

Jeremiah and Pash'chur

20: 1-6

DIG: Jeremiah's broken pot lands him in what kind of trouble? How does he react to the disciplinary action of Pash'chur, his superior? To whom will the renamed Pash'chur be a terror and why? What was Yirmeyahu's state of mind in the midst of this horrible circumstance? What gave him the confidence to speak out? What was he risking to do this? Where was YHVH in the middle of all this?

REFLECT: Have you ever done the right thing and suffered for it? How did it make you feel? What did you say to God? Where in your life are you facing a "no-win" situation? Do you think the Lord knows about it? Do you think He cares? Why or why not? Can Yeshua help get you through it?

605 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

Contrary to what might be expected, I look back with particular satisfaction on experiences that at the time, seemed especially depressing and painful. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo . . . the result would not be to make life enjoyable, but to make it too dull and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the cross signifies. And it is the cross, more than anything else that has called me relentlessly to **Christ**.

Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Twentieth Century Testimony*¹⁸⁶

Word traveled fast (see **Cz - Judah is Like a Broken Jar**). By the time Yirmeyahu got back to the Temple area Yerushalayim was buzzing. The elders of the people and of the priests who had been witnesses to Jeremiah's smashing the jar were doubtless those who passed the word to Pash'chur, from the well-known priestly division (son of Immer, First Chronicles 24:14), and the chief overseer and security officer of the Temple. Jeremiah himself was appointed an overseer of the nations at his call (1:10). Therefore, it's beyond ironic that the overseer of God's Temple was about to take action against God's overseer of the nations. The confrontation between Jeremiah and Pash'chur was not unlike that of Amos and Amaziah (Amos 7:10-17). Pash'chur embodied the leadership that was threatened by Yirmeyahu. Two views of reality clashed and there was no compromise.

When the priest Pash'chur heard Jeremiah prophesying, "Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place [meaning the Temple and Tziyon] that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it ring" (19:3), the chief overseer sought to intimidate, but more importantly to silence him. Pash'chur was responsible for keeping *shalom* in the Temple compound. When he heard what Yirmeyahu had said, as far as he was concerned, Jeremiah was guilty of disturbing *shalom* - his *shalom* (20:1).

First he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten, flogged with 40 lashes, and then put in the stocks (20:2a). There is some difficulty with the word **stocks**. The root word (Hebrew: *haphak*) means to cause distortion, restraint, confinement, or turn over. The possibility was that the prophet was kept in a crooked or confined position that would produce cramped muscles (Jer. 29:26; 2 Chron. 16:10, this latter verse adds in prison) for the whole night.

Pash'chur was from a part of the population who prove to be some of Jeremiah's most persistent persecutors. The humiliation of being placed in the stocks and beaten by a priest was surely galling for the prophet since he too was from a priestly family. With the Temple looming in the background, from a human perspective, Yirmeyahu's treatment seemed to be YHVH's judgment on him, carried out by the priests who care for God's House.¹⁸⁷ In reality, however, the prophet of ADONAI was being unjustly persecuted for speaking God's truth.

Jeremiah was put in prison at the Upper Benjamin Gate at ADONAI's Temple (20:2b). The Upper Benjamin Gate, which was evidently a gate to the Temple compound, was different from the Benjamin Gate in the city walls (37:13; 38:7). The Upper Benjamin Gate was located between the old courtyard and the new courtyard referred to in 2 Kings 15:35 and 2 Chronicles 20:5. The name suggests that it was on the north side of the Temple facing the territory of Benjamin. At any rate, because Pash'chur controlled the Levites who controlled the gates and this particular gate would have a lot of foot traffic in and out of the Temple compound so that everyone could see the prisoner in stocks.¹⁸⁸

But Jeremiah was not sorry or apologetic. He was humiliated, but not intimidated and immediately went back on the attack against the enemies of God's word. **Jeremiah's scathing response, rather than his punishment, is the point of the text.** The next day Pash'chur released him from the stocks, but during the night the prophet had a chance to think about what Pash'chur had done to him. And so, in the morning Yirmeyahu greeted Pash'chur with a word from ADONAI, a word that involved a change in Pash'chur's name. The prophet yelled at Pash'chur, "ADONAI's name for you is not Pash'chur, but magor-missabib, or *terror on every side*" (20:3). This wasn't the only time that Jeremiah had used the term (6:25; 20:10, 46:5, 49:29; Psalm 31:13; Lamentations 2:22).

The Temple could not keep its promises. The system was under judgment . . . and had failed. It may have mouthed *shalom*, but it embodied *terror*. Therefore, it was subject to the *terror* of YHVH. **The name is symbolic of the terror that the Babylonians would arouse among the people of Y'hudah as they attacked.** It seems that the Ruach HaKodesh inspired **Jeremiah** to change Pash'chur's name into the Aramaic *Pash'shor*, which means *fertile on every side*. And then stated that YHVH had a new name for him, the opposite, *terror on every side*.

As a priest, Pash'chur almost certainly took the opportunity to speak a word of judgment in public about **Jeremiah** and his words: **I will smash this nation and this City just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topeth until there is no more room (19:10-11).** It would take the form of repudiating Yirmeyahu's words and actions and claiming divine judgment on him. In response, however, the prophet offers his own scenario of disasters that the new name foreshadows for the priest.¹⁸⁹

For this is what the LORD says: **I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will give all Judah into their hands of the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword. At last the specific nation was mentioned. The foe from the north is no longer a mystery. It is specifically the king of Babylon and his armies. I will deliver all the wealth of this City and the royal house into the hands of their enemies - all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon (20:4-5).** These effects on **Jerusalem** and its populace are sketched in the curses of **Deuteronomy 28** in no little detail. There could be no mistaking the severity of the disaster.

The oracle returned to Pash'chur at its close. **And you, Pash'chur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon.** Those at the center of the Temple, the focus of well-being and security, were the very ones displaced and exposed to death. The very place that was supposed to guarantee life had become the very seat of death. The symbolic world of **Jerusalem** was being effectively dismantled. **There you will die and be buried outside the Land** (this would be especially degrading for a Jew), **you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies (20:6).** It was in this sense that he would be a terror to himself and his friends. They would die either by the sword (30:4) or in Babylon. Pash'chur was not merely a priest but a false prophet, one among those who had declared that no harm would come to the nation (14:13). This was a lie worthy of death.¹⁹⁰ This prophecy was fulfilled in the **second deportation to Babylon** in 597 BC (see Dz - **Zedekiah Ruled For 11 Years from 597 to 586 BC**).

Unafraid of confinement. Uninitiated by taunts. Undeterred by humiliation, or embarrassment, or insecurity, or pain, or failure, or doubt, **Jeremiah** remained faithful to his calling as **God's** mouthpiece. But **he** paid a heavy price. **Jeremiah** didn't like it. **He** yelled at **Pash'chur**, and after **he** yelled at **Pash'chur** **he** yelled at **God** (see **Db - You Deceived Me, LORD, and I Have Been Deceived**), frightened, lonely, hurt and angry that all this was happening to **him**. **He** didn't like any of it, but **he** wasn't afraid of it because the most important thing in **his** life was **God** - not comfort, not applause, not security, but the living **God**. What **he** did fear was worship without astonishment, religion without commitment. **He** feared getting what **he** wanted and missing what **God** wanted.

Like Jeremiah, we don't have to like it. But it is still the only thing worthy of our fear. What a waste it would be to take these short, precious, eternity-charged years that we are given and squander them in worldly pursuits when we can be, like **Jeremiah**, intensely human and passionate with **God**.¹⁹¹