

CHAPTER 24

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 24

This chapter contains a vision of two baskets of figs, representing the Jews both in captivity, and at Jerusalem. The vision is declared, (^{<2401>}Jeremiah 24:1-3); where both time and place are pointed at, in which the vision was seen, and the nature of the figs described, and what passed between the Lord and the prophet concerning them. The explication of the vision begins, (^{<2404>}Jeremiah 24:4); and continues to the end of the chapter. The good figs were an emblem of the good people that were carried captive with Jeconiah into Babylon, which the Lord says was for their good; and he promises to own them, and set his eyes upon them for good, and that they should return to their own land, and have a heart to know him as their God, and return unto him, (^{<2405>}Jeremiah 24:5-7); the bad figs signify the people that were with Zedekiah at Jerusalem, and those that were in Egypt, who are threatened to be carried captive into all lands, and there live under the greatest reproach and disgrace; or be destroyed in their own land by the sword, famine, or pestilence, (^{<2408>}Jeremiah 24:8-10).

Ver. 1. *The Lord showed me*, etc.] A vision, or in a vision, what follows; for by this it appears that what was seen was not real, but what was exhibited in a visionary way by the Lord, and represented to the mind of the prophet:

and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord; or “pots”, as Jarchi; these do not signify the law and Gospel, or the synagogue and church, or the Jews and Christians, or hell and heaven, as some have interpreted it, observed by Jerom; but the Jews that were in captivity with Jeconiah, and those that remained in Jerusalem with Zedekiah, as it is explained in some following verses. These baskets are said to be “set before the temple of the Lord”, not to be sold there, but to be presented to the Lord; in allusion to the baskets of firstfruits, which, according to the law, were thither brought for that purpose, (^{<4802>}Deuteronomy 26:2); and signify, that the two people represented by them were before the Lord, in his sight, were known to him, and judged by him;

after that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon: this was done when Jeconiah had reigned but little more than three months, and in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, (^{<1248>}2 Kings 24:8,12 ^{<1319>}2 Chronicles 36:9,10). This is mentioned, not only to show the time of this vision, which was a little after this captivity, in the beginning of Zedekiah's reign; but to let us know who the captives were, signified by the good figs. The "carpenters" and "smiths" were carried away with the king and the princes, partly that they might be serviceable to the king of Babylon in his country; and partly that they might not be assisting to their own country in repairing their fortifications, and making instruments of war for them. There were a "thousand" of this sort carried captive, (^{<1246>}2 Kings 24:16); where the former of these are called "craftsmen". Jarchi interprets both of the scholars of the wise men; and Kimchi, of counsellors and wise men. The word for "carpenters" is used both of carpenters and blacksmiths; and that for "smiths" may be rendered "enclosers", or "shutters up"; which the Targum understands of porters or shutters of gates; and some think goldsmiths are meant, that set or enclose precious stones in gold; and others are of opinion that masons are intended, so called from the building of walls for the enclosing of places. The Syriac version renders it "soldiers"; but those are distinguished from them, (^{<1244>}2 Kings 24:14,16). The Septuagint version translates it "prisoners"; but so all the captives might be called; and it adds, what is not in the text, "and the rich"; and the Arabic version following that; though it is true they were carried captive; for it is said, "none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land", (^{<1244>}2 Kings 24:14). This, according to Bishop Usher^{f505}, was in the year of the world 3405, and before Christ 599; and so the authors of the Universal History^{f506} place it; and Mr. Whiston^{f507} also; and Mr. Bedford^{f508} a year later; and in the same year that this captivity began was Cyrus the Persian born, who was the deliverer of the Jews from it.

Ver. 2. *One basket [had] very good figs, [even] like the figs [that are] first ripe, etc.]* As there are some figs that are ripe sooner than others, and which are always the most desirable and acceptable; and such were they that were presented to the Lord, (^{<300>}Micah 7:1 ^{<631>}Deuteronomy 26:2); these signified those that were carried captive into Babylon with Jeconiah, among whom were some very good men, as Ezekiel, and others; and all

might be said to be so, in comparison of those that were at Jerusalem, who were very wicked, and grew worse and worse:

and the other basket [had] very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad; as nothing is more sweet and luscious, and agreeable to the taste than a sound ripe fig, and especially a first ripe one; so nothing is more nauseous than a naughty rotten one: these signified the wicked Jews at Jerusalem indulging themselves in all manner of sin; so those who seemed to be the worst, through their being carried captive, were the best; and those who, seemed to be the best, by their prosperity, were the worst. This is to be understood in a comparative sense, as Calvin observes; though this does not so much design the quality of persons, as the issue of things, with respect unto them. The captivity of the one would issue in their good, and so are compared to good figs; when the sins of the other would bring upon them utter ruin and destruction without recovery, and therefore compared to bad figs that cannot be eaten.

Ver. 3. *Then said the Lord unto me, what seest thou, Jeremiah?* etc.] This question is put, in order that, upon his answer to it, he might have an explication of the vision:

and I said, figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil; or “so bad”, or “because of badness”^{f509}; which may be applied to mankind in general; who may be distinguished into good and bad: those that are good, who are made so by the grace of God; for none are so by nature, or of themselves; they are very good: they have many good things in them; they have a good heart, a new and a clean heart, and a right spirit created in them; they have a good understanding of spiritual things; they have a good will to that which is good, and good affections for God and Christ, and divine things; they have the good Spirit of God and his graces in them, and Christ and his word dwelling in them: and they do good things, and are prepared for every good work; they are good to others; pleasantly and acceptably good to God through Christ; and profitably good to their fellow saints and fellow creatures. On the other hand, those that are bad are exceeding bad; as they are by nature children of wrath, unclean, corrupt, loathsome, and abominable in the sight of God; so they are from their youth upward, and continue so, and are never otherwise; all in them, and that comes from them, are evil; their hearts are desperately wicked, the thoughts and imaginations of their hearts are evil continually; their words are idle, corrupt, and filthy, and all their actions

sinful; there is no good in them, nor any done by them; they are good for nothing; they are of no use to God, to themselves, or others; sin has made them like itself, exceeding sinful: and now between these two sorts there is no medium; though all sins are not alike; and some in a comparative sense may be called greater or lesser sinners; yet all are exceeding bad, even the least: they are all of the same nature, and have the same wicked hearts; though some may be outwardly righteous before men; and hypocrites and formal professors are worst of all. There never were but two sorts of persons in the world; the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent; the children of God, and the children of the devil; and so things will appear hereafter at the great day; the one will be placed at Christ's right hand as good and righteous men, the other at his left hand as wicked, and will have separate states to all eternity: and so those figs are explained in the Talmud^{f510}; the good figs, they are the perfect righteous; the bad figs, they are the perfect wicked.

Ver. 4. *Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] As follows; where an explanation is given of the above vision, to which this is a transition.

Ver. 5. *Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel,* etc.] Of all the tribes of Israel; of the ten tribes that had been carried captive long ago by the king of Assyria; and of the other two tribes, part of whom were in Babylon, and the other in Judea, who were not wholly cut off by the Lord; but he still had a regard for them; and therefore introduces what he was about to say in this manner:

like those good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah; that they are good men, and like those good figs, even those that were; and though they are carried captive: or, "I will know them"^{f511}; take notice of them; show an affectionate love to them, and care of them; make himself known unto them, and own them for his, in the furnace of affliction:

whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for [their] good; or "for good things", as the Septuagint and other versions; for their temporal good; some were raised to great honours, as Daniel, and his associates; others got and possessed estates in Babylon, and some returned with favours and riches: and this was also for their spiritual good; to bring them to a sense of their sins, to repentance for them, and acknowledgment of them; and particularly to cure them of idolatry, which

it effectually did; so the Lord makes all “things to work together for good”, to them that love him, (~~see~~ Romans 8:28); and it may be observed, that though the Chaldeans carried the Jews captive out of their own land, and the city of Jerusalem, meant by “this place”, into the land of Babylon, yet they were only instruments; it was the Lord’s doing; he sent them thither. Jarchi connects the phrase “for good” with the word “acknowledge”, supposing a transposition of the words, thus, “I will acknowledge them for good”.

Ver. 6. *For I will set mine eyes upon them for good*, etc.] His eyes of omniscience, providence, and grace; to communicate good things to them; to take care of them in the furnace of affliction, that they were not lost, but made the better; to watch over them, protect and defend them; to deliver them out of their troubles, and to bring them into their own land; as follows:

and I will bring them again into this land: the land of Judea, and city of Jerusalem, where Jeremiah now was, and saw this vision: this was accomplished when the seventy years’ captivity was ended:

and I will build them, and not pull [them] down; and I will plant them, and not pluck [them] up; alluding to the building of houses, and planting of vineyards; signifying that they and their families should be built up and continue; yea, that they should be a habitation for God, and the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, of his planting, and which should remain: this will be more fully accomplished in the latter day; though it had in part a fulfilment upon the Jews’ return from captivity.

Ver. 7. *And I will give them an heart to know me, that I [am] the Lord*, etc.] God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; the unchangeable Jehovah; the everlasting I AM; a covenant keeping God; faithful and true to his promises; able and willing to perform them; and does all things well and wisely; and was their Lord and God. This knowledge designs not the first knowledge of the Lord, but an increase of it; and not head knowledge, but heart knowledge; a knowledge of God, joined with love and affection to him, high esteem, and approbation of him; and including communion with him, and an open profession and acknowledgment of him: and it is an appropriating knowledge also; a knowing him for themselves, and as their own; and such a knowledge or heart to know the Lord is a pure gift of his, and without which none can have it: and it may be observed, that in

captivity it was given them; afflictions were the means of it; and happy it is when hereby men come to have a knowledge of God, and to be better acquainted with him, (^{<192D>}Psalm 92:12);

and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; that is, it shall appear that they are so, by the above blessings of grace and goodness bestowed upon them; the Lord hereby owning them for his people, and they hereby coming to know that he is their God:

for, or “when”^{f512}

they shall return unto me with their whole heart; affectionately, sincerely, and unfeignedly. It supposes that they had backslidden from God, his ways and worship; but now should return by sincere repentance to him, and to his worship, and obedience to his commands; so the Targum,

“for they shall return to my worship with their whole heart;”

all this will have an entire accomplishment in the latter day, when the Jews will be converted and turn to the Lord, and fear him and his goodness.

Ver. 8. *And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil*, etc.] Here follows an explication of the evil figs, and an application of them to the wicked Jews:

surely thus saith the Lord, so will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah; who was then the reigning king of Judah, Jeconiah’s father’s brother; whom the king of Babylon had made king in his stead, and changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, (^{<124H>}2 Kings 24:17); him the Lord threatens to give up to ruin and destruction, or to deliver into the hands of the enemy:

and his princes, and the residue of them, that remain in this land; the rest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that continued in the land of Judea, and were not carried captive:

and them that dwell in the land of Egypt; who had fled thither for safety upon the invasion of their land, and besieging their city; all these being like to the bad figs, exceeding evil and wicked, are threatened to be delivered into the hands of their enemies, though they might think themselves safe and secure where they were.

Ver. 9. *And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for [their] hurt*, etc.] Jeconiah and the captives with him were only

carried into Babylon; but these should be scattered one from another into the several parts of the world. The former were carried captive for their good, and it issued in that; but these were carried away for their hurt, to the injury of their persons and properties, and without having any effect upon them to the good of their souls: though this might begin to be fulfilled by the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, yet it had a more complete fulfilment in the destruction of this people by the Romans; to which these and the following words seem more particularly to refer:

[to be] a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them; their names to be used as a proverb for their riches ill gotten, their falsehood and tricking; and under the curse of God, and the reproach of man, as they are this day; (see ~~Exod~~ Deuteronomy 28:37).

Ver. 10. *And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them,* etc.] Meaning not in other lands, where they should be driven, but while in their own land, by which many should perish; and the rest that escaped these dreadful judgments should be carried captive. The Targum is,

“I will send those that kill with the sword, etc.”

till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers; so that none of them should be left there to inhabit it, which is now their case; and it is an aggravation of their calamity and punishment, that they are no more the inhabitants of that good land, which was God's gift to them, and to their fathers before them.