

Wicked Kings of Judah

Jeremiah 21-22

Jeremiah 21 - *"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying, ² "Please inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all His wonderful works, that the king may go away from us."*

³ Then Jeremiah said to them, *"Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, ⁴ 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls, and I will assemble them in the midst of this city. ⁵ I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. ⁶ I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence. ⁷ And afterward," says the Lord, "I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword. He shall not spare them, or have pity or mercy."*

⁸ *"Now you shall say to this people, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. ⁹ He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes out and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him. ¹⁰ For I have set My face against this city for adversity and not for good," says the Lord. "It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."*

¹¹ *"And concerning the house of the king of Judah, say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, ¹² O house of David!*

Thus says the Lord: "Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him who is plundered out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury go forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

¹³ *"Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain," says the Lord, "who say, 'Who shall come down against us? Or who shall enter our dwellings?' ¹⁴ But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings," says the Lord. "I will kindle a fire in its forest, and it shall devour all things around it."*

Background Notes

After the reign of good King Josiah, four more kings came to the throne in the kingdom of Judah. All the last four kings of Judah were wicked kings. Jeremiah denounced them in four messages of judgment in chapters 21-22. Jeremiah delivered the four messages at different times.

The first message concerned Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. It was given before Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple was destroyed, and before the Jewish people were carried off to captivity in Babylon. Through Pashhur and

Zephaniah, Zedekiah requested Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord about Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem (v1-2). Jeremiah responded with God's message of judgment. Jerusalem was already under siege by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies. Zedekiah was probably hoping for a positive answer, like the prophecy Isaiah gave to King Hezekiah over 100 years earlier, when Sennacherib and the Assyrians had besieged Jerusalem. At that time, God miraculously delivered Jerusalem in one night.

But times were different now, so the answer from the Lord that Jeremiah gave Zedekiah was not exactly what Zedekiah had hoped to hear. Not only would Nebuchadnezzar successfully invade Judah and Jerusalem, but also the Lord Himself would fight against Judah because of her wicked ways.

Doctrinal Points

1. God does not always direct in the same way, even in similar situations.

God told Jeremiah that there was a way of life and a way of death (v8-9). The "way of life" was to surrender to the Babylonians. If they tried to hold out, they would die. This direction was very different from the answer God gave Hezekiah when the Assyrians were besieging Jerusalem - a similar situation. Why the difference? Although the situations were similar, there were other factors involved. And so the Lord told Hezekiah the way of life was **not** to surrender, whereas he told Zedekiah that the way of life was to surrender – the exact opposite directions in similar situations.

There's an application for us about decision-making in our own lives. **God does not always direct in the same way, even in similar situations.** We all make big decisions at various times in our lives, and God promises to guide us if we trust in Him (Proverbs 3:5-6). Sometimes we're to change jobs and move, and sometimes we're to stay put on the same job and not move - even though the situations may be similar. Sometimes we're to leave a church or ministry for a different church or ministry, and sometimes we're to stay and serve in the same church or ministry.

God knows all the factors. We don't. As we trust fully in Him, God promises to guide us in all the decisions we must make. But remember this biblical principle in decision-making: God does not always direct in the same way, even in similar situations.

2. The birth and reign of Christ does not nullify Jeremiah's prophecy against Jehoiachin.

Jeremiah 22:1-19 - *"Thus says the Lord: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and there speak this word,² and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, you who sit on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates: ³ Thus says the Lord: "Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the plundered out*

of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴ For if you indeed do this thing, then shall enter the gates of this house, riding on horses and in chariots, accompanied by servants and people, kings who sit on the throne of David. ⁵ But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself," says the Lord, "that this house shall become a desolation."

⁶ For thus says the Lord to the house of the king of Judah: "You are Gilead to Me, the head of Lebanon; yet I surely will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited. ⁷ I will prepare destroyers against you, everyone with his weapons. They shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire. ⁸ And many nations will pass by this city; and everyone will say to his neighbor, 'Why has the Lord done so to this great city?' ⁹ Then they will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.'"

¹⁴ "For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: "He shall not return here anymore, ¹² but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more." ¹³ "Woe to him who builds his house by injustice and his chambers by unrighteousness; who uses his neighbor's service without wages and gives him nothing for his work, ¹⁴ who says, 'I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers, and cut out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion. ¹⁵ "Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. ¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this knowing Me?" says the Lord. ¹⁷ "Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and violence."

¹⁸ Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

"They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my sister!' They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, master!' or 'Alas, his glory!' ¹⁹ He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

Once again, these verses revealed that social justice is very important to the Lord. If Judah would treat the orphans, widows and strangers with fairness and justice, then the kings in Israel would continue (v1-4). However, if they disobeyed the Lord in this area, the kingdom of Judah (even though it had the beauty of Gilead and Lebanon) would come to an end - because they turned away from the Lord to worship foreign gods (v5- 9).

In verses 10-12, the message of judgment concerned King Jehoahaz (Shallum). Jehoahaz' father, King Josiah, had just died. Jehoahaz reigned for only three months before he was taken as a captive to Egypt and never returned, as predicted in these verses.

The third message of judgment in verses 13-19 was directed to King Jehoiakim. He was also a son of Josiah and Jehoahaz' brother. Jehoiakim was unjust. He didn't pay the laborers who worked on his royal building projects. Jehoiakim's father, Josiah, was a good king, but Jehoiakim practiced oppression and extortion (v17). So when wicked King Jehoiakim died, he was not lamented or given a proper burial (v18-19).

The fourth message of judgment (v20-30) was directed against Jehoachim's son, Jehoiachin (aka Jeoniah or Coniah). It contains our doctrinal point for chapter 22: the birth and reign of Christ does not nullify Jeremiah's prophecy against Jehoiachin.

In verses 20-22, Judah was told that all her shepherds, and her lovers in her sin of spiritual adultery would be swept away in the coming Babylonian captivity. Their homes, built from the cedar of Lebanon, would no longer be nests of security: *O inhabitant of Lebanon, making your nest in the cedars, how gracious will you be when pangs come upon you, like the pain of a woman in labor?*" (v23). Even if Jehoiachin were a signet ring on the Lord's right hand, He would remove it and give it into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (v24-25). The Babylonian captivity was sure, even for the king and the queen mother (v26-27).

Now comes the curse on Jehoiachin, in verses 30: *"Thus says the Lord: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days. For none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling anymore in Judah.'"* This prophecy against Jehoiachin said that none of his descendants would ascend the throne - and no descendant of Jehoiachin ever did become king.

But Jesus, the Messiah, is a descendant of David through Jehoiachin - and the Lord is certainly king and will reign as king over this earth when He returns. So was this prophecy nullified by the birth and reign of Jesus Christ? No! Because of the virgin birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ is not a biological descendant of Jehoiachin.

Jesus has the legal right and claim to the throne of David through Jehoiachin, but His *biological* link to David was through his mother, Mary. Mary was in the line of David, but not through Jehoiachin. (See the genealogies of our Lord in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.) So the birth and reign of Christ does not nullify Jeremiah's prophecy against Jehoiachin.

Practical Application

Take the way of life, not the way of death.

In Jeremiah 21:8, the Lord said to the people through Jeremiah, *"I set before you the way of life and the way of death."* The way of life was to get out of the city. Staying in the city meant death.

In application for today, the Lord would again say to everyone: there is a way of life and there is a way of death. John 3:36 says that if you do nothing, you will remain under the wrath of God against sin. That is the way of death. The way of life is to escape from the wrath of God against sin by turning to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sins, and by trusting Him as your personal Savior.

Take the way of life, not the way of death!