When God promised the poor captives a glorious return, in due time, to their own land, it was a great discouragement to their hopes that they were unworthy, utterly unworthy, of such a favour; therefore, to remove that discouragement, God here shows them that he would do it for them purely for his own name's sake, that he might be glorified in them and by them, that he might manifest and magnify his mercy and goodness, that attribute which of all others is most his glory. And, the restoration of that people being typical of our redemption by Christ, this is intended further to show that the ultimate end aimed at in our salvation, to which all the steps of it were made subservient, was the glory of God. To this end Christ directed all he did in that short prayer, Father, glorify thy name; and God declared it was his end in all he did in the immediate answer given to that prayer, by a voice from heaven: I have glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again, Joh 12:28.

I. How God's name had suffered both by the sins and by the miseries of Israel; and this was more to be regretted than all their sorrow, which they had brought upon themselves; for the honour of God lies nearer the hearts of good men than any interests of their own.

1. God's glory had been injured by the sin of Israel when they were in their own land, Eze 36:17. It was a good land, a holy land, a land that had the eye of God upon it. But they defiled it by their own way, their wicked way; that is our own way, the way of our own choice; and we ourselves must bear the blame and shame of it. The sin of a people defiles their land, renders it abominable to God and uncomfortable to themselves; so that they cannot have any holy communion with him nor with one another. What was unclean might not be made use of. By the abuse of the gifts of God's bounty to us we forfeit the use of them; and, the mind and conscience being defiled with guilt, no comfort is allowed us, nothing is pure to us. Their way in the eye of God was like the pollution of a woman during the days of her separation, which shut her out from the sanctuary and made very things she touched ceremonially unclean, Le 15:19. Sin is that abominable thing which the Lord hates, and which he cannot endure to look upon. They shed blood and worshipped idols (Eze 36:18) and with those sins defiled the land. For this God poured out his fury upon them, scattered them among the heathen. Their own land was sick of them, and they were sent into other lands. Herein God was righteous, and was justified in what he did; none could say that he did them any wrong, nay, he did justice to his own honour, for he judged them according to their way and according to their doings, Eze 36:19. And yet, the matter being not rightly understood, he was not glorified in it; for the enemies did say, as Moses pleaded the Egyptians would say if he had destroyed them in the wilderness, that for mischief he brought them forth. Their neighbours considered them rather as a holy people than as a sinful people, and therefore took occasion from the calamities they were in, instead of glorifying God, as they might justly have done, to reproach him and put contempt upon him; and God's name was continually every day blasphemed by their oppressors, Isa 52:5.

2. When they entered into the land of the heathen God had no glory by them there; but, on the contrary, his holy name was profaned, Eze 36:20.

(1.) It was profaned by the sins of Israel; they were no credit to their profession wherever they went, but, on the contrary, a reproach to it. The name of God and his holy religion was blasphemed through them, Ro 2:24. When those that pretended to be in relation to God, in covenant and communion with him, were found corrupt in their morals, slaves to their appetites and passions, dishonest in their dealings, and false to their words and the trust reposed in them, the enemies of the Lord had thereby great occasion given them to blaspheme, especially when they quarrelled with their God for correcting them, than which nothing could be more scandalous.

(2.) It was profaned by the sufferings of Israel; for from them the enemies of God took occasion to reproach God, as unable to protect his own worshippers and to make good his own grants. They said, in scorn,

"These are the people of the land, these wicked people (you see he could not keep them in their obedience to his precepts), these miserable people--you see he could not keep them in the enjoyment of his favours. These are the people that came out of Jehovah's land, they are the very scum of the nations. Are these those that had statues so righteous whose lives are so unrighteous? Is this the nation that is so much celebrated for a wise and understanding people, and that is said to have God so nigh unto them? Do these belong to that brave, that holy nation, who appear here so vile, so abject?"

Thus God sold his people and did not increase his wealth by their price, Ps 44:12. The reproach they were under reflected upon him.

II. Let us now see how God would retrieve his honour, secure it, and advance it, by working a great reformation upon them and then working a great salvation for them. He would have scattered them among the heathen, were it not that he feared the wrath of the enemy, De 32:26-27. But, though they were unworthy of his compassion, yet he had pity for his own holy name, and a thousand pities it was that that should be trampled upon and abused. He looked with compassion on his own honour, which lay bleeding among the heathen, on that jewel which was trodden into the dirt, which the house of Israel, even in the land of their captivity, had profaned, Eze 36:21. In pity to that God brought them out from the heathen, because their sins were more scandalous there than they had been in their own land.

"Therefore I will gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land, Eze 36:24. Not for your sake, because you are worthy of such a favour, for you are most unworthy, but for my holy name's sake (Eze 36:22), that I may sanctify my great name,"

Eze 36:23. Observe, by the way, God's holy name is his great name. His holiness is his greatness; so he reckons it himself. Nor does any thing make a man truly great but being truly good, and partaking of God's holiness. God will magnify his name as a holy name, for he will sanctify it: I will sanctify my name which you have profaned. When God performs that which he has sworn by his holiness, then he sanctifies his name. The effect of this shall be very happy: The heathen shall know that I am the Lord when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes and yours. When God proves his own holy name, and his saints praise it, then he is sanctified in them, and this contributes to the propagating of the knowledge of him. Observe,

1. God's reasons of mercy are all fetched from within himself; he will bring his people out of Babylon, not for their sakes, but for his own name's sake, because he will be glorified.

2. God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious; therefore he will sanctify his name by the pardon of sin, because it has been profaned by the commission of sin.