

Jeremiah Chapter 24

Verses 1-10: Jeremiah saw the vision of “two baskets of figs” between the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s capture of Jerusalem (in 597 B.C. and its final destruction in 586 B.C.). No doubt those who had avoided exile and had remained in the land viewed themselves as favored by God, but the prophet turns this idea upside down.

Jeremiah 24:1 "The LORD showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs [were] set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon."

“After that Nebuchadnezzar ... carried away”: Babylon’s second deportation of Judeans (in 597 B.C.; compare 2 Kings 24:10-17).

Figs throughout the Bible have symbolized the physical house of Israel. In this particular lesson, it is a little more selective. This is really speaking of the houses of Judah and Benjamin. The Babylonian captivity came about because of the worship of false gods. We will see the two types of figs representing two attitudes toward the punishment God has sent upon them. Notice that a certain group of these people of the physical house of Israel were carried away into Babylon. Jeconiah is the same person as Jehoiachin. Jehoiakim was his father. In every generation there seems to be great trials that come. It is not the trials that make or break a man, but the way that man handles his problems. These figs are in two separate baskets, which symbolize the fact they were separated in two different places. Perhaps one basket is for those in Babylon and one basket is for those who escaped.

Jeremiah 24:2 "One basket [had] very good figs, [even] like the figs [that are] first ripe: and the other basket [had] very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad."

"Like the figs that are first ripe": Figs were usually gathered in August. The “first ripe,” the “summer fruits” (of Micah 7:1). The “hasty fruit before the summer” (Isaiah 28:4; Hosea 9:10), were looked upon as a choice delicacy. The “naughty” (i.e., worthless), fruits were those that had been left behind on the tree, bruised and decayed.

God afterwards explained to the prophet, and he to the king’s house, the significance of this vision. The figs first ripe are usually best. By these good figs, as will appear by the following verses, are intended Jeconiah or Jehoiachin. With the ten thousand mentioned (2 Kings 24:14). And the seven thousand mentioned (2 Kings 24:16), which went with him into captivity. By the other figs which were very bad, not to be eaten, are signified Zedekiah and the residue of the people carried with him into captivity. Some may object that Jeconiah and the people then carried away were wicked enough, why else were they carried away? And being so, how are they compared to good figs?

(1) Though they were bad, yet they might be comparatively good. This people, for the eleven years they continued in their own land, after that their brethren were carried away, not only continuing in their former courses, but still growing worse and worse.

(2) They seem not to be called good or bad figs with respect to their manners or quality, but in respect to what God intended to do to them. In other words to use them as bad figs are used, not fit to be eaten.

One basket of figs is not edible, because they are so bad. It reminds me of Jesus cursing the fig tree that did not produce fruit. We know that all fruit trees to be very good, must be pruned back from time to time. It appears that the figs in the one basket is from a good growth. They have probably been pruned to make them better. We know that the punishment that had come on Judah and Benjamin was to cause them to return to God. I believe the basket of good figs learned their lesson well, and repented and came back to God. The basket of figs that were bad did not learn from their experience. They just went further away from God than they had been in the beginning. They are not changed.

Jeremiah 24:3 "Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil."

What seest thou, Jeremiah?": The question is asked as if to force the symbol as strongly as possible on the prophet's mind, leaving him to wait till another word of the Lord should come and reveal its true interpretation. We are reminded, as he must have been, of the vision and the question which had first called him to his work as a prophet (Jer. 1:11).

As there are some figs that are ripe sooner than others, and which are always the most desirable and acceptable. And such were they that were presented to the Lord, (Micah 7:1). These signified those that were carried captive into Babylon with Jeconiah, among whom were some very good men, as Ezekiel, and others. And all might be said to be so, in comparison of those that were at Jerusalem, who were very wicked, and grew worse and worse.

"And the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad": As nothing is more sweet and luscious, and agreeable to the taste than a sound ripe fig, and especially a first ripe one. So nothing is more nauseous than a naughty rotten one. These signified the wicked Jews at Jerusalem indulging themselves in all manner of sin. So those who seemed to be the worst, through their being carried captive, were the best. And those who, seemed to be the best, by their prosperity, were the worst. This is to be understood in a comparative sense, as Calvin observes. Though this does not so much design the quality of persons, as the issue of things, with respect unto them. The captivity of the one would issue in their good, and so are compared to good figs. When the sins of the other would bring upon them utter ruin and destruction without recovery, and therefore compared to bad figs that cannot be eaten.

It is well-known that people who are living for God are in a growing process. They become better every day. My own statement is that Christianity is a daily walk through life with Jesus as our Leader. The longer we walk, the more like Him we become. Sin is the same way. Once a person commits a sin it is much easier to commit the sin again, or one much worse. The slide into a lifestyle of sin is easy, you just commit the first sin. The rest is easy.

Jeremiah 24:4 "Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,"

The words seem to imply an interval, during which the prophet was left to ponder over the symbols that he had thus seen. At last “the word of the Lord came” and made their meaning clear.

Very often in these lessons, Jeremiah reminds us that the words are coming directly from God.

Jeremiah 24:5 "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for [their] good."

“Like these good figs” (the object lesson of verse 2 is explained). Deported Judeans, captive in Babylon, will have good treatment, not death as shown (in 29:5-7, 10). They will be granted privileges as colonists rather than being enslaved as captives.

This punishment of captivity by the Chaldeans is for the good of the people captured. They surrendered to them, knowing this punishment was from God. Had they remained in the worship of false gods they would have soon gone to the point of no return. God got them out of there to cause them to seek His face again.

Verses 6-7: The Lord’s transformation of His people’s hearts would heal Israel’s “heart” problem (17:1, 9), and break the pattern of sin and disobedience that had characterized their history.

While it is true that a remnant returned to Judah (in 538 B.C.), this promise had greater overtones in regard to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic (Gen. chapter 12), Davidic (2 Sam. chapter 7), and New (Jer. chapter 31), Covenants in the day of Messiah’s coming and kingdom (compare 32:41; 33:7). Their conversion (verse 7), from idolatry to the one true God is expressed in language which, in its fullness, applies to the complete conversion in the final Kingdom after the present dispersion (compare Rom. 11:1-5, 25-27).

Jeremiah 24:6 "For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull [them] down; and I will plant them, and not pluck [them] up."

His eyes of omniscience, providence, and grace; to communicate good things to them. To take care of them in the furnace of affliction, that they were not lost, but made the better. To watch over them, protect and defend them. To deliver them out of their troubles, and to bring them into their own land; as follows.

"And I will bring them again into this land": The land of Judea, and city of Jerusalem, where Jeremiah now was, and saw this vision. This was accomplished when the seventy years' captivity was ended.

"And I will build them, and not pluck them down": And I will plant them, and not pluck them up": Alluding to the building of houses, and planting of vineyards; signifying that they and their families should be built up and continue. Yea, that they should be a habitation for God, and the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, of his planting, and which should remain. This will be more fully accomplished in the latter day. Though it had in part a fulfilment upon the Jews' return from captivity.

Since they willingly submitted to the chastisement God had put on them, God is pleased with them. He will restore them their land again. Their repentance and acceptance of the punishment they deserved, brought them back into the blessings of God. The greatest blessing was the fact that God forgave them. He restored the blessings on them when He removed the curse.

Jeremiah 24:7 "And I will give them a heart to know me, that I [am] the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

Although this prophecy has provisional application for the returning exiles in the sixth century B.C., it looks far beyond to Israel's ultimate regathering under the terms of the new covenant (see the note on 33:31-34).

They are brand new creatures. God has created a new heart within them. This is a total spiritual renewal within them. It is like the Christians experiencing the new spiritual birth. God wants to fellowship with mankind. He wants to be their God. His holiness will not allow Him to fellowship with them, unless they turn to Him with their whole heart. The curse is gone and the blessings of God are upon them.

Verses 8-10: Those remaining at Jerusalem during the 11 years (597 – 586 B.C.), of Zedekiah's vassal reign would soon face hardship from further scattering to other countries, violent death, famine and disease (compare Jer. 29:17; see 25:9 and note there). These verses quote the curses (of Deut. 28:25, 37; compare 29:18, 22; Psalm 44:13-14), and are also fulfilled in the history of the long dispersion until Messiah returns.

Jeremiah 24:8 "And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt:"

Here follows an explicit meaning of the evil figs, and an application of them to the wicked Jews.

"Surely thus saith the Lord, so will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah": Who was then the reigning king of Judah, Jeconiah's father's brother. Whom the king of Babylon had made king in his stead, and changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). Him the Lord threatens to give up to ruin and destruction, or to deliver into the hands of the enemy.

"And his princes, and the residue of them, that remain in this land"": The rest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that continued in the land of Judea, and were not carried captive.

"And them that dwell in the land of Egypt": Who had fled thither for safety upon the invasion of their land, and besieging their city. All these being like to the bad figs, exceeding evil and wicked, are threatened to be delivered into the hands of their enemies. Though they might think themselves safe and secure where they were.

It appears that Zedekiah was the uncle of Nebuchadnezzar. He was very evil. He was the leader of those that the basket of bad figs represented. We see a rebellious group who would not tolerate the chastisement of the LORD. They had not repented of their evil. Some had fled to Egypt to keep from being captured and they were included in this evil group.

Jeremiah 24:9 "And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for [their] hurt, [to be] a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them."

Jecooniah and the captives with him were only carried into Babylon. But these should be scattered one from another into the several parts of the world. The former was carried captive for their good, and it issued in that. But these were carried away for their hurt, to the injury of their persons and properties, and without having any effect upon them to the good of their souls. Though this might begin to be fulfilled by the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, yet it had a more complete fulfilment in the destruction of this people by the Romans. To which these and the following words seem more particularly to refer.

"To be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them": Their names to be used as a proverb for their riches ill gotten, their falsehood and tricking. And under the curse of God, and the reproach of man, as they are this day (see Deut. 28:37).

They did not repent and the curse was not removed from them. They would be scattered to many different countries. The lands where they lived would look down on them as second-class citizens. The punishment of banishing them to many lands is punishment from God. They would be thought of as outcasts wherever they went.

Jeremiah 24:10 "And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers."

Meaning not in other lands, where they should be driven, but while in their own land, by which many should perish. And the rest that escaped these dreadful judgments should be carried captive. The Targum is, "I will send those that kill with the sword, etc."

"Till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers": So that none of them should be left there to inhabit it, which is now their case. And it is an aggravation of their calamity and punishment, that they are no more the inhabitants of that good land. Which was God's gift to them, and to their fathers before them.

They will not live in the Promised Land any longer. God will drive them out. The sword would cause them to run for safety somewhere else. The famine would send them away in search of food to eat. The pestilence was like locusts that devoured everything in its way. Remember all of this was sent on them by God to drive them out of the land.

Jeremiah Chapter 24 Questions

1. What did God show Jeremiah in verse 1?
2. Who is Jeconiah?
3. What do figs symbolize?
4. In this particular Scripture, they symbolize whom?
5. What do the two types of figs represent?
6. What is another name for Jeconiah?
7. It's not the trials that come that make or break a man, but the way that man _____ those trials.
8. How did the two baskets of figs differ?
9. What makes a fruit tree good?
10. Why did the punishment come to Judah and Benjamin?
11. What did Jeremiah notice about the figs?
12. How is this like people?
13. What does the author say Christianity is?
14. Why is it so important not to commit the first sin?
15. What promise does God make them in verse 6?
16. Why will God bless them, and be their God?
17. Who was the leader of the evil ones?
18. Who was his nephew?
19. What will happen to those evil ones?
20. What would they be thought of wherever they went?

21. What did God send against them to remove them from the land?