Learn to strengthen yourself

"If you have raced with men on foot and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are not so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" Jer. 12:5

The source of the River Jordan is mainly from the snows of Mount Hermon (2,774 metres). Snow usually lies on the top all year round and melted snow flows down to the Sea of Galilee (210 metres above sea level and then down to the Dead Sea which is about 430 metres below sea level. The level of the Dead Sea is still dropping today.

The River Jordan is embedded in the memories of God's people:

- Joshua's crossing
- David being ferried over
- Naaman's healing
- John the Baptist etc.

Today the river is a bit of a disappointment because so much water is taken out for irrigation.

Jeremiah was writing in very different days – the last days of King Josiah's reign. Josiah was killed fighting the Egyptians and Israel came under the power of Egypt. But Babylon was already moving against Egypt and war on a major scale was imminent.

The simple and central thought is if you get weary when running in a foot race how can you hope to win when you run in a race against horses? If you lack confidence in peaceable surroundings, then how are you going to fare in very difficult circumstances?

For Jeremiah, clearly his work as a prophet was going to get more difficult, more dangerous and more terrible than anything he had had to do before. This is a good question for us to consider in these days. Look at Jeremiah 12:1. The prophet had grumbled at what God was doing. Do you know this feeling? Sure, you've got plenty to cause you to complain! But the Sovereign Lord God is not under any obligation to account to us for His conduct of affairs! Remember, when Jeremiah told the people what God had told him to say, their response was, ***"You shall die"*** (Jer. 26:8). Again he was threatened with death (Jer. 38:4) and in the end they put him in a cistern and, ***"Jeremiah sank in the mud".***

We can argue similarly about the battlefield; if you can't contend successfully against infantry, how are you going to deal with tanks, heavy artillery, helicopter gunships and nuclear armaments? So I think what God was saying to Jeremiah was, "If you are troubled by My government of affairs and the liberty given to evildoers as seen in current events, what will you do when much worse things occur – famine, pestilence, death, captivity, the destruction of cities and (in Jeremiah's case) the destruction of the temple with some of the people – including Jeremiah – carried away as fugitives to Egypt?"

D.L. Moody once said, "I have never known God use a discouraged person!" And often God puts us through a time of testing to fit us for the future. In the turmoil of all that is happening in the Muslim World, God has great things in store for us. We need to attempt great things and expect great things!

The Lord Jesus asked the disciples the question, ***"Whom do men say that I am?"*** The response of some was, ***"Jeremiah"***! (Mt. 16:14) So Jeremiah rose to the challenge when the time of testing came! We need triumphant confidence and victory-winning faith to meet the perplexities and setbacks of our times.

Life in the Muslim World in the days ahead will be a testing of our faith in God that will produce in us great spiritual and moral victories.

So if you are in a "minor" trial, keep your balance, your hope and your courage strong. Then you will be ready for the major trials. Fail in the minor ones and you will probably fail in the major ones later. Stand strong in faith, unshaken, untroubled and unafraid in your current troubles. That is the best preparation for the future.

The question God asked Jeremiah was not asked to alarm him, but to strengthen him. The Lord Jesus said to us through John, ***"Little children you are from God ….. He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."*** (1 Jn. 4:4) So in minor trials we must learn to triumph.

Remember Moses lost his temper in a minor trial. David lost control over his thoughts and sinned grievously. Peter was also controlled by fear and failed. But in sickness and in trial Paul found the truth of, ***"My grace is sufficient"*** (2 Cor. 12:9). In passing through sorrow God promises, ***"I will be with you. The waters shall not overflow you.***" (Is. 43:2) These are very comforting promises. They are promises of security. ***"He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him"***. (2 Tim. 1:12). There is the promise of His presence in the ***"valley of the shadow of death"*** (Ps. 23:4). How well do we do then when all alone? We will never be all alone! The Lord Jesus will always be with us – our Advocate, our Saviour, our Comforter and our Friend! He is our very great Friend and will always stand by us!

So what are the things that really get you down? At the start of life in a new culture the first discouragements are often difficulties with the language, tummy upsets and all the mistakes you constantly make. But if you can't stand up to the ordinary "foot slogging", if you can't take the everyday annoyances, how will you cope with the tough stuff? How will you manage if your freedom is curtailed, your relaxation, sports and hobbies are restricted? What if adjustment to the culture is painfully slow or you are working for others in a school, business etc. under difficult leadership that gets you down, what is your reaction? Ask yourself how you are going to cope with "the thickets of Jordan".

Always remember Eph. 3:20, ***"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work in us …."***

This is the current test for fitness in the work God has called us to in the coming decades. Will we develop the proven qualities of endurance that can withstand all kinds of pressure and uncertainty? Do you have the ability to get back up fast as you walk with Him ***"Who was made perfect through suffering"***? (Heb. 2:10) ***"For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."***