

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

H. A. Ironside

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CHAPTER TWENTY

THE FIRST DESTRUCTIVE CRITIC ON RECORD

(Chap. 36)

Among the host of latter-day evils which are sapping the very foundations of Christianity in the minds of the masses, none has been more audaciously impious in its assault upon the truth of God than the so-called Higher Criticism. Under the guise of reverent scholarship seeking to determine the authenticity of books that faith has never questioned, the advocates of this destructive school have not hesitated to cut in pieces the Scriptures of truth, and deliberately seek to falsify the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, at least, who knew all things, had no doubts as to the divine authority of every jot and tittle of the Old Testament. It was to Him the inspired utterance of the Holy Ghost.

His apostles, likewise, accepted every part of it - the Law, and the Prophets, and the Psalms - as God's unerring message to His creatures. Nowhere is there the least hesitancy as to owning the full authority of any portion of what was in their day the accepted canon of Holy Scripture.

It has remained for present-day theorists, bereft alike of sound judgment and true godliness, to challenge the genuineness and to impugn the veracity of what our Lord and His first followers (themselves inspired men) received without question as the **“oracles of God.”** Terrible indeed must be the judgment of those who seek thus to undermine faith in God's holy Word, and to turn the simple from the ways that be in Christ to paths of error and confusion.

And what, alas, will be the eternal state of those who, in many instances, accept all too greedily the poisoned sweetness of these venders of religious confections, glad in heart to be released from a sense of responsibility to God and His Word that has been at least a check upon their consciences, when tempted to ways of utter ungodliness?

Rest assured, dear fellow-believer, ours is a faith founded upon an impregnable Rock. Men who refuse it do so to their own destruction. The wild vagaries of the destructive critics are only the precursors of the great apostasy that is now near at hand. But, thank God, ere that awful night of gloomy unbelief settles down upon the minds of the great mass of Christendom, the Church will have been caught away to be with the Lord in the Father's house.

The Holy Spirit, with the Body of Christ, leaving this scene, Antichrist will quickly arise, to whom all the vaunted learning of the day, then Christless, will bow the knee; for **“God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie: that they all may be judged because they obeyed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (II Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

These opponents of the important truth of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures are but the John the Baptists of Antichrist - the preparers of his way. No honest reader of the Old Testament can fail to see that inspiration is stamped on every page. Jesus affirms it again and again; and when quoting Old Testament Scripture, does so as giving forth the last word on the subject, against which there can be no gainsaying.

Note it in His temptation, where each passage quoted in defeat of Satan is taken from Deuteronomy, the book so much attacked by the critics. He who knew all things questioned neither its reputed authorship, nor its divine authority. Elsewhere He solemnly declares, **“The Scripture cannot be broken,”** and that **“not one jot or tittle shall pass from the Law until all be fulfilled.”**

The Scriptures everywhere bear witness of Him, and He is seen as the fulfilment of Scripture. In the wilderness; in His life of service; in His passion on the cross - one thing after another is said or done **“that it might be fulfilled which was written”** in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Him; and in resurrection it is still the same. To the two on the road to Emmaus He opens up the sacred volume, explaining in every scripture the things concerning Himself. It is the same with the apostles: for Peter, Paul, James or Jude the testimony of Scripture is the end of controversy: **“Well spake the Holy Ghost,” “The Holy Ghost saith,” “As it is written”** - such are the expressions used to introduce passages from the three great divisions of the Old Testament. In reverence they received every word as direct from the living God.

As to the New Testament writings, the stamp of divine authority rests upon every page. The Lord Jesus said to His apostles, **“Whoso heareth you heareth Me.”** And John therefore writes, **“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”** (I John 4:6). In the most solemn way he seals the authority of the book of Revelation, testifying that **“if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”** (Revelation 22:18, 19).

Peter, too, classes the letters of **“our beloved brother Paul”** with **“the other Scriptures,”** thus attesting their divine source; and the great apostle to the Gentiles asserts full inspiration in unmistakable terms: **“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth”** (I Corinthians 2:13). And in I Corinthians 14:37 he writes: **“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”** To so acknowledge brings lasting blessing; to deny, brings shame and everlasting confusion, after the plaudits of the “liberal-minded” have been hushed for aye!

It is sometimes stated there are portions of Paul's epistles where he himself disclaims divine authority, but gives his own private opinion. Because of the importance of the subject, and in order to help any reader who may thus be troubled, we will turn aside to notice these passages.

In I Corinthians 7 he writes, as to the relations of husbands and wives, and in the opening verses gives them their true place in the family. In ver. 5 he says: **“Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”** Then he immediately adds: **“But I speak this by permission, and not by commandment.”** That is, he does not command such times of separation, which in some households might bring in confusion - he simply permits it in cases where it would be profitable. Only an ungodly will could pervert this to teach that the apostle was denying direct inspiration.

Ver. 12 is supposed to teach similarly. If compared with verse 10 and 11 all is clear. **“Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.”** All this was directly commanded by the Lord in Matthew 19. Therefore he says, **“Yet not I, but the Lord.”** He had already spoken. Now look at the next verse: **“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord** (that is, the Lord had not heretofore spoken as to what is to follow; the apostle himself declares the mind of God regarding it): **“If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him,”** etc.; and here instruction is given for varied cases as they might come up. Notice the authoritative tone in ver. 17: **“And so ordain I in all the churches.”** Here we have both conscious inspiration and authority.

In ver. 25 he writes: **“Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.”** The italicized portion negatives all thought of partial or non-inspiration. He gives an inspired judgment based on the place God has given him. The 40th verse is similar. His was a judgment guided by the Spirit of God. There is a difference between revelation and inspiration. Here we have the latter, but not necessarily the former.

As to the universality of his writings, or their application to all believers, the opening verses of the epistle we have been looking at state it most emphatically. He writes **“unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”** (ver. 2). Could words be plainer? Who, that is at all subject to the Scriptures, would limit the application of a letter so addressed? Note, too, how he speaks of himself in the introduction to the Romans. **“By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name”** (ver. 5).

And so one might go on from epistle to epistle and point out similar evidences of his consciousness that what he wrote was binding on the consciences of all saints, because inspired by the Holy Ghost.

Let us turn now to the chapter before us, which gives us the first recorded instance of this unhallowed mutilation and rejection of the written Word of God - now so common. The exceeding importance of the subject alone has made so long a digression permissible. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was instructed by the Lord to take a roll of a book and to write all that He had spoken against both Israel and Judah and the surrounding nations, from the beginning of the prophet's ministry in the days of Josiah unto the time when so commanded (vers. 1, 2).

We read of no writings of his prior to this; the letters of chap. 29 having been penned some years later. All his messages had been delivered orally. Now they are to be gathered together in the form of a book, so that the king and the house of Judah may the better consider what God had said.

The Lord adds, "**It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin**" (ver. 3).

How God longed for their recovery! He had no delight in their judgment. Much more readily would He have granted forgiveness had there been any evidence of repentance and contrition of heart.

Accordingly, Baruch wrote "**all the words of the Lord**" at Jeremiah's dictation. The prophet himself was "**shut up**" (in what way we know not), and could not go to the house of the Lord, but Baruch is sent to read all that has been written to the assembled multitudes, upon the occasion of a fast which had been proclaimed because of the wretched conditions prevailing, when all the cities of Judah would be represented in Jerusalem. Gathered thus for humiliation and the afflicting of their souls, it might be they would give ear to the Word of God, and turn from their manifold iniquities when they knew the great anger of the Lord and what He had pronounced against them (vers. 6, 7).

This fast was to take place in the ninth month of Jehoiakim's fifth year. On that day the son of Neriah repaired to the temple and read in the book before all the people, at the door of the new gate of the Lord's house, standing in the entrance to the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe. The son of this Gemariah, Michaiah by name, seems to have been deeply affected by the words to which he had listened. His heart and mind full of them, he went down to the scribe's chamber, of the royal palace, where he found a company of the chief men assembled. Among them were his own father, and a scribe known as Elishama, together with other leaders of the people, and all the princes. To them the young man gave an outline of all he had heard from Baruch's reading of the roll.

They were evidently concerned, for the time at least, for they sent at once to summon the servant of the prophet to bring the book and come to their council-hall; and having come, they said, "**Sit down, and read it in our ears.**"

So for the second time that day Baruch read the solemn messages, with the result that they were afraid, and said to the reader, "**We will surely tell the king of these words.**"

They desired to be certain that the writing was indeed what it professed to be, a series of messages from the Lord through Jeremiah; so they asked Baruch, “**Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth?**” He replied, “**He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.**”

Evidently realizing something of the importance of the contents of the roll, yet fearing the king’s wrath upon the promulgators of it, and being solicitous as to the prophet’s welfare, the princes warned Baruch, saying, “**Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be**” (vers. 11-19).

Laying up the roll in the chamber of Elishama, the scribe, the princes and chief men hurried themselves to the king’s palace, and gave to Jehoiakim the gist of the words it contained. Jehudi is sent at once to fetch it, and began to read it in the presence of the king and of the princes who stood beside him.

The reader had but gone over three or four leaves when the impatient monarch “**cut it with a penknife,**” or a “*scribe’s knife,*” and deliberately cast it into the fire before him. In vain three of the princes besought the king not to burn the sacred roll. The king persisted in his impiety; neither did he nor his servants manifest any fear or concern for the affront offered to the Lord.

On the contrary, an order was issued for the arrest of both Baruch and Jeremiah, but the Lord cared for His servants, and “**hid them**” (vers. 20-26).

The king thus put himself on record as the first mutilator of the Word of God recorded in Scripture.

Alas, how many have followed in his steps since that day, when, all unknown to himself and his foolhardy friends, he sealed his doom by his willful rejection of the inspired message. The “scribe’s knife” has often been used since to mutilate and destroy the Word of truth - aye, to the final sorrow of every one that does it! Heaven and earth may pass away; the Word of God, never! Truth cannot be destroyed; it is unalterable, and the will of impious “scholarship” can never set it aside.

The emissaries of Rome, also, sought to make an end of it in the days of papal persecutions.

Thousands of Bibles were consigned to the flames, but they became as the seed from which millions of copies sprang. Infidelity has raged and done its worst to discredit it. Still the Bible is triumphant. Any other book, so treated, would long ago have been but a memory, and have disappeared from the face of the earth: but God has cared for it.

It has remained for so-called Christian scholars to emulate Romanism and Atheism, under the guise of legitimate criticism, in knifing the sacred volume and consigning large portions of it to the fire of their cheap scorn and derision, as unreliable and uninspired; but they have yet to learn that the book they criticize is, itself, the supreme critic.

“For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner (literally, critic) of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12, 13).

Of the Word of God, as of the person of Christ, it may be said: **“Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder”** (Matthew 21:44).

In that solemn day when the **“books are opened”** Jehoiakim will find, unharmed by the flames, the roll he wantonly sought to destroy brought out as a witness against his guilty soul; and those who now, whatever their profession, assail the truth, seeking to discredit the Scriptures as the very Word of God, will be judged then by the very portions they now refuse.

Who can conceive the awful awakening of men in that day who have filled Christian pulpits and doled out venerated infidelity to the ignorant and the blind, to the destruction of themselves and their willing hearers - what an awakening, when they stand face to face with Him who sits upon **“the great white throne,”** whose Word they have dared to impugn! They will behold in the glory:

- The “mythical Abraham” who believed God;
- The “unknown” Isaiah, who testified to the coming of the Lord Jesus in terms so unmistakably clear;
- The very Jonah whose story they had laughed to scorn; and
- The Daniel whose experiences they had classed with fables.

All these veritable, living men, in the abode of light and bliss; but themselves, who ridiculed their very existence, alas, cast into outer darkness forever, nevermore to doubt the Word of God!

Jehoiakim’s effort to destroy the Scriptures, like all others since, could only be utterly futile. The Word of the Lord came again to Jeremiah to **“take another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah had burned”** (vers. 27, 28).

Not only would the prophecies which had been consigned to the flames be re-written and preserved forever, but much more was to be added. As for the impious monarch, condign punishment must be meted out to him, that others might learn not to trifle with or reject the Word of God.

“Then shalt thou say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord: Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost” (vers. 30, 31).

It may have seemed to some that this declaration, so far as his having none to sit upon David's throne was concerned, had signally failed, when upon his captivity his son Jehoiakim, or Jeconiah, ascended that throne. But after an inglorious reign of but three months and ten days he was carried away to Babylon with a great number of the people, in accordance with the doom pronounced upon him by this same prophet, in chapter 22:30.

Not one thing should fail of all that the Lord had pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem. To refuse to read the roll and to destroy it in the fire did not in any sense annul it (ver. 31).

In accordance with this word, **“Jeremiah took another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words”** (ver. 32).

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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