

Review

When we were finishing up chapter 20, God had instructed Ezekiel to foretell the destruction of Jerusalem to the Jews. The words he was to use were a parable of a forest fire. But when they heard it, they said, "Isn't he just speaking parables?" They either refused to understand it or just didn't believe it.

Now, as chapter 21 begins, God tells Ezekiel to give the same message, but this time, it will be in much clearer terms.

21:1-2 Set Your Face Toward Jerusalem

In the parable, Ezekiel was told to set his face toward Teman and speak against the south. Now, God is clear as a bell: "Set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against it." Hard to misinterpret that! There is no more room to misunderstand or misinterpret. This prophecy will be against Jerusalem, its sanctuaries, and against the whole land of Israel.

21:3 The Sword Of The Lord

The prophecy towards Israel was God saying, "I am against you." He tells them that He is going to draw His sword and cut them off from the land. Just like the parable of the forest fire, God is specific - this judgment will spread from south to north.

As we will see when we get down to verse 18, the sword of which God speaks is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and his army. This sword is the fire of the previous parable.

The Righteous And The Wicked

It is interesting to note that both the righteous and the wicked will be cut off from the land. God had already alluded to this in the parable of the forest fire:

Ezek. 20:47 ..."Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree..."

Now it is clear: This will be such a complete judgment that everyone will suffer the effects - both the righteous and the wicked. Some things

are so universal that everybody experiences them. After all, Jesus pointed out that God...

Matt. 5:45 ...causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

The wicked experience universal blessings, just as the righteous will sometimes suffer universal judgments. In this case, everybody is going to be removed from the land of Israel - either by death or exile. For the wicked, this will be a judgment of suffering. But for the righteous, it will turn out to be a blessing. After all, if they happen to be killed during the siege of Jerusalem, they will be blessed for eternity, having been saved. But if they are exiled, then that too will work out for their good.

And God has earlier reminded us He knows who the righteous are. When Ezekiel was taken in a vision to Jerusalem, He had heard the Lord tell an angel to...

Ezek. 9:4 "...put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst."

The righteous would be removed from the land of Israel, but God had marked who they were.

It Will Not Return To Its Sheath

The Lord also makes a point of saying that there is no way to prevent this judgment now. In countless times past, God had given them opportunity to repent. The Jews were continually being exhorted to turn from their sin to prevent judgment from befalling their nation. But now it was too late. God said that His sword would not return to its sheath again.

21:6-7 Groan Because Of The News

Ezekiel was to continue to spread the news about Jerusalem's impending destruction. The way he would do this is to walk around groaning. When people asked him why he was groaning, he would tell them the news.

This is interesting to me, because it is the reverse of what the

Christian is to model. We are also to behave in such a way that makes people ask what's going on. But what we have been commanded to do is...

1Pet. 3:15 ...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...

Now this is an interesting concept, because groaning is easy. Just walk around sighing loudly, and soon enough, people will start asking, "What's your problem?" But how do you get people to ask you about hope? That's a tough one! After all, you don't see hope in people on a regular basis, because it's within you. It can be mistaken for happiness or just being in a good mood. No, hope is demonstrated by people in hopeless situations.

- When they're in the middle of dire straights and talk about their trust in God, they're displaying their hope.

- When someone's life circumstances are crashing around them, but they themselves are not crashing, they're displaying their hope.

- When experiencing a death or unexpected tragedy, the Christian who prays and has faith is displaying the hope that lies within them.

21:8-11 The Sword Sharpened And Polished For The Slayer

The warning of the sword of the Lord continues, and is clear for the most part. The sword is polished and sharpened, ready to be put into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, ready to be used.

But there is a confusing part of this passage, found in verse ten, when the Lord says,

Ezek. 21:10 "...Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree?"

Even reading the original Hebrew leaves us a bit in the dark with this sentence. A comparison of Bible translations also reveals a huge diversity of thought:

Ezek. 21:10(NIV) "...Shall we rejoice in the scepter of my son [Judah]? The sword despises every such stick."

Ezek. 21:10(KJV) "...Should we then make mirth? It contem-

neth the rod of my son, as every tree."

Ezek. 21:10(NKJ) "...Should we then make mirth? It despises the scepter of My son, as it does all wood."

Ezek. 21:10(NLT) "...Now will you laugh? Those far stronger than you have fallen beneath its power!"

Ezek. 21:10(MSG) "My child, you've despised the scepter of Judah by worshiping every tree-idol."

My best guess after looking at the context and the Hebrew words is that God is asking, "Should we be happy that the scepter of Judah will be rejected like a simple wooden twig?"

21:12-13 Strike Your Thigh

The sword of the Lord will be against God's people. Ezekiel is told to demonstrate this by slapping his hand on his thigh. God's people are going to be tested, to be examined. What will happen if they all fail? Will the scepter depart from Judah permanently?

Fortunately, we know that,

2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

God's promises to preserve a remnant will stand, in spite of the rebellion of the vast majority of the Jews in Jerusalem at that time. The scepter will one day be in the hand of the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who will rule with a rod - a rod of iron.

21:14-17 Clap Your Hands Together

Unlike our modern society, in Bible times clapping wasn't always a positive thing. Sure, there were times when people clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!" (2Kings 11:12), or shouted with joy (Psalm 47:1). But there were other times when clapping was a negative demonstration. Remember that Job talked about a wicked man who men would clap their hands at and hiss him from his place (Job. 27:23). Jeremiah described the scene after this destruction of Jerusalem took place, saying,

Lam. 2:15-16 All who pass along the way clap their hands in

derision at you; They hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, "Is this the city of which they said, 'The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth?'" All your enemies have opened their mouths wide against you; They hiss and gnash their teeth...

Ezekiel will be clapping his hands together as he prophesies, to accentuate the sword striking Judah like lightning. God will also be clapping His hands together for the same reason.

21:18-20 Two Ways For The Sword

Remember that Ezekiel is in captivity in Babylon, nowhere near Jerusalem. However, he does have the brick upon which he was instructed to inscribe the city of Jerusalem (Ezek. 4:1). This brick served as the model for the city when Ezekiel laid siege to it (Ezek. 4:2).

I believe that the Lord is instructing Ezekiel to make a sign to show the two ways from which the Babylon armies will be attacking. The first would be through the Ammonites' capitol city of Rabbah, and the second would be straight towards Jerusalem.

21:21 Three Forms Of Divination

At the fork in the road, Nebuchadnezzar would be using occultic means to find supernatural direction. The Lord mentions three forms of divination that he would use.

The first was that "he shakes the arrows." This was a method of casting lots. Each of the arrows would be designated as a possible plan of action, or direction, or name, etc., and would be placed in a quiver. Then it would be shaken to see in what order the arrows fell out. This would signify the god's direction for the seeker.

Then the king had to consult his household idols. These were portable statuettes of his gods, to which he would pray and offer sacrifices.

Nebuchadnezzar also "looked at the liver." The word for this sort of divination is "hepa-TOS-copy." Because the liver was considered to be the seat or focal point of life, a sacrificial animal's liver was often inspected for health or disease. A bad liver meant that you had offered a

bad sacrifice to your god, who would then not look favorably upon your endeavor.

21:22-24 Nebuchadnezzar's Answer

Even though Nebuchadnezzar had consulted false gods for direction, the true and living God made sure that the answers pointed to His plan. The king's three methods of divination all pointed to putting Jerusalem to siege.

Interestingly, the Jews in Jerusalem were relying upon the false prophets, who had been telling them that everything was going to be fine. They had promised that Babylon would not be attacking.

And so when word came to them that Nebuchadnezzar had been directed by his gods to attack Jerusalem, they thought, "Well, that's not the will of God. Our prophets have told us just the opposite." But the Lord's reminder through Ezekiel is that He is judging them for their iniquity.

21:25-27 The Prince's End Has Come

You should remember from our last study that King Zedekiah had set these events in motion with his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar's rule (Jer. 27:6-17). Now, God is telling him, "It's all over. Take off the king's crown, because you're done for."

Notice too the prophetic promise that no one else will be the king of Israel until the Messiah comes as king.

21:28-32 Sons Of Ammon Will Be Destroyed

This prophecy wasn't just about Jerusalem. The sword was going in two directions, one of which pointed straight at the Ammonites.