

Ezekiel – The Sword of GOD

©2024 Mike Whyte

Copyright Notice: this document may be used freely for personal study, preaching, and teaching.
No part of it may be used under any circumstances for commercial purposes or to attain personal gain or advantage.

Chapter twenty-one of the Book of Ezekiel contains a critical message to the exiles: the destruction of Jerusalem is very close. God is moving the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, inexorably to the destruction of the city, the people, and the leaders. The prophecy ends with a note of hope: **the Messiah will come**. And, as a postscript, Babylon will be punished. (Ez21:3,11,19a,25-26a,27b,30) **This chapter is the “climax” of the Book of Ezekiel.** Its message is critical for the end-time: **when God make the decision to act, things will unfold very quickly.**

A Fire in the Negeb: Ezekiel is told to perform a symbolic act, “**preach toward the southland**”, the “trees” represent people who will be killed (Ez20:45-49). Next Ezekiel is told to “**set your face toward Jerusalem**”, and explicitly identify that the sword of YHWH is coming to destroy “**both righteous and wicked**”. From Babylon, “facing Jerusalem” and “facing the Negev” would be exactly the same – look to the west (Ez21:1-5).

The News That is Coming: Ezekiel is told to “**groan; with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes**” as a sign of the tragic news of the destruction of Jerusalem that will soon come. The sword of God “**is sharpened and also polished**” – “**it despises every tree**”: none will be spared (Ez21:6-10).

Who Will Wield the Sword? The sword has been authorized by God, but **a human slayer** will wield it (Ez21:11-13). The **most important word** in verses ten and thirteen is שֶׁבֶט - **shevet**, a masculine noun, which has the most common meaning of “**rod**” or “**staff**” (see, for example, Ex21:20, Lv27:32, 2Sm7:14, Job9:34). In the hands of a king, or “The King”, a staff is a “**sceptre**” (see Gn49:10, Nm24:17, Ps45:6, Is14:5, Ez19:11,14, Am1:5,8, Zc10:11). **The “sword” is the “rod” or “staff” of God’s punishment.**

The Efficacy of the Sword: Before YHWH identifies “the slayer”, he makes it clear that “the slayer” is no more than an instrument in God’s hands wielding God’s sword, “**let the sword come down twice, yes, three times**” (this is an “idiom” of intensification, see also Jr22:29); it emphasizes that the **Sword of YHWH will accomplish its purpose** (Ez21:14-17). Ezekiel performs another symbolic act depicting a map showing **the advance of the King of Babylon towards Jerusalem** (Ez21:18-23). Next the prophecy gets specific: the sins of the people of Jerusalem are blatant, “**in all your deeds your sins appear**”; they must be punished (Ez21:24). Zedekiah, “**profane wicked one, prince of Israel**”, as the last exponent of the Dynasty of David is identified, and the destruction of Dynasty is specified, “**Remove the turban and take off the crown ... a ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it**” (Ez21:25-27a). Finally, the Dynasty will pass to the Messiah “**until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs**” (Ez21:27b).

Difficult Hebrew: verses 26-27: Six other translations considered: all are very different in points of detail (due to the underlying difficulty of the Hebrew text), but **all translations agree on the main points:** the symbols of “nationhood” are to be removed; this is a radical change; the idiom of triple repetition is used to emphasize the intensity of the destruction; and, the coming of the Messiah will bring restoration. The Prophet Jeremiah discusses in great detail the end of the Davidic Dynasty and its reinstatement by the Messiah (see Jr21:11-14, 22:1-30, 23:1-8).

The Promises to David: The ultimate focus of the promises is **the World Tomorrow** (2Sm7:10a). David’s son would establish a **Dynasty** (2Sm7:11b-12), which would ultimately be **punished by human agency** (2Sm7:14b). However, the throne and Dynasty would be **reinstated in perpetuity** (2Sm7:13b,16), which can only be fulfilled by the Messiah. The fulfilment of these promises is clear and specific in the New Testament (Lk1:30-33,68-69, At15:13-17, Mt1:1-16, Lk3:23-31). We have no explicit information on Mary’s line of descent, only inferences are possible (Lk1:5,35-36,26-27), but clearly Jesus received human DNA from Mary. Jesus’ “male” DNA was created by the Holy Spirit in the divine conception – this DNA was “Davidic”. Jesus is now both King and High Priest (Jh18:37, 1Tm6:14-15, Hb4:4-15, 10:19-21). **Jesus Christ is “The Son of David”; as King of kings, he sits on “The Throne of David”; he will perpetuate “The Dynasty of David” forever; and soon, he will bring his throne and establish the Kingdom of God.**

The Reproach of Ammon: Ammon had been involved in planning rebellion with Israel in 593 (Jr27:1-3). Nebuchadnezzar had his sights on both Jerusalem and Rabbah (Ez21:20). The word “**reproach**” is from הָרַפָּא - **herpa**, “abuse”, “scorn” – **the Ammonites likely “taunted” Israel when Nebuchadnezzar went to Jerusalem rather than Rabbah** (Ez21:28-29).

Judgement of the Slayer: God is finished with Nebuchadnezzar: he no longer wields the sword of God – **it can go back to the sheath**. Babylon will be judged, and the hegemony will pass to Cyrus of Persia. This is **a very brief synopsis of the prophesized judgement of Babylon discussed in much more detail elsewhere** (Ez21:30-32).

The PowerPoint slides for this presentation are available at <https://mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca/presentations>