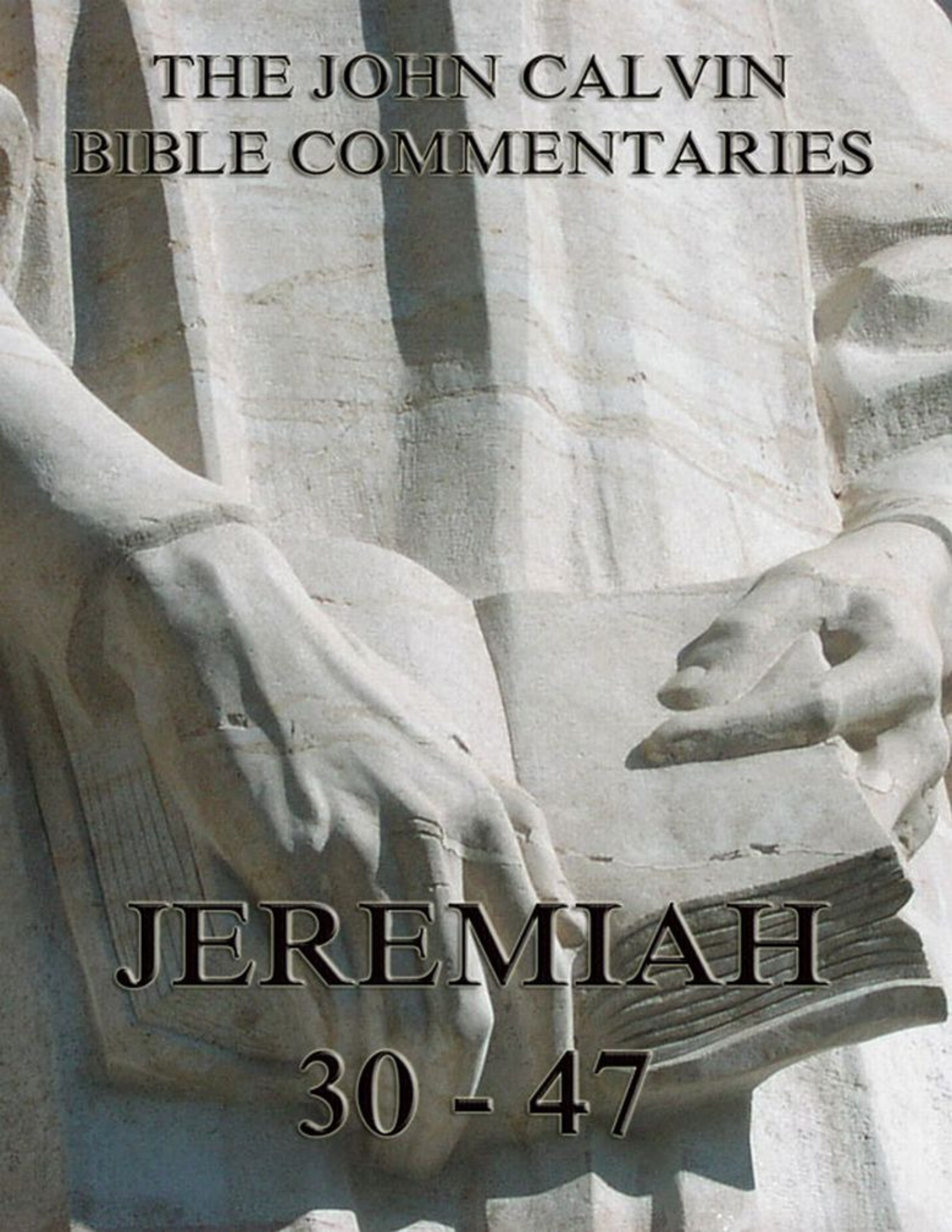

THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

JEREMIAH 30 - 47

Commentaries On Jeremiah 30- 47

John Calvin

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John Calvin – A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his

father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too well-known Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumergue considers the first

Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's educatlon was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis

Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Noyon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet,

escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto *"Omnia ad Dei gloriam"*, and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he

came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were

thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinquents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and

ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and

after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at

Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted,

would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered

among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish

champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was

addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

COMMENTARIES ON JEREMIAH 30-47

CHAPTER 30

JEREMIAH 30:1-3

1. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, **1**. Sermo qui fuit ad Jeremiam a Jehova dicendo,

2. Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. **2**. Sic dicit Jehova, Deus Israel, dicendo, Scribe tibi omnes sermones quos loquutus sum ad to in libro:

3. For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. **3**. Quoniam ecce dies veniunt, dicit Jehova, et reducam captivitatem populi mei Israel et Jehudah, dicit Jehovah; et reducam eos in terram quam dedi patribus ipsorum et possidebunt cam.

This and the next chapter contain, as we shall see, a most profitable truth; and that the people might be the more attentive, God introduced these prophecies by a preface. Jeremiah spoke many things which afterwards, as it has elsewhere appeared, had been collected and inserted in one volume by the priests and Levites; but God reminds us in these words, that the prophecies which are to follow

respecting the liberation of the people, were especially to be remembered.

There is, however, another circumstance to be noticed. We have seen that such was the stubbornness of the people, that Jeremiah spent his labor among them in vain, for he addressed the deaf, or rather stocks and stones, for they were so possessed by stupor that they understood nothing, for God had even blinded them, a judgment which they fully deserved. Such was the condition of the people. We must further bear in mind the comparison between the doctrine of Jeremiah and the fables of those who fed the miserable people with flatteries, by giving them the hope of a return after two years. God knew what would be the event; but the people ceased not to entertain hope and to boast of a return at the end of two years. Thus they despised God's favor, for seventy years was a long period: "What! God indeed promises a return, but after seventy years who of us will be alive? Hardly one of us will be found then remaining, therefore so cold a promise is nothing to us." They, at the same time, as I have said, were filled with a false confidence, as with wind, and behaved insolently towards God and his prophets, as though they were to return sound and safe in a short time.

But profane men always run to extremes; at one time they are inflated with pride, that is, when things go on prosperously, or when a hope of prosperity appears, and they carry themselves proudly against God, as though nothing adverse could happen to them; then when hope and false conceit disappoint them, they are wholly disheartened, so that they will receive no comfort, but plunge into the abyss of despair. God saw that this would be the case with the people, except he came to their aid. Hence he proposes here the best and the fittest remedy —

that the Prophet, as he had effected nothing by speaking, should write and convert as it were into deeds or acts what he had spoken, [fF1] so that after the lapse of two years they might gather courage, and afterwards acknowledge that they had been deceived by unprincipled men, and thus justly suffered for their levity, so that they might at length begin to look to God and embrace the promised liberation, and not wholly despond. This, then, is the reason why the Prophet was commanded to write the words which he had before declared with his mouth.

Now, as we understand the design of God, let us learn that when it happens that we go astray and wander after false imaginations, we are not on that account to cast away the hope of salvation; for we see that God here stretches forth his hand to those who had erred, and who had even wilfully cast themselves into ruin, for they had been more than enough admonished and warned by true and faithful prophets; their ears they had stopped; their hearts they had hardened; and yet when they had sought as it were designedly to ruin themselves, we see how God still recalled them to himself.

He says that God had commanded him to *write in a book all the words* which he had heard; and the reason follows, *For, behold, come shall the days, saith Jehovah, in which I will restore the captivity of my people Israel and Judah.* [fF2] There is to be understood a contrast between the restoration mentioned here and that of which the false prophets had prattled when they animated the people with the hope of a return in a short time; for, as I have said, that false expectation, when the Jews sought unseasonably to return to their own country, was a sort of mental inebriety. But when they found that they had been deceived, despair only remained for them. Hence the Prophet recalls them

here to a quietness of mind, even that they might know that God would prove faithful after they found out that they had rashly embraced what impostors had of themselves *proclaimed.* We then see that there is here an implied comparison between the sure and certain deliverance which God had promised, and the false and stolid hope with which the people had been inebriated: *come,* then, *shall the days.* Now it appears that two years had taken away every expectation; for they believed the false prophets who said that God would restore them in two years; after the end of that time all the hope of the people failed. Therefore the Prophet here removes that erroneous impression which had been made on their minds, and he says that *the days* would *come* in which God would redeem his people; and thus he indirectly derides the folly of the people, and condemns the impiety of those who had dared to promise so quick a return.

We now, then, see why he says, *come shall the days;* for every hope after two years would have been extinguished, had not God interposed. *Come,* then, *shall the days in which I wll restore the captivity of Israel and Judah.* The ten tribes, we know, had been already led into exile; the tribe of Judah and the half tribe of Benjamin only remained. Hence the ten tribes, the whole kingdom of Israel, are mentioned first. The exile of Israel was much longer than that of Judah. It afterwards follows, —

4. And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel, and concerning Judah.

4. Hi vero sunt sermones quos loquutus est Jehova de Israele et Jehudah (vel, ad Israelera et ad Jehudah:)

5. For thus saith the Lord, We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.

5. Certe ita dicit Jehova, Vocem trepidationis audivimus, pavorem et non pacem (vel, pavoris et non pacis)

6. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into
paleness?

6. Inquirite et aspicite an pariat masculus? quare video cunctos viros manibus suis super lumbos tanquam parturiens (solet mulier, subaudiendum est, vel, sicuti solet mulier parturiens) et conversae sunt omnes facies in pallorem (vel, in auriginem, ut alii vertunt, sed nomen palloris melius convenit?)

Both Jews and Christians pervert this passage, for they apply it to the time of the Messiah; and when they hardly agree as to any other part of Scripture, they are wonderfully united here; but, as I have said, they depart very far from the real meaning of the Prophet.

They all consider this as a prophecy referring to the time of the Messiah; but were any one wisely to view the whole context, he would readily agree with me that the Prophet includes here the sum of the doctrine which the people had previously heard from his mouth. In the first clause he shews that he had spoken of God’s vengeance, which

rested on the people. But it is briefly that this clause touches on that point, because the object was chiefly to alleviate the sorrow of the afflicted people; for the reason ought ever to be borne in mind why the Prophet had been ordered to commit to writing the substance of what he had taught, which was, to supply with some comfort the exiles, when they had found out by experience that they had been extremely perverse, having for so long a time never changed nor turned to repentance. The Prophet had before spoken at large of the vices of the people, and many times condemned their obstinacy, and also pointed out the grievous and dreadful punishment that awaited them. The Prophet then had in many a discourse reproved the people, and had been commanded daily to repeat the same thing, though not for his own sake, nor mainly for the sake of those of his own age, or of the old. But after God had destroyed the Temple and the city, his object was to sustain their distressed minds, which must have otherwise been overwhelmed with despair. This, then, is the reason why the Prophet here touches but slightly on the vengeance which awaited the people. There is, however, as we shall see, great force in this brevity; but he is much fuller as to the second part, and for this end, that the people might not succumb under their calamities, but hope in the midst of death, and even begin to hope while suffering the punishment which they deserved.

Now he says, *Thus saith Jehovah, A cry,* or, the voice of trembling, or of fear, *have we heard.* The word hdrj, *cherede,* is thought to mean properly that dread which makes the whole body to tremble, and is therefore rendered trembling. God speaks, and yet in the person of the people. Why? In order to expose their insensibility; for as they were obstinate in their wickedness, so they were not terrified by threatenings, however many and dreadful.

God dictated words for them, for they were altogether void of feeling. We now see why God assumed the person of those who were secure, though Jeremiah daily represented to them God's vengeance as near at hand. The meaning is, that though the people were asleep in their sins, and thought themselves beyond the reach of danger, even when God was displeased with them, yet the threatenings by which God sought to lead them to repentance would not be in vain. Hence God says, *We have heard the voice of fear;* that is, "Deride and scoff as you please, or remain insensible in your delusions, so as to disregard as the drunken what is said, being destitute of feeling, reason, and memory, yet God will extort from you this confession, this voice of trembling and fear."

He then adds, *and not of peace.* This is emphatically subjoined, that the Prophet might shake off from the people those foolish delusions with which they were imbued by the false prophets. He then says, that they in vain hoped for peace, for they could not flee from terror and fear. He enhances this fear by saying, *Inquire and see whether a man is in labor?* Some one renders this absurdly, "Whether a man begets?" by which mistake he has betrayed a defect of judgment as well as ignorance; he was indeed learned in Hebrew, but ignorant of Latin, and also void of judgment. For the Prophet here speaks of something monstrous; but it is natural for a man to beget. he asks here ironically, "Can a man be in labor?" because God would put all men in such pains and agonies, as though they were women travailing with child. As, then, women exert every nerve and writhe in anguish when bringing forth draws nigh, so also men, all the men, would have their hands laid on their loins, on account of their terror and dread. Then he says, *and all faces are turned into paleness;* that is, God would terrify them all.

We now understand the meaning of the Prophet; for as the Jews did not believe God's judgment, it was necessary, as the Prophet does here, to storm their hardness. If he had used a common mode of speaking, they would not have been moved. Hence he had respect to their perverseness; and it was on this account that he was so vehement. *Inquire,* then, he says, *and see whether a man is in labor?* God would bring all the men to a condition not manly, such as that of a woman in labor, when in her last effort to bring forth, when her pain is the greatest and the most bitter. Men would then be driven into a state the most unbecoming, strange, and monstrous. It follows: —

JEREMIAH 30:7

7. Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it. **7**. Heus, quia magnus hic dies a non esse sicut ipsum *(hoc est,* ut non sit similis, ut nunquam fuerit similis) et tempus afflictionis (vel, augustiae), hoc ipsi Jacob. *(hoc est,* populo Israelitico) et ab ea servabitur.

The Prophet goes on in this verse to describe the grievousness of that punishment for which the people felt no concern, for they disregarded all threatenings, as I have already said, and had now for many years hardened themselves so as to deem as nothing so many dreadful things. This, then, was the reason why he dwelt so much on this denunciation, and exclaimed, *Alas! great is that day:*

“great” is to be taken for dreadful; and he adds, *so that there is none like it.* It was a dreadful spectacle to see the city destroyed, and the Temple partly pulled down and partly consumed by fire: the king, with all the nobility, was driven into exile, his eyes were put out, and his children were slain; and he was afterwards led away in a manner so degraded, that to die a hundred times would have been more desirable than to endure such indignity. Hence the Prophet does not say without reason, that *that day* would be *great,* so that none would be *like it:* and he said this, to shake away the torpidity of the people, for they thought that the holy city, which God had chosen for his habitation, could not fall, nor the Temple perish, he further says, that it would be a *time of distress* to the people. But at the end of the verse he gives them a hope of God’s mercy, even deliverance from this distress. We now, then, see the design of the Prophet in these verses. [fF3] — There will be no Lecture tomorrow on account of the Consistory.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, that as we cease not in various ways perversely to provoke thy wrath against us, — O grant that we may at length be turned to obedience by thy kind admonitions, and at the same time submit also to thy just severity, and know that whenever thou severely chastisest us, we are dealt with as we deserve: may we yet never despond, but flee to thy mercy, not doubting but that thou in the midst of wrath rememberest thy paternal love, provided we rely on that favor which thou hast promised to us through thine only-begotten Son. — Amen.

JEREMIAH 30:8

8. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of
him:

8. Et erit die illo, dicit Jehova exercituum, confringam jugum a collo tuo, et vincula tua disrumpam et non adigent amplius eum ad servitutem alieni:

Jeremiah proceeds with what he touched upon in the last verse, even that the Lord, after having chastised his people, would at length shew mercy to them, so as to receive them into favor. He says, in short, that their captivity would not be perpetual. But we must remember what we have before stated, that is, that deliverance is only promised to the faithful, who would patiently and resignedly submit to God and not disregard his paternal correction. If, then, we desire God to be propitious to us, we must suffer ourselves to be paternally chastised by him; for if we resist when goaded, no pardon can by any means be expected, for we then, as it were, wilfully provoke God by our hardness.

He therefore says, *in that day,* that is, when the appointed time was completed. The false prophets inflamed the people with false expectation, as though their deliverance was to take place after two years. God bade the faithful to wait, and not to be thus in a hurry; he had assigned a day