

REPLIES TO THE CAVILS OF UNBELIEF.

A striking feature of this book is the way in which the prophet voices and replies to the unbelieving questionings, by which a disobedient and gainsaying people sought to justify their departure from the ways of righteousness. In these searching replies they "are rebuked for a skepticism that questioned moral distinctions and scoffed at the threatenings of judgment." The light of truth from heaven lays bare their sin and sweeps away the refuges of lies. Denying the goodness of Jehovah, they ask, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" The evidence of this love is shown in the contrast between their condition and that of a kindred nation, and in the way in which they had been crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercy. Resenting the charges of the prophet, they ask, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" The answer is, that they have withheld what was due, and polluted the altar by offering what had defects and blemishes. Instead of the long-suffering of God leading them to repentance, "because sentence against an evil work was not executed speedily," they ask, "Where is the God of judgment?" Jehovah points to a coming day when the Angel of the Covenant, even the Lord whom they professed to seek, would come in judgment to fulfil what He had spoken; and He declares that it is not because of His unfaithfulness, but because of His unchanging love that they were not consumed.

When charged with speaking against God, they say, "Wherein have we spoken so much against thee?" The answer shows how greatly their disbelief had dishonored God. They had declared that it was vain to serve God or keep His ordinances; and that the proud and wicked were happy and blest, rather than those who served Jehovah. The reply to this bold blasphemy is exceedingly suggestive. They are told, though their sin had so blinded them that they could not discern between the obedient and the transgressor, yet there was among them a people who "feared the Lord and thought upon His name"; and who strengthened each other's faith by frequent religious fellowship, in which they talked together of the things of God. And so far from there being no difference between the servants