

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SEVENTY YEARS' CAPTIVITY AND THE WINE-CUP OF THE LORD'S FURY (Chap. 25)

The “**burden**” of this chapter antedates that which we have just been considering by about seventeen or eighteen years; the date in the first verse being the fourth year of Jehoiakim and the first of Nebuchadrezzar. Of the former it is recorded that “**he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon**” (II Kings 24:4). Yet his father was the godly and devoted king Josiah who had trembled at the word of the Lord and sought to drive idolatry from the land. Grace is not inherited. “**Ye must be born again**” is of equal force whether applied to progeny of saint or sinner.

It is to the people of Judah and Jerusalem that the prophet addresses himself - not to the rulers as such. For three and twenty years he had exercised his office among them, declaring the word of the Lord.

Since the thirteenth year of Josiah, when the reforms were going on, to the present, when idolatry prevailed everywhere, he had spoken unto them, “**rising early and speaking,**” but they would not hearken. Other servants and prophets had preceded him, but to them likewise they had turned a deaf ear.

The messages of all had been in a great measure alike. They said, “**Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke Me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.**” But there had been no response nor sign of repentance, that He might not be provoked to anger (vers. 2-7).

Because they had thus refused to hearken, the northern army led by Nebuchadrezzar, whom the Lord calls “**My servant,**” should be brought against them and the nations round about them who had seduced them into their idolatrous practices. All joy and gladness, as well as all that told of a people pursuing the ordinary avocations of life, should cease, and the whole land should become a desolation: not forever, however, but “**these nations,**” we read, “**shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**”

This period is a most significant one.

When Israel were about to enter the land, the Lord told them that every seventh year was to be a sabbath, in which the ground was to lie fallow.

“When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee; and for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat” (Leviticus 25:2-7).

A promise of assured prosperity, if observed, was also given; for we read:

“And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then will I command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store” (Leviticus 25:20-22).

There would thus be no lack, but an abundant supply, if they kept the year of rest and gave the land its sabbath; in this way acknowledging the divine ownership, and themselves the Lord’s servants. In Exodus 23:10, 11 we have the command to observe the Sabbatic year more briefly given: but one clause is added, which shows the Lord’s grace to the lowly - **“That the poor of thy people may eat.”** He would keep open house, as it were, and the poverty-stricken should avail themselves of His bounty, resting and eating in this year of cessation from the ordinary duties of husbandry. Not only did He promise blessing if His Word was obeyed; but, through Moses, He solemnly warned them of judgment if they failed to give ear to His commandments. If they walked contrary to Him, He would walk contrary to them; and He declared:

“I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it” (Leviticus 26:34, 35).

And in verse 43, of the same chapter, He says:

“The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept the punishment of their iniquity; because, even because they despised My judgments, and because their soul abhorred My statutes.”

This word, then, it was that the Lord was about to fulfil. The people were to be transported to Babylon for seventy years.

In the present unsatisfactory state of chronology, one would not build too much on numbers; but it would seem that for the entire period from the dedication of the temple till the destruction of it, the Sabbath year had been unobserved. This was approximately 490 years. Seventy Sabbaths had been neglected. For seventy years they should dwell in the stranger's country while the land kept sabbath.

In II Chronicles 36:21, when the threatened captivity had actually taken place, it is stated that it was **“to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath to fulfil threescore years and ten.”**

It is impossible to overreach God. Selfish Judah, doubtless, reasoned that time would be gained and wealth more rapidly accumulated if the year of rest were allowed to pass unobserved. They had to learn the truth of the words, **“Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”**

So with many a self-seeking child of God since. Time spent in waiting upon Him has been esteemed as time lost. Many are too busy to give Him His portion. Business, pleasure, everything that begins and ends with self, in short, must come first; leaving little or no time for Him. But He invariably balances things at last. Many a saint has spent long, weary months and years on a bed of languishing, for the simple reason that the things of God were crowded out and neglected in days of health and vigor. Yet, blessed be His name, as in the case of His earthly people, the days of captivity have been made to become days of great fruitfulness. It was in their subjection to the Babylonian yoke that Judah learned to abhor idols. Never has the nation offended on that ground since. The seasons of the Lord's chastening are not lost time. Afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those exercised thereby. The discipline over, and the lost Sabbath years made up, they were to be permitted to return to their land.

“It shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands” (vers. 12-14).

The overthrow of Babylon would be the signal that Israel's redemption had drawn nigh. Daniel, it will be remembered, was a student of the writings of the former prophets, and it is recorded that he **“understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem”** (Daniel 9:2). He had God's sure word, and he knew that he could rely on it. Jeremiah but spoke the words which, by the inspiration of the Almighty, had been given him.

It is noticeable that Babylon, having been permitted to destroy Jerusalem, and having been the instrument of the Lord's discipline, should in her turn be utterly destroyed for her manifold abominations.

“Judgment must begin at the house of God.” The nations, however, should not escape. Verses 15 to 26 give a list in detail of the various peoples to whose lips the wine-cup of the Lord's fury must be pressed. To each one Jeremiah is to hand it in turn, to **“cause all the nations . . . to drink it.”** Drinking, they would fall and rise no more (ver. 27).

“And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by My name, and should ye be utterly unpunished?” (vers. 28, 29).

Nay, it could not be; for, **“if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”** (I Peter 4:18). How the nations were made to drink and to fall before the might of the Lord has been for long ages a matter of authentic history.

In martial meter, and with graphic delineation, the day of the Lord's controversy with the nations and their shepherds, or kings, is set forth in the closing verses (30-38). Comment is unnecessary. The simplicity and grandeur of the description need no interpreter.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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