

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Fifty-Second Week - Sunday

### THE END ARRIVES

*"And he [Zedekiah] also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear an oath by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh God of Israel. . . . And Yahweh God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:13-16).*

In approaching the close of his history, the author of the books of Chronicles indulges us with some reflections on the causes of the catastrophe which he relates. He thus appears as a commentator upon his own narrative, and the instance before us claims special notice. It was the greatness of the event and the dreadfulness of the consummation that called for the observations here introduced

We find described the iniquities of the nation, especially in the latter years, and the absolute inflexibility and mulishness of the king who "stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning to the LORD God of Israel." And after distinctly stating that even "all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more," the writer goes on to say that God "sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, **till there was no remedy.**" These are awful words.

The word "remedy" is to be understood medicinally--"no healing," as the marginal reading indicates. It is an analogy of the physician who, as long as there is any hope of curing his patient of the disease under which he labors, bestows the utmost solicitude and attention, and who leaves no means or resources untried which might bring about healing. But the physician sees at length that the disease is incurable; there is no remedy, no healing, no hope. At length, after much reluctant delay, he abandons the case and leaves the patient to die.

But it may be made still more exact. The disease, we will say, is not essentially mortal--not absolutely beyond the resource of medicinal skill. But the patient is obstinate. He neglects the

regimen prescribed, refuses the medicine offered, and unleashes upon the physician insulting and contemptuous words and actions to the point where his meek and kind spirit is roused to anger and he leaves the miserable man to perish of the disease which his obduracy has placed beyond all cure.

The judgment which now befell Israel, terrible as it was, is not as astonishing as the patience God had so long displayed in their perverseness. How long He withheld the stroke that at last laid them low! The judgment came most gradually, with constant appeals to repentance and warnings for continued impenitence. Both Judah and Israel had all along evinced a strong propensity to idolatrous abominations; and the jealous endeavors of good kings--the warnings, censures and pleas--together with a long series of glorious prophets specially commissioned by God, were ineffectual to rouse them and to produce a real reformation.

It was for this that the nation was carried away captive and the holy city and its temple reduced to ruin. This calamity came gradually, as it were, piece-meal. Ample opportunity had been left for repentance while God had not yet forgotten to be gracious. But they repented not. Gradual punishment produced no reform in the religion or morals of the people; their morals had become exceedingly corrupt. The last king was no better than his predecessors, notwithstanding the more abundant and sharper warnings he received. Therefore the long-suspended doom at length came down and the land was given over to desolation, and what must have seemed to the people national extinction and utter ruin.

The mercy, the justice, and the wisdom of God are all equally displayed in this event. His *mercy* in bringing this judgment so gradually. That it was a most *just* punishment for their sins no one ever questioned, and they have themselves constantly admitted it, even with tears. It was, in particular, a most righteous punishment of their idolatry, which Moses had long since foretold. (The succession of the Divine judgments is most remarkably traced out in Leviticus 26, an altogether astonishing chapter which should be read in connection with the closing portion of the books of Kings and Chronicles.)

But we also see the *wisdom* of God in this. He did not mean utterly to cast off his people. Therefore He brought them under this great affliction because, as had too plainly appeared, nothing less would suffice to purify them and turn their hearts from the love of idols. In the midst of His wrath the Lord remembered mercy, and this was the end He had in view. In their captive and disconsolate state they had abundant time to look narrowly into the past, and their grievous calamities gave them the disposition to reflect upon the long course of iniquity and perverseness which had brought upon them the heaviest judgments of God. Now "their own wickedness corrected them, and their backslidings reproved them," and they did not fail to "know and see that it was an evil and bitter thing that they had forsaken the LORD their God, and that his fear had not been in them."

In the land of their captivity the words of the prophets would continue to sound in their ears. Their abject and wretched condition made those warnings sink deep into their hearts and gave

them an utter abhorrence of that which they learned to regard as the true cause of all their sufferings--their idolatry. This is no hypothesis. It is certain that after the Babylonian captivity, and under occasional inducements as strong as any to which they had been tempted, there was never again among them the least tendency to idolatry, so deep and salutary was the impression made upon them by this great affliction and so effectual the cure.