

# JEREMIAH 15: 20

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## JEREMIAH'S CRISIS OF FAITH

Readers of Jeremiah's book come away praising the prophet's courage in the face of resistance not only from former friends but especially from family members, causing the events that he enshrined in six laments.<sup>1</sup> We admire his language about God's word being "as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jeremiah 20:9). That said, we have not penetrated his language wherein he calls God "a liar" (15:18) and talks of being "deceived" by Him (20:7). The official Latter-day Saint King James Bible footnote on Jeremiah 20:7 gives an alternate meaning to "deceived" as "persuaded"; but "persuaded" here must be infused with the negative sense of "enticed."<sup>22</sup> "Deceived" is the correct rendition.

Herodotus, the Greek historian, hands the key to us in Book I, sections 103–106, of his *History*. In this text, he narrates an account of Scythian horsemen sweeping into Syria-Palestine from the north and riding south along the Mediterranean coast to Egypt, where they were met by Pharaoh Psammeticus and bribed with Egyptian wealth not to invade the Nile Valley. They then turned back north and, except for a small number who settled in Beth-shean just south of the Sea of Galilee, disappeared. People in Jerusalem of course knew of this large military force and would surely have pulled people and livestock into the city both times that the Scythian cavalry rode along the seacoast, taking note that the horsemen sacked the coastal city of Ashkelon on their return. After all, the Scythians presented a potential threat to the capital city. But the threat never materialized; it was only apparent.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jeremiah 11:18–12:6; 15:10–21; 17:9–10, 14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–12; 20:14–18.

<sup>2</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 170–171.

Why is this story important? Because. Because from the very beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah had been warning the people of Judah with clenched teeth that “out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land” (Jeremiah 1:14). No one took him seriously. Until the Scythians showed up and presented a potential menace. But when they retreated back to their northern homeland, the threat evaporated. Then everyone’s gaze turned on Jeremiah, who was no older than twenty-five or so. Clearly, in the minds of all, he was a false prophet. And he himself believed that the Lord had tricked him by producing a foe “out of the north” and then withdrawing it. Only after these events did Jeremiah learn that the menacing foe would be the Babylonian army.

With this background, we can understand Jeremiah’s strong feelings and heightened language when describing his relationship to the Lord. Later in sweet, reassuring language that would mirror the words of the prophet’s calling, the Lord promised to reinstate Jeremiah to his holy tasks (Jeremiah 15:19–21).

## **Further Reading**

H. H. Rowley, “The Early Prophecies of Jeremiah in Their Setting,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 45, no. 1 (1962–1963): 198–234.

S. Kent Brown, “History and Jeremiah’s Crisis of Faith,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 105–118.

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