

JEREMIAH'S AFFLICTIONS

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When God first called young Jeremiah to be a prophet to the sinful people of Judah and Jerusalem, He foretold that Jeremiah would suffer much at the hands of his countrymen. In Jeremiah 1:8-10, the Lord told Jeremiah, "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." God was going to "call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jer 1:15-19). God promised that Jeremiah would not be killed by the people, but he would suffer much affliction.

Jeremiah's sufferings

As God had promised, Jeremiah was persecuted greatly for righteousness' sake. In Jeremiah 15:15-18, Jeremiah said, "O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" The Book of Jeremiah contains many details of the prophet's persecutions, including attempts on his life (that failed per God's promise), threats, and imprisonment (see Jer 11:18-23; 12:5-6; 15:10,15-18; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:1-3,7-18; 29:24-32; 32:1-3,8,12; 33:1; 36:5,19,26; 37:11-21; 38:1-16,24-28). In one notable example, Jeremiah was put into a pit by king Zedekiah and his princes because of his prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah (Jer 38:1-5). "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire" (Jer 38:6). After this, the Ethiopian eunuch Ebedmelech took thirty men and "took him up out of the dungeon" (Jer 38:7-13). All of this was done because Jeremiah had spoken the word of God to the people as the Lord had commanded him.

Lamentations chapter three

The Book of Lamentations, especially chapter 3, contains Jeremiah's own description

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(continued)

of his sufferings. In Lamentations 3:1, Jeremiah said, "I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath." He further said that he was "remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me" (Lam 3:19-20). Jeremiah had seen darkness (Lam 3:2,6), and his flesh and skin was old and his bones broken (Lam 3:4). He had been compassed with gall and travail (Lam 3:5), and hedged about such that he could not get out, bearing a heavy chain (Lam 3:7). His ways had been enclosed with a hewn stone, and were made crooked and turned aside (Lam 3:9,11). He was pulled in pieces and made desolate (Lam 3:11). He had been hit with "arrows" (Lam 3:12-13). Jeremiah was "a derision to all my people; and their song all the day" (Lam 3:14). He was filled with bitterness and drunken with wormwood (Lam 2:15). His teeth were broken and he was covered with ashes (Lam 3:16). He was far removed from peace and prosperity (Lam 3:17). His strength had perished (Lam 3:18). In Lamentations 3:52-58, Jeremiah said, "Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life."

Jeremiah's endurance

Yet, through all of this, the prophet endured and continued to serve the Lord obediently and faithfully. He said in Lamentations 3:22-23, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." He also said, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him" (Lam 3:25). God's purpose for giving afflictions to men is *not* to cast them off forever or to inflict grief just for the sake of grief. "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lam 3:31-33). Suffering for righteousness' sake is one of the major ways that we grow spiritually. In the midst of his own afflictions, Job said, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). The New Testament also teaches this. For example, 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." This is why we need to study men like Job and Jeremiah. James 5:10-11 says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."