



Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 21

*Theme: Babylon removes last Davidic king
until Messiah comes*

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Theme: Babylon removes last Davidic king until Messiah comes.

McGee Introduction: It is important to study the Book of Ezekiel because it is so often neglected and its message is very pertinent for this hour in which we are living today. Although the words of Ezekiel were spoken many years ago, it was the Word of God as he has almost monotonously repeated: "The word of the LORD came unto me, saying." Since it is the Word of God, it has an application for us in this day and in this nation. The liberal argues that, like the Book of Revelation, the Book of Ezekiel cannot be understood and does not have a message for us. Ezekiel's visions are tremendous, and I do not propose to have the final word on their interpretation. I just stand in awe and wonder. But in this section of the book we are down to the nitty-gritty where the rubber meets the road, and I am sincere when I say that Ezekiel is not difficult to understand and he is very practical for us.

Chapter 21 is one of the most important chapters in the Book of Ezekiel as it makes it very clear that the king of Babylon is going to remove the last king of the Davidic line until Messiah comes.¹

Clarke Introduction: The prophet goes on to denounce the fate of Jerusalem and Judea; using signs of vehement grief, to denote the greatness of the calamity, vv. 2-7. He then changes the emblem to that of a sharp and bright sword, still denoting the same sad event, vv. 8-17; and, becoming yet more explicit, he represents the king of Babylon, who was to be employed by God in this work, as setting out to take vengeance on both the Jews and the Ammonites, for joining with Egypt in a confederacy against him. He is described as standing at the parting of the roads leading to the respective capitals of the Jews and Ammonites; and doubting which to attack first, he commits the decision of the matter to his arts of divination, performed by mingling arrows inscribed with the names of the different nations or cities, and then marching against that whose name was written on the arrow first drawn from the quiver. In this case the name Jerusalem comes forward; and therefore he proceeds against it, vv. 18-24. History itself could scarcely be more explicit than this prophecy. The profane prince Zedekiah as then declared to be given up by God, and his kingdom devoted to utter destruction, for that breach of oath of which the prophet foretells he should be guilty, vv. 25-27. The remaining verses form a distinct prophecy relating to the destruction of the Ammonites, which was fulfilled about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, vv. 28-32.²

Since the people refused to understand Ezekiel's message about the fire on the southland (20:45-49), he gave four messages to expand his parable's meaning. In these messages Ezekiel changed the "fire" to a "sword" and the "Negev" to Judah and Jerusalem.³

Chuck Smith: Now the prophets of God were often very colorful persons. And because people would not always listen to the Word of God, they would often do things to draw the people's attention to create a question in their mind, curiosity, "What in the world is he doing now?" And when these questions would arise or when they would draw the people's attention, then they would preach the message of God to them. And so,

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 20:47). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 20:45-49). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

oftentimes their ministry was extremely colorful, as they were attracting attention, creating the questions in order that they might deliver their message to the people. And as we come in to chapter 21, Ezekiel is getting a lot of attention grabbers here from the Lord and his ministry to the people.⁴

The interpretation of the parable 21:1-7

Ezekiel 21:1

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Constable 1-2: Again the Lord told His prophet to speak a message of judgment against Jerusalem, the pagan sanctuaries, and the whole land of Israel (i.e., Judah). This would be a clarification of the figures used in the previous parable.⁵

[LORD] *Y^ehovah*, Hebrew 3068, *yeh-ho-vaw'*; from Hebrew 1961 (hayah); (the) self-*Existent* or Eternal; *Jehovah*, Jewish national name of God :- Jehovah, the Lord. Compare Hebrew 3050 (Yahh), Hebrew 3069 (Y^ehovih).

LAN: The short message in Ezekiel 20:45-48 introduces the first of three messages about the judgments that would come upon Jerusalem: (1) the sword of the Lord (Ezekiel 21:1-7); (2) the sharpened sword (Ezekiel 21:8-17); (3) the sword of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 21:18-22). The city would be destroyed because it was defiled. According to Jewish law, defiled objects were to be passed through fire in order to purify them (see Numbers 31:22-23; Psalm 66:10-12; Proverbs 17:3). God's judgment is designed to purify; destruction is often a necessary part of that process.

WBC 1-7: *The fire of war and the sword directed against Jerusalem and Israel. 2.* Preach. Cf. 20:46. The words, Jerusalem ... holy places (the Temple and its precincts), and Israel, correspond to the three *souths* of 20:46. 3. My sword. Cf. 21:5; 30:24, 25; 32:10. Jehovah will fight on behalf of his people (Josh 5:13-15); defeat Israel's enemies (Deut 32:41, 42; Isa 31:8; Jer 50:35), and judge the ungodly (Jer 25:31; Isa 66:16). The sword drawn against Israel is that of his agent, Nebuchadnezzar (see v. 19; 12:13; 17:20). I will cut off ... righteous and the wicked. The "green" and "dry" trees of 20:47. This instance of corporate solidarity does not prevent the righteous individual's entering into that fellowship with God that transcends death (cf. ch. 18).⁶

⁴ Chuck Smith, Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor/Founder, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA,

⁵ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on the Book of Ezekiel, 2010

⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

BKC 1-5: In the parable (20:45-49) Ezekiel had “set” his “face toward the south,” but now God told him to set his face against Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuary and prophesy against the land of Israel. The object of God’s judgment was His land, His Holy City, and His dwelling place.

God said that by a sword He would cut off . . . both the righteous and the wicked. This seems to contradict Ezekiel’s earlier prophecy (18:1-24) that only the wicked would die and the righteous would live. This problem so perplexed the translators of the Septuagint that they changed “righteous” to “unrighteous.” One possible solution is that “the righteous and the wicked” may be viewed from the people’s perspective. As far as the people could tell the judgment was indiscriminate. It affected those who were in open idolatry as well as those who claimed to be followers of God. Yet in God’s eyes only the wicked were being punished since He had promised to deliver those who were truly righteous. Another solution is that the phrase “cut off” may refer to captivity, not physical death. Whatever the exact meaning, Ezekiel was stressing the extent of the coming judgment.

The judgment would extend from south to north (already stated in 20:47). In case anyone failed to understand the parable of the forest fire, Ezekiel repeated this phrase to stress that all Judah would be judged. When judgment came, then the people would know that . . . the LORD had drawn His sword (cf. 21:3). Though the people refused to acknowledge the meaning of the parable (20:49), they could not claim ignorance when God’s slaughter would actually begin.⁷

McGee: Ezekiel will repeat this three times in this chapter. There is only one alternative for you: either you agree that the Lord said this, or you take the position that Ezekiel is lying. I believe that the Lord said this to him and that Ezekiel is not giving his viewpoint. I do not think that Ezekiel’s feelings entered into his message very much. Jeremiah was overwhelmed by his feelings; they entered into every word he spoke. I do not think that is true of Ezekiel. In the beginning of his ministry when God gave Ezekiel his commission, He told him that he was going to speak to a rebellious and hardheaded people. God also said at that time He would make Ezekiel’s head harder than theirs. I think maybe a little of that hardness got down to his heart, and so he could really lay it on the line to these people. You actually love the man for this, for, if his feelings had entered into it, this man would have been crushed by the message that he had to give.⁸

ESV 1-7: The Drawn Sword. The opening words directly correspond with those of 20:46-47: set your face, preach, prophesy, and **say** all appear in the same order in those preceding verses. Now, however, the addressees are identified with clarity. The “southland” is Jerusalem, the “south” is now sanctuaries, the “forest land” is the **land of Israel** (in Ezekiel’s distinctive phrase; see note on 7:2). No doubt remains about the focus of the Lord’s judgment, while the destroying agent is translated into the metaphor of the drawn **sword** (21:3).

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:1-5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 21:2

Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop *thy word* toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel,

[**man**] '*adam*, Hebrew 120, *aw-dawm*'; from Hebrew 119 ('*adam*'); *ruddy*, i.e. a *human being* (an individual or the species, *mankind*, etc.) :- × another, + hypocrite, + common sort, × low, man (mean, of low degree), person.

Set thy face toward Jerusalem—This is a continuation of the preceding prophecy; and in this chapter the prophet sets before them, in very plain language, what the preceding metaphors meant, so that they could not complain of his parables.

McGee 2-3: Judgment is impending and apparently now is inevitable. Up to this point, the mercy of God has been extended, but now judgment is coming and there is no alternative.

“Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I am against thee.” This is the first time He has said this about His city of Jerusalem.

“And will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked.” This sounds strange, does it not? Who are the righteous? The ones who say they are righteous? In our day they are the ones who are church members but are not saved at all, the ones who go through the ritual, who are religious. A great many people have the band-aid of religion over the sore of sin. They need to pull that old band-aid off and get that sore lanced, before it destroys them. It's a cancerous sore, and you simply do not cure cancer by putting a band-aid over it. Neither do you cure sin by becoming religious. God said, “I'm cutting it off now; I'm moving in with the sword, and I intend to destroy the city.”⁹

Chuck Smith 2-6: So, at this point having uttered these words, "God has stretched out His sword against Jerusalem," he would have said, "Just hold his loins, bend over and start just sighing." And just really wailing in a sense, just sighing and all.

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.

both righteous and wicked: This pairing shows that God was going to allow the dreadful temporal consequences of sin to affect everyone in the land, both faithful and unfaithful.

Constable 3-5: Ezekiel was to announce that Yahweh stood opposed to His people (cf. Luke 9:5, 41; 19:41; 21:20-24). Instead of being their divine defender (cf. Deut. 32:41; Josh. 5:13-15; Isa. 31:8; 34:5-8; 66:16; Jer. 25:31; 50:35-37; Zeph. 2:12), He was going to turn against them. He would put them to death with a sword (cf. fire, 20:47-48), both

⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the righteous (the green tree) and the wicked (the dry tree) throughout the whole land. The Book of Habakkuk deals with the problem of how and why God would use the wicked Babylonians as His instrument of chastening, a problem that the Israelites could not solve on their own. Everyone would know that He had been responsible for the judgment, and He would not sheath His sword (quench the fire, 20:48). This chapter has more references to the sword of the Lord as a figure of God's judgment than any other chapter in the Bible.

Unfortunately, some of the righteous would suffer along with the wicked, but this is often the case in times of war.

Behold, I am against thee—Dismal news! When God is against us, who can be for us?

And will draw forth my sword—War.

And will cut off from thee—The land of Judea.

Clarke: The righteous and the wicked—All shall be removed from thee. Some shall be cut off—removed by the sword; shall be slain in battle, or by the pestilence; and some shall be cut off—die by the famine; and some shall be cut off—removed from the land by captivity. Now, among the two latter classes there might be many righteous as well as wicked. And when all the provisions were consumed, so that there was no more bread in the city, during the siege by Nebuchadnezzar, the righteous must have suffered as well as the wicked; for they could not be preserved alive, but by miracle, when there was no bread; nor was their perishing for want any loss to them, because the Lord would take them straight to his glory. And however men in general are unwilling to die, yet there is no instance, nor can there be, of any man's complaint that he got to heaven too soon. Again, if God had permitted none to be carried off captive but the wicked, the case of these would be utterly hopeless, as there would be none to set a good example, to preach repentance, to reprove sin, or to show God's willingness to forgive sinners. But God, in his mercy, permitted many of the righteous to be carried off also, that the wicked might not be totally abandoned, or put beyond the reach of being saved. Hence, both Ezekiel and Daniel, and indeed several others, prophets and righteous men, were thus cut off from the land, and carried into captivity. And how much was God's glory and the good of men promoted by this! What a seed of salvation was sown, even in the heathen countries, by thus cutting off the righteous with the wicked! To this we owe, under God, many of the Psalms, the whole of the Book of Ezekiel, all the prophecies of Daniel, the bright example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, the decrees passed in favor of the religion of the true God by Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, etc. And to this dispensation of God's merciful providence we owe the Books and example of Ezra and Nehemiah. Where then is the injustice, so loudly declaimed against, of God's thus cutting off from the land of Judea the righteous with the wicked? The righteous were not cut off for the crimes of the wicked, (see chap. 18), nor were these crimes visited upon them, yet several of them shared in the common calamity, but none perished. Those that were removed by a violent death, (and I believe we shall find few such), got a speedier entrance into eternal glory.

ESV 3-4: The righteous and wicked correspond to the “green” and “dry” trees of 20:47. Whereas elsewhere the fate of the righteous has been marked off from that of the wicked (e.g., 9:4–6), and the teaching of ch. 18 also points in a different direction, here God predicts a judgment that will come on the whole nation and will affect everyone, righteous and wicked alike. Sometimes the righteous suffer not as judgment for their own sin but simply as a trial that is part of life in a fallen world. One must allow here for God's freedom to judge as he will. This is not the first or last time in Scripture that the righteous experience the heavy hand of God (e.g., Job; cf. James 5:11).

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:

From the south to the north—The whole land shall be ravaged from one end to the other.

He is going to draw out the sword from its sheath—all the way from the south to the north.

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.

Clarke: It shall not return any more—That is, till all the work that I have designed for it is done. Nor did it; for Nebuchadnezzar never rested till he had subdued all the lands from the south to the north, from the Euphrates to the Nile.

“It shall not return any more”—the time for judgment has come.

Ezekiel 21:6

Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of *thy* loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes.

Parable of the Sigh (21:6–7).

God told Ezekiel to give vent to his emotions, to groan as a mourner might groan “with breaking heart and bitter grief.” His actions were designed to provoke an inquiry on the part of the captives. He was to explain that his actions dramatized the behavior of the captives when they would hear the news that their Temple had been destroyed in Jerusalem. The tidings would be such as would cause every heart to melt and hands to droop. Spirits would be faint and knees would be as weak as water. As shocking as this sounds, it would happen. Yahweh himself declared it to be so. Five years after Ezekiel

performed this action parable, the news of the destruction of Jerusalem reached the captives in Babylon.¹⁰

The Lord was instructing Ezekiel to express his breaking heart and emotion, in order to convey, through him, the intensity that God felt here.

Sigh ... with the breaking of thy loins. The loins were regarded as the seat of strength (Job 40:16; cf. Ps 66:11; 69:23; Isa 21:3; Nah 2:10). Before their eyes. An acted parable. 9. The exiles in Babylonia would likewise be heartbroken at the news of Jerusalem's fall (cf. 33:21).¹¹

Constable 6-7: The Lord told Ezekiel to let the Jewish exiles among whom he lived witness his groaning, grief, and heartbreak as he delivered this message. When the people asked the prophet why he was so sad, he was to tell them that it was because of the coming judgment.

The need for the action described in these verses suggests that Ezekiel's oral presentation so far had failed to impress his audience. Since they would not be shocked, even by the reference to the righteous perishing with the wicked, a new rhetorical strategy is adopted. Yahweh orders the prophet to perform another sign-act before his hearers. The performance involved paralinguistic nonverbal groaning, normally expressive of the deepest pain and grief.

God would have Ezekiel experience something of what was in His own heart toward the rebellious nation.

Ezekiel's grief would mark the people to whom he spoke this prophecy when they heard the news that the sword was coming. And the Lord guaranteed that the judgment would indeed come.

Clarke: Sigh—with the breaking of thy loins—Let thy mourning for this sore calamity be like that of a woman in the pains of travail.

BKC 6-7: Ezekiel was instructed to act out the grief the people would feel when Jerusalem fell. As he sobbed in anguish, the people would ask what was wrong. He was to answer that it was because of the news that was coming. The awful realization of their country's demise would devastate them (cf. 7:17). Yet there was no doubt it would happen. It will surely take place, declared the Sovereign LORD.¹²

The prophet was directed to show emotional distress in order to depict the coming terror of judgment. The phrase "a breaking heart" literally is "breaking of loins," an allusion to a pain equal to breaking the hips, which were viewed as the seat of strength in a man. "Bitterness" is a reference to unusual anguish.

¹⁰ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 21:6–7). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

¹¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:6–8). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:6–7). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

McGee 6-7: God asks Ezekiel to do something here, and I am not prepared to say whether Ezekiel's feelings are in it or not. He didn't do it naturally—God told him to do it—so I would say that he is acting the part. However, in doing so, he is revealing the heart of God.

The people have complained about Ezekiel's giving parables to them. In Ezekiel 20:49 we read, "Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" In effect, they were saying, "We don't get his message." They didn't *want* to get it; they didn't like to be told that things were wrong. We sometimes think that the parables of the Lord Jesus are obtuse and difficult to understand. They are not, if you *want* to understand them. The religious rulers in His day understood what He was saying—that is the reason they hated Him. They understood He was speaking judgment against them.¹³

ESV 6–7: Intertextual connections suggest that these verses continue to address the destruction of both "righteous and wicked" (see note on vv. 3–4). The groan and breaking heart of v. 6 point back to 9:4, which identifies the righteous by this behavior and thus directly connects this passage to the one with which it is in greatest tension. Verse 7 of ch. 21 echoes 7:17 and the reaction to the coming day of the Lord. The closing phrase, behold ... it will be fulfilled, echoes 7:5–6, 10. This passage, then, infers that all have at some level been defiled and provides a precedent within Ezekiel for the totality of judgment expressed in 21:3–4.

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.

This was speaking of the coming judgment of Nebuchadnezzar on them in B.C. 588-586.

Wherefore sighest thou?—The prophet was a sign unto them. His sighing and mourning showed them how they should act.

Chuck Smith: So he is to go into this little scene of this heavy sighing as he holds his loins and bends. Until they say, "What are you sighing about?" He said, "I'm sighing because of the tidings that are going to be coming. And, of course, when they come, all of you will be sighing and mourning when you hear that Jerusalem has been destroyed, the cities have been murdered." Many of them had families back in Jerusalem still. They are soon to be receiving word that their families had been wiped out.

¹³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The song of the sword 21:8-17

Ezekiel 21:8

Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Just in case you didn't get the message, Ezekiel repeats it again.

Parable of the Sword (21:8–17).

The thought of the unsheathed sword earlier in chapter 21 gave birth to this unit. This parable may have been accompanied by sword brandishing. In any case, Ezekiel pointed to a “sword.” It was sharpened and polished. Its dazzling brightness and sharpness added a fresh element of terror. This sword was designed to fit snugly into the hand of the slayer. Perhaps responding to smiles on the faces of his audience, Ezekiel asked rhetorically, “Shall we rejoice?” i.e., Do you think I am joking? The sword which Ezekiel was describing was no laughing matter. It would serve as a rod to correct God's son Israel who had rejected lesser forms of discipline (21:8–11).

God told Ezekiel to manifest the signs of deep mourning. He was to “cry out and wail” and “strike” his thigh. That sword was coming against God's people. The princes would fall in that day with the people. This would be a “testing” or trial for Judah. The “rod which despises,” i.e., King Zedekiah who despised God's word, would cease to exist. The people would be without a king! (21:12f.).

Ezekiel was told to clap his hands to summons the sword of judgment. He was to “let the sword be doubled the third time,” i.e., brandish his sword three times. This may represent the three times Nebuchadnezzar would invade the land of Judah. In any case, that sword would surround Judah like a besieging army. The point of that sword at every gate would cause consternation. God had provided that glittering sword. It was designed to strike with lightning-like speed. As Ezekiel spoke that sword was ready for its work of slaughter (21:14f.).

The Lord addressed his sword, the king of Babylon. He urged the sword to demonstrate its sharpness and to move in any direction. Babylon was being urged to get on with the judgment. God clapped his hands to order that the sword begin its work. Only when that work was completed could the wrath of Yahweh be appeased (21:16f.).¹⁴

Constable 8-10: Another of Ezekiel's messages was to be poetic. He was to announce that a sword had been sharpened and polished and was now ready to go to work slaughtering people quickly.

A sword, a veritable Excalibur with a life of its own, is made ready for its grim destiny. How could the people rejoice since the rod (scepter, symbol of authority) of God's representative (son) would have no respect for anyone (despise every tree, cf. 20:47) in this judgment? They could not. God's son here refers to Nebuchadnezzar who would accomplish God's will by executing His punishment.

The figures of the rod and the son of God both describe Messiah elsewhere (cf. Gen. 49:9-10; 2 Sam. 7:14), so Ezekiel's hearers were accustomed to thinking of these figures

¹⁴ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 21:8–17). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

as representing their deliverer. But here they learned that God had another son with a scepter who would destroy them (cf. Isa. 10:5, where the rod is the Assyrians).

BKC 8-10: Ezekiel's second message about the sword was a poetic song of judgment. Its theme was that God's sword was sharpened, ready for the slaughter. The song is in three stanzas (vv. 8-10a, 11-12, 14-17). These sections were divided by two interludes, each focusing on "the rod" (vv. 10b, 13).

In the first stanza God's sword of judgment was sharpened with a whetstone to give it a keen cutting edge and polished and scoured to remove all rust and give the blade a gleam. Much like a soldier preparing for battle, God had honed His weapon so it would be effective.

The sword was coming because Israel had despised the rod and all advice. Some feel that "rod" refers to the king's scepter (cf. Gen. 49:9-10). If so, the people were rejecting God's threat of judgment and relying instead on His promise of a continued line of rulers for Judah. But this interpretation seems foreign to the passage. Perhaps "rod" refers to the chastisement God had used to try to curb Israel's sin and bring her back to Himself. A rod was often used for discipline (cf. Prov. 10:13; 13:24; 23:13), and God used "the rod" to discipline His own (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Job 9:34; 21:9). Israel had despised God's earlier attempts to use a rod to correct her, so He now used the sword. In this interpretation the son in Ezekiel 21:10 was not Ezekiel but Israel and her king.¹⁵

ESV 8-17: The Sharpened Sword. The Hebrew of these verses is notoriously difficult (thus the several esv translation footnotes). Some phrases in translation are approximations at best. Even if the details are obscure, the gist is clear enough. Verses 8-13 focus on the nature of the sword itself, honed to razor sharpness; vv. 14-17 describe its lethal effect.

Ezekiel 21:9

Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished:

[furbished] *marat*, Hebrew 4803, *maw-rat'*; a primitive root; to *polish*; by implication to *make bald* (the head), to *gall* (the shoulder); also, to *sharpen* :- bright, furbish, (have his) hair (be) fallen off, peeled, pluck off (hair). Furbish—polish and brighten (Ezekiel 21:9-10).

WBC 9-11. *The sword sharpened for the slaughter.* 10. Should we then make mirth? These words, from here to the end of the verse, are corrupt. Keil's interpretation (*Biblical Commentary on Ezekiel, in loco*) retains the MT: "Shall we rejoice (saying), 'The scepter of my son despises all woods' (i.e., other scepters)." This interpretation sees here a reference to Gen 49:9, 10; II Sam 7:14. Cf. verse 27.¹⁶

¹⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:8-10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:9). Chicago: Moody Press.

McGee: God is going to judge the city. This is a frightful and fearful word which comes from the lips of God, the One who had yearned over Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus, too, *wept* over Jerusalem because He loved the city: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:37–38). If you want to know how terrible that judgment was, read what happened when Titus the Roman came in A.D. 70 and leveled that city—just as Nebuchadnezzar is about to do in Ezekiel’s time.

God makes it clear what He is going to do, and the message is not a brand new one by any means. In the Book of Isaiah we find: “For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many (Isa. 66:16). And again we read, “Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth” (Isa. 24:17). Ezekiel is to sigh because of the judgment that is coming. The Lord Jesus said of the day that is still coming, “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:26). Ezekiel is to sigh and weep because God has now drawn the sword of judgment. Judgment lies ahead in our day, my friend. That is not a popular message, just as it was not in Ezekiel’s day.¹⁷

Nelson 9-11: The Babylonian army led by Nebuchadnezzar—the sword—is pictured as ready and moving swiftly. While vv. 9–17 are written as Hebrew poetry, the lines actually meant to be sung may have been limited to these in vv. 9–11. **My son:** In this context, the words refer to Judah (see “My people” in v. 12). If the people reacted with mirth, it would show that they mistakenly believed that such judgment would never come on God’s people and must therefore be meant for an enemy nation.¹⁸

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.

Is it time for joy? Is it time for a hilarity?

[rod of my son] The scepter of Judah, My son.

Clarke: It contemneth the rod of my son—“It,” the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, “contemneth the rod,” despises the power and influence of my son—Israel, the Jewish people: “Out of Egypt have I called MY SON.”

Clarke: As every tree—As all the stocks, kindreds, and nations, over which I have already given him commission. Can the rod of Israel be spared, when the trees of Assyria, Egypt, etc., have been cut down?

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ The Nelson Study Bible

Chuck Smith 10-12: Now from sighing he goes to crying and howling. And as he cries and howls and draws the attention of the people, then he speaks to them about this sword of the Lord that is to be stretched out against Jerusalem. How God is coming with His sword to judge the people. And, of course, it will be wielded at the hand of the Babylonians.

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.

Constable: It was as though God had polished the sword with which He would judge His people and had placed it in the hand of their slayer, Nebuchadnezzar.

[**the slayer**] Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Clarke: This sword is sharpened—It is prepared for the slaughter, it is furbished; from the French, *foubir*, to polish, brighten. He shall have splendid victories every where. Some complain of corruption in the original in this place; but I think without sufficient reason.

BKC 11-13: The second stanza revealed the victims against whom the sword was drawn: God's people and all Israel's princes. The leaders had rejected God's advice and chastisement so all they could expect was the sword. Because of the massive destruction God told Ezekiel, Cry out and wail.¹⁹

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.

Cry and wail ... strike your thigh: Ezekiel was told to add verbal groans and a physical gesture to his musical message. In that culture, these actions displayed great grief and sorrow (Jer. 31:19).

Constable 12-13: Ezekiel was therefore to cry out and slap his thigh in great despair because this judgment was coming on the people and officials of Judah (cf. Jer. 31:19). The leaders would die with the rest of the people. This cutting off of Israel's leadership was a cause for even greater sorrow than the destruction of the ordinary Israelites. This would really test the nation. The Judahites should not despise the rod that

¹⁹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:11–13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

the Lord would use to judge them; they should not think that Nebuchadnezzar lacked the power to destroy Judah. Nevertheless even Nebuchadnezzar would not prevail over Israel ultimately because the rod Messiah would be the final victor.

[smite therefore upon thy thigh] Smiting the thigh was a symbol of grief for men, as beating the breast was for women.

Beating the breast was a gesture of grief.

WBC 12, 13: *The agitation of the prophet.* 12. Smite ... upon thy thigh. As a gesture of despair (Jer 31:19). 13. It is a trial. The text is corrupt. Of many reconstructions, Keil's is close to the MT: "For the trial is made, and what if the despising scepter shall not come?" That is, What will happen if that kingdom, Judah, shall be left without a ruler? Cf. verses 10, 27.²⁰

ESV: The princes of Israel may refer to the tragic events at Riblah (2 Kings 25:6–7). This prompts one of two gestures narrated here: strike ... your thigh is an action associated with lament (see Jer. 31:19).

Ezekiel 21:13

Because *it is a trial*, and what if *the sword* contemn even the rod? it shall be no *more*, saith the Lord GOD.

[it is a trial] It (Jehovah's sword) is tried, or proved, and what if it contemns (despises or scorns) the rod (scepter) of Judah? It (the scepter) will be no more until the Messiah comes whose right it is to rule. The Septuagint reads, "Therefore clap thine hands, for sentence has been passed: and what if even the tribe (of Judah) be rejected? That shall not be, saith the Lord God." The idea here is that though God's sword destroyed even the scepter, the tribe of Judah would not be completely cut off.

Because it is a trial—This will be a trial of strength and skill between the Chaldeans and the Jews; and a trial of faith and patience to the righteous.

And what if the sword, (Nebuchadnezzar), contemn even the rod?—Overthrow Zedekiah? It will do so; for the regal government of Judea shall be no more. Or, it is tried; that it the sword. Nebuchadnezzar has already shown himself strong and skillful.

Nelson: Israel failed a test. The sword would strike God's people, specifically the nation's rulers (the meaning of the word scepter). These words drew upon the messianic implications of Gen. 49:9, 10 and the promises of the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam. 7. The Jews had misinterpreted these promises to mean that their nation would never fall. Because of their sin, however, the Davidic line of kings would be interrupted. False

²⁰ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:12). Chicago: Moody Press.

messianic hopes related to Judah were corrected when Jerusalem was overthrown in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar (see vv. 25–27).

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.

So he's doing a lot of things to get attention. So now he's just clapping his hands.

Constable 14-15: Ezekiel was to clap his hands together as he continued to prophesy symbolizing his approval of God's will (cf. 6:11; 22:13; 25:6; Num. 24:10; 2 Kings 11:12; Job 27:23; Ps. 47:1; Isa. 55:12). But he was also to announce the awfulness of the coming sword-like judgment.

Some translators interpreted the description of the invasion as coming three times and doing double damage the third time (e.g. NKJV). This may be a reference to Nebuchadnezzar's three invasions of Jerusalem in 605, 597, and 586 B.C., the last invasion being twice as bad as the other two. Another preferable translation is that the sword would strike twice or even three times (e.g. NIV). This suggests that the invasion would come fast from several different angles, that the sword would double or triple itself in its influence.³²³ The invasion would be unusually devastating.

Living in an age of special visual effects in which images transform themselves, it is not difficult for us to visualize this sword multiplying and swashbuckling its way through Jerusalem. Even the great among the people would not escape. This may refer to the great one, King Zedekiah, or to the great ones, the leading men of Judah. The invaders would surround everyone.

[doubled the third time, the sword of the slain] Doubled three times expresses the violence and force of the sword.

Clarke: Let the sword be doubled the third time—The sword has been doubled, and it shall come the third time. Nebuchadnezzar came against Judea THRICE.

1. Against Jehoiakim.
2. Against Jeconiah.
3. Against Zedekiah.

The sword had already been doubled; it is to come now the third time, i.e., against Zedekiah.

Clarke: The sword of the slain— *chereb chahalim*, “the sword of the soldiers,” of the Chaldeans. So in the next clause, *hi chereb chahal haggadol*, “it is the sword of that great soldier,” that eminent king and conqueror. This is the meaning of the word *chahal*, that is so ill rendered in almost every place of its occurrence, in our Version. See Dr. Kennicott.

WBC 14, 15: *The sword doubled and tripled in intensity for the carnage.* The MT of these verses is difficult, and all translations resort to conjectural emendations. Clap your hands (RSV). A gesture of strong emotion (cf. v. 17; 22:13). 16. Go thee one way or other. An apostrophe to the sword. 17. I will also smite mine hands together. The Lord exults over the coming vengeance.²¹

BKC 14-17: The third stanza stressed the work of the sword. In derision both the prophet and God would strike their hands (vv. 14, 17; cf. 6:11; 22:13). As the sword would move swiftly against the people and princes, it would strike and strike again (twice, even three times), seemingly coming from every side. In fear the people's hearts would melt (cf. 21:7). The judgment moved to all sides (to the right, then to the left) as it relentlessly pursued the people. It would stop only when the judgment was complete.²²

Nelson 14-17: Ezekiel was commanded to clap (see 6:11). The order the third time let the sword do double damage was a numeric device (see Prov. 6:16) used here to emphasize the extent and effectiveness of the sword's (or Babylon's) employment against Judah. I also will beat My fists pictures God clapping along with Ezekiel. God would applaud the fact that even evil events can be made to serve His purposes and plans (see Jer. 27:5).

As in 6:11, to clap your hands communicates agitation, perhaps in anticipation of the imminent judgment.

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.

Constable: The sword would cause the people to lose heart and die in the gates of the city, the place where the leaders did business. The Lord had an instrument of judgment (sword) that He had prepared and kept ready that would slaughter His people suddenly (like lightning), namely, Nebuchadnezzar.

Wrapped up—It is not a blunt sword, it is carefully sharpened and preserved for the slaughter.

²¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:14). Chicago: Moody Press.

²² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:14–17). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 21:16

Go thee one way or other, *either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set.*

Constable 16-17: The Lord spoke to His instrument of judgment urging it to show itself sharp by slaying His people on every side, as the Lord directed. Yahweh would also give His approval by clapping His hands and appeasing His wrath against His sinful people.

At least some of the problem that Ezekiel's audience had in accepting such a gloomy picture of the future can be traced to the natural religious tendency to think of God as kindly and thus not really capable of punishing people decisively. Why would God destroy His own beloved people in whom He had invested such time and effort since He brought them out of Egypt centuries before? Some of the problem lay also in people's natural, routine optimism. It is hard to imagine the country in which one grew up and enjoyed life in the past actually coming to an end, never again to be an independent nation, never again to have its own government and laws and economy and stable traditions.

[thee one way or other, either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set] That is, the sword—cut to the right and then to the left wherever the edge is set or turned.

Clarke: Go thee one way or other—Thou shalt prosper, O sword, whithersoever thou turnest; against Ammon, or Judea, or Egypt.

Ezekiel 21:17

I will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said *it.*

Dake: [will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest] A symbol of the judgment of God resting after it has been completed; or, it could be as the Septuagint reads, "And I also will clap My hands and let loose My fury." Sometimes smiting hands was a sign of contempt (Job 27:23; Lament. 2:15); anger (Ezekiel 22:13; Numbers 24:10); sorrow (Ezekiel 6:11); triumph (Ezekiel 25:6); or of a pledge or an oath (Genesis 14:22; Proverbs 11:21). It was the same as our shaking hands to confirm an agreement.²³

As in 6:11, to clap your hands communicates agitation, perhaps in anticipation of the imminent judgment.

²³ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

The model of the map 21:18-27

Ezekiel 21:18

The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

Parable of the Crossroads (21:18–27).

The Lord directed Ezekiel to sketch a road with a fork in it. That represented the road which the “king of Babylon” would travel. The prophet was to make a sign post which pointed out the destinations of the two roads. One road lead to Rabbah, capital of Ammon; the other led to Jerusalem. At that fork in the road the king of Babylon would resort to his pagan divination to determine which direction he should go with his army. He would shake the arrows, inquire of the “household gods” (*teraphim*), and look at the liver of a sacrificial animal. The king’s divination pointed the way to Jerusalem. There he would set up his battering rams, cast up mounds and build a siege wall. There he would “open the mouth for slaughter,” i.e., lift up the battle cry (21:18–22).

The citizens of Jerusalem regarded Nebuchadnezzar’s divination as vain. In the past they had escaped Babylon’s wrath by swearing oaths of allegiance to the Chaldean king. The king of Babylon, however, would now bring “iniquity to remembrance,” i.e., he would remember the oaths which the leaders of Judah had broken. The citizens of Jerusalem would be “seized” by Nebuchadnezzar. Their more recent transgressions cause God also to remember their whole record of rebellion. They would be “seized with the hand” of divine justice as well (21:23f.).

The coming of Nebuchadnezzar would also be the climax of the punishment for Zedekiah, Judah’s profane and wicked prince. The insignia of his rank—the turban and crown—would be removed. Socially, things would be thrown into confusion. The lowly would be exalted, the high brought low. The monarchy would be a total ruin. The throne of Judah would be empty “until he comes whose right it is.” Then the Lord would give the throne to that individual. The reference here is to the Messiah (21:25–27).²⁴

Constable 18-20: The Lord also commanded Ezekiel to make a representation of two roads coming out of Babylon by which judgment from Yahweh would come. Perhaps he did this by drawing in the dirt or on a tablet. Really there was to be one road leaving Babylon that diverged as it approached Jerusalem, and there was to be a signpost at the fork in the road. One of this road's branches would go to Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites to the east of Judah. The other branch would lead to Jerusalem.

Geographically this fork was at Damascus.

LAN: 18-23 Ammon evidently rebelled against Babylon about the same time as King Zedekiah of Judah. In 589 B.C. the nations of Judah and Ammon were among those who conspired against Babylon (Jeremiah 27:3). Ezekiel gave this message to the exiles who had heard the news and were again filled with hope of returning to their homeland. Ezekiel said that Babylon’s king would march his armies into the region to stop the rebellion. Traveling from the north, he would stop at a fork in the road, one leading to Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, and the other leading to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

²⁴ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 21:18–27). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

He had to decide which city to destroy. Just as Ezekiel predicted, King Nebuchadnezzar went to Jerusalem and besieged it.

BKC 18-23: Ezekiel’s third message on the sword showed God’s directing the sword of Babylon against Jerusalem. In symbolic actions Ezekiel pictured God supernaturally guiding Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem to over-throw the city.

God told Ezekiel to mark out two roads for the sword of the king of Babylon to take. When Jerusalem rebelled against Babylon in 588 B.C., she was one of three cities or countries seeking independence. The other two were Tyre and Ammon. Nebuchadnezzar led his forces north and west from Babylon along the Euphrates River. When he reached Riblah (north of Damascus in Syria) he had to decide which nation he would attack first. He could head due west toward the coast and attack Tyre, or he could go south along one of two “highways” leading to Judah and Ammon. Tyre was the most difficult of the three cities to attack (cf. chap. 26; 29:17-20), so Nebuchadnezzar decided not to make it his first objective. His choice then was whether to head down the coastal highway and attack Judah and . . . Jerusalem or to head down the Transjordanian highway and attack Ammon and Rabbah. “Rabbah” was the capital of Ammon and is identified with the modern city of Amman in Jordan.

The war council met at Riblah, at the fork in the road, to decide which course of action to take. Apparently Nebuchadnezzar and his generals could not agree on which direction to go, so they consulted their gods.

Nebuchadnezzar used three means to determine his course of action: casting lots with arrows, consulting his idols, and examining the liver. Casting lots with arrows was probably similar to today’s practice of drawing straws. Two arrows were placed in a quiver, each one inscribed with the name of one of the cities being considered for attack. The arrow drawn or cast out first was the one the gods indicated should be attacked. The consulting of “idols” (*terāpîm*) involved the use of teraphim or household idols. The exact nature of this practice is unknown but perhaps the idols were used in an attempt to contact departed spirits and hear their advice. Examining the liver was a form of divination known as hepatoscopy. The shape and markings of the liver of a sacrificed animal were studied by soothsayers to see if a proposed plan was favorable or not.

These practices by themselves could do nothing, but God worked through them to accomplish His judgment. Into Nebuchadnezzar’s right hand would come the lot for Jerusalem. As Nebuchadnezzar went through his procedures, God had all the signs point toward the coastal highway and Jerusalem. That would be where he decided to proceed.

The rulers of Judah had pledged allegiance to Babylon, but they had violated their oath by rebelling. Yet even as Nebuchadnezzar set up his siege works around the city, the people refused to believe he would succeed. They thought his omen was false and that he was doomed to failure—but they were wrong. Since they had broken their covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 17:11-21), he would take them captive.²⁵

ESV 18–23: Ezekiel performs another symbolic action (see ch. 4), drawing (presumably on the ground) a map with a forked road, and supplying road signs. It is unknown how much of the rest of the action was actually performed or whether it was simply narrated.

²⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:18–23). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

It depicts Nebuchadnezzar at his camp, probably somewhere in Syria, deciding whether to bear west toward Jerusalem or east toward Rabbah (21:20, modern Amman). He decides to attack Jerusalem (v. 22).

ESV 18–29: The Sword of Nebuchadnezzar. In v. 11 the sword was committed to the “hand of the slayer,” identified here as the king of Babylon. This sets a new trajectory for this “sword” oracle, as the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar is imagined (vv. 18–23), as well as its threat to Jerusalem (vv. 24–27) and its application to Ammon (vv. 28–29).

Ezekiel 21:19

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.

There is a fork in the road, and God asked Ezekiel to now draw a map. Southwest went to Judah and Jerusalem. Southeast went to Rabbath-Ammon.

Clarke: Appoint thee two ways—Set off from Babylon, and lay down two ways, either of which thou mayest take; that to the right, which leads to Jerusalem; or that to the left which leads to Rabbath of the Ammonites, verse 20. But why against the Ammonites? Because both they and the Moabites were united with Zedekiah against the Chaldeans, (see Jeremiah 27:3), though they afterwards fought against Judea, 12:6.

WBC: Appoint thee two ways. The prophet was commanded to mark on the sand, or possibly on a brick or tile (cf. 4:1), two lines representing two roads which the king of Babylon and his army would follow. These roads come forth from the same land, Babylon, and follow the same route hundreds of miles to the Orontes Valley before diverging. At the head of the way (road) to the city. Perhaps this refers to Riblah, in the Lebanon country (or Damascus), where the two roads separate. A pointing hand or signpost (cf. I Sam 15:12; II Sam 18:18) was to be erected, indicating direction. 20. Rabbath of the Ammonites (cf. 25:5). In Greco-Roman times this city was called Philadelphia; today it is known as Amman. It is situated at the source of the Jabbok, twenty-five miles northeast of the Dead Sea. Rabbath-Ammon lay on one road and Jerusalem on the other. Both were guilty of conspiracy against Babylon (Jer 27:1-3).²⁶

McGee: In other words, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to decide which way he was going to come to Jerusalem. Now, do you think he’s going to turn to the Lord? No, he is pagan. He is going to use divination and necromancy:²⁷

²⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:19). Chicago: Moody Press.

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 21:20

Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced.

In about B.C. 590 Ammon had conspired with Judah against Babylon, so they were in a sense together. The king was going to go against each of them, but as kings always did in those days, he used divination, or fortune-telling, to choose which one he was going to pick.

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.

One way of divining was to put arrows in a quiver and shake them, and the first one that came out was the choice. Another way was to consult images. A third way was the liver, which they regarded as the seat of life because it was full of blood. They would cut open an animal, typically a sheep, and depending on the marks of the liver, decide what the choice might be.

Constable 21-22: When the king of Babylon reached the fork in the road, he used pagan methods to determine which road he should take (cf. Isa. 47:8-15). Belomancy involved writing various names on several arrows, mixing them in a quiver, and then drawing or throwing them out. The arrow chosen indicated the god's selection. Teraphim were household idols that the pagans believed had connections with the spirits of departed ancestors who could communicate with them (necromancy). Hepatoscopy involved inspecting the liver or entrails of a sacrificed animal and making a decision based on their shape, color, and markings.

Both Judah and Ammon had proved to be disloyal vassals; they had both rebelled against Babylon in 593 B.C. The lot fell to go against Jerusalem and to besiege it rather than Rabbah. Obviously the Lord controlled the pagan means that Nebuchadnezzar used to determine what He should do (Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Jer. 27:6).

[king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination] Nebuchadnezzar is here pictured as standing at the entrance of the holy land, at the fork of two roads—one to the right leading to Judah, and the other to the left leading to Ammon—using divination to determine which road to take first. Judah was chosen first (Ezekiel 21:22-27) before Ammon (Ezekiel 21:28-32).

[made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver]

Three Ways of Divining

1. Making the arrows bright, that is, shaking the arrows—a mode of divination used by the Arabians, but forbidden by the Koran. According to Jerome, in cases such as the one here, each arrow bore the name of some town to be attacked. After the arrows were shaken up in the quiver, they were drawn out one by one. The places were to be attacked in the order their names on the arrows were drawn out. As Jerusalem was the first in this instance, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to make the siege on it. Another writer says that the arrows were thrown up to see which way they would fall, and in this manner the place to be taken was indicated. The Arabs generally used only three arrows. On one was written, "My God hath bidden me"; on the second, "My God hath forbidden me"; and the third was blank. If the blank was drawn the arrows were shaken up again and drawn until the arrow bearing the decided answer came forth. If it was the one forbidding the inquirer he waited a whole year before consulting the arrows again on the question.
2. Consulting the teraphim, or the household gods worshiped as a family talisman to obtain directions concerning the future. Nothing is known regarding how the teraphim were consulted. The first mention of them in Scripture is the occasion of Rachel stealing them from her father in Haran (Genesis 31:19,34). They were put away by Jacob (Genesis 35:4), set up by Micah as his gods (Judges 17:4), and considered as idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23).
3. Looking at the liver. People judged what step to take by examining the liver of an animal that was sacrificed, to see whether it was good or bad. If the liver was healthy and the lobes inclined inward, the omen was favorable; but if diseased, dry, spotted, or without the band between the parts, the omen was unfavorable. This method of divination was used by many nations.²⁸

Clarke: For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way—He was in doubt which way he should first take; whether to humble the Ammonites by taking their metropolis, Riblath, or go at once against Jerusalem. In this case of uncertainty, he made use of divination. And this was of three kinds: 1. By arrows. 2. By images or talismans. 3. By inspecting the entrails of a sacrifice offered on the occasion.

1. He made bright his arrows. This might be after the manner in which the divination is still practiced among the Arabs. These arrows were without head or wing. They took three. On one they wrote, Command me, Lord. On the second, Forbid me, Lord. The third was blank. These were put in a bag, and the querist put in his hand and took one out. If it was Command me, he set about the business immediately; if it was Forbid me, he rested for a whole year; if it was the blank one, he drew again. On all occasions the Arabs consulted futurity by such arrows. See D'Herbelot, under the word ACDAH.
2. As to the images, the Hebrew calls them *teraphim*. See Genesis 31:19.
3. And as to the liver, I believe it was only inspected to see whether the animal offered in sacrifice were sound and healthy, of which the state of the liver is the

²⁸ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

most especial indication. When the liver is sound, the animal is healthy; and it would have been a bad omen to any who offered sacrifice, to find that the animal they had offered to their gods was diseased; as, in that case, they would have taken for granted that the sacrifice was not accepted.

Nebuchadnezzar had three ways to get advice on the future. One was shaking the arrows, much like drawing straws, to see which course of action was right; the second was consulting an idol to see if some spirit might direct him; the third was having priests inspect the liver of a sacrificed animal to see if its shape and size would indicate a decision.

WBC: At the parting (lit., *mother*) of the way, the king of Babylon would use three types of divination. He would shake arrows, one marked for Jerusalem and the other for Ammon, in a quiver or helmet; and the one inscribed “Jerusalem” would be drawn out. He would consult images, or *teraphim*, small household gods in human form (cf. Gen 31:19; I Sam 19:13, 16). He would look at the liver (as the seat of life, filled with blood) for omens, a custom practiced among the Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans. 22. Divination for Jerusalem. All of the methods would point to Jerusalem as the goal against which the invaders would shout a battle cry, and erect battering rams, mounds, and siege towers (RSV). 23. But to the Jews who had sworn oaths of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar only to break them (17:16-18), the divination would seem false. 24. Ye have made your iniquity to be remembered. Because of your guilt (*āwôn*), transgressions (*pēsha*), and sins (*ḥattā't*), you shall be seized by the hand; i.e., arrested by enemy officers.²⁹

McGee: These are methods which were used in that day and are actually used today also. “He made his arrows bright” would be better translated as, “he shook his arrows to and fro.” This was sort of like rolling dice or looking at tea leaves. He dropped his arrows down to see which direction they pointed to determine which direction he should take to Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was entirely a pagan and heathen king. God, however, will overrule his actions—that is important to remember.³⁰

There are three methods of divination mentioned: (1) *belomancy* or shaking of arrows, a practice used among Arabs for determining the future, in which a man used three arrows: one with an affirmative mark, another with a negative response, and one blank, which if drawn caused him to draw again; (2) a consultation of the “images” or *teraphim* (Heb.), which were small household ancestral gods (Gen 31:19, note); (3) *hepatoscopy*, or the examination of the liver of a sacrificial animal, which was commonly practiced in Babylon.

ESV: Three means of divination (manipulation of objects in search of a divine message) are described. Shakes the arrows may be akin to drawing lots; consults the *teraphim* may refer to small idol images (usually translated “household gods,” e.g., Gen. 31:19; Hos.

²⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:21). Chicago: Moody Press.

³⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

3:4). Liver omens are well known throughout the ancient Near East. They involved examining the organ of a sacrificed animal.

Chuck Smith 20-21: Now these were methods by which they sought to divine the purposes of their god. And when Nebuchadnezzar came to the parting of the ways, one road led to the capitol of the Ammonites, to the city of Rabbath, the other road led to Jerusalem. He has his troops; they are going to march. "Against whom shall we march? Let's consult the gods." And so they would take these arrows, and on one arrow they would write the name Rabbath; on the other arrow they would write the name Jerusalem. They would put the arrows into a sack and shake them up and then they reach in and pull out an arrow and whatever name is on the arrow they have discerned as the purpose of god that that is what we will smite.

And then they would cut a lamb and lay out its liver and then they would watch these lines on the liver. Again, to determine the direction that they were to go. And so they would divine by liver or by this shaking of the arrows. And so he is to speak to the people about how that Nebuchadnezzar was standing at the fork of the road. One road leading to Rabbath, the other to Jerusalem to divine, to seek, to get guidance from his god as to where he was to strike.

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.

The Lord was not here sanctioning the use of divination. He was just playing out how the Babylonian king was going to do it and, of course, the Lord had it come out so that Jerusalem was the king's choice.

[At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem] Jerusalem was on the right hand road; this was the place chosen by divination to be attacked before Ammon was. Zedekiah and the rulers of Israel considered this choice to be false divination (Ezekiel 21:23).

Clarke: At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem—He had probably written on two arrows; one, Jerusalem; the other, Riblath; the third, left blank. He drew, and that on which Jerusalem was written came to his hand; in consequence of which he marched immediately against that city. It was ripe for destruction; and had he marched before or after, it would have fallen; but he never considered himself as sure of the conquest till now.

That Nebuchadnezzar's answer coincided with God's promises and predictions for Jerusalem did not mean that his **divination** was acceptable. It merely demonstrated that God is sovereign while individuals remain responsible for all choices, good or bad (Gen. 45:4–8; 50:20; Job 2:10; Dan. 2:20–23; 4:34–37; Rom. 8:28).

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.

Constable : Nebuchadnezzar's decision to come against Jerusalem would look like a mistake to the leaders of Israel. It would seem to them that God should have guided him to besiege the Ammonites since they were more wicked. Furthermore Israel's leaders had sworn oaths of allegiance to Yahweh in response to His sworn promises to them. They thought surely He would defend them, but they were wrong. He would allow Nebuchadnezzar to capture them.

[to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken] This refers to the oaths and the covenant which Zedekiah and the elders of Israel had made with Nebuchadnezzar to rule Judah under him, and not rebel. Zedekiah broke this covenant and for that God determined to destroy him and Judah (Ezekiel 17:11-21; 2 Kings 24:20).

Clarke: To them that have sworn oaths—To Zedekiah and his ministers, who had bound themselves by the oath of the Lord to be faithful to the Chaldeans, and to pay them the promised tribute. The oaths may refer, farther, to the alliances formed with the Egyptians, Ammonites, and others. They will not believe that Nebuchadnezzar shall succeed against them, while they expect the powerful assistance of the Egyptians.

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.

Constable 24-27: The Lord would remember the sins of His people and allow them to suffer conquest (Deut. 28—29). He would allow their destruction because their many sins were open before Him. Even wicked King Zedekiah, the "prince" of Israel, would be as good as dead when his day of judgment came with the taking of Jerusalem. The Lord would remove the high priest's turban and the king's crown by terminating their offices. Then there would be a reversal of fortunes: the powerful would be humbled and the poor of the land would be the only people allowed to remain in it. Yahweh would make Jerusalem the ultimate ruin. The triple repetition of a word in Hebrew, here "ruin," is the strongest way to express a superlative in the Hebrew language (cf. Isa. 6:3; 24:1-3). Jerusalem would no longer enjoy its former glories until One would come who had a divine right to replace both high priest and king (cf. Ps. 110:2, 4; 72; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5; 33:17; Zech. 6:12-13). God would then give the city into His control (Gen. 49:10; Isa. 2:1-4). This is, I believe, a messianic prediction of Jesus Christ's future earthly reign from Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 5—7). Another view is that it refers to Nebuchadnezzar.

This was 2500 years ago, so we just read this glibly; but if you try to put yourself in the position of the inhabitants of Jerusalem having to hear this prophet describe what God was going to do, these would be very heavy words. Ezekiel was probably not too popular of a guy.

BKC 24-27: God then pronounced judgment on the people (v. 24) and the prince (vv. 25-27). Because of open rebellion, Jerusalem's people would be taken captive. They felt secure in their city, but they would be forcibly torn from it and dragged in chains to Babylon.

The profane and wicked prince of Israel was King Zedekiah. Because he violated his oath of allegiance to Babylon, he would be deposed. Zedekiah was stripped of authority (his turban and crown were removed), blinded, and imprisoned for life in Babylon (2 Kings 25:4-7). The once-proud king was humbled (the exalted will be brought low). The lowly ("poorest people of the land," 2 Kings 25:12) who were allowed to remain took his place in managing the land for Babylon.

The right to rule in Israel was taken from Zedekiah, and the land was destroyed. Ezekiel's triple use of ruin stressed that Israel's throne was to be absolutely desolate. It will not be restored until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to Him I will give it. This prophecy recalls Genesis 49:10, which speaks of "the scepter" in the line of Judah. The line of David would not be restored till the righteous, God-appointed King would come. There were no valid claims till Christ rode into Jerusalem to claim His rightful rule (cf. Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11; Rev. 19:11-16; 20:4). Christ will fulfill Ezekiel's prophecy; *He* will be the King of Israel.³¹

ESV 24–27: With the sword committed to the Babylonian king, impending judgment is announced on Jerusalem. Although this section begins with plural references, it quickly focuses on an individual, the "wicked" prince of Israel, who must be Zedekiah.

Missler: Priesthood and the Crown Verses 25 – 27

These verses point out that the priesthood and the crown were going to be temporarily removed until the Messiah comes. There is a whole study you might undertake which points out that the priesthood and the right to rule were always kept separate in the Scripture, except in a couple of cases, Melchizedek being one of those exceptions. Melchizedek was both a priest and a king. Abraham gave him tithes; Psalm 110:2-4 makes reference to that. The Book of Hebrews points out that Jesus Christ is the High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek, not Aaron. The concept of a priest also being a king is a very key idea. We see that in Isaiah 9:6 which promises the Messiah, and also in Zechariah 6, Psalm 72, Isaiah 42:1, Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:17. The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Hebrews deal with this whole issue (do see our commentary set on *Hebrews* for an in-depth study.) The Messiah is unique. Only two people ever fit that category of priest and king: Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. It has been suggested that one other group fits this category, the Church, since we are to be co-heirs with him. If the 24 elders in Revelation are the Church, they cast their crowns before the sea before the Lamb receives the seven-sealed scroll and that places them off the earth before the

³¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:24–27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

tribulation, since the plagues do not begin until the seals are opened. [See our *Revelation* commentary set for a detailed study.]³²

Ezekiel 21:25

And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end,

[And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end] Zedekiah was here personally addressed by the prophet and judgment was pronounced upon him and his kingdom (Ezekiel 21:24-27).

And thou profane wicked prince of Israel—Zedekiah, called here profane, because he had broken his oath; and wicked, because of his opposition to God and his prophet.

Whose day is come—Who in a short time shalt be delivered into the hands of thy enemies.

WBC: The dishonored wicked prince of Israel, Zedekiah, had reached his day (I Sam 26:10) of punishment (cf. Ezk 21:29; 35:5). 26. The turban (RSV; *miṣnepet*, “diadem” or “mitre,” used elsewhere of the high priest; see Ex 28:4; Lev 8:9) and the crown (*atārâ*; cf. Jer 13:18; II Sam 12:30) of the royal house would be removed. The whole existing state of things would be overturned. 27. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it (RSV). The repetition expresses the superlative degree (cf. Isa 6:3; Jer 22:29). The prevailing condition of things would be overturned, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him. This is Ezekiel’s first distinct reference to the personal Messiah, who will have the right to wear the crown and will be a true king. See Gen 49:10, where Ezekiel evidently read *shellô*, “whose it is” (equivalent to *āsher lô*; cf. v. 27) in place of *Shilôh*. On this use of right, see Deut 21:17; Jer 32:7, 8.

McGee: “Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel”—he is speaking of Zedekiah. “Whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end”—the time for judgment has come; this is the end time.

Scripture has a great deal to say about the end of this age. The correct translation of Ezekiel’s phrase would be, “in the time of the iniquity of the end.” Daniel also used this expression, “... the time of the end ...” (Dan. 11:35). The disciples asked the Lord Jesus, “... Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matt. 24:3), and the Lord answered that question for them. Paul also spoke of it a great deal in 2 Thessalonians. This man, Zedekiah, then is a picture of that future wicked prince, the false messiah, the Antichrist, who is coming at the time of the end.³³

³² Chuck Missler, Notes on the Book of Ezekiel, khouse.org

³³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Chuck Smith: Here is a marvelous prophecy in Ezekiel that actually comes out to our present day and into the future. As the Lord said, "And thou profane and wicked prince of Israel." Now the direct prophecy is against Zedekiah, who was to be the last of the kings of Israel until the king whose right it is shall come to reign. But this prophecy also has a double interpretation in that the profane king referred to here, "Thou profane wicked prince of Israel," is actually the antichrist in the last days. The words, "when iniquity shall have an end," literally is, "at the end of the days of iniquity." So it is in the last days when the antichrist arises and is accepted by the Jews as their Messiah, worshipped by them in a sense, acclaimed by them as their deliverer.

Now, Jesus said to the Jews, "I came in My Father's name but you did not receive Me. Another is going to come in his own name and him you will receive" (John 5:43). Daniel tells us that the prince of the people that shall come, the antichrist, will make a covenant with the nation Israel and in the midst of the final seven-year period he'll break that covenant as he sets up the abomination that causes desolation. Now this world ruler that will arise soon upon the scene, known in the scripture as the son of perdition, the beast, commonly called the antichrist, is going to arise with great power, blasphemies and all, going to take over this European confederation of nations. Going to make a covenant with the nation Israel, going to be hailed by them in the beginning as their Messiah.

If you go to Israel today, you will hear that there is much talk about the Messiah. They are really expecting the Messiah to come very soon. In fact, a couple of respected rabbis have been making some predictions that the Messiah is coming very soon and the people are all excited about it. Incidentally, there is some fellow here in the United States going around declaring that the man who has the answers for all of the world's problems is going to appear in the first part of 1982. And he is featured on so many of the television talk shows and all, and he is lecturing all over the United States on this man that the world is waiting for and has been looking for. The man who has the solutions and the answers and is gonna bring peace and all. And he's sort of a forerunner, he declares, of this man who will make himself known in the early part of 1982, will take over the governments, and will bring peace to mankind. The answers to your prayers are about upon us, he is telling people. And he's going around lecturing. Interesting, only inasmuch as people are looking for some kind of a leader to lead us into sanity from the insanity that seems to prevail in the world diplomacy.

But if you go to Israel today, they'll tell you they're expecting Messiah very soon. They will tell you that they do not look for the Son of God. They do not believe the Messiah will be the Son of God, that he will be a man just like Moses was a man. Moses said, "And there shall come another prophet like unto myself. Unto him shall ye give heed." He was prophesying concerning the Messiah. So they say he'll be a man just like Moses. He'll not be the Son of God. So then you must question them, well then how will you know he's your Messiah? And immediately their answer will come back, "Because he will help us to rebuild our temple." Just, that's where it is. And so in Israel today, they are looking for some man who will come and help them to rebuild their temple. Of course, Daniel tells us he'll make a covenant with them. Surely this covenant is to rebuild their temple. He will make the covenant whereby they will be able to rebuild their temple. We will get in a couple of weeks, three or four weeks, to a fascinating prophecy here in Ezekiel. In fact, Ezekiel starts getting more exciting all the while now as we move on into this latter portion. You see, it sort of starts with Israel's history, but then it keeps coming

chronologically and it goes right on out to what's happening today, yesterday, last year, the last few years. And it goes right in to what is going to happen next year, and the next few years in Israel. And it goes into the rebuilding of the temple which is coming very soon. And he gives you dimensions of the temple. And then he makes one very interesting comment concerning the temple, which I think is an extremely significant prophecy, and we will point that out to you when we get to... stay tuned.

Now, here he is predicting this profane wicked person who will arise in the end of the days of iniquity. "Thus saith the Lord God, 'Remove the diadem.'" And the word diadem there is miter. It is the little head thing that priest wore, not the crown of the king. But also the crown. Now Satan gives unto this man his authority and his power. He comes as a spiritual leader to Israel. That is, in the making of the covenant which is related and associated to the rebuilding of the temple. People are excited. They acclaim him as their Messiah. He has the answers; he has the solutions. He has the most simple solution for the rebuilding of the temple, one that doesn't upset the Muslims, the great Moslem world. They're not upset by his solution. He's just a genius and the whole world wonders after the genius of this man, as he comes up with this solution that is so simple yet so practical and so easy to fulfill and everybody is happy.

Now, take from him this miter, for he is a false Messiah; he is not the true Messiah. He is not the true priest that shall come. He's not the true king.

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.

[diadem] This was the mitre (official turban of a king or high priest) of the high priest, and the crown here refers to the headpiece of the king. Both the high priest and the king were to be removed and judged by Nebuchadnezzar; this was literally fulfilled (2 Kings 25:5-7,18-21).

[exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high] Debase Zedekiah and the high priest and exalt Gedaliah over Judah (2 Kings 25:7,18-24).

Exalt him that is low—Give Gedaliah the government of Judea.

Abase him that is high—Depose Zedekiah—remove his diadem, and take off his crown.

Zedekiah is to be brought low, and there will not be another king to sit upon the throne of David "until Shiloh come," until the Messiah comes.

Chuck Smith 6-27: So when Jesus Christ returns, He will destroy this man of sin with the brightness of His coming, with a sharp sword that goes forth out of His mouth. And He shall sit upon the throne of David and will be acclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords. And He will bring in the glorious Kingdom Age.

So there is this false hope that they will hold on to at the beginning. In the scriptures we read, "Because they would not believe the truth of God, God gave them over to a

strong delusion that they would believe a lie" (II Thessalonians 2:10-11). He will come with such power, such exciting miracles, such charisma that the whole world, except for the elect, will be deceived and were if possible even deceive the elect. Now, that word elect there does not refer to the church, but to Israel. Those elect of Israel who have been elected of God, the 144,000 elected of God to be sealed and preserved in the Great Tribulation period. Coming with lying wonders, but God is going to overturn, and he who is exalted himself will be abased, and he who was abased will be exalted and will come and sit upon the throne whose right it is.

When we get into the book of Revelation chapter 5 we see a scroll in the right hand of Him who was sitting upon the throne, God. The scroll is sealed with seven seals; it has writing both within and without. And an angel proclaims with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to take the scroll and loose the seals thereof?" The scroll is the title deed to the earth. Who is worthy to redeem the earth back to God? is the whole idea. The earth originally was God's. God gave it to man; man turned it over to Satan. Satan governs and rules the world today. Jesus came to redeem the world back to God, not by force, but by the price of His blood. The just for the unjust. "For by one man's sin entered the world, and death by sin so that death passed unto all men because all sin. Even so, by one man's righteousness shall many be made righteous." And so in heaven, the day is come, the transaction, the time of redemption.

There is the scroll, the instrument that was drawn up. "Who is worthy to take the scroll and loose the seals?" John began to sob convulsively because no man was found worthy in heaven and earth or under the sea to take the scroll or even to look upon it. But the elder said, 'Don't weep, John. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to take the scroll and loose the seals.' And I turned and I saw Him as He stepped forth and He took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne. And when He did, the twenty-four elders came forward with their vials, golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints and they offered them before God. And they sang a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the scroll and loose the seals. For Thou was slain and hath redeemed us by Thy blood" (Revelation 5:2-5,7-9).

Now, "whose right it is." You see, He is going to come and reign. Satan's kingdom is going to be overthrown. Satan will no longer rule over the earth. In fact, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss. And He will rule whose right it is, and then we will see the world that God intended when He made Adam and placed him upon the earth. You'll see the earth renewed and restored to the beauty and glory of the Garden of Eden. You'll see an earth in which righteousness will reign. You will see an earth in which there is no sickness, no blindness, no lameness, no deformities. You'll see an earth that is covered with righteousness, even as the waters do cover the sea. An earth without deserts, an earth without hurricanes, an earth that is lush and beautiful and glorious and doesn't have polluted skies. You'll see the earth that God intended. And you'll live and dwell with Him upon this earth for a thousand years. Glorious day, and we look forward to it.

But it's interesting. Here is the prophecy, "There will be no king in Israel until He comes whose right it is." There's not going to be any diadem, not going to be any royal crown until Jesus comes. It's interesting that when the Jews return from their Babylonian captivity, they didn't reestablish monarchy. They didn't anoint a king to rule over them. The monarchy ended with Zedekiah. It is interesting that when the Jews returned to Israel again in 1948 they did not establish a monarchy which was their traditional form of

government. And there will not be a monarchy or a king until He comes whose right it is. And Jesus Christ will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. So beautiful prophecy here concerning Jesus Christ in this twenty-first chapter.

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 point is that both the right to the priesthood, and the right to the crown are included. (Genesis 49:10 and Isaiah 2.)

[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 kingdom of Judah was to be overthrown and exist no more until the Messiah would come whose right it is; and it would be given to Him (Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 42:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:17; Hosea 3:4-6; Zech. 6:12-13; Zech. 14:9; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 14:13-18; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 20:1-10).

I will overturn—I will utterly destroy the Jewish government. Perverted will I make it. Heb. *perverted, perverted, perverted I will make it*.

Clarke: Until he come whose—is— *mishpat*, the judgment; i.e., till the coming of the son of David, the Lord Jesus; who, in a mystic and spiritual sense, shall have the throne of Israel, and whose right it is. See the famous prophecy, Genesis 49:10, and Luke 1:32. The *avah*, which we translate overturn, is thrice repeated here; to point out, say the rabbins, the three conquests of Jerusalem, in which Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah were overthrown.

McGee: This is a remarkable prophecy. “Until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him,” that is, the Lord Jesus. From Zedekiah down to the Lord Jesus there has been no one in the line of David who ever sat on that throne. Ezekiel is saying that no one would ever be able to do so. The Lord Jesus is the only One who will. Right now He is sitting at God’s right hand, waiting until His enemies are made His footstool when He comes to this earth to rule.

This remarkable prophecy began back in Genesis 49:10, when Jacob was giving the prophecies concerning his twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. He said there: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” “The sceptre” means the king. The Hebrew word for “until He come” is very similar to the word, *Shiloh*. It speaks of the Lord Jesus—this is the way He was introduced in Scripture. This is the reason that John the Baptist said, “... Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). Why? Because it was “at hand” in the Person of the One who had come, the One of whom all the prophets had spoken.³⁴

³⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The “He” of this verse refers to the Messiah. There is neither rest nor safety until the Messiah comes as the rightful Ruler, of whom the prophets from before the time of David have prophesied as the Restorer of Israel and as the Prince of Peace (Gen 49:10; Isa 9:6; Jer 23:5; 33:17).

ESV: Turban and crown are both insignias of office. The former is related to the priesthood (Ex. 28:4); the latter is clearly royal. It may be, however, that these are the same and the reference is simply to Zedekiah. This is often the way with Hebrew parallelism (cf. Prov. 4:9; Isa. 62:3).

The message concerning Ammon's fate 21:28-32

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:

The Sword and Ammon (21:28–32).

The Ammonites lived on the eastern side of the Jordan river. They were taunting the Jews because of all the misfortune which had befallen their land. The same lightning-swift, polished sword of divine justice which fell on Judah would also fall on Ammon. The soothsayers of Ammon promised peace. That, however, was not what the Lord had in mind for Ammon. He depicted the Ammonites hanging from the neck of the wicked Jews who would be slain in the time of punishment. At this point God told Ezekiel to return the sword to its sheath (21:28–30a).

Ezekiel then expanded upon his predictions of the judgment of Ammon. The Ammonites would be judged on their own soil. There God would pour out his indignation on Ammon. His anger would grow ever more intense as a flame blown by bellows. The destroyers of Ammon would be ruthless men, skillful destroyers. Ammon would be consumed in the fire of God’s judgment. The blood of her people would be shed throughout the land. She would be remembered no more. For her there was no hope of restoration such as the prophet envisioned for Israel (21:30b–32).³⁵

Rabbat of the Ammonites was the other city mentioned in verse 20 along with Jerusalem. The lot fell on Jerusalem as the first one to be dealt with. Now it is Ammon’s turn.

Constable 28-30: As for Ammon, the Lord said, it too would fall under His judgment (cf. 25:1-7). This oracle against a foreign nation is not with the others in Ezekiel (chs. 25—32) evidently because of the catchword "sword" that also marks the preceding prophecies in this chapter and because the previous message raised the question of Ammon's fate. The Ammonites were saying that the Judahites deserved destruction because of their

³⁵ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 21:28–32). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

wickedness. They attacked and plundered the land of Judah after the siege of Jerusalem. However, Yahweh would put His sword of judgment on Judah away to rest; Israel's enemies would attack her no more. Then He would judge the Ammonites in their ancient homeland.

[concerning the Ammonites] After Jerusalem, Ammon was also to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

[concerning their reproach] See Jeremiah 49:1; Zeph. 2:8.

Concerning the Ammonites—They had reproached and insulted Judea in its low estate, see Ezekiel 25. This prophecy against them was fulfilled about five years after the taking of Jerusalem. See Joseph. Ant. lib. 10 c. 11; and Jeremiah 27, 48, 49; Ezekiel 25.

The Ammonites and Israelites were usually fighting with each other. God told the Israelites not to ally with foreign nations, but Judah and Ammon united against Babylon in 589 B.C. (Jeremiah 27:3). God first judged Judah when Nebuchadnezzar first went to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 21:22); but Ammon will also be judged, not for allying with Judah, but for watching Jerusalem's destruction with insulting delight.

WBC: Oracle Against Ammon. 21:28-32 (cf. 25:1-7; Amos 1:13-15; Zeph 2:8-11; Jer 49:1-6). Although Nebuchadnezzar would turn aside from Ammon to Jerusalem (v. 19, 20), Ammon's doom would be worse than Jerusalem's. 28. Casting reproach upon Israel, they drew the sword against her for conquest. 29. They divine a lie. The false visions and lies of the Ammonite soothsayers would urge their warriors to lay the sword on the necks of ... the wicked, the princes and people of Israel. 30. Return your sword to its sheath, says the Lord, for in your own land, the land of thy nativity, will I judge you. 31. They would be delivered into the hand of brutish men (cf. Ps 94:8), savages from the desert (Ezk 25:4, 10), "forgers of destruction." 32. Ammon was to become as fuel to the fire, the lifeblood of the nation poured out in its own land. In contrast to Israel, there would be no future restoration for Ammon.³⁶

BKC 28-32: Ezekiel's fourth prophecy about the sword was directed against the Ammonites, who thought they had escaped Nebuchadnezzar's attack (cf. vv. 20-22). Ammon and Jerusalem, though enemies, had allied against Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar decided to attack Jerusalem, Ammon was relieved and happy. They were thankful that Jerusalem would suffer in their place. In fact after Jerusalem's fall the Ammonites organized a coup that caused the death of Gedaliah, the governor of the land appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 40:13-41:10). The Ammonites tried to set up another government in Israel that would be opposed to Babylon—probably so Nebuchadnezzar would again attack Judah instead of Ammon!

The sword that had been polished for Jerusalem (Ezek. 21:9, 11) would also reach Ammon. The Ammonites thought they had escaped Nebuchadnezzar's judgment but they would be punished. In God's wrath and fiery anger He would hand Ammon over to brutal

³⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 21:25–28). Chicago: Moody Press.

men, men skilled in destruction. These invaders are identified in 25:4 as “people of the East” (cf. comments on Job 1:3)—possibly a reference to nomadic invaders. The fire of judgment directed against Judah (cf. 20:45-49) would also consume Ammon.³⁷

Nelson: Ammon was east of Judah between the Jabbok to the north and the Arnon to the south. While Jehoiakim was king (608–598 B.C.; 2 Kin. 24:2), the Ammonites joined other nations east of the Jordan in raiding Judean territory, in return for protection from Nebuchadnezzar. Later, during the reign of Zedekiah (c. 593 B.C.), Ammon, Moab, Edom, and others conspired against Babylon, but with false hopes of help from Egypt (Jer. 27:3–11). their reproach: This was the Ammonites’ ridicule of Judah and delight over the destruction of Jerusalem, especially the temple (see 25:3, 6; 36:15; Obad. 10–14; Zeph. 2:8). The sword bringing judgment was either Nebuchadnezzar’s army (see vv. 9, 10, 19, 20; 25:4) or the Ammonites who had been led to believe they would be involved in Judah’s defeat (see v. 29).

ESV 28–29: The application of this prophecy to the Ammonites is in addition to the prophecy in 25:1–7, where the prophecy against Ammon stands first among the collection of oracles against foreign nations. The point here is that the visitation of the sword against Jerusalem does not preclude its coming to Ammon as well (21:20).

So the Ammonites will not escape, but then God said, "Don't think that you're going to be delivered. I will judge thee, the nation Israel, in the place where you were created. Right in the land. And the land of your nativity."

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*.

The Ammonites also divined and pronounced the divination of Nebuchadnezzar a lie; but theirs was a lie, for their necks were brought down with the other slain of the nations whose end had come (Ezekiel 21:29-32).

McGee: Ezekiel is speaking of the judgment of the Ammonites, but we also have again the expression, “when their iniquity shall have an end,” suggesting the end of this age. In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul writes: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” The Lord Jesus Christ will put down this enemy in the last days.³⁸

³⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 21:28–32). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 21:29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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.

Dake: [to return into his sheath] The sword was not to return to its sheath until it had fully accomplished its mission in destroying Judah, Ammon, and other nations round about. Ammon was to be destroyed in her native land. God's indignation was to be upon her, as well as on Judah. The fire of His wrath was to come upon the Ammonites and they were to be turned over into the hands of men who were brutish and skillful to destroy (Ezekiel 21:31); they were to be fuel in the fire of God's wrath, and their blood was to be shed in the midst of the land. They were not to be remembered anymore (Ezekiel 21:32).

Clarke: I will judge thee—This seems to refer to Nebuchadnezzar, who, after his return from Jerusalem, became insane, and lived like a beast for seven years; but was afterwards restored, and acknowledged the Lord.

Creation, Sovereignty—God created (Hebrew *bara*•) the Ammonites in their land. See note on Ge 1:1. His creative power extends to all people, and, therefore, His moral law includes all nations. His judgment knows no distinction nor favoritism. No one will escape the wrath of His punitive hand. He is not limited by geographical distance nor manipulated by heathen nations and their gods.³⁹

ESV 30–32: The Sword Sheathed and Judged. The instruction to return the sword to its sheath (v. 30) is the counterpart to the action begun in v. 3. With its work done, the “tool” is now itself subject to judgment. In this, Babylon is like Assyria in Isa. 10:5–19. The conclusion in Ezek. 21:31–32 points in two directions: fire of my wrath refers back to the parable of the fire that began this oracle complex (20:45–49), and it anticipates the conclusion to the oracle that follows (22:31); so too in 21:32, fuel for the fire points back to 20:45–49, while the reference to blood prepares the way for ch. 22.

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* skilful to destroy.

Constable 31-32: The Lord promised to judge the Ammonites in the fierceness of His wrath and to deliver them into the hands of their enemies. He would burn up their cities and cause their blood to flow in their fields, Viking-style. There would be no future for the Ammonites, but there would be for the Israelites.

To the Semitic mind nothing could be more terrible: no prospect of restoration, no continuance in succeeding generations, no memorial, not even a memory. Oblivion.

Nelson 31-32: The brutal men are defined as “the men of the East” in 25:4. The fall of Jerusalem meant only that Judah would be judged first. Some Judeans took refuge in

³⁹ Disciple's Study Bible

Ammon (see Jer. 41:1–3). God remembered Ammon’s animosity and foretold its future as a place that shall not be remembered. The events of Jer. 41 led to a Babylonian expedition against Ammon in which the capital city Rabbah was sacked and many inhabitants deported (see 25:1–7). Ammon was later invaded by Arabs and its autonomy ceased. Eventually it was absorbed into the Persian Empire.

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*.

The sword is against Ammon in this later part of Chapter 21. Chapter 25 is going to deal also with this judgment against Ammon. Ammon rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem, as did Edom as well. Of course Edom is the subject of Obadiah’s prophecy, while Ammon is the subject of both this and some subsequent remarks.

Clarke: Thou shalt be no more remembered—The empire of the Chaldeans was destroyed, and the power transferred to the Persians; the Persian empire was destroyed, and given to the Greeks; the Grecian empire was destroyed, and given to the Mohammedans; and the destruction of the Mohammedans is at no great distance.

Ezekiel’s generation was going to go into captivity—that would be the end as far as they were concerned. It would be their children who would return back to the land of Israel.