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You Deceived Me, LORD, and I Have Been Deceived Jeremiah's Seventh Complaint 20: 7-18

You deceived me, LORD, and I have been deceived DIG: What happens to Jeremiah the day he is confined to prison? What happened when the prophet decides he will no longer prophesy? What blame does Yirmeyahu dare shift to YHVH? What internal tension does that create? Which seems more dominant at this point, his personal bitterness or divine compulsion? Why? What totally opposing emotions take turns gripping him? Which feeling do you think is winning at this point? Why is he so despairing of the day of his birth (1:5 and see **Job 3)? Why doesn't ADONAI answer the outburst? Has God been very consoling to His prophet in the past?**

REFLECT: How would you feel if you had to do the same thing as Jeremiah? What does it mean to live above your moods? Have you ever been a laughing-stock for the LORD? Is your way of handling anger and depression anything like Yirmeyahu's? Have you ever wished you had never been born? Do you keep your anger inside or do you let it out? How often do you ride an "emotional roller coaster" – up one moment and down the next? Do you enjoy the ride or throw up? Have you ever alternated back and forth between hope and despair? Where? When?

605 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

Jeremiah was unflinching in **his** speech against **the Temple, Jerusalem** and **Judah** (**to see link click Cw – At the Potter's House**)**.** But after this defiant proclamation, we are permitted access to **his** conversation with **ADONAI**, which had a much different tone. Now **he** grumbles and complains to **God** over the very real cost of **his** public ministry.

Yirmeyahu turns in bitterness against **YHVH**. **You deceived me, ADONAI, and I**

was deceived (20:7a). The Hebrew verb *pittah* not only means to be **deceived** but also to be **seduced (NJB)**. It is used of a man **seducing** a **virgin in Exodus 22:16.** The **NRSV** covers both meanings by using **enticed**. This was extremely difficult. The task to which **Jeremiah** was called to do was probably the most difficult of any prophet. **Judah** was about to go under judgment. Nevertheless, **his** statement here is pretty close to blasphemy. When you call to mind the sensitive nature of this **man**, you aren't surprised that **he** vacillated between optimism and pessimism, between hope and despair. **Yirmeyahu**, however, lived above **his** moods and did the will of **ADONAI** regardless of how **he** felt.

There are seven passages in the book of **Jeremiah** labeled complaints or confessions (1) **Ax – Oh, Adonai ELOHIM, Surely You Have Deceived This People**; (2) **Bj – The Plot Against Jeremiah**; (3) **Bk – Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Why Do All the Faithless Live at Ease?**; (4) **Cm – Woe to Me, Mother, That You Gave Me Birth**; (5) **Cs – Heal Me ADONAI, and I Will Be Healed, Save Me and I Will Be Saved**; (6) **Cx – Jeremiah's Response to a Threat Against His Life**; and (7) **Db – You Deceived Me, LORD, and I Have Been Deceived**. In each of these **Yirmeyahu** speaks in the first person. **He** opens **his** heart. **He** reveals what is going on inside while the fireworks are going off outside. **Jeremiah's** inner life is revealed in these confessions/complaints/prayers. When **the prophet** was out of the public's eye **he** was passionate with **God**. **He** confessed/complained like we all do. This was **his** private life. This was **a man** of prayer.[192]

God did not deceive **Jeremiah**, although **the prophet** boldly accuses **Him** of it. Because of **his** prophetic office **he** had become a laughing stock. **You overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of ADONAI has brought me insult and reproach all day long (20:7b-8). Jeremiah** had the difficult job of proclaiming **God's** message to a society that had turned their backs on **YHVH**. This required **him** to endure physical abuse, verbal attacks, imprisonment, and isolation. But when **Jeremiah** was under attack, so was **the word of the LORD**.



But if I say: **I will not mention His word or speak anymore in His name, Jeremiah** gets spiritual heartburn. **His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot (20:9).** It was in this context that **he** accuses **YHVH** of **deceiving him**. **Jeremiah** seems to be saying that **he** had no idea of what was in store for **him** when **he** entered the prophetic office. Although **God** had alluded to the troubles coming **his** way, **he** had not imagined that **his** ministry would be so difficult.[193]

However, the very name **the prophet** gave **Pash'chur** (see **Da – Jeremiah and Pash'chur**) was applied to **Jeremiah** by **the people**. **He** was maligned by those who could not bear to hear **his** word and dismissed **him** as an irresponsible traitor. **I hear many** false **prophets whispering, "Terror on every side," denounce him! Let's denounce him!** When **he** would start to prophesy **the people** would say, "Here comes **Mr. Magor-Missabib . . . Mr. Negative." All my** so-called **friends are waiting for me to slip,** saying: **Perhaps Jeremiah will be deceived. Then we will prevail over** this "phony prophet" **and take our revenge on him (20:10). The prophet from Anathoth** must have felt deeply isolated.

But Yirmeyahu had a **Helper** through all **his** trouble. **ADONAI is with me like a mighty warrior. God** had promised: **I am with you . . . to deliver you (1:19).** All **Jeremiah** can do in the face of this withering opposition is to resort to **his** rock-solid faith in **YHVH**. **The prophet** knows that in the long run **His persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly be disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten (20:11b). The prophet** knows that **God** will protect **him** and ultimately **his** prophecies will come to pass. This statement of trust seems contradictory to the complaint. Whereas earlier **YHVH** had been accused of deception **(20:7)**, now **the LORD's** steadfastness is celebrated. **Jeremiah's** confidence in **ADONAI** served two purposes. First, it is a statement of

genuine trust. **He** had come to know that **Ha'Shem's** power is reliable and can be counted on. Second, it is a motivation addressed to **God**, reminding **Him** of **His** character and what must be done.[194]

Ha'Shem did not desert **Jeremiah**, and **He** will not desert us. We have **His** continual aid through the power of **the Ruach HaKodesh** who lives inside every believer **(John 14:16-17)**. **The Helper** gives us hope **(Romans 15:13)**, steers us toward spiritual truth **(John 16:13)**, and pours out **God's** love in our hearts **(Romans 5:5)**. We can trust that **YHVH** faithfully helps us as we endure hardship. We can say with **the prophet from Anathoth**: **ADONAI is with me like a mighty warrior (20:11a).**[195]

LORD of heaven's angelic **armies, You who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have committed my cause (20:12). Jeremiah** does not ask for free grace, but only for an equitable settlement. **He** asks to be rewarded for **his** relentless obedience. This is a prayer of weakness and power. **Jeremiah** is aware that **he** is weak and helpless. **He** cannot prevail, but **he** is confident that **Ha'Shem** will prevail. Everything depended on **YHVH**. That is why the prayer is so urgent and passionate. **Yirmeyahu** must have **ADONAI** on **his** side.[196]

Having committed his cause to God, the prophet, in a sudden upsurge of faith, breaks into praise. Then **Jeremiah** sings a song of praise. **Sing to ADONAI! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked, as his own experience testified (20:13). The prophet** is so confident of **God's** intervention and **his** own innocence that **he** anticipates a resolution as though it had already been accomplished.

After the bold, confident conclusion expressed as praise in **20:11-13**, we are shocked and taken aback by the next five verses. This does not make such trust and praise false, but this trust is not the whole truth. The full truth of **Jeremiah** includes a harsh equivalent. This bold and obedient **prophet** found **himself** in a moment of candid humanity, feeling alone, abandoned, hopeless and full of despair against a hostile abyss. We can all relate.

In any case, these verses are a cry from the depth of **his** soul **(Psalm 130:1)**. It is a wish hardly formed, not yet ready to be cast as a prayer. **Cursed be the day I was born!** Like **Job (Job 3:2-12), Jeremiah** cursed the day of **his** birth. **May the day my mother bore me not be blessed (20:14)!**

He imagines the day of **his birth. His father** waited while the midwives worked. Then the news. Then the rejoicing. **Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad – a son! The language was ironic: the birth of a son was an occasion for rejoicing, but now was a tragedy! May that man be like the tower ADONAI overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning, a battle cry at noon. For he did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave, her womb enlarged forever (20:15-17).** If only the news had not been brought. **God** could have suppressed the news and killed the baby. **Jeremiah** felt as if he would have been better off. **I wish I had never left the womb to enter the world.**

Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame (20:18)? Jeremiah was well known as "the weeping prophet." In **Matthew 16** some thought Jesus might have been **Jeremiah** resurrected! **Isaiah** said **Yeshua** was **a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). The prophet's** question went unanswered, as we might expect. We do not know why, as **Yirmeyahu** did not know why because the reasons are hidden in the purposes of **God**.

Yirmeyahu has been called the most human and tragic prophet in all the TaNaKh. **He** continued to meet persecution, and continued to see **God's** word rejected to the end of **his** life. **He** experienced very few moments of rest and relaxation and security after being called to be a prophet. **His** life was one round of persecution and imprisonment and beating and anguish after another. **He** confessed many times to being harassed and tormented. But **his** persistence in **his** calling even after the fall of Jerusalem bears **his** own deep conviction about **God's** promise.

In the confessions/complaints/prayers of **Jeremiah** we encounter the entire spectrum of human, emotional distress: fear of shame, fear of failure, loss of strength, doubting of faith, loneliness, pity, disappointment turn to hostility towards **YHVH**. But the complaints were not the words of a quitter. **Yirmeyahu's** entire life seems to have been lived in the tension of **his** calling. The only way in which **he** could have put an end to that tension would have been to quit the prophetic office . . . and that **he** never did. **He** may have wanted to on more than one occasion – but **he** never did. **Jeremiah's** qualities of character remain a standing rebuke to believers who excuse themselves from serving **God** because of personal reluctance or weakness. It was precisely this man who, for all **his** weakness, was **the LORD's** chosen instrument to speak **His** word, **His** judging and saving word, to **His** people.

The prophet learned the meaning of obedience, felt the discomforts of anguish, and endured the trials of loneliness; but through it all **ADONAI** was steadfast and **Jeremiah** was satisfied. In a greater or lesser degree, we who love **Jesus Christ** with all our hearts and want to serve **Him** to the very core of our being, must learn the same lessons.[197]