

CHAPTER 16

In this chapter,

- I.** The greatness of the calamity that was coming upon the Jewish nation is illustrated by prohibitions given to the prophet neither to set up a house of his own (v. 1-4) nor to go into the house of mourning (v. 5-7) nor into the house of feasting (v. 8, 9).
- II.** God is justified in these severe proceedings against them by an account of their great wickedness (v. 10-13).
- III.** An intimation is given of mercy in reserve (v. 14, 15).
- IV.** Some hopes are given that the punishment of the sin should prove the reformation of the sinners, and that they should return to God at length in a way of duty, and so be qualified for his returns to them in a way of favour (v. 16-21).

◀ JEREMIAH 16:1-9

PROHIBITIONS GIVEN TO JEREMIAH

The prophet is here for a sign to the people. They would not regard what he said; let it be tried whether they will regard what he *does*. In general, he must conduct himself so, in every thing, as became one that expected to see his country in ruins very shortly. This he foretold, but few regarded the prediction; therefore he is to show that he is himself fully satisfied in the truth of it. Others go on in their usual course, but he, in the prospect of these sad times, is forbidden and therefore forbears marriage, mourning for the dead, and mirth. Note, Those that would convince others of and affect them with the word of God must make it appear, even in the most self-denying instances, that they do believe it themselves and are affected with it. If we would rouse others out of their security, and persuade them to sit loose to the world, we must ourselves be mortified to present things and show that we expect the dissolution of them.

I. Jeremiah must not marry, nor think of having a family and being a housekeeper (v. 2): *Thou shalt not take thee a wife*, nor think of *having*

sons and daughters in this place, not in the land of Judah, not in Jerusalem, not in Anathoth. The Jews, more than any people, valued themselves on their early marriages and their numerous offspring. But Jeremiah must live a bachelor, not so much in honour of virginity as in diminution of it. By this it appears that it was advisable and seasonable only in calamitous times, and times of *present distress*, ^{407b}1 Corinthians 7:26. That it is so is a part of the calamity. There may be a time when it will be said, *Blessed is the womb that bears not*, ^{429b}Luke 23:29. When we see such times at hand it is wisdom for all, especially for prophets, to keep themselves as much as may be from being *entangled with the affairs of this life* and encumbered with that which, the dearer it is to them, the more it will be the matter of their care, and fear, and grief, at such a time. The reason here given is because the *fathers and mothers, the sons and the daughters, shall die of grievous deaths*, v. 3, 4. As for those that have wives and children,

1. They will have such a clog upon them that they cannot flee from those deaths. A single man may make his escape and shift for his own safety, when he that has a wife and children can neither find means to convey with them nor find in his heart to go and leave them behind him.
2. They will be in continual terror for fear of those deaths; and the more they have to lose by them the greater will the terror and consternation be when death appears every where in its triumphant pomp and power.
3. The death of every child, and the aggravating circumstances of it, will be a new death to the parent. Better have no children than have them brought forth and bred up *for the murderer* (^{393b}Hosea 9:13, 14), than see them live and die in misery. Death is grievous, but some deaths are more grievous than others, both to those that die and to their relations that survive them; hence we read of *so great a death*, ^{411b}2 Corinthians 1:10. Two things are used a little to palliate and alleviate the terror of death as to this world, and to sugar the bitter pill — bewailing the dead and burying them; but, to make those deaths grievous indeed, these are denied: *They shall not be lamented*, but shall be carried off, as if all the world were weary of them; nay, they *shall not be buried*, but left exposed, as if they were designed to be monuments of justice. *They shall be a dung upon the face of the earth*, not only despicable, but detestable, as if they were good for nothing but to manure the ground; being *consumed*, some *by the sword* and some *by famine, their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven*

and the beasts of the earth. Will not any one say, “Better be without children than live to see them come to this?” What reason have we to say, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit*, when those creatures that we expect to be our greatest comforts may prove not only our heaviest cares, but our sorest crosses!

II. Jeremiah must not go to the house of mourning upon occasion of the death of any of his neighbours or relations (v. 5): *Enter thou not into the house of mourning.* It was usual to condole with those whose relations were dead, to *bemoan them*, to *cut themselves*, and *make themselves bald*, which, it seems, was commonly practised as an expression of mourning, though forbidden by the law, ^{GEN}Deuteronomy 14:1. Nay, sometimes, in a passion of grief, they did *tear themselves for them* (v. 6, 7), partly in honour of the deceased, thus signifying that they thought there was a great loss of them, and partly in compassion to the surviving relations, to whom the burden will be made the lighter by their having sharers with them in their grief. They used to mourn with them, and so *to comfort them for the dead*, as Job's friends with him and the Jews with Martha and Mary; and it was a friendly office to *give them a cup of consolation to drink*, to provide cordials for them and press them earnestly to drink of them for the support of their spirits, give wine to those that are of heavy heart *for their father or mother*, that it may be some comfort to them to find that, though they have lost their parents, yet they have some friends left that have a concern for them. Thus the usage stood, and it was a laudable usage. It is a good work to others, as well as of good use to ourselves, to *go to the house of mourning*. It seems, the prophet Jeremiah had been wont to abound in good offices of this kind, and it well became his character both as a pious man and as a prophet; and one would think it should have made him better beloved among his people than it should seem he was. But now God bids him not lament the death of his friends as usual, for 1. His sorrow for the destruction of his country in general must swallow up his sorrow for particular deaths. His tears must now be turned into another channel; and there is occasion enough for them all.

2. He had little reason to lament those who died now just before the judgments entered which he saw at the door, but rather to think those happy who were seasonable *taken away from the evil to come*.

3. This was to be a type of what was coming, when there should be such universal confusion that all neighbourly friendly offices should be

neglected. Men shall be in deaths so often, and even dying daily, that they shall have no time, no room, no heart, for the ceremonies that used to attend death. The sorrows shall be so ponderous as not to admit relief, and every one so full of grief for his own troubles that he shall have no thought of his neighbours. All shall be mourners then, and no comforters; every one will find it enough to bear his own burden; for (v. 5), *“I have taken away my peace from this people, put a full period to their prosperity, deprived them of health, wealth, and quiet, and friends, and every thing wherewith they might comfort themselves and one another.”* Whatever peace we enjoy, it is God's peace; it is his gift, and, *if he give quietness, who then can make trouble?* But, if we make not a good use of his peace, he can and will take it away; and where are we then? ¹⁸⁹Job 34:29. *“I will take away my peace, even my loving-kindness and mercies;”* these shall be shut up and restrained, which are the fresh springs from which all their fresh streams flow, and then farewell all good. Note, Those have cut themselves off from all true peace that have thrown themselves out of the favour of God. All is gone when God takes away from us his lovingkindness and his mercies. Then it follows (v. 6), *Both the great and the small shall die, even in this land, the land of Canaan, that used to be called the land of the living. God's favour is our life; take away that, and we die, we perish, we all perish.*

III. Jeremiah must not go to the house of mirth, any more than to the house of mourning, v. 8. It had been his custom, and it was innocent enough, when any of his friends made entertainments at their houses and invited him to them, to *go and sit with them*, not merely to drink, but *to eat and to drink*, soberly and cheerfully. But now he must not take that liberty,

1. Because it was unseasonable, and inconsistent with the providences of God in reference to that land and nation. God called aloud to *weeping, and mourning, and fasting*; he was coming forth against them in his judgments; and it was time for them to *humble themselves*; and it well became the prophet who gave them the warning to give them an example of taking the warning, and complying with it, and so to make it appear that he did himself believe it. Ministers ought to be examples of self-denial and mortification, and to show themselves affected with those terrors of the Lord with which they desire to affect others. And it becomes all the sons of Zion to sympathize with her in her afflictions, and not to be merry when she is perplexed, ³⁰⁶Amos 6:6.

2. Because he must thus show the people what sad times were coming upon them. His friends wondered that he would not meet them, as he used to do, in the house of feasting. But he lets them know it was to intimate to them that all their feasting would be at an end shortly (v. 9): *“I will cause to cease the voice of mirth. You shall have nothing to feast on, nothing to rejoice in, but be surrounded with calamities that shall mar your mirth and cast a damp upon it.”* God can find ways to tame the most jovial. *“This shall be done in this place, in Jerusalem, that used to be the joyous city and thought her joys were all secure to her. It shall be done in your eyes, in your sight, to be a vexation to you, who now look so haughty and so merry. It shall be done in your days; you yourselves shall live to see it.”* The voice of praise they had made to cease by their iniquities and idolatries, and therefore justly God made to cease among them *the voice of mirth and gladness*. The voice of God's prophets was not heard, was not heeded, among them, and therefore no longer shall *the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride*, of the songs that used to grace the nuptials, be heard among them. See ^{246D}Jeremiah 7:34.

^{246D}JEREMIAH 16:10-13

CAUSES OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS

Here is,

1. An enquiry made into the reasons why God would bring those judgments upon them (v. 10): *When thou shalt show this people all these words, the words of this curse, they will say unto thee, Wherefore has the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us?* One would hope that there were some among them that asked this question with a humble penitent heart, desiring to know what was the sin for which God contended with them, that they might cast it away and prevent the judgment: *“Show us the Jonah that raises the storm and we will throw it overboard.”* But it seems here to be the language of those who quarrelled at the word of God, and challenged him to show what they had done which might deserve so severe a punishment: *“What is our iniquity? Or what is our sin? What crime have we even been guilty of, proportionable to such a sentence?”* Instead of humbling and condemning themselves, they stand upon their own justification and insinuate that God did them wrong in pronouncing

this evil against them, that he *laid upon them more than was right*, and that they had reason to *enter into judgment with God*, ^{<K&B>}Job 34:23. Note, It is amazing to see how hardly sinners are brought to justify God and judge themselves when they are in trouble, and to own the iniquity and the sin that have procured them the trouble.

2. A plain and full answer given to this enquiry. Do they ask the prophet why, and for what reason, God is thus angry with them? He shall not stop their mouths by telling them that they may be sure there is a sufficient reason, the righteous God is never *angry without cause*, without good cause; but he must tell them particularly what is the cause, that they may be convinced and humbled, or at least that God may be justified. Let them know then,

(1.) That God visited upon them the iniquities of their fathers (v. 11): *Your fathers have forsaken me, and have not kept my law*. They shook off divine institutions and grew weary of them (they thought them too plain, too mean), and then they *walked after other gods*, whose worship was more gay and pompous; and, being fond of variety and novelty, they *served them and worshipped them*; and this was the sin which God had said, in the second commandment, he would *visit upon their children*, who kept up these idolatrous usages, because they received them *by tradition from their fathers*, ^{<Q18>}1 Peter 1:18.

(2.) That God reckoned with them for their own iniquities (v. 12): “You have made your fathers' sin your own, and have become obnoxious to the punishment which in their days was deferred, for *you have done worse than your fathers*.” If they had made a good use of their fathers' reprieve, and had been led by the patience of God to repentance, they would have fared the better for it and the judgment would have been prevented, the reprieve turned into a national pardon; but, making an ill use of it, and being hardened by it in their sins, they fared the worse for it, and, the reprieve having expired, an addition was made to the sentence and it was executed with the more severity. They were more impudent and obstinate in sin than their fathers, *walked every one after the imagination of his own heart*, made that their guide and rule and were resolved to follow that, on purpose *that they might not hearken to God* and his prophets. They designedly suffered their own lusts and passions to be noisy, that they might drown the voice of their consciences. No wonder then that God has taken up this resolution concerning them (v. 13): “*I will cast you out of*

this land, this land of light, this valley of vision. Since you will not hearken to me, you shall not hear me; you shall be hurried away, not into a neighbouring country which you have formerly had some acquaintance and correspondence with, but into a far country, *a land that you know not, neither you nor your fathers*, in which you have no interest, nor can expect to meet with any comfortable society, to be an allay to your misery.” Justly were those banished into a strange land who doted upon strange gods, which neither they nor their fathers knew, ^{<657>}Deuteronomy 32:17. Two things would make their case there very miserable, and both of them relate to the soul, the better part; the greatest calamities of their captivity were those which affected that and debarred that from its bliss.

[1.] “It is the happiness of the soul to be employed in the service of God; but *there shall you serve other gods day and night*; that is, you shall be in continual temptation to serve them and perhaps compelled to do it by your cruel task-masters; and, when you are forced to worship idols, you will be as sick of such worship as ever you were fond of it when it was forbidden you by your godly kings.” See how God often makes men's sin their punishment, and *fills the backslider in heart with his own ways*. “You shall have no public worship at all but the worship of idols, and then you will think with regret how you slighted the worship of the true God.”

[2.] “It is the happiness of the soul to have some tokens of the lovingkindness of God, but you shall go to a strange land, *where I will not show you favour*.” If they had had God's favour, that would have made even the land of their captivity a pleasant land; but, if they lie under his wrath, the yoke of their oppression will be intolerable to them.

~~216~~ JEREMIAH 16:14-21

DELIVERANCE FROM BABYLON

There is a mixture of mercy and judgment in these verses, and it is hard to know to which to apply some of the passages here — they are so interwoven, and some seem to look as far forward as the times of the gospel.

I. God will certainly execute judgment upon them for their idolatries. Let them expect it, for the decree has gone forth.

1. God sees all their sins, though they commit them ever so secretly and palliate them ever so artfully (v. 17): *My eyes are upon all their ways.* They have not their eye upon God, have no regard to him, stand in no awe of him; but he has his eye upon them; neither they nor their sins are *hidden from his face, from his eyes.* Note, None of the sins of sinners either can be concealed from God or shall be overlooked by him, ^{<107>}Proverbs 5:21; ^{<132>}Job 34:21; ^{<190>}Psalm 90:8.

2. God is highly displeased, particularly at their idolatries, v. 18. As his omniscience convicts them, so his justice condemns them: *I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double,* not double to what it deserves, but double to what they expect and to what I have done formerly. Or I will recompense it *abundantly*; they shall now pay for their long reprieve and the divine patience they have abused. The sin for which God has a controversy with them is their having *defiled God's land* with their idolatries, and not only alienated that which he was entitled to as his inheritance, but polluted that which he dwelt in with delight as his inheritance, and made it offensive to him *with the carcasses of their detestable things*, the gods themselves which they worshipped, the images of which, though they were of gold and silver, were as loathsome to God as the putrid carcasses of men or beasts are to us. Idols are *carcasses of detestable things*. God hates them, and so should we. Or he might refer to the sacrifices which they offered to these idols, with which *the land was filled*; for they had high places in all the coasts and corners of it. This was the sin which, above any other, incensed God against them.

3. He will find out and raise up instruments of his wrath, that shall *cast them out of their land*, according to the sentence passed upon them (v. 16): *I will send for many fishers and many hunters* — the Chaldean army, that shall have many ways of ensnaring and destroying them, by fraud as fishers, by force as hunters. They shall find them out wherever they are, and shall chase and closely pursue them, to their ruin. They shall discover them wherever they are hid, in *hills or mountains, or holes of the rocks*, and shall drive them out. God has various ways of prosecuting a people with his judgments that avoid the convictions of his word. He has men at command fit for his purpose; he has them within call, and can send for them when he pleases.

4. Their bondage in Babylon shall be sorer and much more grievous than that in Egypt, their task-masters more cruel, and their lives made more

bitter. This is implied in the promise (v. 14, 15), that their deliverance out of Babylon shall be more illustrious in itself, and more welcome to them, than that out of Egypt. Their slavery in Egypt came upon them gradually and almost insensibly; that in Babylon came upon them at once and with all the aggravating circumstances of terror. In Egypt they had a Goshen of their own, but none such in Babylon. In Egypt they were used as servants that were useful, in Babylon as captives that had been hateful.

5. They shall be warned, and God shall be glorified, by these judgments brought upon them. These judgments have a voice, and speak aloud,

(1.) Instruction to them. When God chastens them he teaches them. By this rod God expostulates with them (v. 20): “*Shall a man make gods to himself? Will any man be so perfectly void of all reason and consideration as to think that a god of his own making can stand him in any stead? Will you ever again be such fools as you have been, to make to yourselves gods which are no gods, when you have a God whom you may call your own, who made you, and is himself the true and living God?*”

(2.) Honour to God; for he will be known by the judgments which he executes. He will first recompense their iniquity (v. 18), and then he will *this once* (v. 21) — this once for all, not by many interruptions of their peace, but this one desolation and destruction of it. “*For this once, and no more, I will cause them to know my hand, the length and weight of my punishing hand, how far it can reach and how deeply it can wound. And they shall know that my name is Jehovah, a God with whom there is no contending, who gives being to threatenings and puts life into them as well as promises.*”

II. Yet he has mercy in store for them, intimations of which come in here for the encouragement of the prophet himself and of those few among them that tremble at God's word. It was said, with an air of severity (v. 13), that God would banish them into a strange land; but, that thereby they might not be driven to despair, there follow immediately words of comfort.

1. *The days will come, the joyful days, when the same hand that dispersed them shall gather them again, v. 14, 15. They are cast out, but they are not cast off, they are not cast away. They shall be brought up from the land of the north, the land of their captivity, where they are held with a strong hand, and from all the lands whither they are driven, and where they*

seemed to be lost and buried in the crowd; nay, *I will bring them again into their own land*, and settle them there. As he foregoing threatenings agreed with what was written in this law, so does this promise. *Yet will I not cast them away*, ^{<1854>}Leviticus 26:44. *Thence will the Lord thy God gather thee*, ^{<1514>}Deuteronomy 30:4. And the following words (v. 16) may be understood as a promise; God will send for fishers and hunters, the Medes and Persians, that shall find them out in the countries where they are scattered, and send them back to their own land; or Zerubbabel, and others of their own nation, who should fish them out and hunt after them, to persuade them to return; or whatever instruments the Spirit of God made use of to *stir up their spirits to go up*, which at first they were backward to do. They began to nestle in Babylon; but, *as an eagle stirs up her nest and flutters over her young*, so God did by them, ^{<381>}Zechariah 2:7.

2. Their deliverance out of Babylon should, upon some accounts, be more illustrious and memorable than their deliverance out of Egypt was. Both were the Lord's doing and marvellous in their eyes; both were proofs that the Lord liveth and were to be kept in everlasting remembrance, to his honour, as the living God; but the fresh mercy shall be so surprising, so welcome, that it shall even abolish the memory of the former. Not but that new mercies should put us in mind of old ones, and give us occasion to renew our thanksgivings for them; yet because we are tempted to think that the former days were better than these, and to ask, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* as if God's *arm had waxed short*, and to cry up the age of miracles above the later ages, when mercies are wrought in a way of common providence, therefore we are allowed here comparatively to forget the bringing of Israel out of Egypt as a deliverance outdone by that out of Babylon. That was done *by might and power*, this *by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, ^{<306>}Zechariah 4:6. In this there was more of pardoning mercy (the most glorious branch of divine mercy) than in that; for their captivity in Babylon had more in it of the punishment of sin than their bondage in Egypt; and therefore that which comforts Zion in her deliverance out of Babylon is this, that *her iniquity is pardoned*, ^{<241>}Isaiah 40:2. Note, God glorifies himself, and we must glorify him, in those mercies that have no miracles in them, as well as in those that have. And, though the favours of God to our fathers must not be forgotten, yet those to ourselves in our own day we must especially give thanks for.

3. Their deliverance out of captivity shall be accompanied with a blessed reformation, and they shall return effectually cured of their inclination to idolatry, which will complete their deliverance and make it a mercy indeed. They had defiled their own land with their *detestable things*, v. 18. But, when they have smarted for so doing, they shall come and humble themselves before God, v. 19-21.

(1.) They shall be brought to acknowledge that their God only is God indeed, for he is a God in need — “*My strength* to support and comfort me, *my fortress* to protect and shelter me, *and my refuge* to whom I may flee *in the day of affliction*.” Note, Need drives many to God who had set themselves at a distance from him. Those that slighted him in the day of their prosperity will be glad to flee to him in the day of their affliction.

(2.) They shall be quickened to return to him by the conversion of the Gentiles: *The Gentiles shall come to thee from the ends of the earth*; and therefore shall not we come? Or, “The Jews, who had by their idolatries made themselves as Gentiles (so I rather understand it), *shall come to thee* by repentance and reformation, shall return to their duty and allegiance, even *from the ends of the earth*, from all the countries whither they were driven.” The prophet comforts himself with the hope of this, and in a transport of joy returns to God the notice he had given him of it: “*O Lord! my strength and my fortress*, I am now easy, since thou hast given me a prospect of multitudes that shall *come to thee from the ends of the earth*, both of Jewish converts and of Gentile proselytes.” Note, Those that are brought to God themselves cannot but rejoice greatly to see others coming to him, coming back to him.

(3.) They shall acknowledge the folly of their ancestors, which it becomes them to do, when they were smarting for the sins of their ancestors: “*Surely our fathers have inherited*, not the satisfaction they promised themselves and their children, but *lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit*. We are now sensible that our fathers were cheated in their idolatrous worship; it did not prove what it promised, and therefore what have we to do any more with it?” Note, It were well if the disappointment which some have met with in the service of sin, and the pernicious consequences of it to them, might prevail to deter others from treading in their steps.

(4.) They shall reason themselves out of their idolatry; and that reformation is likely to be sincere and durable which results from a

rational conviction of the gross absurdity there is in sin. They shall argue thus with themselves (and it is well argued), *Should a man* be such a fool, so perfectly void of the reason of a man, as to *make gods to himself*, the creatures of his own fancy, the work of his own hands, when they are really *no gods?* v. 20. Can a man be so besotted, so perfectly lost to human understanding, as to expect any divine blessing or favour from that which pretends to no divinity but what it first received from him?

(5.) They shall herein give honour to God, and make it to appear that they know both his hand in his providence and his name in his word, and that they are brought to know his name by what they are made to know of his hand, v. 21. *This once*, now at length, they shall be made to know that which they would not be brought to know by all the pains the prophets took with them. Note, So stupid are we that nothing less than the mighty hand of divine grace, known experimentally, can make us know rightly the name of God as it is revealed to us.

4. Their deliverance out of captivity shall be a type and figure of this great salvation to be wrought out by the Messiah, who shall *gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad*. And this is that which so far outshines the deliverance out of Egypt as even to eclipse the lustre of it, and make it even to be forgotten. To this some apply that of the *many fishers and hunters*, the preachers of the gospel, who were *fishers of men*, to enclose souls with the gospel net, to find them out *in every mountain and hill*, and secure them for Christ. Then the Gentiles came to God, some *from the ends of the earth*, and turned to the worship of him from the service of dumb idols.