

CHAPTER 19

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of the 17th, to foretel and lament the ruin of the house of David, the royal family of Judah, in the calamitous exit of the four sons and grandsons of Josiah — Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, in whom that illustrious line of kings was cut off, which the prophet is here ordered to lament (v. 1). And he does it by similitudes.


I. The kingdom of Judah and house of David are here compared to a lioness, and those princes to lions, that were fierce and ravenous, but were hunted down and taken in nets (v. 2-9).

II. That kingdom and that house are here compared to a vine, and these princes to branches, which had been strong and flourishing, but were now broken off and burnt (v. 10-14). This ruin of that monarchy was now in the doing, and this lamentation of it was intended to affect the people with it, that they might not flatter themselves with vain hopes of the lengthening out of their tranquility.

EZEKIEL 19:1-9

THE FALL OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

Here are,

I. Orders given to the prophet to bewail the fall of the royal family, which had long made so great a figure by virtue of a covenant of royalty made with David and his seed, so that the eclipsing and extinguishing of it are justly lamented by all who know what value to put upon the *covenant of our God*, as we find, after a very large account of that covenant with David ( Psalm 89:3, 20, etc.), a sad lamentation for the decays and desolations of his family (v. 38, 39): *But thou hast cast off and abhorred, hast made void the covenant of thy servant and profaned his crown*, etc. The kings of Judah are here called *princes of Israel*; for their glory was diminished and they had become but as princes, and their purity was lost; they had become corrupt and idolatrous as the *kings of Israel*, whose ways they had learned.

The prophet must *take up a lamentation* for them; that is, he must describe their lamentable fall as one that did himself lay it to heart, and desired that those he preached and wrote to might do so to. And how can we expect that others should be affected with that which we ourselves are not affected with? Ministers, when they boldly foretel, must yet bitterly lament the destruction of sinners, as those that have not *desired the woeful day*. He is not directed to give advice to the princes of Israel (that had been long and often done in vain), but, the decree having gone forth, he must *take up a lamentation* for them.

II. Instructions given him what to say.

1. He must compare the kingdom of Judah to a *lioness*, so wretchedly degenerated was it from what it had been formerly, when it sat as a queen among the nations, v. 2. *What is thy mother?* thine, O king? (we read of Solomon's crown wherewith his mother crowned him, that is, his people, ²¹⁸¹Song of Solomon 3:11), thine, O Judah? The royal family is as a mother to the kingdom, a nursing mother. She is a *lioness*, fierce, and cruel, and ravenous. When they had left their divinity they soon lost their humanity too; and, when they *feared not God*, neither did they *regard man*. She *lay down among lions*. God had said, *The people shall dwell alone*, but they *mingled with the nations and learned their works*. She *nourished her whelps among young lions*, taught the young princes the way of tyrants, which was then used by the arbitrary kings of the east, filled their heads betimes with notions of their absolute despotic power, and possessed them with a belief that they had a right to enslave their subjects, that their liberty and property lay at their mercy: thus *she nourished her whelps among young lions*.

2. He must compare the kings of Judah to *lions' whelps*, v. 3. Jacob had compared Judah, and especially the house of David, to a *lion's whelp*, for its being strong and formidable to its enemies abroad (¹⁴⁹⁹Genesis 49:9, *He is an old lion; who shall stir him up?*) and, if they had adhered to the divine law and promise, God would have preserved to them the might, and majesty, and dominion of a lion, and does it in Christ, the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*. But these *lions' whelps* were so to their own subjects, were cruel and oppressive to them, preyed upon their estates and liberties; and, when they thus by their tyranny made themselves a terror to those whom they ought to have protected, it was just with God to make those a terror to them whom otherwise they might have subdued. Here is lamented,

(1.) The sin and fall of Jehoahaz, one of the whelps of this lioness. He *became a young lion* (v. 3); he was made king, and thought he was made so that he might do what he pleased, and gratify his own ambition, covetousness, and revenge, as he had a mind; and so he was soon master of all the arts of tyranny; he *learned to catch the prey and devoured men*. When he got power into his hand, all that had before in any thing disobliged him were made to feel his resentments and become a sacrifice to his rage. But what came of it? He did not prosper long in his tyranny: *The nations heard of him* (v. 4), heard how furiously he drove at his first coming to the crown, how he trampled upon all that is just and sacred, and violated all his engagements, so that they looked upon him as a dangerous neighbour, and prosecuted him accordingly, *as a multitude of shepherds is called forth against a lion roaring on his prey*, ²³⁰⁴ Isaiah 31:4. And *he was taken*, as a beast of prey, *in their pit*. His own subjects durst not stand up in defence of their liberties, but God raised up a foreign power that soon put an end to his tyranny, and *brought him in chains to the land of Egypt*. Thither Jehoahaz was carried captive, and never heard of more.

(2.) The like sin and fall of his successor Jehoiakim. The *kingdom of Judah* for some time expected the return of Jehoahaz out of Egypt, but at length despaired of it, and then *took another* of the *lion's whelps*, and *made him a young lion*, v. 5. And he, instead of taking warning by his brother's fate to use his power with equity and moderation, and to seek the good of his people, trod in his brother's steps: *He went up and down among the lions*, v. 6. He consulted and conversed with those that were fierce and furious like himself, and took his measures from them, as Rehoboam took the advice of the rash and not-headed young men. And he soon learned to *catch the prey*, and he *devoured men* (v. 6); he seized his subjects' estates, fined and imprisoned them, filled his treasury by rapine and injustice, sequestrations and confiscations, fines and forfeitures, and swallowed up all that stood in his way. He had got the art of discovering what effects men had that lay concealed, and where the treasures were which they had hoarded up; he *knew their desolate places* (v. 7), where they hid *their money* and sometimes hid *themselves*; he knew where to find both out; and by his oppression he *laid waste their cities*, depopulated them by forcing the inhabitants to remove their families to some place of safety. *The land was desolate*, and the country villages were deserted; and though there was great plenty, and a fulness of all good things, yet people quitted it all for fear of *the noise of his roaring*. He took a pride in making

all his subjects afraid of him, as the lion makes all the beasts of the forest to tremble (^{<3088>}Amos 3:8), and by his terrible roaring so astonished them that they fell down for fear, and, having not spirit to make their escape, became an easy prey to him, as they say the lions do. He hectored, and threatened, and talked big, and bullied people out of what they had. Thus he thought to establish his own power, but it had a contrary effect, it did but hasten his own ruin (v. 8): *The nations set against him on every side*, to restrain and reduce his exorbitant power, which they joined in confederacy to do for their common safety; and *they spread their net over him*, formed designs against him. God brought against Jehoiakim bands of the Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, with the Chaldees (^{<4212>}2 Kings 24:2), and he was *taken in their pit. Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon*, ^{<4406>}2 Chronicles 36:6. They put this lion within grates, bound him *in chains*, and *brought him to the king of Babylon*, v. 9. What became of him we know not; but *his voice was nowhere heard roaring upon the mountains of Israel*. There was an end of his tyranny: he was *buried with the burial of an ass* (^{<3229>}Jeremiah 22:19), though he had been as a lion, *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*. Note, The righteousness of God is to be acknowledged when those who have terrified and enslaved others are themselves terrified and enslaved, when those who by the abuse of their power to destruction which was given them for edification make themselves as wild beasts, as *roaring lions and ranging bears* (for such, Solomon says, *wicked rulers are over the poor people*, ^{<3185>}Proverbs 28:15), are treated as such — when those who, like Ishmael, have their *hand against every man*, come at last to have *every man's hand against them*. It was long since observed that bloody tyrants seldom die in peace, but have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy.

*Ad generum Cereris sine caede et sanguine pauci
Descendunt reges et sicca morte tyranni —*

*How few of all the boastful men that reign
Descend in peace to Pluto's dark domain!
— Juvenal*

~~390~~ EZEKIEL 19:10-14

THE FALL OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

1. Jerusalem, the mother-city, is here represented by another similitude; she is a vine, and the princes are her branches. This comparison we had before, ~~388~~ Ezekiel 15:1. Jerusalem is as *a vine*; the Jewish nation is so: *Like a vine in they blood* (v. 10), the blood-royal, like a vine set in blood and watered with blood, which contributes very much to the flourishing and fruitfulness of vines, as if the blood which had been shed had been designed for the fattening and improving of the soil, in such plenty was it shed; and for a time it seemed to have that effect, for she was *fruitful and full of branches* by reason of the waters, the *many waters* near which she was *planted*. Places of great wickedness may prosper for a while; and a vine set in blood may be full of branches. Jerusalem was full of able magistrates, men of sense, men of learning and experience, that were *strong rods*, branches of this vine of uncommon bulk and strength, or poles for the support of this vine, for such magistrates are. The boughs of this vine had grown to such maturity that they were fit to make white staves of for *the sceptres of those that bore rule*, v. 11. And those are *strong rods* that are fit for *sceptres*, men of strong judgments and strong resolutions that are fit for magistrates. When the royal family of Judah was numerous, and the courts of justice were filled with men of sense and probity, then *Jerusalem's stature was exalted among thick branches*; when the government is in good able hands a nation is thereby made considerable. Then she was not taken for a weak and lowly vine, but *she appeared in her height*, a distinguished city, *with the multitude of her branches*. *Tanquam lenta solent inter viburna cupressi* — *Midst humble withies thus the cypress soars*. “*In thy quietness*” (so some read that, v. 10, which we translate *in thy blood*) “*thou wast such a vine as this.*” When Zedekiah was quiet and easy under the king of Babylon's yoke his kingdom flourished thus. See how slow God is to anger, how he defers his judgments, and waits to be gracious.

2. This vine is now quite destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar, being highly provoked by Zedekiah's treachery, *plucked it up in fury* (v. 12), ruined the city and kingdom, and cut off all the branches of the royal family that fell in his way. The vine was *cut off close to the ground*, though not plucked up by the roots. The *east wind dried up the fruit* that was blasted. The

young people fell by the sword, or were carried into captivity. The aspect of it had nothing that was pleasing, the prospect nothing that was promising. Her *strong rods were broken and withered*; her great men were cut off, judges and magistrates deposed. *The vine itself is planted in the wilderness*, v. 13. Babylon was as a wilderness to those of the people that were carried captives thither; the land of Judah was as a wilderness to Jerusalem, now that the whole country was ravaged and laid waste by the Chaldean army — a *fruitful land turned into barrenness*. “It is *burnt with fire* (³⁸⁰⁶Psalm 80:16) and that fire has *gone out of a rod of her branches* (v. 14); the king himself, by rebelling against the king of Babylon, has given occasion to all this mischief. She may thank herself for the fire that consumes her; she has by her wickedness made herself like tinder to the sparks of God's wrath, so that her own branches serve as fuel for her own consumption; in them the fire is kindled which *devoured the fruit*, the sins of the elder being the judgments which destroy the younger; her *fruit* is burned with her own branches, so that she *has no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule*, none to be found now that are fit for the government or dare take *this ruin under their hand*, as the complaint is (²³⁸⁶Isaiah 3:6, 7), none of the house of David left that have a right to rule, no wise men, or men of sense, that are able to rule.” It goes ill with any state, and is likely to go worse, when it is thus deprived of the blessings of government and has *no strong rods for sceptres*. *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is a child*, for it is as well to have no rod as not a strong rod. Those strong rods, we have reason to fear, had been instruments of oppression, assistant to the king in *catching the prey and devouring men*, and now they are destroyed with him. Tyranny is the inlet to anarchy; and, when the rod of government is turned into the serpent of oppression, it is just with God to say, “There shall be no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule; but let men be as *are the fishes of the sea*, where the greater devour the less.” Note, *This is a lamentation and shall be for a lamentation*. The prophet was bidden (v. 1) *to take up a lamentation*; and, having done so, he leaves it to be made use of by others. “*It is a lamentation* to us of this age, and, the desolations continuing long, it *shall be for a lamentation* to those that shall come after us; the child unborn will rue the destruction made of Judah and Jerusalem by the present judgments. They were a great while in coming; the bow was long in the drawing; but now that they have come they will continue, and the sad effects of them will be entailed upon posterity.” Note, Those who fill up the measure of their fathers' sins are laying up in store for their

children's sorrows and furnishing them with matter for lamentation; and nothing is more so than the overthrow of government.