

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

This chapter contains an entire prophecy. The symbol of the linen girdle, left to rot for a considerable time, was a type of the manner in which the glory of the Jews should be marred during the course of their long captivity, Jeremiah 13:1-11. The scene of hiding the girdle being laid near the Euphrates, intimated that the scene of the nation's distress should be Chaldea, which that river waters. The next three verses, by another emblem frequently used to represent the judgments of God, are designed to show that the calamities threatened should be extended to every rank and denomination, Jeremiah 13:12-14. This leads the prophet to a most affectionate exhortation to repentance, Jeremiah 13:15-17. But God, knowing that this happy consequence would not ensue, sends him with an awful message to the royal family particularly, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in general, declaring the approaching judgments in plain terms, Jeremiah 13:18-27. The ardent desire for the reformation of Jerusalem, with which the chapter concludes, beautifully displays the compassion and tender mercy of God.

Verse 1

Thus saith the Lord unto me - This discourse is supposed to have been delivered under the reign of Jeconiah, the son and successor of Jehoiakim, who came to the throne in the eighteenth year of his age; when the Chaldean generals had encamped near to Jerusalem, but did not besiege it in form till Nebuchadnezzar came up with the great body of the army. In these circumstances the prophet predicts the captivity; and, by a symbolical representation of a rotten girdle, shows the people their totally corrupt state; and by another of bottles filled with wine, shows the destruction and madness of their counsels, and the confusion that must ensue.

Go and get thee a linen girdle - This was either a vision, or God simply describes the thing in order that the prophet might use it in the way of illustration.

Put it not in water - After having worn it, let it not be washed, that it may more properly represent the uncleanness of the Israelites; for they were represented by the girdle; for "as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah." And as a girdle is as well for ornament as use; God took them for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory, Jeremiah 13:11.

Verse 4

Go to Euphrates, and hide it there - Intending to point out, by this distant place, the country into which they were to be carried away captive.

Verse 7

And behold, the girdle was marred; it was profitable for nothing - This symbolically represented the state of the Jews: they were corrupt and abominable; and God, by sending them into captivity, "marred the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem," Jeremiah 13:9.

Verse 12

Every bottle shall be filled with wine? - The bottles were made for the purpose of being filled with wine; and it is likely, from the promising appearance of the season and the grapes, that there was a great likelihood of a copious vintage; and this made them say, "Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? Have we not every prospect that it will be so? Do we need a revelation to inform us of this?"

Verse 13

Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land - with drunkenness - You pretend to take this literally, but it is a symbol. You, and your kings, and priests, and prophets, are represented by these bottles. The wine is God's wrath against you, which shall first be shown by confounding your deliberations, filling you with foolish plans of defense, causing you from your divided counsels to fall out among yourselves, so that like so many drunken men you shall reel about and jostle each other; defend yourselves without plan, and fight without order, till ye all fall an easy prey into the hands of your enemies. The ancient adage is here fulfilled: -

Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.

"Those whom God determines to destroy, he first renders foolish."

Verse 16

Give glory to - God - Confess your sins and turn to him, that these sore evils may be averted.

While ye look for light - While ye expect prosperity, he turned it into the shadow of death - sent you adversity of the most distressing and ruinous kind.

Stumble upon the dark mountains - Before you meet with those great obstacles, which, having no light - no proper understanding in the matter, ye shall be utterly unable to surmount.

Verse 17

My soul shalt weep in secret places - If you will not hearken to the Lord, there is no remedy: destruction must come; and there is nothing left for me, but to go in secret, and mourn and bewail your wretched lot.

Verse 18

Say unto the king and to the queen - Probably Jeconiah and his mother, under whose tutelage, being young when he began to reign, he was left, as is very likely.

Sit down - Show that ye have humbled yourselves; for your state will be destroyed, and your glorious crown taken from your heads.

Verse 19

The cities of the south shall be shut up - Not only the cities of the north, the quarter at which the Chaldeans entered, but the cities of the south also; for he shall proceed from one extremity of the land to the other, spreading devastation every where, and carrying off the inhabitants.

Verse 20

Where is the flock - thy beautiful flock? - Jerusalem is addressed. Where are the prosperous multitudes of men, women, and children? Alas! are they not driven before the Babylonians, who have taken them captive?

Verse 21

Thou hast taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee - This is said of their enemies, whether Assyrians or Chaldeans: for ever since Ahaz submitted himself to the king of Assyria, the kings of Judah never regained their independence. Their enemies were thus taught to be their lords and masters.

Verse 22

Are thy skirts discovered - Thy defenseless state is every where known; thou art not only weak, but ignominiously so. It is thy scandal to be in so depressed a condition; thou art lower than the basest of thy adversaries, and thou art so because of thy sin.

Verse 23

Can the Ethiopian change his skin - Can a black, at his own pleasure, change the color of his skin? Can the leopard at will change the variety of his spots? These things are natural to them, and they cannot be altered; so sin, and especially your attachment to idolatry, is become a second nature; and we may as well expect the Ethiopian to change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as you to do good, who have been accustomed to do evil. It is a matter of the utmost difficulty to get a sinner, deeply rooted in vicious habits, brought to the knowledge of himself and God. But the expression does not imply that the thing is as impossible in a moral as it is in a natural sense: it only shows that it is extremely difficult, and not to be often expected; and a thousand matters of fact prove the truth of this. But still, what is impossible to man is possible to God. See the note on Jeremiah 13:27.

Verse 24

The wind of the wilderness - Some strong tempestuous wind, proverbially severe, coming from the desert to the south of Judea.

Verse 25

Trusted in falsehood - In idols, and in lying prophets.

Verse 26

Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face - It was the custom to punish lewd women by stripping them naked, and exposing them to public view; or by throwing their clothes over their heads, as here intimated. Was this the way to correct the evil?

Verse 27

I have seen thine adulteries - Thy idolatries of different kinds, practiced in various ways; no doubt often

accompanied with gross debauchery.

Wo unto thee, O Jerusalem wilt thou not be made clean? - We see from this, that though the thing was difficult, yet it was not impossible, for these Ethiopians to change their skin, for these leopards to change their spots. It was only their obstinate refusal of the grace of God that rendered it impossible. Man cannot change himself; but he may pray to God to do it, and come to him through Christ, that he may do it. To enable him to pray and believe, the power is still at hand. If he will not use it, he must perish.