

Jeremiah – Prophet of the Last Days and Prophetic Reflections

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Table of Contents

Jeremiah – Prophet of the Last Days and

Prophetic Reflections

Table of Contents

Jeremiah – Prophet of the Last Days

Prophetic Reflections for the Last Days

What ought we to be about in God in the Last Days?

True and False Prophets

Jeremiah – Prophet of the Last Days

The absence of persecution in the church is a statement to our shame. There is something wrong in the character of the church when it does not evoke any opposition to itself. It means that the church has been found quite acceptable in the same world that is at enmity with God. It is this contradiction that we want to examine in an account from the life of Jeremiah.

Chapter 38 of Jeremiah gives the account of Jeremiah being placed in a muddy cistern, a hole in the ground. Zedekiah was the King of Israel in those days, and in refusing to heed Jeremiah's warnings, Jerusalem was conquered.

Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking to all the people, saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'He who stays in this city will die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans will live and have his own life as booty and stay alive...This city will certainly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it'" (Jer. 38:1-3).

The prophecy foretold the defeat of Israel, Judah, and the city of Jerusalem. Those who seek to resist such a word are warned that they are going to perish. If we were living at that time, many of us would have considered Jeremiah to be a false prophet. We would have said that he was saying things that were not in the "national interest," or that he was "giving aid to the enemy," or "harassing the church."

It was exactly that indictment that came to Jeremiah, and I suspect may well be the distinguishing certification of God for the true prophet in the last days. In other words, the prophet's message must necessarily be subversive to the vested interests of men and their traditional notions of God, and what they think is right. The message may well contradict all that they suppose is true about God and His way: "Would God destroy His own city? Would God destroy present-day Israel, having established it in 1948?"

Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people, but rather their harm." So King Zedekiah said,

"Behold he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you" (Jer. 38:4-5).

A king like that who abdicates his own responsibility to make ultimate judgments, particularly about prophets of God, deserves judgment. Nothing has changed. The leaders of this world are very much of the same spirit. They work according to the polls, i.e., "Which way is the wind blowing? What are the people saying? What do they want?" And the answer to those questions is what they will do.

Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud (Jer. 38:6).

There was no whisper to Jeremiah of, "Hey, this is only temporary. Stick this out for a day or two. We will be back and get you out." That pit was intended for Jeremiah's death. There was no food, no water, no light and no warmth. That was to be his end. There was no thought that he was ever to be retrieved. I do not think that Jeremiah was given any encouragement that there would be a future escape from his predicament. He had the full expectation that this was his end. This needs to sink into our spirits. As far as we are concerned, we should have a realistic anticipation that when the end seems to come, that that in fact is the end. Except it pleases the Lord, it *will* be the end. But if it pleases the Lord, then there is no pit too deep, too remote or too hidden that He cannot find and rescue us from.

The prophet is suffering the consequences of his obedience to God. He could have been saved this fate had he been more decorous and politic, and careful what he said and how he said it. But in the kind of simple obedience that he rendered, "Thus says the Lord, 'This city is going to be captured....,' " he was inviting this kind of reaction. He did not have his own self-interest at heart, but was bringing upon himself the logical response that his statement would make in his obedience to God. Persecution is proportionate to obedience. God does not call us to the things that are trifles, but to obedience in the things that necessarily will antagonize and run across the grain of the world and what men want to hear.

There was no illumination in that cistern. It was not something made for human habitation. At that time, all the water was gone, and there was only mud remaining. Can you imagine going into that mud and ooze? Where do

you find a place lay down for some kind of momentary comfort? The mud is in your eyes and teeth and hair. It is absolutely wretched! I think I would rather be shot, maybe even burned at the stake, than be lowered to die from starvation and thirst in a mud hole.

But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king's palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin (Jer. 38:7).

"Ebed" means "servant" and "Melech" means "king." He was a black man and the servant to King Zedekiah. He was also a eunuch. In those days, they fixed a man so that he could render service that would not in any way threaten the harem of these nobles and kings. He was a man of lowly circumstances, being black, a eunuch and a servant. Yet this was God's provision to bring the prophet up out from death. The lowliest social cast-off is the one that God had chosen to be the instrument of Jeremiah's deliverance.

This episode may well be a picture of the remnant of Israel in the last days; that its last experience is to be cast off and out and thrown into a pit for death. Her dispersal will again be into the nations and into the dungeons of imprisonment in the last days. And God will save them out of those pits, dungeons and confinements by some lowly thing of His choice like, for example, the predominantly Gentile church. There is a place for the despised of the world in the last days' purposes of God, and it has to do with the final, ultimate salvation and redemption of His people Israel. This is the way of God from all eternity. It is so much the statement of His wisdom. The thing that the world looks upon as foolish and despicable is the thing that He employs for a most glorious use: to save His ancient people out from death.

And Ebed-melech went out from the king's palace and spoke to the king, saying, "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city" (Jer. 38:8-9).

As a eunuch, you do not just go to a king and say, "Hey, buddy, can I make a suggestion?" What an effrontery! For this eunuch to even approach the king and to make mention of a prophet, who is in dishonor, was a remarkable act of courage in itself. And he was not even a Hebrew! The lowly and despised have a greater sense for God and righteousness than the

supposed people of God who will be looking the other way. Where were the faithful of God who knew that Jeremiah was going to suffer such a fate? Yet here was a man willing to take the risk of aggravating and endangering himself by encountering the king.

What one does to the prophet is what one does to God. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. When you touch the prophetic man, you are touching the heart of God. The prophet is nothing in himself. It is neither his wisdom nor his words that are being exhibited. He is the mouthpiece and expression of very God Himself. To touch him is to touch the very God who sent him. To do him disservice, or assault, is to lay your hands upon God.

Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority, and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the prophet the cistern before he dies" (Jer. 38:10).

It is clear that the throwing of Jeremiah into the cistern was not a momentary vacation. It was intended for his death, and probably the king's conscience was bothering him, having given those men permission to do it. And so he was no doubt relieved that someone took the initiative to give him the opportunity to save himself from a wrong decision.

So Ebed-melech took the men under his authority and went into the king's palace to a place beneath the storeroom and took from there worn-out rags and let them down by ropes into the cistern to Jeremiah (Jer. 38:11).

This is not a trivial detail. God's deliverance is carried out by employing the lowest of the low, the thing that is the least prestigious, the most insignificant, the poorest, the most despised. In this case, it is worn-out rags! Didn't they have a decent rope harness in the kingdom appropriate to a prophet? No, they let down some old clothing and rags to pull the prophet out of the pit. This is prophetic from beginning to end. The Lord Himself has got to be our dependency, and it is He who always chooses the foolish and weak thing.

Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Now put these worn-out clothes and rags under your armpits under the ropes"; and Jeremiah did so.

So they pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern, and Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse (Jer. 38:12-13).

The king then sends for the prophet.

Then King Zedekiah sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance that is in the house of the Lord; and the king said to Jeremiah, "I am going to ask you something; do not hide anything from me."

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death? Besides, if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

But King Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah in secret saying, "As the Lord lives, who made this life for us, surely I will not put you to death nor will I give you over to the hand of these men who seek your life."

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, 'If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive.

But if you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand.' "

Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, lest they give me over into their hand and they abuse me."

But Jeremiah said, "They will not give you over. Please obey the Lord in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live.

But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word that the Lord has shown me:

Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon, and those women will say, 'Your close friends have misled and overpowered you; while your feet were sunk in the mire, they turned back'" (Jer. 38:14-22).

This is a prophecy of what would befall the king, his entourage, his family, and the nobles if he refused to surrender. He did in fact refuse, and everything that Jeremiah said came true. The city was burned with fire; all of Zedekiah's sons were killed before his face, and then his eyes were gouged out. The last thing he saw was the murder of his sons, and then in chains and fetters, he was taken to Babylon to live the rest of his life in humiliation and degradation as a prisoner.

When you ask for the prophetic word, make sure you have an intention of obeying it. To hear the prophetic word, and then ignore it, will bring spiritual blindness upon yourself. In this case, the king's eyes were actually gouged out. You cannot hear the word of God and the prophetic word casually, as if there is no consequence. Either it is going to open your eyes to greater illumination, or it is going to bring a deepened darkness. This episode is charged with remarkable significance. The Chaldeans did not know this conversation, but they plucked Zedekiah's eyes out nevertheless. So the remarkable judgment of God took its full sway, even through Gentiles, who had no knowledge of that God, let alone of being instructed by Him.

So complete is the sovereignty of God in honoring the prophetic word that it was fulfilled right to the letter. The king was told, "If you surrender, your family will be preserved, the city will be preserved, and your own life will be preserved." He chose not to surrender. It was the fear of man and what might fall on him through man that kept him from obedience to God. The fear of man was greater than the fear of God.

You can just read a glimpse of that judgment in chapter 39, which is the fall of Jerusalem in the tenth month. The city of God and the temple were burned, the nobles were killed. Nobles are the people of culture, refinement, education and intelligence. When you destroy them, there is not much left. In fact, the only ones who were allowed to remain in Judah were those who had no distinction, no qualification and no especial ability. But the cream of the crop that distinguished Israel as a nation of significance was destroyed. That has always been the tactic of victorious, triumphant armies; they break the back of a nation by destroying the heart and the quality of it, leaving just a residue of the poor and undistinguished. Israel could have been saved that had they heeded the prophet.

Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, saying, "Take him and look after him, and do nothing harmful to him; but rather deal with him just as he tells you" (Jer. 39:11-12).

The Gentiles "enemies" of Judah were more respectful to the prophet of God than God's own people. Special instructions were issued from the very king of Babylon himself to preserve the prophet and to decently care for him.

Now the word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah while he was confined in the court of the guardhouse, saying, "Go and speak to Ebed-melech the

Ethiopian, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to bring My words on this city for disaster and not for prosperity; and they will take place before you on that day.

But I will deliver you on that day,' declares the Lord, 'and you shall not be given in to the hand of the men whom you dread.

For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your own life as a booty, because you have trusted in Me,' declares the Lord' " (Jer. 39:15-18).

God went out of His way for this black man to inform him that he was to be preserved. What a statement of how much God honored that self-initiated thing that preserved the life of his prophet, and therefore became life for that black man himself.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released him from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains, among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah, who were being exiled to Babylon.

Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, "The Lord your God promised this calamity against this place;

And the Lord has brought it on and done just as He promised. Because you people sinned against the Lord and did not listen to His voice, therefore this thing has happened to you (Jer. 40: 1-3).

Imagine the captain of the guard, a Gentile Chaldean, recognizing the prophetic truth, and even the cause of the judgment. It is like God was punctuating the message of judgment out of the lips of a Gentile, who would have been completely removed from the understanding of the God of Israel, yet recognizing nevertheless that this was a judgment for sin against that city and nation.

So the captain of the bodyguard gave him a ration and a gift and let him go.

Then Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land (Jer. 40:5f -6).

Though Jeremiah had been thrown into the pit, a most shameful and degrading way for man to end his life, yet he was preserved. The Lord brings him out, spares his life, gives him honor even with the enemy, and is released from chains, given food, a present and told to take his liberty as he felt led and directed. The fact that the thought would come to a Gentile to

give a gift to the prophet has got to be the inspiration of God to a man who is not even regenerate. It is almost like God is saying, "Look, you were obedient to me and took every risk, and it came close to requiring your life, but I have saved you out of the pit, and I have set you free, and here is a final token of My esteem, My affection and appreciation for your uncompromising devotion to Me."

There is nothing that men can do, however fierce and bitter their anger, against the servants of God that can in any way triumph over God's own will. He can undo the most diabolical intentions. For those saints whose lives were not spared death, the reader may raise a question, "Was He unable to do for them what He did for Jeremiah, or was their death in His will?" My answer is that they were not to be delivered from it, but delivered in it. The testimony of many who have been burned at the stake is a visible demonstration of joy in their final suffering.

Jeremiah's time in the pit did not in any way compromise him. In that, we are given a glimpse of what makes a prophet a prophet; his character has a selfless unconcern about his own life. It did not matter what befell him. Two value systems are demonstrated. The one seeks its own life, the material thing, and the benefits of this life, as against the prophet who disregards what the consequence would be for himself.

The Lord is gracious and gentle in giving warning of His judgments. They come in installments, but when people keep refusing to hear, there remains only sudden judgment: Zedekiah blinded and losing his sons, the nation itself destroyed, the temple and city burned, and the final survivors being pursued with the sword and famine and pestilence into Egypt.

We are either going to live from every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, or we will perish. The people did not live by the word of the Lord from the mouth of the prophet. Had they heeded it and received it, it would have been life for them. The rejection of it was their death. They calculated their security along other lines, which is, in the last analysis, idolatrous and God-rejecting. It must bring judgment, especially being the people of God. They were under a double indictment because they had the greater responsibility—the knowledge of God and His provision for them throughout all their history. They had forsaken the Law and the commandments, despite the warnings that God had sent them through His prophets of what the consequence of that rejection would be.

Jeremiah was obedient to God despite any visible evidence that he was being heard by God's people or being received. It is an excruciating form of suffering. It is like having your guts torn out. There is something in our humanity that cries out for some recognition, "Well done, brother, I appreciated that word." But for Jeremiah and any true prophet, there was nothing. He had to bear that, though it was death for him.

The two great prophets of restoration are the prophets who brought the words of doom and judgment: Ezekiel and Jeremiah. They were given the privilege of speaking about a last days' restoration: "It shall come to pass in the last days that God will..." That honor was given to those who had to bear the dishonor and shame. Only a true prophet is willing to bear the reproach of it in the suffering of it. The question for us as the church is whether we will be identified with something that is true in the last days, and that speaks of the judgments to come.

Prophetic Reflections for the Last Days

A compilation of messages regarding the last days.

The following are some intimations, prophetically considered, that require sharing at this time:

Concern about decaying environmental, economic and political conditions is moving the world toward global unification. Safety and self-interest will likely take precedence over ideological distinctions between nations, just as doctrinal differences between major church bodies will be eclipsed by the overriding interests of *peace and unity*. Historic principles, such as international law and the sovereignty of nations, will be sacrificed for the expedience of world order. Major powers will act summarily to maintain peace in their respective spheres of influence with the tacit approval of those who would formerly have opposed them on ideological grounds. The pragmatic urgencies of high-tech global economy will supersede ideology, allowing its rhetoric, but rendering its purposes as merely *ornamental* and not serious by those who wield power. Thus, with the possible exception of Israel and the Islamic powers, the stage is set for that global federation that constitutes the *beast* system.

The social character of the world, in its inexorably fallen state, will become more vile and filthy. Through appeals of the uttermost sophistication, both overt and subliminal, merchandise will be fashioned from the very souls of men (especially of children and youth) – corrupting if not absorbing or consuming all who do not consciously and sacrificially resist its power. An impatient, vacuous, inherently lawless, culturally illiterate, sensual world – frustrated and exasperated in its contention for what it cannot materially obtain – will give increasing vent to explosive anger and physical violence. Increasing calamity and disaster will give rise to looting, pillage, deepening chaos, and rape by the new *barbarians* (Chuck Colson's apt phrase) beyond society's ability to control. *Emergency powers*, setting aside due process of the law, will introduce a regimentation and curbing of traditional freedoms unknown and unacceptable to earlier generations. What is banal, lewd, and vulgar will be enshrined as desirable – values celebrated as *good* by the mass-cult of dark, witchy and degenerate media-blitz idols of entertainment. These glitzy non-persons will accrue robber-baron fortunes for themselves, as well as those who *package* them through the willing, exorbitant sacrifice of ecstatic, blasphemous, Christ-despising millions.

Paradoxically, society will be forced to abandon even what remains of Christian restraint, morality and propriety in its attempt to protect itself from the endemic evils of drugs, AIDS, venereal disease and teen pregnancies. As is already the case in Zurich, the city of the Swiss Reformers, free syringes, prophylactics and AIDS tests will be universally dispensed, in effect sanctioning the very evils being opposed! Such an implicit official endorsement of evil cannot take place without further compromising the very moral constituency of society, thereby ensuring the destitution and emptiness that moves multitudes to mindless experimentation, addiction and death.

Thus, global disillusionment and final dejection will be the portion of disappointed ideologues, (first in Marxism-socialism, and then democracy - *secular utopian dreams*) making them candidates for Christ or cults. The dreaded nihilism of despair that was the root of *Hitlerian-Naziism* of the 1930's will also be the breeding ground for the global totalitarianism of the end-times. The dissolution of contending ideologies and the unification of world economies will produce a blurring of national boundaries, which even now is resulting in a massive shifting and relocation of peoples. This will add to the fears and tensions of ethnicity and race among the unredeemed, but render to God through a transcendent globally-minded, non-parochial Church, the means to sift out and draw to Himself a remnant people from among all the nations. Many from among world Jewry will find themselves increasingly vexed and harassed among all nations, experiencing as the Gentiles in New Testament times, being *without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world* (Ephesians 2:12).

This emerging true Church will finally grow sick of the *hype* and the banal predictability of a merely *phraseological* Christianity. It will seek the deeper reality of faith and relationship, counting the cost and increasingly taking on the visage of *pilgrim, stranger and sojourner in the earth*. Those that remain in conventional church situations, either impervious to the need or unwilling to pay the price, will settle under a deception of religious unreality, condemning as *heretics* and *agitators* those who cannot abide the same. Centrifugal forces will polarize Christendom ultimately toward two camps - *persecuted or persecutors* - reminiscent of the opposition of the Reformation churches to the Anabaptists of the 16th century! Finally, impeding *unities* will drive the *religio-political* kind to fury against that minority of the Spirit which will not subscribe to their ecumenical designs. So once again, and finally, a man will find his enemies to be those of his own

household; yet, one's love for his enemies in response to opposition and persecution will be the distinguishing mark of this consummating, remnant-martyr Church. Such a response will be the possibility of those whose conscious, determined preparation and sanctification begins now.

The light of His countenance in such a separated people will be the very factor that brings upon them, as it did Stephen, the retribution and assault of those who hate the light and prefer darkness – from without but more so from within the *church*. Radical *apostolicity* or *apostasy* will prove the only options during this polarization in the end-times. Neutrality or middle-of-the-road alternatives will be waste and void. We will be, finally and at last, compelled to be *saints*, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, in an age when the only other option is to wear the mark of the Beast.

For those unable to buy or sell in the global world economy, Christian community of a creative, productive, life-sustaining kind, however much dreaded by many till now, will prove one of the few, if not only, viable alternatives for sanctity and life. For those *sons and daughters* who radically separate themselves, not to so much as even touch the unclean thing, the love of the Father, the actuality of God as Father, known by few, will become a sustaining power against insecurity or falling in all the tremulous pressures of the end (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Such a people, a saving-remnant dotting the globe, will constitute in themselves a living accusation against sin and evil. Their presence in an age where iniquity abounds will no longer be tolerated. They will, in many instances, provoke their own martyrdom, thus fulfilling the mystery of the purposes of God in suffering. Through this, the usurping Powers, the false gods of this age, are evicted from the heavenlies by this ultimate demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God! (Ephesians 3:10). In such a manner is that governmental vacancy created to which a glorified Church shall be elevated at the coming of its vindicated, long-awaited King – even the return of the crucified Lord in glory, to fearlessly judge the earth and to rule the nations in righteousness.

What ought we to be about in God in the Last Days?

There must be a cleaving to the prophetic word appropriate to the Last Days' purposes of God. At its heart is Israel's final redemption as obtained through a Church, alerted and prepared through such a word, for its own self-transfiguring and essential part in that restoration. This mandate, until now

largely unseen, neglected or rejected, can be fulfilled only in the character and authority of true "sons" predicated, as they must be, upon the power of the resurrection life. The message of death to the self life must, of necessity, likewise itself go forth exclusively on these same terms; i.e. in persuasive resurrection power and truth, or the whole endeavor is contradicted and vain.

What is ultimately at stake in all this, and powerfully resisted, is the Lord's appearing as Deliverer and King. His Coming is inextricably joined to Israel's restoration, obtained after a yet future but final time of tribulation and dispersal through the nations (Acts 3:21; Isaiah 35; Jeremiah 30 and 31; Ezekiel 35, 36 and 37. This final, global sifting succeeds only as the demonstration of the mercy of God expressed through that of a self-sacrificing Church, extending itself to the Jew, at its peril, not regarding its own life as dear unto itself. The Lord's return brings in His millennial theocratic rule constituting the final defeat, through such a remnant Church, of the ages-long usurping principalities and powers bent furiously, at the end, upon Israel's annihilation. In so doing, the overcoming Church brings to completion the eternal purpose of God for itself (Ephesians 3:10), and is fitted now for its own part in His millennial rule and reign (Revelation 2:26; 3:21).

It is in this requirement of being Israel's "saviors" (Ezekiel 20:33f; Rev. 12:14; Matt. 25:35f), and in opposition to the final fury of Anti-Christ persecution, that an apostasy-avoiding remnant Church is brought at last to full apostolic and prophetic stature out of its till-then, characteristic shallowness and self-centeredness. A message of this kind, powerfully resisted and contested, must be brought against the opposition also of competing false apostolic and prophetic presumers promoting an alternative ecumenical "unity." These will likely be disposed to verbally "slay us" assuredly thinking they are doing *God* a service!

This global process of sifting, both of Israel and the Church, takes place principally in "the wilderness of the nations" (Ezekiel 20:35; Hosea 2:14; Amos 9:9). There, in the out-of-the-way, less frequented places, a people prepared by God, both spiritually and perhaps practically in life-sustaining, food-productive communities, are fitted for the sudden onrush and intrusion of a people in flight in their desperate and unkempt condition. There, through such a prepared people, is revealed the "face of God" to that remnant of Jews who survive the worldwide process of attrition. These

return to Zion as the "redeemed of the Lord" to everlasting joy where "mourning and sighing will flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

In this manner, the Lord is released from a long, self-imposed confinement to be King over them (Acts 3:21) and hence all nations. The restored remnant, constituting then the redeemed, saved nation, Israel, fulfill their irrevocable gift and calling (Romans 11:15, 29) to "bless all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12) as a "nation of priests and a light unto the world"! The Lord's sanctuary established in the midst of a people now made holy permits the "law to go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord out of [the rebuilt ruins of] Jerusalem" bringing millennial peace and blessedness to all the nations of the earth (Isaiah 2; Micah 4).

We need to proclaim this message to a yet unsuspecting Church in the nations whose affinity for Israel and the Jew is at best fitful and unformed; to call the Church to the requirements of a true apostolicity as being definite and normative, in a word, to a cruciform lifestyle borne out of jealousy for the glory of God (Ephesians 3:21; Romans 11:33-36) and their own eternal reward as participants in the rule and reign of the Kingdom proportionate to every suffering.

The purity, truth and power of that word will be entirely reflective of the degree that we ourselves are living consistently in the reality to which we, through our message, are inviting others. The premium will be upon the validity of our own personal and corporate character as it is daily tempered in the earnestness of "life together" by which also we have radically separated ourselves from anti-Christ dependencies to a life of faith and trust in the provision of God for ourselves. The message is validated and made urgent and penetrating to the degree that it is wrought out in our own life and experience.

Needless to say, we will be bitterly hated and opposed by the powers of darkness. Oppressing and depressing mind battles, demonically twisted communications and the compelling allegations of the "accuser of the brethren" will be the frequent experience of us all. Our prayer times together, the necessity to "speak the truth in love" and "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," are, for us, an urgent, daily requirement in which we, like all of us, too often fail.

True and False Prophets

I trust that you share with me the increasing sense of importance that this subject bears. Up until now, I have borne with some patience and even amusement the number of those who currently label themselves "prophetic" and the popularity that this calling now enjoys, which has been contrary to my own experience. It seemed another one of those "fads" that sooner or later would fade away. Now though, it is hitting too close to home in the things jealously dear to my own heart that have to do with the maintaining of the dignity and meaning of the word "prophet" itself! After all, if we cheapen or lose the true office of prophet, what foundation have we, seeing that "the household of God...[is itself] built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19-20).

My own now bold proclamation in every place of an impending time of calamity for the state of Israel and Jews everywhere, as being a statement issuing authoritatively from an office rather than an opinion, demands a repudiation or a recognition of the seriousness of that office and those who profess to speak from it. For I believe that it is to those in the true office of prophet that the incisive interpretation of prophetic scripture is given. The question then of true or false has now become either the unnecessary disturbing of the church for that which is already past or a life-or-death warning of that which is not only future but imminent.

How remarkably this parallels the experience of an earlier "prophet of doom," Jeremiah, who had not only to contend with the recalcitrance of the nation to heed his warning but the active opposition of those claiming also to be prophets! The cry of God through him against the false prophets in the classic diatribe of chapter 23 must have been an additional anguish for his already vexed soul. In a "thus saith the Lord of hosts," not employed as the device to sanctify what is only a human conjecture, but as one that punctuates the urgency of God's own heart, the people are warned "not to listen to the words of the prophets that prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord" (v.16).

For even to listen is to be dulled and made more conducive to the soothing and seductive "It shall be well with you...no calamity shall come upon you" (v.17). Such men prophesy "the deceit of their own hearts...saying I have dreamed a dream...by their dreams which they tell one another...they make

my people forget my Name" (vv.25-27). That is, in the lightness of their banter to which the name of the Lord is recklessly affixed, God is necessarily demeaned and diminished *as God*; for what God is in the totality of his Nature and character is implied and is intrinsic in His Name!

From whence this unspeakable audacity of those who though they were *not* sent, "yet they ran" (v.21)! "Senseless prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing", who have "envisioned falsehood and lying divination" and even in the depths of their own self-deception, "yet [even] wait for the fulfillment of their word" (Ezekiel 13:3-6) [of a peace that cannot and will not come] "saying to those who despise the Word of the Lord, it shall be well with you...no calamity shall come upon you" (Jeremiah 23:17)!

"For who has stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and hear His Word? Who has given heed to His Word so as to proclaim it?" (v.18). The very word "who" in the cry of this verse indicates not many, for the "council" of God implies the most intimate sense of God from which men of presumption and ambition are necessarily barred! God grounds the sanctity of His Name and His Word in the confines of *relationship* from which busy men have neither the time nor disposition to enter. Neither is it a place where one can come with the express purpose of finding a word. For to come for the expediency of the word alone is to come in the spirit of utility, which is to say, not to come *in the name of the Lord!* God must be sought, consistently, for His own sake and not for that which can be obtained from Him, even for "ministry"!

How shall men who have already profaned the sacred by invoking the name of the Lord as a catchword [to give an aura of credibility to their own conjectures] so much as even have the *disposition* for such a seeking? They are *false* in themselves and reflect an age that is false in itself in which many in the church have been infected and cannot tell the difference! As always in the last analysis of any issue, it is the Cross which is at stake! For to be "in the council of the Lord" requires that brokenness, that disposition to wait, that separation from the itch for fame and recognition, that willingness for the bearing of rejection, of misunderstanding, of necessary offense, that utterness toward God, that sending from a body willing to share in these sufferings the burden of the unique prophetic anguish, the daily dying which is necessarily the history and condition of any man called to the holy task of prophet in this final generation.

Has ever our age stood in greater need of hearing the heart of God? O for *the* Word of the Lord when He *chooses* to give it. When it comes, I suspect, it will be to those who are in the practice of a daily and early communing, who do not make the issue of obtaining *anything* a condition for their devotion, who find His silences as holy as His speakings, paying homage to Him as God because He is God, and will therefore not withhold His Word when it comes, however painful its implications and its judgments, knowing that even the judgments of God are themselves a mercy! To them, like the ancient Hebrew prophets cited above, will the honor and privilege also be given to proclaim to Israel their restoration, and to the Church, His soon Coming, His Kingdom and His glory.

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