

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 16

In this chapter the ruin and destruction of the Jews is set forth, and confirmed by the prophet's being forbid to be merry, or to go into the house of feasting or mourning, with the reasons thereof; also the sins of the people, the cause of it, are pointed at; and afterwards a promise of their restoration is made; and the chapter is concluded with a prayer of the prophet, pressing his faith in the divine protection, and in the calling of the Gentiles. After the preface or introduction, (²⁴¹⁴¹Jeremiah 16:1), the prophet is forbid to take a wife, or have any children, with the reason of it; because that parents and children would die of grievous deaths unlamented, and not be buried, (²⁴¹⁴²Jeremiah 16:2-4) and he is also forbid to go into the house of mourning, because peace, lovingkindness, and mercy, were taken from the people, and both great and small would die, and no lamentation be made for them, nor have any burial also, (²⁴¹⁴³Jeremiah 16:5-7), nor might he go into the house of feasting, because the voice of joy and gladness would cease out of the land, (²⁴¹⁴⁴Jeremiah 16:8,9), and upon the people's inquiring the reason of all this, the prophet is bid to tell them, that it was for their forsaking the Lord and his worship, and for their idolatrous practices; of which they were more guilty than their forefathers, and therefore would be cast out of the land, and carried captive into a strange country, (²⁴¹⁴⁵Jeremiah 16:10-13) but, after all this, they should be restored again to their own land, and have a greater deliverance than that out of Egypt, as they themselves would own, (²⁴¹⁴⁶Jeremiah 16:14,15) but before this would be, fishers and hunters should be sent to distress them, and all because of their iniquities, which God's eye was upon, and would recompense, (²⁴¹⁴⁷Jeremiah 16:16-18), and the chapter is closed with the prophet's prayer, in which he expresses his faith in the Lord, and in the conversion of the Gentiles, who would be convinced of their idolatry, and made to know the power and name of the Lord, (²⁴¹⁴⁸Jeremiah 16:19,20).

Ver. 1. *The word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] The Targum is, the word of prophecy from the Lord: whether this is a new prophecy, or the

former continued, is not certain; the latter seems probable. This introduction is omitted in the Septuagint and Arabic versions.

Ver. 2. *Thou shall not take thee a wife*, etc.] Not because it was unlawful; for it was lawful for prophets to marry, and they did; but because it was not advisable, on account of the calamities and distresses which were coming upon the nation; which would be more bearable by him alone, than if he had a wife, which would increase his care, concern, and sorrow.

Neither shall thou have sons nor daughters in this place; in Anathoth, says Kimchi; but it is most likely that Jerusalem in particular is meant, though the whole land of Judea in general may be designed; and though nothing is more desirable than to have children to build up the family, and bear and continue a man's name for futurity, yet in times of public calamity these do but add to the affliction.

Ver. 3. *For thus saith the Lord concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place*, etc.]. This is a reason given why the prophet should not have, and why he should not be desirous to have, sons and daughters in such a place and country, devoted to destruction:

and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land: the land of Judea; which shows what is meant by the place before mentioned; both the one and the other, parents and children, should die there; this is what was determined by the Lord concerning them; and therefore it could not be a desirable thing for a man to have wife and children, whom he must part with in such an uncomfortable manner, as is after described; and to show the certainty of which the prophet is forbid to do as above.

Ver. 4. *They shall die of grievous deaths*, etc.] Such as the sword, famine, and pestilence. The Targum particularly adds famine. It may be rendered, "deaths of diseases, or sicknesses"^{f333}; such as are brought on by long sickness and lingering distempers; by which a man consumes gradually, as by famine, and is not snatched away at once; and which are very grievous to bear.

They shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; which two offices are usually done to the dead by their surviving relations; who mourn for them, and express their grief by various gestures, and which especially were used by the eastern nations; and take care that they have a decent burial: but neither of these would now be, which is mentioned as an

aggravation of the calamity; that not only the deaths they should die of would be grievous ones, but after death no regard would be shown them; and that either because there would be none to do these things for them; or they would be so much taken up in providing for their own safety, and so much in concern for their own preservation, that they would not be at leisure to attend to the above things:

but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth; lie and rot there, and be dung to the earth; which would be a just retaliation, for their filthy and abominable actions committed in the land:

and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; the grievous deaths before mentioned; the sword without, and the famine within; the one more sudden, and at once, the other more lingering; and therefore may be more especially designed by the death of lingering sicknesses referred to:

and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; lying unburied; (see ^{<4073>}Jeremiah 7:33).

Ver. 5. *For thus saith the Lord, enter not into the house of mourning,* etc.]

On account of his dead relations or neighbours; since they were taken away from the evil to come, and therefore no occasion to mourn for them: moreover, this was to show the certainty of what is before and after said; that, at the time of the general calamity predicted, there would be no lamentation made for the dead. R. Joseph Kimchi says the word here used signifies, in the Arabic ^{f334} language, a lifting of the voice, either for weeping, or for joy ^{f335}; and Jarchi, out of the ancient book Siphri, interprets it a “feast”; and it is rendered a “banquet” in (^{<3007>}Amos 6:7), and so may here design a mourning feast, such as were used at funerals, called by the Greeks *περιδειπνεα*, and by the Latins “parentalia”, as Jerom observes. Neither go to lament nor bemoan them; neither go to the house of mourning, or the mourning feast; to the houses of the deceased, to condole the surviving relations, and to express sorrow for the dead, by shedding tears, and shaking the head, or by any other gesture or ceremony after mentioned,

For I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the Lord; all peace or prosperity is of God, and therefore called his, and which he can take away from a people when he pleases; and having determined to take it

away from this people because of their sins, he is said to have done it, it being as certain as if it was done:

even lovingkindness and mercies; all benefits, which flowed from his favour, love, and mercy, as the whole of their prosperity did.

Ver. 6. *Both the great and the small shall die in this land*, etc.] The nobles as well as the common people, high and low, rich and poor; none shall be exempted from the grievous deaths by the sword, famine, and pestilence.

They shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them; as before, (^{<2464>}Jeremiah 16:4), this shall be the common case of them all; the great and the rich shall have no more care and notice taken of them than the poor:

nor cut themselves; their flesh, with their nails, or with knives, to show their grief for the dead, and to alleviate the sorrow of surviving friends, by bearing a part with them:

nor make themselves bald for them; by plucking off the hair of their heads, or by shaving them, and between their eyes; which though forbidden the Jews by the law of God, as being Heathenish customs, yet obtained in the times of Jeremiah, and were usually done; (see ^{<6540>}Deuteronomy 14:1).

Ver. 7. *Neither shall men tear themselves*, etc.] Either their flesh, or their clothes: or, “stretch out”^{f336}; that is, their hands, and clap them together, and wring them, as persons in great distress do: or “divide”, or “break”, or “deal unto them”^{f337}; that is, bread, as at their funeral feasts. Thus the Septuagint version, neither shall bread be broken in their mourning; and to the same sense the Targum; so the word is used in (^{<2367>}Isaiah 63:7), a practice that obtained among the Heathens; (see ^{<6544>}Deuteronomy 26:14) and now with the Jews, as it seems: which they did

for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; they used to carry or send food to the surviving relations, and went and ate with them, in order to comfort them for the loss of their friends; but this now would not be done, not because an Heathenish custom, but because they would have no heart nor leisure for it: (see ^{<5317>}Ezekiel 24:17).

Neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother: not give them a cup of good liquor to comfort and cheer their spirits, overwhelmed with sorrow, on account of the death

of a father or mother; which was wont to be done, but now should be omitted; the calamity would be so great, and so universal, that there would be none to do such offices as these; (see ²⁸⁰⁶Proverbs 31:6,7).

Ver. 8. *Thou shall not also go into the house of feasting*, etc.] Which it was lawful to do, and which the prophet doubtless had done at other times; but now a time of calamity coming on, it was not proper he should; and the rather he was to abstain from such places, and from pleasant conversation with his friends, to assure them that such a time was coming, and this his conduct was a sign of it; for which reason he is forbid to attend any entertainment of his friends, on account of marriage, or any other circumstance of life, for which feasts were used:

to sit with them to eat and to drink: which not only expresses the position at table, but continuance there; for at feasts men not only eat and drink for necessity, or just to satisfy nature, but for pleasure, and unto and with cheerfulness; which may lawfully be done, provided that temperance and sobriety be preserved; but the prophet is not allowed to do that now, which at other times he might do, and did; and that on purpose that his friends might take notice of it, and inquire the reason of it, the distress that was coming upon them, as the words following show.

Ver. 9. *For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, etc.] Who is able to do what he here threatens he will, and which he will do, notwithstanding his being the God of Israel; their hearts not being right with him, nor they steadfast in his covenant.

Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place, in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness: upon any account whatsoever, civil or religious; and that out of Jerusalem, where their religious feasts were kept, as well as where were often expressions of joy made on civil accounts; and this should be in their sight, it should be notorious and remarkable, that they could not but observe it; and it should be in a short time, in their days, though they were very desirous of putting these evil days far from them, and were not willing to believe they should be at all, or, however, not in their days:

the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride; the epithalamiums, or marriage songs, sung at the celebration of nuptials; these should cease, marrying and giving in marriage being over; the consequence of which

must be ruin to the nation, a lawful succession of mankind being not otherwise to be kept up.

Ver. 10. *And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt show this people all these words*, etc.] Or, “all these things”^{f338}; which he was forbid to do; as marrying and having children, going into the house of mourning or feasting, with the reasons of all, because of the calamities coming upon them:

and they shall say unto thee, wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? as if they were quite innocent, and were not conscious of anything they had done deserving such punishment, especially so great as this was threatened to be inflicted on them; as their dying grievous deaths, parents and children, great and small, and be unlamented, and unburied: or “what is our iniquity?” or “what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?” supposing we have been guilty of some weaknesses and frailties; or of some few faults; which though they cannot be justified, yet surely are not to be reckoned of such a nature as to deserve and require so great a punishment: thus would they either deny or lessen the sins they had been guilty of, and suggest that the Lord was very hard and severe upon them.

Ver. 11. *Then shalt thou say unto them*, etc.] In answer to their questions; not in a general way, but by observing to them particular sins, and those gross ones, they had been guilty of:

because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord; that is, his worship, as the Targum; they had quitted his service, and left attending on his word and ordinances; and therefore it was but just with him to forsake them, and give them up into the hands of their enemies:

and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them; were guilty of gross idolatry, serving and worshipping the creature more than and besides the Creator; even idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and wood, and stone, which were no gods; for there is no other true God besides the Lord; and which they were well informed of, and therefore their sin was the greater to leave him and worship them; and which sin, because of the heinousness of it, is repeated:

and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; they forsook his worship, as the Targum, and did not observe the law of the decalogue or ten commandments; especially the two first of them, which required the

worship of the one true God, and forbid the worshipping of others; and which threatened the visiting such iniquities of fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation, of such that hated the Lord; and such were these persons, as follows.

Ver. 12. *And ye have done worse than your fathers*, etc.] Not only committed the same sins, but greater, or, however, attended with more aggravating circumstances; they were wilfully and impudently done, and obstinately persisted in; and therefore deserving of the great evil of punishment pronounced against them.

For, behold, ye walk everyone after the imagination of his evil heart; they walked not as the word of God directs, but as their own evil heart dictated; the imagination of which was evil, and that continually, (^{כֹּחַ}Genesis 6:5).

That they may not hearken unto me; to the word of the Lord, and obey that; their minds being blinded, and their hearts hardened, and they obstinately bent on their own evil ways.

Ver. 13. *Therefore will I call you out of this land*, etc.] By force, and against their wills, whether they would or not, and with abhorrence and contempt: it is to be understood of their captivity, which was but a just punishment for the above sins; for since they had cast off the Lord and his worship, it was but just that they should be cast off by him, and cast out of their land, which they held by their obedience to him:

into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; a foreign country, at a great distance from them; with which they had no alliance, correspondence, or commerce; and where they had no friends to converse with, or show them any respect; and whose language they understood not; all which was an aggravation of their captivity in it:

and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; should have their fill of idolatry, even to loathsomeness; and what they had done willingly in their own land, following the imagination of their own evil hearts, now they should be forced to; and what they did for their own pleasure, and at certain times, when they thought fit, now they should be obliged to attend tonight and day. The Targum is, “and there shall ye serve people that worship idols day and night”; that as they had served idols, now they should serve the people, the worshippers of those idols; the former was their sin, the latter their punishment:

where I will not show you favour; or, “not give you grace”^{f339}; the favour and mercy of God serve to support persons in distress; but to be denied these is an aggravation of it, and must needs make the captivity of those people the more afflicting. Some understand this of the Lord’s not suffering their enemies to show them any favour or mercy; so Kimchi,

“the enemy shall have no mercy on you, but make you serve with rigour;”

and to the same purpose the Targum, connecting them with the people, the idol worshippers, and paraphrasing them thus,

“who shall not be merciful to you;”

and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions, “who shall not give you mercy”; or “rest”, as the Vulgate Latin. The Jews^{f340} interpret this of the Messiah, whose name, they say, is Chaninah, the word here used, whom the Lord would not give them where they were.

Ver. 14. *Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord*, etc.] Or nevertheless, “notwithstanding”^{f341} their sins and iniquities, and the punishment brought upon them for them: or “surely”, verily; for Jarchi says it is an oath, with which the Lord swore he would redeem them, though they had behaved so ill unto him:

that it shall no more be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; this was the form of an oath with the Jews, when a man, as Kimchi observes, used to swear by the living God that brought Israel out of Egypt; or this was a fact which they used frequently to make mention of, and relate to their children; and observe to them the power and goodness of God in it; and so the Targum,

“there shall be no more any declaring the power of the Lord who brought up, etc.”

Ver. 15. *But the Lord liveth*, etc.] Or they shall swear by the living Lord; or declare his power, as the Targum: “that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north”; that is, from Babylon, which lay north of Judea. The Jews^{f342} gather from hence, that the land of Israel was higher than all other lands, because it is said, that “brought up”, or “caused to ascend”; as out of the land of Egypt as before, so out of all other lands. The meaning is, that the deliverance from the Babylonish captivity was a

greater blessing and mercy than the deliverance out of Egypt; the hardships they endured in Babylon being in some respects greater than those they endured in Egypt; and especially the favour being recent, and fresh upon their mind, it would swallow up the remembrance of the former mercy; that would be comparatively forgotten, and not be so frequent and common in the mouths of men; so great would be the sense of this deliverance; wherefore this prophecy both expresses the grievousness of their captivity in Babylon, as exceeding their bondage in Egypt, and the greatness of their salvation from it; when they should be not only brought out of Babylon, but also

from all the lands whither he had driven them; from Egypt, Media, and Persia, and other places: or, “whither they were driven”: by the kings of the earth, as Kimchi interprets it; though it is certain the Lord’s hand was in it; it was according to his will, and by his providence, that they were scattered about among the nations:

and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers; which had its accomplishment at their return from the Babylonish captivity; and will be more fully accomplished in the latter day, when the Jews shall be converted, and return to their own land. Kimchi says this refers to the days of the Messiah, and the gathering of the captives; and some following passages manifestly belong to Gospel times. So Jarchi and Abarbinel understand this and the following of the days of the Messiah.

Ver. 16. *Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them*, etc.] Which some understand of the Egyptians, who lived much on fish, and were much employed in catching them, to which the allusion is thought to be; but rather the Chaldeans are intended, whom God, by the secret instinct of his providence, brought up against the Jews; who besieged Jerusalem, and enclosed them in it, and took them as fishes in a net; (see ³⁰¹⁴Habakkuk 1:14-17), though some interpret this, and what follows, of the deliverance of the Jews by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus, who searched for them in all places, and sent them into their own land; or of Zerubbabel, and others with him, who used all means to persuade the Jews in the captivity to go with them, and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem; and there are not wanting others, who by the “fishers” think the apostles are meant; who were fishers by occupation, and whom Christ made fishers of men, and sent forth to cast and spread the net

of the Gospel in the several parts of Judea, for the conversion of some of that people; (see ^{<4018>}Matthew 4:18,19 ^{<3570>}Ezekiel 47:9,10):

and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks; either the same persons, the Chaldeans, are meant here, as before; who, as they should slay those they took in Jerusalem with the edge of the sword, as fishes taken in a net are killed, or presently die, which is the sense of the Targum, and other Jewish commentators; so those that escaped and fled to mountains, hills, and holes of the rocks, to hide themselves, should be pursued by them, and be found out, taken, and carried captive: or, the Romans^{f343}. So Nimrod, the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel, being a tyrant and an oppressor, is called a mighty hunter, (^{<4008>}Genesis 10:8-10).

Ver. 17. *For mine eyes are upon all their ways,* etc.] Not only which they may take to hide themselves from their enemies, and where they should be directed to find them; but their evil ways in which they walked, and which were the cause of their calamities; these, how secret soever they were, were under the eye of God, whose eyes are in every place, and upon all the ways of men, good and bad; though they might flatter themselves, as wicked men sometimes do, that the Lord sees them not, and does not take notice of their iniquities: but, that they might be assured of the contrary, it is added,

they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes; neither their ways nor their works, their persons nor their actions, could be concealed from the Lord; none can hide himself in secret places, that they should not be seen by him; the darkness and the light are both alike to an omniscient God. The Targum is,

“their iniquities are not hid from before (or from, or the sight of) my Word;”

the essential Word of God; (see ^{<8012>}Hebrews 4:12,13).

Ver. 18. *And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double,* etc.] Or, “but first I will recompense”, etc.^{f344}; meaning, before he showed favour to them, and returned their captivity, (^{<2165>}Jeremiah 16:15), he would punish them according to their sins; not double to what they deserved, but to what they were used to have, or he was used to inflict upon them, punishing them less than their sins deserved; but now he would reward them to the full, though not beyond the measure of justice, yet largely and

abundantly, and with rigour and severity. Some understand this of God's gathering together all their sins and iniquities "from the beginning"^{f345}, as they render the word; the sins of their fathers and their own, and punishing them for them all at once; or first their fathers' sins, and then their own, in which they imitated their fathers, and filled up the measure of their iniquity. So the Targum,

"and I will render to the second as to the first, for everyone of both, their iniquities and their sins."

Because they have defiled my land; out of which he cast the Canaanites for the same reason; and which he chose for the place of his residence and worship, and settled the people of Israel for that purpose in it: that they might serve him in it, and not do as the Heathens before them had done, and which yet they did; and this was what was provoking to him.

They have filled mine inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable things; with their idols, which were not only lifeless, but stinking, loathsome, and abominable; or unclean creatures, which were sacrificed unto them; and some think human sacrifices, the bodies of men, are meant: places of idolatrous worship were set up everywhere in the land, and therefore it is said to be filled therewith; and it was an aggravation of their wickedness, that this was done in a land which the Lord had chosen for his own possession, and had given to Israel as an inheritance.

Ver. 19. *O Lord, my strength and my fortress*, etc.] These are the words of the prophet, rising out of the temptation which beset him; casting off his impatience, diffidence, and unbelief; calling upon God, and exercising faith in him; having received the promise of the restoration of his people to their land, and a view of the future conversion of the Gentiles; which were a means of recovering his spiritual strength, of invigorating grace in him, and of encouraging him to exercise it in a lively manner; to go on in his duty constantly, and to bear affliction cheerfully and patiently; "strength" to do which he had from the Lord; and to whom he ascribes it; and whom he calls his "fortress", or strong hold; and such the Lord is to his people, a strong hold to prisoners of hope, and a strong tower or place of defence to all his saints:

and my refuge in the day of affliction; in which he now was, or saw was coming upon him, when he should be carried captive into Babylon; but God was his refuge, shelter, and protection, and to him he betook himself,

where he was safe; and which was infinitely better to him than the mountains, hills, and holes of rocks, others would fly unto, (²⁴¹⁶Jeremiah 16:16).

The Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth; not the Jews, who were like to the Gentiles for their idolatries, and other wicked practices, and therefore so called, who should return from the several distant countries where they had been scattered, to their own land, and to the worship of God in it; but such who were really Gentiles, that should be converted, either at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and should come along with the Jews when they returned, and worship the Lord with them; or rather in Gospel times. And so Kimchi says this belongs to the times of the Messiah; when the Gospel was to be, and was preached among them, even to the ends of the earth; and many savingly came to Christ for righteousness and strength, for peace, pardon, salvation, and eternal life; and turned to him as to a strong hold, and fled to him for refuge, and laid hold on him, the hope set before them.

And shall say, surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanities, and [things] wherein [there is] no profit; meaning their idols, which did not give what their priests, and the abettors of them, promised; and so deceived their votaries, and disappointed them of their expectations, which became vain, and so were of no profit and advantage to them; a poor inheritance this, which they had possessed and enjoyed for many generations, which their children, now being convinced of, relinquish; for a false religion is not to be retained on this score, because the religion of ancestors, and of long possession with them.

Ver. 20. *Shall a man make gods unto himself,* etc.] Can a man make his own gods? a poor, weak, mortal man? can he make gods of gold, silver, brass, wood, or stone? can he put deity into them? and when he has made images of these, can he be so stupid as to account them gods, and worship them? can he be so sottish, and void of understanding, as to imagine that anything that is made by himself or any other, can be God?

and they are no gods; that are made by men; he only is the true God, that is the Maker and Creator of all things; or they are no gods themselves that pretend to make them, and therefore how should they make gods? can they give that which they have not? or impart deity to others which they have not themselves? These words are a continuation of the speech of the Gentiles, and contain their reasonings, exposing the folly of their idolatrous

ancestors: though some take them to be the words of God, or of the prophet, inveighing against the Jews for their stupidity in worshipping idols; when the Gentiles were convinced of the folly and vanity of such practices, and acknowledged it.

Ver. 21. *Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know*, etc.] Or, “at this time”, as the Targum; when the Gentiles shall be convinced of the idolatry they have been brought up in, and of the vanity and falsehood of their idols; they shall be made to know the true God, God in Christ, Christ himself, whom to know is life eternal, and to know the way of life and salvation by him; and all this through the ministry of the Gospel that should be brought among them, the Spirit of God accompanying it; by means of which they should come to Christ from the ends of the earth, before predicted.

I will cause them to know my hand and my might; to experience the power and efficacy of his grace in conversion; quickening their dead souls, softening their hard hearts, taking away the stony heart, and giving a heart of flesh; and making them willing in the day of his power to be saved by Christ, and to serve him; to relinquish their idols, and turn to and worship the living God in spirit and in truth: though most understand this not as a promise of grace to the Gentiles, but as a threatening of punishment to the idolatrous Jews; that because of their idolatry they should once for all, or by this one and grievous calamity, captivity in Babylon, be made to know what they could not be brought to know by all the instructions and warnings of the prophets; they should now feel the weight of the Lord’s hand, the lighting down of his arm with the indignation of his wrath; and so the Targum,

“I will show them my vengeance and the stroke of my power.”

And they shall know that my name is the Lord; the Jehovah, the self-existent Being, the Being of beings, the everlasting and unchangeable I AM; who is able to make good his promises, or perform his threatenings; a name incommunicable to creatures, which do not belong to the idols of the Gentiles, is peculiar to the true God, who is the most High in all the earth; (see ⁴³³⁸Psalm 83:18).