

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

H. A. Ironside

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IMPRISONED FOR THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

(Chaps. 32, 33)

All the fervid appeals of the prophet had been apparently wasted on Zedekiah. His heart was bent on departure from God. For over nine years, however, we hear of no positive act of persecution on his part. It is rather the other way. The records indicate that he stood in awe of the solemn and terrible denouncer of his iniquitous ways. His conscience would be, like Herod's, on the accuser's side.

In this tenth year of his reign he was in great straits, owing to the fact that the army of the king of Babylon had invested Jerusalem. In his distress he turned not to the Lord, but brazenly steeled his heart against His words. Jeremiah, particularly, was as a thorn in his side. He determined to silence him. Accordingly he commanded his apprehension, and the prophet was soon placed under arrest and shut up in the court of the prison, which adjoined the royal palace. The ostensible reason given was that by his words he weakened the hands of the people of Jerusalem by declaring that the defence would be in vain; the Lord having assured him that the city was to fall into the hands of the besiegers. Of Zedekiah, too, he had prophesied only evil.

He should not escape, but be certainly delivered into the power of Nebuchadrezzar and led to Babylon as a captive (vers. 1-5). All this was a most unwelcome message for the self-willed king. Having no thought to humble himself, he concluded to silence the seer rather than bow to his message. It has been the common resource of men in all ages, who being set upon their own ways are angered when coming judgment is proclaimed.

In the prison Jeremiah is instructed by the Lord to make what to many would have seemed a most unwise investment.

His cousin Hanameel, the son of his uncle Shallum, had a field in Anathoth, which he, doubtless pressed by the troubles of the times, was desirous of realizing some money upon. A purchaser would be hard to find, but he is instructed to go direct to the very man who had prophesied the captivity of the people, to whom he offers to sell it, as the “**right of redemption**” was Jeremiah's; that is, according to the law he was *the Gael, or kinsman-redeemer*. By his purchasing the field, it would not pass from the house of his fathers.

Hanameel accordingly went to the court of the prison, there to find his cousin in durance vile. The Lord had already apprised Jeremiah of his purpose. **“Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin,”** he said: **“for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself”** (ver. 8). Assured that it was from the Lord, the prophet unhesitatingly bought the property in question, paying for it seventeen shekels of silver. The deed was accordingly made out transferring the property to him, properly attested by witnesses, all in due order as required by the law and custom of the time.

The title-deeds seem to have been contained in two rolls. One was open and the other sealed.

The open one would probably, under ordinary circumstances, be placed on file in the official archives; the sealed one was to be safely stored away until the seventy years’ servitude had come to a close, when it would be of value in determining the portion of Jeremiah’s heirs. It was delivered to Baruch, of whom we now hear for the first time, but who was evidently the prophet’s amanuensis, and a faithful man.

He was instructed to **“take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land”** (vers. 9-15).

The purchase is thus seen to be a distinct act of faith on Jeremiah’s part. God had informed him of the sure return from Babylon of the remnant of the people, upon the expiration of the seventy years. He implicitly believed that word, and therefore bought what seemed to be a piece of ground now worthless, in the possession of which neither he nor his heirs could enter.

At the appointed time the sealed title-deeds would put the rightful owner into possession of the field.

No thoughtful Bible student can fail to see in this striking incident the key to the understanding of the vision of the seven-sealed book in the Revelation. The latter is unquestionably the title-deed to this world. It remains sealed till the rightful Heir steps forth to claim it. He, the worthy One, has first to purge His heritage by judgment, before entering into possession of it. The opening of the seals is the declaration that He is about to enter into His vested rights.

Returning to our chapter, we have, from the 16th verse to the 25th, Jeremiah’s prayer upon the signing of the deeds, followed (from verse 26 to the end) with the Lord’s reiteration of the promise that the land shall yet be inhabited by Israel and fields again bought therein.

In his prayer the prophet acknowledges the power, as also the loving-kindness, of the Lord, and owns the righteousness of His judgment upon His people because of their sins. **“Ah, Lord God!”** he prays, **“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”** (ver. 17).

This is the ground of his confidence. He reposes upon the Word of the Omnipotent God.

“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 everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (vers. 18, 19).

He is owned as the Moral Governor of the universe, who deals with all according to their works. Nothing is too small for His notice, or too great for His capacity.

“All things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to render to all men according to the fruit of their doings. He shows Himself strong in behalf of those who seek to honor Him; while, to such as lightly esteem Him, He appears as an enemy. Not that He ever is such - **“His mercy endureth forever”** - but from the wicked He hides His face.

Jeremiah goes back to the nation’s beginning in Egypt, owning the grace that dealt with them in giving deliverance from the cruel oppressor and in bringing them into the land of promise. All He had undertaken had been abundantly fulfilled, but they obeyed Him not; therefore **“all this evil”** had come upon them (vers. 20-23). Now the Chaldeans surrounded the beloved city, while famine and pestilence raged within. **“What Thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, Thou seest it”** (ver. 24). Yet the Lord had said, **“Buy the field for money, and take witnesses;”** even though the city was given into the hand of the Chaldeans (ver. 25). Here he breaks off abruptly, and at once the Lord answers him by delineating more fully the sin of Israel and Judah, but in assuring him also of the everlasting nature of His covenant with them.

He declares, in verse 27, that He is the God of all flesh, and asks, **“Is there anything too hard for Me?”** - taking up the expression Jeremiah had used in the beginning of his prayer. Precious it is to have to do with One to whom nothing is impossible. What comfort for His imprisoned servant to know that it was the Almighty upon whom he leaned!

Into the hand of the Chaldeans the city shall surely be given, He goes on to say; and Nebuchadrezzar shall take it, destroying the houses and roofs where incense was offered to Baal, and drink offerings were poured out unto other gods.

From their youth the course of Israel and Judah had been only evil. Jerusalem had been to Him **“as a provocation”** of His anger **“from the day they built it unto this day;”** therefore it should be razed to the ground (vers. 28-31).

Kings, princes, priests, prophets, and the commonalty of Judah and Jerusalem, had all been of one heart to do evil in His sight. They had turned their backs upon Him; and though He gave them instructors who would fain have recovered them to Himself, they had refused to heed their messages. Even in His own house they had set up their abominable idols, thus defiling its sacred precincts, while unmentionable idolatrous practices (of which He could say, **“which I commanded them not, neither came it into My mind”**) had they perpetrated (vers. 32-36).

Therefore there was no remedy; He would give them up until His chastisement had yielded **“the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”** In that day He will **“give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear [Him] forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them”** (vers. 37-39).

When, in true repentance, they turned back to Himself, He would **“make an everlasting covenant with them,”** and never more turn away from them, but would put His fear in their hearts, that they should not depart from Him (ver. 40). With His **“whole heart and soul”** He will rejoice over them to do them good. How touchingly human the language used! (ver. 41).

All the evil prophesied had been and should be fulfilled to the letter. In like manner will He literally carry out all His promises for good. No word of His can by any means fail of accomplishment. Israel restored and the land once more inhabited in peace and safety, **“men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south”** (vers. 42-44).

The thirty-third chapter consists of two distinct prophecies, but we group them with the preceding because all alike were given during the time that Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the prison. His body might be in confinement, but none could hinder the communication of divine messages to the soul of the man of God.

The first section includes verses 1 to 18. Like the foregoing, it concerns the restoration to the land, but in no sense limiting it to the return at the expiration of the seventy years in Babylon. **“Great and mighty things”** God is about to show to His servant. He who, for their sins, has permitted the overthrow of Jerusalem, having hidden His face from it, will assuredly bring it health and cure, revealing unto them **“the abundance of peace and truth.”** He will cause the captivity of both Israel and Judah to return, and give them to know His pardoning grace, cleansing them from all their transgressions (vers. 1-8).

Jerusalem is destined yet to become a **“name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all the nations of the earth,”** for the fame of His lovingkindness towards it shall go out into all the world. In place of the desolation which it must for a time know, its streets shall once more be filled with a joyous, God-fearing multitude who shall chant the praise of their covenant-keeping God (vers. 9-11).

In the country round about shepherds shall once more pasture their flocks with none to make them afraid, when the cities shall be rebuilt and the waste places inhabited, in the day that the Lord will perform all His promises of blessing (vers. 12-14).

At that time the veil that for centuries has covered their hearts will be removed; the lowly Nazarene, once rejected as an impostor, will reappear in glory, to be accepted of all the people as the Anointed of the Lord.

“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,” verse 15, 16).

We have already noticed that in chap. 22:6 it is He who is called by this significant name. Here it is applied to her - that is, to restored Jerusalem. His righteousness shall be put upon her; and clothed in the garments of salvation she shall rejoice beneath Immanuel’s sway. The promise made to David shall be fulfilled: he **“shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel,”** and the priesthood likewise shall be established (vers. 17, 18).

The second section is composed of the balance of the chapter-verse 19 to 26, inclusive. It resembles the affirmation of chap. 31:35-37, but is even fuller. If the covenant of the day and of the night can be broken, then may His covenant with David be annulled; but as truly as the stars of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will He multiply the seed of David and of the Levites that minister unto Him (vers. 19-22).

In their unbelief they had charged Him with violating His pledge and casting off the two families (Israel and Judah) which He had chosen; and the reference in their complaint is probably to the Chaldeans: **“They have despised My people, that they should be no more a nation before them”** (vers. 23, 24).

Their reasoning is utterly at fault. It is because they are His people that He **“will punish them for their iniquity.”** Though they pass under the rod, He will not utterly give them up. If His covenant be not with day and night, and if He have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then He will cast away the seed of Jacob and of David; otherwise He will certainly **“cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them”** (vers. 25, 26).

Soon, perhaps in the lifetime of many now upon earth, will He cause these promises to be fulfilled.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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