

CHAPTER 27

Jeremiah the prophet, since he cannot persuade people to submit to God's precept, and so to prevent the destruction of their country by the king of Babylon, is here persuading them to submit to God's providence, by yielding tamely to the king of Babylon, and becoming tributaries to him, which was the wisest course they could now take, and would be a mitigation of the calamity, and prevent the laying of their country waste by fire and sword; the sacrificing of their liberties would be the saving of their lives.

I. He gives this counsel, in God's name, to the kings of the neighbouring nations, that they might make the best of bad, assuring them that there was no remedy, but they must serve the king of Babylon; and yet in time there should be relief, for his dominion should last but 70 years (v. 1-11).

II. He gives this counsel to Zedekiah king of Judah particularly (v. 12-15) and to the priests and people, assuring them that the king of Babylon should still proceed against them till things were brought to the last extremity, and a patient submission would be the only way to mitigate the calamity and make it easy (v. 16-22). Thus the prophet, if they would but have hearkened to him, would have directed them in the paths of true policy as well as of true piety.

~~270~~ JEREMIAH 27:1-11

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S VICTORIES FORETOLD

Some difficulty occurs in the date of this prophecy. This word is said to come to Jeremiah *in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim* (v. 1), and yet the messengers, to whom he is to deliver the badges of servitude, are said (v. 3) to come to *Zedekiah king of Judah*, who reigned not till eleven years after the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. Some make it an error of the copy, and think that it should be read (v. 1), *In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*, for which some negligent scribe, having his eye on the title of the foregoing chapter, wrote *Jehoiakim*. And, if one would admit a

mistake any where, it should be here, for Zedekiah is mentioned again (v. 12), and the next prophecy is dated the same year, and said to be in the *beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*, ²⁴¹Jeremiah 28:1. Dr. Lightfoot solves it thus: In the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign Jeremiah is to make these bonds and yokes, and to put them upon his own neck, in token of Judah's subjection to the king of Babylon, which began at that time; but he is to send them to the neighbouring kings afterwards in the reign of Zedekiah, of whose succession to Jehoiakim, and the ambassadors sent to him, mention is made by way of prediction.

I. Jeremiah is to prepare a sign of the general reduction of all these countries into subjection to the king of Babylon (v. 2): *Make thee bonds and yokes*, yokes with bonds to fasten them, that the beast may not slip his neck out of the yoke. Into these the prophet must put his own neck to make them taken notice of as a prophetic representation; for every one would enquire, What is the meaning of Jeremiah's yokes? We find him with one on, ²⁴⁰Jeremiah 28:10. Hereby he intimated that he advised them to nothing but what he was resolved to do himself; for he was not one of those that *bind heavy burdens* on others, which they themselves will not *touch with one of their fingers*. Ministers must thus lay themselves under the weight and obligation of what they preach to others.

II. He is to send this, with a sermon annexed to it, to all the neighbouring princes; those are mentioned (v. 3) that lay next to the land of Canaan. It should seem, there was a treaty of alliance on foot between the king of Judah and all those other kings. Jerusalem was the place appointed for the treaty. Thither they all sent their plenipotentiaries; and it was agreed that they should bind themselves in a league offensive and defensive, to stand by one another, in opposition to the growing threatening greatness of the king of Babylon, and to reduce his exorbitant power. They had great confidence in their strength thus united, and were ready to call themselves the high allies; but, when the envoys were returning to their respective masters with the ratification of this treaty, Jeremiah gives each of them a yoke to carry to his master, to signify to him that he must either by consent or by compulsion become a servant to the king of Babylon, let him choose which he will. In the sermon upon this sign,

1. God asserts his own indisputable right to dispose of kingdoms as he pleases, v. 5. He is the Creator of all things; he *made the earth* at first, established it, and it abides: it is still the same, though *one generation*

passes away and another comes. He still by a continued creation produces *man and beast upon the ground*, and it is by his *great power and outstretched arm*. His arm has infinite strength, though it be stretched out. Upon this account he may give and convey a property and dominion to whomsoever he pleases. As he hath graciously *given the earth to the children of men* in general (⁴⁸⁶Psalm 115:16), so he give to each his share of it, be it more or less. Note, Whatever any have of the good things of this world, it is what God sees fit to give them; we ourselves should therefore be content, though we have ever so little, and not envy any their share, though they have ever so much.

2. He publishes a grant of all these countries to Nebuchadnezzar. Know all men by these presents. *Sciant praesentes et futuri* — *Let those of the present and those of the future age know.* “This is to certify to all whom it may concern that I have *given all these lands*, with all the wealth of them, into *the hands of the king of Babylon*; even the *beasts of the field*, whether tame or wild, *have I given to him*, parks and pastures; they are all his own.” Nebuchadnezzar was a proud wicked man, an idolater; and yet God, in his providence, gives him this large dominion, these vast possessions. Note, The things of this world are not the best things, for God often gives the largest share of them to bad men, that are rivals with him and rebels against him. He was a wicked man, and yet what he had he had by divine grant. Note, Dominion is not founded in grace. Those that have not any colourable title to eternal happiness may yet have a justifiable title to their temporal good things. Nebuchadnezzar is a very bad man, and yet God calls him his servant, because he employed him as an instrument of his providence for the chastising of the nations, and particularly his own people; and for his service therein he thus liberally repaid him. Those whom God makes use of shall not lose by him; much more will he be found the bountiful rewarder of all those that designedly and sincerely serve him.

3. He assures them that they should all be unavoidably brought under the dominion of the king of Babylon for a time (v. 7): *All nations*, all these nations and many others, shall serve *him, and his son, and his son's son*. His son was Evil-merodach, and his son's son Belshazzar, in whom his kingdom ceased: then the time of reckoning with his land came, when the tables were turned, and *many nations and great kings*, incorporated into the empire of the Medes and Persians, *served themselves of him*, as before,

~~254~~ Jeremiah 25:14. Thus Adonibezek was trampled upon himself, as he had trampled on other kings.

4. He threatens those with military execution that stood out and would not submit to the king of Babylon (v. 8): That nation that will not *put their neck under his yoke* I will *punish with sword and famine*, with one judgment after another, till it is *consumed by his hand*. Nebuchadnezzar was very unjust and barbarous in invading the rights and liberties of his neighbours thus, and forcing them into a subjection to him; yet God had just and holy ends in permitting him to do so, to punish these nations for their idolatry and gross immoralities. Those that would not serve the God that made them were justly made to serve their enemies that sought to ruin them.

5. He shows them the vanity of all the hopes they fed themselves with, that they should preserve their liberties, v. 9, 10. These nations had their prophets too, that pretended to foretell future events by the stars, or by dreams, or enchantments; and they, to please their patrons, and because they would themselves have it so, flattered them with assurances that they *should not serve the king of Babylon*. Thus they designed to animate them to a vigorous resistance; and, though they had no ground for it, they hoped hereby to do them service. But he tells them that it would prove to their destruction; for by resisting they would provoke the conqueror to deal severely with them, to *remove them*, and *drive them out* into a miserable captivity, in which they should all be lost and buried in oblivion. Particular prophecies against these nations that bordered on Israel severally, the ruin of which is here foretold in the general, we shall meet with, <ch.> 48 and 49, and Ezekiel 25, which had the same accomplishment with this here. Note, *When God judges he will overcome*.

6. He puts them in a fair way to prevent their destruction by a quiet and easy submission, v. 11. The nations that will be content to *serve the king of Babylon*, and pay him tribute for seventy years (ten apprenticeships), *those will I let remain still in their own land*. Those that will bend shall not break. Perhaps the dominion of the king of Babylon may bear no harder upon them than that of their own kings had done. It is often more a point of honour than true wisdom to prefer liberty before life. It is not mentioned to the disgrace of Issachar that because he saw *rest was good*, and the *land pleasant*, that he might peaceably enjoy it, he bowed *his shoulder to bear*, and *became a servant to tribute* (~~144~~Genesis 49:14, 15),

as these are here advised to do: *Serve the king of Babylon and you shall till the land and dwell therein.* Some would condemn this as the evidence of a mean spirit, but the prophet recommends it as that of a meek spirit, which yields to necessity, and by a quiet submission to the hardest turns of Providence makes the best of bad: it is better to do so than by struggling to make it worse.

— *Levius fit patientia*
Quicquid corrigere est nefas. — *Hor.*

— *When we needs must bear,*
Enduring patience makes the burden light. — *Creech.*

Many might have prevented destroying providences by humbling themselves under humbling providences. It is better to take up a lighter cross in our way than to pull a heavier on our own head.


27 JEREMIAH 27:12-22

SUBMISSION TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR URGED

What was said to all the nations is here with a particular tenderness applied to the nation of the Jews, for whom Jeremiah was sensibly concerned. The case at present stood thus: Judah and Jerusalem had often contested with the king of Babylon, and still were worsted; many both of their valuable persons and their valuable goods were carried to Babylon already, and some of the *vessels of the Lord's house* particularly. Now how this struggle would issue was the question. They had those among them at Jerusalem who pretended to be prophets, who bade them hold out and they should, in a little time, be too hard for the king of Babylon and recover all that they had lost. Now Jeremiah is sent to bid them yield and knock under, for that, instead of recovering what they had lost, they should otherwise lose all that remained; and to press them to this is the scope of these verses.

I. Jeremiah humbly addresses the king of Judah, to persuade him to surrender to the king of Babylon. His act would be the people's and would determine them, and therefore he speaks to him as to them all (v. 12): *Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and live.* Is it their wisdom to submit to the heavy iron yoke of a cruel tyrant, that they may

secure the lives of their bodies? And is it not much more our wisdom to submit to the sweet and easy yoke of our rightful Lord and Master Jesus Christ, that we may secure the lives of our souls? Bring down your spirits to repentance and faith, and that is the way to bring up your spirits to heaven and glory. And with much more cogency and compassion may we expostulate with perishing souls than Jeremiah here expostulates with a perishing people: “*Why will you die by the sword and the famine — miserable deaths, which you inevitably run yourselves upon, under pretence of avoiding miserable lives?*” What God had spoken, in general, of all those that would not submit to the king of Babylon, he would have them to apply to themselves and be afraid of. It were well if sinners would, in like manner, be afraid of the destruction threatened against all those that will not have *Christ to reign over them*, and reason thus with themselves, “*Why should we die the second death, which is a thousand times worse than that by sword and famine, when we might submit and live?*”

II. He addresses himself likewise to the priests and the people (v. 16), to persuade them to *serve the king of Babylon*, that they might *live*, and might prevent the desolation of the city (v. 17): “*Wherefore should it be laid waste, as certainly it will be if you stand it out?*” The priests had been Jeremiah's enemies, and had sought his life to destroy it, yet he approves himself their friend, and seeks their lives, to preserve and secure them, which is an example to us to render *good for evil*. When the *blood-thirsty hate the upright, yet the just seek his soul*, and the welfare of it,  Proverbs 29:10. The matter was far gone here; they were upon the brink of ruin, which they would not have been brought to if they would have taken Jeremiah's counsel; yet he continues his friendly admonitions to them, to save the last stake and manage that wisely, and now at length in this their day to understand the *things that belong to their peace*, when they had but one day to turn them in.

III. In both these addresses he warns them against giving credit to the false prophets that rocked them asleep in their security, because they saw that they loved to slumber: “*Hearken not to the words of the prophets* (v. 14), *your prophets*, v. 16. They are not God's prophets; he never sent them; they do not serve him, nor seek to please him; they are yours, for they say what you would have them say, and aim at nothing but to please you.” Two things their prophets flattered them into the belief of: —

1 That the power which the king of Babylon had gained over them should now shortly be broken. They said (v. 14), “*You shall not serve the king of Babylon; you need not submit voluntarily, for you shall not be compelled to submit.*” This they prophesied *in the name of the Lord* (v. 15), as if God had sent them to the people on this errand, in kindness to them, that they might not disparage themselves by an inglorious surrender. But it was a lie. They said that God sent them; but that was false; he disowns it: *I have not sent them, saith the Lord.* They said that they should never be brought into subjection to the king of Babylon; but that was false too, the event proved it so. They said that to hold out to the last would be the way to secure themselves and their city; but that was false, for it would certainly end in their being driven out and perishing. So that it was all a lie, from first to last; and the prophets that deceived the people with these lies did, in the issue, but deceive themselves; the blind leaders and the blind followers fell together into the ditch: That *you might perish, you, and the prophets that prophesy unto you*, who will be so far from warranting your security that they cannot secure themselves. Note, Those that encourage sinners to go on in their sinful ways will in the end perish with them.

2. They prophesied that the vessels of the temple, which the king of Babylon had already carried away, should now shortly be brought back (v. 16); this they fed the priests with the hopes of, knowing how acceptable it would be to them, who loved the *gold of the temple* better than the *temple that sanctified the gold*. These vessels were taken away when Jeconiah was carried captive into Babylon, v. 20. We have the story, and it is a melancholy one, ^{<2213>}2 Kings 24:13, 15; ^{<4460>}2 Chronicles 36:10. All the *goodly vessels* (that is, all the *vessels of gold* that were *in the house of the Lord*), with all the treasures, were taken as prey, and brought to Babylon. This was grievous to them above any thing; for the temple was their pride and confidence, and the stripping of that was too plain an indication of that which the true prophet told them, that their *God had departed from them*. Their false prophets therefore had no other way to make them easy than by telling them that the king of Babylon should be forced to restore them in a little while. Now here,

(1.) Jeremiah bids them think of preserving the vessels that remained by their prayers, rather than of bringing back those that were gone by their prophecies (v. 18): *If they be prophets*, as they pretend, and if *the word of the Lord be with them* — if they have any intercourse with heaven and any interest there, let them improve it for the stopping of the progress of the

judgment; let them step into the gap, and stand with their censers *between the living and the dead*, between that which is carried away and that which remains, that *the plague may be stayed*; let them make intercession with the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left go not after the rest.

[1.] Instead of prophesying, let them pray. Note, Prophets must be praying men; by being much in prayer they must make it to appear that they keep up a correspondence with heaven. We cannot think that those do, as prophets, ever hear thence, who do not frequently by prayer send thither. By praying for the safety and prosperity of the sanctuary they must make it to appear that, as becomes prophets, they are of a public spirit; and by the success of their prayers it will appear that God favours them.

[2.] Instead of being concerned for the retrieving of what they had lost, they must bestir themselves for the securing of what was left, and take it as a great favour if they can gain that point. When God's judgments are abroad we must not seek great things, but be thankful for a little.

(2.) He assures them that even this point should not be gained, but the brazen vessels should go after the golden ones, v. 19, 22. Nebuchadnezzar had found so good a booty once that he would be sure to come again and take all he could find, not only in *the house of the Lord*, but in the *king's house*. They shall all be carried to Babylon in triumph, and *there shall they be*. But he concludes with a gracious promise that the time should come when they should all be returned: *Until the day that I visit them in mercy*, according to appointment, and *then I will bring those vessels up again, and restore them to this place*, to their place. Surely they were under the protection of a special Providence, else they would have been melted down and put to some other use; but there was to be a second temple, for which they were to be reserved. We read particularly of the return of them, ⁴¹⁰⁸Ezra 1:8. Note, Though the return of the church's prosperity do not come in our time, we must not therefore despair of it, for it will come in God's time. Though those who said, *The vessels of the Lord's house shall shortly be brought again*, prophesied a lie (v. 16), yet he that said, *They shall at length be brought again*, prophesied the truth. We are apt to set our clock before God's dial, and then to quarrel because they do not agree; but the Lord is a God of judgment, and it is fit that we should wait for him.