisdom was, would undertake to examine the affair between him and his friends, and judge of it, and decide the point; or, as others, he has respect to Bildad’s advice to search the fathers, and learn their sentiments, and be determined by them; to which he replies, that though it will be allowed that wisdom is with them, for the most part, yet their judgment of things is no further to be regarded than as it agrees with the wisdom of God, and the revelation he has made of his will; though it seems best of all to consider these words as an adage or proverbial sentence generally agreed to, that it often is, as it might be expected it should, though it is not always, that men well advanced in years are wise; that as they have lived long in the world, they have learned much by observation and experience, and have attained to a considerable share of wisdom and knowledge in things, natural, civil, and religious:

and in length of days is understanding; the understandings of men are improved and enriched, and well stored with useful science, having had the opportunity of much reading, hearing, and conversation; by this Job would suggest, that if his friends had more knowledge of hidden and recondite things, beyond common people, which yet they had not, it was not so wonderful, since they were aged men, and had lived long in the world; or rather it may be that this is mentioned, to observe that from hence, seeing it is so among men, that ancient men have, or it may be expected they should have, a considerable share of wisdom and understanding; it may be most easily and strongly concluded, that God, who is the Ancient of days, has the most perfect and consummate wisdom and knowledge, which is asserted in (^{<1812B>}Job 12:13).

Ver. 13. *With him [is] wisdom and strength*, etc.] Not with the ancient and long lived man, but with God, who has made the whole universe, and in whose hand and at whose dispose all creatures are, (^{<1811B>}Job 12:9,10); with him wisdom is originally, essentially, and inderivatively, as the fountain and fulness of it; he is the only and all wise God; his wisdom is displayed in

making the world, and all things in it, in the beautiful manner they are set, and in their subserviency to each other; in all the dispensations of his providence, having all a “bathos”, a depth of wisdom and knowledge in them, being all according to the counsel of his will; and in the work of redemption and salvation by Christ, in which he has abounded in all wisdom and prudence; in finding out and appointing a Redeemer, mighty and strong, equal to the work; in contriving and bringing it about, in such a manner as to glorify all his perfections; hence the Gospel, which is the publication of this grace, is called the wisdom of God: and with him is wisdom to communicate to his people, to direct them how to behave under every providence, in every station of life, in the church, and in the world, (see ^{<3106>}James 1:5); and he has “strength”, which he has shown in making the world out of nothing, in upholding it, and all things in it in being, in executing his designs, decrees, and purposes, in fulfilling his promises, and in supporting and strengthening his people, under all their trials and exercises, to withstand every enemy, and perform every duty; ancient men, though they may increase in wisdom, they decline in strength, but God has both, in infinite perfection:

he hath counsel and understanding; his decrees and purposes, wisely formed within himself, are his counsels of old, and which are truly and punctually performed in time; his plan of peace, reconciliation, and salvation by Christ, may, with propriety, be called the counsel of peace between them both; and the Gospel, and the various doctrines of it, are the whole counsel of God, and so are the ordinances of it; and besides these, by which he counsels and advises his people, he has counsel with him, and which he gives unto them by his spirit, for which they bless his name; and so even did Christ as man and Mediator, (^{<3107>}Psalm 16:7); he has counsel to give, and does give in things temporal, relating to the common affairs of life, and in things concerning the good and welfare of immortal souls; all which comes from him who is “wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working”, (^{<3109>}Isaiah 28:29); and he has an “understanding” that is infinite and unsearchable; he has an understanding of himself, his nature, perfections, and persons of all his creatures, and of all things past, present, and to come; the same things are said of Christ, the wisdom of God, (^{<3184>}Proverbs 8:14). Job, having observed these things of God, passes on to discourse most admirably and excellently of the power and wisdom of God in various instances, especially in the dispensations of his providence, by

which he appears to have known the secrets of wisdom, and not so ignorant as represented by Zophar.

Ver. 14. *Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again,* etc.] Which some restrain to the tower of Babel; but though the builders of it were obliged to desist from building, it does not appear that it was broken down, but seems to have continued many ages after: others more probably refer it to the destruction of Sodom, as Sephorno, which was an utter destruction, a perpetual desolation, and that city never was rebuilt to this day; and the same may be observed of many other cities that have had their foundations razed up, and have never been rebuilt, Thebes, Tyre, etc. and as will be the case of Rome, or the great city of Babylon, when once destroyed; yea, this has been true of kingdoms and states, such as Jeremiah was to root out, pull down, and destroy; that is, by prophesying of their destruction, as the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and others, whose names and nations are no more, (see ^{<4110>}Jeremiah 1:10 25:27); and the four monarchies broken down and destroyed, and made as the chaff of the summer threshing floor, by the kingdom of Christ, (^{<2725>}Daniel 2:35,44); and may be exemplified in particular persons and families; in Job and his family, the Lord broke him with breach upon breach; he broke him in his estate and substance; he broke down the hedge about him, and exposed him to thieves and robbers that plundered him of his substance; he broke down his family, that had been so largely and happily built up, by taking away his children by death; and he broke his constitution by diseases, afflictions, and sorrows, to which Job may have here respect, when he at this time never expected to have his losses in his substance, and in his family, and in his health, repaired, as they were; nor could it have been done without the will and pleasure of God; and oftentimes, when such breaches are made, there is no reparation; a man's wealth, and health, and family, are never built up again:

he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening; if he shut up a man in a prison, there is no opening the doors of it to let out unless he pleases; whether it be the prison of sin, in which all are concluded, in the fetters and with the cords of which they are held, and will continue, unless those shackles are broken off by powerful and efficacious grace, and the Lord proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and gives it; or whether it be the prison of the law, in which sinners are shut up, and held as condemned malefactors; there is no deliverance from it but by Christ, who has redeemed his people from the

curse and condemnation of it; and by his Spirit, as a spirit of adoption, who delivers them from the bondage of it, and makes them free indeed; or whether it be the prison of afflictions, straits, and difficulties in life, with which even good men are surrounded, being bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction; there is no opening for them, or getting out of them, unless the Lord breaks their bands asunder, and brings them out of darkness and distress, as out of prison houses, and so opens and makes a way for their escape; or whether he shuts them up, and they are so straitened in their souls that they cannot come forth in the free exercise of grace, and discharge of duty, as it was with Heman, when he said, “I am shut up, and I cannot come forth”, (^{<3888>}Psalm 88:8); and as it was with David, when he prayed, “bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name”, (^{<4217>}Psalm 142:7); there is no opening for them till the spirit of the Lord opens their hearts and their graces, and brings them forth into exercise; and “where he is there is liberty”, (^{<4117>}2 Corinthians 3:17); or if he shuts up a man in the grave, as the Targum paraphrases it, brings him to the house appointed for all living, and locks him up in it; there can be no opening for him till the resurrection morn, when Christ, who has the keys of hell and death, will unlock the graves, and the dead shall come forth, as Lazarus did at his call, (^{<4114>}John 11:43): or if “he shuts upon a man”^{f517}, as the words may be rendered; shuts the gates of heaven upon a man, as the door into the marriage chamber of the Lamb will be shut upon and against the foolish virgins, as well as profane sinners, there can be no opening, cry as long as they will; (see ^{<4250>}Matthew 25:10-13); and as God shut the door of Eden, or the earthly paradise, against Adam, when he drove him out, (^{<0023>}Genesis 3:23,24), to which Sephorno refers this passage; or if the Lord shuts up a man in hell, there is no opening, no way of escape from thence. We read of “spirits in prison”, (^{<4119>}1 Peter 3:19), which is to be understood not of the limbus or purgatory of the Papists, but of hell; and these “spirits” are the disobedient in the times of Noah, who dying, or being swept away with the flood, were cast into hell, where they have lain ever since, and will lie unto the judgment of the great day; between the place of the damned, and of the happy, in Abraham’s bosom, is a great gulf, that there is no passing from one to the other, which is the immutable and unalterable decree of God, which has fixed the everlasting states of men, (^{<2165>}Luke 16:26).

Ver. 15. *Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up*, etc.] Or “lays a restraint in” or “on the waters”^{f519}; either in the ocean, as he did at the

creation, when he gathered the waters that were upon the face of the earth into one place, and restrained them there, even in the decreed place he broke up for them, called the sea, and set bars and doors to keep them within bounds, whereby the places they left became dry and the dry land appeared called earth; and so at the time of the flood, when the waters which covered the earth and drowned the world were called off again, the face of it was dry, and so it remains, the waters of the great ocean being restrained from overflowing it; and also when God rebukes the see, and smites the waves of it, or withholds the ebbing and flowing of the tides brooks and rivers of water dry up; (see Na 1:4 ^{<3801>}Zechariah 10:11); or else this may be understood of God's withholding and restraining the waters in the clouds, and not suffering them to let down rain on the earth; when not only brooks dry up, as the brook Cherith did, where Elijah abode for sometime, but the fruits of the earth, trees, plants, and herbs dry up, wither and die; (see ^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:7 ^{<2019>}Joel 1:19,20); and this is an emblem in a spiritual sense of God's withholding the word and ordinances, the waters of the sanctuary the means of grace, and of fruitfulness; which when he does, the consequence of it is barrenness and unfruitfulness in kingdoms, cities, towns, families, sad particular persons; and of his withholding the communications of his grace, often compared to water in Scripture, even from his people; the effect of which is, that they are in, withering circumstances, the things that revive seem ready to die, though they shall not; love waxes cold, faith is ready to fail, and hope and strength seem perishing from the Lord:

also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth; as at the time of the flood, when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and such vast quantities of water issued out as overflowed the whole world, by which it was overturned; and as the Apostle Peter says, "perished", (^{<6075>}2 Peter 3:5,6); though this is also true of inundations that may have been since, which though not universal as that, yet so far as they have reached have overturned all in their way, and carried off the fruits of the earth, the habitations of men, and men themselves; whole countries, cities and towns, have been carried away by the waters of the sea, or sunk into it, particularly all that space. Where now is the Atlantic sea, as Pliny ^{f520}, from Plato, relates. It is well when the grace of God flows, and overflows, and superabounds abounding sin, and overpowers and overcomes carnal, earthly, and sensual lusts, and reigns

where sin did, and teaches to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to mortify the members on the earth.

Ver. 16. *With him [is] strength and wisdom*, etc.] Which is repeated from (^{<8123>}Job 12:13); though different words are used but expressive of the same things; of the greatest strength might, and power of God, as the above instances show and of his most consummate, solid and substantial wisdom, as appears by what follows:

the deceived and the deceiver [are] his: the wisdom, knowledge, sagacity and penetration into affairs, which the one has not, and the other has are from him; he withholds them from the one, who are simple and void of understanding, and so are easily imposed upon and deceived, and he given them to others, who make as ill use of them, deceive their fellow creatures some are deceivers in civil things, in the business and affairs of life, who circumvent, trick, cheat, and defraud their neighbours in buying and selling, using deceitful weights and measures, and by many other artful methods; others are deceivers in religious affairs, such are false teachers, deceitful workers, that lie in wait deceive; their intention into deceive, they do it knowingly, and on purpose; they walk in craftiness, and handle the word of God deceitfully; there were many of these in the times of the apostles that had then entered into the world, but never more than now; the great impostor and deceiver of all is. Satan, to whom Jarchi restrains the words, who beguiled Eve, and indeed deceives the whole world, (^{<6111>}Revelation 12:9). Multitudes are deceived by him, as well as by, his emissaries, false teachers, and by their own hearts lusts; and even God's elect themselves, while in a state of unregeneracy, bear this character of "deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures", (^{<6183>}Titus 3:3). Now these are "his", the Lord's; which Mr. Broughton interprets, "from him", "by him", and "for him"; the wit, wisdom, subtlety, and sagacity of deceivers, are from him; gifts of nature, in themselves good, bestowed on them by him; the ill use they make of it is from themselves, and owing to the vitiosity of their nature; nay, it is not only by his permission, but according to his ordination and will, that there are such persons in the world: in some cases they appear not only to have leave or permission, but an order to seduce, as to the, lying spirit sent forth to seduce Ahab, (^{<11221>}1 Kings 22:20-25); yea, the princes of Noph being deceived, and they seducing Egypt, it is ascribed to the Lord's mingling a perverse spirit in the midst thereof, (^{<23913>}Isaiah 19:13,14); nay, when a prophet is deceived, God himself is said to deceive that prophet, (^{<2549>}Ezekiel 14:9); so much is there of the permissive and

efficacious will of God in this matter; not that he is the author of error and deceit, or infuses these into men, only the orderer, disposer, and, overruler of these things to some purposes orb is; he has power over them, and counterworks them, when he pleases; he can and does restrain them, and stops them, that they shall proceed no further, than he wills; false teachers would, if possible, deceive the very elect, (⁴¹⁰⁴Matthew 24:24), but they cannot, and the reason is, God hinders them; Satan can go on no longer deceiving the world than it is the pleasure of God; a notorious instance of, hindering and, restraining him may be seen in (⁴¹¹³Revelation 20:3,8); and all the deceptions that are suffered to be among men they are all, wisely ordered, and overruled to good purposes, so as to issue well; the deception of our first parents was suffered and willed, that the grace of God might be displayed in the salvation of, men; errors and heresies are and must be for the trial and discovery of sound believers that they which are approved might be manifest; and men that like not to retain God in their knowledge reject both the light of nature and revelation, are left in righteous judgment to a reprobate mind, to give heed to seducing spirits, and are given up to strong delusions to believe a lie, that they might be damned, (see ⁴¹¹⁹1 Corinthians 11:19) (⁴¹²⁸Romans 1:28 ⁴¹²⁰2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Now all this shows the infinite and consummate wisdom of God; it is brought to prove, not only that he “knows” deceivers, and all their arts and tricks, through which men are deceived by them, as Aben Ezra interprets it, and so the Vulgate Latin version renders it; but he is the fountain of all that wisdom and knowledge in them, superior to others, which they abuse, nor can they use it without his leave; and he can and does counterwork them, and restrains them as he pleases, and makes all to work for and issue in his own glory.

Ver. 17. *He leadeth counsellors away spoiled,* etc.] Such who have the greatest share of knowledge and wisdom in civil things, and are capable of giving advice to others, and are very useful in commonwealths, in cities, towns, and neighbourhoods; wherefore it is a judgment on a people when such are removed, (⁴¹²⁸Isaiah 3:3); these God can spoil at once of all their wisdom and knowledge, and render them unfit to give advice and counsel to others; or he can confound their schemes, disappoint their devices, carry their counsel headlong, and make it of none effect, and so spoil them of their ends and views, and of their fame, credit, and reputation:

and maketh the judges fools; men of great parts, abilities, and capacities, whereby they are qualified to sit upon the bench, preside in courts of

judicature, and judge in all matters of controversy that come before them; and it is a happiness to a country to have such persons, as it is a judgment to have them removed, (see ^{<218D>}Isaiah 3:2); yet God can take away the wisdom of such men, deprive them of their natural abilities, and so infatuate them, that they shall not be able to understand a cause, but pass a foolish sentence, to their own shame and disgrace, as well as to the injury of others; (see ^{<240B>}Isaiah 40:23).

Ver. 18. *He looseth the bonds of kings*, etc.] Not with which they themselves may be bound, being taken prisoners, or being so before made kings, and brought from thence to reign, as in (^{<2044>}Ecclesiastes 4:14); but that which they bind on their subjects, a yoke of bondage, tyranny, and oppression; so that to loose their bond is to loose their subjects from it, and free them from their arbitrary and despotic power, and from the burdens they lay upon them: unless rather it should be understood of loosing their waistbands, as an emblem of their government, ungirding them, or unkinging them, stripping them of their royal power and authority, called a “loosing of their loins”, (^{<235U>}Isaiah 45:1); and this power God has over such great personages, as to set up kings, and remove them at his pleasure, (^{<212B>}Daniel 2:21); which shows that strength and power, as well as wisdom, are with him; this may respect Chedorlaomer casting off the yoke of Nimrod, and the kings of Canaan casting off the yoke of Chedorlaomer, and being loosed from it, (^{<014D>}Genesis 14:1,4);

and girdeth their loins with a girdle; not with a royal waistband, as an ensign of government; (see ^{<210B>}Isaiah 11:5 22:21); which he looses, and strips them of, but another instead of that; he girds them with the girdle of a servant or traveller; the allusion being to the custom in those eastern countries, where they wore long garments, for servants to gird them up, when they waited on their masters, or when men went long journeys, (see ^{<277D>}Luke 17:7,8); and so may signify that kings sometimes become servants, or go into captivity, and there be used as such, as they sometimes are; the Vulgate Latin version is, “he girds their reins with a rope”.

Ver. 19. *He leadeth princes away spoiled*, etc.] Of their principalities and dominions, of their wealth and riches, and of their honour and glory; or “priests”^{f521}, as some choose to render the word, against whom God has indignation for their sins, and leads them into captivity with others; so the Septuagint version, “he leads the priests captives”; for no office, ever so sacred, can protect wicked men, (see ^{<211B>}Lamentations 2:6 ^{<244B>}Jeremiah

14:18); and from these sometimes the law perishes, and they are spoiled of their wisdom and knowledge, and made unfit to instruct the people, and so of their credit and reputation among them. Sephorno interprets it of the priests spoiled of their prophesying, they prophesying false things to kings:

and overthroweth the mighty; the mighty angels from heaven when they sinned, and mighty men on earth, kings and princes, whom he puts down from their seats of majesty and grandeur. Sephorno interprets this of kings, whose ways are perverted, by being led by false prophets, as Ahab was. Some ^{f522} understand this of ecclesiastical men, mighty in word and doctrine, well grounded in theology, yet their wisdom being taken away from them, they turn aside into wicked paths, practices, and principles, and fall from their steadfastness in truth and holiness.

Ver. 20. *He removeth away the speech of the trusty*, etc.] Speech is proper to mankind, and a benefit unto them, whereby they can converse together, and communicate their minds to each other; this is the gift of God, he gives to men in common the faculty of speaking; to some the tongue of the learned to speak various tongues, either in an ordinary or in an extraordinary manner; and he that gives can take away; he that made man's mouth or lip can make it speechless, as he does at death; when he takes away man's breath, he takes away his speech; the state of the dead is a state of silence; and sometimes he does it while living, by striking dumb, as he did Zechariah the father of John the Baptist; and even without so doing, as in the builders of Babel, he took away the speech they had, and gave them another; and sometimes he suffers not men to speak what they would, but what is contrary to their inclinations and desires, as in Balaam, who would willingly have cursed Israel, but could not. Now that God should take away by any means the speech of liars, and faithless persons, as Ananias and Sapphira, by striking them dead, (~~4~~ Acts 5:1-10); and of false teachers, deceivers, and bold blasphemers of God, and of his Son, and of the blessed Spirit, whose mouths ought to be stopped, is no wonder; but it seems strange that he should remove the speech of "trusty" or "faithful" ^{f523} men, that speak the truth, and are to be credited and believed; and as the preceding words are understood of ecclesiastic persons, these may be continued concerning them; and the character agrees with ministers of the word, who are in trusted with the rich treasure of it; that is put in earthen vessels, and committed to the trust of faithful men; who appear to be such when they speak the word faithfully, declare the whole counsel of God, and keep back nothing profitable to men; when they speak plainly, without

ambiguity, and sincerely, without mixing or adulterating it; and are faithful as to God, who has appointed them, and put them into the ministry, so to the souls of men under their care: now God sometimes takes away the speech of these, not by changing their voice, or ordering them, instead of the gracious promises of the Gospel, to deliver out the menaces and threatenings of the law; but either by commanding them to be dumb and silent, and speak no more to an incorrigible and rebellious people; as Ezekiel was bid to prophesy no more to the house of Israel, and the apostles to preach no more to the Jews; or by suffering them to be silenced by the edicts of wicked princes, and their violent persecutions of them, so that the teachers of men are removed into corners, and not to be seen or heard; and also by death, when their faces are no more seen, and their speech no more heard. Some, both Jewish and Christian interpreters, derive the word here used from the root **אָמַן**, “to speak”, and render it “speakers” or “orators”^{f524}; so Mr. Broughton translates the words, “he bereaveth the orators of lip”; he takes away their eloquence from them, deprives them of their speaking well, and strips them of their natural and acquired abilities, by which they have become good speakers; and such who use their talents well in this way are beneficial to a commonwealth, and it is a loss when they are removed, or their speech removed from them, (see ^{218B}Isaiah 3:3);

and taketh away the understanding of the aged; or “elders”^{f525}, as Mr. Broughton, either in age or office; elders in age, with whom understanding, reason, judgment, counsel, and wisdom, by all which the word is interpreted, may be thought to be, and it is expected they should, and oftentimes are, though not always; yet all this God can take away, and does when he pleases, and they become like children in understanding; through the infirmities of old age their memories fail them, their reason is impaired, their understanding and judgment are weakened, and they become unfit to give advice themselves, and are easily imposed on, and drawn aside by others, as may be observed in Solomon, the wisest of men, when he was grown old. This is to be understood of the natural understanding in things natural and civil, but not of the spiritual understanding, which is never taken away, but rather increased in old age; the true light of grace shines more and more unto the perfect day; it is a gift of God without repentance, which he never revokes and removes: it may intend the natural “taste”^{f526}, as the word may be rendered; this is often and generally taken away from the aged, as in old Barzillai, who could not taste what he ate and drank, as

to distinguish and relish it, (~~1095~~ 2 Samuel 19:35); but not the spiritual taste, of the Lord as gracious, of the good word of God, and the fruits of divine grace; the taste and savour of which remain with the people of God in old age; or this may design men in office, either civil magistrates, called senators, the elders of the people, judges, and counsellors, who instead of being taught more wisdom, which their offices require, sometimes become infatuated, their understanding of civil things is taken away from them, their wise counsels become brutish, and they like children; or ecclesiastic persons, elders of churches, who, having talents for public usefulness, either neglect them, or make an ill use of them, and therefore are taken away from them; their right arm is dried up, and their right eye darkened, (~~1253~~ Matthew 25:28,29 ~~3817~~ Zechariah 11:17).

Ver. 21. *He poureth contempt upon princes*, etc.] Not on good princes, such as rule in righteousness, and decree judgment and govern their subjects according to good laws, in a mild and gentle manner, and answer to their name of free, liberal, beneficent and munificent. These, as there is an honour due unto them, it is the will of God they should have it; much less are princes, in a figurative sense, meant, good men, the children of God, who are born of him the King of kings, and so princes in all the earth; but, in a literal sense, bad princes, that oppress their subjects, and rule them with rigour, and persecute good men; such as rose up against Christ, as Herod and Pontius Pilate; persecutors of the saints, as the Roman emperors, and the antichristian princes in the papacy; these God sometimes brings into contempt with their subjects, deposes them from their government, reduces them to a mean, abject, and servile state; or they die a shameful death, as Herod was eaten with worms, and many of the Heathen emperors died miserable deaths; and the vials of God's wrath will be poured out upon all the antichristian states, and their princes: pouring denotes the abundance of shame they are put to, as if they were clothed and covered with it, it being plentifully poured out like water, or as water was poured upon them, which is sometimes done by way of contempt, (see ~~1974~~ Psalm 107:40);

and weakeneth the strength of the mighty; the strength of men, hale and robust, by sending one disease or another upon them, which takes it away from them; or by "the mighty" are meant men in power and authority; kings, as the Targum paraphrases it, mighty monarchs, whose strength lies in their wealth and riches, in their fortresses and powerful armies; all which God can deprive them of in an instant, and make them as weak as other

men. Some render it, “and looseneth the girdle of the mighty”^{f527}, the same as loosening the loins of kings, (^{2340b}Isaiah 14:1); ungirding them, and taking away their power and authority from them, rendering them unfit for business, or unable to keep their posts and defend their kingdom.

Ver. 22. *He discovereth deep things out of darkness*, etc.] The deep things of God, his own deep things which lie in his heart, wrapped up in darkness impenetrable to creatures, and which could never be known unless he had discovered them; such as the thoughts of his heart, which are very deep, (^{1925b}Psalm 92:5); the deep things of God, which the Spirit of God only knows, searches, and reveals, (^{420c}1 Corinthians 2:10,11); even his thoughts of peace, and good things for his people, which are many and precious, are known to himself, and made known to them, or otherwise must have remained in darkness, and out of their reach, being as high as the heavens are from the earth; the decrees and purposes of God, which he hath purposed in himself, are deep things in his own breast, and lie concealed in darkness there, until discovered by the accomplishment of them; such as his decrees of election in Christ, redemption by him, and the effectual calling by his grace; all which are revealed and made known by the execution of them: the love of God to his people, which lay hid in his heart from everlasting; this is discovered by the gift and mission of his Son; in the regeneration and quickening of his people, and of which he makes still larger discoveries to them in the course of their lives: likewise the mysteries of the Gospel, unknown to natural men, even the wise and prudent, only known to such to whom it is given to know them, to whom they are revealed by the Father of Christ, and by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; respecting the persons in the Godhead, the grace of each person, the incarnation of Christ, the union of the two natures in him, redemption and justification by him, regeneration by the Spirit of God, union to Christ, and communion with him, and conformity to him in soul and body, now and hereafter: likewise the secrets of his providence, in which there is a great depth of his wisdom and knowledge, and is in great obscurity; his path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known; his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out, but before long they will be made manifest, and lie open to view. There are also the deep things of others, which he discovers, as the depth of sin in the deceitful heart of man, which none knows as himself; and which lie hid there until they are discovered in the light of the divine Spirit, who convinces of them,

enlightens the understanding to behold those swarms of lusts and corruptions it never discerned before; and then a man comes to see and know the plague of his own heart, he was before a stranger to; also the depths of Satan, his deep laid schemes, his wiles and stratagems, to draw into sin, and so to ruin; these are unknown to natural men, but saints are made acquainted with them, so that they are not altogether ignorant of his devices, (~~¶124~~ Revelation 2:24 ~~¶121~~ 2 Corinthians 2:11); likewise the secret plots, counsels, and combinations of wicked men, which they lay deep, and seek to hide from the Lord, being formed in the dark; but he sees and knows them, discovers and confounds them: to which may be added all the wicked actions of men done in the dark, but cannot be hid from God, with whom the darkness and the light are both alike; and who, sooner or later, brings them to light, even the hidden things of darkness, and makes manifest the counsels of the heart, as he will do more especially at the day of judgment, to which every secret thing will be brought:

and bringeth but to light the shadow of death; not only life and immortality, as by the Gospel, but death, and the shadow of it, even deadly darkness, the grossest of darkness; such who are darkness itself he makes light, and out of the darkness in them commands light to shine, as in the first creation; to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, he causes a great light to arise, the light of the Gospel, and the light of grace, yea, Christ himself, the light of the world; he calls and brings them out of it into marvellous light, out of the dark dungeon and prison of sin and unbelief, to the enjoyment of spiritual light and life here, and to everlasting light and glory hereafter.

Ver. 23. *He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them*, etc.] As he did before the flood, when the earth was tilled, and all over peopled with them, but at the flood he destroyed them at once. Saphorno interprets it of the seven nations in the land of Canaan, which were increased in it, and destroyed, to make way for the Israelites to inhabit it; and this has since been verified in other kingdoms, large and populous, and brought to destruction, particularly in the four monarchies, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman, and will be in the antichristian states and nations of the world:

he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them [again]; or “stretcheth” or “spreadeth out the nations”^{f528}, as he did all over the earth before the deluge, and then most remarkably straitened them, when they were reduced

to so small a number as to be contained in a single ark: “or leads them” ^{f529}; that is, “governs them”, as Mr. Broughton renders the word, rules and overrules them, as large as they are; or leads them into captivity, as some Jewish writers ^{f530}, as the Israelites; though they have been enlarged, and became numerous, as it was promised they should, yet have been led into captivity, first the ten tribes by the Assyrians, and then the two tribes by the Chaldeans; the Targum is, “he spreadeth out a net for the nations, and leadeth them”, that is, into it, so that they are taken in it, (see ^{<3923>}Ezekiel 12:13).

Ver. 24. *He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth,* etc.] The people of the earth are the common people; the “chief” or “heads” ^{f531} of them, as it may be rendered, are kings, princes and generals of armies; whose “hearts” may be said to be “taken away” when they are dispirited, and deprived both of courage and conduct; have neither valour nor wisdom, neither fortitude of mind, nor military skill to defend themselves and their people against their enemies. Saphorno interprets this of Sihon and Og, whose spirits the Lord hardened, and made their hearts obstinate to war with Israel, (^{<4823>}Deuteronomy 2:30); but it may be better understood of the Israelites, and the heads of them, when they were discomfited by the Amalekites, quickly after their coming out of Egypt, (see ^{<0445>}Numbers 14:45); about which time Job lived: and the rather, since it follows,

and caused them to wander in a wilderness [where there is] no way: no track, no beaten path to follow, to be a guide to them, and direct their way; in such a wilderness the Israelites wandered near forty years, (see ^{<4974>}Psalms 107:40).

Ver. 25. *They grope in the dark without light,* etc.] Like blind men, as the men of Sodom, when they were struck with blindness; or “they grope”, or “feel the dark, and not light” ^{f532}, as the Targum; as the Egyptian, did when such gross darkness was upon them as might be felt:

and he maketh them to stagger like [a] drunken [man]; that has lost his sight, his senses, and his feet, and knows not where he is, which way to go, nor how to keep on his legs, but reels to and fro, and is at the utmost loss what to do; all this is said of the heads or chief of the people, in consequence of their hearts being taken away, and so left destitute of wisdom and strength.