

MIGRATORY BIRDS**NO. 2858****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1903****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 28, 1870**

*“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times;
and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming;
but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.”*

Jeremiah 8:7

IN our text the prophet makes use of the flight of migratory birds to teach a valuable lesson. He mentions the swallow, which is the most prominent among the summer visitors to our own country, but he also names the stork, the crane, and the turtledove—all of them familiar instances of birds that came, at a certain season, to Palestine, and punctual to the hour, at given changes of the weather, winged their way back again to warmer climes. Too many careless observers, like the peasant of whom Wordsworth writes—

*“A primrose by a river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more,”—*

would have seen those birds, and soon forgotten all about them, but the prophet, observing the wisdom of these wanderers of the air, contrasts it with the folly of man, who knows not “the judgment of the LORD,” and obeys not so readily the monitions of his God as the birds do the instinct by which He guides them to and fro. We shall mark these migratory birds, and set the wisdom of their instinct in contrast with the folly of mankind.

I. The first thing that strikes us is the fact that the stork, and the swallow, and the crane, and the turtledove, know **WHEN TO COME AND GO**.

So far as we know, *no audible command is given to them*. You and I might forget, in the beginning of summer, that then is the period when the swallow will put in an appearance in our land, and that towards autumn, he must take himself away, across the purple sea, to the African strand, or wherever he can find a suitable climate.

But these birds know when to come or go, they tell by some mysterious means, exactly when to start on their long flight. They were never known to go too soon, they are never known to stay too late. The bulk of them depart at one period, and the rest a few days later.

If we are living in the suburbs, we hear a twittering congregation gathering around the gables of the houses, and in the evening, we miss the swift winged hawks who had, during the summer, found their evening meal among the dancing insects. Their shrill, joyous twittering is hushed, for they have perceived that the heavy dews of autumn, and the long nights of winter, are coming to strew the earth with fading flowers and falling leaves, and by and by, with frost and snow, and therefore, they have flown off to fairer lands where other summers await them.

They will come back again in due time, true as the calendar. Whether we look for them, or not, they will be punctual to nature’s appointment. As sure as the summer’s sun will be their return. They know without any special instruction, when to come, and when to go.

It is worthy of observation that *the young birds*, which have been born in this country and have never made the long journey before, yet *set forth with the older ones at the appointed time*. They are novices

in the art of travelling, yet they try their callow wings, and away they fly to the far-off land where the sun shines as it does not in this higher latitude.

I wish that our young people were all as wise as the young swallows are—that they knew their appointed time—that they understood that there is no period in life which has so much of hopefulness about it as the period of childhood and youth—that it is the best time in which to seek the Savior, for it has a special promise attached to it, “Those that seek me early shall find me.” I would that they could hear the Lord Jesus Christ’s peculiarly sweet and tender message concerning them, “Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Yet, alas! young storks, and swallows, and cranes, and turtledoves fly at the appointed season, but many young men and maidens delay, and waste the joyous hours of the morning of their lives in the ways of sin and folly—yes, they waste the hours which, if consecrated to Christ, and to His service, would have brought them a rich return in this life, and in the life to come, would have tended to increase and intensify their everlasting happiness.

Further, *the parent birds also go their way at the right time*. They can, and doubtless do, help to guide the young. They may have made that journey but once before, but they know all about it—they remember how long and how weary a way it was to them—but when the hour has struck, away they go, attended by their little ones.

I would that all you, who are parents among mankind, were as wise as these parent fowls of heaven, you have your children around you, but whither are you leading them? Your example, if not your precept, is guiding them somewhere, you are influencing them for good or evil. You cannot help doing so, I think you would hardly wish to help it, for a child of yours, over whom you had no influence whatever, would be a strange occupant of your home.

Oh, that you would be as wise as these migratory birds! May God’s own wisdom make you so, that your own flight to heaven may be an impulse to your child to take flight thither also! May your faith help his faith, may your holiness check him from sin, may your consecration to God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, induce him to give his heart to God while he is yet young!

I speak to you who are in middle life, and remind you that these birds which have come to the prime of their days, take their flight at the appointed time, and if ever there is a set time for turning unto God, with you who have come so far on life’s journey without seeking the Lord, it surely is now.

You who have reached the full strength of your manhood, and have your households about you, and yet are not saved, be not like the rich man whom God called a fool because he had much of this world’s goods stored up, and yet had not thought of making provision for his soul. Do not set your affections upon those well-feathered nests which you are so soon to leave, but seek an enduring portion in that better land where joy maintains eternal spring. Stretch your wings now, for the flight Christward and heavenward, and may you have the happiness of seeing your sons and daughters following in the same blessed track!

Some of the migratory birds are growing old. Their wings are somewhat worn, and their flight is a very weary one. Life, to them, has lost its early brilliance, yet when the time comes, they too, the veterans of the sea passage, are measuring the leagues of ocean waves, when the waters are calm, or in times of storm when favoring gales may better serve their purpose.

These birds add experience to instinct, and rightly follow the guidance of nature, yet there are old men and old women, who are not as wise as the old swallows are. They linger in the plains of sin though the harvest is past and the summer is ended, and the winter is coming fast upon them. I see the first flakes of snow on their frost-crowned heads. Already their leaf begins to wither. The light of their day is darkening, the flower of their beauty fading, and the shadows of their weakness lengthening.

What! not away yet, old greybeard? Not away yet, when the killing frost is already upon you? Stretch your soul’s wings at once. ’Tis late, ’tis very late, the sere leaf of autumn warns you, the white rime of the early frost chides you! Oh, that you would know the seasons and the judgments of God, even as the birds of the air do, and that you would seek Him now ere it be too late! It is the eleventh hour with

you, man! You have reached your three-score years and ten, yet you are unsaved. May divine grace visit you, and make you wise—and if it does, you will not sleep till you have found the Savior, lest your couch should become your tomb. You will not dare to go into another week of work days until you have made this first day of the week, the appointed Sabbath, a day of rest unto your soul in the bosom of your Savior.

Observe well that these birds—*the young, the parents, and the older birds, all go at the right time.* Perhaps the bright days linger a while, our autumns sometimes are protracted and tempting. When the winter months have come, we may have some almost summer days in this changeful climate of ours, but no bright second-summer tempts the swallow to linger. That interesting bird may have an eye for fair scenes and lovely views, and I think, wherever he may fly, he will see no fairer land than this, and no greener dells and fresher woodlands than those that adorn our happy isle, yet he lingers not for them.

Though it be Africa's brown unattractive sand that calls him, on he goes, for he must go or die, his food will fail him here, the damps will be deadly to him, so away he must go. He has built his nest, and birds love their nests as we love our homes, he has formed associations and acquaintances, it may be, for birds have friendships, but the time has come when, with his companions, or without them, he must without fail proceed on his long voyage to the sunny shore.

He performs his predestined journey at the ordained time, and let nothing tempt anyone to linger in love of sin, and love of this world, when he ought to be seeking those things which are above. Let not the world's pleasures, nor its gains, nor its tenderest associations beguile you.

You, O man, like the swallow, must go or die! It is with you as it was with Lot in Sodom—the city of your habitation is soon to be destroyed, this world, in a little while, must meet destruction. Up, and away! For the fiery hail is ready to descend. The angel of God comes to warn you, saying, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." So, let nothing hinder you, but speed you on till you do reach God, your Father, and Christ, your Brother, and are washed in His precious blood, and made meet to dwell with Him in heaven forever.

But alas! alas! it is still true that men "know not the judgment of the LORD," they know not, as the birds do, their "appointed times." There have been with some of you, times of very gracious visitation, when your heart has been made soft and impressible. I beseech you, "know" that time and avail yourself of it. You know that the preacher's word is not always with equal power. Even the inspired Word of God has not always the same effect when it is read, therefore, cherish every tender emotion that you feel.

You know what was said to David, "And let it be, when thou hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shall bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee." So, when there is a movement within the spirit—when there is a revival in the church—when there are manifest tokens of earnestness in the assembly—then, I pray you, know your appointed time and "bestir yourself."

There are other times also, which should not be forgotten. For instance, times of sickness. Have you been laid aside lately and are you able again to come out of doors? This is a loud call to you—an admonition, a very kind and tender one, yet one that ought to say to you, "Prepare to meet your God." If sicknesses do not soften, they harden. If we get no good from our chastisements, we are sure to get harm from them. So, my afflicted but restored friend, know your time, recognize that you have been smitten by your God, and turn not away from the hand that smites you.

Sometimes the visitation comes in the form of death. Possibly, death has come into your home, and carried off your child. O mother, follow your dear babe to the skies! Or is it your husband who has been called away? Then, O widow, take your Maker for your Husband! Is it your Christian father who has been taken from you, and yet you, his child, are still unsaved? Your father beckons to you from the skies and bids you seek his Savior. Is it your brother who is gone? It might have been yourself, so let the tolling of the knell for him have a message for you, let it say to you, "Consider your ways; for your soul

shall soon be required of you.” Make this period, when God is summoning others to Himself, to be the time when you also take flight to the better land—I mean not heaven, but I mean the heart of Christ, that is the true heaven of this life, and makes this life to be the foretaste of the unending life that is yet to come.

It is very sad that seasons like these, of which I have been speaking, are often the very times when people become more hardened than before. Death itself may grow so familiar that it loses all its impressiveness. The grave digger is often the last man to be affected by the thought of dying.

It must have been a grim spectacle when, during the French Revolution, a certain cemetery was leveled, and turned into a dancing saloon, and there, with the tombstones still in sight, they danced and sang a song in which part of the refrain was, “We dance among the tombs.” Their hair was made up in the same way as those had their hair dressed who were prepared for execution by the guillotine, and no one was admitted to the dance unless he or she had lost a father, or brother, or some other relative by the guillotine, and knowing that they themselves would, in all probability, die in the same terrible fashion, they gathered in the place of the graves, and whirled in the merry dance among the tombs.

It was a strange sight. Surely, none would have dared to act like that had they not been carried away by the madness of that awful period. Literally, of course, we do not act as they did, but spiritually, this is just what many are doing—they are dancing and singing among the tombs. In utter carelessness and wantonness of spirit, they dance within the very jaws of death, and unless God shall cure their madness, and teach them wisdom, even as He has taught the birds of heaven, they will dance themselves into hell.

II. But next, it is very remarkable—indeed, it is one of the wonders of nature—that **THEY KNOW WHERE TO GO.**

Many of them—those newly-hatched birds—have never seen the land towards which they speed, yet they go there, and go to the very place where their parents went before them. They have never seen that sunny shore, yet onward they fly towards it, straight to the mark as if they were arrows shot from a bow. They have no swift-winged messenger to proclaim the time of going and to describe the country so temptingly as to induce them to go, but feeling the motion of a mysterious impulse within them, they fly at the appointed time to the far-off land where they may dwell through the winter in a more genial clime.

Why do they go south? Why don't they fly north, east, or west? If we were left to seek other shores, and we knew nothing of geography, we could not find a suitable place, but these birds, untaught, find the exact spot where it is best for them to spend the many months until they can return to this more northerly land.

The pity concerning poor foolish man is that *by nature, he does not know where to go.* When our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know,” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?” The cry of many aroused souls is, “Whither shall we go? We know not the way.” Men want happiness, where shall they go for it? If the swallow were to fly straight for the north pole in the hope of finding a genial clime, he would not be more foolish than most men are in their supposed pursuit of happiness.

Some fly to unchastity and lasciviousness, and in this way both wreck their bodies and damn their souls. Some fly to money-grubbing, raking up their gold and silver till they fancy that they are wealthy, whereas, often, the more a man has of these things the more he craves, and it is a poor thing that makes us want more than we have any need of. Some fancy that they shall find pleasure in the approbation of their fellow men, but ere long, they discover that the breath of man's nostrils can never fill an immortal soul.

We need something better than the blasts of fame's trumpet to satisfy the spirit, which is to live forever and ever, in raptures or in woe. Some fly to strong drink—some to one thing and some to another—all fools alike! for there is but one kind of true happiness, and only one place where it can be found. Solid satisfaction can only come from reconciliation to God, and that reconciliation can only come to us through Jesus Christ His Son.

Man is never right till he is right with God, and never happy till he is happy in the happy God. Man needs peace and rest, every man needs these blessings. In these feverish days, rest is the great need of the age, and to find it, man flies sometimes to superstition, and sometimes to unbelief. He must be quiet, he says, for there are thoughts that vex and perturb his spirit, and Jesus stands, and says again, as He said of old, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” But to a sadly terrible extent, man heeds not His gracious invitation, and flies anywhere but to the true place of rest.

When man is spiritually awakened, he sees that he needs pardon, and pardon is to be obtained nowhere but in the precious blood that flowed from the wounds of the crucified Son of God. Yet many men try to get it by almsgiving, and penances, and outward reformations, they will even look to priestly lips for absolution, though none can forgive sins but God alone. They fly hither and thither—anywhere except to God, and to the one Mediator between God and men, the Man, Christ Jesus.

O men, as I look upon you, I see the contrast between you and the stork, and the turtledove, and the crane, and the swallow, for when the time comes for these birds to fly, they stretch their wings and away they go as though they could even see the far-off land.

They never stop until they have reached the goal for which they started, but you fly hither, thither, anywhere—and nowhere, in the long run, and you drop down, faint and weary—drop, ah, where?—but into the devouring jaws of the old dragon who has long sought your destruction, and who will achieve it unless you listen to the voice of wisdom which saith, “turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

II. Thirdly, dear friends, these migratory birds not only know the time for them to come or go, and the place to which they should go, but **BY SOME STRANGE INSTINCT, THEY ALSO KNOW THE WAY.**

There is no road that they can follow. Our swallows, I suppose, fly across the English Channel—sometimes across France and Spain—but they are often met with far, far out at sea, and have been known to rest upon the rigging, the masts, and even the decks of vessels when they have grown weary. Their flights are very long and rapid, but they can have no landmarks. They fly, usually, far across the sea, yet they never miss their way, and in due time, they reach their desired end.

No convoy is by their side, no wings of angels are heard rustling around them as they speed upon their way. There may be no favoring wind, but if it should be contrary to them, they fly against it. They must reach the sunnier clime, or die in the attempt, and therefore, though the wind should, at times, keep them back, and impede their flight, yet onward they go.

Now, there are many, many men who can say with the apostle I quoted before, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?” They say this concerning the way to salvation, the way to safety, the way to heaven. They do not know the way. Some of you who have heard the Gospel preached for years do not know the way. That is not through our lack of plain speaking—nor through our want of reiterating—

*“The old, old story,
Of Jesus and His love.”*

I always feel that I have not done my duty as a preacher of the Gospel, if I go out of this pulpit without having clearly set before sinners the way of salvation. I sometimes think that you have so often and so long heard me tell this story that you will get weary of it, but I cannot help it if you do. I had better weary you than in any way be false to my charge. Yet, with all this telling, over and over, and over again, the simple message of “Believe, and live,” though the outward ear hear it, and the mind catches some idea of it, yet the soul embraces it not.

Let me tell it to you yet once more. The way for a soul to fly to the place of safety lies in this direction alone. God’s only begotten and well-beloved Son, who is Himself “very God of very God,”

came down from heaven, and became man, He lived upon this earth a life of perfect obedience to His Father's law, and a life of holy service on behalf of sinful men. On the cross of Calvary, the sin of all those who will ever trust in Him were laid upon Him, and on the accursed tree, He endured all that they ought to have suffered for their sins. God bruised Christ, His own Son, in the stead of as many sinners as believe on Him.

God was perfectly just in acting thus. The payment of our enormous debt of guilt was demanded, and Christ paid it in full, so, all who trust in Jesus may rest assured that their sin was laid upon Christ, put away by Christ, and so completely blotted out that it has ceased to be. We are accounted just through our faith in Jesus Christ, the great Sin-bearer. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

The way of safety, then, is the way of substitution—the way of atonement—the way of Jesus Christ's blood, and the way to travel in that road is by simply trusting—believing with the heart—in Jesus Christ, relying upon Him, depending upon Him, leaning on Him, resting on Him, believing His Word, and accepting Him to be to us what God has set Him forth to be to the trusting sons and daughters of men.

IV. My last remark about these migratory birds—the stork, the turtledove, the crane, and the swallow—is that they not only know the time for their flight, and the place they want to reach, and the way they have to go, but **THEY SHOW THEIR WISDOM BY ACTUALLY GOING TO THE SUNNY LAND.**

It would not profit them in the least, to know when to go if they did not really go at the appointed time. It would not serve them an atom to know where to go, if they did not go—nor to know how to go if they still loitered here. But the wisdom of these fowls of heaven is proved by the fact that they do go. They practice what they know, they yield to the instinct which guides them, the impulse which moves them, but alas! in contrast with these birds, sinners are often very foolish. *They have long heard the Gospel, but they have not yet obeyed it.* They have never practiced what they do know, at least in a sense.

There are many, who profess to believe all that we preach, who prove, by their actions, that they have never really received our message. How foolish it is to say that they believe there is a hell, and yet seek not to escape from it—to talk of believing that there is a heaven, and yet never start in the way that leads to it—and to pretend to believe in the only Savior of sinners, and yet really not to trust in Him!

Then *there are many, who know their danger, yet do not escape from it.* They are fully aware of the terrible place where their sin is carrying them, they are quite conscious that they are without hope of entering heaven, and that when they die, there will be nothing for them but "the blackness of darkness forever," yet all this knowledge is of no avail to them, for they do not seek to escape from their impending doom.

Where shall I find language strong enough to describe such folly as this? There are some, who even say, as that son said to his father, "I go, sir," yet they do not go. They vow, yet break their vow again and again. They are at times moved, but it is only with temporary regrets, for they turn again to the sin they said they had left. Alas! Alas! Alas!

Yet these people are not idiots, they are not fools in other matters. See them at their business, they are sharp enough there. They want to see the latest telegram, for it may affect the stocks and shares in which they are so deeply interested. They are very anxious to be in time about their temporal affairs, they are punctual in their payments, and they are glad to be equally prompt in their receipts. They look after their own interests in everything except the greatest and most important of them all. They carefully examine the title-deeds relating to their estates, they will not set their signature to any document till they have thoroughly understood it, and seen that it is all right. They make everything as secure as they can except their immortal souls.

To take care of the garment, but to neglect the body it covers, is egregious folly, to give all our time to our houses and lands, to our money and our worldly estate, and to leave our soul to be lost, is the supremest folly of which we can be capable. I know not what to say to those who know what they should be, and what they should do, and yet hesitate, and debate, and delay to do it. Is there such folly anywhere else under heaven? The birds of the air and the beasts of the field are not so stupid as that.

Surely the very stones in our streets have as much reason in them as those men have, who know that there is a Savior for sinners, and who yet lose Him by neglecting to trust in Him. Vain is it for me to appeal to you, instead of doing so, I make my appeal to God. O Holy Spirit, save these fools from themselves, and from their sins, and lead them to faith in Christ, the only Savior! O fools, and slow of heart to believe, I call heaven and earth to witness that I have warned you—of the consequences of your fatal folly! If you will perish in your sins, remember that I have warned you—not with such a voice as I would use if I had it, nor in such language as I would wish to speak if it were possible—but using the best I have, that which my heart prompts me to use.

“Why will ye die?” Why will you be lost to all eternity? You must live forever, for you are immortal, God has made you so, and He will never let your soul die. Then, will you deliberately choose to make that endless life of yours to be forever wretched, forever without hope? You do not mean to do so, I cannot think that you are so insane as that. You desire to have peace here and hereafter, then seek the Savior this very hour. None are so happy as true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you have joy forever? Then trust in Him, for if you do not, no joy can ever be yours.

The inexorable decree of God concerning heaven is, “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Therefore, if your names are not in that book—that is to say, if you believe not in Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you are not trusting in the blood of the Lamb—you will go to that dread place where hope can never dawn, but where the midnight despair shall darken over the lost souls that will be imprisoned there forever and for evermore.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 8 AND 9:1

Jeremiah Chapter 8. Verse 1. *At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves:*

The prophet Jeremiah had to foretell terrible judgments upon the guilty people, who had been often warned, but who had at last gone beyond all bearing, and were about to be destroyed by the Chaldeans, for here we have the picture of Judah and Jerusalem invaded by the Chaldeans and Babylonians, just before the city was utterly destroyed.

It was a very common practice to bury treasure with the bodies of kings, hence when any land was invaded by foreign foes, they broke open the tombs and searched for hidden valuables, and it was a sign of the special detestation of the enemy, and of their fury against the people, when they dragged the carcasses out of the graves, and scattered the bones to the four winds of heaven.

In this case, it was foretold that this desecration would not only take place with regard to the bones of the kings, in whose tombs the greatest treasure might be expected to be found, but the bones of princes, priests, prophets, and people were all to be alike brought forth.

2. *And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth.*

What a striking and appropriate judgment that was! As they had worshipped the sun, that very sun was to dry their bones. As they had worshipped the moon, that moon's rays should fall upon their relics, and the stars, which they had adored, would also be quite unable to help them.

3. *And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts.*

There was to be stern treatment for the dead, but it would be worse with the living, for the Chaldeans were strong, fierce, cruel, and most ingenious in the torments which they inflicted upon their captives. It was an awful thing to be living in such times as those, and it is always a terrible thing to be living when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, and sinners are hardened in their sin.

4-5. *Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.*

Perseverance in sin is a great aggravation of it. There are some who fall into sin, but by God's grace, they are raised out of it, and they turn away from iniquity, and are restored to God's favor. Where there is true grace in the heart, where there is spiritual life, there will be restoration, sooner or later, but there are others, like the people of Jerusalem, who have "slidden back by a perpetual backsliding." Day after day, they grow more outrageous in their wickedness.

6. *I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*

God listened, He waited to be gracious, He was eager to hear one penitent cry, and to observe one tear of genuine repentance, but as the war-horse is eager for the fray, and at the first blast of the trumpet, seeks to dash into the very center of the fight, so did these ungodly people. Instead of turning to God, they turned more desperately to sin.

7. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.*

When God's judgments are being experienced, it is high time to repent. But these people did not think of such a thing, they were not half so sensible as migratory birds, which come and go as the seasons guide them.

8. *How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain he made it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.*

What! do they talk like that, the people who do not know and do not regard God's judgments—do they talk in such a style as that? Ah, yes! Some of the most wicked of them have a so-called "religion" upon which they still pride themselves. Their hands are red with blood, yet they keep a Bible handy. They say, "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us," all the while that they are sinning against the Lord and His law. Scribes multiplied copies of the law, and some of these very people, who were most hardened in guilt possessed a copy.

But says God, "certainly in vain he made it; the pen of the scribes is in vain," and our own Bible Societies may go on printing Bibles by the million, but as long as men do not obey what is taught in the Bible, the work of the printing press, like that of the copyist, will be in vain. We need more than the letter of the Word, valuable as that is, we need to know, in spirit and in truth, what the Spirit teaches through the letter, and also to practice it. God grant that even our Bibles may not rise up in judgment against us.

9. *The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?*

See God's judgment upon a man wise in his own conceit. You hear, every now and then, of some wonderfully learned, philosophic, scientific man, and many folk are frightened because he is an infidel. He does not possess true wisdom, God's description of such a man is this, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

10-11. *Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one deals falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.*

It is a dreadful thing when those, who ought to warn the people, simply flatter them, when, instead of speaking sharp, stern, honest, faithful words, they cry, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace.” Such false teachers say, “Do not trouble yourself, all will come right at last. You may live as you like, for there is no hereafter that need alarm you, in another state, you may get set right, whatever God’s Word declares as to the punishment of the impenitent.” There are far too many of these smooth-tongued deceivers living now. God deliver this land from them, lest they become an occasion of judgment against the people!

12. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.*

They had gone so far in sin that they could not blush. It is a dreadful thing when a man has lost the very sense of shame, there will be no repentance where that is the case.

13. *I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.*

They would not recognize the Giver, so the gifts should be taken away from them.

Now the people dwelling in the country villages begin to be alarmed because of the Chaldeans, and they say:—

14-16. *Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defended cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein.*

Dan was the northernmost tribe, bordering on Phoenicia, and after Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Phoenicians, he began to march through the territory of Dan. The mighty horses of the Chaldeans can be seen represented upon the slabs brought home by Mr. Layard, they are a very prominent part of the Chaldean force, so the poet-prophet pictures them as being heard as far as from Dan all the way to Jerusalem, so terrible was their snorting. That, of course, is the imagery of poetry, but there was terrible reality behind it.

17. *For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD.*

Such were the Chaldeans—crafty as serpents, full of the venom of cruelty, wherever they came, there was no way of charming them as a serpent may be charmed. They came on a deadly errand, and thoroughly did they perform it.

18-21. *When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.*

The weeping prophet sorrows over the desolation of his land, in words that have seldom been surpassed for sublime sympathy and pathos—

22. *Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

Jeremiah Chapter 9. Verse 1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

Matthew Henry well observes that, in the Hebrew, the same word signifies “eye” and “fountain,” as if God had as much given us eyes to weep with as to see with, as if there were as much cause to sorrow over sin as to look out upon the beauties of the world. Magnificent in its poetry, and most touching in its pathos, is this verse, which ought never to have been cut off from the previous chapter, “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.