

CHAPTER 52

History is the best expositor of prophecy; and therefore, for the better understanding of the prophecies of this book which relate to the destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, we are here furnished with an account of that sad event. It is much the same with the history we had 2 Kings 24 and 25, and many of the particulars we had before in that book, but the matter is here repeated and put together, to give light to the book of the Lamentations, which follows next, and to serve as a key to it. That article in the close concerning the advancement of Jehoiachin in his captivity, which happened after Jeremiah's time, gives colour to the conjecture of those who suppose that this chapter was not written by Jeremiah himself, but by some man divinely inspired among those in captivity, for a constant memorandum to those who in Babylon preferred Jerusalem above their chief joy. In this chapter we have,

- I.** The bad reign of Zedekiah, very bad in regard both of sin and of punishment (v. 1-3).
- II.** The besieging and taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (v. 4-7).
- III.** The severe usage which Zedekiah and the princes met with (v. 8-11).
- IV.** The destruction of the temple and the city (v. 12-14).
- V.** The captivity of the people (v. 15, 16) and the numbers of those that were carried away into captivity (v. 28-30).
- VI.** The carrying off of the plunder of the temple (v. 17-23).
- VII.** The slaughter of the priests, and some other great men, in cold blood (v. 24-27).
- VIII.** The better days which king Jehoiachin lived to see in the latter end of his time, after the death of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 31-34).

~~2510~~ JEREMIAH 52:1-11

JERUSALEM TAKEN BY NEBUCHADNEZZAR

This narrative begins no higher than the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, though there were two captivities before, one in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the other in the first of Jeconiah; but probably it was drawn up by some of those that were carried away with Zedekiah, as a reproach to themselves for imagining that they should not go into captivity after their brethren, with which hopes they had long flattered themselves. We have here,

1. God's just displeasure against Judah and Jerusalem for their sin, v. 3. His anger was against them to such a degree that he determined to *cast them out from his presence*, his favourable gracious presence, as a father, when he is extremely angry with an undutiful son, bids him get out of his presence, he expelled them from that good land that had such tokens of his presence in providential bounty and that holy city and temple that had such tokens of his presence in covenant-grace and love. Note, Those that are banished from God's ordinances have reason to complain that they are in some degree *cast out of his presence*; yet none are cast out from God's gracious presence but those that by sin have first thrown themselves out of it. This fruit of sin we should therefore deprecate above any thing, as David (~~2511~~ Psalm 51:11), *Cast me not away from thy presence*.

2. Zedekiah's bad conduct and management, to which God left him, in displeasure against the people, and for which God punished him, in displeasure against him. Zedekiah had arrived at years of discretion when he came to the throne; he *was twenty-one years old* (v. 1); he was none of the worst of the kings (we never read of his idolatries), yet his character is that he *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*, for he did not do the good he should have done. But that evil deed of his which did in a special manner hasten this destruction was his *rebelling against the king of Babylon*, which was both his sin and his folly, and brought ruin upon his people, not only meritoriously, but efficiently. God was greatly displeased with him for his perfidious dealing with the king of Babylon (as we find, ~~2515~~ Ezekiel 17:15, etc.); and, because he was angry at Judah and Jerusalem, he put him into the hand of his own counsels, to do that foolish thing which proved fatal to him and his kingdom.

3. The possession which the Chaldeans at length gained of Jerusalem, after eighteen months' siege. They sat down before it, and blocked it up, in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month (v. 4), and made themselves masters of it in the *eleventh year in the fourth month*, v. 6. In remembrance of these two steps towards their ruin, while they were in captivity, they kept *a fast in the fourth month, and a fast in the tenth* (~~3089~~ Zechariah 8:19): that in the *fifth month* was in remembrance of the burning of the temple, and that in the *seventh* of the murder of Gedaliah. We may easily imagine, or rather cannot imagine, what a sad time it was with Jerusalem, during this year and half that it was besieged, when all provisions were cut off from coming to them and they were ever and anon alarmed by the attacks of the enemy, and, being obstinately resolved to hold out to the last extremity, nothing remained but a *certain fearful looking for of judgment*. That which disabled them to hold out, and yet could not prevail with them to capitulate, was the *famine in the city* (v. 6); there was *no bread for the people of the land*, so that the soldiers could not make good their posts, but were rendered wholly unserviceable; and then no wonder that *the city was broken up*, v. 7. Walls, in such a case, will not hold out long without men, any more than men without walls; nor will both together stand people in any stead without God and his protection.

4. The inglorious retreat of the king and his mighty men. They got out of the city *by night* (v. 7) and made the best of their way, I know not whither, nor perhaps they themselves; but the king was overtaken by the pursuers *in the plains of Jericho*, his guards were dispersed, and all his army was *scattered from him*, v. 8. His fright was not causeless, for there is no escaping the judgments of God; they will *come upon the sinner*, and will *overtake him*, let him flee where he will (~~4885~~ Deuteronomy 28:15), and these judgments particularly that are here executed were there threatened, v. 52, 53, etc.

5. The sad doom passed upon Zedekiah by the king of Babylon, and immediately put in execution. he treated him as a rebel, *gave judgment upon him*, v. 9. One cannot think of it without the utmost vexation and regret that a king, a king of Judah, a king of the house of David, should be arraigned as a criminal at the bar of this heathen king. But he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah* the prophet; therefore God thus humbled him. Pursuant to the sentence passed upon him by the haughty conqueror, *his sons were slain before his eyes*, and all *the princes of Judah* (v. 10); then *his eyes were put out*, and he was *bound in chains*, carried in triumph to

Babylon; perhaps they made sport with him, as they did with Samson when his eyes were put out; however, he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, wearing out the remainder of his life (I cannot say his days, for he saw day no more) in darkness and misery. He was kept in prison till *the day of his death*, but had some honour done him at his funeral, ^{<2415>}Jeremiah 34:5. Jeremiah had often told him what it would come to, but he would not take warning when he might have prevented it.

^{<2512>}JEREMIAH 52:12-23

THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY

We have here an account of the woeful havoc that was made by the Chaldean army, a month after the city was taken, under the command of Nebuzaradan, who was *captain of the guard*, or general of the army, in this action. In the margin he is called the *chief of the slaughter-men*, or *executioners*; for soldiers are but slaughter-men, and God employs them as executioners of his sentence against a sinful people. Nebuzaradan was chief of those soldiers, but, in the execution he did, we have reason to fear he had no eye to God, but he served the king of Babylon and his own designs, now that he came into Jerusalem, into the very bowels of it, as captain of the slaughter-men there. And,

- 1.** He laid the temple in ashes, having first plundered it of every thing that was valuable: He *burnt the house of the Lord*, that holy and beautiful house, where their *fathers praised him*, ^{<2611>}Isaiah 64:11.
- 2.** He burnt the royal palace, probably that which Solomon built after he had built the temple, which was, ever since, *the king's house*.
- 3.** He burnt *all the houses of Jerusalem*, that is, all the houses of the great men, or those particularly; if any escaped, it was only some sorry cottages for the poor of the land.
- 4.** He *broke down all the walls of Jerusalem*, to be revenged upon them for standing in the way of his army so long. Thus, of a defenced city, it was made a ruin, ^{<2312>}Isaiah 25:2.
- 5.** He *carried away many into captivity* (v. 15); he took away *certain of the poor of the people*, that is, of the people in the city, for *the poor of the*

land (the poor of the country) he left for *vine-dressers and husbandmen*. He also carried off *the residue of the people that remained in the city*, that had escaped the sword and famine, and the deserters, such as he thought fit, or rather such as God thought fit; for he had already determined some for the *pestilence*, some for the *sword*, some for *famine*, and some for *captivity*, ^{<247D>}Jeremiah 15:2. But,

6. Nothing is more particularly and largely related here than the carrying away of the appurtenances of the temple. All that were of great value were carried away before, *the vessels of silver and gold*, yet some of that sort remained, which were now carried away, v. 19. But most of the temple-prey that was now seized was of brass, which, being of less value, was carried off last. When the gold was gone, the brass soon went after it, because the people repented not, according to Jeremiah's prediction, ^{<247D>}Jeremiah 27:19, etc. When the walls of the city were demolished, the pillars of the temple were pulled down too, and both in token that God, who was the strength and stay both of their civil and their ecclesiastical government, had departed from them. No walls can protect those, nor pillars sustain those, from whom God withdraws. These pillars of the temple were not for support (for there was nothing built upon them), but for ornament and significancy. They were called *Jachin* — *He will establish*; and *Boaz* — *In him is strength*; so that the breaking of these signified that God would no longer establish his house nor be the strength of it. These pillars are here very particularly described (v. 21-23, from ^{<1075>}1 Kings 7:15), that the extraordinary beauty and stateliness of them may affect us the more with the demolishing of them. All the vessels that belonged to the brazen altar were carried away; for the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was not to be purged by sacrifice or offering, ^{<0984>}1 Samuel 3:14. It is said (v. 20), *The brass of all these vessels was without weight*; so it was in the making of them (^{<1074>}1 Kings 7:47), *the weight of the brass was not then found out* (^{<1048>}2 Chronicles 4:18), and so it was in the destroying of them. Those that made great spoil of them did not stand to weigh them, as purchasers do, for, whatever they weighted, it was all their own.

~~252~~JEREMIAH 52:24-30

THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY

We have here a very melancholy account,

1. Of the slaughter of some great men, in cold blood, at Riblah, seventy-two in number (according to the number of the elders of Israel, ~~41124~~Numbers 11:24, 25), so they are computed, ~~1258~~2 Kings 25:18, 19. We read there of five out of the temple, two out of the city, five out of the court, and sixty out of the country. The account here agrees with that, except in one article; there it is said that there were five, here there were seven, of those that were *near the king*, which Dr. Lightfoot reconciles thus, that he took away seven of those that were near the king, but two of them were Jeremiah himself and Ebed-melech, who were both discharged, as we have read before, so that there were only five of them put to death, and so the number was reduced to seventy-two, some of all ranks, for they had all corrupted their way; and it is probable that such were made examples of as had been most forward to excite and promote the rebellion against the king of Babylon. *Seraiah the chief priest* is put first, whose sacred character could not exempt him from this stroke; how should it, when he himself had profaned it by sin? Seraiah the prince was *a quiet prince* (~~2553~~Jeremiah 51:59), but perhaps Seraiah the priest was not so, but unquiet and turbulent, by which he had made himself obnoxious to the king of Babylon. The leaders of this people had caused them to err, and now they are in a particular manner made monuments of divine justice.

2. Of the captivity of the rest. Come and see how *Judah was carried away captive out of his own land* (v. 27), and how it spued them out as it spued out the Canaanites that went before them, which God had told them it would certainly do if they trod in their steps and copied out their abominations, ~~1888~~Leviticus 18:28. Now here is an account,

(1.) Of two captivities which we had an account of before, one in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar (the same with that which is said to be in his eighth year, ~~12412~~2 Kings 24:12), another in his eighteenth year, the same with that which is said (v. 12) to be in his nineteenth year. But the sums here are very small, in comparison with what we find expressed concerning the former (~~1244~~2 Kings 24:14, 16), when there were 18,000 carried captive, whereas here they are said to be 3023; they are also small

in comparison with what we may reasonably suppose concerning the latter; for, when all the residue of the people were carried away (v. 15), one would think there should be more than 832 souls; therefore Dr. Lightfoot conjectures that, these accounts being joined to the story of the putting to death of the great men at Riblah, all that are here said to be carried away were *put to death* as rebels.

(2.) Of a third captivity, not mentioned before, which was in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, four years after the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 30): Then *Nebuzaradan* came, and *carried away* 745 Jews; it is probable that this was done in revenge of the murder of Gedaliah, which was another rebellion against the king of Babylon, and that those who were now taken were aiders and abettors of Ishmael in that murder, and were not only carried away, but put to death for it; yet this is uncertain. If this be the sum total of the captives (*all the persons were* 4600, v. 30), we may see how strangely they were reduced from what they had been, and may wonder as much how they came to be so numerous again as afterwards we find them; for it should seem that, as at first in Egypt, so again in Babylon, the Lord made them fruitful in the land of their affliction, and the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied. And the truth is, this people were often miracles both of judgment and mercy.

~~252~~ JEREMIAH 52:31-34

JEHOIACHIN FAVOURED BY EVIL-MERODACH

This passage of story concerning the reviving which king Jehoiachin had in his bondage we had likewise before (~~252~~ 2 Kings 25:27-30), only there it is said to be done on *the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month*, here on *the twenty-fifth*; but in a thing of this nature two days make a very slight difference in the account. It is probable that the orders were given for his release on the twenty-fifth day, but that he was not presented to the king till the twenty-seventh. We may observe in this story,

1. That new lords make new laws. Nebuchadnezzar had long kept this unhappy prince in prison; and his son, though well-affected to the prisoner, could not procure him any favour, not one smile, from his father, any more than Jonathan could for David from his father; but, when the old

peevish man was dead, his son countenanced Jehoiachin and made him a favourite. It is common for children to undo what their fathers have done; it were well if it were always as much for the better as this was.

2. That the world we live in is a changing world. Jehoiachin, in his beginning, fell from a throne into a prison, but here he is advanced again to a throne of state (v. 32), though not to a throne of power. As, before, the robes were changed into prison-garments, so now they were converted into robes again. Such chequer-work is this world; prosperity and adversity are set the one over-against the other, that we may learn to *rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not*.

3. That, though the night of affliction be very long, yet we must not despair but that the day may dawn at last. Jehoiachin was thirty-seven years a prisoner, in confinement, in contempt, ever since he was eighteen years old, in which time we may suppose him so inured to captivity that he had forgotten the sweets of liberty; or, rather, that after so long an imprisonment it would be doubly welcome to him. Let those whose afflictions have been lengthened out encourage themselves with this instance; the vision will at the end speak comfortably, and therefore wait for it. *Dum spiro spero — While there is life there is hope. Non si male nunc, et olim sic erit — Though now we suffer, we shall not always suffer.*

4. That god can make his people to find favour in the eyes of those that are their oppressors, and unaccountably turn their hearts to pity them, according to that word (¹⁹⁶⁵Psalm 106:46), *He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives*. He can bring those that have spoken roughly to speak kindly, and those to feed his people that have fed upon them. Those therefore that are under oppression will find that it is not in vain to hope and quietly to *wait for the salvation of the Lord*. Therefore our times are in God's hand, because the hearts of all we deal with are so.

5. And now, upon the whole matter, comparing the prophecy and the history of this book together, we may learn, in general,

(1.) That it is no new thing for churches and persons highly dignified to degenerate, and become very corrupt.

(2.) That iniquity tends to the ruin of those that harbour it; and, if it be not repented of and forsaken, will certainly end in their ruin:

(3.) That external professions and privileges will not only not amount to an excuse for sin and an exemption from ruin, but will be a very great aggravation of both.

(4.) That no word of God shall fall to the ground, but the event will fully answer the prediction; and the unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings, any more than his promises, of no effect. The justice and truth of God are here written in bloody characters, for the conviction or the confusion of all those that make a jest of his threatenings. Let them *not be deceived, God is not mocked.*