

# OpenTheo

## January 22nd: Jeremiah 21 & 1 Corinthians 6

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Zedekiah's delegation to Jeremiah. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 21. This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pasher, the son of Malchiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maseah, saying, 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.

Then Jeremiah said to them, Thus shall you say to Zedekiah, 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. I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath.

And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a

great pestilence. 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. 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.

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. 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. And to the house of the king of Judah say, Hear the word of the Lord, 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.

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? 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.

In chapters 21-23 we find a collection of material that is particularly condemning the kings of Judah, concluding in chapter 23 verse 8, and followed by material addressed to its prophets, which takes up the remainder of chapter 23. King Zedekiah sends a delegation to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord. This might be compared to King Josiah's delegation to the prophetess Huldah in 2 Kings chapter 22.

The delegation here contains Pasher, the son of Malachiah, not the same man as put Jeremiah in the stocks in chapter 20, but a different figure. He is also mentioned in chapter 38. He was accompanied by Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maseah, who might have been Pasher, the son of Imaz, successor as the man responsible for temple order.

In chapter 29 Zephaniah is presented as a more sympathetic figure to Jeremiah. We see a further instance of the king consulting Jeremiah in a similar situation in chapter 37. While occurring around the same time however, these address different situations.

Jack Lumbom notes Cornel's observation that the question in this chapter is, will the Chaldeans withdraw? While the question in chapter 37 is, will the Chaldeans who have withdrawn come back again? The first deportation from Jerusalem has already happened here. Nebuchadnezzar has exiled Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother set up Matanah as

king in his place and named him Zedekiah, while Jehoiachin is in Babylon. At this point the year is probably 588 or maybe early 587 BC and the final end of Jerusalem and Judah is about to fall.

Zedekiah however tentatively hopes for an encouraging word from the Lord. Perhaps he expects Egyptian help. He might be hoping for something similar to the response that Hezekiah received from Isaiah when threatened by Sennacherib in Isaiah chapter 37.

Walter Brueggemann argues that the question in verses 1-2 is given four answers in the chapter. The first is in verses 3-7, the second in verses 8-10, the third in verses 11-12 and the final one in verses 13-14. Lumbom divides things differently, seeing four oracles with key word repetitions in verses 4-6, verse 7, verses 8-9 and then in verse 10.

The message is driven home as we work through. Does the Lord still have it in Him to save Judah? Zedekiah wonders. Jeremiah's response is not encouraging.

The Lord is still living and active, He's still the master of human affairs, He's still the Lord of history. But now He is fighting against Judah. The vocabulary of divine action is all present here.

God acts with an outstretched hand and a strong arm, He will turn back, He will strike down. But now however this vocabulary is aimed against Judah. This is the language of the Exodus for instance.

But now the God of the Exodus is Judah's adversary. Yes, the Lord will show His wonderful deeds to Zedekiah, but they will be His wonderful deeds against Judah. Verse 7 makes clear that there is no avenue of escape.

In verses 8-10 Jeremiah turns to address the people. There remains a chance for life for them. The language here echoes the covenant language of Deuteronomy 30 verses 15-20.

The choice that Jeremiah presents here however is between resistance and surrender. Resisting the Babylonians will lead to death. Surrendering to them will allow people to escape with their lives.

The city is doomed, but those who abandon the sinking ship need not be. Brueggemann points out the use of the typical verb that is used in connection with the Exodus here, the verb of going out. By itself this might not mean very much, but in the context of the other allusions to Exodus language in the wider context there may be an ironic reversal here.

Deliverance comes, of an Exodus type, in leaving Jerusalem like Egypt and turning oneself over to the exile in Babylon. One can also imagine how well such a message would go down. Jeremiah might seem to be a traitor, undermining morale and the

willingness of the men to stand and fight.

Verses 11-14 address the king more generically, not necessarily Zedekiah and likely not in the immediate historical context of the preceding section. This is probably 15-20 years earlier. The Lord presents the king with an ultimatum.

Unless he executes justice in the morning, delivering equitable and righteous judgement, delivering the weak from the hand of their oppressors in the manner that he is supposed to do, the Lord's wrath will come upon him. The king is supposed to be the Lord's covenant son, representing and effecting the Lord's justice in the land. The Lord is the God who cares for and redeems the oppressed, and the king must do the same.

As an agent of justice, the king is primarily to act as a deliverer. Jerusalem and those within it may feel secure. They are situated on the table land, they look out from their height over the surrounding valleys, enjoying a commanding position.

Yet the Lord is against them on account of their unrighteousness, and the punishment for their deeds will surely come upon them. Their forest, the royal buildings of the city, would be kindled by the Lord, and the entire world of Jerusalem would be consumed in the resulting conflagration. A question to consider.

The concluding oracles of this chapter likely date from 15-20 years prior to the earlier oracles of the chapter. What effect does it have to place them alongside each other like this? 1 Corinthians chapter 6 Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, and God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

2 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, the two will become one flesh, but he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 3 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6 Paul raises the issue of the Corinthian Christians bringing legal cases against other Christians in the congregation.

The previous chapter had highlighted the responsibility that the church had to cast judgment in the case of the man with his father's wife. In that case the church was called to gather together and declared judgment, condemning the man and delivering him over to Satan. This judgment anticipated the final judgment.

At the end of the chapter Paul declared, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church who you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you. It is likely that the parties involved in these legal cases were wealthier and more powerful.

They were using the courts against weaker persons in all likelihood, as civil cases were matters for the rich and powerful, and the outcome of such cases would likely have been decided by the wealth of the parties involved. Paul cross-examines those who are so eager to go to the law courts. Don't they know that the saints will one day judge the world? That they'll even judge angels? And yet the Corinthians are suggesting by their actions that they're incompetent to adjudicate in everyday cases.

Paul might have verses such as Daniel 7, verses 21-22 and verse 27 of that chapter in mind when he talks about the judgment that the saints will exercise over the world and over angels. Matthew 19, verse 28 gives a similar impression. The Corinthians think that they have great wisdom.

They think that they reign like kings. And yet for all of this supposed super-spirituality, they act as if unbelievers are better equipped to judge than Christians. The very fact of such legal conflict between church members is already a sign of catastrophic failure, even apart from the scandal of airing their personal disputes before unbelievers and in the process tacitly admitting their inadequacy to execute judgment themselves.

Paul wants the Corinthians to feel ashamed that such a situation could arise, and he twists the knife of his criticism in verse 5. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers? You who have been talking so much about your wisdom and your reigning like kings? Is there truly no one among you who can deal with these cases? The Corinthians seem to have forgotten that they are the people of God. If anything, the Corinthians should prefer to allow themselves be wronged and defrauded than to go to the unrighteous pagans, those who are despised for their injustice, for judgment. It is much better to be defrauded and wronged than to defraud and wrong.

And then also a preoccupation with your rights over other concerns is a sign of the flesh. Paul's point is not that legal cases are always inappropriate. Rather, the behaviour of the Corinthians is revealing deep problems within their community.

It's revealing the hollowness of their boast. And it's also showing that they are not a people who love and care for each other. They are rather acting as people of the flesh, people who will bite and devour each other, people who are preoccupied with their own rights over the well-being of all.

Paul wants the Corinthians to be aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Bringing predatory legal cases against others and having sexual relations with

your father's wife are practices characteristic of this evil age. And those who practice or give themselves over to such things will end up being condemned with the evil age.

Back in verse 11 of the preceding chapter Paul wrote, He mentions these offences again in this chapter but he adds to them adulterers and thieves and two others which the ESV combines as men who practice homosexuality. Many of these things are related to the offenders that must be cut off in the book of Deuteronomy and elsewhere. The greedy, the thieves and the swindlers might relate to the discussion of people going to court against others.

That's what they're engaged in. And these are not the practices of those who will inherit the Kingdom of God. The words grouped together as men who practice homosexuality should probably be distinguished.

Other translations use terms like passive homosexual partners practicing homosexuals or effeminate, nor sodomites or male prostitutes, sodomites. They seem to form a pair but there are differences between these two things. Some have seen it as the active and the passive partner in homosexual relations but there is probably more going on.

The second term appears here in the Greek record for the first time. It is however a word that essentially refers to one who lies with a male, as we see the construction of the term. It presumably is based upon the Old Testament prohibition in Leviticus chapter 18 verse 22.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. The first word literally means soft ones and is often translated effeminate, although the term isn't etymologically related to femininity as it is in English.

Although it can be conceptually related as soft men would often adopt feminine affectations. Because of the association of effeminacy with male prostitution or passive homosexual partners in antiquity, some have translated it those ways, drawing those more specific associations. The association with homosexual practice does seem to be there.

However, it should not be so narrowly defined. The concept here is not merely concerned with sexual behaviour but also includes what many would term presentation. In Deuteronomy chapter 22 verse 5 we're told, The concept of softness here probably involves a cluster of related things.

Sexual deviancy, men acting and dressing like women, a devotion to luxury, ease and pleasure. And these are the sinners in Paul's list that get the most attention as they excite the most controversy in the current context. However, they are classed alongside sexually immoral persons more generally, alongside drunkards and other sinners whose sins are more economic in character.

Paul's point here, however, is to call the Corinthians to live out the transformation that has occurred in their lives. They used to be all of these things. They used to be defined by such behaviours, traits and practices.

But something changed. He writes, He presumably has their baptism in mind here, when they were washed and their setting apart was sealed to them. Baptism is also a public declaration of our vindication by God, sealing our justification.

Like the coronation ceremony performed upon someone who has acceded to the throne, baptism is a formal solemnisation of our new status in Christ. We should be able to look back at our baptisms and recall all the realities that have been sealed to us in it. Adoption, justification, sanctification, forgiveness of sins.

And then grasping hold of these promises and gifts by faith, live confidently in terms of them. That seems to be what Paul intends here. By recalling the Corinthians to the fact of their baptism, he will now call them to live out its meaning faithfully.

The Corinthians seem to have used slogans to describe their spirituality. And Paul takes these up and responds to them. Paul responds to their slogans in verses 12-14.

So the Corinthian slogan, Paul's response, The Corinthian slogan, And then the Corinthian slogan, And then Paul's response, You should see the symmetry between those statements. The Corinthians believe that everything has permitted them. But not everything is helpful and edifying.

They champion unfettered liberty. But such liberty can take liberties with us and end up binding us to its service. As they are elevated spiritual persons, they think it doesn't matter what they do with their bodies.

Yet the body is not marginalised by Christian spirituality. The body will not be finally destroyed, but it belongs to the Lord and it will be raised up just as Christ's body was raised. The Corinthians seem to use this slogan about food to justify their sexual promiscuity and other forms of sexual immorality.

If the body is just going to be destroyed, it doesn't really matter that much what you do or don't do with your body. They could continue sleeping with prostitutes because the body ultimately does not matter. Our bodies, however, Paul argues, are in an intimate union with Christ.

They are his members, his limbs and his organs. He talks about this sort of thing in Romans, in chapter 6, verse 13. In the context of that chapter he is talking about baptism.

In baptism our bodies are presented to God. They are marked out as his and they are marked out for resurrection. In chapter 12, verse 1 of Romans.

Spiritual worship involves the presentation of bodies. Our bodies belong to Christ and should not be joined to prostitutes. Paul quotes Genesis chapter 2, verse 24 about the man and the woman becoming one flesh.

Irrespective of the intent of the parties involved, a union occurs. Paul makes the statement flee from sexual immorality. The Corinthians implicit response is, Then Paul responds by arguing that the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

The church, as Paul has argued in chapter 3, verses 16-17, is God's temple. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. The individual, however, is also the temple, with the spirit dwelling in them.

We must treat our bodies accordingly. They are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are not our own to act with however we please.

We were bought with the price of Christ's sacrificed body. And we must glorify God in our bodies for that reason. A question to consider.

How does the foundation of Christian sexual ethics, as described by Paul, contrast with the foundation of modern sexual ethics?