

## Profaning the Holy Name (Jeremiah 34:1–22)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (9/6/2020)

### Introduction

#### 1. The *time* of this prophecy

Chapter 34 and 35 record events just days before the destruction of Jerusalem (586 b. c.).

#### 2. The *occasion* of this prophecy

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to speak a word to the king, Zedekiah. There were two things in that message: (1) A *divine affirmation* was pronounced that Jerusalem would fall to the Chaldeans (vv. 2, 3). (2) A *divine mercy* was extended to the wicked king (vv. 4, 5).

#### 3. Zedekiah's *response*: a glimmer of hope, perhaps? (vv. 8–11).

Zedekiah covenanted with the people to free their enslaved brothers and sisters. Perhaps Zedekiah hoped that in so doing the Lord would relent about destroying the city. The people agreed and obeyed, freeing their slaves.

The plan was reversed, and the slaves were put back under bondage again. This shameful reversal occasioned the Lord's word, "*But then you . . . profaned my name*" (v. 16). Here is a horrible sin that is rarely understood by modern Christians.

### I. The Significance of a Name

#### 1. Names in ancient biblical cultures had great significance.

People and places were given names that reflected their importance, significance, or expectation. In ancient times, a name was the symbol of character, honor, and authority. We see this in the instances of God's changing the names of people or places such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Peter (Gen. 4:25; 16:11; 29:32).

In the text, the Lord was concerned that Israel's behavior was giving the Him a bad name by the nation's disobedience.

#### 2. The name of God is not *God*.

##### a. God is *Elohim*

The Hebrew language denotes all supernatural beings as *Elohim*. We translate that designation as *God*. The problem is that most believe there is only *one Elohim*. However, the very term is *plural* for *El*, the mighty one: "*The Mighty One [El], God [Elohim], the Lord [Yahweh]!*" (Josh. 22:22).

Many passages reveal more than one god (Psa. 82:1). There is only *one* supreme *Elohim*, the God of the Bible (Deut. 32:9). This is not a contradiction but a statement that no other god is equal to the one true God.

The true God often identifies Himself by His superior abilities, such as the Creator of heaven and earth (Jer. 33:2). He also uses the term "*Most High*" (*El-yon*; Psa. 82:6; Gen. 14:22). (.)

##### b. God's name is *Yahweh*.

Moses was concerned to identify God correctly to the people of Israel because they would want to know His name (Ex. 3:13–15). *Yahweh* is a form of the verb "*to be*" (*hayah*). He clearly stated, "*This is my name forever.*"

## II. His Name to Be Held in Honor

### 1. What Yahweh revealed to Moses about His name

Moses watched the Lord and found Him difficult to comprehend. He asked Him to show His glory. The Lord consented” (Ex. 34:5). He did so to *proclaim* the name (Ex. 34:6, 7).

### 2. Israel’s sad failure to rightly honor His name

In Malachi, the Lord gave His final judgment against Israel. He began this judgment by showing how the priests had despised His name (Mal. 1:6; 2:2).

How did Israel despise Yahweh’s name? The third commandment is, “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*” (Ex. 20:7). The Lord’s name is not to be treated as worthless or profaned.

It is to be honored by careful attention to Him, loving and cherishing Him, obeying and serving Him, and submitting to His will. Simply put, His name is honored when His people listen, believe, and trust Him (Num. 6:22–27).

## III. The Sin Illustrated

### 1. How did Zedekiah profane His name?

First, it was a covenant issue: “*I myself made a covenant with your fathers*” (v. 13). That covenant required them to free their household slaves every seven (Ex. 21:2). The fathers, however, “*did not listen to me*” (v. 14).

When the people disobeyed in this, their servants of *contract* became *property*, marring the image and profaning the name of God. Zedekiah decided to honor the contract and release the people from bondage. Perhaps he was reminded of the blessings and cursings of the covenant and hoped this would reverse the curse and stop the Chaldean invasion. Freeing the servants appeared to be successful, but rather than continue the obedience, Zedekiah reversed the plan and made the servants of contract property again.

### 2. The sin they committed

The Hebrew term translated *profane* means, literally, *to wound* (v. 15a). This profaning involved the covenant and their disobedience to the covenant (v. 15b). The Lord charged them, “*You turned around and profaned my name*” (v. 16).

### 3. The sin had two parts.

First, it was selfish fear, a prideful effort to manipulate the Lord and His will to avoid unpleasant consequences.

Second, the sin degraded the authority of God and diminished His glory before a people who needed Him most—the slaves (Rom. 2:23, 24).

## How Does This Sin Affect Us?

### 1. Christians are also related to the Name through covenant (Eph. 1:20, 21).

### 2. Jesus is the One the Father has exalted and given a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9; Col. 3:17).

### 3. Are we living each day to the glory of His name? (Rev. 15:4; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12).