

Ezekiel Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Since the people did not seem to understand the parable of the devouring fire, Ezekiel now explains the impending judgment in terms of a sword.

First, the LORD is pictured as a warrior who says, "I the LORD have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath" (verse 5).

Then the sword is sharpened to make a sore slaughter (verse 10), and directed toward Judah (verse 20).

Finally, Ammon would likewise be slain by the sword (verses 28-32).

(Verse 21), gives interesting insight into the Babylonian practice of divination.

Three distinct ways for determining the will of the gods are mentioned.

Casting arrows (much like our "drawing straws"), consulting images (directly or as mediums to departed spirits), and hepatoscopy, or the divination by inspecting the liver of animals.

In the last named practice, a sacrificial animal was slain, its liver was examined, and the particular shape and configuration was compared with a catalog of symptoms and predictions.

The point is that no matter how much the Babylonian king foolishly uses his divination, the will of the one true God will be accomplished.

In verses (21:1-7) The Word came.

This is the sign of the sword against Jerusalem.

God depicts His judgment in terms of a man unsheathing his polished sword for a deadly thrust.

God is the swordsman (verses 3-4), but Babylon is His sword (verse 19).

Ezekiel 21:1-2 "And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying," "Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop [thy word] toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel,"

This is the beginning of another prophecy.

The historical background for this prophecy is Nebuchadnezzar's (588 B.C. campaign), to quell revolts in Judah, as well as Tyre and Ammon.

Ezekiel 21:3 "And say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I [am] against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked."

In time of judgment and war, the just are sometimes cut off with the unjust.

The "sword being drawn out of his sheath" shows just how quickly this might happen.

The sword, also, shows the severity of the attack.

We know that the conquest of Israel by Babylon was in several phases, and took several years to finish.

This is speaking of that final phase.

Ezekiel 21:4 "Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the south to the north:"

It seems such a shame for the righteous to suffer, but that is the fate of the world.

We are in the world together.

Natural phenomena affect both, and so does war.

In Babylon's indiscrimination as an invader, people in the army's path die, whether righteous or wicked.

This occurs from North to South, through the whole span of Israel's land tying in with the judgment pictured by fire (in 20:45-49).

Trees, green or dry, probably depict people whether righteous or wicked.

Ezekiel 21:5 "That all flesh may know that I the LORD have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath: it shall not return any more."

The reason the sword will not be returned to the sheath, is because this is the final battle.

There will be no question of where this judgment came from, because there had been so much prophecy given pertaining to it.

Even Babylon is aware of the prophecies that have gone forth.

Ezekiel 21:6 "Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of [thy] loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes."

We see from this, that Ezekiel is supposed to be so grieved by this, that his sigh will be so great, it appears that he has broken his loin.

I am sure it does greatly grieve Ezekiel to bring this terrible news to his fellow countrymen.

The bitterness of the eyes is speaking of the tears that flow, when he is bringing this prophecy.

Ezekiel 21:7 "And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak [as] water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD."

Those around Ezekiel will probably, not understand why he is crying and in such pain.

What they do not realize, is that a prophet feels the pain of those he is prophesying against.

The description of the people upon which this terror has come, is their hearts shall melt, their hands will tremble as a feeble person, they will faint from fear, and their knees will be weak as water.

This is a terrible sight.

Of course, as Ezekiel is telling this, he sees it in his mind's eye, as well.

His sorrow is great.

Ezekiel 21:8-9 "Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying," "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished:"

There was a break in the prophecy, perhaps for Ezekiel to strengthen.

The sword is sharpened and ready to go.

This prophecy is not for the future.

It is to happen then.

"Furbished" means polished.

Soldiers, many times, polish their weapons just before a battle begins.

Ezekiel 21:10 "It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, [as] every tree."

This sword is in the hands of the enemy.

We must remember however, that God sent this sword in judgment.

"Contemneth", in the verse above, means to spurn, or disappear.

The new King James Version describes the last sentence as: It despises the scepter of my son as it does all wood.

Possibly this affirmed that God's sword, so overwhelming (in verse 10a), was to despise the Judean royal scepter, which was powerless to stop it and would soon pass away.

God's judgment was too strong for this object made of (or partly of) wood, as it holds in contempt all such items of wood.

"My son" may refer to Judah, or to the king as God's "son," such as was Solomon.

Ezekiel 21:11 "And he hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer."

God is always the judge and executioner, no matter what He uses.

Ezekiel 21:12 "Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it [shall be] upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon [thy] thigh."

This is Ezekiel who is to howl and cry.

Ezekiel could not possibly bring this type of message without it breaking his heart.

The "smiting of the thigh" is another sign of the crying and howling of deep grief.

The fact this destruction will be no respecter of persons, is another reason to mourn.

Even the leaders will be killed by the sword.

Strike thy thigh can also be translated, "beat your breast".

In either wording, it is an emphatic gesture of grief that the prophet acts out.

This accompanies further symbols of grief in his "cry," "howl", smite or clapping of hands (See verse 14).

Ezekiel 21:13 "Because [it is] a trial, and what if [the sword] condemn even the rod? it shall be no [more], saith the Lord GOD."

It will appear that the rod of God has been overcome.

This is not the truth, however.

The attacking sword is from God, as well as the rod.

This is a chastisement from God upon His people to change their ways.

Ezekiel 21:14 "Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite [thine] hands together, and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it [is] the sword of the great [men that are] slain, which entereth into their privy chambers."

Those of great wealth have places which are very private.

Even if they hide in these places, they will be found and run through with the sword.

They cannot hide from God.

The smiting of the hands shows the horror of it all.

Ezekiel 21:15 "I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that [their] heart may faint, and [their] ruins be multiplied: ah! [it is] made bright, [it is] wrapped up for the slaughter."

Those in Jerusalem thought that their walls and their strong gates would save them.

God knows the weak points in the gate.

This is what is meant by the point.

The gates will fall and the walls with them.

The people will faint in their hearts, when they see there is no hope.

The sword is wrapped up until battle.

Ezekiel 21:16 "Go thee one way or other, [either] on the right hand, [or] on the left, whithersoever thy face [is] set."

Whichever way the soldiers went, there was destruction by the sword.

It would not matter whether they were on the right or left, the destruction would come.

This had to be terrible for Ezekiel to see in his thoughts, as he was prophesying.

These were his people.

Ezekiel 21:17 "I will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said [it]."

It appears, at the clapping of God's hand the fury would stop.

When God speaks, it is so.

Ezekiel 21:18-19 "The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying," "Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose [it] at the head of the way to the city."

Now, we begin with a new part of the prophecy.

This imagery sees Babylon's army on the march coming to a crossroads.

One road leads to Jerusalem, and the other probably to Rabbath, the capital of Ammon.

There will be signs posting the direction.

The sword is the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who is faced with a decision.

One sign points to Jerusalem and Judah, the other to Rabbah.

Ezekiel 21:20 "Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defended."

At this point in the road, the invader could choose one way, or the other.

(In 593 B.C.), Ammon had conspired with Judah against Babylon.

The king had to decide which place to attack, so that he sought his gods through divination (See verse 21).

Ezekiel 21:21 "For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made [his] arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver."

The head of the two ways means to either go to Jerusalem and Judah or Rabbah.

All of the things mentioned in the verse above, are things connected with the occult.

This king of Babylon was not a godly man.

He took his directions from witchcraft.

Three methods are available to Babylon's leader.

He shook arrows and let them fall, then read a conclusion from the pattern.

He looked at the Teraphim (idols), examined an animal liver to gain help from his gods.

Actually, the true God controlled this superstition to achieve His will, the attack on Jerusalem and Judah.

Later, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Rabbah in Ammon East of the Jordan (verses 28-32).

Ezekiel 21:22 "At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint [battering] rams against the gates, to cast a mount, [and] to build a fort."

When the quiver was shaken, the arrow that was for Jerusalem came forth.

The rest of this is telling how they battered the gates down.

We must remember in all of this, some false god had no control over this situation.

God controls even Satan.

Ezekiel 21:23 "And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken."

When the people in Jerusalem heard of the divination that went on at the separation of the roads, they still did not believe that the Babylonians would be able to take Jerusalem.

They did not want to believe that the protection of God had been removed from His holy city.

They were wrong.

Ezekiel 21:24 "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, [I say], that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand."

We see again here, why God is letting this happen.

They have sinned by worshipping other gods, and God has not forgotten it.

He is totally aware of the sins they thought they had cleverly hidden.

God reminds them here, of the curses that would come upon them, if they sinned in this manner.

They were so used to God protecting them, that they could not believe He would allow them to be destroyed.

It is the Hand of God that is against them.

He is using the king of Babylon to carry out His wishes.

God is still in control.

It is just not in the way they expect.

Ezekiel 21:25 "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity [shall have] an end,"

The prince will be punished along with the people.

This is speaking of Zedekiah.

Ezekiel 21:26 "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this [shall] not [be] the same: exalt [him that is] low, and abase [him that is] high."

No longer will Zedekiah reign.

He is toppled.

The diadem is not only a crown for a king, but many times speaks of the mitre of the high priest.

It appears from this, that the high priest is punished the same as Zedekiah.

Neither office was fully restored after the captivity.

This marked the commencement of "The Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

Ezekiel 21:27 "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no [more], until he come whose right it is; and I will give it [him]."

The meaning of overturn is overthrow (repeat scripture with the word overthrown and see how it makes more sense, literally).

This 3-fold statement expresses the severest degree of unsettled and chaotic conditions.

Israel was to experience severe instability and even the kingly privilege will not be Israel's again until the Messiah comes, "to whom it rightly belongs," or "whose right it is".

God will give the kingship to Him (Jer. 23:5-8), the greater "David" (Ezek. 37:24).

His "right" is that perfect combination of priestly and royal offices (Hebrew chapters 5 to 7).

Ezekiel 21:28 "And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; even say thou, The sword, the sword [is] drawn: for the slaughter [it is] furbished, to consume because of the glittering:"

In the separation of the roads, when the king of Babylon practiced divination, the Ammonites thought they were safe.

Now, we see that God will deal with them also.

They will be killed by the sword, the same as those in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 21:29 "Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine a lie unto thee, to bring thee upon the necks of [them that are] slain, of the wicked, whose day is come, when their iniquity [shall have] an end."

It appears from this Scripture that the Ammonites divined, as well as Nebuchadnezzar.

They had put their faith in a false god.

They rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem, and God will now destroy them.

Their iniquity had not been overlooked by God.

Their reproach was the gleeful disdain they heaped on Jerusalem when the city fell, the temple was profaned, and Judeans were taken captive.

Ezekiel 21:30 "Shall I cause [it] to return into his sheath? I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity."

The Ammonites were natives of this land, it appears.

They were nomads who were descended from Lot's youngest daughter.

For the Ammonites to resist Babylon would be useless, for they would be slaughtered in their own land.

Ezekiel 21:31 "And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, [and] skillful to destroy."

It would not help them at all to fight against these Babylonians, because it is actually God who has sent the Babylonians.

The blowing just makes the fire burn more brightly.

They are evil, and God will use an evil king to destroy them.

Ezekiel 21:32 "Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire; thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; thou shalt be no [more] remembered: for I the LORD have spoken [it]."

This is the final end of the Ammonites.

They will not be restored, as Jerusalem will be.

Their destruction is final.

They will not only be destroyed, but forgotten, as well.

This prophecy came true in detail.

It was never rebuilt.

Ezekiel Chapter 21 Questions

1. Son of man, set thy face toward _____.
2. Who, besides Jerusalem, was this prophecy for?
3. What is shown by the "sword being out of his sheath"?
4. In time of judgment and war, the _____ are sometimes cut off with the _____.
5. The conquest of Israel by Babylon was in several _____.
6. Why is there no question where this judgment came from?
7. How greatly is Ezekiel grieved by this prophecy?
8. Describe the people at this terror of war.
9. What does "furbished" mean?
10. The sword is in the hands of the _____.
11. What must we remember, however?

12. What is Ezekiel told to do in verse 12?
13. What does the "smiting of the thigh" show?
14. Why can the wealthy not hide in their private place and be safe?
15. What had been thought about the walls of Jerusalem and their gates?
16. When the people see there is no hope, what will they do?
17. In verse 17, God smites His hands together and does what?
18. What are the two ways in verse 19?
19. Where do the two roads lead?
20. Who stood at the dividing of the roads?
21. What was he doing there?
22. All of the things he did were connected to the _____.
23. What is the "looking in the liver" similar to in our day?
24. Which arrow came forth, when the quiver was shaken?
25. What effect did the divination at the parting of the roads have on the people of Jerusalem?
26. Why is God allowing this to happen?
27. Who is the prince of Israel in verse 25?
28. What did the removing of the diadem tell us?
29. Who is the great High Priest?
30. In verse 28, a judgment is made on whom?
31. Who, besides Nebuchadnezzar, divined?
32. Who were the Ammonites descended from?
33. What eventually happens to the Ammonites?