

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN THE LETTER TO THE CAPTIVITY (Chap. 29)

Not alone to “**the poor of the flock,**” and the haughty rulers who remained in the land, was Jeremiah appointed to minister. He had also a service to render to those who had been carried into captivity. It was not his province to go to them in person and minister among them in the land of their bondage. For this service God had raised up Ezekiel, who was of the number of those who had been deported. He prophesied “**among the captives by the river of Chebar**” (Ezekiel 1:1).

By means of a letter, the sorrowing son of Hilkiah was to give the Lord’s message to his dispersed countrymen. False prophets had arisen among them who were giving them false hopes. Their captivity had not changed their hearts. He must give them a word of rebuke, as also a word of encouragement to those who had faith to receive it.

“**Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (after that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes’ of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) by the hand of Elasar the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon**” (vers. 1-4).

The messengers who carried the letter were sent primarily as ambassadors from Zedekiah’s rebellious court to treat with the great Chaldean ruler. They bore, however, a message from a far greater king than either of these, even from the Lord of hosts. He deigns to communicate in this way with His captive people. The first thing He brings before them is that it was no chance misfortune that had happened unto them. It was Himself who had caused them to be carried away. If they really believed this, how it would affect all their ways. They would see that it was in vain to resist His holy discipline; but it would also, surely, be manifest to them that He was truly concerned about them; otherwise He might have left them to pursue unhindered their self-chosen course.

Ah, He loved them too well for that, as He loves "**His own which are in the world**" now far too much to permit them to go on long in a path contrary to His mind without causing them to feel the rod of chastening. Blessed it is to remember that He deals with us not as enemies, but as sons; for "**what son is he whom his father chasteneth not?**"

The entire passage in Hebrews 12 is a notable one, often overlooked by tried saints, who thus despise or faint beneath the discipline instead of being "**exercised thereby.**"

For the dispersed of Judah, then, the message is that they are to receive as from His own hand their affliction; and in place of trying to effect a deliverance before the appointed time, they are bidden to attend with soberness to the duties of life, and to "**seek the peace of the city**" in which they were captives, and to "**pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace**" (vers. 5-7).

In a similar strain are the sojourners and pilgrims of a later dispensation addressed, both in Peter's first letter (2:11-17) and in Paul's first epistle to Timothy (2:1-4). The former of these passages is especially full, and contains teaching often overlooked in our present restless, not to say reckless, age.

"**Submit yourselves,**" we are told, "**to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.**"

In the other portion referred to, the Christian is instructed to make supplication "**for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.**"

We will never be at home in this world. It is a great pity if we seek to be; but we are here by the will of the Lord; and He would have us own in a practical way the great truth that "**the powers that be are ordained of God.**"

This will not make worldly politicians of us. We need have no more to do with the government ourselves than had the captive children of Judah in the land of Shinar; but we shall really be the salt, preserving the whole social and political system from corruption.

It is not ours to "assert ourselves" and "stand for our rights." We side with Him who came into this scene not to get His rights, but His wrongs. Like Him, then, be it ours to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things which are His.

"**For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you; neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in My name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord**" (vers. 8, 9).

In all ages men have abounded who professed to speak in the name of the Lord. By the Word of God their professions are to be tested, as also by their fruits. It can never be of the Holy One to cause people to resist divine discipline, and to prophesy peace to those away from God. The diviners here referred to were substituting their own idle dreams (in accordance with the desires of their unsubject hearts) for the burden of the Lord.

He had already given His word, and now reiterates it, that “after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon” He would visit them and perform His good word toward them. (See chap. 25:11-14). Then He would cause them to return unto Jerusalem, but not before. Until the prophetic hour should strike, all effort to effect their restoration would be in vain.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (ver. 11).

That which they desired was also His desire for them. The looked-for end should surely come, but only in His own time. How precious thus to learn of God’s intimate concern in the welfare of each saint! His thoughts toward those who are redeemed by the precious blood of the Son of His love are ever thoughts of peace—never of evil. David entered into this when he cried, **“How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with Thee”** (Psalm 139:17, 18). But we must never forget that He has declared, **“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Though He permit sorrow and disaster to beset our footsteps, He will at last guide us into our destined haven where **“there remaineth a rest for the people of God.”**

Israel’s God is ours, and His ways with them but typify His ways with us. **“There is an appointed time for all upon the earth.”** For them the set time of their temporal deliverance was the expiration of the seventy years. For us, the morning of our eternal deliverance will be ushered in by **“the coming of our Lord Jesus, and our gathering together unto HIM.”**

The object of their discipline was to lead to a thorough repentance.

That accomplished, they should call upon Him and He would hearken. His word ran, **“Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart”** (vers. 12, 13). Then He would indeed be found of them, and would turn away their captivity, and gather them back to their land.

Because of the disobedience of those who haughtily said, **“The Lord hath raised us up prophets in Babylon,”** and who failed to bow to the rod, a greater judgment should yet be sent upon the land of their patrimony. Like vile figs (see chap. 24:8), the rest of the people should be cast out and destroyed; for when He had called, they had refused to listen. Thus all hope of present recovery should be destroyed (vers. 15-19).

Two of the false prophets are mentioned by name - Ahab and Zedekiah.

Their utterances are plainly declared to be lies, and as a sign they should be delivered into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar and slain before the eyes of their dupes. Their fate was to be a terrible one - “**roasted in the fire**” for their villainy. This form of punishment was evidently a common one with the king of Babylon, as we gather from Daniel 3. For these false prophets there should be no deliverer, as for the three faithful Hebrews who would not bow to the image set up in the plain of Dura. Not only had these men spoken falsely, but their lives were full of iniquity and lechery, as the Lord knew and was “**a witness**” (vers. 20-23).

This concludes the letter to the captivity. It provoked an answer from one of the dispersed who was known as Shemaiah the Nehelamite, or “the dreamer” - a false prophet too, as this name seems to imply.

He sent letters to the Jews remaining at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, with the rest of the sacerdotal company, affirming that “**The Lord hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the Lord, for every man that is mad and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks**” (vers. 24-26). He inquired therefore why Zephaniah had not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, who, according to him, had “**made himself a prophet**.” Men, unsent themselves by God, are ever ready to charge the true servants of the Lord with being self-appointed men - so deceiving are the ways of Satan. Jeremiah’s letter had told the people, “**This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them**” (vers. 27, 28). This aroused the ire of Shemaiah, as he evidently considered its effect would be to destroy the people’s hopes and keep them from rising in rebellion, if Zedekiah’s revolt seemed to be successful.

Zephaniah the priest read the letter in Jeremiah’s hearing. In response, the word of the Lord came again to him, and he wrote a second epistle to “**all them of the captivity**.” He faithfully denounced the dreamer as a prophet whom the Lord had not sent, and who was causing the people to trust in a lie. Because of this, the Lord would punish both him and his seed. His family should be utterly extirpated. Not a man should be left “**to dwell among this people**.” He should not be permitted to live to see the good that God promised to do for those now oppressed and scattered, because “**he hath taught rebellion against the Lord**” (vers. 30-32). Thus the three arch-deceivers are doomed. Let the people heed the word of the One they had so often grieved!

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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