

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JEREMIAH

VIII. Learning From Jeremiah's Struggle Over Open Opposition (Jeremiah 20:1-18)

I. Introduction

- A. God called Jeremiah to minister in Judah during its spiritual decline until God's judgment fell on the nation.
- B. Jeremiah's spiritual ministry is then similar to what God's servants face in our era of spiritual decline. Such a ministry can be marked by opposition that stings and leads to mental and emotional unrest.
- C. Jeremiah 20:1-18 records such an event in Jeremiah's ministry, so we study the passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Learning From Jeremiah's Struggle Over Open Opposition, Jeremiah 20:1-18.

- A. When Pashur, chief officer in the temple, heard Jeremiah prophesy in the temple court that God would punish Judah for its rebellion against His words of warning to repent, he persecuted Jeremiah. Pashur had him seized and flogged with 40 lashes as directed in Deuteronomy 25:2-3 and then put in stocks where Jeremiah was secured by hands, feet and neck, bending his body almost double, Jeremiah 20:1-2. (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1154; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Jeremiah 20:2)
- B. Pashur released Jeremiah the next day, but instead of recanting due to persecution, Jeremiah told Pashur that Pashur's new name would be Magor-Missabib, "terror on every side" (Jer. 20:3; Ibid., B. K. C., O. T.), for the Lord would make Pashur a terror to himself and to all his friends whom he would see be slain by the invading Babylonians. God would give Judah into the hand of the Babylonians, they would carry Judah's wealth and people captive to Babylon and Pashur and his family would go into captivity and die there with all his friends who had prophesied lies in opposition to the true message God had given Judah through Jeremiah, Jer. 20:4-6.
- C. In public, Jeremiah had done well not to yield to Pashur's persecution, but inwardly, Jeremiah suffered much mental and emotional turmoil from the persecution, for he fought the temptation to feel disillusioned with God and his calling as a prophet from the Lord. That struggle is recorded in Jeremiah 20:7-18 (as follows):
 - 1. Jeremiah told the Lord that he "felt that God had deceived him by letting him be ridiculed by the people for his message," Ibid.; Jeremiah 20:7. Though he had faithfully, passionately warned the people to repent to avoid violence and being spoiled by the Babylonians, the people had reacted with mockery, Jer. 20:8.
 - 2. To avoid experiencing more painful persecution, Jeremiah had tried to withhold God's Word, but in doing so, God's Word became like a burning fire in his heart so that he was unable to keep from voicing it, v. 9.
 - 3. Jeremiah explained why he had tried to avoid persecution by withholding God's message, for the message he had proclaimed about "terror on every side" was being thrown back at him in disgust, and even his friends were waiting for Jeremiah to make a mistake or be deceived so that they could take revenge against him for his words of warning about their sinful rebellion, Jeremiah 20:10.
 - 4. Nevertheless, Jeremiah bravely kept trusting the Lord, claiming that God was with him like a Mighty Warrior, that it would not be Jeremiah but his persecutors who would stumble and fall, not prevailing in their plots against him, Jeremiah 20:11a. Jeremiah's persecutors would fail and be disgraced, and their dishonor would never be forgotten, Jeremiah 20:11b.
 - 5. Thus, Jeremiah called on the Lord who examined the righteous and probed the heart and mind of man to exact vengeance in his behalf upon his persecutors, for he committed his case to the Lord, Jeremiah 20:12.
 - 6. Dwelling on his faith in God's just vengeance, Jeremiah expressed praise to the Lord, for He rescued the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked, Jeremiah 20:13.
 - 7. However, typical of people under pressure, Jeremiah the shifted abruptly from his great praise of the Lord to the depths of despondency in his battle of faith in God: he expressed dismay at the day he was born, he called for a curse on the man who had brought his father the glad news of his birth, that that man might be like the towns the Lord overthrew without pity, experiencing sorrow and dismay as in battle, Jer. 20:14-16. Jeremiah grieved that he had ever been born to face the pain he was experiencing in persecution, even though the Lord had selected him in the womb for the task he was performing! (Jer. 20:17-18 with 1:5)

Lesson: *In facing open opposition and ridicule for his ministry of God's Word, Jeremiah struggled internally with a great battle of faith over his suffering while staying committed to soldiering on in the calling God had given him!*

Application: *If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake and we struggle in a battle of faith over it, may we like Jeremiah do what we know is God's will regardless of our emotions, trusting Him to carry us through the trial!*