
JEREMIAH 8: 1 "At that time," says 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 judgments threatened in the last chapter are here declared to extend to the very dead, whose tombs should be opened, and the carcasses treated with every mark of indignity, Jer 8:1-3. From this the prophet returns to reprove them for their perseverance in transgression, Jer 8:4-6; and for their thoughtless stupidity, which even the instinct of the brute creation, by a beautiful contrast, is made to upbraid, Jer 8:7-9. This leads to farther threatening expressed in a variety of striking terms, Jer 8:10-13. Upon which a chorus of Jews is introduced, expressing their terror on the news of the invasion, Jer 8:14, Jer 8:15; which is greatly heightened in the next verse by the prophet's hearing the snorting of Nebuchadnezzar's horses even from Dan, and then seeing the devastation made by his army, Jer 8:16, whose cruelties God himself declares no entreaties will soften, Jer 8:17. On this declaration the prophet laments most bitterly the fate of the daughter of his people, changing the scene unawares to the place of her captivity, where she is introduced answering in mournful responses to the prophet's dirge, Jer 8:18-22. The variety of images and figures used to diversify the same subject is equally pleasing and astonishing. The dress is generally new, always elegant.

Verse 1

They shall bring out the bones - This and the two following verses are a continuation of the preceding prophecy, and should not have been separated from the foregoing chapter.

In order to pour the utmost contempt upon the land, the victorious enemies dragged out of their graves, caves, and sepulchers, the bones of kings, princes, prophets, priests, and the principal inhabitants, and exposed them in the open air; so that they became, in the order of God's judgments, a reproach to them in the vain confidence they had in the sun, moon, and the host of heaven - all the planets and stars, whose worship they had set up in opposition to that of Jehovah. This custom of raising the bodies of the dead, and scattering their bones about, seems to have been general. It was the highest expression of hatred and contempt. Horace refers to it: -

Barbarus, heu, cineres insistet victor, et urbem

Eques sonante verberabit ungula:

Quaeque carent ventis et solibus ossa Quirini (Nefas videre) dissipabit insolens.

Epod. 16:11. "Barbarians fell shall wanton with success,

Scatter the city's flaming ruins wide;

Or through her streets in vengeful triumph ride,

And her great founder's hallowed ashes spurn,

That slept uninjured in the sacred urn."

Francis.

See this judgment referred to, Baruch 2:24, 25.

JEREMIAH 8: 2 and they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the army of the sky, which they have loved, and which they have served, and after which they have walked, and which they have sought, and which they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried, they shall be for dung on the surface of the earth.

JEREMIAH 8: 3 Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue that remain of this evil family, that remain in all the places where I have driven them," says the LORD of Armies.

JEREMIAH 8: 4 "Moreover you shall tell them, 'Thus says the LORD: "'Shall men fall, and not rise up again? Shall one turn away, and not return?"

Verse 4

Moreover thou shalt say - Dr. Blayney very properly observes, "In that part of the prophecy which follows next, the difference of speakers requires to be attended to; the transition being quick and sudden, but full of life and energy. The prophet at first, in the name of God, reproves the people's incorrigibility; he charges their wise ones with folly, and threatens them with grievous calamities, Jer 8:4-13. In the three next verses he seems to apostrophize his countrymen in his own person, and as one of the people that dwelt in the open towns, advising those that were in the like situation to retire with him into some of the fortified cities, and there wait the event with patience, since there was nothing but terror abroad, and the noise of the enemy, who had already begun to ravage the country, Jer 8:14-16. God speaks, Jer 8:17, and threatens to bring foes against them that should be irresistible. The prophet appears again in his own person, commiserating the daughter of his people, who is heard bewailing her forlorn case in a distant land; while the voice of God, like that of conscience, breaks in upon her complaints, and shows her that all this ruin is brought upon her by her own infidelities, Jer 8:18-20. The prophet once more resumes his discourse; he regrets that no remedy can be found to close up the wounds of his country, and pathetically weeps over the number of her slain, Jer 8:21, Jer 9:1."

Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? - That is, It is as possible for sinners to return from their sin to God, for his grace is ever at hand to assist, as it is for God, who is pouring out his judgments, to return to them on their return to him. But these held fast deceit, and refused to return; they would not be undeceived.

JEREMIAH 8: 5 Why then have the people of Jerusalem fallen back by a perpetual backsliding? They cling to deceit, they refuse to return.

JEREMIAH 8: 6 I listened and heard, but they didn't say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Everyone turns to his course, as a horse that rushes headlong in the battle.

Verse 6

As the horse rusheth into the battle - This strongly marks the unthinking, careless desperation of their conduct.

JEREMIAH 8: 7 Yes, the stork in the sky knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane observe the time of their coming; but my people don't know the LORD's law.

Verse 7

The stork in the heaven - The birds of passage know the times of their going and return, and punctually observe them; they obey the dictates of nature, but my people do not obey my law.

JEREMIAH 8: 8 How do you say, "We are wise, and the LORD's law is with us?" But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has worked falsely.

Verse 8

The pen of the scribes is in vain - The deceitful pen of the scribes. They have written falsely, though they had the truth before them. It is too bold an assertion to say that "the Jews have never falsified the sacred oracles;" they have done it again and again. They have written falsities when they knew they were such.

JEREMIAH 8: 9 The wise men are disappointed. They are dismayed and trapped. Behold, they have rejected the LORD's word. What kind of wisdom is in them?

JEREMIAH 8: 10 Therefore will I give their wives to others, and their fields to those who shall possess them: for everyone from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest every one deals falsely.

Verse 10

Therefore will I give their wives - From this to the end of Jer 8:15 is repeated from Jer 6:13-15.

JEREMIAH 8: 11 They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

JEREMIAH 8: 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 those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 8: 13 I will utterly consume them, says the LORD: no grapes shall be 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.

JEREMIAH 8: 14 Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be silent there; for the LORD our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD.

JEREMIAH 8: 15 We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay!

JEREMIAH 8: 16 The snorting of his horses is heard from Dan: at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones the whole land trembles; for they have come, and have devoured the land and all that is in it; the city and those who dwell therein.

Verse 16

The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan - From this to the end of Jer 8:15 is repeated from Babylon to Jerusalem; and it was by this city, after the battle of Carchemish, that Nebuchadnezzar, in pursuing the Egyptians, entered Palestine.

The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones - Of his war horses. This is a fine image; so terrible was the united neighing of the cavalry of the Babylonians that the reverberation of the air caused the ground to tremble. This is better, and more majestic, than the celebrated line of Virgil: -

Quadruple - dante pu - trem soni-tu quatit ungula campum.

It would be much easier to shake the ground with the prancings of many horses, than to cause an earthquake by the sound of the neighing of the troops of cavalry.

JEREMIAH 8: 17 For, behold, I will send serpents, adders, among you, which will not be charmed; and they shall bite you, says the LORD.

Verse 17

I will send serpents - These were symbols of the enemies that were coming against them; a foe that would rather slay them and destroy the land than get booty and ransom.

JEREMIAH 8: 18 Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! My heart is faint within me.

JEREMIAH 8: 19 Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people from a land that is very far off: isn't the LORD in Zion? Isn't her King in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their engraved images, and with foreign vanities?

JEREMIAH 8: 20 The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

Verse 20

The harvest is past - The siege of Jerusalem lasted two years; for Nebuchadnezzar came against it in the ninth year of Zedekiah, and the city was taken in the eleventh; see 2Kgs 25:1-3. This seems to have been a proverb: "We expected deliverance the first year - none came. We hoped for it the second year - we are disappointed; we are not saved - no deliverance is come."

JEREMIAH 8: 21 For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold on me.

JEREMIAH 8: 22 Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then isn't the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

Verse 22

Is there no balm in Gilead? - Yes, the most excellent in the world. "Is there no physician there?" Yes, persons well skilled to apply it. "Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Because ye have not applied to the physician, nor used the balm. Ye die because ye will not use the remedy. But to apply this metaphor: - The Israelites are represented as a man dying through disease; and a disease for the cure of which the balm of Gilead was well known to be a specific, when judiciously applied by a physician. But though there be balm and a physician, the people are not cured; neither their spiritual nor political evils are removed. But what may all this spiritually mean? The people are morally diseased; they have sinned against God, and provoked him to destroy them. They are warned by the prophet to repent and turn to God: they refuse, and sin on. Destruction is come upon them. Might they not have avoided it? Yes. Was it the fault of God? No. Did he not send his prophets with the richest offers of mercy? Did he not give them time, the best instructions, and the most effectual means of returning to him? Has not mercy, the heavenly balm, been ever at hand? And has not God, the great Physician, been ever ready to apply it? Yes. Why then are they not converted and healed? Because they would not apply to the Divine Physician, nor receive the only remedy by which they could be spiritually healed. They, then, that sin against the only remedy must perish, because they might have had it, but would not. It is not because there is a deficiency of grace, nor of the means of grace, that men are not saved; but because they either make no use, or a bad use, of them. Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, has tasted death for every man; but few are saved, because they Will Not come unto him that they may have life.

In my old MS. Bible the text is rendered thus: -

Whether gumm is not in Galaad? Or a leche is not there? Why than the hid wounde of the daughter of my peple is not all helid?

How shall they escape who neglect so great a salvation? Reader, lay this to heart; and, while there is time, apply heartily to the great Physician for thy cure.