

CHAPTER 26

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 26

This chapter gives an account of Jeremiah's preaching; of his being apprehended by the people; of his defence of himself, and acquittance upon it. The time when, place where, and persons to whom the prophet delivered his discourse, are pointed at in (~~2481~~ Jeremiah 26:1,2); the substance of it was, that if the people of the Jews would repent of their sins and turn from them, the Lord would avert the evil he had threatened them with; but if not, he would make their temple like Shiloh, and their city a curse to all the earth, (~~2488~~ Jeremiah 26:3-6); upon hearing which the people seized him, and vowed he should die, because he had prophesied of the destruction of their city and temple, (~~2497~~ Jeremiah 26:7-9); which the princes hearing of, came from the king's house to one of the gates of the temple, and sat as a court of judicature; to whom the priests and prophets accused Jeremiah of the above things as worthy of death, (~~2498~~ Jeremiah 26:10,11); and before whom the prophet made his defence, alleging his mission and orders from the Lord; and therefore, instead of recanting, repeats his exhortation; and as for himself, he was not careful what they did to him; but advises them not to shed innocent blood, since it would bring evil upon them, (~~2492~~ Jeremiah 26:12-15); upon which the princes acquit him, and declare him innocent, (~~2496~~ Jeremiah 26:16); and this is confirmed by a like instance of Micah the prophet, in the times of Hezekiah, who prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem, and yet was not put to death, (~~2497~~ Jeremiah 26:17-19); and by a contrary instance of Uriah, in the then present reign of Jehoiakim, who had been put to death for the like, but wrongly, (~~2498~~ Jeremiah 26:20-23); and, in the issue, Jeremiah, through the good office of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, particularly, was saved from being put to death, (~~2498~~ Jeremiah 26:24).

Ver. 1. *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah*, etc.] So that the prophecy of this chapter, and the facts and events connected with it, were before the prophecy of the preceding chapter, though here related; that being in the fourth year, this in the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. Josiah was lately dead; Jehoahaz his son

reigned but three months, and then was deposed by Pharaohnecho king of Egypt; and this Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, who before was called Eliakim, was set on the throne; and quickly after his coming to it

came this word from the Lord, saying; as follows, to the prophet. This was in the year of the world 3394, and before Christ 610, according to Bishop Usher^{f532}; with whom agree Mr, Whiston^{f533}, and the authors of the Universal History^{f534}.

Ver. 2. *Thus saith the Lord, stand in the court of the Lord's house*, etc.] It, the great court of Israel, where the people used to meet together for worship:

and speak unto all the cities of Judah; the inhabitants of them; not only to those that dwelt at Jerusalem but in the rest of the cities of Judah; for what he was to say concerned them all, they having all sinned, and needed repentance and reformation; without which they would be involved in the general calamity of the nation:

which come to worship in the Lord's house; as they did three times in the year, at the feasts of passover, pentecost, and tabernacles; and it was now the last of these, as Bishop Usher thinks, when this prophecy was to be delivered to them:

all the words that I command thee to speak to them: nothing must be kept back, the whole counsel of God must be declared; not a word suppressed through affection to them, or fear of them; God commanded, and must be obeyed, let the consequence be what it will:

diminish not a word; soften not any expression or alter any word, by putting one more smooth for one rough; or change the accent, or abate of the vehemency of delivering it; but both for matter manner, and form let it be as directed, without any subtraction and diminution, change or alteration: a rule which every minister of the word ought to attend to; seeking not to please men, but God that sends him and Christ whose minister he is.

Ver. 3. *If so be they will hearken*, etc.] And obey; which is expressive not of ignorance and conjecture in God, but of his patience and long suffering, granting space and time for repentance, and the means of it; which disregarded, leave without excuse:

and turn every man from his evil way; his series and course of life, which was evil, and was the case of everyone; so that as their sin was general, the reformation ought to be so too:

that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to do unto them; or “am thinking”, or “devising^{f535} to do unto them”; which repentance must be understood not of a change of mind, but of the course of his providence towards them, which, by his threatenings, and some steps taken, portended ruin and destruction; yet, in case of repentance and reformation, he would change his method of action agreeably to his will:

because of the evil of their doings; this was the reason why he had threatened them with the evil of punishment, because of the evil of their actions; which were breaches of his law, and such as provoked the eyes of his glory.

Ver. 4. *And thou shalt say unto them*, etc.] What follows is the substance of the prophecy, and the sum of the sermon or discourse he was sent to deliver, without diminishing a word of it:

thus saith the Lord, if ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law which I have set before you; first by Moses, by whose hands it was given to their fathers; and by the prophets, the interpreters of it to them; before whom it was set as a way for them to walk in, and a rule to walk by; a directory for them in their lives and conversations; and which continues to be so, as it is set before us Christians by our King and Lawgiver Jesus Christ; though not to obtain righteousness and life by the works of it; which should not be sought for, nor are attainable thereby.

Ver. 5. *To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets*, etc.] The interpretations they give of the law; the doctrines they deliver; the exhortations, cautions, and reproofs given by them in the name of the Lord, whose servants they were; and therefore should be hearkened to; since hearkening to them is hearkening to the Lord himself, in whose name they speak, and whose message they deliver:

whom I sent unto you, both rising up early and sending [them]; they had their mission and commission from the Lord; and who was careful to send them early, if they might be instruments to do them good and prevent their ruin; they had the best of means, and these seasonable, and so were left without excuse:

(but ye have not hearkened); neither to the Lord, nor to his prophets; but went on in their own ways, neglecting the law of the Lord and the instructions of his servants.

Ver. 6. *Then will I make this house like Shiloh*, etc.] Where the ark was until it was taken by the Philistines; and then the Lord forsook his tabernacle there, (^{<980>}Psalm 78:60); and so he threatens to do the like to the temple at Jerusalem, should they continue in their disobedience to him; (see Gill on “^{<2072>}Jeremiah 7:12”) and (see Gill on “^{<2074>}Jeremiah 7:14”);

and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth; that is, the city of Jerusalem, which should be taken up, and used proverbially in all countries; who, when they would curse anyone, should say, the Lord make thee as Jerusalem, or do unto thee as he has done to Jerusalem.

Ver. 7. *So the priests, and the prophets, and all the people*, etc.] As it was in the temple, in one of the courts of it, that Jeremiah was, and said the above things, it is no wonder to hear of the “priests”, since they were there about their work and service; the “prophets” were the false prophets, as the Septuagint and Arabic versions expressly call them; and “all the people” were all the males out of the several cities of Judah, who were come up to the temple on the account of the feast; (see ^{<2012>}Jeremiah 26:2); now these

heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord; in the temple; in the court of Israel; they heard him out, and did not interrupt him while he was speaking; and having heard him, they were angry with him, and were witnesses against him; they did not hear him so as to obey his words, receive his instructions, and follow, his directions; but they heard him with indignation, and were determined to prosecute him unto death.

Ver. 8. *Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking*, etc.] For they let him alone till he had done, either out of reverence of him as a priest and prophet; or they were awed by a secret influence on their minds that they might not disturb him:

all that the Lord had commanded [him] to speak unto all the people; he did as he was ordered, kept back nothing, not fearing the resentment of the people, but fearing God:

that the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, took him; the priests and the prophets were the leading men in this action; they stirred up the

people against him, and through their instigation he was seized and laid hold on:

saying, thou shall surely die; signifying that they would bring a charge against him, which they were able to support, and which by the law would be death; unless they meant in the manner of zealots to put him to death themselves, without judge or jury; and which they would have put in execution, had not the princes of the land, or the great sanhedrim, heard of it; and therefore to prevent it came to the temple, as is afterwards related.

Ver. 9. *Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord*, etc.] Made use of his name in declaring a falsehood, as they would have it; this was the crime: had he said what he thought fit to say in his own name, they suggest it would not have been so bad; but to vent his own imaginations in the name of the Lord, this they judged wicked and blasphemous, and deserving of death; especially since what he said was against their city and temple:

saying, this house shall be like Shiloh; forsaken and destroyed; that is, the temple:

and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? so they wrested his words; for this he did not say, only that it should be a curse to all the nations of the earth:

and all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord; besides those that were in the temple that heard him, others, upon a rumour that he was apprehended by the priests, and prophets, and people in the temple, got together in a mob about him: or, they were “gathered to”^{f536} him; to hear what he had to say in his own defence; and it appears afterwards that they were on his side, (²³³⁶Jeremiah 26:16).

Ver. 10. *When the princes of Judah heard these things*, etc.] The tumult there was in the temple; these were the princes of the blood, or the nobles of the realm, particularly the courtiers, and who were of the king’s privy council; or else the great sanhedrim, consisting of seventy persons, and were the chief court of judicature:

then they came up from the king’s house to the house of the Lord; from the royal palace where they resided; by which it should seem that they were the king’s courtiers, and counsellors, and officers of state; unless in those times the sanhedrim sat there; from hence they came up to the temple, where

Jeremiah and the priests, etc. were, which, being built on a hill, was higher than the king's palace; and therefore are said to "come up" to it:

and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's [house]; as a court of judicature, to hear and try the cause between the prophet and his accusers. This gate of the temple is thought to be the higher gate, which Jotham built, (⁴²⁵⁸2 Kings 15:35). The Targum calls it the eastern gate; and so Kimchi says it was; and that it was called the new gate, according to the Rabbins, because there they renewed the constitutions and traditions; though he thinks the better reason is, because newly repaired, or some new building was added to it. Jarchi also says it was the eastern gate; and gives this reason for its being called new; that when Jehoiakim was carried captive, and some of the vessels of the temple, Nebuchadnezzar's army broke the eastern gate, which Zedekiah afterwards repaired, and made new; but if so, it is here called new by a prolepsis; or this account was written after that time.

Ver. 11. *Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes, and to all the people*, etc.] The priests and the prophets they were the accusers; the princes were the court before whom the cause was brought; and the people were the hearers of it; though it does not seem as if they were a sort of jury, or had any vote in determining; though they sometimes had in instigating a court, and the judges of it, to take on the side of the question they were for:

saying, this man [is] worthy to die; or, "the judgment of death [is] to this man"^{f537}; he is guilty of a capital crime, and judgment ought to be given against him, and he condemned to die:

for he hath prophesied against this city; the city of Jerusalem; saying that it should be a curse to other nations; or, as they interpreted it, that it should be utterly destroyed, and become desolate, and none should inhabit it:

as ye have heard with your ears; this must be directed to the people only; for the princes did not hear Jeremiah's prophecy.

Ver. 12. *Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes, and to all the people, saying*, etc.] In his own defence; which, as Jerom observes, was with prudence, humility, and constancy:

the Lord sent me to prophesy against this house, and against this city, all the words that ye have heard; he does not deny but that he had prophesied

against the city of Jerusalem and against the temple, and that they should both come to ruin, unless the people repented and reformed; but then he urges, that he was sent by the Lord on this errand, and that every word that he had said, and they had heard, he was ordered to say by the Lord; and therefore what was he, that he should withstand God? he surely was not to be blamed for doing what the Lord commanded him to do; besides, all this was threatened only in case they continued obstinate and impenitent; wherefore he renews his exhortations to them in (~~283~~ Jeremiah 26:13).

Ver. 13. *Therefore now amend your ways and your doings*, etc.] Make them good; leave your evil ways, and walk in good ways; forsake your evil works, and do good works:

and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and that because he is your God, as well as what his word directs to is good, and for your good:

and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you; will do as men do when they repent, change their method of acting, and manner of behaviour; so the Lord is said to repent or turn, when he changes the method and conduct of his providence towards men, though he never changes his mind or counsel.

Ver. 14. *As for me, behold, I [am] in your hand*, etc.] In their power, as they were the chief court of judicature; and to whom it belonged to judge of prophets, and to acquit or condemn them, as they saw fit; wherefore he submits to their authority:

do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you; he was not careful about it; he readily submitted to their pleasure, and should patiently endure what they thought fit to inflict upon him; it gave him no great concern whether his life was taken from him or not; he was satisfied he had done what he ought to do, and should do the same, was it to do again; and therefore they might proceed just as they pleased against him.

Ver. 15. *But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death*, etc.] Take this along with you, and then do as you will; that if ye take away my life on this account, you may depend upon it; nothing is more certain than this:

ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; that is, the guilt of innocent blood, which would cry for vengeance upon them that brought the accusation, and insisted upon his being brought in guilty; and upon those that sat in

judgment, and condemned him; and upon all the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem, who should agree to the putting him to death:

for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears; and therefore I am no false prophet, and am clear of the charge brought against me; and have said nothing but what I had a mission and an order from the Lord for, of which you may assure yourselves; and therefore he will avenge my blood, should it be shed on that account; so that you will only increase your guilt, and add to that great load that lies upon you, and will be your ruin, unless you repent and reform.

Ver. 16. *Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets*, etc.] Hearing Jeremiah's apology for himself, by which it appeared that he was to be justified in what he had done, took his part, and acquitted him; and the people, who before were on the side of the priests and false prophets; yet hearing what Jeremiah had to say for himself, and also the judgment of the princes, took his part also, and joined with the court in an address to the priests and prophets, who were the chief accusers, and who would fain have had him brought in guilty of death:

this man [is] not worthy to die; or, "the judgment of death is not for this man"; we cannot give judgment against him; he is not guilty of any crime deserving death; (see Gill on "~~26:11~~" Jeremiah 26:11");

for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God; not in his own name, and of his own head; but in the name of the Lord, and by his order; and therefore was not a false, but a true prophet: what methods they took to know this, and to make it appear to the people, is not said; very probably the settled character of the prophet; their long acquaintance with him, and knowledge of him; his integrity and firmness of mind; the plain marks of seriousness and humility, and a disinterested view, made them conclude in his favour.

Ver. 17. *Then rose up certain of the elders of the land*, etc.] The same with the princes; some of the court, who rose up as advocates for the prophet:

and spake to all the assembly of the people: to justify the vote of the court, and to confirm the people in a good opinion of it, by giving them examples and instances of the like kind:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 18. *Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah*, etc.] Or, Micah of Maresha, as the Targum. Mareshah was a city of the tribe of Judah, (⁶⁵⁴Joshua 15:44); the native place, of this prophet; who appears, by the following quotation, to be the same Micah that stands among the minor prophets; and who is also so called, and lived in the times of Hezekiah, (³⁰⁰Micah 1:1);

and spake to all the people of Judah; very openly and publicly, and just as Jeremiah had done, (²⁴⁰Jeremiah 26:2,7,8);

saying, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be ploughed [like] a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps; Mount Zion, on part of which the temple was built, and on the other the city of David, together with the city of Jerusalem, should be so demolished, as that they might be ploughed, and become a tillage; as the Jews say they were by Terentius, or Turnus Rufus, as they call him, after their last destruction by the Romans:

and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest; covered with grass and shrubs, and thorns and briars; even Mount Moriah, on which the temple stood, which is designed by the house; and so the Targum calls it the house of the sanctuary. Now this was saying as much against the city and temple as Jeremiah did; and was said in the days of a good king too, who encouraged a reformation, and carried it to a great pitch. (see ³⁸²Micah 3:12).

Ver. 19. *Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death?* etc.] No, they did not: neither the king, by his own authority; nor the sanhedrim, the great court of judicature, for the nation; they never sought to take away his life, nor sat in council about it; they never arraigned him, and much less condemned him:

did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord; that is, Hezekiah; he did, as knowing that Micah was a prophet of the Lord, and sent by him; wherefore he received his prophecy with great awe and reverence, as coming from the Lord, and made his supplications to him that he would avert the judgments threatened:

and the Lord repented of the evil which he had pronounced against them? the king and his people, the city and the temple; and so the threatened evil came not upon them in their days:

thus might we procure great evil against our souls; should we put Jeremiah to death: it is therefore much more advisable to do as Hezekiah did, pray unto the Lord to avert the threatened evil, or otherwise it will be worse with us. This precedent is urged to strengthen the decree of the council in favour of Jeremiah.

Ver. 20. *And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord*, etc.] These are not the words of the same persons continued; because the following instance is against them; but of some other persons in the sanhedrim, who were on the side of the priests and prophets; who in effect said, why tell you us of an instance in Hezekiah's time, when there is so recent an one in the present reign, of a man that prophesied just as Jeremiah has done, and was put to death, and so ought he? after this manner Kimchi interprets it; and so Jarchi, who adds, that it is so explained in an ancient book of theirs, called Siphri; though some think they are the words of the same persons that espoused the prophet's cause; and observe the following instance with this view; that whereas there had been one prophet of the Lord lately put to death for the same thing, should they take away the life of another, it would be adding sin to sin, and bring great evil upon their souls; and it might be observed, that Hezekiah prevented much evil by the steps he took; whereas, should they proceed as they had begun in the present reign, they might expect nothing but ruin, which they might easily see with their own eyes was coming upon them: others are of opinion that this instance is added by the penman of this book, either the prophet himself or Baruch, to show the wonderful preservation of him; that though there had been very lately a person put to death for the very same thing, yet he was preserved through the good offices of a person mentioned at the close of the chapter; and which seems to make this account probable. The name of the prophet was

Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim; which was a city of Judah, (~~Joshua~~ Joshua 18:14); but who he was is not known, there being no account of him elsewhere:

who prophesied against this city, and against this land, according to all the words of Jeremiah; just as he had done, in much the same words, if not altogether; so that their case was similar.

Ver. 21. *And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men*, etc.]. Either his courtiers, or his soldiers, or both:

and all the princes, heard his words; the words of the Prophet Urijah; not with their own ears very probably, but from the report of others:

the king sought to put him to death; as being a messenger of bad tidings, tending to dispirit his subjects, and allay the joy of his own mind upon his advancement to the throne:

but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; which some understand as a piece of prudence in him; but rather it was the effect of pusillanimity and cowardice: it seems to show want of faith and confidence in the Lord; and the fear of man, which brings a snare; and besides, it was no piece of prudence to go to Egypt, whatever it was to flee; since there was such an alliance between the kings of Egypt and Judah; and the latter, though dependent on the former, yet the king of Egypt would easily gratify him in delivering up a subject of his, and a person of such a character.

Ver. 22. *And Jehoiakim sent men into Egypt*, etc.] To seek for him; and to require the delivery of him upon being found:

[namely], Elnathan the son of Achbor; the father of this man very probably is the same we read of in Josiah's time, (^{<1222>}2 Kings 22:12,14); who is called Abdon in (^{<1480>}2 Chronicles 34:20);

and [certain] men with him, into Egypt; to assist him in taking him, whose names are not mentioned; Elnathan's is, as being the principal, and to fix an eternal infamy upon him.

Ver. 23. *And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt*, etc.] Having found him, they seized him, and brought him away, with the leave of the king of Egypt: which, no doubt, was easily obtained:

and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who slew him with the sword; very probably with his own hand; or however it was done by his order, and in his presence, most likely:

and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people; either where they were buried in heaps promiscuously, as some think; or in the common burying ground; and not where persons of distinction were laid, as prophets, and others^{f538}; this he did to reflect dishonour upon the prophet.

Ver. 24. *Nevertheless, the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah*, etc.] Though this instance was urged as a precedent to go by,

being lately done; or though the king's cruelty had been so lately exercised in such a manner; yet this man, who had been one of Josiah's courtiers and counsellors, (^{<1221>}2 Kings 22:12); stood by Jeremiah, and used all his power, authority, and influence, in his favour:

that they should not give him into the hand of the people, to put him to death; that the sanhedrim should not; who, by the last precedent mentioned, might seem inclined to it; but this great man, having several brothers, as well as other friends, that paid a regard to his arguments and solicitations; he prevailed upon them not to give leave to the people to put him to death, who appear to have been very fickle and mutable; at first they joined with the priests and false prophets against Jeremiah, to accuse him; but upon the judgment and vote of the princes, on hearing the cause, they changed their sentiments, and were for the prophet against the priests; and now, very probably, upon the instance of Urijah being given as a precedent, they altered their minds again, and were for putting him to death, could they have obtained leave of the court; and which only Ahikam's interest prevented.