

Jeremiah

Chapter 20

Jeremiah Persecuted by Pashhur

Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. 2 Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the LORD. 3 The next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, “The LORD does not call your name Pashhur, but Terror on Every Side. 4 For thus says the LORD: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. He shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall strike them down with the sword. 5 Moreover, I will give all the wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them and seize them and carry them to Babylon. 6 And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. To Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.” 7 O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. 8 For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. 9 If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. 10 For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! “Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” say all my close friends, watching for my fall. “Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him.” 11 But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. 12 O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. 13 Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. 14 Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! 15 Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, “A son is born to you,” making him very glad. 16 Let that man be like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, 17 because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. 18 Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

Ch 20 After being flogged, Jeremiah was locked in the stocks overnight in order that his captives might ridicule and discredit him. However, Jeremiah still announced the threat of the apostate nation’s doom, even more emphatically and pointedly than before. (TLSB)

20:1–6 Pashhur’s response to Jeremiah’s symbolic act (vv. 1–2), and Jeremiah’s rejoinder (vv. 3–6). (CSB)

20:1 *Pashhur*. One or more different men with the same name appear in 21:1; 38:1. (CSB)

Several priests and officials were so named (cf Ne 7:41; 10:3). The name also appears on letters (ostraca) found near the Jerusalem temple. (TLSB)

Immer. Perhaps a descendant of the head of the 16th division of priests in the Jerusalem temple (see 1Ch 24:14). (CSB)

chief officer. The priest in charge of punishing troublemakers, real or imagined, in the temple courts (see v. 2; 29:26). The position was second only to that of the chief priest himself (compare 29:25–26 with 52:24). (CSB)

Not the high priest but an important administrator. (TLSB)

in the house of the Lord – The outside court, where the people assembled in the largest numbers. (Kretzmann)

20:2 The first of many recorded acts of physical violence against Jeremiah. (CSB)

the prophet. The first time Jeremiah is so called in the book here to stress the enormity of Pashhur's actions. (CSB)

beaten. Probably in accordance with the Mosaic law of Dt 25:2–3 (see note on Dt 25:3). (CSB)

stocks. Lit. “restraint, confinement” (the Hebrew for this word is translated “prison” in 2Ch 16:10). (CSB)

Form of public punishment. (TLSB)

Jeremiah had been kept in this crooked posture over night and suffered all its tortures. (Kretzmann)

Upper Benjamin Gate. Probably the same as the “north gate of the inner court” (Eze 8:3; see 2Ki 15:35; see also Eze 9:2). (CSB)

Apparently the name of two gates: one in the city wall, and the other in the temple precincts. Both faced north. Cf 38:7. (TLSB)

of the house of the LORD. The qualifying phrase distinguishes the temple's Gate of Benjamin from the “Benjamin Gate” in the city wall (37:13; 38:7). Both gates were in the northern part of the city, facing the territory of Benjamin. (CSB)

20:3 *Magor-Missabib*. The phrase “terror on every side” (see v. 10) is found in the plural in La 2:22. (CSB)

That is, “terror round about,” the name, of course, signifying the fate that would befall him for his blasphemous behavior toward the Lord's servant. (Kretzmann)

20:4 Pashhur's new name symbolizes terror to all Judah, whose people will be exiled to Babylonia or put to death. (CSB)

terror to yourself – So that his evil conscience and the fear of God's wrath would leave him no rest. (Kretzmann)

friends. Associates and allies in the sense of covenant partners (see v. 6). (CSB)

captive to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, who acceded to the Babylonian throne in 605 B.C. (see notes on 17:15; 18:1–20:18). (CSB)

20:5 Fulfilled in 597 B.C. (see 2Ki 24:13) and in 586 (see 52:17–23; 2Ki 25:13–17). (CSB)

20:6 *you, Pashhur,...* shall go into captivity. Probably in 597 B.C., because shortly after that year (see 29:2) two other men in succession had replaced Pashhur as chief officer in the temple (see 29:25–26). (CSB)

to whom you have prophesied. The priest Pashhur had pretended to be a prophet. (CSB)

Jeremiah did not hold out for personal revenge for his mistreatment by Pashhur. His tormentor was to be exiled and die in Babylon because he contradicted the word of God Jeremiah spoke. Cf 8:11; 14:13; 23:17 for the words of the false prophets. (TLSB)

He abused his office of priest for the purpose of deceiving people. Like Pashur, there are many men in high offices in the Church today who abuse their position for the purpose of leading men astray and dragging them down to ruin with themselves. (Kretzmann)

20:7–18 The sixth, last and longest of Jeremiah's "confessions" (see Introduction: Author and Date). In some respects, it is the most daring and bitter of them all. (CSB)

The verse preceding our text (Jer 20:1-6) are a vivid portrayal of the suffering that may come to God's faithful people precisely because they are faithful. Hence the believer dare not base his faith on what is visible, on the appearance of success or failure, on the evaluations of others. Jeremiah's own ministry appeared to be a failure. Not only did the people refuse to believe the words of the Lord had given him, they put his very life in jeopardy and trusted instead the message of false prophets of hope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

The structure of our text (Jer 20:7-13) is similar to many of the psalms of lament, of which there are about 50 (e.g., Psalms 3-7; 10-14; 22; 25-28; etc) In these an individual mourns his present unfortunate condition, then toward the end of the psalm breaks into joyful praise of God in light of His salvation. In our text verses 7-10 are a lament, while verse 11-13 rejoice in God's eventual triumph and vindication of His faithful servant. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

20:7 Cf. 15:18. *deceived*. † Lit. "seduced" (Ex 22:16) or "enticed" (1Ki 22:20–22); see v. 10. Jeremiah did not become a prophet of his own volition, but the Lord assigned a task to him which brought him unanticipated suffering (see NIV text note; see also 1:7–8, 17–19; cf. Eze 14:9). (CSB)

Hbr verb means to persuade a person to take a certain course of action, usually to do wrong. Thus the same word may be used to describe a woman being persuaded to commit adultery or fornication (cf Ex 22:16) and a man alluring a woman to become his wife by speaking tenderly to her (Hos 2:14). Jeremiah is declaring that he did not become a prophet of his own will; he had to be prevailed upon to assume an obligation that brought him nothing but anguish and pain. Chemnitz: "[Jeremiah] is speaking of his prophetic vocation which, since it brings with it much

hatred, criticism and dangers, as is clear from the content of the chapter, the prophet is overcome by the weakness of his flesh, but he is not only overcome by these things, but in a certain sense he is even arguing with the Lord” (*LTh* 1:193). (TLSB)

Jeremiah is not accusing God of lying but of duping him. The prophet charges that the Lord lured him into a task with painful consequences for which he was not prepared. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

Those whose love is deep also grieve deeply. Jeremiah grieved like Samuel (1 Samuel 15:35) who mourned for the fallen Saul. Jeremiah grieved like Paul (Romans 9:2) who could have wished himself cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews. Jeremiah grieved most of all like our Lord (Luke 19:40-44) who, when approaching Jerusalem, wept over it because He saw the destruction that would soon come upon the city. (PBC)

In his struggle with his grief, the prophet lashed out at the Lord. Grief may lead people to lash out at even those they love. Jeremiah complained that despite all his preaching and proclamation, not one word had been fulfilled.

You are stronger than I – Forcing the prophet into his reluctant mission. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999) – It means: lay hold of. It thus corresponds to *ἄρξω*, Isa 8:11, denoting the state of being laid hold of by the power of the Spirit of God in order to prophesy. (KD)

prevailed – *yaw-kole'*, *yaw-kole'* A primitive root; to *be able*, literally (*can, could*) or morally (*may, might*):—be able, any at all (ways), attain, can (away with, [-not]), could, endure, might, overcome, have power, prevail, still, suffer. (CSB)

20:8 Jeremiah attributes his suffering to the Lord’s demands on his life. (CSB)

violence and destruction. The prophet’s message echoes the Lord’s word (see 6:7). (CSB)

Jeremiah grieved because all his preaching had failed to produce repentance, any kind of turning toward the Lord. He knew that the Lord would keep His word and destroy the city. Because the people of Jerusalem had turned away, nothing could stop its destruction. (PBC)

reproach. See Ps 44:13; 79:4. (CSB)

As he experienced the increasing bitter opposition of his countrymen, he learned with sorrow that God’s law does work wrath (Romans 4:15). It drives the impenitent into even more ferocious hatred for God. Jeremiah learned, to his sorrow, that for some the promise, the gospel itself, becomes “the smell of death” (2 Corinthians 2:16). (PBC)

I am become a laughing-stock all the day, i.e., incessantly. (KD)

20:9 A classic description of prophetic reluctance overcome by divine compulsion (see 1:6–8; Am 3:8; Ac 4:20; 1Co 9:16). (CSB)

I will not mention him – Jeremiah’s initial reaction or resolution to this turmoil is to resign his post. The natural response is to escape the peril and pain by quitting his calling. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

in my heart as it as a burning fire. The figure is unique to the prophet Jeremiah (see also La 1:13). (CSB)

Though Jeremiah confesses his natural disinclination to be a prophet, he also bears witness to the mystery of divine inspiration. By the miraculous working of God, he became the instrument for the transmission of infallible truth. (TLSB)

He tried to stop preaching, but he could not. The Living Word within over-powered him and compelled him. He felt as Paul later would feel: “I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!...I am simply discharging the trust committed to me” (1 Corinthians 9:16,17). (PBC)

The word of God dwells in the heart; but from there outwards it acts upon his whole organism, like a fire shut up in the hollow of his bones, burning the marrow of them (Job 21:24), so that he can no longer bear to keep silence. (KD)

20:10 The Hebrew of the first two lines is identical with that of the first two lines of Ps 31:13. (CSB)

Terror on every side! The phrase is here used as a nickname for Jeremiah in the light of his doleful message. (CSB)

friends. Lit. “men of my peace/welfare” (a similar Hebrew phrase appears in Ps 41:9, where it is translated “close friend”). (CSB)

Friends is translated literally, “every person of my welfare” (that is, those who should be looking after Jeremiah’s well-being, are actually are actually looking for his undoing). (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

watching for my fall. See Ps 35:15; 38:16. (CSB)

For any indication of stumbling on his part. (Kretzmann)

deceived. Same word used in verse 7 now describes his traitors. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

we can overcome him. Or so they think (see v. 11). (CSB)

Here too, the same word as in verse 7 is used. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

take our revenge on him. His enemies will not give up, no matter what it takes (see Ps 56:5–6; 71:10). (CSB)

20:11 *the LORD is with me.* Typical of the individual lament form, Jeremiah now moves from a state of extreme despair to one of affirmation and confidence in God’s vindication. Yahweh is with him as his champion. This statement reminds one of Luther’s bold affirmations in “A Mighty Fortress.”

dread. The Hebrew for this word is translated “cruel” in 15:21, where it describes Jeremiah’s enemies. Here it has a different nuance and is applied to God, whose “might” overcomes all “cruelty.” (CSB)

will not succeed – Once again Jeremiah uses the term “prevail.” Even though Yahweh prevails over His prophet (V. 7), His enemies will not. Perhaps Jeremiah here claims the promise God gave at his commissioning 1:18-19: ¹⁸Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.” (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

The phrase “for I am with you” in verse 19 brings reminders of how the Lord made His presence known in the desert with a pillar of fire or smoke. It also recalls our baptism where Christ came to live in us.

Their eternal dishonor – This disgrace will befall the persecutors, because the Lord of hosts will, as Searcher of hearts, take the part of the righteous, and will take vengeance on their foes. (KD)

There is a child psychologist principle for when a child is the most rebellious and reacting in an angry manner. It says to hold him/her very tight to help him/her feel your unconditional love. You can almost see the Lord (covenant keeper) doing that with Jeremiah and others in Scripture who lashed out in lament. He does that with us too. Instead of responding in kind with anger (“righteous” in His case) and banishing us off to some spiritual timeout to pay for our disrespect and rebellion, God draws us so close to Him that we feel His loving heartbeat that puts us to rest like a baby goes to sleep on a mom’s bosom to the rhythm of her heart beat.

They would be heaped with eternal disgrace, the ignominy of which would attach to them forever. This confidence on the part of Jeremiah now finds expression in a fervent appeal to Jehovah to take his part and defend his cause. (Kretzmann)

20:12 Repeated almost verbatim from 11:20. (CSB)

let me see your vengeance – Jeremiah’s call for God’s “vengeance” is not motivated by selfish retaliation, as was the motive of his traitors. Instead it refers to appropriate and just vindication, a requital guided by righteousness. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

committed my cause – The prophet commits to Yahweh his “cause” a term that has legal associations. The Lord will be Jeremiah’s defense attorney. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

20:13 Prayer not only quieted Jeremiah’s fears but also gave him the boldness to “praise the LORD” as if He had already delivered him. (TLSB)

Sing ... praise the Lord. Praise is a powerful statement of faith. For Jeremiah and the psalmists, praise results from faith’s certainty that no matter how bad things are now, God will make good on His promises of final and complete deliverance. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

delivered... from the hand of evildoers. The believer thus possessing the gifts of the future by faith. But since Jeremiah, for the present, sees nothing but misfortune and sorrow, he cries out in the bitterness of his soul over his unhappy condition. (Kretzmann)

needy. By Jeremiah's time, "poor/needy" had become virtually synonymous with "righteous." (CSB)

Those who are poor in spirit, not necessarily poor of economic means (cf. Matt 5:3). Jeremiah is one who is "needy" because he is dependent on the Lord. He is not helpless or hopeless in the face of his enemies' attacks, but his rescue is from Yahweh. (Concordia Journal – April, 1999)

20:14–18 See Job 3:3–19. From the heights of exultation (v. 13), Jeremiah now sinks to the depths of despair. The irreversibility of his divine call (v. 9), the betrayal of his friends (v. 10), the relentless pursuit of his enemies (vv. 7, 11), the negative and condemnatory nature of his message (v. 8)—all have combined to bring to his lips a startling expression of despondency and hopelessness. The passage serves also as a transition to the next major section of the book. Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah will soon say, are now irrevocably doomed (see 21:1–10). (CSB)

20:14 *Cursed be the day I was born!* † The prophet laments the kind of life to which he was born. (CSB)

Job spoke the same vehement denunciation of his existence and Elijah prayed to have death end his misery. (TLSB)

20:15 News of the birth of a son, normally a blessing in ancient times (see, e.g., Ge 29:31–35), Jeremiah sees as a curse in his own case. (CSB)

Cursed be the man. A rhetorical curse, not directed against the man personally. (CSB)

20:16 *cities that the LORD overthrew.* Sodom and Gomorrah (see Ge 19:24–25, 29). By Jeremiah's time, their wickedness had long been proverbial. (CSB)

hear a cry. The wild battle-cry of the invading army. (Kretzmann)

at noon. To take advantage of the element of surprise, since the usual time of attack was early in the morning. (CSB)

20:17 *forever great.* Lit. "pregnant." In his anguish, Jeremiah wishes that his mother's womb, which gave him birth, had been instead his eternal tomb. (CSB)

20:18 *spend my days in shame* – This cry is wrung from his lips because his office was apparently without success, because his prophetic laboring was in vain, since he was unable to save his people from destruction. Cp. Job 3, 3 ff. Similar periods of depression are liable to strike all Christians, wherefore it is necessary that all without exception grow in trust in His mercy. (Kretzmann)

Ch 20 Jeremiah complains bitterly about the opposition he has experienced in response to the dire warnings he preached to the people. His predictions of destruction stand unfulfilled, giving his enemies grounds to beat him, imprison him, and plot against his life. Jeremiah calls on the Lord for help and praises His name, but he cannot help expressing the anger and despair he genuinely feels. Like Jeremiah, we are often weak and fearful in times of crisis because we doubt the Lord and trust in ourselves. When we are weakest, God's strength shines through more clearly (cf 2Co 12:10). He is ever our refuge and strength, who hears our confession and forgives all our sins. •

By Your Holy Spirit, Father, keep us strong in faith and grant us the courage to bear the name of Jesus in this evil world. Amen. (TLSB)