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L I F E

AND

PROPHECIES

OF

J E R E M I A H.

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# THE LIFE AND PROPHECIES

OF

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# JEREMIAH.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE principal prophet in the time of Josiah, one of the good kings of Judah, was JEREMIAH. Hilkiash, his father, was a priest, and dwelt in Anathoth, which was one of the cities allotted to the priests, when the Israelites first entered Canaan.\* It was in the tribe of Benjamin, and about three miles north of Jerusalem.

According to the Jewish law, Jeremiah was himself a priest; but the Lord had determined, even before he was born, that he should be a prophet, to bear his messages to the people.

He seems to have begun to prophesy when

\* Josh. xxi. 18.

he was quite young; some think when he was not more than fourteen years old. It was about the time when Josiah commenced destroying the idols, that the word of God first came to Jeremiah, and told him that he was to be a prophet to the nations. When he heard this, he replied, "Ah! Lord God! behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child"—meaning, probably, that he thought himself too young and inexperienced for such an important service.

But the Lord replied to him, "Say not 'I am a child,' for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee, saith the Lord."

Then the Lord touched Jeremiah's mouth, to signify that he gave him power to speak as a prophet, and said to him, "Behold I have put my words in thy mouth. See I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." That is, he should declare the judgments which the Lord was about to bring upon the nations.



He was then directed to rise up boldly, and speak to the people all that God should command. He was plainly warned of the opposition which should arise against him, yet God assured him it should not prevail. "I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

It should be remembered that the Jews, at this time, practised idolatry. Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, led the people into the most abominable idolatry. He encouraged the worship of the images that the heathen nations of Canaan had followed as their gods, and built altars to them, and to the sun, moon, and stars, in the very temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. In his long reign, this wicked king made the Jews worse than the nations who had been driven from the land before them.\* And though, when the Lord gave him into the hands of the king of Assyria, who took him in chains to Babylon, when he repented of his wickedness, yet the influence of his evil example remained. The people continued to worship idols, and his son Amon, Josiah's father, who reigned after him, sacrificed to the idols, and trespassed more and more.†

\* 2 Chron. xxiii. 9. † 2 Kings xxi. 2 Chron. xxxiii.

And though Josiah was a pious king, he was but a child when he came to the throne, and it was several years before he could have any influence in putting a stop to the sin of his people. He attempted it when he was twenty years old, but such a youth could do little to reform practices that the people had been accustomed to for nearly eighty years. It proved as might have been expected. The people were afraid to worship their idols openly, lest they should be punished. The same fear led them to observe the Jewish laws and ceremonies. But their hearts were not changed. They still preferred the sinful worship of their images to the pure service of God, and the Lord declared that their turning to him was only a pretence.

Such was the state of the Jews when Jeremiah received the command of the Lord to "utter his judgments against them, touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands."

## CHAPTER II.

THE first duty which Jeremiah had to perform as a prophet to the Jews, was to carry to them a most tender message from the Lord about their ungrateful conduct towards him. We cannot read it without wondering at the patience and long-suffering of God, who, after almost nine hundred years of rebellion on their part, still condescended to address them as one would speak to an old and beloved friend. "Go," said the Lord to his prophet, "and tell Jerusalem (meaning the Jewish people generally) that I remember her, as she was in her youth; when I first led the nation out of Egypt, and chose them as my beloved people; when they felt their need of me to deliver them from bondage, and followed me as their guide through the wilderness, as a young bride depends on her husband. Ah! then they had the kindness of youth, and the tenderness of early love. But when I had brought them safely through

all the dangers of the way, and gave them this fruitful and happy land to dwell in, they forgot their guide and friend. They defiled the land with sin. Even the priests inquired not for the Lord, and the pastors transgressed against him, and the prophets turned to idolatry. And had they done this because they found iniquity in the Lord? Had he been guilty of any evil that deserved this treatment?"\*

Such conduct was most ungrateful. The Jews had forsaken the only God—their Creator, King and Father, and had bowed down to images which they had made, and called the stars their gods. "My people," said the Lord, "have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." Justly did he exclaim, "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord: for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." That is, in leaving the only true

\* Paraphrase of Jer. ii. 1—8.

God for dumb idols, they had acted like men who should go away from an overflowing spring, and dig wells which after all would produce no water.

The Lord then referred to the calamities the Jews had suffered, and would yet suffer, from their enemies, in having their lands made waste and their cities burned. He reminded them that they had brought these sufferings upon themselves by their own wickedness in leaving their God for idols. "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the way? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."

In this manner did the Lord, through the preaching of Jeremiah, rebuke the people for their ingratitude, and show them that their sins were without excuse. He had led them like a father; he had given them wise and good laws; he had been long-suffering; for

though he had sometimes corrected them, it was in mercy, and he still forsook them not. But notwithstanding this, they persisted in following the practices of the heathen nations. They said, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." They worshipped their idols, "saying to a stick, thou art my father; and to a stone, thou hast brought me forth," and turned their backs upon God.

And does this language apply only to the rebellious Jews? Did the Lord do more for them than he has done for those who live in Christian countries in this day?

Think of his mercies to *you*; how he preserved you in infancy and childhood, gave you friends, and has kept you to this day. And how have you returned this kindness? Remember how many sins you have committed against him; how often you have broken his laws; how little you have thought of him; how seldom you have thanked him sincerely for his goodness, or loved him for his holiness. And he has been patient with you, as he was with the Jews. He has not destroyed you, as he might have done. He has not been provoked by your forgetfulness

of him to forget you and leave you to perish. How many instructions he has sent to you! He has put the Bible in your hands to lead you to think of him and to serve him. You have the gospel, which the Jews had not. You know what Jesus has done, and what he has suffered for sinners. This the Jews in Jeremiah's time did not know or imagine. You have had teachers to instruct, and persuade, and warn you. You have had schools, and meetings, and books, all for the same purpose of leading you to God.

Perhaps, too, you have had sickness and pain, to remind you that God alone can keep us in health, or restore us from sickness. Have you not lost a father or mother, a brother or a sister, or some other dear relation, by death? God has thus taught you to think of him who holds the lives of all in his power, and who can remove, at his pleasure, all that we love most.

Or if you have sometimes felt it to be your duty to obey and love God, and have determined to serve him, have you not soon forgotten your resolution, and given up the attempt? When you were sick, did you not

pray to him and ask for pardon, and make up your mind to be a disciple of the Redeemer? You were then like the Jews who followed God in the wilderness, because they had no guide or friend but him: but when they were safely through the desert, they forgot their Saviour, and "became vain."

When the Jews forsook the Lord they followed idols. You may think you have not done this. But any thing is an idol which we love instead of God. Are you not loving the pleasures of this world more than God? Of which do you think oftener—of God, or of some earthly object? Which do you desire most strongly—the happiness of heaven, or the mirth of this life? Which gives you most anxiety from day to day—your soul, or your body? The things of time, or the things of eternity?



## CHAPTER III.

A YEAR before Jeremiah began to prophesy to the Jews, their king, Josiah, commenced destroying the images, groves, and altars that were used in idolatrous worship. He caused the idols that were made of brass to be broken and ground into powder, and the places in which they were kept were taken down and demolished. He also caused the temple at Jerusalem to be repaired. About this same time, the high priest found a copy of the law—perhaps the very one that Moses commanded the Levites to place in the ark of the covenant.\*

The book was read to the king; and as he heard the curses which the Lord pronounced in it against the nation if they should forsake him, he was filled with distress. He sent to a prophetess in Jerusalem, and the Lord told him by her that the curses which had been read from the book of the law would certainly

\* Deut. xxxi. 26.

come upon the people, for they had turned to idolatry. But to Josiah himself the Lord sent this message. "Because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same."

Thus we see that the repentance and humility of Josiah were the means of his escaping the dreadful punishment that would have fallen upon him and his country, if he had made light of the warning of the Scriptures. But these judgments were to visit the guilty people after his death, if they should still refuse to humble themselves, and abandon their iniquities. Then would the threatenings of the book of the law be fulfilled, and when other nations should ask, "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what mean-

eth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt. For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”

When Josiah had heard what the prophetess had said, he assembled the people in the courts of the temple. They came in great numbers, both old and young, to hear what the king had to say to them. When they were all collected, Josiah read to them out of the book which had been found. He probably read particularly the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, in which are written the blessings that were promised to the nation in case of obedience, and the curses threatened if they should turn to idols.

When Josiah had finished reading, he made a solemn covenant or promise that he would keep the commandments of God with all his heart and soul. This he had been doing from the age of sixteen, so far as he knew them. But he wished the nation to join with him in the covenant. It was not enough that he had destroyed their idols; they must keep the commandments of God as given to their fathers, and observe all that was required by the law. Josiah therefore caused all the people who were present to agree to the covenant. The passover was also celebrated, and the priests were appointed to their different duties as of old. The worship of the temple was revived, and the nation seemed to be once more returning to their injured and insulted God.

But this was only a fair appearance. It was produced by the authority of the king, and not by any real change in the hearts of the people. They may have been alarmed by the threatenings of the book that was found, and thought that by observing the ceremonies it required, they could escape the anger of God. But though it is said that

during all the days of Josiah, "they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers,"\* their repentance was not sincere, and they did not in their hearts abandon their sins. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly." It was a pretence; like the religion of persons who profess to repent when they are alarmed at the prospect of death, or of some calamity, but when the danger is over they lose their anxiety, and give up thoughts of religion. God called these feigning Jews *treacherous*, and worse than the other ten tribes, because they attempted to deceive him by professions of repentance. And God still looks upon hypocrites as his worst enemies, and has pronounced the most terrible sentence against them.

But even now the Lord was not unwilling to forgive them if they would come back to him. He was disposed, also, to pardon Israel—the ten tribes who had already gone into captivity—if they would sincerely re-

\* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 33.

pent. Jeremiah was directed to "proclaim these words towards the north," where they were then in bondage—"Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." "Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." Again he pleads with them—"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord." "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me, and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove."

But the Lord was not satisfied with their outward service, and the mere change of their worship, whilst *in their hearts* they preferred the idols of the heathen. He therefore directed Jeremiah to call upon the men of Judah and Jerusalem to reform themselves thoroughly, and thus to prepare for the blessing of the Lord. He signified what they had to do in a most expressive manner. "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." Fallow ground is that which is not ploughed or cultivated, but is full of reeds

and thorns, and other plants that spring up naturally, without sowing or planting; and as the farmer must prepare his ground before he can sow seed and expect a crop, so the Lord called upon the Jews to have their hearts prepared to be reconciled to him, by becoming sincerely humble and penitent, and abandoning their sins. Their dependence on the temple worship, and their ceremonies, whilst their hearts were not changed, was like throwing seed among thorns on the fallow ground, which would either never spring up, or be destroyed by the thorns as soon as it appeared. But if they would truly renounce idolatry, and return to God with all their heart and soul, he would acknowledge them again as his children, and give them his blessing. The prophet Hosea, before the time of Jeremiah, had said the same thing to them—"Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."\*

They well knew how this was to be done. They had been always taught that God would

\* Hos. x. 12.

accept nothing but repentance and the forsaking of sin, as proofs of their sincerity in seeking him. And now they were again most earnestly called to this duty by the prophet—“O Jerusalem, wash **THY HEART** from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved!”

How many there are even in these days who, if there were no threatenings in the Scriptures, would continue in their old habits of sin! They have no real love for God or his law, but serve him outwardly only, through fear of punishment. We see, from the declarations of God to the Jews, that this is of no avail. There is no repentance in it; no sorrow that they have offended God; no desire to have their affections changed, so that sin shall be hated, as well as forsaken, and God loved, as well as feared. They do not care to “wash their *heart* from wickedness.” But God knows that the heart is the very fountain of sin; that men disobey him because their hearts are wicked, and that until these are changed he cannot accept them. It is not the profession only that he wants.

What then are sinners to do if they are in earnest in wishing to be reconciled to God?



They are to cease sinning, both in practice and in heart. They are, as another prophet said, to “put away the evil of their doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well.”\* This must be done from right motives, and sincerely. They cannot change their own hearts, but they know that God is able to do it, and he commands them to break up their fallow ground and seek his mercy, that he may send his Spirit upon them. So that although they cannot sanctify themselves, yet if God is willing to do it for them, they are just as guilty, if they do not apply to him, as if they had all the power; for while God tells the sinner, “Wash thy heart from wickedness that thou mayest be saved,” he at the same time assures him that he has opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness in Christ Jesus,† and says, “Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”‡

\* Isa. i. 16, 17.

† Zech. xiii. 1.

‡ Isa. i. 18.

## CHAPTER IV.

AT the same time that Jeremiah delivered God's messages to the Jews, he declared to them the terrible judgments that were coming upon them in consequence of their refusing to repent. He predicted that their enemies should come upon them and spoil their whole land, so that the fruitful place would become a wilderness, the cities forsaken, and the inhabitants would fly to the woods and rocks to hide themselves. A distant and powerful nation, of a different language, should eat their harvests, and flocks, and fruit; and the Jews themselves should become the servants of strangers in another land. These enemies should come on horses, with bows and spears. They were described as cruel, and having no mercy, and bringing terror and destruction on every side. The people intended were the Chaldeans. Their country lay on the east of Judea, and its capital was the great city of Babylon. Probably about the same time in

which Jeremiah uttered these predictions, the prophet Habakkuk spoke of them by name, and described them thus—"For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand."\*

This nation should have no pity on the Jews, but should slay those they did not take into captivity, till there should be no room to bury them. The cities of Judah, and even the holy city Jerusalem, should be silent and deserted.

In connexion with all these dreadful pre-

\* Ha. i. 6—9.

dictions, Jeremiah constantly reminded the Jews of two things.

One was, that they had brought these calamities upon themselves, by forsaking God and refusing to return. They persisted in idolatry, and the whole nation joined together in this sin, so that the Lord said, that in preparing the cakes which the infatuated people offered to the moon, which they worshipped as the queen of heaven, the women kneaded the dough, the fathers kindled the fire, for which the children gathered the wood.\*

The other was, that before the judgments which he predicted should come, there was time for repentance. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Amend your ways, and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place."† There was still mercy with God for the penitent, and Jeremiah proclaimed this to the people. The Lord compared them to a sick person, for whose disease there was a medi-

\* Jer. vii. 18.

† Jer. iv. 16 ; vii. 3.

cine and a physician that could cure it, if they were only employed—"Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" And the prophet, seeing their awful danger, bursts out with the exclamation—"O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"\*

The Lord had told Jeremiah, when he first called him to prophesy, that he would be opposed and persecuted. This was now fulfilled; for the people of Anathoth, his own city, became enraged against him, because he faithfully proclaimed the words of the Lord. Instead of following his advice, and reforming their lives, they were provoked by his reproofs, and sought to put him to death. They saw that this was the only method of silencing his warning voice. They said, "Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof"—that is, if we take his life we shall stop his preaching, "and let us cut him off from

\* Jer. viii. 22; ix. 1.

the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.”

Thus it has been in all ages, that the wicked hate reproof, and hate those who tell them of their sin and danger, though they kindly and earnestly entreat them, for their own sakes, to avoid it. How often the young feel angry with those who give them faithful advice! How apt they are to abuse or ridicule them! Yet such advisers are their best friends, and in putting them away they run the risk of becoming for ever hardened in their sins.

Let such take warning by the fate of the men of Anathoth, who threatened to kill Jeremiah for his fidelity. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold I will punish them; the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; and there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, even to the year of their visitation.”\*

\* Jer. xi. 22, 23.

## CHAPTER V.

WHILST Jeremiah was employed in his duties as a prophet, the king of Egypt made war upon the king of Assyria. He intended to pass through Judea to the city Carchemish, on the Euphrates, and had ascended as far as Megiddo, in the northern parts of the dominions of Josiah. Josiah went out against him, and in the battle was shot with an arrow, so that he was obliged to be carried to Jerusalem, where he died in the thirty-first year of his reign, and the thirty-ninth of his age.

This was a great calamity to the Jews, and seemed to take away the last hope of their reformation. They were attached to him, and perhaps this was the principal motive that induced them to respect his laws for the observance of religion. But as soon as he was removed by death, they were ready to give up even the form of the worship of God, which he had required of them.

Jeremiah must have felt the loss of one of the few men in Judah who united with him in serving the Lord. It is said he "lamented for Josiah;" which probably means that he wrote an elegy, or poem, on his death, which was accustomed to be sung by the people, long afterwards, in honour of their good king.

Josiah was succeeded by Jehoahaz, his fourth son, who was then twenty-three years of age. Though he had so good a father, and such an excellent example of a king, he was of a very different character. He was soon cut off, for in three months after he began to reign, Nechoh, the Egyptian king who had conquered Josiah, took him prisoner and carried him to Egypt. Jehoahaz is also called Shallum, and Jeremiah, referring to the death of Josiah and the defeat of his son, prophesied thus:—"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the Lord touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; 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."

Nechoh made Eliakim, Josiah's second son, king of Judah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He also was an evil king; for the best of fathers may have their instructions and example made of no effect by the obstinate wickedness of their sons. His kingdom had now to pay tribute to the king of Egypt, and Jehoiakim laid taxes on the people to raise it.

Though Josiah was dead, and the country was governed by a king who was as bad as his people, Jeremiah was not afraid to utter his prophecies, as the Lord directed him. He continued to predict the captivity of the nation, and the sufferings they should endure, proclaiming boldly that their sins were the cause of the anger of God, and that nothing could turn it away but their repentance. He still suffered persecution, but again the Lord promised to protect him; and he could say with David, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put con-

fidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”\*

At one time he was commanded by the Lord to stand in the gates of Jerusalem, which were the most public places of the city, and to admonish the king and all the people of their duty to keep the Sabbath holy. He was to forbid them to carry burdens on that day, or to bring any thing into the city, or to do any work ; but they should hallow the Sabbath as had been commanded in the days of Moses. The Lord promised the people that if they would obey this commandment, the glory of the nation should be restored ; their kings should sit on the throne of David, and Jerusalem and its temple should remain for ever. But if they would not keep holy the Sabbath, the Lord declared that the city should be destroyed. This is one of the many passages in the Scriptures in which the Lord has shown that he will not pass by the sin of Sabbath-breaking.

On another occasion Jeremiah was sent to the valley of Hinnom, or Tophet, on the

\* Psalm cxviii. 6—8.

southern side of Jerusalem, and was told to take with him some of the oldest of the citizens and of the priests. This valley was the place where the people, before the reign of Josiah, celebrated some of their idolatrous rites, and offered their children as sacrifices to the idol Moloch. When they came to the valley, Jeremiah proclaimed the declaration of the Lord, that because of the idolatry of the people, and the sacrificing of their children, the time should come when that place should be a valley of slaughter to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; for they should be slain by their enemies, and their dead bodies be heaped together there, till there was no more room to hold them. The prophet then broke an earthen bottle before those who accompanied him, to signify that in like manner the nation should be destroyed, and not be repaired.

Jeremiah went from Tophet into the temple, and there addressed this message to the people—"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city, and upon all her towns, all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they

have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words.”

A man by the name of Pashur, one of the priests of the temple, and a chief officer, hearing what Jeremiah had said, became enraged against him. He was probably one of those priests of whom Jeremiah had said that they dealt falsely, “for they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” He perhaps pretended that Jeremiah had offended against the temple by uttering such things; and therefore had him beaten, and set in the stocks. This was some disgraceful exposure, or place of confinement, near one of the public gates. On the next day Pashur released him, and then Jeremiah repeated to him the very prophecy for which he had been punished, and told Pashur that he should become a terror to himself and to his friends; that the nation should be carried to Babylon, that he should be among the captives and should die there, he and all the friends to whom he had “prophesied lies.”

## CHAPTER VI.

JEREMIAH was sometimes greatly distressed by the persecutions of his enemies. They ridiculed him daily, and mocked his preaching. They watched him, in hope he would say or do something wrong, for which they might bring him into disgrace. He was sometimes tempted to give up prophesying, but he could not; for when the word of God came to him to speak, he said it was like a fire in his bones, and he could not help proclaiming it. He looked to the Lord for assistance, and was confident that his persecutors could not prevail. With the strength of this faith, he feared not to predict that king Jehoiakim, for his injustice and wickedness, and departing from the example of his father, should die a disgraceful death, and his body be cast out of Jerusalem like the carcass of a beast; and his son Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin) be taken captive by the king of Babylon.

Though Jeremiah had been so shamefully

treated by Pashur for preaching in the temple the words of God, he was not afraid to obey the Lord when he sent him again for the same purpose. One day, after calling on the people to repent, he declared to them that if they did not turn from their evil ways, the Lord would forsake the temple, and make Jerusalem a curse to all the nations of the earth.

This greatly provoked the false priests and prophets of the temple, and the Jews who were present. And when Jeremiah had finished his discourse, they seized him, and declared he should be put to death. When the rulers of the city heard what had taken place, they came from the palace to the temple to inquire about the tumult. The priests and prophets brought Jeremiah before them, and said he deserved to die for having prophesied against Jerusalem.

Jeremiah was not terrified by these accusations, nor by the threats of the mob who wished to put him to death. He remembered the promise of God, in whose name he had spoken, and was not afraid of any thing that men could do. He stood up before them all, and spoke as follows—"The Lord sent me

to prophesy against this house and against this city, all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ear." [Jer. xxvi. 12—15.]

The princes knew that it was a dangerous thing to put a prophet of the Lord to death, and after learning what Jeremiah had said, they declared he was not guilty of any crime, but had spoken in the name of the Lord. The people also now took the prophet's part, and agreed with the rulers.

One of the elders of the people then rose in the assembly, and to show how wrong it would be to inflict any punishment on Jeremiah, mentioned the case of the prophet Micah, who lived in the reign of Hezekiah, and

had used as strong language against Jerusalem as Jeremiah had done. For he had said, "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."\* Yet Hezekiah and the people in his day did not put Micah to death, but on the contrary they attended to his warnings, and repented of their sins, and the Lord withheld the judgment he had threatened. The elder further said, that if instead of imitating this example, they should put Jeremiah to death, they might "procure great evil against their souls."

But there was a prophet named Urijah, not long before this, who had prophesied as Jeremiah had done against Judah and Jerusalem. And king Jehoiakim (who was still reigning) and his chief officers determined to put him to death; but instead of boldly meeting his enemies as Jeremiah had done, Urijah fled into Egypt. However, the king sent men in pursuit of him, who brought him back, and he was executed.

It was therefore likely that the king would

\* Mic. iii. 12. Jer. xxvi. 18.



be in favour of destroying Jeremiah ; and the people, upon remembering the case of Urijah, seem to have returned to their first intention of killing him. But there was a man in the assembly named Ahikam, who had been an officer of Josiah, and was one of those whom he sent to inquire about the book of the law that was found in the temple. He took the part of Jeremiah, and by his influence prevented the people from doing the prophet any injury. Thus the declaration and promise of the Lord were again fulfilled—"For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee ; but they shall not prevail against thee ; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

The Lord often condescended to call the Jews his children, and reproved them as a father for their unnatural conduct. As he said by Malachi—"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master ; if then I be a father, where is my honour ? and if I be a

master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts."\*

For the purpose of showing the Jews an example of obedience to an earthly father, and thus to make them ashamed of their own disobedience to their heavenly Parent, the Lord directed Jeremiah to go to the Rechabites, a tribe of people then living in Jerusalem, but who were not Jews. Jehonadab, one of their ancestors, had commanded his family never to drink wine, nor to build houses, or sow seed, or plant vineyards; but to live in tents. Jeremiah was directed by the Lord to take this tribe to the temple, and offer them wine to drink. He did so, and set abundance of wine before them in pots and cups, and invited them to partake. But they all refused, and as a reason, told what their forefather Jehonadab had commanded, and said that their tribe had not disobeyed this rule since he had made it, which was then three hundred years, but had done according to all that he had commanded them.

When Jeremiah had thus proved the respect of the Rechabites for the request of an

\* Mal. i. 6.

earthly ancestor, the Lord directed him to tell the fact to the Jews—that from the days of Jehonadab to that time his descendants had not broken his regulations, yet the Jews had forsaken the laws of their God, and refused to listen to his prophets. For this their fidelity, said the Lord, the family of Jehonadab should be rewarded by being preserved from extinction, but the rebellious Jews should be punished with all the evils that had been threatened; “because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.”

## CHAPTER VII.

JEREMIAH had now been prophesying for twenty-three years. He had persevered in warning the people both in public and private, as ministers of the gospel now continue to exhort sinners; whether they will hear or despise the message. He had told them the particular visitations they should suffer if they did not repent—such as famine, the destruction of the city and temple, the desolation of the whole land by their enemies, and their captivity in a foreign country.

In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, he named the king who was to subdue them, the length of time their captivity should last, and the consequences that should follow to the land. They were to be invaded by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who should conquer them and all the nations around; their whole country should become desolate: there should be no voice of mirth and gladness in all the land; the noise of

business should cease, and the inhabitants be taken away, and serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. The justice of the Lord, which had so long been restrained, should visit the neighbouring nations of idolaters, and in the course of time Babylon itself, the seat of wickedness, should also be destroyed. "A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth." Jer. xxv. 31, 32.

How dreadful was the destruction thus prepared for the guilty nations! But who can say it was not just? Who does not see that God had been patient, forbearing, and long-suffering, beyond all that the Jews had the least reason to ask or expect? How terrible the desolation of the beautiful country which had been selected from the whole earth for the people of God! Their holy city, and its splendid temple too—its altars, its magnificent buildings, must be demolished, and its

sacred vessels destroyed, or carried to the house of an idol. And the people must be put to death in the houses and the streets ; and those that escape death must be carried to a distant country, and become subject to a foreign king !

This forcibly shows us the evil of sin, that draws down such dreadful punishment. It proves that the Lord is a God of justice as well as mercy ; that he will not let the impenitent go unpunished, and that though his judgments may be delayed, they will at last fall upon the guilty.

And this is a solemn warning to the sinners who are now abusing his grace ; to those who are yet in their sins, and will not look to Christ for pardon ; who despise the messages of his mercy, and are not moved by all that they are told of a judgment to come, and of a destruction that will be for ever and ever !

The judgments of the guilty land were now approaching, and soon it would be seen that Jeremiah was a true prophet. The last warning was to be given, and one more opportunity afforded to the nation to repent. "It may be," said the gracious God, "it may

be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."

Jeremiah was now commanded to have written in a book, or roll of parchment, all the messages which he had given to the Jews in the twenty-three years of his labours as a prophet. When this book was prepared, he was to cause it to be read to the people. Accordingly, he was enabled to remember all that he had prophesied; and as he repeated it, his words were written down by a friend of his, named Baruch. When the writing was finished, he sent Baruch to read it to the people in the temple, on one of the days of their fasting. Even Jeremiah was not yet wholly disheartened, and hoped that when they heard the long and mournful list of calamities with which they were threatened, they would be moved. "It may be," he remarked to Baruch, "it may be they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way."

Baruch did as the prophet had directed, and

read the book, probably twice over at different times, in the hearing of all the people. He seems not to have had the faith of Jeremiah, and to have been afraid of the consequences to himself, of proclaiming in such a public manner, declarations that were likely to provoke the people against him. But the Lord bade Jeremiah to admonish him not to be seeking great things for himself: that is, not to fear to do his duty lest he should suffer loss by it; and he further assured him that his life should be preserved wheresoever he might be taken after the conquest of Jerusalem.

When Baruch had read the prophecies, a son of one of the king's counsellors or princes went to the palace, where his father and the principal men were assembled, and told them what had been read in the temple. They immediately sent a messenger to Baruch, to order him to come to them, and bring with him the book he had read to the people. He came, and at their request read it over to them. As they heard such strong expressions against the character of the nation, and such judgments pronounced against the whole



country, they became alarmed, and said they would be obliged to report it all to the king. They then asked Baruch how he had taken it? He answered them, that he had taken it down just as it was spoken to him by Jeremiah. They advised him that he and Jeremiah should conceal themselves, to avoid the displeasure of the king when he should be informed of the contents of the book.

The counsellors put the book away in one of the rooms of the palace, and went to relate to the king the substance of the prophecies. Jehoiakim was not satisfied with hearing their account, but ordered the book itself to be brought. He appointed one of his attendants to read it before him and his counsellors. The man commenced, but had not read much, when the king became enraged at the prophecy, and taking the book from the reader's hand, cut it with a penknife, and threw it into the fire, near which he was sitting.

Three of the counsellors begged the king not to destroy the volume; but he would not regard their advice, and it was consumed. He then gave orders that both Jeremiah and Baruch should be seized: but they could not be

found. The Lord told Jeremiah to have another book prepared like the one that the king destroyed, and it was written as before by Baruch, with some other predictions added to it. The Lord again declared of Jehoiakim, that when he died his body should be left unburied, that none of his sons should keep possession of his throne, and that he and his family should be punished for their iniquity.

The conduct of Jehoiakim in this case was as foolish as it was wicked. For the cutting and burning of the prophecy would not hinder the accomplishment of what it foretold, and it only increased his guilt to reject the merciful warnings of God.

How differently his pious father acted when the book of the law was found and read to him! He at once humbled himself and turned to the Lord, and required the nation to observe the law; and the Lord forgave and blessed him. But Jehoiakim despised the sacred Scripture, and would not even hear it read through.

Just as foolish and wicked is the conduct of those who now ridicule or hate the holy Scriptures. Some men have done as Jehoia-

him did—burnt the Bible, to show their contempt or fear of it. Many abuse it, and refuse to read it, as he did, because it reproves them of sin, and threatens the wicked with everlasting punishment. But if all the Bibles in the world were destroyed, it would do the sinner no good. God will perform what he promises or threatens, and no power can prevent it. “The wicked SHALL BE turned into hell.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

FOR several years the enemies of Judah had been growing stronger and more successful. The kings of Assyria and Babylon had more than once obtained victories over them, and taken their kings and people captive. Nechoh, king of Egypt, had put Jehoiakim on the throne, and compelled him to pay tribute; and at the very time in which he was despising the counsel of Jeremiah, and destroying his prophecies, because they said the king of Babylon should take possession of his kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Jerusalem. He succeeded, as the prophet had foretold, and Jehoiakim was bound in chains to be carried to Babylon. But it seems that Nebuchadnezzar afterwards released him, and allowed him to remain. He, however, took away some of the costly vessels of the temple, which he put among the treasures of the idol he worshipped in Chaldea. He also selected as captives some of

the most promising Jewish boys, to be educated in the palace of Babylon for his own service. Among these was the lad who was afterwards the prophet Daniel, and his three pious companions, to whom Nebuchadnezzar gave the Chaldean names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This took place about the year of the world 3400, and 600 years before the birth of Christ.

After Jehoiakim had been three years in subjection to Nebuchadnezzar, he attempted to become independent. But he was attacked by his enemies on all sides, and defeated. His reign lasted eleven years, for several of which he was under the power of the kings of Egypt and Babylon. The Bible does not mention the time and place of his death, but Josephus, a Jewish historian, says that the king of Babylon entered Jerusalem, and "slew such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity, together with their king Jehoiakim, whom he commanded to be thrown before the walls, without any burial."\* Thus was accomplished

\* Josephus, *Antiq. h. x. ch. 6.*

the prediction of Jeremiah—"Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

His son Jehoiachin, who had probably reigned eight years with his father, took the throne, but as the prophet had predicted, he did not keep it. He reigned but three months and ten days, when Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon, and made Zedekiah, his uncle, king of Judah.

Jeremiah had prophesied of Jehoiachin, under the name of Coniah, or Jeconiah, that he should be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and be cast out, with his mother, into a strange land, and die there. This was exactly fulfilled. He and his mother, his servants, princes, and officers, were taken to Babylon. At the same time Nebuchadnezzar took off the treasures of the palace and the temple, among which were the splendid vessels of gold which Solomon had made.

He also took the most eminent and useful inhabitants of Jerusalem, to the number of ten thousand, or as some think eighteen thousand, leaving scarcely any but the poorest people behind.

Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar made king of Judah, was the third son of Josiah : but like his brothers, he did not follow the example of his father, and did evil in the sight of the Lord. In the beginning of his reign, Jeremiah, who had not been taken to Babylon with the captives, was informed in a vision of what was to take place during his reign. He saw two baskets of figs ; those in one basket were very fresh and good, the others were not fit to be eaten. The Lord told Jeremiah that these different figs were like the Jews who had gone into captivity, and those who were left in the land. Those who had been taken away would repent and return to the Lord with their whole heart, and in the course of time they or their children should return to their own land and be established there. As to Zedekiah, and those that remained in Judah, and were still perverse, they should be driven away, and be reproach-

ed, and cursed wherever they went, and finally be destroyed by famine, pestilence, or the sword.

And it afterwards proved that the best of the nation—the few who honoured God when they were taken captive, and such as repented in Babylon of their sins, were those who were taken by Nebuchadnezzar. Among them was the prophet Daniel and the prophet Ezekiel, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to declare the will of God, and predict the most important events of future times.

Jeremiah did not forget his countrymen who were carried to Babylon. At one time when Zedekiah sent messengers to Nebuchadnezzar, the prophet wrote a letter by them to the captives, in which he communicated what the Lord wished them to do. Instead of rebelling against the king of Babylon, or making disturbances among his people, he exhorted them to settle as if they did not expect to leave the country, and to seek and pray for the peace of Babylon; for on this their own safety depended. In seventy years, he said, they should return; that is, as a nation; for few would be living at that time who had



been carried from Judah. They were assured from the Lord, that after all they had done to provoke him, his thoughts towards them were of peace and not of evil, and that when they would call upon him and pray to him, he would hear them. "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."\* Then would he restore them to their land in safety.

Among those that went to Babylon were some false prophets, who tried to mislead the people. When Jeremiah's letter was received, one of them, named Shemaiah, wrote back to the priests in Jerusalem, saying that Jeremiah was an impostor, and that they ought to put him in prison, and stop his prophecies. But the Lord sent word to the captives that Shemaiah had deceived them, and that it would be rebellion against God to follow his advice. For his crime in this respect, the Lord declared he would punish him, and none of his family should inhabit the land when the Jews were restored.

In predicting the return of the Jews from

\* Jer. xxix. 13.

captivity, the prophet was led to speak of still more distant and glorious times. Some of these promises, it is supposed, are not yet fulfilled, and will not be until the Jews shall turn to the Saviour, and be restored to their own land, from all parts of the earth where they are now scattered. Others relate to the coming of Christ and the conversion of multitudes of the Jews by the gospel, which took place in the time of our Lord Jesus and his apostles. One of these prophecies is as follows :

“ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah : not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord : but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no

more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord : for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”\*

This passage is quoted by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Jews, as the language of the Holy Ghost, and he declared it to be fulfilled by the gospel, which is the new covenant.†

At another time Jeremiah referred directly to Christ in these words—“ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely : and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”‡

Jesus Christ is this Branch of David ; being descended from him according to the flesh. He is the “ King of kings and Lord of lords,”

\* Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

† Heb. x. 15—17 ; viii. 8—13. ‡ Jer. xxxiii. 5, 6.

and who, of God, is made unto his people  
“wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification  
and redemption.”\*

What glorious hopes were these for the faithful Jews! What a great deliverance was before them! How they must have been comforted in their captivity by the prospect that at a future day their nation should receive a Messiah, and that all, from the least to the greatest, should know the Lord!

This Redeemer and King has come. It is no longer an obscure subject of prophecy and of expectation, but is recorded in history. Those who neglect this Saviour now, and will not submit to him, are as much more guilty than the unbelieving Jews, as our knowledge and opportunities are greater than theirs were. He is a Saviour for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and the Lord says to us as sincerely as he did in the time of Jeremiah—“*Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*”

\* Rom. i. 3. 1 Tim. vi. 15. 1 Cor. i. 30.

## CHAPTER IX.

BESIDES the prophecies respecting the Jews, Jeremiah uttered various other predictions of the fate of the neighbouring nations, and even of Babylon itself. Of that great city and the Chaldean empire, of which it was the capital, he foretold that the time of punishment should come. They should be destroyed, while the captive Jews should return weeping in sorrow for their sins, seeking the Lord their God, and asking "the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, 'Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten.'"

These declarations were fulfilled by the victories of the Medes and Persians, and others, who subdued the kingdom and destroyed the proud city, which has been for ages a heap of ruins. It seemed very improbable, in that day, when Babylon was in its glory, full of wealth and power, and extending her dominions on every side, that her walls

should be thrown down, and the city become uninhabited and desolate. Yet such were the words of Jeremiah at that time, and they have been strictly fulfilled, and Babylon has "become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment, and a hissing, without an inhabitant."

Jeremiah wrote this prophecy, and sent it to Nebuchadnezzar by the hands of an officer who accompanied king Zedekiah on a visit to Babylon. He was directed to read it there, and when he had finished, to tie it to a stone and throw it in the river Euphrates, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her."

Until this destruction came upon the city, the prophet admonished Zedekiah and the other kings to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, as it would be in vain to resist the purpose of God, who had given their dominions into his hands. They were assured that he should even carry the vessels of the temple to Babylon, and that they should not be restored to their place till the time of the captivity was accomplished.

A false prophet, named Hananiah, contra-

dicted this assertion, and said that in two years Jeconiah, (Jehoiachin,) and the Jews who had been already taken to Babylon, should return home. For this denial of his word, the Lord said to Hananiah, "Behold I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord." "So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month."

Zedekiah's reign had now continued for nine years. He persevered in his evil course, and despised the counsel of Jeremiah to humble himself before the Lord. In the ninth year of his reign he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. That monarch then marched against Jerusalem and besieged it.

When Zedekiah found that the words of Jeremiah were indeed about to be fulfilled, he became alarmed, and sent to ask the prophet to pray for the city. But the Lord told Jeremiah to reply, that the city should certainly be taken, and Zedekiah himself should not escape; that he should not die in the siege, or battle, but be carried to Babylon.

When the army of Babylon first besieged

Jerusalem, Zedekiah had Jeremiah put into prison for saying that Nebuchadnezzar should take the city, and that he should be carried to Babylon. Whilst in this confinement the Lord again showed him that the Jews should be restored to their country, and directed him to buy a field in his native Anathoth, as a sign that "houses, and fields, and vineyards should be possessed again in the land."

Jeremiah thought this was wonderful; for the Chaldeans were besieging the city, and there was every prospect that the whole country would be desolate, as he himself had foreshown. It was therefore a singular time to purchase property. But the prophet knew where to go in all times of doubt and perplexity. Instead therefore of wasting his time in his own thoughts about the designs of Providence, he prayed. His prayer began in this beautiful manner:—"Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great,



the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name ; great in counsel, and mighty in work : for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men : to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” Jer. xxxii. 17—19.

The Chaldeans were taking the country, yet he was commanded to buy a field in it ! But the Lord answered him—“Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh : is there any thing too hard for me ?” He then revealed to the prophet, that at a future time God would gather the Jews out of all the countries where they should be scattered, and bring them again to their own land. “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God ; and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them : and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good ; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land

assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Jer. xxxii. 38—40.

These great promises must refer to something more important than the return of the Jews after the seventy years' captivity. They look forward to the glorious times of the New Testament, and the spiritual prosperity of the nation, when their Messiah would come and open the way of pardon and of everlasting peace with God. The atonement of Christ would introduce more blessings than the establishment of their kingdom: it would open to them the means of freedom from the bondage of sin, which is infinitely more dreadful than the slavery of Babylon. It was through this atonement that God could promise them—"I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me." That the blessed times of the gospel were intended is clear, from the language of the prophecy. "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute

judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness."\*

\* Jer. xxxiii. 15, 16.

## CHAPTER X.

THE Chaldean army, hearing that the king of Egypt was marching to the relief of Zedekiah, abandoned the siege of Jerusalem for the present. Jeremiah appears then to have been released from prison, though he told Zedekiah that they would certainly return to the siege. He said also that the only way of escape was to surrender themselves into their hands, for that those who remained in Jerusalem should die of famine and pestilence, or be killed by the sword, whilst the city itself should be burned ; but that those who should join themselves to the Chaldeans should be spared.

When the princes heard what Jeremiah had said, they begged the king to have him put to death. They said his predictions would discourage their men from fighting, and that the prophet was seeking the injury and not the welfare of the people. Zedekiah told them that the prophet was in their power,

and they must do with him as they thought proper.

Upon this they took Jeremiah to the prison. A private house was used for the purpose at this time, in one of the courts or yards of which was a deep dungeon, probably an old well, dug into the ground. They put ropes around him, and lowered him into this pit. The bottom was not paved or floored, but was deep mud, into which the prisoner sank. There he was left to suffer with hunger and cold.

Yet the Lord did not forsake him, and Jeremiah did not complain of his calamities. He again looked to Heaven in prayer, and was answered: for it must be to this time he refers when he says in one of his writings—  
“Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in

the day that I called upon thee : thou saidst, Fear not." Lam. iii. 52—57.

But though there were none of his own countrymen to pity and relieve the prophet in his dreadful condition, there was a foreigner, from Africa, who had compassion on him. This was Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, who lived in the palace. As soon as he heard what the princes had done with Jeremiah, he informed the king, telling him that he was in danger of dying of hunger. Zedekiah commanded Ebed-melech to take thirty men with him, and get Jeremiah out of the dungeon. The kind man did so, and was so considerate, that to prevent the rope from cutting him as they drew him up, he first let down some rags to put under his arms in the places where the rope came, and so he was drawn up safely, and without injury.

The Lord rewarded Ebed-melech for his humanity, and assured him, by the prophet, that when the calamities of Jerusalem should take place, he should be preserved, "for I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a

prey unto thee; because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."

After Jeremiah had been taken out of the dungeon, the king sent for him, and wished to learn what was to be the end of the siege, and what he should do. He promised if he would tell him, he would not put him to death, nor give him into the hands of the people again. The faithful prophet assured him that there was but one way of safety, and that was to surrender himself to Nebuchadnezzar; and if he did not, he would be taken prisoner, and the city be burnt.

The king said he was afraid that the Jews who had already gone over to the Chaldeans would betray him. But Jeremiah replied that they should not, and added this advice, which is applicable to all persons in whatever circumstances they may be—"Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live."

Zedekiah begged the prophet not to let any one know what had passed between them, promising that he would on that condition spare his life. If the rulers should ask him

what the king and he had been talking about, he was not to tell them this part of the conversation, but should say that he had been asking the king not to have him sent back to the dungeon. This was, no doubt, part of what had been said, for we cannot believe that Jeremiah would have said this to the rulers (as he did) if it had not been true.

It appears from this, that Zedekiah was willing to consider what the prophet had said as true. His predictions so far had been accomplished, and it must now have seemed to the king very probable that all the rest would come to pass. He was therefore willing to ask advice of the despised prophet when he found himself in danger, and could not help himself. But like many others, instead of obeying God and believing his word, he hesitated, and resisted the divine warning. Perhaps he intended to follow Jeremiah's counsel at the last, when he could hold out no longer; just as sinners put off repentance till they expect to die; but for the present he neglected it, and the consequence was that his kingdom and his liberty were soon taken from him for ever.



## CHAPTER XI.

JERUSALEM had now been besieged for eighteen months. The provisions of the city had failed, and a famine began. They could remain no longer, and Zedekiah, with the people, fled out of one of the gates by night. The Babylonians pursued them, and overtook the king in the plains of Jericho. They took him prisoner, and carried him to Nebuchadnezzar, who was then at Riblah, a city in Syria. He was tried for his rebellion, and condemned to die.

To increase his punishment, his sons were put to death in his presence. His eyes were then cruelly put out, and in that dreadful condition he was bound with chains and taken to Babylon, where he was kept in prison until his death.

Thus the prophecy of Ezekiel was fulfilled, that though he should die in Babylon, he should not see it.\* His princes, the enemies

\* Ezek. xii. 13.

and persecutors of Jeremiah, were all put to death in Riblah.

Nebuzaradan, the chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar, entered Jerusalem, and after removing the vessels, and ornaments of gold, silver, and brass from the temple, set fire to it, and the palace and all the houses of the city were burnt up. The walls of the city were broken down, and every thing was in ruins. The people who remained in the city were made prisoners, and sent to Babylon, excepting a few who were left to take care of the vineyards and fields, and over whom he placed Gedaliah as ruler. Jerusalem was taken in the year of the world 3416, being 584 years before the birth of Christ, and in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah.

Whilst these events were going on, the Lord did not forget Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to Nebuzaradan that the prophet should not be injured, but that he should do with him as Jeremiah himself should direct. He had been taken in chains with the other captives as far as Ramah. There Nebuzaradan released him, telling him that if he chose to go with him to Baby-

lon, he should be well treated ; but if he did not, he was at liberty to go whithersoever he saw proper.

Jeremiah preferred staying in his own desolate land, to all the rewards offered him in Babylon. Nebuzaradan, therefore, made him a present of money and provisions, and Jeremiah came to Gedaliah, who was over the few who remained, and who had taken up his abode at Mizpah.

A number of Jews, escaping from Nebuchadnezzar, or coming out of places where they had been concealed, now joined themselves to Gedaliah. The king of the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot, who lived to the south-east of Judea, persuaded a Jew named Ishmael to kill Gedaliah. He came with ten others, under the pretence of a friendly visit, and slew him in Mizpah, together with the Jews and Chaldeans who were with him. He took the rest of the people in Mizpah captives, and left Judea to go to the Ammonites. But Johanan, another Jew, with his company, met him on the way, recovered the captives, and brought them back.

Johanan and all the people came to Jere-

miah, and begged him to pray to the Lord for them, that they might know what their duty was in their present situation. The prophet promised to do as they requested, and to declare to them exactly what the Lord should say.

Upon this they solemnly called the Lord to witness that they would do whatever should be required. "Whether it be good or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

Ten days after this the Lord answered Jeremiah's prayer, and sent this message to the people. If they would remain in the land, he would defend them from the king of Babylon, and show them mercy. But if they should determine to go into Egypt to dwell, sword and famine should pursue them, and they should die there.

But notwithstanding all that they had seen and suffered, the remnant of the Jews would not yet trust to the Lord. They were not sincere in asking Jeremiah's prayers, but intended at the time to remove to Egypt, where

they thought they would be safe from the Chaldeans ; choosing to trust themselves for protection to the king of Egypt, rather than to the great God.

As soon, therefore, as Jeremiah had delivered the word of the Lord, which they had sworn to obey, whatever it might be, they replied, “Thou speakest falsely ; the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there. But Baruch, the son of Neriah, setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captive into Babylon.”

So they obeyed not the word of the Lord, but Johanan and the chief men led all the people into Egypt, and brought them to the city of Tahpanhes, Migdol, and other places. Jeremiah was taken with the rest, and he then prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar should have his throne in that very place where they had fled to escape him. “And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death ; and such as are for captivity to captivity ; and such as are for the sword, to the sword.”

It was in Egypt that the Jews, nine hundred years before, had first been led into idolatry. It was to deliver them from this danger, and to keep them a holy people, that God had led them out of their bondage there, and brought them into Judea. But now the sinful remnant of the nation returned of their own accord, and against the express command of God, and soon began to burn incense and to sacrifice to the idols of the land.

Jeremiah reminded the people of these things, and assured them from the Lord that they should not escape punishment, but should be destroyed, until none remained excepting such as would fly to Judea, and become "an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach."

They were now hardened against fear, and in the most blasphemous manner renounced their God. They told Jeremiah they would not listen to the word of the Lord, but were determined to burn incense to the moon, and make offerings to that planet, as the queen of heaven. They had the wickedness to say, that when they did this before in their own land, they had plenty to eat, and were in pros-

perity ; and since they had forsaken it by the command of Josiah, they had nothing but want and trouble.

Jeremiah replied that the true cause of all their sufferings was, that they had “sinned against the Lord, and had not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies.” And as they had dared to forsake the Lord for idols, he pronounced the curse of God upon them : they should be left to their idolatry ; they should no more hear of Jehovah ; the king of Babylon should conquer the king of Egypt ; they should perish by sword and famine, and then should be known “whose words shall stand, mine or theirs.”

Thus was this great and favoured nation brought to ruin, and scattered over the earth in captivity. Jeremiah had now no more to do. The Jews must remain for seventy years in Babylon ; the remnant who had taken refuge in Egypt would soon disappear ; it was time for him to die. He probably did little more, during the rest of his life, than weep over the calamities of his country. It is likely that he now wrote most of the book which is

called his *Lamentations*, and which is filled with the most affecting expressions of grief. When he thought of the great Jerusalem ; the pride of the land, beloved by every Jew as the place of the temple, and the abode of their kings, now in ruins and uninhabited, and in the power of a foreign king, he exclaimed—“ How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people ! how is she become as a widow ! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary ! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks : among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her : all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts : all her gates are desolate : her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed : her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer. All that pass by clap their hands at thee ; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is



this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"\*

He represents the city as calling out to the travellers who passed near it—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."†

But all this desolation and sadness are the wages of sin. We have seen how long and patiently the Lord endured with his people; how he warned, and exhorted, and pleaded with them to repent: how he let them know by his prophets the very sufferings that must come upon them if they did not forsake their iniquities and turn to him, as to a merciful Father, willing to forgive. This the suffering Jews knew, and therefore Jeremiah represents the nation in its distress as saying, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment."

Jeremiah lamented his own afflictions too. He was constantly persecuted by his enemies;

\* Lam. i. 1, 2. 4. 6; ii. 15.

† Lam. i. 12.

reviled, rejected, beaten, and imprisoned. Yet he believed in the Lord, and persevered for forty years in declaring his word. With all his sorrows he could say—"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." He bore witness to the Lord that "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." And he said to those who suffered for their sins—"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."\*

These are the lessons we should learn from the life and prophecies of Jeremiah; and if they are neglected, the ruin will be far more dreadful to us than all that the unhappy Jews suffered from captivity, pestilence, or famine. The Lord Jesus has done more than all the prophets did. He has come from heaven with a message of mercy to the penitent, and

\* Lam. iii. 24—26. 40, 41.

a sentence of destruction to the perverse. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

The time and place of Jeremiah's death are not known. Some think he was stoned by the Jews in Egypt; others that he died in Judea; others in Babylon. But this is a matter of no consequence. He served God on the earth, and such are sure of a glorious reward in the kingdom of heaven.

Like the prophets, and other faithful men spoken of in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, Jeremiah "wrought righteousness, obtained promises, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness was made strong;" he had "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." But like them he bore all his sufferings in patience and faith. He believed God, and looked forward to the fulfilment of all his promises respecting the next life as well as this. He was not saved by his righteousness, but by the mercy of God through

faith. He continued to proclaim the messages of the Lord in the midst of all the opposition that he met, because he trusted in his word. And so are Christians exhorted, in imitation of such an example, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, LOOKING UNTO JESUS, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

His voice still speaks to us from the Bible, and every sinner should listen to it as seriously as if he were one of the rebellious Jews to whom he spoke when on earth. For the same God is our God; his laws are the same, and he will punish the guilty who will not turn and repent.

Jeremiah is mentioned twice in the New Testament, in the gospel of Matthew. In the first place he is called "*Jeremy* the prophet," where a passage from his prophecy is quoted in the account of the destruction of the children by the order of Herod.\*

\* Matt. ii. 17, 18. Jer. xxxi. 15.

The next time he is mentioned he is called *Jeremias*, when the Lord Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and they said, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets."\*

"Jeremy the prophet" is also quoted in the account of the buying of the potter's field with the money of Judas. But as the passage appears in the book of Zechariah, it is most probable the latter was the prophet intended.†

\* Matt. xvi. 13, 14.

† Matt. xvii. 9. Zech. xi. 12, 13. The longest quotation from Jeremiah in the New Testament is in Heb. viii. 8—13, from Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

THE END.

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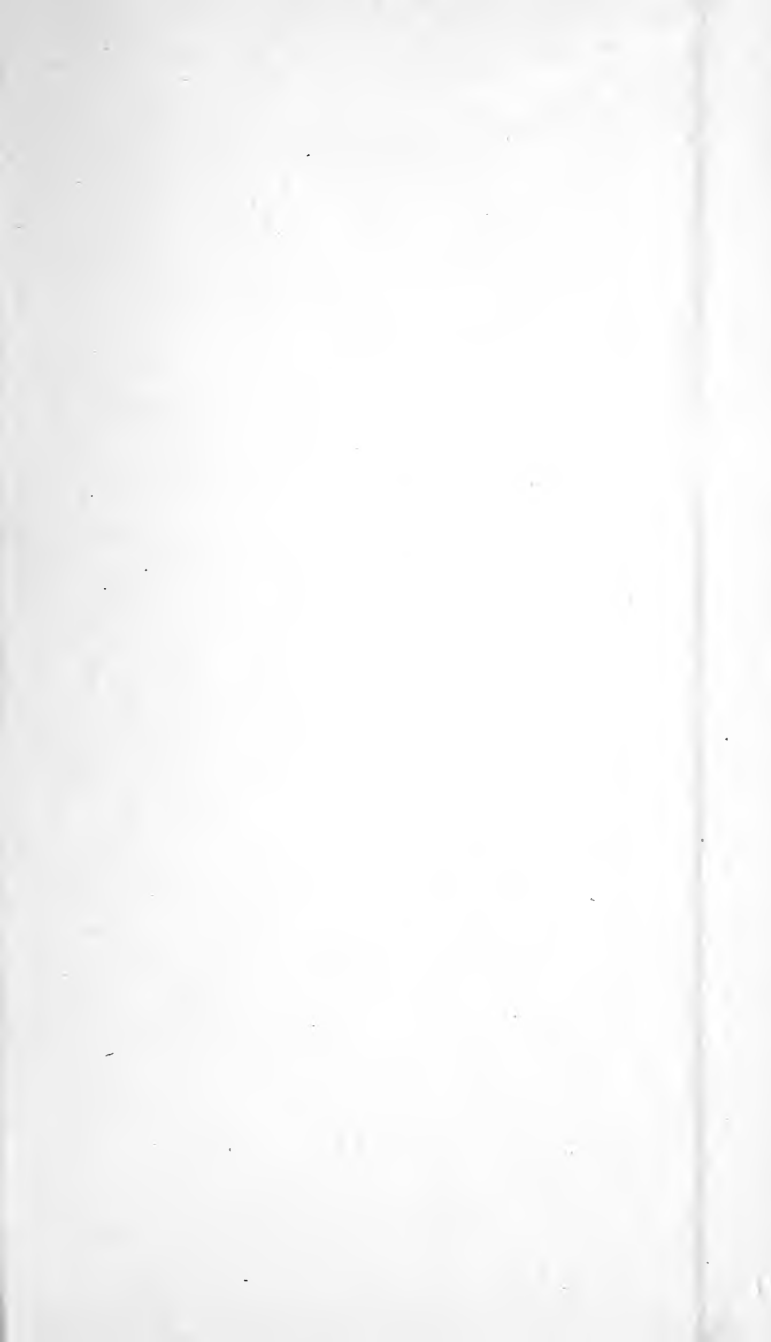
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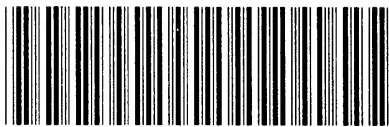
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