

JEREMIAH 26

JEREMIAH'S LIFE IS THREATENED

Jehoiakim was perhaps the most despicable of the kings of Judah. He was an evil-doer who was neither pious toward God nor just toward men. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God." Such is the inspired epitaph by the sacred chronicler. Jeremiah appears to have been in constant conflict with this king. And probably the earliest manifestation of the quarrel that would naturally subsist between two such men occurred in connection with the building of Jehoiakim's grand palace at a dark and disastrous time when his kingdom was greatly impoverished with the heavy tribute that had recently been imposed by Pharaoh Necho, after the defeat and death of Josiah. Just as Elijah confronted Ahab, so did Jeremiah confront this young king with terrible woes. He reminded Jehoiakim that the stability of his father Josiah's throne had not depended upon the splendor of his palace, but upon the justice with which he judged the cause of the poor and needy (chapter 22:3-4).

Obviously, such a monarch would entertain a mortal hatred toward the man who dared to raise his voice in denunciation of his crimes. Like Herod in the case of John the Baptizer, Jehoiakim would not have scrupled to quench in blood the light that cast such strong condemnation upon his oppressive and cruel actions. An example of this was publicly given around this very time, in the murder of the Godly prophet Urijah. This man had dared to utter solemn words against Jerusalem and its inhabitants, in the same way that Jeremiah was doing. And such great fury had been stirred up by Urijah's words that he had been obliged to flee to Egypt; but the wicked king secured his extradition so that he might take revenge with the sword upon his bold denunciations, and fling his body into the graves of the common people. Therefore, little or no hope of life could be expected by Jeremiah if the king decided to take similar measures against him.

Under the Divine impulse, Jeremiah went to the court of the Lord's Temple one day and took his place there. It was during the time when one of the great feasts was going on – when all the cities of Judah had poured their populations into Jerusalem, in order to worship there. And Jeremiah had in mind the commandment which he had received from the Lord: "Speak ... all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word!" (verse 2) Not one word was to be kept back against the people's sins. Truly, there is no greater enemy to the highest usefulness in life, than the presence of the sinful flesh in our activities. There is no department of life or service into which its subtle,

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jeremiah is spitefully persecuted for his faithful preaching – verses 1-11
- ❖ He stands to his doctrine, even in the face of his persecutors – verses 12-15
- ❖ He is wonderfully protected by the prudence of the princes and elders, despite the death of another faithful prophet around the same time – verses 16-24

deadly influence does not penetrate. It is only by the way of Jesus' cross and grave that we can become disentangled and discharged from the insidious domination of this evil principle, which is accursed by God and hurtful to holy living.

There was a twofold appeal in the Divine message which Jeremiah was commissioned to deliver on this great occasion, when the whole land stood listening. On the one side, God entreated His people to repent and turn from their evil ways; and on the other, He told them that their obstinacy would compel Him to make their great national shrine as desolate as Shiloh – the place where the Tabernacle had once stood, which had now lain in ruins for 500 years. But it is impossible to realize the intensity of passion which such words evoked in these people! Sadly, such is always the reception that is given by unregenerated persons to the words of God. The Jews' false prophets had assured them that the presence of Jehovah's Temple among them was a guarantee of their safety, so Jeremiah's suggestion seemed to them to be the height of impertinence!

Thus the faithful prophet suddenly found himself in the vortex of popular excitement; and it is very likely that he would have met his death, except for the prompt interposition of the princes. As soon as they received word of the outbreak that was going on in the city, they came straight away to the Temple. Their presence stilled the excitement and prevented the infuriated people from carrying out their plans against the life of the defenseless prophet. The princes hastily constituted themselves into a court of appeal, before which the prophet and people were summoned. The priests and false prophets demanded a sentence of death; but Jeremiah pleaded that he could not help saying what he had said, for he was bound to utter the words with which the Lord had sent him. And again, he took the opportunity to call upon the people to repent and amend their ways. He acknowledged that he was in their hands and at their mercy, but he warned them that innocent blood would bring its own vengeance upon them all.



This bold and straightforward defense seems to have turned the scales in Jeremiah's favor. The princes gave their verdict: "This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." And the fickle populace appears to have agreed with that conclusion – which was then confirmed even further by some of the elders, who reminded the people that when the prophet Micah had pronounced terrible remonstrances upon the land a century or so earlier, Godly King Hezekiah had listened to his words, entreated the favor of the Lord, and secured the reversal of the Divine sentence against his country.

Thus we see that the Lord does preserve His faithful servants; no weapon that is formed against them ever prospers! (Ps. 31:20; Isa. 54:17)

Lord, we repent and ask for forgiveness of the times when we have become angry at Your words to us that came from the lips of Your faithful messengers. Amen.