

Jeremiah Chapter 21

Verses 1-2: Zedekiah, Judah's last king, who reigned (from 597-586 B.C.), requests here that the prophet pray that the Lord would act for Judah "according to all his wondrous works", hoping That God would work a miracle like He had done when delivering Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 B.C.

Jeremiah 21:1 "The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, saying,"

"King Zedekiah" (compare 2 Kings 24:17 – 25:7), for details of his reign (ca. 597-586 B.C.).

"Pashur": This priest was different from the man by this name (in 20:1-6; compare 38:1).

Chapters 21-24 deal with Judah's false leadership. This Pashur is to be differentiated from Pashur ben Immer (20:1-6). The similarity in names may account for the placement of chapter 21 after chapter 20, even though the events of the present chapter occur sometime later in the days of King Zedekiah. Indeed, this chapter must be dated (about 589/588 B.C.), near to the events described (in Jeremiah 37:1-10). "Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah" is also mentioned (in Jeremiah 37:3), and seems less hostile to Jeremiah than were many of the priests (compare 29:25-26).

This is a different Pashur from the one in the last lesson. Zephaniah was from the priestly family of Maaseiah, and was next in line to the High Priest. Notice again, these messages Jeremiah is speaking is actually God's messages in Jeremiah's mouth. Zedekiah was king before Jehoiachin.

Jeremiah 21:2 "Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us."

"Maketh war against us": This was during the last siege by Babylon (verse 4; ca. 587/586 B.C.), resulting in the third deportation of Jews. Zedekiah hoped for God's intervention, such as Hezekiah received against Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35-36).

In answer to the message from Jeremiah, they ask him to intercede for them before the LORD. They believe that God will fight for them and turn Nebuchadnezzar back. They know God has helped them miraculously before, and they expect Him to do that now. God will not help them, because of their worship of false gods.

Verses 3-11: Jeremiah announced that the Lord would be directly involved in the destruction of Judah (Lam. 2:5). Israel's Holy War traditions celebrated how the Lord had fought on Israel's behalf throughout her history, but the people had become God's enemies because of their covenant unfaithfulness.

Jeremiah 21:3 "Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah:"

The two priests, Pashur and Zephaniah, after he had sought the Lord, and knew his mind and will.

"Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah": By whom they were sent.

It appears that the priest had talked with Jeremiah, and now Jeremiah is giving them a message to take back to the king.

Jeremiah 21:4 "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that [are] in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and [against] the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city."

"Turn back the weapons": The Jews were already fighting the invaders by going outside the walls of the city to battle them on the hillsides and in the valleys as they approached. However, they would soon be driven back into the city where the enemy would collect all their weapons and execute many with those very weapons.

This is such a hard message for Jeremiah to give to the priest for the king. Not only will God not help them, but he will make the weapons in their hands useless. God will let the Chaldeans and the Babylonians overrun them and gather in the midst of the city.

Jeremiah 21:5 "And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath."

"I myself will fight": God used an invader as His judging instrument (verse 7). The Jews have not only the Babylonians as their enemy, but God.

For the theme of the "outstretched hand" (see the note on 6:12).

The worst part of all is that God will fight against them Himself. His fury has come up in His face for their worship of false gods. The wrath of God is reserved for those who have been unfaithful to Him.

Jeremiah 21:6 "And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence."

With one or other of his arrows after mentioned. Or, "them that abide in this city"; that do not go out of it, and surrender themselves to the king of Babylon (see Jer. 21:9).

"Both man and beast": The latter for the sin of the former. Particularly such beasts as were fit for food are meant. Whereby the famine would be increased, and so the greater destruction of men.

"They shall die of a great pestilence": Both man and beast. A disease which comes immediately from the hand of God; hence Hippocrates used to call it, "the divine disease". Here it denotes a very uncommon one, which should sweep away large numbers. Called great, both for quality, or the nature of it, and for the quantity of persons that died of it.

It is not just the war that kills them. God has brought this terrible siege on them, because of their unfaithfulness to Him. There was famine and pestilence as well as the war.

Jeremiah 21:7 "And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy."

"Smith them ... sword": This was the fate of Zedekiah's son and many nobles. Zedekiah died of grief (compare 34:4; 2 Kings 25:6-8).

All of this came to pass literally (see 39:1-10; 52:1-30; 2 Kings 25:1-25; 2 Chron. 36:17-21).

We found in the last lesson that the famine was so great in the land, that people ate their own children. This pestilence is just as great as that also. Then the king of Babylon came into the land and killed and pillaged. The few people that survived all of this went into captivity in Babylon. God's mercy is turned away from this stiff-necked people. He offered them every chance to repent and they did not. Now His wrath is poured out on them.

Verses 8-9: "Life and ... death": Since a persistent lack of repentance had led to the conquest, Jeremiah urged the Jews to submit and surrender to the besieger so as to be treated as captives of war and live rather than be killed.

Jeremiah 21:8 "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death."

These are the words, not of the prophet to the messengers of the king, ordering or advising them what they each of them should say to the people. For the message by them is finished. But they are the words of the Lord to the prophet, directing him what he should say to the people at this critical juncture.

"Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death": The way how to preserve their lives; and which, if they did not choose to take, would be inevitable death. The allusion seems to be to a phrase used by Moses, when he gave the law. Obedience to which would issue in life, and disobedience in death (Deut. 30:15).

For the theme of the two ways (see the note on 6:16).

They had been taught that to obey God brought blessings abundant, but to disobey God brought curses. It was their choice, and they made it. The way of God leads to life. Their way of false gods leads to death. They had made their choice.

Jeremiah 21:9 "He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey."

Imagining himself safe there; not fearing its being taken by the king of Babylon. Though it was so often foretold by the prophet of the Lord that it should.

"Shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence": By the first of these, in sending troops out against the enemy. And by the other two, which raged within the city.

"But he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live": Not fall upon them, as the words may be literally rendered. So, it would describe such that went out of the city and besieged them, whereas it means such who should go out of the city, and surrender themselves unto the Chaldeans. Submit to them, so as to obey them, as the Targum adds; such shall have their lives spared.

"And his life shall be unto him for a prey": It shall be like a spoil or booty taken out of an enemy's hands. It shall be with difficulty obtained, and with joy possessed, as a prey or spoil is.

There is still time for them to flee and live as fugitives. If they stay it means certain death or captivity.

Jeremiah 21:10 "For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."

Or "my fury", as the Targum; their sins had provoked the eyes of his glory. He was wroth with them, and determined to cut them off. His mind was set against them, and upon their ruin. And there was no turning him from it.

"For evil, and not for good, saith the Lord": To bring the evil of punishment upon them for the evil of their sins, and not do any good unto them.

"It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon": Come under his power and dominion, by the will of the Lord. For it was he that gave it into his hands, because of the sins of the people of it.

"And he shall burn it with fire": As he did, both the house of the Lord in it and the temple. The king's house or palace, the stately houses of the princes and nobles, and even the houses of all the people (see Jer. 52:13).

It is not enough that the city will be overthrown, it will be burned as well. God wants to wipe out the memory of the evil that went on here. The king of Babylon was the destroyer, but the judgement came from God.

Verses 11-12: Zedekiah (together with his court), is charged with giving heed to the Lord's words of instruction and warning as the representative of the "house of David". Though he was a wicked king who had failed to appropriate the available blessings of the Davidic covenant (see the note on 2 Sam. 7:12-16), still, he was David's descendant and heir and needed to be reminded of his special God-given responsibilities. Note the similar divine challenge to Ahaz (in Isaiah 7:2, 13).

Jeremiah 21:11 "And touching the house of the king of Judah, [say], Hear ye the word of the LORD;"

Or "to the house of the king of Judah"; that is, his palace, as Calvin understands it. Go to it, and there say as follows as in (Jer. 22:1). And some think that this part of the chapter belongs to that, and was not delivered at the time the former part of it was. But before the peremptory decree was gone forth, to deliver the city into the hand of the king of Babylon to be burned with fire. Since, upon correction, some hope of pardon and salvation is yet given. The Syriac version joins this clause to (Jer. 21:10); "and he shall burn it with fire, and the house of the king of Judah". Burn the city of Jerusalem, and particularly the king's palace. But by "the house of the king" is not meant his dwelling house, but his family, himself, his sons, his servants, his courtiers and nobles, to whom the following speech is directed.

"Hear ye the word of the Lord": And obey it; for not bare hearing is meant, but a reverent attention to, and a cheerful and ready performance of, what is heard.

The city of Jerusalem was of the house of Benjamin. Now this message extends to the house of Judah.

Jeremiah 21:12 "O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver [him that is] spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench [it], because of the evil of your doings."

"O house of David": The royal family and all connected were called to enact justice and righteousness promptly ("morning"). There was still time for them to escape the destruction if there was repentance.

David was beloved of God. God had tolerated more from Judah than He would have others, because they were in the lineage of David. He loved them but He would no longer look the other way. Judgement had come to the house of Judah, because of their worship of false gods.

Jeremiah 21:13 "Behold, I [am] against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, [and] rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?"

“O inhabitant of the valley ... rock of the plain”: Jerusalem personified, situated among rocks, hills and valleys.

They were self-satisfied. They felt no harm would come to them, because they were descendants of David. God sends this message by Jeremiah to let them know, that even His chosen family cannot sin and get away with it. They have been judged of God. They can hide if they wish, but God will find them.

Jeremiah 21:14 "But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it."

“I will punish”: During the siege Jerusalem will be burned (verse 10), as will the land in general.

They will be punished for the things they have done and nothing else. God will try each person's doings with fire. The earthly things will burn up in the fire, as wood does.

Jeremiah Chapter 21 Questions

1. Who was king in verse 1?
2. Who was priest?
3. Is this the same Pashur as in the last lesson?
4. Who was next in line to the High Priest?
5. Who was king of Babylon?
6. What did they ask Jeremiah to do for them?
7. Why will God not help them?
8. What will God do to their weapons?
9. Who were the others against them, besides Babylon?
10. How will God fight against them?
11. Why had God's fury come up in His face?
12. What other thing would they die from, besides the sword?

13. What happens to those of them who are not killed?
14. How bad was the famine?
15. In verse 8, God had set before them the way of _____, and the way of _____.
16. Who chose which road they took?
17. If they get away, how will they have to live?
18. After the battle, what will the king do with the city?
19. The city of Jerusalem was of the house of _____.
20. Who is verse 12 addressed to?
21. David was _____ of God.
22. They were _____.
23. Why did they believe no harm would come to them?
24. What will God punish them according to?