

8. Divine sword against the idolaters

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I believe that I am right about this one. As many as there is not one single criminal who thinks absolutely and positively for sure that he or she will get caught after one's crime, there is not one sinner who thinks that he or she will get caught for one's sin by God.

Even though God can see everything and know everything before our sins ever conceived in our hearts, not like police, somehow we sinners think that we can get by God without Him knowing about our sins or we presume that God will wink at our sins. More over while we sin against the Lord, we pathetically forget all about God including His love for us and what Jesus has done on the cross for us.

Just like that, the Northern Kingdom Israel and the Southern Kingdom Judah forgot all about the Lord while they were pursuing their pagan neighbors' idols and help from them. In million years, they'd never thought that God would punish them for their horrible sins. Somehow they thought that they could get away with their sins because they were the chosen people by Him. Can we say the same thing for the Americans as well as many Christians who are currently sinning against the Lord willfully?

This evening we are going to be with Ezekiel again, son of man, a lone voice of God amongst the Babylon Exiles. Ezekiel has explained the individual responsibility of the people and their leaders and the national responsibility of Israel in our last study that covered chapters 18 through 20. Now he focuses on the fact that God, too, has a responsibility to punish His people when they rebel against Him. He must be true to His character and true to His covenant.

A. GOD DIRECTS THE ENEMY OF ISRAEL

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

The pagan nations of that day used many different types of divinations to figure out the will of their gods. Ezekiel was illustrating the Babylonian army at a fork in the road, deciding which way to go. I am completely guessing at this point, but I believe that my guess is correct. I believe that the Babylonian army was at Damascus. If they went straight down south, they could come to Rabbath, the capital of Ammon, and attack the Ammonites. But if they turned southwest, they would head down to Jerusalem and attack the Jews.

God overruled the soothsayers and diviners and made sure that their target was Jerusalem. This doesn't mean that their divination had any accuracy or godliness, rather the Lord even used it to accomplish His purposes as He uses any types of demonic schemes to strengthen His followers.

Let's get a quick history background:

After the defeat of the Egyptians by the Babylonians in 605 B.C., Jehoiakim began paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. At this time, some young noble people of Judah, such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshak, and Abendnogo, were taken to Babylon.

In 599 B.C., the pro-Egyptian group within Jerusalem was in power and Judah revolted against Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar began the Siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. The city fell about three months later and Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Jerusalem and its temple. He took king Jeconiah, his officials, and other prominent citizens, including the prophet Ezekiel, back to Babylon. At this time Jehoiakim's uncle Zedekiah was appointed king in his place by Nebuchadnezzar.

Though king Zedekiah had sworn an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and had broken it, and Nebuchadnezzar would not stand for this kind of rebellion from a weak satellite kingdom. Zedekiah's sins had finally caught up with him.

Ezekiel refused to call Zedekiah a king but referred him as a prince, because he was a pompous idolater and relies on Egypt instead of the Lord.

But here in v27, the Lord added a brief word of hope: the Messiah from the lineage of king David will come one day and reign over His people and the entire world.

B. WHAT ABOUT THE AMMONITES?

Ezekiel 21:28 "And you, son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach,' and say: 'A sword, a sword is drawn, Polished for slaughter, For consuming, for flashing-- Ezekiel 21:32 You shall be fuel for the fire; Your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall not be remembered, For I the Lord have spoken.'"

According to the Bible, Ammon and Moab were born to Lot and Lot's younger and elder daughters in the aftermath of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Throughout the biblical account, the Ammonites and Israelites are portrayed as mutual antagonists.

When the Ammonites rebelled against Babylon along with Judah, Nebuchadnezzar decided to destroy its kingdom. But when the Babylonian army was heading to Israel, Ammon was in glee and hoping that Judah would be in ruin so that they could go after her as soon as Babylonians leave like a group of hyenas which wait for lions to leave a dead animal left over behind so that they can finish it off.

The Lord used the Babylonian army to destroy Ammon and the Ammonites which no longer exist today, because the Arabs have completely displaced them just as the Lord has spoken even though their old capital city survives as the capital of the new occupants.

C. ISRAEL'S WICKED LEADERS

Ezekiel 22:13-16 "Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst. 14 Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it. 15 I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. 16 You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I am the Lord.""

The main cause of Jerusalem's wickedness had been her evil rulers, especially her recent kings, like Manasseh, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. Each one had acted in his own strength to shed blood through the misuse of his power. They were violating the commandment of God in Exodus 20:13: "You shall not murder." It does not say, "You shall not kill," like the protesters of capital punishment insist.

And the priests and other leaders were not much different:

Ezekiel 22:26-31 Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. 28 Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord had not spoken. 29 The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. 30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.

You would think that the priests would have upheld the law and protested the evil deeds of the rulers, but instead they themselves broke God's law. These men were given the sacred calling of explaining God's holy law so that the people could live holy lives and know a difference between holy things and common things.

How easy it is for us today to pass judgment on God's ancient people, but what about God's contemporary people? Sexual sins – pornography, adultery, fornication, wife-swapping, child molestation, incest, and homosexuality in the church and Christian homes have ripped churches and families apart, and many churches close their eyes to these offenses by not teaching against them from the pulpits.

Even if faithful pastors confront them with the Word of God, either they get thrown out of their churches or the offenders simply leave the church and start attending other churches where they can live as they please. As Ruth Bell Graham said, "If God doesn't judge America, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

In v30, the Lord searched among His people for even one person in authority who would stand in the gap so that the enemy wouldn't penetrate the wall and invade the

city, but He found none. Of course, the Prophet Jeremiah was in Jerusalem, but he was a man with no authority who was rejected by the politicians, priests, and false prophets. The Prophet Isaiah failed in a similar search in Isaiah 51. The Lord promised to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if He found ten righteous men in the city in Genesis 18:23-33, but He found none.

The Lord is still seeking men and women who will take their stand for the moral standard of God and confront the enemy with God's help. As you read history, you meet godly men and women who had the courage to resist the popular evils of their day and dare to expose the breaks in the wall and seek to mend them.

The Lord is looking for intercessors who will cry out to God for mercy and for a return to holiness. Surely the Lord must be disappointed that His people have time for everything except intercessory prayer. I am guilty of that as well, because I am not doing enough of it.

D. TWO HARLOT SISTERS

Ezekiel 23:1-4 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, there were two women, The daughters of one mother. 3 They committed harlotry in Egypt, They committed harlotry in their youth; Their breasts were there embraced, Their virgin bosom was there pressed. 4 Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; They were Mine, And they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah Ezekiel 23:9-10 "Therefore I have delivered her Into the hand of her lovers, Into the hand of the Assyrians, For whom she lusted. 10 They uncovered her nakedness, Took away her sons and daughters, And slew her with the sword; She became a byword among women, For they had executed judgment on her. Ezekiel 23:11 "Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry.

In this chapter, the Lord was not dealing with two wayward kingdoms – Israel and Judah because of their idolatry, rather adultery of unbelief. Instead of seeking the Lord's help in time of crisis, they turned to other nations for protection.

Oholah represents Israel whose capital was Samaria, while her sister Oholibah represents Judah whose capital was Jerusalem.

Oholah means "her tent". When hearing the word "tent," most Jews would immediately think of the tabernacle where God dwelt with His people. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had its own sanctuary and priesthood in Samaria, as well as idols and shrines throughout the land, but that was "her tent" and not "the Lord's tent."

However, Oholibah means "my tent is in her." The Mosaic Law was still held in Judah, even though not always obeyed, and the levitical priests still served at the temple that Solomon built by God's direction and authority. Looking at Jerusalem, even with all of her sins, the Lord could still say, "My tent is in her." The glory had departed from the temple, but the temple was still known as God's dwelling place.

In the days when the nation was united, king David trusted the Lord to help him defend and deliver his people, but king Solomon's policy was to make political treaties to guarantee peace. This is why he married numerous heathen princesses so that their fathers wouldn't attack the Jewish nation.

The leaders of Judah knew what had happened to their sister kingdom and why it happened, but they didn't take the lesson to heart. For us, we have the entire OT that shows us all the good examples to follow; as well as bad examples not to follow. We really don't have any excuse for our unbelief. Just as the Lord demanded more responsibility from Judah which should have known better, He expects us to follow Him with all the faith in Him because we should know better.

E. APPLICATION

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.