

The Plot Against Jeremiah

Jeremiah's Second Complaint

11: 18-23

DIG: Jeremiah helped Josiah close local shrines. Does this sit well in the prophet's hometown of Anathoth? Why did the men of Anathoth listen to the false prophets? Why does this distress him (12:2)? How did he discover the plot? Why did it take him so long to realize that he was in danger? Why do you think that the plot was revealed?

REFLECT: How would you feel if a family member plotted to kill you? Jesus also had a "bad homecoming" (see the commentary on The Life of Christ Fj - Isn't This the Carpenter's Son? Aren't These His Brothers?). Has obeying YHVH ever alienated those closest to you? Did you feel betrayed? How did you handle it? Are you comfortable with God seeking vengeance? What would you request if you were Yirmeyahu?

At the end of Josiah's reign

When viewed historically, the prophet from Anathoth can be demonstrated to have handed down to us the fullest account of a prophet's life and character, by far, to be found anywhere in Scripture. Therefore, our attention is focused on the seven so-called "complaints or confessions" of Jeremiah (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.

We observe that the "complaints" of Yirmeyahu are not merely laments, as we might expect from such a naturally timid man. Jeremiah, often called the "weeping prophet," might in fact better be called the "groaning prophet," or perhaps better still, the "screaming prophet." His confessions were complaints, even accusations as charges brought in a lawsuit. Although Jeremiah was timid at the time of his call, ADONAI caused him to become a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land of Judah (Jeremiah 1:18). That strength of character shows up in various ways in Jeremiah's confessions, and in the prophets' complaints.

A subtly different metaphor may be implied by the name **Jeremiah** itself, which means something like *ADONAI hurls, or launches*. **Yirmeyahu** was the world's first guided missile, aimed by **God** at specific targets and with pinpoint accuracy. His ministry was successful (from **YHVH's** standpoint at least), a fact not only provoked retaliation from **the prophet's** enemies but also provided additional ammunition for his complaints and confessions. His sense of freedom in "talking back" to **God** is similar in many respects to that of Moshe (**Numbers 11:11-15**), in whose prophetic tradition **Jeremiah** found himself.⁸²

Jeremiah's complaint: **God** revealed to **Jeremiah** a plot against his life. This information comes suddenly, and we must wait until **11:21** before the picture is complete. Nor are we informed how **YHVH** made it known to him. A sympathetic relative who brought the news very well may have been **the LORD's** informant. Only then did he see **what they were doing (11:18)**. This marks the first, but not the last, plot against **Jeremiah's** life.

Believers of a later age saw this description, **a gentle lamb led to the slaughter**, as a picture of the betrayal of **Messiah (Acts 8:32)**. The words also remind us of **Isaiah 53:7**. It seemed to **Yirmeyahu** that that his relationship to **the men of Anathoth** was that of a **gentle lamb** that was completely trusting and unaware of the intentions of its owner as he was **led to the slaughter**. The verse suggests that he was probably aware of some schemes afoot in the village, but could not imagine **they were plotting his demise**.

I did not realize that they had plotted against me, and quoting the words of his enemies: **Let us destroy the tree and its fruit. Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more (11:19)**. For any man of **Y'udah**, rejection by his village was the ultimate tragedy. But it was the price **Jeremiah** was called upon to pay for being true to his call from **YHVH** (see **Aj - The Call of Jeremiah**). The village that gave him his basic social and psychological security turned against him. And like an Orthodox Jew of today who comes to believe that **Yeshua is the Messiah**, he was cut off from his family. He was totally alone. Little wonder that he fled to **God** in dismay and despair.⁸³

Sensing himself to be like **a gentle lamb led to the slaughter**, **Yirmeyahu** pleaded with **ADONAI** to turn the tables on them and **drag them off like sheep to the slaughter (12:3)**. **Jeremiah** requested **God's** judgment. Such personal hatred against the spokesman of the **LORD** was both puzzling and infuriating to him. He therefore turned to **the covenant God, ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the righteous Judge, the Searcher of the heart and mind**, who knew the faithfulness of His servant as well as the treachery of his opponents, and in full reliance of **Ha'Shem's justice** confidently stated his conviction: **Let me see Your vengeance against them, for to You I have committed my cause (11:20)**.⁸⁴

Believers sometimes ask, "Why should I tell **God** what's on my mind? **He** already knows everything." **Yirmeyahu**, like an attorney presenting his case, makes a full disclosure to **the Judge**. **He** reads all the facts into the record, anticipating a righteous verdict. **YHVH** did not learn anything during **Jeremiah's** prayers, but **Jeremiah** learned a great deal (**Matthew 6:8**).

The LORD's reply to **Jeremiah's** complaint promises to bring disaster on **the men of Anathoth** who were threatening to kill him for his message of repentance to **ADONAI** and his challenging of the religious establishment in **Jerusalem**. In fact, **Ha'Shem** would punish **the men of Anathoth** with essentially the same punishment that they sought for him. The reason for **Jeremiah's** second complaint is now made clear: **the men of Anathoth** had threatened **Jeremiah** with death because they thought he was prophesying falsely in **God's** name (**11:21**). The false prophets had convinced them that **Jeremiah's** prophecies of doom (if **Judah** did not surrender to **Babylon**) were not true. But what they didn't realize was that the conspiracy against **Jeremiah** was also a conspiracy against **Ha'Shem**.

ADONAI-Tzva'ot responded by assuring **Yirmeyahu** of His ultimate judgment: **I will punish them**. The following verses point to the outcome of the **Babylonian** invasion in 586 BC and destruction of **Tziyon** and her surrounding villages: **Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine** (**11:22**). The decree shows that **Jeremiah's** word is indeed from **the LORD**, and that **the prophet** enjoyed **God's** total support. Threats from **the men of Anathoth** did not silence **Yirmeyahu** any more than a night in the stocks (**20:1-3**), or confinement in the cistern (**38:6**), or in the courtyard of the guard (**38:13**).

Not even a remnant of the families of the conspirators will be left to them, because **I will bring disaster on the conspirators and their families of Anathoth in the year of their punishment** (**11:23**). We know that not everyone from **Anathoth** would be killed because **Ezra 2:23** tells us 128 citizens from **Anathoth** returned from the exile to rebuild and repopulate the Holy City. **The punishment will take a form that vindicates the prophet: the invasion he foretold will come to pass and in it the sword and famine would take their toll.**