

Jeremiah

Chapter 21

Jerusalem Will Fall to Nebuchadnezzar

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, 2 “Inquire of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us.” 3 Then Jeremiah said to them: “Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 4 ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of this city. 5 I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. 6 And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. 7 Afterward, declares the LORD, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people in this city who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword. He shall not pity them or spare them or have compassion.’ 8 “And to this people you shall say: ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. 9 He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war. 10 For I have set my face against this city for harm and not for good, declares the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.’

Chs 21–38 Collection of oracles arising out of the prophet’s confrontation with Israel’s unfaithful leaders. The Lord of the nations will so direct world history that out of chastened and restored Israel, a righteous Branch will spring up in the person of the messianic King, Prophet, and Priest. His rule, Word, and sacrifice will provide an escape for all people from the curse of sin. In almost all instances here, the reader is informed at what time or under what circumstances each “word of the Lord came to Jeremiah” (ch 33). Chs 1–20, however, supply little historical data. Nevertheless, events are not arranged exclusively according to their chronological sequence. (TLSB)

21:1–24:10 The prophet denounces Judah’s rulers (21:1–23:7), false prophets (23:8–40) and sinful people (ch. 24). Although for the most part chs. 1–20 relate events in chronological order, chs. 21–52 are arranged on the basis of subject matter rather than chronology (see 24:1; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 29:2; 32:1; 35:1; 36:1; 37:1; 45:1; 49:34; 51:59; 52:4). (CSB)

21:1–23:7 The rulers of Judah, who bear the primary responsibility for the nation’s economic, social and spiritual ills, are the first to be denounced by Jeremiah. (CSB)

21:1 *This word came.* The phrase does not appear again until 25:1, suggesting that chs. 21–24 constitute an integral section in the book. (CSB)

Zedekiah. Means “The LORD is my righteousness.” (CSB)

Pashhur son of Malkijah. Not the same as the Pashhur of 20:1–6 (see 38:1). (CSB)

the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah. Not the same as the prophet Zephaniah (see 29:25, 29; 37:3; 52:24; see also Zep 1:1). (CSB)

21:2 *Inquire ... of the LORD.* A request for knowledge or information (see Ge 25:22; 2Ki 22:13), not necessarily for help. (CSB)

To find out what attitude Jehovah would take, and whether they could count on His assistance on the basis of a special revelation. (Kretzmann)

Nebuchadnezzar. The name means “O Nabu [a god], protect my son/boundary!” He was the most famous ruler (605–562 B.C.) of the Neo-Babylonian empire (612–539). (CSB)

making war. About 588, because the brash Zedekiah had rebelled against Babylon (see 52:3). (CSB)

This incident taking place at the time when the invaders were already near the city or about to enter. (Kretzmann)

us. Jerusalem. (CSB)

wonderful deeds. For example, in the days of Hezekiah (see Isa 37:36). (CSB)

make him withdraw. See Isa 37:37. (CSB)

Discontinue his advance or raise the siege which he had even then begun. It has ever been thus, that affliction drove people to seek the Lord and His mercy, much as the same people otherwise ignored Him. (Kretzmann)

21:4 *I will turn against you the weapons of war.* Your defense of Jerusalem will fail. (CSB)

will bring them together into the midst of the city. Either (1) the weapons, meaning that Judah’s troops would be totally unable to defend the approaches to the city, or (2) the Babylonians, meaning that Jerusalem’s defeat is imminent and inevitable. (CSB)

21:5 *I myself will fight against you.* The Lord, usually his people’s defender, will now destroy them and seal their doom. (CSB)

with outstretched hand and strong arm. See 27:5; 32:17. A similar phrase is used to describe God’s powerful redemption of Israel at the exodus (see 32:21; Dt 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 26:8), but here God turns his wrath against his own people. (CSB)

in anger and fury and great wrath. Probably quoted from Dt 29:28, where the Hebrew for this phrase is translated “in furious anger and in great wrath.” (CSB)

Climax presented by the synonyms indicating that He was possessed with the highest degree of indignation. (Kretzmann)

21:7 *I will give Zedekiah ... his officials and the people.* Fulfilled in 52:8–11, 24–27 (see Eze 12:13–14). (CSB)

pestilence, sword and famine. Curses for violating God’s covenant (see Lev 26:25–26); the first occurrence of this triad, which occurs 15 times in Jeremiah. (CSB)

not pity...compassion. For this triad see 13:14; see also Eze 5:11. The three triads here heighten the literary effect of the passage. (CSB)

Cf. Deut. 29, 29; 2 Kings 25, 6. 7; Ezek. 12, 13. Thus did Zedekiah receive his answer in agreement with his actions and his state of mind, for he did evil in the sight of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

21:8 *I set before you.* See Dt 11:26. The people are offered a choice, but few of them will make the right decision. (CSB)

He gave them a test, a choice, to show what lay in their hearts. Those who believed His word would live. (PBC)

the way of life and the way of death. See Dt 30:15, 19; see also Pr 6:23. (CSB)

This choice of crucial alternatives is represented as a dilemma. (TLSB)

21:9 Repeated almost verbatim in 38:2. Jeremiah’s counsel of surrender branded him as a traitor in the eyes of many (see 37:13), but he was in fact a true patriot who wanted to stay in Judah even after Jerusalem was destroyed (see 37:14; 40:6; 42:7–22). (CSB)

who ... surrenders to the Chaldeans ... shall live. Fulfilled in 39:9; 52:15. (CSB)

Deserters kept their lives (38:2; 39:9; 52:15). (TLSB)

shall have his life. Lit. “his life will be his (only) booty.” The victorious in battle can expect to share plunder; the defeated are fortunate indeed if their lives are spared. (CSB)

prize of war. Prisoner/slave of the enemy. (TLSB)

21:10 *have set my face.* Lit. “set my face” (see 44:11). (CSB)

Being fully determined to pursue His course of vengeance. (Kretzmann)

harm and not for good. See Am 9:4; contrast 24:6. (CSB)

21:1–10 Through Jeremiah, God reveals His judgment on Jerusalem to the political and religious leaders of Judah: only those who surrender to the Chaldeans will live. God disciplines them for their lack of repentance and for ignoring His warnings. Even during this judgment, mercy and compassion shine through, providing a way of survival. No matter what you face today, call on the Lord with a repentant heart and humbly trust that He has an answer for you. Consider the life and sufferings of Jesus, who humbled Himself to redeem you for your salvation. • Lord, lead us to heed Your warnings against sin and to live repentant lives according to Your holy will, reflecting Your holiness and loving compassion through Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

Message to the House of David

11 “And to the house of the king of Judah say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, 12 O house of David! Thus says the LORD: “Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed,

lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil deeds.”
13 “Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain, declares the LORD; you who say, ‘Who shall come down against us, or who shall enter our habitations?’ 14 I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds, declares the LORD; I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her.”

21:12–14 Even though Zedekiah was a descendant of the house of David, with whom God had made a solemn covenant, he would have no successors. Kings of Israel were not to be arbitrary despots. If they ignored the demand to execute justice, they incurred God’s unquenchable wrath. The royal city and palace will not offer protection, though situated on a rock towering over the surrounding plain. (TLSB)

21:12 *execute justice.*† See 5:28; 22:16; 1Ki 3:28; La 3:59. The king was obliged and expected to do so, as the future Messiah was to do what is just and right (see 23:5; 33:15). (CSB)

in the morning. When the mind is clear and the day is cool (court sessions were held outside, at the city gate; see notes on Ge 19:1; Ru 4:1). (CSB)

Justice was urgent business to be transacted without delay. (TLSB)

delivered... robbed. Repeated in 22:3. (CSB)

wrath will ... burn. Which challenged the holiness of the avenging Lord. (Kretzmann)

21:13 *valley.* Jerusalem, surrounded on three sides by valleys, is called the “Valley of Vision” in Isa 22:1, 5. (CSB)

Jerusalem, rising out of the lower surrounding landscape, appeared to be an impregnable rock. (TLSB)

rock of the plain. Mount Zion. (CSB)

Jerusalem being considered, on the one hand, as being situated beneath Mount Olivet and its range, and on the other as being exalted above the lowlands toward the south and west. (Kretzmann)

you who say. The pronouns are plural in the second half of the verse (referring to Jerusalem’s inhabitants), singular in the first half (referring to Jerusalem personified). (CSB)

Who shall come down against us? The people think that no one can successfully besiege them. (CSB)

Deeming themselves safe from attack within fortifications which were well-nigh impregnable in those days. (Kretzmann)

21:14 *kindle a fire ... consume.* Common prophetic language for divine judgment against rebellious cities (see 49:27; 50:32; Am 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; cf. Jer 21:14. (CSB)

Possibly a metaphor, though the hills of Judah may still have been forested at this time. (TLSB)

forest. The Hebrew for this word is singular and perhaps refers figuratively to Jerusalem’s royal palace, called the “Palace of the Forest of Lebanon” (1Ki 7:2; 10:17, 21; see Isa 22:8) because of the cedar (see 22:7, 14, 15, 23) used in its construction. The palace (see 22:1) is compared to the “summit of Lebanon” in 22:6. (CSB)

The city itself, with all its suburbs, being considered a forest of dwellings. Thus the specific items in the destruction of Jerusalem were ever and again brought to the attention of the apostate Jews, just as the individual incidents of the Last Judgment are set forth at length and with careful attention to details in the New Testament. (Kretzmann)