

Sword & Furnace

(20) Ezekiel 21:1–22:31

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Ezek 21:1-17 – Babylon, the Sword of God

Summary: God is bearing His sword against Jerusalem and will “*cut off both the righteous and wicked from*” the exiles and everyone involved will know it was the Lord’s doing because He declared it beforehand. God’s sword despises the scepter or rule of Zedekiah and will cut through his scepter like wood. This third time of the Babylonian sword will do double damage of the previous times. God is directing even the thrusts of the sword.

Ezek 21:18-27 – God directs the sword of Babylon

¹⁸ *The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: ¹⁹ “And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put it at the head of the road to the city. ²⁰ Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. ²¹ For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver. ²² In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a siege mound, and to build a wall. ²³ And it will be to them like a false divination in the eyes of those who have sworn oaths with them; but he will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken. ²⁴ “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. ²⁵ Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, ²⁶ thus says the Lord God: “Remove the turban, and take off the crown; Nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. ²⁷ Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, Until He comes whose right it is, And I will give it to Him.” ’*

What decision did the king of Babylon have to make?

Appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go: God explained to Ezekiel that the **sword of the king of Babylon** stood at a crossroads, deciding to next

go to either **Rabbah of the Ammonites** or to **Judah, into fortified Jerusalem**.

What did King Nebuchadnezzar do to help him decide?

He shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver: Ezekiel pictured Nebuchadnezzar **at the parting of the road**, using all the methods pagans used to get guidance from their gods.

So, what decision did the King of Babylon make?

In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: At the parting of the roads, Nebuchadnezzar decided to go to **Jerusalem**. He would come against the city with his **battering rams** and bring a great **slaughter**.

What really caused him to decide where to go first?

It will be to them like a false divination: It would be false in the sense that though Nebuchadnezzar sought the pagan gods with their superstitions of divination, *Yahweh was actually guiding him*. As much as the people of Judah and Jerusalem may have prayed the king of Babylon would *not* come against them, God would guide him to them to **bring their iniquity to remembrance**.

Why was the prince of Judah to be humbled?

Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered: Because Judah sinned so memorably before God, it was to be expected that He would remember them in judgment. They prayed and hoped that God and Nebuchadnezzar would forget about them, but they would not.

Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel: After generations of hardened and persistent sin, it could be said that the **day has come** for judgment and of the prince of Israel (probably Zedekiah), his **iniquity shall end**.

Remove the turban, and take off the crown: All the emblems of royalty and leadership would be removed from Zedekiah; **nothing shall remain the same**. He would be humbled, and the humble of the land would be its only inhabitants.

What is the significance of “overthrown” being repeated three times?

Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! Three was related to God, so it His His doing... The idea is repeated three times both for great emphasis and because Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Jerusalem three times, with the third bringing complete destruction and conquest.

What does it mean that “it shall be no longer”?

Until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him: Zedekiah was the last of a long line descended from David to reign in some sense of Jerusalem and Israel. He and his reign would be **overthrown**, and no descendant of David would sit on the throne **until He comes whose right it is** – that is, until God’s Messiah, the true Son of David comes.

- This will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ during the Millennial Kingdom.
- We know this from the Davidic Covenant.

What is the Davidic covenant?

This refers to God’s promises to David through Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17:11–14, 2 Chronicles 6:16). This is an unconditional covenant made between God and David through which God promises David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and would establish a kingdom that would endure forever.

What does it mean that the David Covenant is unconditional?

God did not place any conditions of obedience upon its fulfillment. The surety of the promises made rests solely on God’s faithfulness and does not depend at all on David or Israel’s obedience.

Besides the reference to the genealogy of the Messiah, what else did the Davidic Covenant address?

God reaffirms the promise of the land that He made in the first two covenants with Israel (the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants)...

2 Samuel 7:10 – I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore.

God then promises that David’s son will succeed him as king of Israel and that this son (Solomon) would build the temple. (2 Samuel 7:12–13)

- What began as a promise that David’s son Solomon would build the temple turns into something different—the promise of an everlasting kingdom.

Other references to the Davidic Covenant are found in Jeremiah 23:5; 30:9; Isaiah 9:7; 11:1; Luke 1:32, 69; Acts 13:34; and Revelation 3:7.

How do those who reject a literal Millennial Kingdom believe the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled?

They believe it will be fulfilled during the Eternal State, or spiritually now during the church age since they believe the church has replaced Israel in the plan of God.

What kind of problems result from thinking the church has replaced Israel in the plan of God?

- Their eschatology is pretty worthless... Revelation has to be allegorized and all Old Testament prophecies of the return of the Messiah are considered to have been fulfilled in history (preterism).
- It also leads to antisemitism.

What is the preterist view of the end times?

Preterists consider all Bible prophecy to be history.

- They interpret the book of Revelation as a symbolic picture of first-century conflicts, not a description of what will occur in the end times.
- Preterists teach that all the end-times prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans attacked and destroyed Jerusalem.
- Preterism teaches that every event normally associated with the end times—Christ’s second coming, the tribulation, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment—has already happened.
- Jesus’ return to earth was a “spiritual” return, not a physical one.

How can preterists justify their beliefs?

Preterists usually point to Jesus’ Olivet Discourse to bolster their argument...

Matt 24:34 – Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened

The preterist takes this to mean that everything Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24 had to have occurred within one generation of His speaking—the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was therefore “Judgment Day.”

What is the problem with preterism?

- You have to spiritualize the Second Coming prophecies when all the First Coming prophecies were literally fulfilled.
- God’s covenant with Israel is everlasting (Jer 31:33-6)
- There will be a future restoration of Israel (Isa 11:12).
- The apostle Paul warned against those who, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, teach falsely “that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:17–18).

- Jesus' mention of "this generation" should be taken to mean the generation that is alive to see the beginning of the events described in Matthew 24.

Ezek 21:28-32 – A Sword Against the Ammonites

Summary: God will send His sword against the Ammonites "whose iniquity shall end." God's sword of Babylon will end them so that they "*shall not be remembered.*"

Who were the Ammonites?

The Ammonites were a Semitic people, closely related to the Israelites. Despite that relationship, they were more often counted as enemies than friends.

- Lot, Abraham's nephew, was the progenitor of the Ammonites.

What do we know about Lot?

After Abraham and Lot separated (Genesis 13), Lot settled in the city of Sodom. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness, Lot and his daughters fled to the hill country on the southern end of the Dead Sea.

- Probably thinking they were the only people left on the earth, Lot's daughters got him drunk and had incestuous relations with him to produce children (Genesis 19:37-38).
- The older daughter had a son named Moab ("from father"), and the younger gave birth to Ben-Ammi ("son of my people").
- The Ammonites, descendants of Ben-Ammi, were a nomadic people who lived in the territory of modern-day Jordan.

When did Israel encounter the Ammonites?

In the time of Moses, the fertile plains of the Jordan River valley were occupied by the Amorites, Ammonites and Moabites.

- When Israel left Egypt, the Ammonites refused to assist them in any way, and God punished them for their lack of support (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).
- Later, as the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God instructed them, "*When you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession*" (Deuteronomy 2:19).

What was the downfall of the Ammonites?

The Ammonites were pagans who worshiped the gods Milcom and Molech. Molech was a fire-god with the face

of a calf; his images had arms outstretched to receive the babies who were sacrificed to him.

- God commanded the Israelites not to marry these pagans, because intermarriage would lead the Israelites to worship false gods.
- Solomon disobeyed and married Naamah the Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21), and as God warned, he was drawn into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-8).
- Like their god, the Ammonites were cruel. When Nahash the Ammonite was asked for terms of a treaty (1 Samuel 11:2), he proposed gouging out the right eye of each Israelite man. Amos 1:13 says that the Ammonites would rip open pregnant women in the territories they conquered.
- Under King Saul's leadership, Israel defeated the Ammonites and made them vassals. David continued that sovereignty over Ammon and later besieged the capital city to solidify his control.
- After the split of Israel and Judah, the Ammonites began to ally themselves with the enemies of Israel.
- After Nebuchadnezzar conquered them, the Ammonites who were left mixed with the Arabs.

Ezek 22:1-16 – Sins of Jerusalem

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ² "Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations! ³ Then say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself. ⁴ You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to the end of your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries. ⁵ Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult. ⁶ "Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you. ⁷ In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow. ⁸ You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. ⁹ In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness. ¹⁰ In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity. ¹¹ One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. ¹² In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me," says the Lord God. ¹³ "Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at

the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst. ¹⁴ *Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it.* ¹⁵ *I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you.* ¹⁶ *You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I am the Lord.” ’ ’ ’*

Why was Jerusalem called the bloody city?

Will you judge the bloody city? With a double call, God told Ezekiel to pronounce judgment upon Jerusalem, **the bloody city**. Jerusalem was guilty of many sins, and large among them was injustice leading to death and violence. Perhaps Jerusalem was not as **bloody** as many pagan cities, but they had the word, prophets, and priests of God. They were rightly held to a much higher standard.

What abominations were in mind here?

Show her all her abominations: This refers to another of Jerusalem's many sins, that of gross idolatry. Ezekiel noted, **she makes idols within herself to defile herself**. They were defiled by their unfaithfulness to God and to the actual immoral practices connected to the worship of these pagan idols.

Whose fault was the coming judgment of Jerusalem?

You have caused your days to draw near: The coming judgment upon Jerusalem was their own fault. God was gracious and patient with them over many generations, but eventually they had **come to the end of your years**.

How would other nations react to the judgment of Jerusalem?

Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult: Jerusalem could expect no sympathy from the surrounding nations, both **near** and **far**. They would be **a reproach to the nations and a mockery to all countries**.

Who is called out as being worthy of rebuke?

Look, the princes of Israel: In the first five verses of Ezekiel 22, God rebuked the sinful city. Now He focused His rebuke on the actual sinners in the city, beginning with **the princes of Israel**.

Each one has used his power to shed blood in you: Instead of using their **power** in ways that would honor God and serve His people, the **princes of Israel** used their power in violent, self-serving ways.

How were the Jerusalem leaders anti-family?

they have made light of father and mother (v7)

Why is it that corrupt leaders attack the family?

The family is a basic building block of society. If you can undermine the family, you can make a godless society.

How is it that God established the institution of the family?

The concept of family was introduced in the very beginning...

Genesis 1:28 – *God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*

God's plan for creation was for men and women to marry and have children. A man and a woman would form a "one-flesh" union through marriage (Genesis 2:24), and they with their children become a family, the essential building block of human society.

- The Mosaic covenant reinforces the importance of family. The Ten Commandments deal with maintaining the cohesiveness of the family. The fifth commandment regarding honoring parents is meant to preserve the authority of parents in family matters, and the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery protects the sanctity of marriage.
- The New Testament makes many of the same commands and prohibitions. Jesus speaks on the sanctity of marriage and against frivolous divorce in Matthew 19. The apostle Paul talks about what Christian homes should look like when he gives the twin commands of “children, obey your parents” and “parents, don't provoke your children” in Ephesians 6:1–4 and Colossians 3:20–21.

How did Jesus expand our concept of Family?

Matthew 12:46-50 – *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*

Jesus is not saying that biological family isn't important; He is making the clear theological point that in the Kingdom of Heaven, the most important family connection is spiritual, not physical.

John 1:12-13 – *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent,*

nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God

How are our cultural leaders undermining the family today?

- Making both divorce & abortion common-place
- Children are seen as a financial burden
- Financial aid encourages single-parent families
- It takes a village... the idea that the government is better at raising children than parents.

What other issues did God have with the rulers of Jerusalem?

In your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow: These were those whom the princes of Israel should have cared for. Instead of caring for families (**father and mother**) and the vulnerable of society, they used and despised them.

How does oppressing the poor show contempt for their Maker (Proverbs 14:31)?

Proverbs 14:31 – *Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*

This is an important biblical principle: our treatment of others reflects (and affects) our relationship with God.

- The word translated as “oppresses” can also be translated “slanders.” It includes the idea of putting down or belittling others.

How is it that demeaning others shows contempt for God?

All people are created by God in His image (Gen 1:27)...

Proverbs 22:2 – *Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.*

Thus, pouring contempt on God's creation slanders God. Matthew 25:31–45 – *Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'* “*They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 'He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'*”

Jesus clearly notes that the way we treat those in need is how we treat Him.

- Another way that oppressing the poor shows contempt for God is that it is in direct disobedience to His

commands to love your neighbor as yourself and not to show favoritism.

- The way we treat the poor reflects our love for God. When we mistreat the poor, we treat God with contempt.

What other issues did God have with the rulers of Jerusalem?

You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths: The sins of the princes of Israel were not only against their community; they were also against God Himself. They sinned against God's glory when they sacrificed and feasted to idols **on the mountains**.

One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife: A further area of sin among the princes of Israel was their sexual immorality and perversion. They not only committed adultery (**with his neighbor's wife**), but they also committed incest with a **daughter-in-law** or **sister**.

They take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase: The final area of sin exposed among the princes of Israel was their economic sins against their own community. They lent money in unjust ways and **made profit from your neighbors by extortion**.

How did God regard the corruption of the leaders of Jerusalem?

Therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made: In the strongest terms possible, God said He would oppose these corrupt leaders of Jerusalem. He hated their **dishonest profit** and the **bloodshed** that came from their dishonest courts.

Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? After shocking with the beating fists, God then spoke to the princes of Israel with clear logic. They should soberly consider if they could stand against the great judgment God promised to bring (**I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it**).

What would be the ultimate consequence of Jerusalem's sins?

I will scatter you among the nations: As in previous passages, God promised to not only conquer Judah and Jerusalem but to **scatter** them in exile. When they sat defiled **in the sight of the nations**, then they would understand how God revealed Himself in judgment.

- This also points to how God would scatter Israel after the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70AD.

Ezek 22:17-23 – Israel in the Furnace

Summary: Israel will be gathered to Jerusalem where it will be like a furnace refining *silver, bronze, iron, lead, or tin*. The dross will be burned off so that only the useful metal remains.

Ezek 22:18-28 – Israel’s Wicked Leaders

Summary: God told Ezekiel that the land of Israel has become unclean with false prophets like lions devouring prey, taking treasure and making widows. Her priests have neglected the Law and cannot distinguish between the holy and unholy. Her princes are like wolves destroying people for dishonest gain.

Have we seen these kinds of issues in the USA?

- Way too many of our religious leaders migrate to false doctrines like the prosperity doctrine that takes advantage of people and universalism that leads people to hell.
- Our political leaders are corrupt hypocrites who talk like they care about their constituents but institute damaging policies that enslave and even destroy people while enriching themselves.

Ezek 22:29-31 – Standing in the Gap

²⁹ *The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.* ³⁰ *So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.* ³¹ *Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord God.*

What did the people of Jerusalem learn from their leaders?

The people of the land have used oppressions: The princes of Israel corruptly mistreated and abused others like this (Ezekiel 22:6-12). It was no surprise that the **people of the land** imitated the behavior of their leaders, preying upon each other and those weaker with violence and oppression.

What bad things are we learning from our cultural leaders today?

Critical Race Theory is damaging to our culture... when you divide people into oppressor and oppressed classes, you don’t actually reduce any perceived systematic oppression, you foster new oppression in order to “compensate.” Two wrongs don’t make a right despite what leftists would have us believe.

What was God looking for in Jerusalem?

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall: The image of the **wall** connects back with the false and weak wall of the false prophets just a few verses before this (Ezekiel 22:28). The false prophets build with *untempered mortar*; God looked for a man to bring strength, stability, and security to Israel.

And stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land: The man God sought was not only a builder, but just as importantly was a man of prayer. Like Abraham (Genesis 20:7) and Moses (Exodus 32:9-14) and David (2 Samuel 24:15-18), God looked for one who would, through prayer, **stand in the gap** between a holy God and His disobedient, rebellious, profane people. This man **in the gap** would fight for and hopefully rescue God’s people in prayer.

But I found no one: Here is the tragedy. God hoped for one who would lead and pray to avert the judgment; but there was none. There were godly people to be sure (such as Jeremiah), but none to fill this role at that time.

Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them: Because of the great sin and corruption of the princes, prophets, priests, and people; because there was no one to lead or pray **in the gap**, the judgment God promised was sure to come. It could not be turned back.

Is God looking for someone to stand in the gap today?

Yes, certainly on behalf of individuals but also to pray for our leaders that we might not have to suffer the consequences of ungodly leadership...

1 Timothy 2:1-2 – *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

What applications come from our discussion today?

- God is in control, those in power do His bidding to serve His purposes.
- God is not done with Israel, the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled.
- Prophecy is to be taken literally as it has been historically understood. Preterism is false doctrine.
- The family is an important building block of society.
- Bad leaders teach people bad things, spiritual discernment is needed.
- We should be among those who stand in the gap