

# CHAPTER 21

## INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 21

This chapter contains Jeremiah's answer to King Zedekiah's message to him; in which he assures him of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and gives advice both to the people and the king. The names of the persons sent to him are mentioned, (<sup>21:1</sup>Jeremiah 21:1); and the errand they were sent upon, to desire the prophet to pray to the Lord, that the king of Babylon might be obliged to depart from Jerusalem, (<sup>21:2</sup>Jeremiah 21:2); the answer from the Lord by him is, that their opposition to the king of Babylon should be fruitless; that he should be so far from quitting the siege, that he should enter the city, (<sup>21:3,4</sup>Jeremiah 21:3,4); yea, that the Lord himself would fight against them, and destroy men and beast with the pestilence; and that such who escaped the sword, famine, and pestilence, should fall into the hands of the king of Babylon, (<sup>21:5-7</sup>Jeremiah 21:5-7); and then some advice is given to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to go out and give up themselves to the Chaldeans; which was the best way to save their lives, since the city would certainly fall into their hands, and be burnt by them, (<sup>21:8-10</sup>Jeremiah 21:8-10); and as for the royal family, they are advised to do justice and deliver the oppressed; the not doing of which, it is suggested, was the cause of their ruin, (<sup>21:11,12</sup>Jeremiah 21:11,12); and the chapter is closed with a denunciation of destruction upon the city, notwithstanding the vain trust and confidence of the inhabitants of it, (<sup>21:13,14</sup>Jeremiah 21:13,14).

**Ver. 1.** *The word which came unto Jeremiah from the Lord*, etc.] This prophecy stands out of its proper place, being made in the times of Zedekiah, and when Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon; whereas, after this, there are prophecies which were delivered in the times of Jehoiakim and Jeconiah, who both reigned before Zedekiah; (see <sup>22:11,18,24 25:1</sup>Jeremiah 22:11,18,24 25:1), etc.

*when King Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur the son of Melchiah*; this was another Pashur from him that is spoken of in the preceding chapter, and is called "Magormissabib"; he was the son of Immer; this of Melchiah; he was of the sixteenth course of the priesthood; this of the "fifth":

*and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest*; who was of the “twenty fourth” course; (see <sup><1310></sup>1 Chronicles 24:9,14,18); in (<sup><2624></sup>Jeremiah 52:24), he is called the “second priest”; he was “sagan”, or deputy to the high priest: they were both priests; wherefore the Syriac version renders it in the plural number, “priests”. It may be observed, that the foregoing chapter is concluded with the prophet’s cursing the day of his birth; and the last clause of it expresses the “shame” he imagined his days would be consumed in; and the next account we have is of an honour done him by the king, in sending two priests to him, with a message from him; whereby he tacitly owned him to be a true prophet of the Lord; as indeed he must now be convinced by facts that he was. Princes and people, who slight the ministers of God in time of prosperity, send to them, and are desirous of their assistance in times of distress:

*saying*; as follows:

**Ver. 2.** *Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us*, etc.] Or, “seek the Lord now for us”<sup>f423</sup>; seek the Lord by prayer and supplication for me and my people, for this city and the inhabitants of it; entreat him that he would appear for us, and deliver us out of the hands of the enemy; for this they said in the name of the king that sent them, who knew that the prophet had an interest at the throne of grace, and was a favourite of heaven; and therefore desired him to be an intercessor for them:

*for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us*; the same that is elsewhere called Nebuchadnezzar, commonly called by the Greeks Nebuchodonosor; he was now come up to Jerusalem, and was besieging it, as had been predicted:

*if so be the Lord will deal with us according to all his wondrous works*; which he had done in times past for that nation; as by bringing them out of Egypt; driving out the Canaanites before them; delivering them out of the hands of their neighbours, time after time, when oppressed by them; and particularly by destroying the Assyrian army in Hezekiah’s time, which was besieging the city of Jerusalem, and causing their king to depart and flee in haste; and their present case being similar to that, it is very likely that that was more especially in view:

*that he may go up from us*; namely, the king of Babylon; that he may rise up, and raise the siege, and depart into his own country, as Sennacherib did.

**Ver. 3.** *Then said Jeremiah unto them*, etc.] 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.

**Ver. 4.** *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, etc.] Who had been, still was, and would be, Israel's God, even the God of such who are Israelites indeed; though he should, as he would, give up the present generation to ruin and destruction; they having by their sins forfeited his care and protection of them; and therefore it was in vain to hope for it from this character which they bore:

*behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that [are] in your hands*; so that they should do no hurt to the enemy, but recoil upon themselves. The meaning is, that they should be useless and unserviceable; that they should neither be defensive to them, nor offensive to their enemies; but rather hurtful to themselves. It seems to suggest, as if they should fall out with one another; and, like the Midianites, turn their swords upon one another, and destroy each other:

*wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and [against] the Chaldeans which besiege you without the walls*; by shooting arrows at them from within the city; or by sallying out unto them with sword in hand: this, shows that the Chaldean army, under the command of the king of Babylon, was now without the walls of Jerusalem besieging it:

*and I will assemble them into the midst of this city*; either the weapons of war, as Jarchi and others; which the Chaldeans, breaking into the city, should cause to be brought in to them in the middle of the city, and there slay them with them: or rather the Chaldeans, as Kimchi; who, though now without the walls, and which the Jews thought a sufficient security for them; yet should not be long there, but the walls would be broken down, and they should enter the city, and rendezvous their whole army in the midst of it.

**Ver. 5.** *And myself will fight against you*, etc.] So far from being entreated to do for them according to his wondrous works in times past, as their friend; that he will set himself against them as their enemy; and sad it is to have God for an enemy: if God be for a people, none can be against them to do them any hurt; but if he is against them, it signifies nothing who is for them: this must be much more terrible to them than the whole Chaldean army, and the king of Babylon at the head of them:

*with an outstretched hand, and with a strong arm*; such as he had used formerly in delivering Israel out of Egypt, but now in delivering them into the hands of their enemies; and out of the reach of such a hand there is no getting; and under the weight of such an arm there is no supporting; (see <sup><B86></sup>Exodus 6:6 13:9);

*even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath*; because of their sins and iniquities. This heap of words is used to show the greatness of his indignation: this was not the chastisement of a father, but the rebuke of an enemy; not a correction in love, but in hot displeasure; a punishment inflicted in vindictive wrath by a righteous Judge, appearing in a warlike manner.

**Ver. 6.** *And I will smite the inhabitants of this city*, etc.] With one or other of his arrows after mentioned: or, “them that abide in this city”<sup>f424</sup>; that do not go out of it, and surrender themselves to the king of Babylon; (see <sup><209></sup>Jeremiah 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 **το ψειλον**, “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.

**Ver. 7.** *And afterwards, saith the Lord God*, etc.] After there should be so great a mortality among men and beasts:

*I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants*; the king himself shall not escape; though he shall not die by the pestilence, or famine, or sword, yet he shall fall into the hands of the Chaldeans, and also “his servants”, his courtiers, and counsellors:

*and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine*; such of the inhabitants of the city, as well as those at court, that died not by the sword, famine, and pestilence: these should be delivered

*into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon*; who was now with his army without the walls of the city besieging it:

*and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life*; the Chaldeans, who were their implacable enemies, and cruel, and whom nothing would satisfy but their lives:

*he shall smite them with the edge of the sword*; that is, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, or, however, the army under his command; for what was done by the one is ascribed to the other: this is to be understood of such that fell into their hands upon taking the city, and who endeavoured to make their escape; (see <sup><3894></sup>Jeremiah 39:4-6);

*he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy*; they had no regard to rank or figure, to age or sex; the sons of the king were slain before his eyes, and then his eyes were put out; princes were hanged up by the hand; and no compassion shown to old or young, man or maiden; (see <sup><3870></sup>Jeremiah 52:10,11 <sup><3852></sup>Lamentations 5:12,13 <sup><4887></sup>2 Chronicles 36:17).

This verse is remarkably long.

**Ver. 8.** *And unto the people thou shalt say, thus saith the Lord*, etc.]

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, (<sup><6315></sup>Deuteronomy 30:15,19).

**Ver. 9.** *He that abideth in this city*, etc.] 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 sallying 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 sallied upon them; whereas it designs 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.

**Ver. 10.** *For I have set my face against this city*, etc.] 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, they were so ill deserving of:

*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 inhabitants of it:

*and he shall burn it with fire*; as he did, both the house of the Lord in it, 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 <sup>287B</sup>Jeremiah 52:13).

**Ver. 11.** *And touching the house of the king of Judah, [say]*, etc.] Or “to the house of the king of Judah”<sup>f425</sup>; that is, his palace, as Calvin understands it; go to it, and there say as follows, as in (<sup>221B</sup>Jeremiah 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 a reformation, some hope of pardon and salvation is yet given. The Syriac version joins this clause to (<sup>221D</sup>Jeremiah 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.

**Ver. 12.** *O house of David, thus saith the Lord*, etc.] This appellation is made use of to put them in mind of their descent, and to observe to them how much it became them to follow the example of so illustrious an ancestor, from whom they had the honour to descend; by doing judgment and justice as he did, (<sup>f4085</sup>2 Samuel 8:15); or, otherwise, their being his seed would not secure them from ruin and destruction:

*execute judgment in the morning*; be at it early, and dispatch it speedily; show a hearty regard for it; prefer it to eating and drinking; and do not delay it to the prejudice of persons concerned. The power of judgment with the Jews belonged to the king; he was supreme judge in their courts; they judged, and were judged, the Jews say <sup>f426</sup>; by whom judgment was executed in a morning, and not in any other part of the day; and the case judged ought, as they say, to be as clear as the morning <sup>f427</sup>:

*and deliver [him that is] spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor*; that had anything taken from him by force or fraud; that was either robbed or cheated of his substance; or was refused what he had lent to or entrusted another with; or was by any ways and means wronged and injured by another in his person or property. This suggests that things of this kind were not done, and were the reason why the Lord would deliver them up into the hands of their enemies, or cause his judgments to fall upon them:

*lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench [it]*; or put a stop to it, by all their prayers and entreaties, or by all that they can say or do:

*because of the evil of your doings*; it is a sad thing when princes set bad examples; it is highly provoking to God, whose deputies they are; and it becomes them to begin a reformation, and lead it on, or they cannot expect safety for themselves and their people.

**Ver. 13.** *Behold, I [am] against thee*, etc.] Or, “behold, I unto thee”<sup>f428</sup>; to be supplied either thus, “behold, I say unto thee”<sup>f429</sup>; what follows; and therefore take notice of it, attend unto it: or, “behold, I come unto thee”<sup>f430</sup>; who bid defiance to all their enemies to come near them, as in the latter part of the verse. The Targum is,

“lo, I send my fury against thee;”

and the phrase denotes the Lord’s opposition to them; his setting himself against them, and coming out unto them in his great wrath:

*O inhabitant of the valley, [and] rock of the plain, saith the Lord;* a description of Jerusalem; between the lower and higher part of which lay a valley, called Tyropaeon, which divided the two hills, on which the city was built<sup>f431</sup>; yea, the whole city was on high, on a rock, and around it a valley or plain; and because it was built upon a rock, and fortified with hills and mountains, the inhabitants of it thought themselves safe and secure, and even impregnable; hence it follows:

*which say, who shall come down against us? who shall enter into our habitations?* who of our neighbours dare to make a descent upon us? or are so weak and foolish as to attempt to break through our fortifications, natural and artificial, and enter into our houses, and take away our persons, and spoil us of our goods? we defy them.

**Ver. 14.** *But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord,* etc.] The situation of their city, and the strength of its fortifications, however sufficient they might be thought to keep out an enemy from annoying them; yet it was impossible to hinder the Lord’s coming among them, as he here threatens to do; and “visit” them, as the word signifies, in a way of wrath and justice, according to the demerit of their sins, expressed by “the fruit of their doings”; their punishment was the reward of their unrighteousness, the effect of their sinful practices; and, though this was dreadful and terrible, they could not but own it was just and equitable:

*and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof;* not in the forest of Lebanon, but in the city of Jerusalem; whose houses stood as thick as trees in a forest, and which many of them, at least the most stately, might be built or ceiled with cedars from Mount Lebanon and its forest; though some understand this of the cities and towns about Jerusalem; and so the Targum renders it, “in its cities”; and the Syriac version, “its towns”; but these seem rather meant in the following clause:

*and it shall devour all things round about it;* the mountains and trees upon them, the cities and towns adjacent.