

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SIEGE AND CAPTIVITY FORETOLD

(Chaps. 21-24)

The various prophecies of Jeremiah as set before us in this book do not follow any chronological order. The series recorded in chapters 21-24 belong to the last days of Zedekiah, in whose time the final carrying away to Babylon took place. The next series were uttered in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, and the ones following in his first year. Nevertheless there is evidently a divine purpose in thus grouping them, as they follow a definite moral order showing how utterly hopeless was the state of the people.

Nebuchadrezzar had already commenced the siege of Jerusalem when this portion opens. The form of his name, it will be noticed, is slightly different to that found in the book of Daniel and elsewhere, even in the latter portion of this same book. The spelling as given here agrees better with the inscriptions of late years unearthed in Babylonia than the other, which was probably a Hebraized form. This mighty potentate had, when still a prince, conquered Palestine and Jerusalem, but had left Jehoiakim, brother of Jehoahaz, upon the throne as a tributary to Babylon. From Palestine Nebuchadrezzar marched into Egypt, having already routed the armies of Pharaoh-Necho. While here, tidings of the death of Nabopolassar, his father, reached him, whereupon he returned at once to Chaldea with his light troops, in order to make sure of his succession to the throne. The balance of his army, convoying a number of captives of royal lineage, followed later by a more circuitous route.

Soon after this, Jehoiakim rebelled against him (as recorded in II Kings 24:1), and was punished by being carried captive to Babylon. His son Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, was placed on the throne; but he too rebelled very soon afterwards. Nebuchadrezzar marched again to Jerusalem, and carried him also captive with about ten thousand of the people. It was at this time that Ezekiel and Mordecai were carried to Babylon.

The victorious Chaldean made Mattaniah, uncle of the deposed monarch, king in his stead, changing his name to Zedekiah. Mattaniah meant “*Gift of Jah.*” Zedekiah means the “*Justice of Jah.*” This Jewish prince was a most ungodly man, though but a youth of one-and-twenty when he ascended the throne, and his reign lasted seven years.

Of him it is recorded that **“he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon”** (II Kings 24:19, 20).

The Chaldean army appeared once more before the devoted city, and a long siege began, which lasted almost an entire year. It was during this time of distress and perplexity that Zedekiah sent Pashur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, to Jeremiah. Of the first of these two messengers we shall hear more when we come to consider the thirty-eighth chapter. Zephaniah we shall also meet with as we pursue our meditations. He is mentioned by name on several occasions, and on none to his credit (Jeremiah 29:25; 37:3; II Kings 25:18).

The very fact of Zedekiah having revolted and broken his pledges to the king of Babylon manifested his unbelieving and unsubject heart. God had sent the conqueror against Judah because of sin. That evil unrepented of, no human prowess could avail to effect deliverance. Yet the Judean monarch had thought to break off the yoke by force of arms. Now, in his helplessness, he sends to the Lord’s prophet, but gives evidence of no sense of wrong-doing; consequently his petition is utterly devoid of any expression that might speak of contrition or repentance.

His message is, **“Enquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that he may go up from us”** (ver. 2).

It all sounds pious, but he had not framed his ways or his doings to turn unto the Lord. He feels himself to be in a tight and difficult place. He would avail himself of divine power, if possible, while ignoring divine claims upon him. He is neither the first nor the last that has so acted. For him, however, as for any such, there is no answer of peace.

Jeremiah bids the messengers return to their master, and say that not only does the Lord refuse to fight for him, but He will fight against them, even to turning back the weapons of war in their hands. The city shall be delivered to the Chaldeans, and the bulk of the inhabitants shall die of the sword and a great pestilence. Those that are left, including Zedekiah, shall become the captives of Nebuchadrezzar and be carried away to the imperial city on the Euphrates (vers. 3-7).

Yet a choice was to be given to the people. **“The way of life and the way of death”** should be set before them. All abiding in the city should die, but any who should go out and fall to the besiegers should live; **“his life shall be unto him for a prey.”**

The city itself was to be burned with fire (vers. 8-10). As for the house of Judah’s king, there was a special exhortation and a warning. The execution of justice morning by morning (see Psalm 101:8) was called for, and the deliverance of the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; otherwise the fury of the Lord should burn against them like a fire which none could quench. Proudly they had said, in their fancied security, **“Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?”** The Lord Himself was against them, and would punish according to their corrupt and ungodly ways (vers. 11-14).

The result of this reply to the king's message we are not told. We can but infer that it was entirely disregarded, although Zedekiah evidently feared it was the truth, but did not dare act upon it.

In the beginning of the twenty-second chapter we find the prophet sent by the Lord to the royal palace. He was a pre-Christian John Knox, who, "**strong in the Lord and the power of His might,**" though in himself a frail and trembling man, could be the reprover of kings as well as pastor of the poor.

There is no hesitancy or uncertainty about his utterances. It is "**the word of the Lord**" he brings. He speaks as "**the oracles of God.**" His address is a call to righteousness. If the king will be the leader in turning to God, as he has been a leader in rebellion against Him, there shall still enter in by the gates of the royal house kings sitting upon the throne of David. Otherwise "**this house shall become a desolation.**"

As Gilead and Lebanon for glory and beauty had they been before Him: they should become as the dry and parched wilderness; insomuch that the nations, in wonderment, should ask as they passed by, "**Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city?**" and the answer would be, "**Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them**" (22:1-9).

How abundantly the prophetic burden has been verified, let the centuries witness! Jerusalem is to-day the pillar of salt to the nations, crying to all the kingdoms of the earth, "**Remember!**" The dead should, at least, find a grave in the land of their fathers - soon to be hallowed by Messiah's feet. For them let none weep. For him that goeth away let them "**weep sore,**" for "**he shall return no more, nor see his native country**" (ver. 10).

Shallum, otherwise called Jehoahaz (see I Chronicles 3:15; II Kings 23:30, 32), had been carried away to Egypt by Pharaoh-Necho about eighteen years previously, after an evil and ignominious reign of but three months. Some perhaps had hope that he, a son of the godly king Josiah, might yet return as their deliverer, but the seer declares that "**he shall not return thither any more: but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more**" (vers. 10-12). This sentence was fulfilled very shortly afterwards.

Ever since Josiah's untimely death on the plains of Megiddo, his unworthy successors had been characterized by iniquity.

"**Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong,**" the reprover of kings goes on - "**that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a wide house,**" etc. (vers. 13, 14). The Lord's heart is ever concerned about the poor and needy. When Josiah did judgment and justice, it was well with him. He judged the cause of the afflicted and poverty-stricken; and this, the Lord declares, was "**to know Him.**"

This crying sin of Jeremiah's age is being multiplied a thousandfold in these last days.

Rich men heap up wealth by others' labor, and tread down the poor. In their pride and hauteur they build themselves palaces and live as though God had forgotten their iniquitous means of acquisition of wealth. But He that is higher than the highest is not an unconcerned spectator. He has said: **"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you"** (hoarded riches, while multitudes are in distress, witness against their possessors), **"and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped together treasure for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, and is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth"** (hosts). **"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you."**

The hour of the Lord's vengeance is about to strike!

Meantime the word to the poor and lowly who trust in His name is: **"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord: . . . the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"** (James 5:1-8).

He will not look on forever in apparent (only apparent) indifference. There shall yet be a righting of all the wrongs of the ages. The workers of iniquity shall be visited with swift retribution, as this city of God was delivered to the Gentile oppressor for its manifold wickedness.

It took more than ordinary boldness to enable a poor priest to face proud Zedekiah and declare, **"Thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence"** (ver. 17) - a solemn and terrible indictment, to which the wicked king made no reply. His conscience, as in Herod's case, was on the accuser's side.

Jehoahaz' doom has been pronounced - to die in Egypt. His successor, Jehoiakim, set up by Pharaoh-necho, whose name had been changed from Eliakim (II Kings 23:34), should have no better fate: he had been carried to Babylon seven years prior to this time, and for him none should lament, but he was destined to die in captivity and to be **"buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem"** (vers. 18, 19; see also chap. 36:30). Thus one by one the kings of Judah should be destroyed; for in their prosperity the Lord had spoken; but they had willfully said, **"I will not hear."** **"This,"** He declares, **"hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou hast not obeyed My voice."** Therefore all the shepherds of the people should go into captivity, that they might be ashamed and confounded for all their wickedness; when their anguish came upon them like the pangs of a travailing woman, then might they become gracious and subject to His will.

There was still another Judean king in captivity. Coniah (called variously Jeconiah, Jehoiachin, Joiakim and Joachim) had, after a brief and inglorious reign of a little over three months, been likewise carried to Babylon. For him, too, there should be no return. He must die in the land of the stranger, as **"a vessel wherein is no pleasure"** (vers. 24, 28).

Thus one by one the men on whom the people had set their hopes were being taken away in judgment. Would they never learn?

“O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (vers. 29, 30).

In him the line of Solomonic succession ends. Royalty passes over to the line of David’s son Nathan.

This explains why we have the two genealogies of our Lord in the New Testament.

Matthew gives Joseph’s line through this very Coniah. But if Christ came through him, He would not be able to sit upon the throne. In Luke we evidently have the line of Mary the daughter of Heli, Joseph’s father-in-law, through Nathan, thus preserving the blood-line of David while avoiding the curse of Coniah.

“Write ye this man childless” is a solemn word for a Christian, if we may venture to spiritualize it. Every one saved by the blood of Christ should covet to be a winner of souls. **“He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him”** (Proverbs 11:26).

If my reader has been born again, he is now in possession of a treasure for lack of which needy men and women on every hand are perishing - dying in their sins and going down to a Christless eternity. Oh, see to it that you share with them the great and precious things confided to you. Strive to be one whom God can use in leading others to Himself. **“He that winneth souls is wise”** (Proverbs 11:30). Thus you shall have the joy of beholding your children in the faith who shall be your crown of rejoicing in that day (I Thessalonians 2:19, 20). Who can conceive the loss if one must then be written **“childless!”**

Israel’s pastors - that is, their kings - had to a great degree failed to use their exalted office for the blessing of the sheep confided to their care. The last four, especially, who reigned in Jerusalem were recreant shepherds, intent only upon enriching themselves, and caring nought for the flock. In the opening verses of the 23rd chapter a **“woe”** is pronounced upon them for destroying and scattering the sheep of the Lord’s pasture.

“Ye have scattered My flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord” (vers. 1, 2).

It is a pitiable thing when the leaders of the people of God cause the simple to err; when those who are set to guide and protect the flock lead them into by-paths and expose them to danger. Solemn will be the accounting when the Lord shall visit for these things. By referring to the 34th chapter of Ezekiel the reader will get a fuller description of the course of these evil shepherds. See especially verse 1 to 6. Both there and here there are sweet assurances that human pastors having so wretchedly failed, the Lord Himself will gather the remnant of His flock from all countries whither He has driven them, and will bring them again to their folds, where they shall be fruitful and increase (ver. 3).

This has no reference to a conversion of Jews to Christianity. But this promise speaks of a still future and literal return of the Jews to their land after the present dispensation has closed, and the Church is removed to heaven. When thus restored to the home of their fathers, and to their King whom they once rejected, saying:

“We have no king but Caesar”, He shall then **“set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord”** (ver. 4).

Twelve of these shepherds we know, for our Lord said to the apostles: **“Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (Matthew 19:28).

Judas, by transgression, forfeited his place, but Matthias was given the bishopric thus made vacant. Through the promised Messiah are these covenanted mercies of David to be fulfilled. **“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and justice in the earth”** (ver. 5).

This Branch of the Lord’s planting is frequently referred to in the prophets. Isaiah tells of His beauty and glory when **“the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel . . . and the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion”** (Isaiah 4:2-4). The entire passage is depicting a Millennial scene.

In Zechariah 3:8 the Lord says, **“Behold, I will bring forth My servant the BRANCH,”** and He will then **“remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”**

Also in chapter 6:12, 13 of the same book, we read: **“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the Man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”**

When vacillating Pilate set Jesus before the multitude, and, unconsciously uttering the words of the prophet, cried, **“Behold the Man!”** he was directing the gaze of Israel to the Branch of the Lord in whom, though they knew it not, all their hopes were centered. **“In His days . . . Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, [JEHOVAH TSIDKENU] – THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”** (ver. 6). Having no title to blessing in themselves, they shall find it all in their once rejected Messiah.

Like that great pattern Jew, Saul of Tarsus (I Timothy 1:16), they will **“be found in Him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”** (Philippians 3:9). Unto them, as unto us now, He shall be made their wisdom: even righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (I Corinthians 1:30).

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land” (vers. 7, 8).

Some would seek to make the partial return in the days of Cyrus to be the fulfilment of this promise. It is manifestly an erroneous interpretation.

- In the first place, there was no such universal restoration then, as this verse warrants us to expect; and
- In the second, Israel did not dwell in the land, but were soon scattered again, and are to-day dispersed among all nations.

Isaiah plainly tells us that **“it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, . . . and assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”** (Isaiah 11:11, 12). It is to this second and final deliverance that Jeremiah refers.

We are next introduced to another of the contrasts so frequent in this book.

After having, for a brief moment, dwelt upon the glories of Messiah’s reign, he gives utterance to his lamentation over the state of his people; so different from what it shall be in that day of Millennial blessing.

“My heart within me is broken,” he says, **“because of the prophets; all my bones shake: I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of His holiness”** (ver. 9).

No unworthy jealousy of others in the prophetic office affected him thus, but his soul was deeply moved as the lying seers were but leading their disciples farther from God, causing them to be at peace in their wretched condition. The whole land mourned by reason of the adulteries and profaneness of the nation, and both prophet and priest were the leaders in the iniquities so commonly practiced. Therefore **“their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness,”** and perish at the visitation of the Lord (vers. 10-12).

Not only in Judah was this the state of things, but in Samaria, from whence the ten tribes of the northern kingdom had been carried into Assyria long before: prophets had arisen who **“prophesied in Baal,”** and caused the remnant that were left in the land to err (ver. 13). But it was in Jerusalem that the evil was most manifest. There the prophets themselves, licentious and untruthful, strengthened the hands of the evil doers, keeping them back from repentance, until the city had become as Sodom and Gomorrah for vileness. For this they (the prophets) should be fed with the wormwood of His wrath and be made to drink the water of gall of His judgment (vers. 14, 15).

The people are pleaded with not to hearken unto them; they were but made vain through their false prophets, speaking a vision of their own heart, having received nothing from the Lord. To those despising Him, they declared, **“The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace;”** and they assured every one walking after the imagination of his own heart that no evil should come upon him (vers. 16, 17).

As a result, a whirlwind of the Lord had gone forth in fury, for He would execute the thoughts of His heart against prophet and people alike; and His counsel and word should stand. In the latter days they should consider it, and understand that they were being so dealt with in chastisement for their departure from Himself (vers. 18-20). These self-appointed prophets, unsent by God and with no word from Him, could not cause the people to turn from their evil ways; they but encouraged them in their sin. Alas! that they have had many successors, both in Judaism and in Christendom, must be patent to every thoughtful person. Do not such teachers and preachers abound? And the blind multitude, **“having itching ears, depart from the truth”** to follow after their self-chosen deceivers. But the eye of the Lord, who is **“not a God afar off,”** is over all, and none can **“hide in secret places from Him who fills heaven and earth”** (vers. 23, 24).

He heard the lies of the prophets, who spoke out of the deceit of their own hearts, in the dark days we have been considering; and He is taking note of all the empty vaporings of to-day. Instead of His sure and faithful Word, mere idle dreams were being given out as the Word of God. **“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord”** (vers. 25-28).

All men’s brightest thoughts and loftiest imaginings are but as worthless chaff compared with the pure, unadulterated Word of God. We **“have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”** (II Corinthians 4:2), is the utterance of the true minister. How different to Satan’s wretched counterfeit!

“Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”

There is a power in the simple truth of God such as no merely human fancies or philosophies can ever have. It alone can break the heart of stone. But these prophets, giving out their dreams and speculations for the people’s acceptance, were actually stealing the Lord’s words from them. He was therefore against them; and they would be of no profit to the people (vers. 29-32).

On the other hand, when either priest, prophet, or any of the people, should come to Jeremiah in perplexity and fear, asking, **“What is the burden of the Lord?”** he is to answer, according to their folly, **“What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the Lord;”** while all who shall profess to have another **“burden”** shall be punished, and **“the burden of the Lord”** shall be mentioned no more, **“for every man’s word shall be his burden”** - that is, they shall have no word from God, but shall be given up to their own thoughts, because they had perverted the words of the living God.

They must therefore bear their judgment, and know the truth of that which had been penned by Solomon, **“Where there is no vision, the people perish”** (Proverbs 29:18). They shall be **“an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten”** (vers. 33-40).

The twenty-fourth chapter is added here as an appendix, because it relates a vision given after the carrying away of Jeconiah, therefore during the early part of Zedekiah’s reign. Jeremiah was shown by the Lord, in vision, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord (ver. 1). The fig tree is the well-known symbol of Judah nationally; as the vine is of Israel as a whole. Judah was likened by the Lord Jesus to a **“fig tree planted in a vineyard.”**

In the vision following, (chap. 24:1-6) one basket contained good fruit; the other bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. They set forth the two classes into which the Lord had divided the people. Those carried away captive by the Chaldeans had been sent away **“for their good.”** He would watch over them in grace, and eventually restore them (the remnant) to their land, to be once more planted, never to be plucked up again. This last phrase negatives effectually the unworthy theory that would consider the promise fulfilled in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Have they not been **“plucked up again?”** Surely. But when the Lord’s set time has come, they shall be established in their land never to be rooted out of it again. For in that day God will give them a heart to know Himself: they shall be His people and He will be their God: for they shall do what the former remnant never did - **“return unto Him with their whole heart”** (ver. 7).

These then are the good figs to be treasured up by the Lord. The evil figs, which were utterly worthless, typified Zedekiah with the residue of Jerusalem remaining in the land, and those dwelling in defiance of His Word in the land of Egypt. They were to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth **“for their hurt”** (as the others **“for their good”**), and should be **“a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither”** He should drive them: ever punished by the sword, famine and pestilence until utterly consumed (vers. 8-10). Who but one inspired of God could have so faithfully predicted, long before it came to pass, that which, for over two millenniums, has been a matter of history, familiar to all?

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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