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Introduction

Jeremiah, in the spirit of prophecy, seeing the Chaldeans on their march, bids his people set up the usual signals of distress, and spread the general alarm to betake themselves to flight, Jeremiah 6:1. Then, by a beautiful allusion to the custom of shepherds moving their flocks to the richest pastures, Jerusalem is singled out as a place devoted to be eaten up or trodden down by the armies of the Chaldeans, who are called up against her, and whose ardor and impatience are so great that the soldiers, when they arrive in the evening, regret they have no more day, and desire to begin the attack without waiting for the light of the morning, Jeremiah 6:2-5. God is then represented as animating and directing the besiegers against this guilty city, which sinned as incessantly as a fountain flows, Jeremiah 6:6, Jeremiah 6:7, although warned of the fatal consequence, Jeremiah 6:8. He intimates also, by the gleaning of the grapes, that one invasion should carry away the remains of another, till their disobedience, hypocrisy, and other sins should end in their total overthrow, Jeremiah 6:9-15. And to show that God is clear when he judgeth, he mentions his having in vain admonished and warned them, and calls upon the whole world to witness the equity of his proceedings, Jeremiah 6:16-18, in punishing this perverse and hypocritical people, Jeremiah 6:19, Jeremiah 6:20, by the ministry of the cruel Chaldeans, Jeremiah 6:21-23. Upon this a chorus of Jews is introduced expressing their fears and alarm, Jeremiah 6:24, Jeremiah 6:25; to which the prophet echoes a response full of sympathy and tenderness, Jeremiah 6:26. The concluding verses, by metaphors taken from the process of refining gold and silver, represent all the methods hitherto used to amend them as wholly ineffectual, Jeremiah 6:27-30.

Verse 1

O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee - As the invading armies are fast approaching, the prophet calls on the inhabitants of Jerusalem to sound an alarm, and collect all the people to arm themselves and go against the invaders. They are called the children of Benjamin, because Jerusalem was in the tribe of Benjamin.

Tekoa - Was a city about twelve miles to the south of Jerusalem.

Beth-haccerem - Was the name of a small village situated on an eminence between Jerusalem and Tekoa. On this they were ordered to set up a beacon, or kindle a large fire, which might be seen at a distance, and give the people to understand that an enemy was entering the land.

Out of the north - From Babylon. The Scythians. - Dahler.

Verse 3

The shepherds with their flocks - The chiefs and their battalions. The invading army is about to spoil and waste all the fertile fields round about the city, while engaged in the siege.

Verse 4

Prepare ye war against her - The words of the invaders exciting each other to the assault, and impatient lest any time should be lost; lest the besieged should have time to strengthen themselves, or get in supplies.

Verse 5

Arise, and let us go by night - Since we have lost the day, let us not lose the night; but, taking advantage of the darkness, let us make a powerful assault while they are under the impression of terror.

Verse 6

Hew ye down trees - To form machines.

And cast a mount - That may overlook the city, on which to place our engines.

This is the city to be visited - We are sure of success, for their God will deliver it into our hands, for it is full of oppression, and he has consigned it to destruction.

Verse 7

As a fountain casteth out her waters - The inhabitants are incessant in their acts of iniquity; they do nothing but sin.

Verse 8

Be thou instructed - Still there is respite: if they would even now return unto the Lord with all their heart, the

advancing Chaldeans would be arrested on their march and turned back.

Verse 9

They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand - The Chaldeans are here exhorted to turn back and glean up the remnant of the inhabitants that were left after the capture of Jerusalem; for even that remnant did not profit by the Divine judgments that fell on the inhabitants at large.

Verse 10

The word of the Lord is unto them a reproach - It is an object of derision; they despise it.

Verse 11

I am full of the fury of the Lord - God has given me a dreadful revelation of the judgments he intends to inflict: my soul is burdened with this prophecy. I have endeavored to suppress it; but I must pour it forth upon the children, on the young people, on husbands and wives, on the old and the super-annuated. All must partake in these judgments.

Verse 14

They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly - Of the daughter is not in the text, and is here improperly added: it is, however, in some MSS.

Peace, peace - Ye shall have prosperity - when there was none, and when God had determined that there should be none. Here the prophets prophesied falsely; and the people continued in sin, being deceived by the priests and the prophets.

Verse 16

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see - Let us observe the metaphor. A traveler is going to a particular city; he comes to a place where the road divides into several paths, he is afraid of going astray; he stops short, - endeavors to find out the right path: he cannot fix his choice. At last he sees another traveler; he inquires of him, gets proper directions - proceeds on his journey - arrives at the desired place - and reposes after his fatigue. There is an excellent sermon on these words in the works of our first poet, Geoffrey Chaucer; it is among the Canterbury Tales, and is called Chaucer's Tale. The text, I find, was read by him as it appears in my old MS. Bible: - Standith upon weies and seeth, and asketh of the olde pathes; What is the good weie? and goth in it, and gee schul fynden refresching to your soulis. The soul needs rest; it can only find this by walking in the good way. The good way is that which has been trodden by the saints from the beginning: it is the old way, the way of faith and holiness. Believe, Love, Obey; be holy, and be happy. This is the way; let us inquire for it, and walk in it. But these bad people said, We will not walk in it. Then they took another way, walked over the precipice, and fell into the bottomless pit; where, instead of rest, they find: -
- a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulfur, unconsumed.

Verse 17

I set watchmen - I have sent prophets to warn you.

Verse 20

Incense frown Sheba - Sheba was in Arabian famous for the best incense. It was situated towards the southern extremity of the peninsula of Arabia; and was, in respect of Judea, a far country.

And the sweet cane from a far country - The calamus aromaticus, which, when dried and pulverized, yields a very fine aromatic smell; see on Isaiah 43:24 (note). This was employed in making the holy anointing oil. See Exodus 30:23.

Verse 23

They shall lay hold on bow and spear - Still pointing out the Chaldeans: or according to Dahler, the Scythians, who had before their invasion of Palestine overrun many parts of Asia, and had spread consternation wherever their name was heard.

Verse 27

I have set thee for a tower and a fortress - Dr. Blayney translates, I have appointed thee to make an assay among my people. The words refer to the office of an assayer of silver and gold; and the manner of assaying here intended is by the cupel, a flat broad iron ring filled with the ashes of burnt bones. To separate the alloy from the silver they add a portion of lead; and when all is fused together, and brought into a state of ebullition,

the cupel absorbs the lead, and with it the dross or alloy, and the silver is left pure and motionless on the top of the cupel. The people are here represented under the notion of alloyed silver. They are full of impurities; and they are put into the hands of the prophet, the assayer, to be purified. The bellows are placed, the fire is lighted up, but all to no purpose: so intensely commixed is the alloy with the silver, that it can not be separated. The nozzle of the bellows is even melted with the intensity of the fire used to effect the refinement; and the lead is carried off by the action of the heat; and the assayer melteth in vain, for the alloy still continues in union with the metal. The assayer gives up the process, - will not institute one more expensive or tedious - pronounces the mass unfit to be coined, and denominates it reprobate silver, Jeremiah 6:30. Thus, the evil habits and dispositions of the Israelites were so ingrained that they would not yield to either the ordinary or extraordinary means of salvation. God pronounces them reprobate silver, - not sterling, - full of alloy; - having neither the image nor the superscription of the Great King either on their hearts or on their conduct. Thus he gave them up as incorrigible, and their adversaries prevailed against them. This should be a warning to other nations, and indeed to the Christian Church; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare these.