

CHAPTER 19

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 19

The subject matter of this chapter is a lamentation for the princes and people of the Jews, on account of what had already befallen them, and what was yet to come, (³⁹⁰Ezekiel 19:1). The mother of the princes is compared to a lioness, and they to lions; who, one after another, were taken and carried captive, (³⁹⁰Ezekiel 19:2-9); again, their mother is compared to a vine, and they to branches and rods for sceptres, destroyed by an east wind, and consumed by fire, (³⁹⁰Ezekiel 19:10-14).

Ver. 1. *Moreover, take thou up a lamentation, &c.*] These words are directed to the Prophet Ezekiel, to compose a doleful ditty, a mournful song, such as was used at funerals; and by it represent the lamentable state of the nation of the Jews and their governors, in order to affect them with it, with what was past, and present, and yet to come:

for the princes of Israel; or, “concerning them”^{f278}; the princes meant are Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, who were kings, though called princes, these words being synonymous; or, if so called by way of diminution, the reason might be, because they were tributary, either to the king of Egypt, or king of Babylon.

Ver. 2. *And say, what [is] thy mother? &c.*] That is, say so to the then reigning prince, Zedekiah, what is thy mother like? to what is she to be compared? by whom is meant, not the royal family of David only, or Jerusalem the metropolis of the nation, but the whole body of the people; and so the Targum interprets it of the congregation of Israel. The answer to the question is,

a lioness; she is like to one, not for her strength and glory, but for her cruelty and rapine; for her want of humanity, mercy, and justice:

she lay down among lions; that is, kings, as the Targum interprets it Heathen princes, the kings of the nations about them, as of Egypt and Babylon, (²⁶¹⁷Jeremiah 50:17); so called for their despotic and arbitrary power, tyranny, and cruelty: now this lioness, the people of the Jews, lay

down among them, joined with them in leagues and marriages, and learned their manners, and became of the same temper and disposition:

she nourisheth her whelps among young lions; princes, as the Targum explains it; either the princes of Judah, who were become like young lions, fierce and cruel; or the princes of other nations, among whom the children of the royal family were brought up; or, however, they were trained up in the principles of such, even of arbitrary and despotic power, and were taught to oppress their subjects, and not execute justice and mercy among them.

Ver. 3. *And she brought up one of her whelps*, &c.] Or sons, as the Targum: or, “made him to ascend”¹²⁷⁹, as the word signifies; to mount the throne; this was Jehoahaz, whom the people of the land took and anointed him, and made him king in the stead of Josiah his father, (¹²³⁰2 Kings 23:30);

it become a young lion; that is, a king, as the same Targum explains it, and a tyrannical and arbitrary one:

and it learned to catch the prey; being instructed by evil counsellors, he soon learned to oppress his subjects, to get their substance from them, and do many evil things, as he is said to do, (¹²³¹2 Kings 23:32);

it devoured men; or a man, Adam, the people of Israel, so called, (¹²³²Ezekiel 34:31); as the Jews frequently observe; it ate up and destroyed their liberties, privileges, and property.

Ver. 4. *The nations also heard of him*, &c.] The neighbouring nations, particularly the Egyptians; the fame of his behaviour reached them; they were informed how he used his own subjects, and what designs he had formed, and what preparations he was making against his neighbours; wherefore they thought it proper to oppose his measures in time, and to hinder him from proceeding and putting his projects into execution, by coming out against him, and fighting with him, as they did:

he was taken in their pit; alluding to the manner of hunting and taking lions, and such like beasts of prey; which was done by digging pits, and covering the mouths of them with straw, as Jarchi observes, into which in their flight they fell unawares: so Pharaohnecho king of Egypt came out against Jehoahaz, and took him, and put him in bonds at Riblah in the land

of Hamath, that he might reign no more in Jerusalem, after he had been on the throne but three months, (¹²³⁸2 Kings 23:31,33);

and they brought him with chains into the land of Egypt; or, “with hooks”^{f280}; in his nose, as in (²³⁷⁹Isaiah 37:29); or with a bridle, as the Septuagint; or with branches, as the Syriac version, in his jaws; the Targum renders it in chains, as we do: it is certain that Jehoahaz was put in bonds or fetters, and carried into Egypt, where he died, (¹²³⁸2 Kings 23:33,34).

Ver. 5. *Now when she saw*, &c.] That is, his mother, as the Syriac version expresses it; not his natural mother; as the mother of Sisera looked out and waited for him; but the congregation of Israel, as Jarchi interprets it, the body of the Jewish people:

that she had waited; for the return of Jehoahaz out of Egypt, which was expected for some time: or, “that she was become sick”; or “weak”^{f281}, and feeble, and brought to a low estate by his captivity, and by the tax the king of Egypt put upon her:

[and] her hope was lost; of his return to her any more, and so of being eased of the tribute imposed, and of being restored by him to liberty and glory; for the Lord had declared that he should return no more to his native country, but die in the place where he was carried captive, (³²¹⁰Jeremiah 22:10-12);

then she took another of her whelps; or sons, as the Targum:

[and] made him a young lion: a king, as the same Targum paraphrases it; that is, Jehoiakim, the brother of Jehoahaz, who before was called Eliakim, but his name was changed by Pharaohnecho; and though he is said to make him king, yet it was by the consent of the people of the Jews.

Ver. 6. *And he went up and down among the lions*, &c.] The kings, as the Targum; kings of neighbouring nations, as Pharaoh king of Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and sometimes he was subject to the one, and sometimes to the other: and his going up and down among them may denote his continuance as a king; for whereas his brother reigned but three months, he reigned eleven years:

he became a young lion; an oppressive prince, a cruel and tyrannical king:

and learned to catch the prey, [and] devoured men; he was notorious for his acts of injustice and arbitrary power; for the detaining the wages of

workmen, and for his oppression, violence, and rapine, and shedding of innocent blood, (²⁴²¹³Jeremiah 22:13,17).

Ver. 7. *And he knew their desolate palaces*, &c.] He took notice of the palaces or seats of the richest men of the nation, and pillaged them of their treasure and wealth, and so they became desolate: it may be rendered, he “knew their widows”^{f282}: or, “his own widows”; whom he made so; he slew the men to get their substance into his hands, and then defiled their widows:

and he laid waste their cities; by putting the inhabitants to death; or obliging them to leave them, and retire elsewhere, not being able to pay the taxes he imposed upon them, partly to support his own grandeur and luxury, and partly to pay the tribute to the king of Egypt:

and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, by the noise of his roaring; by his menaces and threatenings, edicts and exactions, he so terrified the inhabitants of the land, that though it was full of men and riches, it became in a great measure destitute of both; the people left their houses, both in city and country, and fled elsewhere with the remainder of their substance that had not fallen into his hands: his menacing demands being signified by roaring agrees with his character as a lion, to which he is compared, (³¹⁹¹²Proverbs 19:12).

Ver. 8. *Then the nations set against him*, &c.] Or, “gave against him”^{f283}; that is, their voice, as Kimchi; they called to one another, to gather together against him; they gave their counsel against him; they, joined together, agreed, and combined against him, and disposed their armies, and set them in array against him:

on every side from the provinces; Nebuchadnezzar and his auxiliaries, which consisted of the people of the provinces all around, who were brought together, and placed round about Jerusalem, at the siege of it; particularly the bands of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, (¹²⁴¹¹2 Kings 24:1,2);

and spread their net over him; which may be expressive both of the policy, crafty and secret contrivances and designs, of Jehoiakim’s enemies; and of their external force and hostile power against him:

he was taken in their pit; which they dug for him, or by the means which they contrived for his ruin, and which they put in execution and effected:

the metaphor of a lion is carried on, and the manner of taking one is alluded to, which is commonly in pits, as Pliny^{f284} says; and the Arabs now dig a pit where lions are observed to enter, and covering it over slightly with reeds, of small branches of trees, they frequently decoy and catch them^{f285}.

Ver. 9. *And they put him in ward in chains, &c.*] Or “in an enclosure”; or “in a collar with hooks”^{f286}; put a collar of iron, as is said, about his neck, which had hooks in it, and to those hooks chains were put, in which he was led a prisoner; and it is certain that he was bound in fetters, in order to be carried to Babylon though it is thought he never reached thither, but died by the way (⁴⁸¹⁶2 Chronicles 36:6);

and brought him to the king of Babylon; to Nebuchadnezzar, who came up against him with his army of many nations, he having rebelled against him; and, being taken by his soldiers, was brought to him in chains, wherever he was, whether without the gates of Jerusalem, or at any other place; for it is not certain where he was: however,

they brought him into holes; places of confinement, one after another, in his way to Babylon; where, it seems, before he came thither, he died, and was cast out on a dunghill, and had no burial, as Jeremiah foretold, (³²²⁸Ezekiel 22:18,19);

that his voice should no more be heard in the mountains of Israel; in the kingdom of Israel, to the terror of its inhabitants, threatening them with death, if they did not answer his exorbitant demands; nor was it ever heard any more: the allusion still is to a lion traversing the mountains, and roaring after its prey, to the terror of other creatures.

Ver. 10. *Thy mother [is] like a vine in thy blood, &c.*] Another simile is here made use of, relating to the same persons; the same that were compared to a lioness are here compared to a vine, as the people of the Jews frequently are, (⁴⁸¹⁸Psalm 80:8 ²³⁶¹Isaiah 5:1 27:3 ³⁴²¹Jeremiah 2:21 ³³¹¹Ezekiel 15:2 17:6); the same person is here addressed, the then reigning prince, Zedekiah, whose mother, the Jewish people, from whence he sprung, had been in times past, and still was, like a vine; and especially with respect to his blood, the royal family from, chore he descended: the allusion is to the use of blood laid to the roots of vines, by which they became more fruitful. It may have regard; as Calvin thinks, to the original of the Jewish nation, who, when in their blood, or as soon as they were

born, that is, as soon as they became a nation, were at first like a flourishing vine. Some render the words, “in thy likeness”; so Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech; to which the Targum agrees,

“the congregation of Israel, when it did according to the law, was like to a vine, &c.”

planted by the waters; for in those hot countries vines required water, and thrived the better for being near to them, or for being in watery places; this may denote the many privileges, blessings, laws, and ordinances, which were for the advantage of the Jewish people; both in their civil and ecclesiastical state:

she was fruitful and full of branches, by reason of many waters; grew populous, rich, and wealthy.

Ver. 11. *And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bear rule,* &c.] That is, many sprung from her, and rose up in that nation who were fit to hold sceptres to be kings, rulers and governors, and were such. So the Targum.

“and there were in her strong rulers, kings that were, highly to subdue kingdoms;”

such as David, Solomon, and at hers after them: or this may refer to the times of Josiah, and at his death, who left behind him several sons, who became kings, besides other princes of the blood; as his brother Mattaniah, who also was king: and some even carry this to Zedekiah himself, who had many children, who seemed to be strong rods, fit for sceptres, or sceptre bearers; that is, to be kings. The allusion seems to be to the sceptres of the ancients, which were no other than walking sticks, cut off of the stems or branches of trees, and decorated with gold, or studded with golden nails. Thus Achilles is introduced by Homer^{f287} as swearing by a sceptre; which, being cut off of a trunk of a tree left on the mountains, and stripped of its bark and leaves, should never more produce leaves and branches, or sprout again: and such an one, he observes, the Grecian judges, *εν παλαμης φορεουσι*, carry in their hands. Sometimes they were made of the “oleaster”^{f288}, or wild olive, the same as a shepherd’s staff; for what shepherds were to their flocks, that were kings to men;

and her stature was exalted among the thick branches; as the body and trunk of a tree rises up higher than the branches, which are thickest about

the middle of it, and so more eminent and conspicuous; thus it was with the nation of the Jews, and the royal family in it, that appeared more glorious and excellent among the nobles and princes of it; or, as the Targum expresses it,

“it was lifted up in its strength above its own kingdom;”

or rather the sense is, that in the days of David and Solomon, and some others, it greatly exceeded all the kingdoms of the nations round about it:

and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches; was seen and taken notice of for the multitude of her people, and the grandeur of her state.

Ver. 12. *But she was plucked up in fury*, &c.] This vine being turned into a degenerate plant of a strange vine; or the people of the Jews becoming wicked, disobedient to God, and disregarding his laws and ordinances, the wrath of God came upon them, and let in the Assyrians among them, who carried off ten tribes at once; and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin not taking warning hereby, but continuing and increasing in sinful courses, great part of them were carried captive into Babylon, with their king Jeconiah, who succeeded Jehoiakim before mentioned; when the kingdom seemed to be utterly ruined and destroyed, and is what is here referred to:

she was cast down to the ground; a phrase expressive of, the entire overthrow of the nation; for a vine, though plucked up, yet, if immediately planted again, might grow; but being plucked up, and left on the ground, and there lie, there is no hope of it; so that this denotes the desperate case of this people at this time, being in captivity. So the Targum paraphrases both clauses,

“and it was rooted up with strength out of the land of the house of the Shechinah, and translated into another land;”

and the east wind dried up her fruit; Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and the Chaldean army, compared to an east wind, because hurtful and pernicious, as that is to trees and fruit, and because Babylon lay northeast of Judea; the people of, the land are meant by the fruit of the vine, with their wealth and riches, which were seized upon and wasted, or carried into Babylon. So the Targum,

“and a king strong as the east wind slew her people;”

her strong rods were broken and withered; or, “strong rod”; the singular for the plural; which may design King Jeconiah particularly, who with his mother, wives, princes, and officers, and the mighty of the land, even all the mighty men of valour, with the craftsmen and smiths, were taken and carried captive, (~~12344~~2 Kings 24:14-16);

the fire consumed them; the wrath of God, which is often compared to fire, the same with fury in the beginning of the verse; which shows that it was for sin, which had provoked the Lord to wrath and anger, that all this ruin came upon the Jewish nation. The Targum is,

“her strong governors removed, and were carried captive; and the people which are strong, as fire consumed them.”

Ver. 13. *And now she [is] planted in the wilderness, &c.*] In the land of Babylon, which though a very fruitful country, yet, because of the hardships and miseries which the Jews were exposed unto in it, was a wilderness to them:

in a dry and thirsty ground; which is a periphrasis or description of a wilderness, (~~19501~~Psalm 63:1); and designs the same place as before; where the Jews were deprived of their liberties, and had not the opportunities of divine worship, the word and ordinances; and were destitute of the comforts both of civil and religious life. Unless this is to be understood of the land of Judea, which by the devastation made in it by the king of Babylon, and the multitudes that were carried captive by him out of it, it became like a desert, a dry and thirsty land; and so the vine planted in it signifies the remainder of the people left in it, after this great destruction; when it looked like a vine plucked up, and thrown down, and left on the ground, dried up with the east wind, and burnt with fire; and thus it fared with the remnant in a little time after, as the next words show.

Ver. 14. *And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, &c.*] By “her branches” are meant the rest of the Jews left in the land; and by the “rod” of them King Zedekiah, now on the throne, when this prophecy was given out; the “fire” said to go out of him signifies his rebellion against the king of Babylon, his breaking covenant and oath with him, which greatly provoked the Lord, and brought down the fire of his wrath upon him, (~~12240~~2 Kings 24:20);

[which] hath devoured her fruit; destroyed the people by sword, famine pestilence, and captivity; yea, the city and temple of Jerusalem, with the

palaces and houses therein, were burnt with material fire; their king was taken, and his eyes put out; his sons were slain, and all the princes of Judah:

so that she hath no strong rod [to be] a sceptre to rule; none to be king, or succeed in the kingdom; and there never was a king after of the family of David, or of the tribe of Judah, till Shiloh the Messiah came; though there were princes and governors, yet no sceptre bearer, no king. The Targum of the whole is,

“and there came people who were strong as fire, and, because of the sins of her pride, slew her people; and there were not in her strong rulers, kings that are mighty to subdue kingdoms;”

this [is] a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation; that is, this prophecy, as the Targum, is a lamentation, or matter of lamentation; what of it had been already fulfilled occasioned lamentation; and, when the rest should be fulfilled, it would be the cause of more. Lamentable was the case of the Jews already, but it would be still more so when all that was foretold of them should be accomplished. It denotes the continuance of the sad estate of that people; and perhaps may refer to their present condition, which will continue till they are turned to the Lord.