

Preface To The Prophet Jeremiah (1545 and 1532)

Few comments are needed for an understanding of the prophet Jeremiah, if one will only have regard to the events that took place under the kings in whose time he preached. For his preaching had reference to the condition of the land at that time.

In the first place, the land was full of vices and idolatry; they slew the prophets and would have their own vices and idolatry go unrebuked. Therefore, the first part, down to the twentieth chapter, is almost entirely rebuke and complaint of the wickedness of the Jews.

In the second place, he also foretold the punishment that was at hand; namely, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the whole land, and the Babylonian Captivity, and the punishment of all the nations also. Yet, along with this, he gives encouragement, and promises that at a definite time, after the punishment is over, they shall be released and return into the land and to Jerusalem. This subject is the most important that is in Jeremiah, for on account of it Jeremiah was raised up, as is indicated in the first chapter by the vision of the rod and the seething caldrons that came from the North. And this was highly necessary; for since this cruel misfortune was to come upon the people, and they were to be torn asunder and carried away out of their land, many pious souls, such as Daniel and others, would have been driven to despair of God and all His promises, because they would not have been able to think otherwise than that it was all over with them and they were utterly cast off by God, that no Christ would ever come, but that God, in great anger, had taken back His promise because of the people's sin.

Therefore Jeremiah had to be there and proclaim the punishment and the wrath, telling them that it would not last forever, but for a fixed time, such as seventy years, and that afterwards they would come again into grace. With this promise he had also to encourage and sustain himself, or he would have had little comfort and happiness. For he was a sad and troubled prophet and lived in miserably evil days. He had a peculiarly hard ministry, besides, for through more than forty years, down to his imprisonment, he had to say hard things to obstinately wicked people, and do little good, but rather look on while they went from bad to worse; they wanted to kill him, and they put much hardship upon him.

Beside that, he had to live through it, and see it with his own eyes, when the land was destroyed and the people led captive, and there was great misery and bloodshed. And this does not include what he had, afterwards, to preach and suffer in Egypt, for it is believed that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Egypt.

In the third place, like all the other prophets, he prophesies of Christ and His kingdom, especially in

the twenty-third, and thirty-first chapters, where he clearly prophesies of the person of Christ, of His kingdom, of the new testament and the end of the old testament.

But these three subjects do not follow one another and are not separated in the book in the way that they actually came along. Upon the first subject, indeed, there is often something in a later chapter which happened before that which is spoken of in an earlier chapter, and so it seems as though Jeremiah had not composed these books himself, but that parts of his utterances were taken and written into the book. Therefore one must not care about the order, or be hindered by the lack of it. We learn from Jeremiah, however, among other things, that, as usual, the nearer the punishment is, the worse the people become, and the more one preaches to them, the more they despise his preaching. Thus we understand that when it is God's will to inflict punishment, He lets people become hardened, so that they may be destroyed without any mercy and not appease God's wrath with any repentance. So formerly the men of Sodom not only despised righteous Lot, but even plagued him, when he taught them; and yet their own plague was at the door: Pharaoh when about to be drowned in the Red Sea, had to afflict the children of Israel twice as much as before: and Jerusalem had to crucify God's Son, when its own final destruction was on the way. So it now goes everywhere. Now that the end of the world is approaching the people rage and rave most horribly against God, and blaspheme and damn God's Word, though they well know that it is God's Word and the truth. Besides, so many fearful signs and wonders are appearing, in the heavens and among all creatures, which threaten them terribly, and it is a wicked, miserable time, even worse than that of Jeremiah.

But so it will be, and must be. They will be careless, and sing, "Pax There is no need!" and only persecute everything that accords with the will of God, and all the threats of the signs will be wasted, until (as St. Paul says) their ruin overtakes them suddenly and destroys them before they are aware of it.

But Christ will know how to keep His own, for whose sake He lets His Word shine forth in this shameful time, as He kept at Babylon Daniel and those like him, for whose sake Jeremiah's prophecy had to shine forth. To the same dear Lord be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God over all, to eternity. Amen.