

# A CHARACTER STUDY OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Lesson 6

## THE SUFFERING PROPHET

*“Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days.”*

Jeremiah 37:15-16

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## THE SUFFERING PROPHET

*“Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness.”*

*Jeremiah 23:9*

The faith of Jesus Christ in America for the past 150 years has been unique in all of church history. Believers down through the years have been called upon to suffer and some times die for their faith. In American, however, Christians have known relative peace and security. We have been free to assemble and worship together and preach the Gospel without fear of rebuke or reprisal. Churches have been blessed with religious freedom and have been thankful for that priceless opportunity. This has not always been true for Christians everywhere. Many churches have not had this freedom and preachers around the world have many times been called upon to suffer for the

faith. Even today, believers in many places know extreme persecution for no other reason than they claim to follow the faith of the Savior, Jesus Christ. They teach us the meaning of sacrifice.

Jeremiah has been called the reluctant prophet because he was given a message to deliver that would anger his hearers. When God called Jeremiah to serve Him, He promised him three things. (Jer. 1:7-9) He said, "I am with thee." "I have put my words in thy mouth" and then God said I will "deliver thee." Jeremiah knew that if he answered this call, he would need to be delivered from those who heard his message. The word "deliver" means to rescue or to support. He would need to be rescued from dangerous people and situations. Jeremiah was the "weeping prophet" and he was the "reluctant prophet." He endured beatings, imprisonment, and death threats. Yet, in each of these situations, God always rescued him from danger or sent someone to him to support him and to provide for his needs. God called him to a hard work but kept His promise to deliver him.

## **“DEVICES” WERE DEvised AGAINST JEREMIAH – Jeremiah 18:1 – 23**

In chapter 18 of his prophecy, Jeremiah was sent to preach to the people of Israel. He told them that they must repent from their sin and do good. (Jer 18:11) Instead of repenting they decided there was no hope for them and turned their hatred toward Jeremiah. They determined to “*devise devices against Jeremiah*”. (Vs. 18) A device was a scheme that was created to oppose him. They made four such devices against him. The first device was a verbal smear campaign. They used their words. They would “*smite him with the tongue*” (Vs. 18) They started a whisper war against him to discredit him. Next, they dug a pit of emotional depression for him. He said that “*they have digged a pit for my soul*” (Vs. 20) Their continual harping and back-biting was designed to discourage him so he would give up his preaching. Thirdly, he said that “*they have digged a pit to take me.*” (Vs. 22) Their goal was to hinder his work any way they could. It is hard to work when there are walls and impediments placed on all sides. Finally,

they set “*snares for my feet*” (Vs. 22b). They devised any way they could to trip him up in his work.

Jeremiah saw these devices that were used against him. He did not retaliate against the people but left to God their recompense. (Vs. 23) Interestingly, he did not pray for mercy on them, but that that they should be “*over-thrown*”. He asked God to deal with them in His own “*time of anger.*” It is a dangerous thing to oppose the man of God. Pastor, at some point these devices will be uses against you. Be encouraged. The Father stands by the man who preaches His truth. (Vs. 19)

### **THE PERSECUTION OF PASHUR – Jeremiah 20:1-6**

At the end of Jeremiah nineteen, there is recorded the story of Jeremiah’s first experience of personal physical violence. God sends him to the Temple to prophecy against the people who had “hardened their necks” against the Lord. Pashur, a Temple official, was angered at the preaching. He had Jeremiah beaten and placed in stocks.

“The expression ‘smote Jeremiah’ is a technical one, and in all likelihood means that the official scourging of ‘forty stripes save one’ was administered. (Morgan)” (Guzik. On Jeremiah 20:2) He was severely beaten for the crime of bringing the words of God to the people. He was warning them that God’s Judgment was coming because of their stubborn refusal to obey God. Not only was he beaten, but afterward he was placed in “stocks”. “The 'stocks,' where the prophet was confined, were intended not only for restraint but also for torture. . . . The stocks, which were used for false prophets (cf. 2 Chron 16:10), held the feet, hands, and neck so that the body was almost doubled up (cf. 29:26). . . . This is the first recorded act of violence done to Jeremiah.” (Constable. P. 190) Perhaps this was the sufferings that Jeremiah endured that caused him to almost despair when he cried out to the Lord. In pain, he cried, “*O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me.*” (Vs 20:7) Yet,

in his despair, God delivered him, as He promised that He would do. Jeremiah proclaimed, *“But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore, my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.”* (Vs 20:11) The Father may ask us to travel difficult paths but He will not allow us to travel them alone. His presence will be there to lead and guide all the way.

**THE IMPRISONMENT OF JEREMIAH. –**  
(Jeremiah 36 - 39)

“Chapters 37—44 contain what some have called the Via Dolorosa [Way of suffering] prose of the Jeremiah book, describing as they do Jeremiah's suffering before and after the collapse of the nation from the vantage point of one who had observed it at close range. . . .” It has been referred to as “the 'passion narrative of the prophet.'” These designations apply particularly to chaps. 37-38, which report Jeremiah's imprisonments

prior to Jerusalem's capture." (Constable. P 315) In chapter 36 is found the account of Jeremiah writing his prophecies in a scroll. These prophecies were read to the people of Jerusalem and then read to King Jehoiakim who destroyed the pages by burning them. Jeremiah had instructed his assistant, Baruch, to read the scroll in the Temple. Jeremiah did this because he had been excluded from the court of the Temple. His previous message offended the Temple officials. (cp. Vs. 19:14-20:2)

For several more years Jeremiah ministered among his people but they still did not respond with repentance from their sin. (Jer 37:2) During this time, history reports that Pharaoh came up from Egypt and challenged Babylon, who's armies fled in fear. (Vs. 37:11) At this same time, Jeremiah attempted to return to his home town of Anathoth outside of Jerusalem. When it was discovered that he was leaving, he was captured, and accused of desertion. *"Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate*

*himself thence in the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison.” (Vs. 12-15)*

“The text records five steps in Jeremiah's prison experiences. First, he was arrested in the gate and committed to a dungeon on a false charge of treason (37:11-15). Second, he was released from the dungeon but restricted to the courtyard of the prison (37:16-21). Third, he was imprisoned in Malchijah's miry dungeon in the prison courtyard (38:6). Fourth, he was released from this dungeon but restricted to the prison courtyard again until Jerusalem fell (38:17-28). Fifth, Nebuzaradan, the captain

of the Babylonian guard, took him in chains to Ramah, where he released Jeremiah (40:1-4).<sup>1</sup> (Constable. P.318) Jeremiah's "crime" was he preached to the people that God was going to use Babylon to punish Israel for their unfaithfulness. He told them that they would be safer if they surrendered to the Babylonians and allowed themselves to be taken captive. *"Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt."* (Vs 38:4)

At one-point, Jeremiah found himself in the dungeon of Malchiah. "The nobles had Jeremiah placed in a cistern of one of the royal princes, Malchijah, which was in the court of the guardhouse. Jeremiah had previously been confined in this court or stockade (37:21), but now he was lowered into the cistern with ropes. The cistern had no water in it, but the bottom was very

muddy, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. The nobles wanted him to die there of "natural causes," i.e., hunger— probably to alleviate their guilt." (Constable. P. 328) What a terrible place to find oneself! He was there because he told the people what God wanted them to hear. Now he was sinking in filthy muck. "*And in the dungeon, there was no water, but mire: so, Jeremiah sunk in the mire.*" (Vs.38:6) Here God again kept His promise to "deliver" Jeremiah. God placed on the heart of a man who was named, Ebed-melech to speak to the king and ask him if he could rescue the prophet from this terrible place. Ebed-melech was a eunuch from Ethiopia, a minor official in the court. His name means, "servant of the king." (Wycliffe. P. 683.) At that moment he became the servant of the Most-High God and was sent to rescue the Prophet of God. He let down "*old cast clouts and old rotten rags. [old clothes and rags]*" (Vs.11) God provided a deliver to his servant and rescued him from this place of death. He placed him in a space of safety and fed him for the rest

of the time he was kept there. Jeremiah told the King, Zedekiah, *“Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.”* (Vs. 20) Again, the prophet spoke the Word of God, even after suffering such affliction. "Nothing is more marked throughout all this story than the absolute and unswerving loyalty of Jeremiah to the message of judgment which he was called on to deliver." (Constable. P. 327. Quoting Morgan.) Through all the physical suffering, threat of bodily harm, and death, Jeremiah remained faithful to his calling. He trusted that the Lord would fulfill His promise to deliver him from his foes. In each situation, God did just that. With all the confusion of the attack on the city, Jeremiah was protected and fed even when the rest of the city knew famine. The Lord keeps his promises. Even when He calls us to perilous missions, we are safe in His protection.

## NOTES

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