

**W**HY HAVE THE CROPS WITHERED, our storehouses been emptied, the pastures of our flocks failed, the fruits of the earth been withheld, and the plains been filled with shame instead of with fatness: why have valleys lamented and not abounded in corn, the mountains not dropped sweetness, as they shall do hereafter to the righteous, but been stript and dishonored, and received on the contrary the curse of Gilboa? The whole earth has become as it was in the beginning, before it was adorned with its beauties. Thou visitedst the earth, and madest it to drink — but the visitation has been for evil, and the draught destructive. Alas! what a spectacle! Our prolific crops reduced to stubble, the seed we sowed is recognized by scanty remains, and our harvest, the approach of which we reckon from the number of the months, instead of from the ripening corn, scarcely bears the firstfruits for the Lord. Such is the wealth of the ungodly, such the harvest of the careless sower; as the ancient curse runs, to look for much, and bring in little, to sow and not reap, to plant and not press, ten acres of vineyard to yield one bath: and to hear of fertile harvests in other lands, and be ourselves pressed by famine. Why is this, and what is the cause of the breach? Let us not wait to be convicted by others, let us be our own examiners. An important medicine for evil is confession, and care to avoid stumbling. I will be first to do so, as I have made my report to my people from on high, and performed the duty of a watcher. For I did not conceal the coming of the sword that I might save my own soul and those of my hearers. So will I now announce the disobedience of my people, making what is theirs my own, if I may perchance thus obtain some tenderness and relief.

One of us has oppressed the poor, and wrested from him his portion of land, and wrongly encroached upon his landmark by fraud or violence, and joined house to house, and field to field, to rob his neighbor of something, and been eager to have no neighbor, so as to dwell alone on the earth. Another has defiled the land with usury and interest, both gathering where he had not sowed and reaping where he had not strawed, farming, not the land, but the necessity of the needy. Another has robbed

God, the giver of all, of the firstfruits of the barn-floor and winepress, showing himself at once thankless and senseless, in neither giving thanks for what he has had, nor prudently providing, at least, for the future. Another has had no pity on the widow and orphan, and not imparted his bread and meager nourishment to the needy, or rather to Christ, Who is nourished in the persons of those who are nourished even in a slight degree; a man perhaps of much property unexpectedly gained, for this is the most unjust of all, who finds his many barns too narrow for him, filling some and emptying others, to build greater ones for future crops, not knowing that he is being snatched away with hopes unrealized, to give an account of his riches and fancies, and proved to have been a bad steward of another's goods. Another has turned aside the way of the meek, and turned aside the just among the unjust; another has hated him that reproveth in the gates, and abhorred him that speaketh uprightly; another has sacrificed to his net which catches much, and keeping the spoil of the poor in his house, has either remembered not God, or remembered Him ill — by saying "Blessed be the Lord, for we are rich," and wickedly supposed that he received these things from Him by Whom he will be punished. For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Because of these things the heaven is shut, or opened for our punishment; and much more, if we do not repent, even when smitten, and draw near to Him, Who approaches us through the powers of nature.

**SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN** on the crop failure of A.D. 373, Oration XVI, *On his Father's Silence, Because of the Plague of Hail*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. VII, p. 253.

*The introduction to this translation of St. Gregory's Oration in NPNF Vol. VII gives the historical background to it, and the references for his abundant scriptural allusions.*

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