

Jeremiah Chapter 20

Verses 1-2: This is not the “Pashur” (of 21:1; 38:1). This Pashur was a priest and chief officer of the temple police. Because another is mentioned later as holding this position (29:25-26), Pashur either died soon after this or may have been carried away captive in the siege of Jerusalem in 598/597 B.C.

Pashur’s response of beating and imprisoning Jeremiah reflects the kind of persecution and opposition that the prophet experienced throughout his ministry. Places of confinement and imprisonment play a prominent role in the story of Jeremiah from here until the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 39 (compare 29:26; 32:2; 33:1; 37:11-15, 21; 38:1-13, 29).

Jeremiah 20:1 "Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who [was] also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things."

“Pashur”: The meaning is either “ease”, or deliverance is round about”, both in contrast to the new name God assigns him (in verse 3). He was one of several men so named (compare 21:1; 38:1).

“Immer”: He was one of the original “governors of the sanctuary” (compare 1 Chron. 24:14).

“Chief governor”: He was not the High-Priest, but the chief official in charge of temple police, who were to maintain order.

We know that God had not left the priest out in the accusations He had Jeremiah to bring. It appears also from the verse above, that Pashur held a political position of some importance. In the last lesson, Jeremiah had said, that it would not matter how important in the community a person was, the judgement from God would be the same. We know that Pashur either heard Jeremiah say this directly, or got word of it from the others who had met with him.

Jeremiah 20:2 "Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that [were] in the high gate of Benjamin, which [was] by the house of the LORD."

“Smote Jeremiah”: He or others acting on his authority, delivered 40 lashes (see Deut. 25:3), to the prophet.

“Put him in the stocks”: Hands, feet, and neck were fastened in holes, bending the body to a distorted posture, causing excruciating pain.

The meaning of the term “stocks” (29:26), is not clear. It may refer to a device used to restrain the prophet or, more likely, indicates a cell or dungeon (2 Chron. 16:10).

“High gate of Benjamin”: The northern gate of the upper temple court.

"Smote" in the verse above, means strike or beat. He probably had him whipped. To strike a prophet is a very serious thing. It appears they actually locked Jeremiah up with leg chains. It appears this Pashur was in charge of keeping order in the court of the LORD. This would have given him a great deal of lee-way to do as he wished. He, like the priests and others in authority, did not like the message Jeremiah brought. The others had never physically attacked Jeremiah however.

Verses 3-6: "Magor-Missabib" means "terror on every side" and is a recurring phrase in the book to refer to the disasters that accompany God's judgment (6:25; 20:10; 49:29). Judah's national disaster would extend to Pashur's family because of his opposition to Jeremiah; there are serious consequences attached to rejecting God's Word (Isa. 39:6).

Jeremiah 20:3 "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The LORD hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib."

"Pashur" is given a name that symbolizes the great terror that will come upon Judah and Jerusalem. The Hebrew "Magor-missabib", "Terror on Every Side", is often used by Jeremiah (6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29; Lam. 2:22). The details of that terror (are in verses 4 and 6).

This was a bold thing to say to the person who had authority to put you in chains. The name Magor-missabib means fearing, or affright from around. We see then, the thing that Pashur had done to Jeremiah was from fear.

Jeremiah 20:4 "For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold [it]: and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword."

"Babylon": This was Jeremiah's direct identification of the conqueror who would come out of the "north" (1:13), from "a far country" (4:16).

This fright of Pashur will turn to terror when he sees all of his friends falling by the sword. Those that are not killed will be taken into captivity in Babylon.

Jeremiah 20:5 "Moreover I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labors thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon."

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 labors thereof": All the fruit of their labors. All their wealth and riches got by labor. And 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 Isa. 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.

It appears from this, that Pashur had put a great deal of importance on material things. God will take all of them away from him. All of the things he had been so proud of would be carried back to Babylon as spoil. I have to greatly admire Jeremiah for being able to stand before this man with much worldly power and prophesy these things to him.

Jeremiah 20:6 "And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies."

Particularly he and his family should not escape. Whoever did;

"And thou shalt come to Babylon": Being brought there, though very much 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 (Jer. 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 badly 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.

It appears that Pashur will live to be taken captive in Babylon and be killed there. He will not even be buried in his native land. He and all of his friends will die and be buried in Babylon. Jeremiah not only prophesies his doom, but calls him a liar as well. He had been prophesying that all was well. That was a lie, and Jeremiah tells him so.

Verses 7-10: Jeremiah complains that God has deceived and over-powered him in calling him and subjecting him to such intense suffering and persecution. The Lord allows the righteous to

bring their negative emotions to Him in prayer, and this type of accusatory language toward God appears in more than a third of the Psalms.

Jeremiah 20:7 "O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me."

Jeremiah often allows the reader to see his inner turmoil in the midst of his continuous persecution. It will not do to attempt to soften the language as some have suggested. The believer is at times so overcome by circumstances that he says things that on more sober reflection are, at best, inadvisable (compare Psalm 73:1-22). The verb translated "deceived" is a strong one and can be translated "seduced" (compare Exodus 22:16; 1 King 22:20:22). Jeremiah complains that God had overpowered him when He called him. But God had warned him of all that he would face right from the start (1:18), and had reassured His prophet on several occasions (compare 11:18 – 12:17; 15:10-21; 17:7-18). However black the circumstance, the believer must come to trust in God's abiding presence with him (compare Joshua 1:5; Heb. 13:5-6).

This is possibly speaking of Jeremiah not wanting to be a prophet in the first place, and the Lord made Jeremiah a prophet anyway. He is feeling sorry for himself, because no one likes him. Not only do they not like Jeremiah, but they laugh at him and say he is not a true prophet.

Jeremiah 20:8 "For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily."

"A derision, daily": (In verses 7-18), Jeremiah prayerfully lamented the ridicule he was experiencing because of God's role for his life. His feeling wavered between quitting (verse 9a), being encouraged (verses 9c, 11), petitioning for help (verse 12), praise (verse 13), and waves of depression (verses 14-18, compare 11:18-23; 15:10, 15-18).

This was not a message Jeremiah would have chosen to tell. There was great gloom and doom in the message he brought. God put the words in Jeremiah's mouth, and Jeremiah spoke them. Every day was difficult for him because of the message he brought. They all hated Jeremiah because of the message. We must remember he was just a youth.

Jeremiah 20:9 "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But [his word] was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not [stay]."

"I will not ... speak any more": A surge of dejection swept over Jeremiah, making him long to say no more. But he was compelled inside (compare Job 32:18-19; Psalm 39:3; Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 9:16-17), because he did not want his enemies to see him fail (verse 10), he felt the powerful presence of the Lord (verse 11), and he remembered God's previous deliverances (verse 13).

Jeremiah's calling instilled a compelling urgency to proclaim God's Word even when he wanted to retire from ministry. Paul expressed this same urgency in the New Testament "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 9:16).

It appears from this that Jeremiah tried to stop bringing the prophecies, but God would not let him. They burned in his heart until he had to tell what God had told him. He was compelled to prophesy. He had to do what God called him to do.

Jeremiah 20:10 "For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, [say they], and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, [saying], Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him."

The prophet here rendered a reason why he thought of giving up his work as a prophet. His ears were continually filled with the abuse and disapproval of those that criticized him. And besides he was afraid on all hands, there were so many traps laid for him, so many devices devised against him. They did not only take all advantages against him, but they sought advantages and invited others to raise up false stories of him. They said to men like themselves, raise the report, we will send it abroad.

"All my familiars watched for my halting": Not only strangers, but those that I might have expected the greatest kindness from. Those that pretended most courteously, watched for opportunities to do me mischief and lay in wait for my halting.

"Saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him": Desiring nothing more than that I might be enticed to speak or do something which they might make into a matter of a colorable accusation.

"And we shall take our revenge on him": That so they might satisfy their malice upon me. This hath always been the genius of wicked men. Job and David both made complaints much like this (Job 19:19; Psalms 31:13; 55:12-14). Thus, it fared with Christ himself. The same spirit which yet possessed wicked men was found in wicked men in all former times. And this ought to be a great relief to the people of God under the same condition. To consider that the servants are not above their Lord, and wicked men of old persecuted the prophets.

It seems everyone thought he was either insane or power crazy. They chose not to believe him. They plotted to stop him anyway they could. They all wanted to get even with him for his terrible prophecies.

Jeremiah 20:11 "But the LORD [is] with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: [their] everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten."

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 (Jer. 1:18). 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 act 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 defeated, and they do not succeed, they shall be filled with shame and confusion. Or, "because they do not deal prudently", as the word is rendered (Isa. 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".

At times, there were moments when Jeremiah thought of quitting. He was persecuted on every side. God had promised Jeremiah from the beginning, that He would protect him. God will fight for Jeremiah. Every word that Jeremiah brought to these people from God will happen. Jeremiah was being persecuted in the service of God. God is a very present help, especially to those who are in His service. God will punish those who persecute Jeremiah. Nothing good will come to them. It is a dangerous thing to persecute those in service for God.

Jeremiah 20:12 "But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, [and] seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause."

That triest their faith and patience, in order to the farther purification of their souls. And the increase of these and all their other graces. Or, who takes cognizance of them, and of every cause in which they are interested. And who does not judge in their favor with partiality.

"The reins and the heart": Let me see thy vengeance on them (see Jer. 11:20).

"For unto thee have I opened my cause": As to a just judge, who will not fail to do me justice.

Jeremiah has been persecuted so much and for so long, that now he asks God to let him see the punishment He has in store for those who persecuted him. He will see it, because he will remain in Jerusalem during the siege of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 20:13 "Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers."

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.

"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 faltering. 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 in advance.

Jeremiah is praising and thanking God ahead of time for the answer to his request. He is speaking as if it has already happened. He is the one delivered from the evildoers.

Verses 14-18: Jeremiah's wish that he had never been born recalls Job cursing the day of his birth because of his intense suffering (Job 3:3). Some of the greatest saints in history have suffered from moments of despair, even depression (1 Kings 19:4).

Jeremiah 20:14 "Cursed [be] the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed."

When grace has the victory, it is good to be ashamed of our folly. To admire the goodness of God, and be warned to guard our spirits another time. See how strong the temptation was, over which the prophet got the victory by Divine assistance! He is angry that his first breath was not his last. While we remember that these wishes are not recorded for us to utter the like, we may learn good lessons from them. See how much those who think they stand, ought to take heed lest they fall. And to pray daily, lead us not into temptation. How frail, changeable, and sinful is man! How foolish and unnatural are the thoughts and wishes of our hearts, when we yield to discontent! Let us consider Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we should be at any time weary and faint in our minds under our lesser trials.

This is Jeremiah regretting the day he was born.

Jeremiah 20:15 "Cursed [be] the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad."

"Cursed be the man": The servant of God fell into sinful despair, and he questioned the wisdom and purpose of God, for which he should have been thankful.

It is almost as if Jeremiah is thinking that his life has been of no good to anyone. We remember that his father was a priest. It was a blessing in a Jewish family for a man child to be born.

Jeremiah 20:16 "And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide;"

In his fury, as the Targum and Septuagint add. Meaning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were utterly destroyed, and were never recovered (Gen. 19:25).

"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 noon": 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 broken in, and gotten the victory and seizing the plunder.

Jeremiah's family, and perhaps the man spoken of here, were not on Jeremiah's side. They did not think him to be a prophet. Perhaps that is what this is all about.

Verses 17-18: Jeremiah's wish that he had never come forth from his mother's "womb" is a reminder that the Lord's call is never a guarantee of an easy life (Lam. 3:1).

Jeremiah 20:17 "Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb [to be] always great [with me]."

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"; 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.

We know from the very first lesson on Jeremiah, that he was anointed from his mother's womb. His entire life was dedicated to the work God had called him to do.

Jeremiah 20:18 "Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

"Labor" 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 nature.

"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 received 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.

Jeremiah is lamenting here, that there had not been joy in his life. His life had been spent in bringing a message of doom to the very people he grew up with. This was not a message that would bring joy, but sorrow. He was shamed by everyone who knew him. No one believed him. They all hated him and wanted to kill him. His life had been one of sorrows. This could be the message from many who serve the LORD. We, like Jeremiah, go on with the task God has set before us. Even though Jeremiah was so sorrowful, he continued serving God.

Jeremiah Chapter 20 Questions

1. Who was the father of Pashur?
2. What was Pashur's position?
3. What had Pashur heard?
4. Then Pashur _____ Jeremiah the prophet.
5. Where did he imprison Jeremiah?
6. Why had Pashur done this to Jeremiah?
7. What name did Jeremiah tell Pashur God named him?
8. What did that name mean?
9. Who would Pashur be a terror to?
10. What will happen to his friends?
11. What would the fright of Pashur turn into?
12. What had Pashur put a great deal of importance on?
13. What would happen to all of them?
14. Where will Pashur die?
15. What did Jeremiah call Pashur?
16. What is Jeremiah saying in verse 7?
17. What type of message had been the only message Jeremiah brought?
18. Why could Jeremiah not stop prophesying?

19. What did everyone think about Jeremiah?
20. How is the LORD described in verse 11?
21. Who will punish those who persecute Jeremiah?
22. Will Jeremiah see them punished?
23. What is Jeremiah doing in verse 13?
24. What does Jeremiah say, that lets us know he regrets being born?
25. How did Jeremiah's family feel about him?
26. Who can, possibly, relate to Jeremiah's sorrow?