

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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INTRODUCTORY

In taking up the study of the writings of Jeremiah it is not purposed to attempt a full exposition of the books of this the tenderest of all the prophets. My only thought is to jot down notes of what has been particularly impressed on my own heart in going over them, in the hope that others, especially young Christians, may, like myself, find benefit.

The prophecy with its poetical appendix forms a portion of Scripture abounding in soulful, stirring appeals. If we think of prophecy merely as foretelling the future (and especially unfolding the glories of Messiah's kingdom), we shall not find it nearly so full as either Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel, with which it is commonly classed as being one of the major prophets. It has not the majesty of the first, the extended vision of the last, nor the wondrous imagery of the other; but none of these characteristics would be expected in a series of messages chiefly intended for the conscience. If, however, we think of prophecy in its New Testament sense, as that which brings the soul into the presence of God, we realize at once how fully this is the case here.

The same is true in great measure of Ezekiel, but it would seem that there the people are practically given up from the start, their defection is so complete; part of them already having been carried into captivity, as in the case of the prophet himself (Ezekiel 1:1); but in Jeremiah, in the first half of the book at least, we have evidently ministry with a view to recalling wandering hearts to the One they had forsaken.

It is their restoration to God as a means of deferring the already announced judgment (II Kings 22:12-20) that is now before us. This stamps the book as a whole, and gives character to it. What in Ezekiel is expressed in picture - the slow and reluctant leaving of the Shekinah (chap. 10:4, 18, 19) - is, in the earlier book, brought before us in the earnest pleadings and conscience-rousing entreaties of the Spirit in the tender-hearted Seer, sorrowing so deeply over the fallen condition of his people. I have often been struck by what seemed to be a characteristic likeness in Jeremiah and Nehemiah.

- Both were actuated by the same fervent love for the people and city of God.
- Both were men of broken and contrite spirits, who trembled at the word of the Lord.
- Both were very easily moved men, tears being frequently common to them.

In the earlier servant, however, there is perhaps more exaltedness of character, more self-forgetfulness, than in the later one. For instance, Nehemiah says: **“Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done”** (chap. 13:14); a sentiment frequently repeated. Jeremiah never spoke like this. Once only he cries, when he sees his message is rejected, and hope of the repentance of Judah is gone, and they are devising evil devices against him: **“Remember that I stood before Thee to speak good for them, and to turn away Thy wrath from them”** (chap. 18:20). He was a less intrepid man naturally, however, than the other, the weakness of his heart being again and again manifested, though this only gives better opportunity (as in the case of Gideon and Ezra) for God to display His power. **“When I am weak, then am I strong,”** is the “irresistible might of weakness,” which relies upon **“One who is mighty.”**

Nehemiah, too, seems to be more of what people call a patriot than the man who advised submission to the Babylonian yoke; but in this it is clear that each had the mind of God for the time in which he lived. One stood at the ending of a path of declension and backsliding; the other, at the beginning of a new era of temporary restoration and blessing. Men of God both were. May we emulate what His grace wrought in each.

Coming, then, to the book of Jeremiah itself, we notice that it divides naturally into two main parts, with an appendix added by a later hand, though of course equally inspired by the Holy Ghost.

In chapters 1-24 we hear the gracious pleadings of Jehovah with His erring and rebellious people. This portion is moral rather than devoted to foretelling events.

Chapters 25-51 give in more detail the judgments of God, by means of Nebuchadnezzar, resultant upon the rejection of the previous messages; with, however, promises of future blessing and restoration at the expiration of seventy years' captivity.

The whole present interval of scattering, since the cutting off of Messiah, is passed over in silence. **“Thus far the words of Jeremiah.”**

Chapter 52 is the historical account of the carrying out of the predicted but long-delayed judgment: compare it with II Kings 24:18-20; 25:1-17. The closing verses intimate that as the prophecies of vengeance were thus fulfilled, so shall those be that told of restoration, for Jehoiachin is not allowed to die in prison, but is taken into favor by the king of Babylon - earnest of what is yet to come.

In the Lamentations we are permitted to hear the outpourings of the heart of the grief-stricken prophet bewailing the accomplishment of that which he himself had predicted. How gladly would this dear servant of God have had all his prophecies prove false and himself be put to shame, had the people but been spared!

In this he is blessedly unlike Jonah, who was angry when grace was shown to the repentant Ninevites, at the possible expense of his prophetic reputation, or of his probable desire that Nineveh, from whom Israel had suffered, might not go unpunished.

What makes Jeremiah's sorrow the more bitter is that it has all been deserved by a rebellious and stiff-necked people; but he still turns to Jehovah for succor and renewal. **"Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."**

Oh that those who seek to care for the sheep and lambs of the flock to-day were more characterized by the love and self-abnegation that marked this dear servant of God, whose spirit was not soured by rejection as ours often is, but whose love was only the deeper as the objects of it heaped upon him insult and ignominy. In this, how like the true Man of Sorrows!

In fact, so marked is this, that the rabbis have sought to find in Jeremiah the patient Sufferer of Isaiah 53. To only One, as we know, can such words really apply; but it speaks volumes for Jeremiah's loving endurance in his deep, deep grief, that he should be the **"other man"** (Acts 8:34) whom Christ-rejecting doctors put in the very place of the Holy Sufferer of Calvary. May we be more and more conformed to His blessed ways down here, who **"has left us an example that we should follow His steps."**

~ end of Introduction ~

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