

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 8

In this chapter the prophet goes on to denounce grievous calamities upon the people of the Jews; such as would make death more eligible than life; and that because of their idolatry, (^{<2408>}Jeremiah 8:1-3) and also because of their heinous backslidings in other respects, and continuance in them, (^{<2408>}Jeremiah 8:4,5) likewise their impenitence and stupidity, (^{<2408>}Jeremiah 8:6,7) their vain conceit of themselves and their own wisdom; their false interpretation of Scripture, and their rejection of the word of God, (^{<2408>}Jeremiah 8:8,9) their covetousness, for which it is said their wives and fields should be given to others, (^{<2480>}Jeremiah 8:10), their flattery of the people, and their impudence, on account of which, ruin and consumption, and a blast on their vines and fig trees, are threatened, (^{<2481>}Jeremiah 8:11-13), their consternation is described, by their fleeing to their defenced cities; by their sad disappointment in the expectation of peace and prosperity; and the near approach of their enemies; devouring their land, and all in it; who are compared to serpents and cockatrices that cannot be charmed, (^{<2484>}Jeremiah 8:14-17) and the chapter is closed with the prophet's expressions of sorrow and concern for his people, because of their distress their idolatry had brought upon them; and because of their hopeless, and seemingly irrecoverable, state and condition, (^{<2488>}Jeremiah 8:18-22).

Ver. 1. *At that time, saith the Lord, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah,* etc.] That is, either the Chaldeans or the Romans would do this; for this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, either by the former or the latter; and it is certain that Jerusalem was ploughed up by the Romans, whereby the prophecy in (^{<3082>}Micah 3:12) was accomplished; when it is highly probable the graves were dug up, and the bones of the dead brought out, and scattered abroad by way of revenge; or it may be that graves were opened, especially the graves of kings and great men, for the sake of finding treasure in them: it follows,

and the bones of his princes; of the princes of Judah:

and the bones of the priests; that sacrificed to idols:

and the bones of the prophets: the false prophets; though this might be the case of the priests and prophets of the Lord; whose bones, in this general devastation, might be exposed as well as others; which of all might be thought to be the most sacred: and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves; high and low, rich and poor, male and female; their graves, in common, were without the city.

Ver. 2. *And they shall spread them before the sun and the moon, and all the host of heaven*, etc.] The stars. This shows, not only that they should be publicly exposed; but, as it refers to their idolatrous worship of the sun, moon, and stars, that these deities will not be able to help them; as they could not prevent their dead bodies being dug up, so neither could they order or cause them to be gathered together, and buried again:

whom they have loved; whereas they ought to have loved the Lord their God, and him only: it means an idolatrous love of and affection for them; and not the love of them, as creatures for use and delight; otherwise the light of the sun, moon, and stars, is sweet, and their influence great; and a pleasant thing it is to behold them, and especially the former of them, the fountain of light and heat: and whom they have served; more and besides the Creator of them, whom they should have served, the Lord of hosts, and him only:

and after whom they have walked; not in a natural and literal sense, but in a religious one, as is after explained:

and whom they have sought; for advice and counsel, and by making their prayers and supplications to them:

and whom they have worshipped; by bowing the knee, or kissing the hand; by offering sacrifices, and burning incense, and putting up petitions to them; by trusting in them, and expecting good things from them; (see ^{<2218>}2 Kings 21:3-5 23:5 ^{<2078>}Jeremiah 7:18 ^{<2186>}Ezekiel 8:16):

they shall not be gathered, nor be buried: meaning not the men that should die in those times, but the bones that should be brought out of the graves; these, having been scattered about, should not be collected together again, and replaced in their sepulchres:

they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth; that is, they should lie and rot upon the face of the earth, and crumble into dust, and become dung for it; (see ^{<4830>}Psalm 83:10).

Ver. 3. *And death shall be chosen rather than life*, etc.] By them that should be alive in those times, who would be carried captive into other lands, and be used very hardly, and suffer greatly, by the nations among whom they should dwell; (see ^{<4806>}Revelation 9:6). The Septuagint version, and those that follow it, make this to be a reason of the former, reading the words thus, “because they have chosen death rather than life”; (see ^{<4509>}Deuteronomy 30:19), but the other sense is best, which is confirmed by what follows:

by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family; the nation of the Jews, become very corrupt and degenerate; so the people of Israel are called the whole family of Israel, (^{<4081>}Amos 3:1), now it is foretold, that those which remained of that people, who died not by famine, or were not slain by the sword, yet should be in such a miserable condition, as that death would be more eligible to them than life:

even which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the Lord of hosts: for, though they were carried captive by men, yet the thing was of the Lord, and a just punishment upon them for their sins.

Ver. 4. *Moreover, thou shalt say unto them*, etc.] The Jews, in Jeremiah’s time, in order to leave them inexcusable, though the Lord had before assured that they would not hearken to him, (^{<4177>}Jeremiah 7:27):

thus saith the Lord, shall they fall, and not rise? men, when they fall, endeavour to get up again, and generally they do:

shall he turn away, and not return? when a man turns out of the right way into a wrong one, as soon as he is sensible of his mistake, he returns back; this is usually done among men. This is generally the case in a natural sense, and might be expected in a moral sense; that whereas these people had fallen into sin, they would rise again by repentance; and, having turned from the good ways of God, would soon return again to them.

Ver. 5. *Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?* etc.] These people fall into sin, and rise not again by repentance; they turn out of the good ways of God and religion, and return not again; they backslide and revolt from the Lord, and they continue in

their revolt and rebellion; their backsliding is an everlasting one; there is no hope of their repentance and recovery: it is a vehement and passionate expostulation about the people of the Jews, founded upon the former general observation, showing them to be the worst of all people: it is a common saying, “it is a long lane that has no turning”; but these people, having departed from the Lord, return no more. A very learned man renders the words, “why does Jerusalem turn away this people with an obstinate aversion?”^{f170} that is, the rulers and governors of Jerusalem, as in (~~4237~~ Matthew 23:37) or rather thus, “why does a stubborn aversion turn away this people, O Jerusalem?” and so they are an address to the magistrates and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

They hold fast deceit; practise it, and continue in the practice of it, both with God and man:

they refuse to return: to the Lord, to his worship, and to the right ways of holiness and truth, from whence they had erred; (see ~~2483~~ Jeremiah 5:3).

Ver. 6. *I hearkened and heard*, etc.] These are either, the words of the prophet, as Kimchi and Abarbinel think; who listened and attended to, and made his observations upon, the words and actions, conduct and behaviour, of this people, of which he gives an account: or of the Lord himself, as the Targum; who hearkened to the language of their hearts and actions, and heard the words of their mouth; all that they spoke against him, against his prophets, and those that feared his name; all their lying words, their false swearing; all their oaths and curses, and every idle expression that dropped from them; all which he takes notice of, and men are accountable to him for them:

but they spake not aright: what is so in the sight of God and good men; what is agreeable to right reason, and the word of God; they spoke what was contrary to all this. Wicked men neither think aright, nor act aright, nor speak aright.

No man repented him of his wickedness: of his heart, of his lips, and of his life; no man can repent of himself; no man truly does, without the grace of God:

saying, what have I done? which question an impenitent man does not put; but when it is made, the true answer to be returned to it is, that which is contrary to the nature of God; which is a breach of his law; which a man has reason to be ashamed of; at which he may be astonished, it being so

exceeding sinful; that which cast the angels out of heaven, Adam out of paradise, and wicked men down to hell; which is deserving of the wrath of God, and eternal death; for which a man can never make atonement himself; and by which he is undone, to all intents and purposes, without an interest in Christ, and salvation by him.

Every one turneth to his course: which is not a good, but a bad one; sin is a way, a road, a path, in which men walk; a course, a series of sinning, a progress and persisting in it; such as the course of this world, and this course is evil, (~~<BIB>~~Ephesians 2:2):

as the horse rusheth into the battle, which denotes their swiftness to commit sin, the pleasure they take in it, and their inattention to danger, and death by it; (see ~~<BIB>~~Job 39:21-25), or overflows^{f171}; the impetuosity of the horse is expressed by the overflowing of a river.

Ver. 7. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times*, etc.] Of going and returning; for this is a bird of passage, as Pliny^{f172} and other naturalists observe; which goes away as winter approaches, and returns when that is over. The temperature of the air, as to heat and cold, and the natural propensity of such birds of passage to breed their young, are thought to be the incentives to change their habitation; and wonderful thing it is in nature, that they should know the proper time of their passage, what places to go to, and how to steer their course thither; and, as the above naturalist observes, they go and come in the night:

and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming: for these also are birds of passage; the turtle is absent in the winter, and its coming is a sign of spring, (~~<BIB>~~Song of Solomon 2:11,12), the crane, according to Aelianus^{f173}, goes away with the stork, and returns when winter is over; and the same is observable of the swallow; hence the common saying, one swallow does not make spring; so Horace^{f174} uses “hirundine prima” for the beginning of spring. Where these birds retire to is not known; some think the swallows fly into Egypt and Ethiopia; but Olaus Magnus^{f175} says they lurk in holes, and even under water, where they hang together, and are sometimes drawn out in clusters, and being brought to the fire, and thawed, will revive and fly about.

But my people know not the judgment of the Lord; meaning not the unsearchable judgments of God, or those providential dispensations of God which are a great deep, and are not clearly discerned and known by the

best of men; but either his own judgments, which are inflicted upon wicked men as punishments for sin, which yet are not taken notice of, and duly attended to, as they should be; or rather the law of God, and his revealed word, which is the rule of judgment and justice, and a declaration of righteousness, showing what is just and good, and ought to be done, which they were willingly ignorant of; or else the final and future judgment of God after death, to which all men must come, and into which every thought, word, and work, will be brought, and which day wicked men put far from them; (see ^{<2003>}Isaiah 1:3).

Ver. 8. *How do ye say, we are wise*, etc.] Which they were continually boasting of, though they were ignorant of the judgment of the Lord, and were more stupid than the stork, turtle, crane, and swallow:

and the law of the Lord is with us? this was the foundation of their boast, because the law was given to them, and not to the nations of the world, which knew not God, and therefore they must be a wise and understanding people; and this law continued with them, they had it in their synagogues, and in their houses, and read it, and heard, or at least they might and ought to have heard and read it, and in this they trusted; of this character and cast were the Jews in the times of Christ and his apostles, (^{<8017>}Romans 2:17-20) to which agrees the Targum,

“how say ye, we are wise, and in the law of the Lord we trust?”

Lo, certainly in vain made he it; either the law, which was made or given in vain by the Lord to this people, since they made no better use of it, and valued themselves upon having it, without acting according to it; or the pen of the scribe, which was made by him in vain to write it, as follows:

the pen of the scribes is in vain; in vain, and to no purpose, were the scribes employed in writing out copies of the law, when either it was not heard or read, or however the things it enjoined were not put in practice; or the pen of the scribes was in vain, when employed in writing out false copies of the law, or false glosses and interpretations of it, such as were made by the Scribes and Pharisees in Christ’s time, and the fathers before them, by whose traditions the word of God was made of none effect: and so the Targum,

“therefore, lo, in vain the scribe hath made the lying pen to falsify;” that is, the Scriptures. The words may be rendered,

“verily, behold, with a lie he wrought; the pen: is the lie of the scribes^{f176}.”

Ver. 9. *The wise men are ashamed*, etc.] Of the wisdom of which they boasted, when it would appear to be folly, and unprofitable to them:

they are dismayed and taken; frightened at the calamities coming upon them, and taken as in a snare, as the wise sometimes are in their own craftiness, (^{<8613>}Job 5:13).

Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; sent by the prophets, which urged obedience to the law, and is the best explanation of it; but this they despised, and refused it:

and what wisdom is in them? to condemn that, which, if attended to, would have been profitable to them, and the means of making them wise unto salvation; let them therefore boast of their wisdom ever so much, it is certain there can be none in persons of such a spirit and conduct.

Ver. 10. *Therefore will I give their wives unto others*, etc.] To strangers, to the Gentiles; than which nothing could be more disagreeable to them, or a sorer punishment, of a temporal one:

and their fields to them that shall inherit them; or,

to the heirs^{f177}; other and new ones; and who should possess them as if they were the true and rightful heirs of them.

For everyone from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest everyone dealeth falsely; covetousness and false dealing, which prevailed in all ranks and orders of men among them, were the cause of their ruin: covetousness is the root of all evil; and to deal falsely, or make a lie, as the words may be rendered, is diabolical and abominable in the sight of God, and especially in men of such characters, who were to preach truth to others; (See Gill on ^{“<2063>}Jeremiah 6:13”).

Ver. 11. *For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people*, etc.] (See Gill on ^{“<2064>}Jeremiah 6:14”), (See Gill on ^{“<2065>}Jeremiah 6:15”).

Ver. 13. *I will surely consume them, saith the Lord*, etc.] Or, “gathering I will gather them”^{f178}; into some one place, the city of Jerusalem, and there destroy them. The word is, *hyyl k ^wql*, expressive of consumption and

destruction, as Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech observe; and so the Targum,

“destroying I will destroy them, saith the Lord.”

There shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; some understand this by way of complaint, that there were no fruit on the vine and fig tree, nor even leaves; which they allegorically interpret of the fruit of good works being wanting in them, which was the cause of their ruin. Others think there are metaphors which describe the manner of their destruction; and so the Targum,

“and they shall fall, as the grapes fall from the vine, and as the falling fruit from the fig tree, and as the leaf from the tree.”

Though it rather intends the sterility of the land, and in general the famine that should attend the siege of Jerusalem. Grapes and figs are mentioned only, as Kimchi observes, because they were the chief fruits, and they are put for the whole.

And the things that I have given them shall pass away from them; whatever they had in their barns and cellars, or were just becoming ripe in their fields, vineyards, and gardens, should either be blasted, or rather be taken away and devoured by their enemies, so that they themselves should not enjoy them. The Targum interprets it of the law transgressed by them, as the cause of their ruin, and paraphrases it thus,

“because I have given them my law from Sinai, and they have transgressed it;”

and so Jarchi,

“this shall be unto them, because I have given them statutes, and they have transgressed them.”

Ver. 14. *Why do we sit still?* etc.] In the country, where were barrenness and want of provisions; in the villages and unwall'd towns, where they were exposed to the spoils and ravages of the enemy. These words, with what follow, are the words of the prophet, in the language of the Israelites, as Kimchi observes.

Assemble yourselves; this is the gathering together, in order to be consumed, before threatened, which they themselves were made to do:

and let us enter into the defenced cities; such as Jerusalem, where they thought they should be safe from their enemies:

and let us be silent there; either promising themselves rest, quietness, and security; or suggesting that it would be right in them to say nothing by way of complaint; having no reason to murmur at their afflictions, since they were no other than what their own sins had brought upon them:

for the Lord our God hath put us to silence; stopped their mouths that they could not complain, being convicted in their consciences of their sins; and brought them into a state of destruction and death, which makes silent:

and given us water of gall to drink; afflictions bitter and deadly. The Targum is,

“and hath made us drink the cup of an evil curse, as the heads of serpents;”

a poisonous and deadly potion:

because we have sinned against the Lord; which they were obliged to own; though it does not appear that they had true repentance for their sins, or amended their ways; sometimes confession of sin is made without either of these.

Ver. 15. *We looked for peace*, etc.] Outward prosperity, affluence of temporal blessings, peace with enemies, and safety from them, which the false prophets had given them reason to expect; or which last they concluded and hoped for, from their being in the defenced cities:

but no good came; they were disappointed in their expectation; the good that was promised them, and they looked for, never came, but all the reverse:

and for a time of health; or, of healing^{f179}; the political wounds of the commonwealth of Israel:

and behold trouble! or “terror”^{f180}; at the approach of the enemy, described in the following verses. The Targum is,

“a time of pardon of offences, and, lo, a punishment of sins.”

Healing, in Scripture, signifies pardon of sin; (see ^{<3940>}Psalm 41:4 103:3).

Ver. 16. *The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan*, etc.] That is, was heard at Jerusalem. It seems to be a hyperbolical expression, showing the certainty of the coming of the Assyrian monarch and his army, to invade Judea, and besiege Jerusalem; the news of which was brought from Dan, which lay in the further part of the land; (see ³⁴¹¹⁵Jeremiah 4:15), and pointing at the way in which they should come northwards, through Phoenicia and the tribe of Dan, with a numerous cavalry of horses and horsemen: for, by “his” horses are meant Nebuchadnezzar’s; unless, with Calvin, it can be thought that they are called the Lord’s, because ordered and sent by him, whose war it was against the people. The Targum paraphrases the words thus,

“because they worshipped the calf that is in Dan, a king with his army shall come up against them, and carry them captive;”

and so Jarchi interprets it.

The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; his horses, strong and mighty; (see ⁴¹¹²²Judges 5:22) where we read of the prancings of the mighty ones; and here the Targum,

“at the voice of the treading of his strong ones, all the inhabitants of the earth shall be moved;”

and by the land trembling undoubtedly are meant the inhabitants of the land, filled with dread and consternation at the noise and near approach of the Chaldean army.

For they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; or, “the fulness of it”; which because of the certainty of it, is represented as then done: the city, and those that dwell therein; meaning not only the city of Jerusalem, and the inhabitants of it, but other cities also, the singular being put for the plural; and so the Targum,

“the cities, and they that dwell in them.”

Ver. 17. *For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you*, etc.] The Chaldeans, comparable to these noxious and hurtful creatures, because of the mischief they should do unto them. The Targum is,

“for, lo, I will raise up against you people that kill as the destroying serpents.”

These were raised up by the Lord, and sent by him, just as he sent fiery serpents among the Israelites in the wilderness, when they sinned against him; there literally, here metaphorically.

Which will not be charmed: Jarchi says, at the end of seventy years a serpent becomes a cockatrice, and stops its ear, that it will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, according to (¹⁸⁸⁰Psalm 58:4,5), the meaning is, that these Chaldeans would not be diverted from their purposes in destroying of the Jews by any arts or methods whatever; as not by force of arms, so not by good words and entreaties, or any way that could be devised.

And they shall bite you, saith the Lord; that is, kill them, as the Targum interprets it; for the bite of a serpent is deadly.

Ver. 18. *When I would comfort myself against terror,* etc.] Either naturally, by eating and drinking, the necessary and lawful means of refreshment; or spiritually, by reading the word of God, and looking over the promises in it:

my heart is faint in me; at the consideration of the calamities which were coming upon his people, and which were made known to him by a spirit of prophecy, of which he had no room to doubt. So the Targum takes them to be the words of the prophet, paraphrasing them,

“for them, saith the prophet, my heart grieves.”

Ver. 19. *Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people,* etc.] This was what made his heart faint, such was his sympathy with his countrymen, his people in distress, whom he affectionately calls the daughter of his people, whose cry was loud, and whose voice he heard lamenting their case:

because of them that dwell in a far country; because of the Chaldeans, who came from a far country; (see ²⁴⁵⁵Jeremiah 5:15) who were come into their land, and devoured it; through fear of them, and because of the devastation they made; hence the voice of their cry: or this is to be understood of the Jews in a far country, carried captive into Babylon, and the voice of their cry there, because of their captivity and oppression. So Abarbanel and the Targum,

“lo, the voice of the cry of the congregation of my people from a far country;”

and so read the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions.

Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her? these are the words of the people, complaining of the Lord, calling in question whether he was in Zion, and whether he was King there; and if he was, how came it to pass that he did not protect it; that he suffered the city to be taken, and the inhabitants to be carried captive?

Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with their strange vanities? that is, with their idols, and their idolatrous worship; this is the Lord’s answer to them, giving a reason why he suffered the enemy to come in among them, and prevail over them, namely, their idolatry. It may be rendered, “with the vanities of a stranger”^{f181}; of a strange people, or of a strange god.

Ver. 20. *The harvest is past*, etc.] Which was in the month of Ijar, as Jarchi observes, and answers to part of April and May:

the summer is ended; which was in the month Tammuz, and answers to part of June and July:

and we are not saved; delivered from the siege of the Chaldeans; and harvest and summer being over, there were no hopes of the Egyptians coming to their relief; seeing winter was approaching; and it may be observed, that it was in the month of Ab, which answers to part of July and August, that the city and temple were burnt. These are the words of the people of the Jews, despairing of help and salvation. So the Targum,

“the congregation of Israel said, the time is passed, the end is up, and we are not redeemed.”

Ver. 21. *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt*, etc.] These are the words, not of God, as Jerom; nor of Jerusalem, as the Targum; but of the prophet, as Kimchi observes, expressing his sympathy with the people in their affliction: and they may be rendered, “for the breach of the daughter of my people”^{f182}, which was made when the city was broken up and destroyed, (²⁶³⁷Jeremiah 52:7).

I am broken; in heart and spirit:

I am black; with grief and sorrow. The Targum is,

“my face is covered with blackness, black as a pot.”

Astonishment hath taken hold on me; at the miseries that were come upon his people; and there was no remedy for them, which occasion the following words.

Ver. 22. *Is there no balm in Gilead?* etc.] Which was famous for it; (see ^{<1375>}Genesis 37:25), or rather turpentine or rosin, a gum which drops from pine trees and the like; since balm or balsam grew on this side Jordan, near Jericho and Engedi, and not beyond Jordan, in the land of Gilead; and rosin is good for healing. Some render it “treacle”, but very wrongly, since, as Calvin observes, that is a composition of many things,

Is there no physician there? or surgeon, anyone that heals wounds and bruises; very probably there were many such lived in Gilead, since it was a place where proper medicines were to be got and applied: this may be understood of prophets and teachers, who, in a moral and spiritual sense, are instruments of healing of men, by showing them their evil, calling them to repentance, and directing where to go for healing or pardon of sin; namely, to Christ, the alone physician, and to his precious blood, shed for the remission of sins. Some reference may be had to Elijah, who was of Gilead, and to the school of the prophets there, (^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:1). The Targum is,

“Jeremiah the prophet said, perhaps there are no good works in me, that I should supplicate for the house of Israel; should I not desire the doctrine of Elijah the prophet, who was of Gilead, whose words were healing?”

Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? that is, seeing there is balm in Gilead, and a physician there, how comes it to pass that such medicine is not made use of, and such a physician not applied to, that health might be restored? This shows the stupidity, sluggishness, and indolence of the people, and how inexcusable they were, as well as the prophet’s great concern for their welfare; the want of means of deliverance, or non-attendance to them, or the failure of them.