

The Attackers: The Fall of Jerusalem to Chaldea, 586 B.C.; Zedekiah's Sons Are Executed & He Is Blinded by Nebuchadnezzar; the False Prophets' Dreams Turn into Nightmares; Judah Judged for Its Idolatry; False Prophets Condemned by God; Loss of Thought Goes before the Fall; Judah's Prophets & Priests Do not Attend to God's Flock & God Attends to Them with Punishment, Jer 23:1-2

30. When Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah was forced to watch the execution of his sons and then have his eyes put out.

In the 11th year of Zedekiah's reign, just as the supply of food in the city was exhausted, the Chaldean army effected a breach in the wall, and the king of Babylon with his high officials came in and sat in the middle gate. Zedekiah and his men of war, seeing this, fled my night, taking the ill-advised route by the road to Jericho; were pursued and captured in the plains of the Jordan; and Zedekiah was brought before the king of Babylon at Riblah 'rib'-lal. After putting to death Zedekiah's sons and the nobles of Judah before his eyes, the king of Babylon then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and carried him captive to Babylon, where, it is uncertain how long after, he died. Ezekiel's prophecy of his doom is enigmatic: "I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (Ezekiel 12:13).¹

31. Zedekiah bought the public lie; Zedekiah's destiny was to die in infamy. He chose to believe the hollow words of the false prophets rather than the inspired prophecy of the Lord through His true prophet, Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 23:25 - "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!'

v. 26 - "How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart,

v. 27 - who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal?

v. 28 - "The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the Lord.

v. 29 - "Is not My word like fire [a symbol of personal judgment to unbelievers]?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer [a symbol of national judgment] which shatters a rock [a client nation; here, the Southern Kingdom; today, the United States]?"

v. 30 - "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who steal My words from each other.

v. 31 - "Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The Lord declares.'

v. 32 - "Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the Lord, "and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the Lord.

¹ John Franklin Genung, "Zedekiah," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:3142.

32. How and why had things come to this pass? It all started with the failure of the prophets and the priests to teach doctrine to the people of the Southern Kingdom:

Jeremiah 23:1 - “Woe [הוי (hoy): prelude to a dressing down] to the shepherds [רעה (ra’ah): the prophets and the priests] who are destroying and scattering the sheep [צאן (so’n): flock] of My pasture [מרעהיה (mar’iyt): Judah]!” declares the Lord.

v. 2 - Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not [לא (lo’)] attended [(1) Qal perfect of פקד (paqath): paid attention; cared for] to them; behold, I am about to attend [(2) Qal active participle of פקד (paqath) punish] to you for the evil of your deeds,” declares the Lord.

33. The Lord accuses the clergy of “not paying attention” to His flock. The **first use** of the verb is a Qal perfect which refers to a completed action resulting in an ongoing status quo. The clergy was not doing its job.
34. The **second use** of the verb is a Qal active participle. The Lord announces the punishment that He will personally administer.
35. The verb *paqath* is interpreted differently based on its use in either a positive or negative context:

פקד (paqath). God “attends” or “takes note of” someone or something and acts accordingly, whether to bestow divine blessing or judgment. Thus, in positive contexts *paqath* is often glossed as “be concerned about, care for, attend to, help”; while in negative contexts it is typically glossed as “punish.”

The negative meaning punish is most often construed with the collocation *paqath* ’l, where the preposition indicates the object of divine displeasure. This construction is responsible for the traditional translation: “to visit sins upon one.” (p. 659)

God is the only legitimate author of punishment in the Old Testament. While his punishment at times extends to non-Israelites, ... the people of Israel and/or their leaders are most often the object of this punishment.² (p. 660)

36. The metaphor of shepherd and sheep is common throughout the Bible. Jesus calls Himself the “good Shepherd” in John 10:11.
37. In our passage, the “shepherds” are scattering the Lord’s “sheep.” They have not taught doctrine to the “sheep” and the “sheep” had wandered into the evil “sheepfold” of idolatry.
38. For this failure to perform their duties before God, the Lord pronounces the administration of punishment upon these prophets and priests.
39. Two examples are given in:

Jeremiah 29:21 - “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying to you falsely in My name, ‘Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will slay them before your eyes.

² Tyler F. Williams, “פקד,” in *New Testament Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, gen. ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). 3:659–60.

Jeremiah 29:22 - 'Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "May the Lord make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire,

v. 23a - because they have acted foolishly in Israel ..."

40. From these passages in Jeremiah, two principles become obvious: **(1)** Divine punishment is imposed upon those who speak the public lie, and **(2)** divine punishment is imposed upon those who believe the public lie.