

September 7

Scriptures: Read Jeremiah 20 & 21

Key Verse: “Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers.” (Jeremiah 20:13)

Overview

After breaking the earthen vessel, Jeremiah followed the Lord’s leading to the Temple mount for further public preaching. Once again he pronounced the coming divine judgment and rebuked the people for their carelessness (19:14-15). Those in the court, falsely believing themselves to be worshipping God, were angered by Jeremiah’s accusation and condemnation. The priest Pashhur, son of Immer (cf. 1 Chron. 24:14), was the chief of security and was responsible for keeping the peace in the holy area of God’s House. However, when Jeremiah revealed him to be one of the false prophets (20:6b), he expressed his anger by striking Jeremiah. How ironic that the one who was supposed to maintain the sanctity of the Temple was actually a source of defilement. He was also the one who authorized the imprisonment of Jeremiah, the only one present who really had any right to be there (20:1-2).

Despised, rejected, and held up to public scorn, Jeremiah spent the night in stocks, which kept his feet, hands, and neck in a distorted and painful position. The persecution, however, did not stop Jeremiah from being God’s spokesman. The next day when Pashhur came to release him from the stocks, he boldly told him that God had now changed his name from Pashhur (which implies “prosperous, calmness and peacefulness”) to Magor Missabib (meaning “fear [terror] on every side”); this was a term that King David used when he was oppressed by his enemies (Ps. 31:13). The Lord would cause Pashhur to not only be a terror to himself, but to experience terror all around him, for he and his household would be taken captive by the enemy. For the first time, Jeremiah now reveals the name of that enemy — Babylon — thus confirming the prophecies of Isaiah spoken a century earlier (cf. Isa. 39:6-7).

Imprisoned and put to shame, Jeremiah turns to the Lord with a broken heart and reveals his innermost thoughts. Because of the message God had given him, he had been the object of mockery and shame, and had he been like the other prophets, he would have been honoured. In his weakness and pain, he wished that he could remain silent in order to avoid the persecution, but his convictions would not allow it, for God’s word was like “a burning fire” within his heart which he could not contain. His sentiments were like that of the Apostle Paul, who said: “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16; cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-10; 6:3-10). Jeremiah, like Job, had reached the depths of despair, and he expressed his sorrow of heart by wishing he had never been born. This seems to us like something terrible to say, but the reasons behind his despair are more than just his present painful circumstance and humiliation, it is because his message of salvation had been rejected, and therefore God had been rejected. As a prophet, he had envisioned the result of this rejection and wished he would not live to see the horrible slaughter of his people and the destruction of his nation (20:14-18; cf. Job 3:3,10-11, 20). Jeremiah, however, could still sing praises to God, for he knew that God was sovereign, and he had the faith that God would mercifully deliver all those who were truly His people (20:11-13).

It is obvious that there is a time gap between chapters 20 and 21, since the event recorded in chapter 21 is during the reign of the last wicked king of Judah, Zedekiah. He had rebelled against their Babylonian suzerain which caused Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege to Jerusalem (for historical background see 2 Kings 24-25). Since Jerusalem was a strongly fortified city, the siege took a little more than a year; therefore, the situation inside the city was horrible and distressing. Finally, it was realized that Jeremiah was a true prophet of God, for his prediction of Babylon's attack on Judah had come to pass. Even though Zedekiah sent his representatives to enquire of the Lord from Jeremiah, it is evident that Zedekiah asked with unbelief. After his hopes in help from Egypt failed, Zedekiah, out of desperation, thought he would see if the divine power could help them, as God had done years earlier when the Assyrians had laid siege to Jerusalem. However, unlike the godly King Hezekiah, Zedekiah ignored the demands of God and did not humble himself before God.

Jeremiah's message was not what Zedekiah's chief officers wanted to hear. He boldly spoke the words of God, even though it could have endangered his very life. He made it clear that God was against Jerusalem, and had sent the Babylonians against them; yet there was a way of escape from death, and that was by yielding to the will of God and accepting God's just punishment for their sin. "The way of life" (21:8; cf Deut. 30:19), even if it meant poverty and captivity, was in surrendering to the Babylonians, and if anyone remained in the city, death was inevitable. Jeremiah also prophesied a message of doom for Zedekiah, and although we do not read of his response, we can be sure the prophecy was fulfilled (cf. 2 Kings 25:7).

Prayer

God of truth, make us to be men and women of our convictions, willing to stand for what we believe in, no matter what it may cost. Cause Your Word to burn like fire in our hearts, that we will be faithful to speak "in season and out of season".