

**Jer. 15:10-21, Jeremiah's Suffering**  
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**A. Overview**

This section, like 11:18-12:6, is a conversation between the Lord and Jeremiah on the subject of his personal pain and inconvenience over the coming judgment. As before, there are two interchanges. As before, the Lord gently rebukes and encourages Jeremiah.

**Application:** We should be exhorted by these passages not to be discouraged in our service to the Lord, but to trust in him for the outcome. I feel particularly rebuked by these verses, for I have often sympathized with Jeremiah in his plaint, and now I see the Lord correcting him (and me) for this attitude.

10, Jer: Everybody hates me.

11-14, YHWH: I will preserve you, but through judgment.

15-18, Jer: I have been faithful; why not deliver me?

19-21, YHWH: promise of deliverance through suffering

**B. 10, Jer: Everybody hates me.**

The first sentence outlines his complaint, the second substantiates it.

1. The complaint: he bemoans his birth as a man of strife and contention. This complaint is tantamount to a rejection of his calling. Consider:
  - a) He was commissioned from his birth, 1:5.
  - b) "Strife" here is Heb. *rib*, the word meaning "lawsuit" that we discussed in ch. 2. Places where Jeremiah brings the Lord's *rib* against his hearers include
    - 1) 2:9 (to which they respond with a countersuit in v.29),
    - 2) 25:31 (the Lord has a lawsuit against the nations)
    - 3) 50:34; 51:36 (where the Lord pleads FOR Israel, with three uses of the root)
  - c) "Contention," *mardown*, is from *dyn* "to judge". *mardown* has no other use in Jer (unlike *rib*). Two possible allusions here:
    - 1) Is there an allusion to the verb *din*? Occurs in Jer, but as description of what one should do for widow, etc., not as what God is going to do them.
    - 2) In 2 Sam. 21:20 (Qere), one of Goliath's sons is called *yi\$ mardown*. Usually people follow the Ketiv *middin* as archaic plural, following Chr *middah*, see Driver. But the Qere must have had some significance: perhaps suggested by the next verse, *way:xarep )et-yisra)el* "he reproached Israel."

Jeremiah both gives and receives a lot of *xerpah* "reproach" in his ministry. See, for example, v.15 below. But then, why not just say *yi\$ xerpah*? Answer: *yi\$ madown* was already in use as moniker for Goliath's son, "monster."

d) Summary: Cf. recent Ann Arbor Observer about Judy Bell, the local process server, whose job it is to carry court decisions to those who have lost them. In the accompanying photo, she is hiding her face with her arm; the caption says, "Process servers don't like to be recognized." Theirs is not a popular job. Jeremiah is God's "process server," responsible for telling the people that they have lost their lawsuit with God. Thus he has become about as popular as Goliath's son, an offensive monster who deserves to be destroyed.

2. The evidence: Everyone curses him, even though he has done nothing (such as engage in unlawful lending) to merit it. Cf. Neh. 5 for an example of the destructive social effects of lending. "Owe no man anything, save to love him."

**C. 11-14, YHWH: I will preserve you, but through judgment.**

This section is *extremely* difficult and obscure in Hebrew. Almost every line is open to multiple interpretations. I have selected a set of interpretations that make sense together, and respond to the previous paragraph. The key to this interpretation is that this promise must correspond to what eventually came to pass with Jeremiah; by looking ahead in the book and seeing what happened, we can make better sense of the promise.

Ch. 39 records that when Neb. finally conquered the city, he did not take Jeremiah into captivity, but loosed him from his bonds (40:4) and let him remain in the land, while the Babylonian army and the captives went back to Babylon. In this light, we can explain the successive phrases of the promise.

Another possibility should be kept in mind: that the passage is intentionally ambiguous. Most phrases can be read either positively of Jeremiah, or negatively of the people. But this seems too subtle at this point.

1. An oath: "I swear that I will release you, for your good." Promises that Jeremiah will be set free, as fulfilled in 40:4. Why was Neb. so favorable to Jeremiah? Jeremiah knew that judgment was inevitable, and often urged the king to surrender. Probably Neb. viewed Jer. as a fifth columnist and is rewarding him for his assistance to the Babylonian cause.

The K/Q reading has led to many interpretations. The interpretation "release" can fit with either punctuation.

a) Ketiv

1) \$"RW.T:KF < \$:) "RW.T:KF "remnant" It will be well with thy remnant.

2) Read as infinitive:

a> \$AROWT:KF < \$RR Thy affliction becomes welfare

- b> \$:ROWT:KA < \$RH Thy release becomes good
- 3) \$FROWTIYKF < \$RR
  - a> I afflict thee to thy good (but Amarna usage: defame)
  - b> I strengthen thee to thy good
- b) Qere: \$"RIYTIKA
  - 1) emended, \$"RFT.YKF < \$RT "I have served you"--reads )MR as )MN
  - 2) < \$RH, I loose thee to thy good
  - 3) < \$IR:YOWN "armor": I have armed thee to thy good
- c) Choose "I loose the" or "thy release...": cf. 40:4.

2. A second oath: "I swear that I will cause the enemy to meet you...." This is ambiguous: could mean "meet with favor" or "attack." Could even mean "entreat." Again, the events of ch. 39-40 fit well. The common interpretation that sees in "the enemy" the people of Judah who are oppressing Jeremiah, and that finds its fulfillment in such passages as 20:1ff, falters on the observation that Jer. seems to reserve )OY"B for the national adversary, and never uses it for his internal opposition. (Is this a lesson for us about our attitude toward professing believers?)
3. Then a rhetorical question: "Can one break iron, even northern iron, and brass?" Iron from the Black Sea, to the north of Israel, was famous in antiquity. The allusion is to 1:18, where Jer. is compared to a brass wall and an iron pillar. As difficult as the trials are through which he must pass, God has given him the strength to endure them. (Note that the people are also called brass and iron in 6:28.)
4. With v.13, compare 17:2, spoken to the people at large. Jeremiah, like them, will suffer the loss of his wealth, but not for the same reasons. The "not" extends over three phrases, not one as in AV: "not for price, nor for all thy sins, nor for all thy borders." Unlike the people, this loss is not in punishment for his sins; unlike the king, he is not giving it as tribute to preserve his borders (Holladay).

Contrast Jeremiah's experience with that of our Lord.

- a) Jeremiah suffers *with* the people, though he does not share their sins.
  - b) The Lord Jesus suffers *for* his people, bearing their sins instead of them, so that they do not need to suffer at all.
5. 14: Then the enemy will leave. The Lord will take them away to a foreign land. NB: It is the enemy who leaves, *not Jeremiah!*
  6. The last couplet explains the reason for this suffering, and anticipates its broader spread. Jeremiah is feeling the warmth of God's wrath, which is directed, not at "thee", but at "you," the people as a whole.

D. **15-18, Jer: I have been faithful; why not deliver me from suffering?**  
To understand this prayer properly, we need to recognize that the

Lord responds by calling Jeremiah to "return" or repent. Thus something about it is unacceptable. To discover what that is, we must note very carefully the extent to which this prayer is founded on other scripture.

An important clue is in the order of the prayer. Jeremiah's response has four parts: a statement of *trust*, a *request* for help, a *defense* of his own actions, and an anguished *question* about whether he can really expect anything from the Lord. As a prayer, then, it moves him away from the Lord rather than toward him; starts in trust and ends in question, rather than the other way around.

**Application:** It's not wrong to question the Lord, but our prayer should bring us toward faith, not away from it. Jeremiah's backward prayer leads to a rebuke from the Lord in the next paragraph.

1. 15a, Trust.

Jeremiah begins where all faith must end: The Lord knows. He knows our troubles, the opposition we face, the limits of our own strength. He knows his own plans for us. According to 2 Cor. 5:7 and Heb. 11:1, faith and knowledge are complementary. We need faith only because we do not have knowledge, and our faith is only as good as the knowledge of the one in whom we place it. Thus to say "Oh Lord, Thou knowest" is to take the stand of faith.

Consider these testimonies:

- a) JOB 23:10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
- b) JER 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.
- c) Jer 18:23 Yet, Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me....
- d) ISA 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:
- e) 1 Cor. 13 Then shall I know even as also I am known.

2. 15b, Request.

Based on this faith, it is not at all inappropriate for Jeremiah to ask for deliverance from his enemies. The request consists of a summary and an amplification.

- a) The summary: "remember me and visit me." The two verbs are parallel in 14:10 and Ps. 106:4, and have much the same meaning. Both indicate active involvement; "Remember" with God is not passive, for he always knows everything, but active and volitional. "Lord, intervene in my situation."
- b) Amplification: The intervention requested is presented once positively and once negatively, in a mood reminiscent of the imprecatory psalms.

- 1) Positively, "Avenge me of my adversaries." Vengeance belongs to the Lord; this is appropriate, Deut. 32:35.
- 2) Negatively, "Do not exercise toward my adversaries your wonted long-suffering, which in this case would only give them latitude to destroy me." He is alluding to Exod. 34:6, where God reveals himself as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger [same expression as here] and abundant in mercy and truth."

3. 15c-17, Defense.

Such an imprecatory request must be justified by showing that the suppliant is so closely identified with God's interests that those who oppose him are opposing God. This Jeremiah proceeds to do. Again, he begins with a summary statement, "Know that for your sake I have borne reproach," and then amplifies it with two statements about his own conduct in the matter.

Each of these statements tells what he did, and explains (with KY) how it manifests his identity with God. The two statements together closely reflect Ps. 1:1,2, the contrast between seeking the company and approval of the wicked, and taking pleasure in the law of God. Jeremiah treats these in reverse order.

- a) 16, cf. Ps. 1:2, "His delight is in the law of the Lord." Jer. goes beyond the Ps. in showing us the reason for this delight: he is called by God's name.
  - 1) Jer's delight in God's word is expressed in culinary terms, and follows the "eating" imagery of 1:9; Ezek. 3:1-3; Rev. 10:9,10. For the imagery outside of the prophetic application, compare
    - a> Isa. 55:1-3
    - b> Deut. 8:3, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.
    - c> Job 23:12 Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.
    - d> Amos 8:11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.
    - e> Ps. 19:10, sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.
    - f> 1 Pet. 2:2, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.
  - 2) The reason for his delight: he is called by the Lord's name. Thus are all who are known as "the people of God," and in particular, in this age, "Christians." The honor we ought to feel at representing him, the consciousness of our relationship to him, ought to give us a longing to know him

better.

- 3) *Application*: Compare John 10, "my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." One of the surest signs of spiritual health is receptivity to God's Word. NB: Not the words of men about God's Word, but God's Word itself.
- b) 17, cf. Ps. 1:1, "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. Again, the addition of the reason goes beyond Ps. 1.
  - 1) He did not join in the mockery and scorn of those who rejected the Lord, preferring instead to be isolated and alone.
  - 2) The reason: the Lord filled him with wrath. Cf. 6:11; the idea is that he is so closely identified with the Lord that he hates those whom the Lord hates. Cf. Ps. 15:4, "in whose eyes a vile person is contemned."
  - 3) *Application*: Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God, James 4:4. The world will try to seduce us away from the Lord. We need to be sure that we are not denying him in order to remain friendly with unbelievers.

#### 4. 18, Question.

Thus far, there is nothing wrong, and a great deal right, in what Jer. has said. But his closing question betrays a lack of faith that elicits the Lord's gentle rebuke in the next section. He sees his pain as incurable. This means he holds out no hope that even the Lord can set it right. Then he suggests that the Lord could be deceitful to him, like "waters that fail," a spring on which travelers count but which disappoints them by running dry. Cf. his accusation of the Lord in 20:7, where, however, the Lord does not rebuke him. (Does this prove the meaning "persuade" in 20:7?)

#### E. 19-21, YHWH: Trust my promise, and be not faithless.

Jer. has expressed doubts about the Lord's trustworthiness and reliability. If these continue, he will be worthless as a prophet! The Lord challenges him concerning this failing, and then reassures him of the conditions of his call.

##### 1. 19, The Challenge

- a) In general, Jer. must return; that is, repent of his lack of faith. Then the Lord will let him continue to stand in his presence and hear his counsels.
- b) Specifically, he must bring forth (that is, speak) precious rather than vile words, if he is to serve as the Lord's mouthpiece.
- c) Warning: Don't become like the people. Don't drop down to their standard. Rather, be an example to which they can aspire.

2. 20-21, The Assurance
  - a) 20 abstracts 1:18-19. The Lord has not been deceitful. He will continue to strengthen, defend, and deliver Jeremiah, though the pain may be greater than anything Jeremiah had expected.
  - b) 21 assures Jer. that the wicked will not prevail against him.

#### F. Summary

Serving the Lord is not for sissies. He promises to deliver us, but our path may lead through incredible suffering on the way.

#### Analysis

- A. 10, Jer: ampl p: Everybody hates me.
  1. text: 10 )OWY L/IY )IM./IY K.IY Y:LID:T./INIY )IY\$ RIYB  
W:/)IY\$ MFDOWN L:/KFL-HF/)FREC
  2. ampl: concession p
    - a) concession: coordinate p
      - 1) LO)-NF\$IYTIY
      - 2) W:/LO)-NF\$W.-B/IY
    - b) text: K.UL.OH M:QAL:LAW/NIY S
  
- B. 11-14, YHWH: quote p: I will preserve you, but through judgment.
  1. quote f: 11 )FMAR Y:HWFH
  2. quote:
    - a) )IM-LO) \*\$FROWT/IKF \*\*\$"RIYT/IKF L:/+OWB
    - b) )IM-LOW) HIP:G.A(:T.IY B/:KF B.:/("T-RF(FH W./B:/("T CFRFH )ET-HF/)OY"B
    - c) 12 H:A/YFRO(A B.AR:ZEL B.AR:ZEL MI/C.FPOWN W./N:XO\$ET
    - d) (cf. 17:2) 13 X"YL/:KF W:/)OWC:ROWTEY/KF LF/BAZ )ET."N LO) BI/M:XIYR W./B:/KFL-XA+.O)WTEY/KF W./B:/KFL-G.:BW.LEY/KF
    - e) 14 W:/HA/(:ABAR:T.IY )ET-)OY:BEY/KF B.:/)EREC LO) YFDF(:T.F
    - f) reason: K.IY-
      - 1) )"\$ QFD:XFH B:/)AP./IY
      - 2) (:AL"Y/KEM T.W.QFD S
  
- C. 15-18, Jer: I have been faithful; why not deliver me from suffering?
  1. 15 )AT.FH YFDA(:T.F Y:HWFH
  2. request: ampl. p: Deliver me from my enemies.
    - a) text: coord. p (cf. 14:10; Ps. 106:4)
      - 1) ZFK:R/"NIY
      - 2) W./PFQ:D/"NIY
    - b) ampl: nap
      - 1) W:/HIN.FQEM L/IY M"/ROD:P/AY
      - 2) )AL-L:/)EREK: )AP./:KF T.IQ.FX/"NIY
  3. defense: ampl. p
    - a) text: D.A( &:)"TIY (FLEY/KF XER:P.FH
    - b) ampl: coordinate p
      - 1) reason p: I took pleasure in your word, because of your name.
        - a> sequence p
          - 1> 16 NIM:C:)W. D:BFREY/KF
          - 2> WF/)OK:L/"M
          - 3> WA/Y:HIY \*D:BFREY/KF \*\*D:BFR/:KF L/IY L:/&F&OWN

W./L:/&IM:XAT L:BFB/IY  
b> reason: K.IY-NIQ:RF) \$IM/:KF (FL/AY Y:HWFH ):ELOH"Y  
C:BF)OWT S

2) reason p: I rejected carnal pleasures, because of your wrath.  
a> nap  
1> 17 LO)-YF\$AB:T.IY B:/SOWD-M:&AX:AQIYM WF/)E(:LOZ  
2> MIP.:N"Y YFD/:KF B.FDFD YF\$AB:T.IY  
b> reason: K.IY-ZA(AM MIL.")T/FNIY S

4. question: coord. p  
a) 18 LFM.FH HFYFH K:)"B/IY NECAX W./MAK.FT/IY ):ANW.\$FH  
M"):ANFH H"RFP")  
b) HFYOW TIH:YEH L/IY K.:/MOW )AK:ZFB MAYIM LO) NE):EMFNW. S

D. 19-21, YHWH: quote p: Trust my promise, and be not faithless.  
1. quote f: 19 LFK"N K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH  
2. quote:  
a) condition:  
1) )IM-T.F\$W.B  
2) WA/):A\$IYB/:KF L:/PFN/AY T.A(:AMOD  
b) condition:  
1) W:/)IM-T.OWCIY) YFQFR MI/Z.OWL"L  
2) K.:/P/IY TIH:YEH  
c) contrast  
1) YF\$UBW. H"M.FH )"LEY/KF  
2) W:/)AT.FH LO)-TF\$W.B ):AL"Y/HEM  
d) Assurance (cf. 1:18-19): reason-text-reason p  
1) reason: 20 W./N:TAT.IY/KF LF/(FM HA/Z.EH L:/XOWMAT  
N:XO\$ET B.:CW.RFH  
2) text: contrast p  
a> W:/NIL:X:AMW. )"LEY/KF  
b> W:/LO)-YW.K:LW. L/FK:  
3) reason: K.IY-)IT./:KF ):ANIY L:/HOW\$IY(/:AKF  
W./L:/HAC.IYL/EKF N:)UM-Y:HWFH  
e) coordinate p  
1) 21 W:/HIC.AL:T.IY/KF MI/Y.AD RF(IYM  
2) W./P:DITIIY/KF MI/K.AP (FRICIYM P