

Jeremiah's days and ours

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JEREMIAH LIVED at a critical period in Jewish history. Conditions inside the nation were at a low ebb. Spiritual values had been discarded, the pure worship of the Lord corrupted in many ways, and, though the people might say, "The LORD liveth", their actions revealed their insincerity. So the prophet says of them: "surely they swear falsely" (5:2).

Externally also, affairs were fast developing to a crisis. Rumours were rife of an impending invasion of the land by the Babylonians. The reports of this were interpreted in various ways by the leaders of the Jews. Some advised the nation to ignore them, declaring that they were false. In the name of the Lord they promised peace to the people. On the other hand, there were faithful men like Jeremiah who correctly interpreted 'the signs of the times'. In chapter 25, for instance, we find the prophet denouncing the people, and describing Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, as "My servant" (v. 9), coming to execute vengeance on a disobedient and wicked nation. He declared that the invasion was imminent, and warned the people to flee from Jerusalem if they would escape the evil that would be poured out on it.

We live in similar times of crisis, both within and without. Disaster for the world is nigh at hand, with the signs of the times crying out aloud that our Lord is at the door. We know that his coming will usher in "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1). In Christadelphia the Truth has run a course of more than 150 years, and what we might call the pioneering spirit has faded out.

Earnest contention for the one faith sounds a little ridiculous in these enlightened times and liberally-minded days. If we are too much in earnest we risk our popularity. Hard work and constant study in the things of the Word are steadily being replaced by social evenings with games aping the radio and television, whilst a striving for respectability in preaching is fast blurring the sharp line of demarcation that should exist in our minds between the world and the things of the Truth.

Perhaps, it may be said, there is not anything inherently wrong in a social evening or a desire

for respectability; and yet too much of that sort of thing is hardly conducive to that "hardness" which Paul said was required in a true soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3).

Jeremiah's action

What did Jeremiah do about the situation in his days? He saw his people at the crossroads. He knew that such was the measure of their iniquity that God would no longer be turned from His intention to cast down and destroy. Prayer to this end would not, therefore, avail. God had indeed told him: "pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee" (7:16).

Things had gone too far. So he lifts up his voice in warning and exhortation of a peculiarly individual character. He speaks of something that they all could do, to the end that the few who had 'ears to hear' might indeed hearken. His message is this: "Stand ye in the ways, and see" (6:16). That is, stop and think. Contemplate where you have come from and where you are going to.

He then goes on: "ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls". Here was the exhortation to Israel to revert to the attitude of their fathers of old. But what answer was made to Jeremiah? "They said, We will not walk therein . . . We will not hearken" (vv. 16,17). They were satisfied with things as they were and saw no need for change.

We live in very similar times, and it therefore lies upon each one of us, so far as we are able, to echo the call of Jeremiah. We must encourage our brethren and sisters, we must encourage one another to revert to the beliefs and practices of our pioneers. We must strive to let their uncompromising attitude towards the world, and their unceasing contention for the faith, find an echo in us today. This can only be accomplished by a growing familiarity with the Word of Truth. Then, despite the troubles which will ebb and flow around us, we shall find strength to be knit together, and so, even now, "find rest for your souls", as is promised through the prophet (v. 16).

Our actions

Undoubtedly this is a hard and lonely path to follow, and may lead us into much tribulation. To go against the majority is always difficult and uncomfortable. Jeremiah found it so. He found himself in prison. By this time the Babylonian army was hammering at the gates of Jerusalem, and Jeremiah foretold calamity. He had been fearless in his declaration of the purpose of God towards Israel and had refused to speak lies in His Name. God had promised him help and deliverance: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee" (1:8); and God did deliver him—first from the extreme rigours of imprisonment and later to freedom under the Chaldeans.

When Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon and the mire, and likely to die of hunger, his friend Ebed-melech took courage into his hands and spoke for him to the king. What a friend to have! So Jeremiah abode in "the court of the prison", and thus God preserved him; for the king gave commandment "that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent" (37:21).

This, remember, was at a time of famine such that Jeremiah declares of those that suffered it: "their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones . . . They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of My people" (Lam. 4:8-10). Jeremiah, however, was preserved along with Ebed-melech who fell not. Why? Because "thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the LORD" (Jer. 39:18).

What was true then is true today. God will still preserve those that put their trust in Him. Steadfastness and resolution in the things of the Truth might well bring us into trial, whether it be the physical trial of Jeremiah or perhaps the mental struggle of Ebed-melech as he resolved to speak for his friend. In all this it was with them as it is with us: "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Trial, however, is still trial, so we find God does more than make us able to bear the trial.

He brings comfort and joy to us in the midst of trial. He did this with Jeremiah and He does it with us.

While Jeremiah was in the prison, God told him that his cousin Hanameel was about to visit him with the object of selling him a parcel of land at Anathoth, some eight miles to the north of Jerusalem. This he did in accordance with the law. We might well think that Jeremiah would have declined his right, seeing that the land was overrun with soldiers and captivity lay ahead, as he well knew. But no, Hanameel came as God said he would, and Jeremiah proceeded to purchase the land. The deeds were signed, the transaction duly registered (all the formalities with which we are familiar in our day), the silver passed over, and the title passed to the prophet.

So Jeremiah owned the land. What then? Listen to the voice of God through the prophet: "Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days" (32:14). Why was this commandment given? Verse 15 continues: "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land". So Jeremiah buried the deeds in the earthen vessel to await the day of which God had spoken:

"And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in Mine anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever" (vv. 36-39).

We still await this day. We look forward confidently, as did Jeremiah when he buried his title deeds, to the day when he would come into possession of that which he had purchased. Jeremiah, looking forward in hope, was sustained by the knowledge of the "joy that was set before him" in his very present tribulation. God gave him in this very significant transaction of purchase practical evidence of the surety of that which would be accomplished. We likewise have practical evidence before our eyes if we will but heed it. We have the 'signs of the times' spoken

of before in the Word of God, making it manifest that “the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save” (Isa. 59:1). The emblems on the table, week by week, speak to us of the manner of our redemption. Thus we know that our hope is both sure and nigh at hand.

Looking ahead

As we look ahead with Jeremiah and all the faithful, what a glorious prospect opens out to our view! From the prophecy of Ezekiel we learn that the plot purchased by the prophet falls in that area of the land adjacent to the temple which is to be devoted to the sons of Zadok in that great day when the glorious sanctuary will be an established fact. There will dwell Jeremiah, and not him alone, but Messiah the prince, accompanied by a galaxy of mighty men, patriarchs and prophets and apostles such as the world has never seen at one time.

Truly it is a time to anticipate with joy, and the very prospect can sustain us now as it sustained Jeremiah in his day. We have an inheritance there just as he had. That land of God’s people, which has witnessed all those events that we know so well, will, if we hold fast, witness the completion of our course. We will be there, by God’s grace. We will see Jeremiah establish his title, and we will establish ours.

Jeremiah loved this land, which Moses said was “a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deut. 11:12). Jeremiah saw Jerusalem in desolation under the oppressor, and said: “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water . . . Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort

her” (Lam. 1:16,17). Jerusalem is oppressed still. Let us, then, love that land, and long to see Zion established. Is it not written: “of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there” (Ps. 87:5,6)? Thus we establish our title. We are of Sarah, “which . . . answereth to Jerusalem . . . which is above . . . which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:24-26).

So, as we read on in Jeremiah of the evil and the wickedness that enveloped the land in his day, as we read of war, bloodshed and desolation, as we contemplate Jerusalem in our day as “a cup of trembling unto all the people round about . . . a burdensome stone for all people” (Zech. 12:2,3), and to be the place of even more terrible scenes of warfare and destruction—as we think on these things, let us, like Jeremiah, stay our hope on the day when the land will be cleansed and restored to beauty, a paradise indeed.

Let us pray daily for that time to come, looking forward to the blessings that will flow to all nations from that glorious centre. Let us think of the joy that will be ours: the solemn assemblies, the sabbaths, the feast days, all men walking in the fear and knowledge of our God, the beauty of holiness arising from Divine law and judgement. Thus shall the glory of the Lord fill the land covenanted by God to Jeremiah and to all the faithful, and from thence the whole world. Is it not so written? This was the message of Isaiah, a message which Jeremiah read, and which we can read: “He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isa. 27:6).

The Good and Right Way

God has given His Word to instruct us,
 How to walk in the Good and Right Way.
 So, if we give heed to God’s Message,
 And practice His precepts each day,
 Our lives will be filled with great blessings
 As we read, as we watch, as we pray.
 And as children of God we’ll show others
 All the joys in the Good and Right Way.

C.S.

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