

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 15

This chapter contains the Lord's answer to the prophet's prayers, in which he declares himself inexorable, and had resolved on the ruin of the Jewish nation for their sins; the prophet's complaint of the hardships he endured, notwithstanding his sincerity and integrity; and the Lord's promise of protection and deliverance, in case of his continuance in the faithful discharge of his office. The Lord denies the request of the prophet, by observing, that if even Moses and Samuel had been the intercessors for the people, he would not have regarded them, being determined upon casting them out, and sending them away captive, (^{<24151>}Jeremiah 15:1), their punishment is declared, which was resolved on; some for death, or the pestilence; others for the sword; others for famine; and others for captivity; and others to be devoured by dogs, and fowls, and wild beasts, (^{<24152>}Jeremiah 15:2,3), the cause of which were their sins, particularly their idolatry in the times of Manasseh, (^{<24153>}Jeremiah 15:4), wherefore they should have no pity from men, nor would the Lord any more repent of the evil threatened, of which he was weary, because of their many backslidings, (^{<24154>}Jeremiah 15:5,6), which destruction, being determined, is illustrated by a description of the instrument of it; by the multitude of widows, and the distress of mothers bereaved of their children, (^{<24155>}Jeremiah 15:7-9) on which the prophet takes up a complaint of his being born for strife and contention, and of his being cursed by the people, though no usurer, (^{<24156>}Jeremiah 15:10), when he is comforted with a promise of being used well by the enemy, both he and his remnant, (^{<24157>}Jeremiah 15:11), but as for the people of the Jews in general, they would never be able to withstand the northern forces, the army of the Chaldeans; their riches and substance would be delivered into their hands, and their persons also be carried captive into a strange land, and the prophet along with them, because of their sins, and the wrath of God for them, (^{<24158>}Jeremiah 15:12-14), upon which the prophet prays to the Lord, who knew him, that he would remember and visit him, and avenge him of his persecutors, and not take him away in his longsuffering; he urges, that he had suffered rebuke and reproach for his sake; that he was called by him to his office, which he

had cheerfully entered on; he had his mission, commission, and message, from him, which he received with the greatest pleasure, signified by eating his words with joy; and that he had not associated himself with mockers and scoffers at religion and the word of God; and therefore expostulates why he should be put to so much pain, and be used as he was, (^{<2415>}Jeremiah 15:15-18), wherefore the Lord promises that, upon condition of doing his work faithfully, he should be preserved, protected, and delivered, (^{<2419>}Jeremiah 15:19-21).

Ver. 1. *Then said the Lord unto me*, etc.] In answer to his expostulations and entreaties, (^{<2449>}Jeremiah 14:19-22),

though Moses and Samuel stood before me; to pray before me, as the Targum; to make intercession for the people. Standing is a prayer gesture. The Jews say there is no standing but prayer, or that is meant when it is mentioned; (see Gill on “^{<4065>}Matthew 6:5”). Moses and Samuel were named, because they were eminent for prayer, and had success in it, for the people of Israel. Of Moses, (see ^{<2321>}Exodus 32:11,31,32 ^{<0447>}Numbers 14:17-19) and of Samuel, (see ^{<0009>}1 Samuel 7:9) and of both, (^{<3906>}Psalms 99:6). The Arabic version reads “Moses and Aaron”, but wrongly. The Palmists make use of this text to prove the intercession of saints in heaven for those on earth; but the words are only a supposition, and not a fact. The meaning is, that supposing that Moses and Samuel were alive, and made intercession for the people, their prayers would not be regarded; and such a supposition, as it suggests that they were not alive, so that they did not stand before him, and make intercession for Judah; wherefore this is against, and not for, the intercession of saints in heaven:

yet my mind could not be towards this people; God could have no good will to them, no delight in them; could not be reconciled to them, or agree to it, that the favours asked for should be granted them, or that they should be continued in their own land; and therefore it was in vain for the prophet to solicit on their account; but, on the other hand, it is ordered as follows:

cast them out of my sight; or presence; as persons loathsome and abominable, not to be borne; I cannot look upon them, or have anything to say to them, in a favourable way:

and let them go forth; from my presence, from the temple, the city, and out of their own land; that is, declare that so it shall be.

Ver. 2. *And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee,* etc.] As doubtless they will, when this message is brought to them:

whither shall we go forth? in a jeering scornful manner, not believing that this would be their case:

then thou shall tell them, thus saith the Lord, such as are for death, to death; such as were appointed to death, or to die by the pestilence, which is often signified by death; they shall go forth unto it; or it shall meet them, and seize upon them, and take them away:

and such as are for the sword, to the sword; who are appointed to die by the sword of the enemy, into whose hands they should fall by attempting to escape out of the city, shall perish by it:

and such as are for the famine, to the famine; such as are appointed to die by that, shall die of it in the city, where they shall be besieged, and not be able to get out to fetch in any provisions, and where none can be brought, because of the enemy:

and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity; such as are spared from the pestilence, sword, and famine, and are designed to be carried captive into a strange land, shall be taken and carried thither; nor will it be in their power, or in any other's, to hinder any of the above things, to which they are appointed of God. According to the Jews, the latter of these is more grievous than the former; as the sword than death, and famine than the sword, so captivity than them all^{f310}.

Ver. 3. *And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord,* etc.] Or four families^{f311}, and these very devouring ones; that is, four sorts of punishment; and so the Targum,

“four evil punishments;”

which are after mentioned. These are represented as under God, and at his beck and command; servants of his, that go and come at his pleasure, and do his will; and as being over men, and having power and authority to kill and to destroy by a divine commission:

the sword to slay: the first and chief of the four families or punishments, which had a commission from the Lord to sheath itself in his people, the Jews; even the sword of the enemy, the Chaldeans, drawn against them by a divine order and appointment:

and the dogs to tear; the carcasses of those that are slain with the sword: or “to draw”^{f312}; as the word signifies; it being the usual way of dogs to draw and drag the flesh about they are feeding on; this is another of the four families, and a very voracious one it is:

and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy; or “to eat, and to corrupt”, the bodies of those that are slain by the sword. The meaning is, that such should not have a burial, but should be the food of fowls and wild beasts: these are the other two destroying families, which have their commission from the Lord for such service.

Ver. 4. *And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth*, etc.] Not only into Babylon, but into other countries; which has had its full accomplishment in this their last captivity by the Romans: or “I will give them for a commotion”^{f313}; shaking and trembling; they shall be like Cain, fugitives and vagabonds, and be in fear and trembling everywhere, for what is, or is about to come upon them: or “for horror unto all kingdoms”^{f314}; all that see the calamities and judgments that come upon them will be struck with dread and horror, plainly seeing the hand of the Lord in them:

because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah; because of the idolatry and murder committed by him; and which were the more aggravated, by having so good a parent, and so religious an education, and by his high office and dignity as king of Judah; and though these sins were personally forgiven him, yet, being imitated and continued in by the Jews, captivity is threatened them. The Targum is,

“because they turned not (or were not converted) as Manasseh;”

and so in the Talmud^{f315}, because Manasseh repented, and they did not; but this sense the words will not bear, because of what goes before, of which these are a reason; and because of what follows after, which are connected with them:

for that which he did in Jerusalem; the innocent blood he shed there, and the idolatrous worship he there set up; even where the temple was, the place of God’s worship, and which was the metropolis of the nation, and so set an example, which must influence the whole country.

Ver. 5. *For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem?* etc.] The inhabitants of it; their sins being so many, and so heinous, and so

aggravated, and so deserving of punishment, that none could pity their case, or have a heart of compassion towards them, or even spare reproaching them: or “who shall bemoan thee?” sympathize and condole with thee, or speak a comfortable word to thee, or seek to alleviate thy grief and sorrow: or “who shall go aside to ask how thou doest?” or “of thy peace?”^{f316} shall not think it worth their while to go a step out of their way, or turn into a house, and inquire of thy welfare, or salute thee.

Ver. 6. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord,* etc.] His worship, as the Targum; and had set up idols, and idol worship; and this was the cause of the sword, pestilence, famine, and captivity, and of all the evils that befell them:

thou art gone backward; from the law of the Lord, and from his pure worship and service, from his ways and from his ordinances; and therefore it was but just they should go into captivity; hence it follows:

therefore will I stretch out mine hand against thee, and destroy thee; his hand of power and vengeance, which when stretched out, and falls with weight, whether on particular persons, or on a nation, brings inevitable ruin and destruction with it:

I am weary with repenting; not that the Lord ever changes his mind, or the counsel of his will; in this sense he is without repentance; but the conduct of his providence, and the dispensations of it; not executing the threatenings denounced, but sparing them a little longer, showing mercy, and exercising patience and longsuffering; but now he was as one weary and tired out, and was determined to bear no longer with them, but stir up all his wrath against them, and destroy them.

Ver. 7. *I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land,* etc.] Either of their own land, the land of Judea; and so the Septuagint version, “in the gates of my people”; alluding to the custom of winnowing corn in open places; and by fanning is meant the dispersion of the Jews, and their being carried captive out of their own land into other countries: or of the land of the enemy, into their cities, as the Targum paraphrases it; gates being put for them frequently; whither they should be scattered by the fan of the Lord; for what was done by the enemy, as an instrument, is ascribed to him:

I will bereave them of children; which shall die of famine, or pestilence, or by the sword, or in captivity: I will destroy my people; which must be when

children are cut off, by which families, towns, cities, and kingdoms, are continued and kept up; and this he was resolved to do, though they were his people:

since they return not from their ways; their evil ways, which they had gone into, forsaking the ways of God, and his worship: or,

yet they return not from their ways^{f317}; though fanned with the fan of affliction, bereaved of their children, and threatened with destruction: it expresses their obstinate continuance in their evil ways, and the reason of God's dealing with them as above.

Ver. 8. *Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas*, etc.] Their husbands being slain; not in the times of Ahaz, when a hundred and twenty thousand men were slain in one day in Judah, by Pekah the son of Remaliah, (~~4RX6~~ 2 Chronicles 28:6), as Kimchi thinks; but in the times of Zedekiah, at the siege of Jerusalem, and the taking of it, and in the Babylonish captivity before predicted. The children of Israel were to be as the sand of the sea, and were very numerous; and here the widows are said to be so too, their husbands, who were numerous, being dead; and this, as it was of the Lord, so it was in his sight, and according to his counsel and will. Mention is made of "seas", in the plural, number, there being many in or near Judea, as the Red sea, the sea of Galilee, and the Mediterranean sea:

I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler, at noonday; that is he would bring upon the Jews, against the mother of the young men, or mothers of them; for the young men being destroyed by the spoiler, it was against them; a calamity upon them, and a distress unto them, who have generally a tender concern for them. The Targum is,

"against the company of their young men;"

the Jews; or against Jerusalem, the mother city, the metropolis of the nation, full of young men fit for war: or, "against the mother", that is, Jerusalem, a "young man"^{f318}; meaning Nebuchadnezzar, who came against Jerusalem in the first year of his reign; and, as some say, in the eighteenth year of his age; and who came not as a thief in the night, but as a spoiler at noonday; not in a secret insidious manner, but openly and with force of arms making his way through the land to Jerusalem, in defiance of the Jews, and in the face of them:

and I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly; that is, upon the city of Jerusalem: for though he came openly, his march was quick, and he was presently at Jerusalem, and laid siege to it at once:

and terrors upon the city; or, “city and terrors”,^{f319}; the city was immediately filled with terrors at the appearance of Nebuchadnezzar and his army. R. Joseph Kimchi interprets it, “an army and terrors”, from (^{<02816>}Samuel 28:16), the Babylonian monarch, at the head of his army, which spread terrors where he came. Some render the word, from (^{<20413>}Daniel 4:13,23), “a watcher and terrors”,^{f320}: meaning the Chaldean army, called watchers, (^{<20416>}Jeremiah 4:16). The Targum is,

“I will bring an army upon them suddenly, and destroy their cities;”

it should be rendered “alienation of mind and terrors”: from the use of the word, **ry**], in the Arabic language^{f321}.

Ver. 9. *She that hath borne seven languisheth*, etc.] Either the mother that has borne many children, seven being put for a large number, now being able to bear no more, and being bereaved of what she had, and who were her staff and support, and from whom she had her expectation, faints away, and dies through grief and trouble; or Jerusalem, which formerly abounded with young men, is now in a forlorn and destitute state; her children, the inhabitants of it, being slain with the sword, or dying of famine and the pestilence. In the Talmud^{f322}, this is interpreted of seven wicked kings of Israel, as Jeroboam, Baasha, Ahab, Jehu, Pekah, Menahem, and Hoshea; and elsewhere of seven kings of Judah, thus reckoned, Jehoram, Joash, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah^{f323}:

she hath given up the ghost; or, “blew out her soul”^{f324}; her breath departs; no life can be kept in her; she faints away at the calamities coming on her:

her sun is gone down while it was yet day; the darkness of affliction, and the evening of distress and calamity came upon her sooner than was expected, while in the midst of peace and prosperity that was promised, and hoped to be enjoyed for a long time to come; (see ^{<3019>}Amos 8:9):

she hath been ashamed and confounded; of her vain hope, trust, and confidence:

and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the Lord; that is; such who died not of the famine and pestilence, but

at the breaking up of the city endeavoured to make their escape, these fell into the hands of the enemy, and perished by the sword, as the Lord here predicts; for whatsoever he says certainly comes to pass.

Ver. 10. *Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast born me a man of strife,* etc.] Not that the prophet was a quarrelsome and contentious man, but others quarrelled and contended with him, and that for no other reason than for his faithful discharge of his office, under which he ought to have been easy; but being a man of like passions with others, wishes he had never been born, than to meet with so much trouble; and seems to blame his mother for bearing him; or however looked upon himself to be a miserable man through his birth, and that he was destined from thence to this sorrow:

and a man of contention to the whole earth; or “land”; the land of Judea, the inhabitants of it, as the Targum; for with no other had Jeremiah to do; and it were these only that contended with him, because he brought a disagreeable message to them, concerning their captivity:

I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; which was not lawful with the Jews to do; and therefore such were cursed that did it: but this is not to be restrained to this particular branch of business, which was not usual; but has respect to all trade and commerce; and the meaning is, that the prophet did not concern himself with secular affairs, but attended to the duties of his office; he carried on no negotiations with men; he was neither a creditor nor a debtor; had nothing to do with pecuniary affairs; which often occasions strifes and contentions, quarrels and lawsuits; and yet, notwithstanding, could not be free from strife and debate:

yet everyone of them do curse me; that is, everyone of the inhabitants of the land of Judea, so much known were Jeremiah and his prophecies; these slighted and set light by both him and his predictions; and wished the vilest imprecations upon him for his messages to them. The word here used is compounded of two words, or derived from two roots, as Kimchi observes; the one signifies to make light or vilify, in opposition to honour and glory; and the other to curse, in opposition to blessing; and this is often the case of the ministers of the word, not only to be slighted and despised, but to be defamed and cursed; (see ^{<RH12>}1 Corinthians 4:12,13).

Ver. 11. *The Lord said,* etc.] In answer to the prophet’s complaint:

verily it shall be well with thy remnant: not with the remnant of his people, or those that should escape the threatened calamities; but the sense is, that it should be well with him in his latter end; the remainder of his days should be comfortable or be spent in peace and prosperity; and so the Targum,

“if thine end shall not be for good.”

The words are in the form of an oath, as Kimchi and Ben Melech observe; and the meaning is, that if it is not well with thee in thy last days, then say I am unfaithful, and not true to my word. According to Donesh, cited by Jarchi, the word translated “remnant” has the signification of loosing; and he renders it, “if I loose thee not for good”^{f325}; which accordingly was done, (^{240b}Jeremiah 40:4), and this sense is confirmed by the note of the Masorites: “verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well”; or, “if I do not”, etc. for it is also in the form of an oath, as before, as Jarchi notes; and so it was, Nebuchadnezzar gave charge to Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, to look well to him, and do him no harm; who, when he loosed him, gave him his choice to go with him to Babylon, or continue in the land, (^{239b}Jeremiah 39:11,12 40:4), or, “verily I will”, or, “shall I not entreat the enemy for thee?”^{f326} and make him gentle and humane, so that he shall use thee kindly. Jarchi interprets this of Zedekiah and his courtiers seeking to Jeremiah, in the time of their distress, to pray for them, (^{247b}Jeremiah 37:2), and to which sense the Targum inclines,

“if they shall not come and help thee, etc.”

in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction; when the city is taken, and the people carrying captive.

Ver. 12. *Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?*] Can iron break iron, especially that which comes from the north, which was harder than the common iron; or steel, the hardest of all? though the Jews were hard as iron, they could not prevail against and overcome Jeremiah, who was made an iron pillar and brasen walls against them, (^{241b}Jeremiah 1:18), and so these words are spoken for his comfort and encouragement: or they may respect the Jews and the Chaldeans; and the sense be, that the Jews, as mighty and as strong as they fancied themselves to be, and boasted that they were, they could not find themselves a match for the Chaldean army, which came out of the north; and may be said to be as hard as the northern iron, which came from the Chalybes, a people in the north, near Pontus,

from whom steel has its name in the Latin tongue; and this sense agrees with what follows.

Ver. 13. *Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price*, etc.] Not the prophet's substance and treasure; for it does not appear that he had any, at least to require so much notice; but the substance and treasure of the people of the Jews, to whom these words are directed; these the Lord threatened should be delivered into the hands of their enemies, and become a spoil and free booty to them, for which they should give nothing, and which should never be redeemed again:

and that for all thy sins, even in all thy borders; this spoiling of their substance should befall them because of their sins, which they had committed in all the borders of their land, where they had built their high places, and had set up idolatrous worship; or else the meaning is, that their substance and treasure in all their borders, in every part of the land, should be the plunder of their enemies, because of their sins.

Ver. 14. *And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies*, etc.] Not Jeremiah, but the Jews, to whom these words are continued. The meaning is, that they should go along with the Chaldeans out of their own land into theirs:

into a land which thou knowest not; the land of Babylon; and there is another reading of the words in the margin, "I will cause thee to serve thine enemies"^{f327}, in a land that thou knowest not"; which is followed by the Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions. Some render the words, "I will bring thine enemies from, or through, a land that thou knowest not"^{f328}; the place from whence they came, and those through which they came, being at a great distance:

for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you; meaning the wrath of God, compared to fire, which was kindled and excited by their sins, and which would continue upon them until it had destroyed them.

Ver. 15. *O Lord, thou knowest*, etc.] All persons and things; he knew the prophet and his heart, and all that was in it; his innocence and integrity; all his afflictions, and what he met with from his enemies; and he knew them, and all their malicious designs against him:

remember me; with the favour which he bore to his own people, his covenant with him, his promises to him, and the word on which he had

caused him to hope; because of his trials and troubles, he might seem to be forgotten by him:

and visit me; in mercy for good; and so the Targum adds,

“that thou mayest do well unto me:”

and revenge me of my persecutors; not so much for his own sake; unless this is to be attributed to his frailty and infirmity, to the warmth of his spirit, being a man of like passions with others; for private revenge ought not to be sought by good men, but for the sake of God and his glory, in whose cause he was engaged, and on whose account he was persecuted:

take me not away in thy longsuffering; while thou art bearing with others, do not take me away by death; or suffer them, whom thou dost forbear, to take me away, or give them an opportunity thereby so to do; or when thy longsuffering is at an end, do not involve me in the same calamity with them. The Targum is,

“do not give delay to my injury;”

or,

“length to my affliction;”

that is, do not delay to take vengeance on my persecutors; and to this sense Jarchi interprets it,

“do not take my cause, and leave it to thy longsuffering, but hasten and avenge me;”

and Deuteronomy Dieu proposes such a rendering of the words, “to thy longsuffering do not bring me”^{f329}; and which sense is favoured by the Septuagint version:

know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke; let it appear, and that even to mine enemies, that it is for thy sake that all this reproach is cast upon me; and all these afflictions are endured by me, by thy resentment of their carriage to me.

Ver. 16. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them*, &c.] The messages he was called to deliver unto others appeared to him to be of God, and they were as welcome to him as food is to a hungry man; he cheerfully received them, treasured them up in his memory, digested them in his mind, and

carefully retained them. So the doctrines of the Gospel, which are the words of God, and not of men, when by searching and close application they are found in the Scriptures, and under the ministry of the word, they are food to souls, sweet, savoury, wholesome, nourishing, and strengthening; not as merely heard externally, or only assented unto, or superficially tasted of; but when eaten, as Ezekiel's roll was by him; and which is done by faith, which receives, feeds upon, and digests the word; for, unless it is mixed with faith, it is not profitable:

and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; the messages which the prophet was sent with, even those which denounced grievous things against his people in case of impenitence, were gladly received by him, and he readily delivered them, hoping that they would be a means of bringing them to a sense of their sins, and to repentance for them, and so of preserving them from ruin; and especially those words or doctrines he had in commission to deliver, which respected the Messiah, his person, offices, kingdom, righteousness, and grace; the calling of the Gentiles, and the enlargement of the interest of Christ; the glory of his name, and the prosperity of his people in the latter day. The word of the Gospel, when received and eaten by faith, whether by ministers or people, is productive of spiritual joy and pleasure; the promises of it being exceeding precious; and the doctrines of it doctrines of grace, salvation, peace, pardon, and righteousness, by Christ, who is the sum and substance of them:

for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts; what added to his joy was, that the name of the Lord was called upon him, or that he was called a prophet of the Lord: this he looked upon as a high honour done him; and what still more increased his joy was, that he was a prophet, not of Baal, that could not hear nor help his prophets and worshippers; but of the Lord God of hosts and armies, who was able to uphold him, protect and defend him, against his enemies.

Ver. 17. *I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced,* etc.] With them, the mockers; or, “those that make merry”^{f330}; as the word is rendered in (^{2B19}Jeremiah 30:19 31:4), and so the Targum,

“those that sing;”

and dance and live jovially; with these the prophet did not associate himself; such levity being unsuitable to his character as a prophet, and to

those grievous messages he was charged with; and though he had joy, it was of another kind; it was not carnal, but spiritual; not outward, but inward; and what arose from the word of the Lord, being found and eaten by him. Moreover, there were some things which he was obliged by his office to deliver, that were very distressing to him, and made him very melancholy; so that he shunned all company and diversion, which might have been lawfully enjoyed: for this is not to be understood of the assembly or council of the wicked governors of the nation, and much less of the refuse of the people, that mocked at the word of God, and scoffed at the prophets and people of God; but of Jeremiah's friends and acquaintance, that met and made merry together; with whom he could not join, because of the sorrowful case in which he was, on account of the people he was sent unto:

I sat alone, because of thine hand; not because he was obliged to it, being deserted by men, but of choice; he withdrew from company, kept himself retired at home in his own house, there meditating upon the word of God, and mourning over the case of his people; and this he did, because the afflicting hand of God was upon him, or because the hand and spirit of prophecy was upon him, and he was charged to denounce very grievous things against the people; and because the hand of divine power and authority was over him, to which he ought to be subject, and was ready to obey:

for thou hast filled me with indignation; either with the indignation of the people against him, because of his prophecies; or with indignation against them, because of their sins; or with denunciations of wrath he was to deliver to them; and so the Targum,

“for thou hast filled me with a prophecy of cursing.”

Ver. 18. *Why is my pain perpetual,* etc.] The pain of his mind; his uneasiness for the good of his people, which was likely to last, having no hope of a change for the better: or it may design the pain which they gave him by their reproaches and persecutions of him, which seemed as if they would have no end:

and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? the same thing is meant as before. The allusion is to an old ulcer, or obstinate wound, which no medicine can affect, is desperate and deadly; and such the prophet

reckoned his case to be, or however deprecates it, and expostulates with God why it should be so:

wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail? such God cannot be, nor did the prophet think he was; he knew that he was God that could not lie, and that he was faithful to his promises, and would not disappoint the faith, hope, and expectations of his people; but he feared he would be thought to be so by others, by his enemies, who would triumph over him, and say, where is thy God? did he not promise to make thee a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brasen walls? is he as good as his word? is he not like a dry brook, whose waters fail? are not thy hope and expectation in vain, who hast been trusting to him, and depending on him? and it is as if the prophet should say, Lord, let them have no occasion to speak after this manner; nor suffer my faith in thy promises to fail; show thyself to be as thou art, a covenant keeping God, and whose faithfulness never fails: to which an answer is returned in the following verses.

Ver. 19. *Therefore thus saith the Lord, if thou return,* etc.] From thine unbelief, diffidence, and impenitence, and repent of them; expressed in the preceding verses:

then will I bring thee again; or, “restore thee^{f331}”; pardon his sin, and return him to his post and place, to his office and ministry in it, and confirm and establish him therein:

and thou shalt stand before me; not only as a petitioner for the people; (see ²¹⁵Jeremiah 15:1), but as a servant of the Lord, attending to his word, and waiting his orders, and ready to execute them. It denotes his stability in his office:

and if thou wilt take forth the precious from the vile; take precious truths, comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones; truths more valuable and desirable than thousands of gold and silver, from those doctrines which are worthless and contemptible, comparable to wood, hay, and stubble, and everything that is mean and vile; these faithful ministers should separate one from the other, and not mix and blend them together: or precious souls, truly gracious ones, who are precious in the sight of God, are redeemed by Christ, by his precious blood, and are adorned with the graces of the Spirit; these are to be distinguished from the vile, from sinners impenitent and unbelieving, that live in sin, in defiance of the law, and in contempt of the Gospel; a difference is to be made between them;

delivering out comfortable words to the one, and denouncing severe threatenings to the other; doing the reverse of the false prophets, (^{<412>}Ezekiel 13:22):

thou shalt be as my mouth; to the people; speak what I command thee, and whatsoever thou sayest shall be as if I had spoken it myself:

let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them; this is said of the people of the Jews, to whom the prophet was sent; and the sense is, that he should not at all comply with them, or conform to their humours, or flatter and sooth them in their sins, as the false prophets did; but if they returned to him, attended on his ministry, received his words and messages, and agreed and conformed to him, and followed his directions and example, it would be very well; but otherwise he was not in the least to give way to them, or go into any sinful compliance with them, either with respect to doctrine or practice,

Ver. 20. *And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall*, etc.] As he had promised him, when he first called him to his office, (^{<4018>}Jeremiah 1:18), and so would not be as a liar to him:

and they shall fight against thee; by words and blows, by menaces and imprisonment:

but they shall not prevail against thee; so as to cause him to call in his words, and contradict his prophecies; or so as to take away his life:

for I am with thee, to save thee, and deliver thee, saith the Lord; the presence of God with his ministers is sufficient to save and deliver them out of all their troubles, and to protect and defend them against all their enemies; (see ^{<4181>}Matthew 28:20).

Ver. 21. *And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked*, etc.] The wicked Jews, Zedekiah and his courtiers, who imprisoned him:

and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible; as kings and great men of the earth seem to be; or, “the violent”, or “strong”^{f332}, and mighty; that were stronger than he, that would use him with violence, and inject terror into him.