

CHAPTER 26

As in the history of the Acts of the Apostles that of their preaching and that of their suffering are interwoven, so it is in the account we have of the prophet Jeremiah; witness this chapter, where we are told,

I. How faithfully he preached (v. 1-6).

II. How spitefully he was persecuted for so doing by the priests and the prophets (v. 7-11).

III. How bravely he stood to his doctrine, in the face of his persecutors (v. 12-15).

IV. How wonderfully he was protected and delivered by the prudence of the princes and elders (v. 16-19). Though Urijah, another prophet, was about the same time put to death by Jehoiakim (v. 20-23), yet Jeremiah met with those that sheltered him (v. 24).

JEREMIAH 26:1-6

JEREMIAH'S FAITHFUL PREACHING

We have here the sermon that Jeremiah preached, which gave such offence that he was in danger of losing his life for it. It is here left upon record, as it were, by way of appeal to the judgment of impartial men in all ages, whether Jeremiah was worthy to die for delivering such a message as this from God, and whether his persecutors were not very wicked and unreasonable men.

I. God directed him where to preach this sermon, and when, and to what auditory, v. 2. Let not any censure Jeremiah as indiscreet in the choice of place and time, nor say that he might have delivered his message more privately, in a corner, among his friends that he could confide in, and that he deserved to smart for not acting more cautiously; for God gave him orders to preach *in the court of the Lord's house*, which was within the peculiar jurisdiction of his sworn enemies the priests, and who would therefore take themselves to be in a particular manner affronted. He must

preach this, as it should seem, at the time of one of the most solemn festivals, when persons had come from all the *cities of Judah to worship in the Lord's house*. These worshippers, we may suppose, had a great veneration for their priests, would credit the character they gave of men, and be exasperated against those whom they defamed, and would, consequently, side with them and strengthen their hands against Jeremiah. But none of these things must move him or daunt him; in the face of all this danger he must preach this sermon, which, if it were not convincing, would be very provoking. And because the prophet might be in some temptation to palliate the matter, and make it better to his hearers than God had made it to him, to exchange an offensive expression for one more plausible, therefore God charges him particularly *not to diminish a word*, but to speak all the things, nay, *all the words*, that he had commanded him. Note, God's ambassadors must keep closely to their instructions, and not in the least vary from them, either to please men or to save themselves from harm. They must neither *add* nor *diminish*, ^{READ} Deuteronomy 4:2.

II. God directed him what to preach, and it is that which could not give offence to any but such as were resolved to go on still in their trespasses.

1. He must assure them that if they would *repent of their sins*, and turn from them, though they were in imminent danger of ruin and desolating judgments were just at the door, yet a stop should be put to them, and God would proceed no further in his controversy with them, v. 3. This was the main thing God intended in sending him to them, to try if they would return from their sins, that so God might turn from his anger and turn away the judgments that threatened them, which he was not only willing, but very desirous to do, as soon as he could do it without prejudice to the honour of his justice and holiness. See how God *waits to be gracious*, waits till we are duly qualified, till we are fit for him to be gracious to, and in the mean time tries a variety of methods to bring us to be so.

2. He must, on the other hand, assure them that if they continued obstinate to all the calls God gave them, and would persist in their disobedience, it would certainly end in the ruin of their city and temple, v. 4-6.

(1.) That which God required of them was that they should be observant of what he had said to them, both by the written word and by his ministers, that they should *walk in all his law which he set before them*, the law of Moses and the ordinances and commandments of it, and that they should

hearken to the words of his servants the prophets, who pressed nothing upon them but what was agreeable to the law of Moses, which was *set before them* as a touchstone to try the spirits by; and by this they were distinguished from the false prophets, who drew them from the law, instead of drawing them to it. The law was what God himself set before them. The prophets were his own servants, and were immediately sent by him to them, and sent with a great deal of care and concern, *rising early to send them*, lest they should come too late, when their prejudices had got possession and become invincible. They had hitherto been deaf both to the law and to the prophets: *You have not hearkened*. All he expects now is that at length they should heed what he said, and make his word their rule — a reasonable demand.

(2.) That which is threatened in case of refusal is that this city, and the temple in it, shall fare as their predecessors did, Shiloh and the tabernacle there, for a like refusal to walk in God's law and hearken to his prophets, then when the present dispensation of prophecy just began in Samuel. Now could a sentence be expressed more unexceptionably? Is it not a rule of justice *ut parium par sit ratio* — *that those whose cases are the same be dealt with alike*? If Jerusalem be like Shiloh in respect of sin, why should it not be like Shiloh in respect of punishment? Can any other be expected? This was not the first time he had given them warning to this effect; see ch. 7:12-14. When the temple, which was the glory of Jerusalem, was destroyed, the city was thereby *made a curse*; for the temple was that which made it a blessing. *If the salt lose that savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing*. It shall be *a curse*, that is, it shall be the pattern of a curse; if a man would curse any city, he would say, *God make it like Jerusalem!* Note, Those that will not be subject to the commands of God make themselves subject to the curse of God.

~~2017~~ JEREMIAH 26:7-15

JEREMIAH PROSECUTED FOR HIS PREACHING

One would have hoped that such a sermon as that in the foregoing verses, so plain and practical, so rational and pathetic, and delivered in God's name, would work upon even this people, especially meeting them now at their devotions, and would prevail with them to repent and reform; but,

instead of awakening their convictions, it did but exasperate their corruptions, as appears by this account of the effect of it.

I. Jeremiah is charged with it as a crime that he had preached such a sermon, and is apprehended for it as a criminal. The *priests*, and *false prophets*, and *people*, *heard him speak these words*, v. 7. They had patience, it seems, to hear him out, did not disturb him when he was preaching, nor give him any interruption till he had *made an end of speaking all that the Lord commanded him to speak*, v. 8. So far they dealt more fairly with him than some of the persecutors of God's ministers have done; they let him say all he had to say, and yet perhaps with a bad design, in hopes to have something worse yet to lay to his charge; but, having no worse, this shall suffice to ground an indictment upon: He hath said, *This house shall be like Shiloh*, v. 9. See how unfair they are in representing his words. He had said, in God's name, *If you will not hearken to me, then will I make this house like Shiloh*; but they leave out God's hand in the desolation (*I will make it so*) and their own hand in it in not hearkening to the voice of God, and charge it upon him that he *blasphemed this holy place*, the crime charged both on our Lord Jesus and on Stephen: He said, *This house shall be like Shiloh*. Well might he complain, as David does (^{1865}Psalm 56:5), *Every day they wrest my words*; and we must not think it strange if we, and what we say and do, be thus misrepresented. When the accusation was so weakly grounded, no marvel that the sentence passed upon it was unjust: *Thou shalt surely die*. What he had said agreed with what God had said when he took possession of the temple (^{1906}1 Kings 9:6-8), *If you shall at all turn from following after me, then this house shall be abandoned*; and yet he is condemned to die for saying it. It is not out of any concern for the honour of the temple that they appear thus warm, but because they are resolved not to part with their sins, in which they flatter themselves with a conceit that the *temple of the Lord* will protect them; therefore, right or wrong, *Thou shalt surely die*. This outcry of the priests and prophets raised the mob, and *all the people were gathered together against Jeremiah* in a popular tumult, ready to pull him to pieces, were *gathered about him* (so some read it); they flocked together, some crying one thing and some another. *The people* that were at first present were hot against him (v. 8), but their clamours drew more together, only to see what the matter was.

II. He is arraigned and indicted for it before the highest court of judicature they had. Here,

1. The *princes of Judah* were his judges, v. 10. Those that filled the thrones of judgment, *the thrones of the house of David*, the elders of Israel, they, hearing of this tumult in the temple, *came up from the king's house*, where they usually sat near the court, *to the house of the Lord*, to enquire into this matter, and to see that nothing was done disorderly. They *sat down in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house*, and held a court, as it were, by a special commission of *Oyer and Terminer*.

2. The *priests and prophets* were his prosecutors and accusers, and were violently set against him. They appealed to *the princes*, and *to all the people*, to the court and the jury, whether *this man* were not *worthy to die*, v. 11. The corrupt priests and counterfeit prophets have always been the most bitter enemies of the prophets of the Lord; they had ends of their own to serve, which they thought such preaching as this would be an obstruction to. When Jeremiah prophesied in the house of the king concerning the fall of the royal family (~~201~~ Jeremiah 22:1, etc.), the court, though very corrupt, bore it patiently, and we do not find that they persecuted him for it; but when he comes into the *house of the Lord*, and touches the copyhold of the priests, and contradicts the lies and flatteries of the false prophets, then he is adjudged *worthy to die*. For the prophets *prophesied falsely*, and the *priests bore rule by their means*, ~~205~~ Jeremiah 5:31. Observe, When Jeremiah is indicted before the princes the stress of his accusation is laid upon what he said concerning the city, because they thought the princes would be most concerned about that. But concerning the words spoken they appeal to the people, "*You have heard* what he hath said; let it be given in evidence."

III. Jeremiah makes his defence before the princes and the people. He does not go about to deny the words, nor to diminish aught from them; what he has said he will stand to, though it cost him his life; he owns that he had prophesied against *this house* and *this city*, but, 1. He asserts that he did this by good authority, not maliciously nor seditiously, not out of any ill-will to his country nor any disaffection to the government in church or state, but, *The Lord sent me* to prophesy thus: so he begins his apology (v. 12), and so he concludes it, for this is that which he resolves to abide by as sufficient to bear him out (v. 15): *Of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you, to speak all these words*. As long as ministers keep closely to the

instructions they have from heaven they need not fear the opposition they may meet with from hell or earth. He pleads that he is but a messenger, and, if he faithfully deliver his message, he must bear no blame; but he is a messenger from the Lord, to whom they were accountable as well as he, and therefore might demand regard. If he speak but what God appointed him to speak, he is under the divine protection, and whatever affront they offer to the ambassador will be resented by the Prince that sent him.

2. He shows them that he did it with a good design, and that it was their fault if they did not make a good use of it. It was said, not by way of fatal sentence, but of fair warning; if they would take the warning, they might prevent the execution of the sentence, v. 13. Shall I take it ill of a man that tells me of my danger, while I have an opportunity of avoiding it, and not rather return him thanks for it, as the greatest kindness he could do me? *“I have indeed (says Jeremiah) prophesied against this city; but, if you will now amend your ways and your doings, the threatened ruin shall be prevented, which was the thing I aimed at in giving you the warning.”* Those are very unjust who complain of ministers for preaching hell and damnation, when it is only to keep them from that place of torment and to bring them to heaven and salvation.

3. He therefore warns them of their danger if they proceed against him (v. 14): *“As for me, the matter is not great what become of me; behold, I am in your hand; you know I am; I neither have any power, nor can make any interest, to oppose you, nor is it so much my concern to save my own life: do with me as seems meet unto you; if I be led to the slaughter, it shall be as a lamb.”* Note, It becomes God's ministers, that are warm in preaching, to be calm in suffering and to behave submissively to the powers that are over them, though they be persecuting powers. But, for themselves, he tells them that it is at their peril if they put him to death: *You shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves*, v. 15. They might think that killing the prophet would help to defeat the prophecy, but they would prove wretchedly deceived; it would but add to their guilt and aggravate their ruin. Their own consciences could not but tell them that, if Jeremiah was (as certainly he was) sent of God to bring them this message, it was at their utmost peril if they treated him for it as a malefactor. Those that persecute God's ministers hurt not them so much as themselves.

~~2016~~ JEREMIAH 26:16-24

JEREMIAH'S ACQUITTAL AND DELIVERANCE

Here is,

I. The acquitting of Jeremiah from the charge exhibited against him. He had indeed spoken the words as they were laid in the indictment, but they are not looked upon to be seditious or treasonable, ill-intended or of any bad tendency, and therefore the court and country agree to find him not guilty. The priests and prophets, notwithstanding his rational plea for himself, continued to demand judgment against him; but the princes, and all the people, are clear in it that *this man is not worthy to die* (v. 16); for (say they) *he hath spoken to us*, not of himself, but *in the name of the Lord our God*. And are they willing to own that he did indeed speak to them *in the name of the Lord* and that that Lord is their God? Why then did they not amend their ways and doings, and take the method he prescribed to prevent the ruin of their country? If they say, His prophecy is *from heaven*, it may justly be asked, *Why did you not then believe him?* ~~4075~~ Matthew 21:25. Note, It is a pity that those who are so far convinced of the divine original of gospel preaching as to protect it from the malice of others do not submit to the power and influence of it themselves.

II. A precedent quoted to justify them in acquitting Jeremiah. Some of the *elders of the land*, either the princes before mentioned or the more intelligent men of the people, stood up, and put the assembly in mind of a former case, as is usual with us in giving judgment; for the wisdom of our predecessors is a direction to us. The case referred to is that of Micah. We have extant the book of his prophecy among the minor prophets.

1. Was it thought strange that Jeremiah prophesied against this city and the temple? Micah did so before him, even in the reign of Hezekiah, that reign of reformation, v. 18. Micah said it as publicly as Jeremiah had now spoken to the same purport, *Zion shall be ploughed like a field*, the building shall be all destroyed, so that nothing shall hinder but it may be ploughed; *Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins*, and *the mountain of the house* on which the temple is built shall be *as the high places of the forest*, overrun with briers and thorns. That prophet not only spoke this, but wrote it, and left it on record; we find it, ~~3982~~ Micah 3:12. By this it appears that a

man may be, as Micah was, a true prophet of the Lord, and yet may prophesy the destruction of Zion and Jerusalem. When we threaten secure sinners with the taking away of the Spirit of God and the kingdom of God from them, and declining churches with the removal of the candlestick, we say no more than what has been said many a time, and what we have warrant from the word of God to say.

2. Was it thought fit by the princes to justify Jeremiah in what he had done? It was what Hezekiah did before them in a like case. Did Hezekiah, and the people of Judah (that is, the representatives of the people, the commons in parliament), did they complain of Micah the prophet? Did they impeach him, or make an act to silence him and put him to death? No; on the contrary, they took the warning he gave them. Hezekiah, that renowned prince, of blessed memory, set a good example before his successors, for he *feared the Lord* (v. 19), as Noah, who, being *warned of God of things not seen as yet, was moved with fear*. Micah's preaching drove him to his knees; he *besought the Lord* to turn away the judgment threatened and to be reconciled to them, and he found it was not in vain to do so, for *the Lord repented him of the evil* and returned in mercy to them; he sent an angel, who routed the army of the Assyrians, that threatened to plough *Zion like a field*. Hezekiah got good by the preaching, and then you may be sure he would do no harm to the preacher. These elders conclude that it would be of dangerous consequence to the state if they should gratify the importunity of the priests and prophets in putting Jeremiah to death: *Thus might we procure great evil against our souls*. Note, It is good to deter ourselves from sin with the consideration of the mischief we shall certainly do to ourselves by it and the irreparable damage it will be to our own souls.

III. Here is an instance of another prophet that was put to death by Jehoiakim for prophesying as Jeremiah had done, v. 20, etc. Some make this to be urged by the prosecutors, as a case that favoured the prosecution, a modern case, in which speaking such words as Jeremiah had spoken was adjudged treason. Others think that the elders, who were advocates for Jeremiah, alleged this to show that thus they might *procure great evil against their souls*, for it would be adding sin to sin. Jehoiakim, the present king, had slain one prophet already; let them not fill up the measure by slaying another. Hezekiah, who protected Micah, prospered; but did Jehoiakim prosper who slew Urijah? No; they all saw the contrary. As good examples, and the good consequences of them, should encourage

us in that which is good, so the examples of bad men, and the bad consequences of them, should deter us from that which is evil. But some good interpreters take this narrative from the historian that penned the book, Jeremiah himself, or Baruch, who, to make Jeremiah's deliverance by means of the princes the more wonderful, takes notice of this that happened about the same time; for both were in the reign of Jehoiakim, and this *in the beginning of his reign*, v. 1. Observe,

1. Urijah's prophecy. It was *against this city, and this land, according to all the words of Jeremiah*. The prophets of the Lord agreed in their testimony, and one would have thought that out of the mouth of so many witnesses the word would be regarded.
2. The prosecution of him for it, v. 21. Jehoiakim and his courtiers were exasperated against him, and *sought to put him to death*; in this wicked design the king himself was principally concerned.
3. His absconding thereupon: *When he heard that the king had become his enemy, and sought his life, he was afraid, and fled, and went in to Egypt*. This was certainly his fault, and an effect of the weakness of his faith, and it sped accordingly. He distrusted God, and his power to protect him and bear him out; he was too much under the power of that *fear of man* which *brings a snare*. It looked as if he durst not stand to what he had said or was ashamed of his Master. It was especially unbecoming him to flee *into Egypt*, and so in effect to abandon the land of Israel and to throw himself quite out of the way of being useful. Note, There are many that have much grace, but they have little courage, that are very honest, but withal very timorous.
4. His execution notwithstanding. Jehoiakim's malice, one would think, might have contented itself with his banishment, and it might suffice to have driven him out of the country; but those are *bloodthirsty* that *hate the upright*, ^{29:10} Proverbs 29:10. It was the life, that precious life, that he hunted after, and nothing else would satisfy him. So implacable is his revenge that he sends a party of soldiers into Egypt, some hundreds of miles, and they bring him back by force of arms. It would not sufficiently gratify him to have him slain in Egypt, but he must feed his eyes with the bloody spectacle. They *brought him to Jehoiakim*, and he *slew him with the sword*, for aught I know with his own hands. Yet neither did this satisfy his insatiable malice, but he loads the dead body of the good man with infamy, would not allow it the decent respects usually and justly paid

to the remains of men of distinction, but cast it into *the graves of the common people*, as if he had not been a prophet of the Lord; thus was the *shield of Saul vilely cast away, as though he had not been anointed with oil*. Thus Jehoiakim hoped both to ruin his reputation with the people, that no heed might be given to his predictions, and to deter others from prophesying in like manner; but in vain; Jeremiah says the same. There is no contending with the word of God. Herod thought he had gained his point when he had cut off John Baptist's head, but found himself deceived when, soon after, he heard of Jesus Christ, and said, in a fright, *This is John the Baptist*.

IV. Here is Jeremiah's deliverance. Though Urijah was lately put to death, and persecutors, when they have tasted the blood of saints, are apt to thirst after more (as Herod, ~~417~~ Acts 12:2, 3), yet God wonderfully preserved Jeremiah, though he did not flee, as Urijah did, but stood his ground. Ordinary ministers may use ordinary means, provided they be lawful ones, for their own preservation; but those that had an extraordinary protection. God raised up a friend for Jeremiah, whose hand was with him; he took him by the hand in a friendly way, encouraged him, assisted him, appeared for him. It was *Ahikam the son of Shaphan*, one that was a minister of state in Josiah's time; we read of him, ~~122~~ 2 Kings 22:12. Some think Gedaliah was the son of this Ahikam. He had a great interest, it should seem, among the princes, and he used it in favour of Jeremiah, to prevent the further designs of the priests and prophets against him, who would have had him turned over *into the hand of the people*, not those people (v. 16) that had adjudged him innocent, but the rude and insolent mob, whom they could persuade by their cursed insinuations not only to cry, *Crucify him, crucify him*, but to *stone him to death* in a popular tumult; for perhaps Jehoiakim had been so reproached by his own conscience for slaying Urijah that they despaired of making him the tool of their malice. Note, God can, when he pleases, raise up great men to patronize good men; and it is an encouragement to us to trust him in the way of duty that he has all men's hearts in his hands.