

21:1 The word which came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying,

2 Inquire, I pray thee, of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us: peradventure Yahweh will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.

The section here in chapter 21 turns in a new direction- through chapter 24, to a denunciation of false prophets.

Excursus: Pashhur

פִּשְׁחֹר, “splitter,” “cleaver”. The name of a priest, son of Immer, and “chief governor in the house of the Lord” (Jer 20:1), who persecuted Jeremiah, putting him in “the stocks” hard by the “house of Yahweh” in the “gate of Benjamin” (Jer 20:2). When released, Jeremiah pronounced Divine judgment on him and the people. Future captivity and an exile's death are promised to Pashur whose name he changed from its masterful significance to a cowering one. “Terror on every side” (*māghōr miṣṣābhīb*) is to take the place of “stable strength” (Jer 20:3 ff).

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

4 Thus saith Yahweh, the 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 that besiege you, without the walls; and I will gather them into the midst of this city.

5 And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation.

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

This answer is intended to disabuse the king and his servants of all hope of help from God. So far from saving them from the Chaldeans, God will fight against them, will drive back into the city its defenders that are still holding out without the walls against the enemy; consume the inhabitants by sword, pestilence, famine; deliver the king, with his servants and all that survive inside the lines of the besiegers, into the hand of the latter, and unsparingly cause them to be put to death.

7 And afterward, saith Yahweh, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, even such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar 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.

The Lord will make known His almighty power not for the rescue but for the chastisement of Judah. The words "with outstretched hand and strong arm" are a standing figure for the miraculous manifestation of God's power.

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

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 passeth over to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.

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

And yet Jeremiah remained in the city to urge the remnant to repentance! The better Shepherds stay with the sheep no matter what.

11 And touching the house of the king of Judah, hear ye the word of Yahweh:

12 O house of David, thus saith Yahweh, Execute justice in the morning, and deliver him that is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

The kingly house, i.e., the king and his family, under which are here comprehended not merely women and children, but also the king's companions, his servants and councilors; they are counseled to hold judgment every morning. These verses don't seem to fit in the context- unless one remembers that the king's house too stands under God's judgment.

13 Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, [and] of the rock of the plain, saith Yahweh; you that say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?

14 And I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith Yahweh; and I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is round about her.

The inhabitant of the valley is the daughter of Zion, the population of Jerusalem personified. The situation of the city is spoken of as עמק, ravine between mountains, in respect that Jerusalem was encircled by mountains of greater height. And God himself is against her.

22:1 Thus said Yahweh: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,

The prophet could go down only from the temple.

2 And say, Hear the word of Yahweh, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates.

3 Thus saith Yahweh: Execute ye justice and righteousness, and deliver him that is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence, to the sojourner, the fatherless, nor the widow; neither shed innocent blood in this place.

4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.

5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith Yahweh, that this house shall become a desolation.

6 For thus saith Yahweh concerning the house of the king of Judah: Thou art Gilead unto me, [and] the head of Lebanon; [yet] surely I will make thee a wilderness, [and] cities which are not inhabited.

Lebanon was the highest mountain in Israel, and Gilead the richest and most fertile part of the country; and were, therefore, proper emblems of the reigning family. Though important, judgment will descend on them. No one is exempt from the requirement of obedience.

7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons; and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

“I have prepared, קדשתי (kiddashti), I have sanctified - consecrated, to this work. They have their commission from me” is God’s message.

8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbor, Wherefore hath Yahweh done thus unto this great city?

9 Then they shall answer, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

11 For thus saith Yahweh touching Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, [and] who went forth out of this place: He shall not return thither any more.

Excursus: Shallum

שָׁלֹום, *shallūm*, שָׁלֹום, *shallum*, “the requited one” (2Ki 15:10-15): The 15th king of Israel, and successor of Zechariah, whom he publicly assassinated in the 7th month of his reign. Nothing more is known of Shallum than that he was a son of Jabesh, which may indicate that he was a Gileadite from beyond Jordan. He is said to have made “a conspiracy” against Zechariah, so was not alone in his crime. The conspirators, however, had but a short-lived success, as, when Shallum had “reigned for the space of a month in Samaria,” Menahem, then at Tirzah, one of the minor capitals of the kingdom, went up to Samaria, slew him and took his place. It was probably at this time that Syria threw off the yoke of tribute to Israel, as when next we meet with that kingdom, it is under its own king and in alliance with Samaria (2Ki 16:5). The 10 years of rule given to Menahem (2Ki 15:17) may be taken to include the few months of military violence under Zechariah and Shallum, and cover the full years 758-750, with portions of years before and after counted as whole ones. The unsuccessful usurpation of Shallum may therefore be put in 758 BC (some date lower).

12 But in the place whither they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more.

13 Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not his hire;

14 that saith, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion.

15 Shalt thou reign, because thou strivest to excel in cedar? Did not thy 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 to know me? saith Yahweh.

17 But thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

18 Therefore thus saith Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: they shall not lament for him, [saying], Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him, [saying] Ah lord! or, Ah his glory!

The mourning rituals of ancient Israel and lamentations for the dead, are loud, vehement, and distressing. For a child or a parent grief is expressed in a variety of impassioned sentences, each ending with a burden like that in the text, “Ah my child!” “Ah my mother!”

19 He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

That is, he will be left unburied- a terrible disgrace for an ancient Israelite.

20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and cry from Abarim; for all thy lovers are destroyed.

Line the route to be taken by the exiles and lament them as they pass by!

21 I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.

22 The wind shall feed all thy shepherds, and thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness.

23 O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how greatly to be pitied shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail!

24 As I live, saith Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence;

25 and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them of whom thou art afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.

26 And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die.

27 But to the land whereunto their soul longeth to return, thither shall they not return.

28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not?

These are probably the exclamations of the people, when they heard those solemn denunciations against their king and their country.

29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Yahweh.

And the Prophet replies in the name of God.

30 Thus saith Yahweh, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah.

His family line is to be erased. A tremendous tragedy for the royal family.

23:1 Woe unto the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith Yahweh.

2 Therefore thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, against the shepherds that feed my people: Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith Yahweh.

3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

Because they are such as have scattered, driven away, and not visited the flock of the Lord, therefore He will punish in them the wickedness of their doings. In the **לֹא פִקְדָתָם אֲתָם** is summed up all that the rulers have omitted to do for the flock committed to their care.

4 And I will set up shepherds over them, who shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, saith Yahweh.

5 Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

The figurative expressions are founded on the idea that the sheep, when they are neglected by the shepherds, are torn and devoured by wild beasts.

6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness.

וְזֶה שְׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאוּ יְהוָה צְדִקְנוּ (vezeh shemo asher yikre'o Yehovah tsidkenu), which the Septuagint translate as follows, *Και τουτο το ονομα αυτον ο καλεσει αυτον Κυριος, Ιωσεδεκ*, "And this is his name which the Lord shall call him Josedek."

7 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that they shall no more say, As Yahweh liveth, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

8 but, As Yahweh liveth, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land.

9 Concerning the prophets. My heart within me is broken, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of Yahweh, and because of his holy words.

He was terrified even by his own message, and shocked at the profanity of the false prophets.

10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. And their course is evil, and their might is not right;

11 for both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith Yahweh.

They had even introduced idolatry into the Temple of God!

12 Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith Yahweh.

13 And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied by Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.

14 In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, so that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them become unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

The prophets of Jerusalem, while professing a pure faith, have followed the ways, and become as corrupt as the prophets of Samaria. They are incorrigible, brutish sinners, who will as surely be destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah were.

15 Therefore thus saith Yahweh of hosts concerning the prophets: Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the prophets of Jerusalem is ungodliness gone forth into all the land.

16 Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Yahweh.

Do not listen to those who promise you safety, without requiring you to forsake your sins and turn to the Lord. Ignore those who speak without divine authority or commission. They are false, speaking from the delusions of their own minds.

17 They say continually unto them that despise me, Yahweh hath said, Ye shall have peace; and unto every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come upon you.

18 For who hath stood in the council of Yahweh, that he should perceive and hear his word? who hath marked my word, and heard it?

19 Behold, the tempest of Yahweh, [even his] wrath, is gone forth, yea, a whirling tempest: it shall burst upon the head of the wicked.

This describes the effects of the hot pestilential wind blowing from the south, frequently mentioned or referred to in the Old Testament.

20 The anger of Yahweh shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall understand it perfectly.

21 I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied.

22 But if they had stood in my council, then had they caused my people to hear my words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

23 Am I a God at hand, saith Yahweh, and not a God afar off?

Far and near are here in their local, not their temporal signification. A god near at hand is one whose domain and whose knowledge do not extend far; a God afar off, one who sees and works into the far distance. The question, which has an affirmative force, is explained by the statement in the following verse.

24 Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? saith Yahweh. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith Yahweh.

25 I have heard what the prophets have said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart?

27 that think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers forgat my name for Baal.

Dreams were understood by the ancients to be revelatory of the divine will.

28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? saith Yahweh.

29 Is not my word like fire? saith Yahweh; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

In the original words there is something singular: הלוא כה דברי כאש (halo coh debari kaesh), "Is not thus my word like fire?" I suspect that כה (coh), thus, was formerly written כח (coach), strength or power; and so it was understood by the Targumist: "Are not all my words strong, like fire?" and probably the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews read it thus, and had it in view when he wrote: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword."

30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith Yahweh, that steal my words every one from his neighbor.

31 Behold, I am against the prophets, saith Yahweh, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

32 Behold, I am against them that prophesy lying dreams, saith Yahweh, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their vain boasting: yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all, saith Yahweh.

33 And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of Yahweh? then shalt thou say unto them, What burden! I will cast you off, saith Yahweh.

The word **מַשָּׂא** (massa), here used, signifies burden, oracle, prophetic discourse; and is used by almost every prophet. But the persons in the text appear to have been mockers. "Where is this burden of the Lord?" - "What is the burden now?" To this insolent question the prophet answers in the following verses.

34 And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of Yahweh, I will even punish that man and his house.

35 Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, What hath Yahweh answered? and, What hath Yahweh spoken?

36 And the burden of Yahweh shall ye mention no more: for every man's own word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of Yahweh of hosts our God.

When the will of God becomes a "burden" rather than a delight, God let's those so minded bear their burdens alone.

37 Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath Yahweh answered thee? and, What hath Yahweh spoken?

38 But if ye say, The burden of Yahweh; therefore thus saith Yahweh: Because ye say this word, The burden of Yahweh, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of Yahweh;

39 therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave unto you and to your fathers, away from my presence:

40 and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

By their act of disobedience they have become castoffs. If they do not want God, God does not want them.