

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 20

This chapter gives an account of the usage that Jeremiah met with from many for his prophecies, and the effect it had upon him. He was smitten and put in the stocks by Pashur the priest, who released him the next day, (^{<2001>}Jeremiah 20:1-3); upon which he prophesies again of the delivery of the city of Jerusalem, with all its riches, and of the whole land, to the Chaldeans; and particularly that Pashur should be a terror to himself and all his friends; and that both he and they should be carried captive into Babylon, and die, and be buried there, (^{<2002>}Jeremiah 20:4-6); and then he complains of his being mocked at by the people for the word of the Lord; which he therefore determined to make no more mention of, but was obliged to it; and of the defamations of him, and snares that were laid for him, (^{<2003>}Jeremiah 20:7-10); under which he is supported with the consideration of the Lord's being with him, and that his enemies should not prevail, but be confounded; and appeals to him, and calls for vengeance from him on them; and, in the view of deliverance, not only praises the Lord himself, but calls upon others to join with him in it, (^{<2004>}Jeremiah 20:11-13); and yet, after all, the chapter is concluded with his cursing the day of his birth, and the man that brought his father the news of it, (^{<2005>}Jeremiah 20:14-18).

Ver. 1. *Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest*, etc.] Not the immediate son of Immer, but one that descended from him after many generations; for Immer was a priest in David's time, to whom the sixteenth course of the priests fell by lot, (^{<2006>}1 Chronicles 24:14);

who [was] also chief governor in the house of the Lord; the temple; not the high priest, since he was of the course of Immer; perhaps he was the head of the course to which he belonged, the chief of the priests of that course. The Targum calls him the "sagan" of the priests. There was such an officer, who was called the "sagan" or deputy to the high priest, who upon certain occasions acted for him; and some think that this man was in the same office; though others take him to be the same with the captain of the temple, (^{<2007>}Acts 4:1). Who

heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things; some that heard him in the court of the temple prophesying of the evil that should come upon the city, and places adjacent to it, went and told the chief governor of it. Though the words may be rendered, “now Pashur heard^{f406} ----Jeremiah prophesying these things”; he heard him himself; either he was one of the ancients of the priests that went with him to Tophet, and heard him there; or, however, when he came from thence, and stood and prophesied in the court of the temple, he heard him.

Ver. 2. *Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet*, etc.] Either with his fist, or with a rod, while he was prophesying, to stop his mouth, and hinder him from going on, and to show his resentment, and influence, the people not to believe him; or he ordered him to be smitten and scourged by some inferior officer. This was very ill treatment of a prophet, a prophet of the Lord, and one that was a priest too, of the same order with himself;

and put him in the stocks; or ordered him to be put there; but whether it was such an engine or instrument as we call “stocks”, in which the feet of prisoners are put, is not certain. Kimchi’s father says, it was an instrument made of two pieces of wood, in which the necks of prisoners were put; and some say it had besides two holes for the two hands to be put in; and so the same with our “pillory”. The Septuagint render it “a cataract”, a ditch or dungeon. Jarchi interprets it a prison; and so our translators render the word in (^{247B}Jeremiah 29:26); however, it was a place of confinement, if not of torture and pain;

that [were] in the high gate of Benjamin; here were these stocks, pillory, or prison; which was either a gate of the city of Jerusalem, so called, because it looked towards and led out to the tribe of Benjamin, (^{247B}Jeremiah 37:13 38:7); or a gate of the temple, which stood on that side of it that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin; both the city and temple being partly in the tribe of Judah, and partly in the tribe of Benjamin; and it seems by this that there was an upper and lower gate of this name; and the following clause seems to incline to this sense:

which [was] by the house of the Lord; or, “in the house of the Lord”^{f407}; the temple.

Ver. 3. *And it came to pass on the morrow*, etc.] After the prophet was put into the stocks; so that he was there all night:

that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks; either to bring him before the priests, or the sanhedrim, to be examined; or in order to dismiss him, being either admonished by his friends, or convicted in his own conscience that he had done a wrong thing;

then said Jeremiah unto him; when he had brought him out, not being at all intimidated by him, and having a word from the Lord for him:

the Lord hath not called thy name Pashur; which, according to Jerom, signifies “blackness of mouth”; and, according to others, “diffusing paleness”; one that terrified others, and made their faces look pale; but now it should be otherwise, and he himself should be filled with terror, and have paleness of thee: but, according to a late etymologist, it signifies one abounding or “increased in liberty”⁴⁰⁸, who in a little time would become a captive; for it is not suggested hereby that he should no more be called by this name, but that he should be in a condition which would not answer to it, but to another, as follows:

but Magormissabib; or, “fear round about”; signifying that terrors should be all around him, and he in the utmost fright and consternation. The Septuagint version renders it “one removing”; changing from place to place; that is, going into captivity; a stranger and wanderer, as the Syriac version. The Targum is,

“but there shall be gathered together against thee those that kill with the sword round about;”

meaning the Chaldeans, which would make him a “Magormissabib”.

Ver. 4. *For thus saith the Lord, behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends*, etc.] This is an interpretation of the name given, “Magormissabib”: and shows that it was not a mere name he had, but that he should be in fact what that signifies; his conscience should be filled with terror at the judgments of God coming upon him for his sins; and which could not be concealed in his own breast from others, but he should be seized with such tremblings and shakings, and be such a spectacle of horror, that his own familiar friends, instead of delighting in his company, would shun it, and run away from him: unless this terror is to be understood of the Chaldean army, which should not only terrify him, but his friends, in whom he placed his confidence; these would be thrown into such a consternation, as not to be able to help him or themselves; to which the following words agree:

and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold [it]; which would be an aggravation of the calamity, that not only he should be deprived of their assistance, but that they should fall into and by the hands of the Babylonians, and in his sight also:

and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; the whole land, and the inhabitants of it:

and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword; being in his hands, he shall do as he pleases with them, either carry them captive, or slay them; and some he will dispose of one way, and some another.

Ver. 5. *Moreover, I will deliver all the strength of this city*, etc.] The fortifications of it; its towers, as the Syriac version; the riches of it, as the Targum; all its magazines and stores, in which its strength lay:

and all the labours thereof; all the fruit of their labours; all their wealth and riches got by labour; all their goods in trade; all their manufactures and merchandise:

and all the precious things thereof; all their plate and jewels, the rich furniture of their houses, and whatsoever was laid up in their treasures as rare and valuable:

and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies; which they in successive reigns had been laying up in store for years together; (see ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 39:6);

which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon; make a prey of them, seize them as their property, and carry them away with them.

Ver. 6. *And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house, shall go into captivity*, etc.] Particularly he and his family should not escape; whoever did:

and thou shalt come to Babylon; being brought there, though sore against his will:

and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there; even in a defiled land, as all other countries were reckoned by the Jews; and to be buried in such a land, Kimchi observes, was a curse; and so it is here threatened as such:

thou, and all thy friends; that is, such as should escape the sword, (^{200b}Jeremiah 20:4);

to whom thou hast prophesied lies; this shows the cause of; all this threatened destruction to him and his friends; not only because he had so ill used Jeremiah, a true prophet of the Lord; but because he was a false prophet, and his friends had hearkened to his lies, and disbelieved those prophecies that came from the Lord himself.

Ver. 7. *O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*, etc.] What follows from hence to the end of the chapter is thought to have been said by the prophet, when in the stocks, or in prison, and shows mixture of grace and corruption in him; a struggle between flesh and spirit, and the force of a temptation under which he laboured, arising from difficulties and discouragements in his work; and he not only complains to God, but of him; that he had deceived him, when he first called him to be a prophet, by telling him that he should be set over nations and kingdoms, to pull them down, (²⁰¹⁰Jeremiah 1:10); which he understood of foreign nations, but now found his own people were meant, so Jerom; or in not immediately executing the threatenings he sent him with; as was the case of Jonah; or by giving him reason to expect honour and ease, whereas he met with nothing but disrespect and trouble; and that he should have divine protection and success against his opposers, (²⁰¹⁸Jeremiah 1:18,19); whereas he was now delivered into their hands, and used in the most reproachful manner; but be it so, this was all a mistake of the prophet, and no deception of God. Calvin takes it to be ironically spoken, expressing the sense of his enemies, who charging him with a deception, tacitly charged God with being the author of it. Others, to soften the expression, render the words, “if thou hast deceived me, I am deceived”; or, “thou hast deceived me if I am deceived”^{f409}. But it seems best of all to translate them, as they will hear it, “O Lord, thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded”^{f410}; so the word is used of God in (⁰⁰²⁷Genesis 9:27); “God shall enlarge” or “persuade Japheth”; see also (²⁰¹⁴Hosea 2:14), where it is rendered allure; and then the sense is, thou hast persuaded me to take upon me the prophetic office against my will, and against remonstrances made by me; and I was persuaded by thy words and promises, and by thy spirit and grace, to enter upon it; to which sense the following words incline:

thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; so strong were the arguments, motives, and inducements the Lord made use of; so pressing his injunctions

and commands; so forcible the constraints of his spirit; that the prophet was obliged to yield unto them, and was made willing in the day of his power to comply, though first it was sore against his will; but he could not withstand the divine call, and therefore might have hoped, since it was so manifest that he was sent of God, and did not run of himself, that he should have met with a better reception, and more success; but so it was not:

I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me; he was the laughing stock of everyone of the people of Israel, from the highest to the lowest; princes, priests, and people, all derided him and his prophecies, and that continually, every day, and all the day long, and especially when he was in the stocks; though it was not only his person they mocked, but the word of the Lord by him, as appears from (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 20:8).

Ver. 8. *For since I spake, I cried out*, etc.] Or, “when I speak, I cry”^{f411}; whensoever I speak in the name of the Lord, and deliver message from him to the people, I lift up my voice and cry aloud, that all may hear and understand; and as showing zeal, fervour, and diligence: or, “I cry” with grief and trouble at the usage I meet with, and the contempt that is cast upon the word; or because of what I am obliged to declare to them, as follows. The Targum takes in both sense, of the word thus,

“for at the time that I prophesy, I lift up my voice, weeping, and crying.”

I cried violence and spoil: or, “proclaimed” it^{f412}, for a different word is here used; that is, he publicly declared the rapine and oppression they were guilty of, inveighed against it, and reprov'd them for it; and foretold the violence of the enemy, and the spoil that he should make of them, when he should come upon them, even the king of Babylon; as well as cried out and complained of the injurious treatment he himself met with from them;

because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily; which is a reason either why he cried with grief and sorrow; or why he cried violence and spoil, ruin and destruction: or, “though the word of the Lord was”^{f413}, &c; yet he went on publishing and proclaiming it: or, “surely the word of the Lord was made a reproach”^{f414}, &c; either because of the matter of it, it not being believed, or the manner in which it was delivered; or because it was not immediately fulfilled.

Ver. 9. *Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name*, etc.] Not that he publicly said this before his enemies, or

privately to his friends, but he said it in his heart; he thought, nay, resolved, within himself, to prophesy no more; since no credit was given to him, but contempt cast on him; he was disgraced, and God was dishonoured, and no good done; wherefore he concluded it was better to be silent, and not mention the name of God, and say nothing of any message he had from him, since it was to no purpose. A temptation that oftentimes besets a minister of the word, because of the ill usage he meets with, the ill success of his ministry; and is but a temptation, as such see it to be sooner or later, as Jeremiah did;

but [his word] was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; which wanted vent, and must have it, and which only could be quenched by being divulged; and which, until it was done, he was in the utmost pain, as if he had been all on fire; his conscience accused him; his heart smote and condemned him; a woe was to him; (see ~~406~~ 1 Corinthians 9:16); or “there was in mine heart as a burning fire”^{f415}, etc. a principle of love to God, and to the souls of men; a zeal for his glory, and the good of his countrymen; which made him uneasy, and constrained him to break his former resolution: for the phrase, “his word”, is not in the original text; though it is in like manner supplied by the Targum,

“and his words became in mine heart as fire burning and overflowing my bones;”

and so Kimchi,

“and the word of the Lord was in my heart as fire burning;”

and also Jarchi; the prophecy was as fire, to which it is compared, (~~229~~ Jeremiah 23:29);

and I was weary with forbearing; to speak; weary to hold it in:

and I could not [stay]; or I could not hold it in any longer; I was obliged to speak in the name of the Lord again, and deliver whatever message he was pleased to send me

Ver. 10. *For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side,* etc.] It was brought to the prophet’s ears by some of his friends, how he was defamed by many, and these great and mighty ones, as the word also signifies; how his character was aspersed; his good name taken away; and false and scandalous reports were raised of him from all quarters; which filled him

with fear all around, so that he might quickly expect fresh trouble from one side or another; (see ^{<8B13>}Psalm 31:13); and this was a reason of his entering into the above resolution to leave off prophesying: though some understand it as an additional reason to the former for going on with it; being not only inwardly pressed to it in spirit, but outwardly provoked by the usage of his enemies. Some retain the words “Magormissabib”, untranslated, and render the whole thus, “for I heard the defaming of many magormissabibs”; of many such as Pashur, so called, (^{<2B13>}Jeremiah 20:3); but neither the accents nor the syntax will admit of it; since there is an accent on many, which makes a stop, and “magormissabib” is in the singular number: rather it may be rendered, “I have heard the defaming of many; [even of] magormissabib”, that is, of Pashur and his associates;

report, [say they], and we will report it; these are the words of the defamers, whether Pashur and his accomplices, or the great ones, the princes and nobles, the priests and false prophets, that more especially bore a grudge to Jeremiah; addressing themselves to the common people, and such who were most acquainted with the prophet, and his manner of life; saying, tell us what you can of him, right or wrong, true or false, that may be any ways improved against him, and we shall tell it to the king, or to the sanhedrim, the court of judicature, and get him punished for it; or we shall take care to have it spread about city and country, and so blast his character and credit with the people, that none will after regard his prophecies;

all my familiars watched for my halting; or, “every man of my peace”^{f416}; who pretended to be at peace, and to be friendly with him, and wished well unto him, spoke fair to his face, as if they were cordial friends, and fond of the most intimate acquaintance with him; perhaps the men of Anathoth, the birth place of Jeremiah, are here meant; whom the priests at Jerusalem, or others, had engaged on their side, narrowly to observe what was said and done by him, of which any handle could be made against him to the government; and accordingly they did; they watched his words, and observed his actions, if they could catch at anything that was imprudently or inadvertently said or done, or what could be misconstrued to his disadvantage;

[saying], peradventure he will be enticed; to say or do something that may be laid hold on, and be produced against him, to the ruin of him; he not being on his guard, and knowing of no design against him:

and we shall prevail against him; gain our point, get him accused, condemned, and punished:

and we shall take our revenge on him; for inveighing so severely against their sins, which they could not bear; and for threatening them with punishments that should be inflicted on them, which they liked not to hear.

Ver. 11. *But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one*, etc.] The Targum is,

“the Word of the Lord is for my help.”

“Mighty” to support, uphold, defend, and deliver him; and “terrible” to his enemies. The prophet looks back to the promise the Lord had made him, of his gracious and powerful presence, (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 1:18,19); which he now takes comfort from; and it would have been well if he had kept this always in view, and had continued in the same actings of faith and temper of mind: but this lasted not long, as some following verses show;

therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and shall not prevail; though they should very hotly and furiously pursue him, yet they should stumble and fall by the way, and not be able to overtake him, and execute their designs upon him; the Lord, who was with him, and on his side, would throw some things in their way, at which they should stumble, and which should hinder them from proceeding;

they shall be greatly ashamed, for they shall not prosper; when they see their schemes are disappointed, and they do not succeed, they shall be filled with shame and confusion: or, “because they do not deal prudently”,^{f417}, as the word is rendered, (²⁵¹³Isaiah 52:13); they do not act a wise, but a foolish part, and therefore shame will be the consequence of it;

[their] everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten; neither by themselves nor others; the memory of it will always continue, to their everlasting grief and reproach. A very learned man connects these words with the former, thus, “they shall be greatly ashamed, for they shall not prosper, with an everlasting shame never to be forgotten”,^{f418}, very rightly; so another learned interpreter^{f419}.

Ver. 12. *But, O Lord, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart*, etc.] That tries the cause of the righteous, and vindicates them, rights their wrongs, and does them justice; being the omniscient God, the

seer and searcher of the hearts and reins; who knows the uprightness of their hearts, as well as their ways, and the sincerity of their affections: or that tries the faith and patience of the righteous, their constancy and integrity; and upon trial finds that their affections are real, and their souls sincere;

let me see thy vengeance on them; his enemies and persecutors; he does not seek vengeance himself, but desires it of the Lord; he does not ask to see his vengeance, but the Lord's vengeance on them, what he thought was just and proper to inflict on them; he knew that vengeance belonged to the Lord, and therefore left it with him, and prayed for it from him. The Targum is,

“let me see the vengeance of thy judgments on them;”

for unto thee have I opened my cause; or “revealed”, or “made it manifest”^{f420}; this he did in prayer, at this time, when he laid before the Lord his whole case, and appealed and applied to him for justice, who judgeth righteous persons, and judgeth righteously.

Ver. 13. *Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord*, etc.] The prophet, from prayer, proceeds to praise; and from expressions of faith and confidence in the Lord, having committed his cause to him, being assured of success, rises up to a holy triumph and joy; and calls upon his soul, and upon others, to join with him in praising, and singing praises to the Lord: this is said, as Kimchi observes, with respect to the saints in Jerusalem; for there were some good people doubtless there at this time, a remnant according to the election of grace; who had a regard for the prophet, and wished well to him, and were ready to join with him in acts of devotion, prayer, or praise;

for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil doers; or, “the life of the poor”; meaning himself, a poor destitute person, few or none to stand by him but the Lord, who had delivered him out of the hand of Pashur and his accomplices; and out of the hand of those that watched for his halting; and out of the hands of all his persecutors: or this may respect not past deliverances, but what was to come; which the prophet had such a believing view of, that he calls upon himself and others to praise God for beforehand.

Ver. 14. *Cursed [be] the day wherein I was born*, etc.] If this was said immediately upon the foregoing, it was a most strange and sudden change of frame indeed that the prophet came into, from praising God, to cursing

the day of his birth; wherefore some have thought it was delivered at another time, when in great anguish of spirit; very likely when so ill used by Pashur, as before related; but here repeated, to show in what distress he had been, and what reason there was for praise and thanksgiving; for the words may be connected with the preceding, thus, “for he hath delivered from the hand of evil doers the soul of the poor, who said”^{f421}, in the time of his distress, “cursed be the day”, &c; but, whenever it was spoke, it showed the impatience of the prophet, the weakness of his faith, and the greatness of his folly, to curse a day, and his birth day too, as Job did, when under affliction, (~~1800~~ Job 3:1-16);

let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed; to myself or others; let it be reckoned among the unhappy and unfortunate days; let it not be blessed with the light of the sun, or with the light of joy and prosperity; (see ~~1804~~ Job 3:4,7); let it not be said on this occasion, as commonly is, we wish you joy on your birth day, and may you see many happy days of this kind. Abendana observes, that some of their Rabbins say, that Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth, because it was the ninth of Ab, the day on which the temple was burnt.

Ver. 15. *Cursed [be] the man who brought tidings to my father*, etc.] The word signifies commonly good tidings, as the news of a child born, and especially a man child, is to its parent. The Septuagint use the same word the angel did, when he brought the tidings of the birth of Christ, (~~1810~~ Luke 2:10,11). This was still more foolish and sinful, to curse the man that carried the tidings of his birth to his father; who did a right thing, and what was acceptable, and perhaps might be a good man. Kimchi observes, that there are some that say, it was known to Jeremiah that this man was Pashur, the son of Immer, and therefore he cursed him; but this is without any foundation;

saying, a man child is born unto thee, making him very glad; as the birth of a man child usually makes glad its parent, whether father or mother; (see ~~1812~~ John 16:21).

Ver. 16. *And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew*, etc.] In his fury, as the Targum and Septuagint add. Meaning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were utterly destroyed, and were never recovered:

and repented not; whose sentence God never repented of, nor revoked: this was very severe and uncharitable, to wish for so sore a destruction upon an innocent person;

and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; as soon as he is up in the morning, the first thing that salutes his ears, let it be the noise of an enemy invading the city he dwells in; and by noon let him hear the shouting of him, having broke in, and gotten the victory, seizing the plunder.

Ver. 17. *Because he slew me not from the womb*, etc.] As soon as he came out of it; that is, as soon as he was born; either because God slew him not so soon, as Kimchi; or the angel of death, as Jarchi: or rather the man that carried the tidings of his birth to his father, who is all along spoken of in the two former verses; he curses him for not doing that, which, had he done, would have been exceeding criminal in him indeed; for not committing murder, even for not murdering an innocent babe;

or that my mother might have been my grave; he wishes he had died in her womb, and had never been brought forth; and so that had been his grave, where he should have been at ease and safety:

and her womb [to be] always great [with me]; or, “her womb an everlasting conception”^{f422}; his wish was, that she had been always conceiving, or ever big with child of him, but never bring forth; which was a more cruel and unnatural wish than the former concerning the man, the carrier of the tidings of his birth; since this was wishing a perpetual, painful, and intolerable evil to his own mother.

Ver. 18. *Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow*, etc.] “Labour” in performing his work and office as a prophet; and “sorrow” in suffering reproach, contempt, and persecution for it; which to avoid, he wishes he had never been born: a sign of a very fretful and impatient spirit, and of a carnal frame. Jarchi thinks this refers to the destruction of the temple;

that my days should be consumed with shame? through the bad usage of him, the reproach that was cast upon him, and the contempt he was had in for prophesying in the name of the Lord. All this shows that there is sin in the best of men, and what they are when left to themselves; how weak, foolish, and sinful they appear. And Jeremiah recording these his sins and

failings, is an argument of the uprightness and sincerity of the man, and of the truth of Scripture.