

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: The Sword of the Lord and the Bloody City

Ezekiel 21:1-22:31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

To show that God's judgment is deliberate, certain, and just, falling on a people who were warned repeatedly and who refused to repent, so that no one may presume on delay or charge God with arbitrary wrath.

To lift the hearer's eyes from the ruin of Jerusalem to the rightful King, Christ, who reigns now, and to press the present duty of standing in the breach through warning, intercession, and holy living.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does the threefold preparation of the sword (drawn, sharpened, polished) teach about the deliberateness and certainty of God's judgment, and how is this consistent with His patience and warning beforehand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord commands Ezekiel to set his face toward Jerusalem and prophesy against the sanctuaries, drawing His sword from its sheath against righteous and wicked alike in the land.

That the sword cuts off both righteous and wicked refers to the temporal calamity of the siege, in which the godly suffer the national disaster alongside the guilty, and does not deny the eternal distinction God makes between persons.

Ezekiel is told to sigh with breaking heart before the people's eyes, so that his bodily grief becomes a sign of the dread that will overtake every heart when the report comes.

The repeated 'It comes and it shall be done' presses the certainty of the word, a theme the whole book sounds: when God speaks judgment, it stands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The phrase 'cut off from you both righteous and wicked' troubles readers who expect the righteous to be spared every hardship; it speaks of shared temporal suffering, not shared eternal condemnation.
- Some confuse the sanctuaries (plural) here with pagan high places; the reference is to the holy places of the temple now under judgment.

- Readers may miss that the prophet's own grief is part of the message, not merely his private feeling.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God make His prophet groan before he speaks the word?
- How can faithful believers share in a community's temporal suffering without sharing its guilt before God?
- What does the certainty of 'it shall be done' demand of those who hear God's warnings today?

Question 2

Student Question:

When have you treated God's warnings as empty words, assuming that delay meant He would not act? What in these chapters confronts that assumption in your own heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The song of the sword begins: a sword is sharpened to make a sore slaughter and polished to glitter like lightning.

The doubled action of sharpening and polishing pictures judgment made ready and unmistakable, gleaming so that none can pretend not to see it coming.

The rhetorical question whether the people will rejoice exposes the folly of a nation that has despised the rod, the scepter of Judah that should have ruled in righteousness.

Verse 13 speaks of a testing that has come, underscoring that this trial is no accident but a proving of a people who scorned correction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The poetic structure of the sword song is difficult in translation; the repeated lines are deliberate, mirroring the relentless strokes of the blade.
- Some read the glittering sword as merely Babylon's weaponry; the song makes plain it is the Lord's sword wielded through Babylon.
- The contempt for the scepter (the rod of correction and the rule of Judah) can be missed if the wordplay is flattened.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God describe His judgment as polished and gleaming rather than hidden?
- How does a people come to despise the very rod meant to correct them?
- What does it look like to rejoice rightly under God's discipline rather than scorn it?

Question 3

Student Question:

How does the phrase 'until he comes whose right it is' (21:27) point forward to Christ, and why is it wrong to read it as a promise of a future earthly throne in Jerusalem rather than the reign Christ exercises now over His church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel is told to clap his hands and let the sword fall twice, even three times, a gesture dramatizing the surrounding slaughter that hems the city in.

The sword wheels to right and left wherever its edge is appointed, picturing an enemy from which there is no escape on any side.

The Lord says He too will clap His hands and satisfy His fury, language that stresses His direct authorship of the judgment behind the human army.

The prophet's striking gestures make the sermon visible, a sign-act declaring the certainty and thoroughness of what is decreed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God 'clapping' and being 'satisfied' in fury is anthropomorphic language describing His settled, righteous resolve, not a loss of control or relish in cruelty.
- Readers may find the prophet's clapping strange; sign-acts throughout Ezekiel teach by the body what words alone might fail to land.
- The 'right and left' is sometimes read geographically; it more likely pictures the blade turning every direction so none escape.

Discussion Prompts

- How do the prophet's physical gestures help the people grasp what is coming?
- What does it mean that God's fury can be 'satisfied' by just judgment?
- Where do people today imagine an escape from accountability that does not exist?

Question 4

Student Question:

Chapter 22 lists oppression of the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow alongside idolatry. What does this teach you about how you treat the vulnerable, and where might you be guilty of the bloodless violence of neglect?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord directs Ezekiel to mark two roads for the sword of the king of Babylon, one to Rabbah of the Ammonites and one to Jerusalem in Judah.

At the parting of the way the king halts to use divination, shaking arrows, consulting teraphim, and inspecting a liver, the standard omen practices of the ancient world.

The omen falls on Jerusalem, and though the people regard it as a false divination, the Lord brings their iniquity to remembrance so that they are taken.

The episode shows God overruling even pagan superstition to accomplish His just purpose against a guilty city, without God endorsing the divination itself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- This passage is misused to lend credibility to divination; Scripture elsewhere forbids it (Deuteronomy 18:10–12), and here God merely overrules a pagan act, He does not approve it.
- The teraphim and liver omens are unfamiliar to modern readers and need brief explanation as ancient methods of seeking guidance from idols.
- Some imagine the lot determined the outcome; rather, the lot served the outcome God had already decreed.

Discussion Prompts

- How can God use even a pagan king's superstition to fulfill His word without approving the superstition?
- Why do the guilty dismiss true warnings as 'false divination'?
- Where do people seek guidance from forbidden sources rather than from God's revealed word?

Question 5

Student Question:

Ezekiel 22:26 says the priests did violence to the law and made no distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. How does failure to teach God's distinctions still corrupt God's people, and what does this require of teachers and elders today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Because their guilt is openly remembered, the people will be taken; the wicked prince of Israel, his day come, is told to remove the turban and the crown.

Things will not remain as they are: that which is low shall be exalted and that which is high abased, the great reversal that judgment brings.

The threefold 'a ruin, ruin, ruin' marks the kingdom overturned, the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem brought to an end with Zedekiah.

Yet the promise 'until he comes whose right it is' points beyond the failed kings to the rightful heir, the Messiah, to whom the kingdom truly belongs, and to whom God will give it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Premillennial readers take 'whose right it is' to promise a future earthly throne in Jerusalem; the New Testament shows this fulfilled in Christ who reigns now over His church, not in a future physical kingdom (Luke 1:32-33, Acts 2:30-36).
- Some apply 'ruin, ruin, ruin' only to one event; the threefold word stresses total and final overthrow of the old monarchy.
- The shift from threat to promise in a single verse can be missed if read only as doom.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this verse comfort a Christian even as it pronounces ruin on Jerusalem?
- Why is it important to see Christ's kingdom as present and spiritual rather than future and earthly?
- What does 'whose right it is' teach about who truly owns the right to reign?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you blurred the line between holy and common, treating worship, the Lord's Day, or the Lord's Supper as ordinary rather than set apart for God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord turns the sword next against the Ammonites, who reproached Israel; they are not spared because Jerusalem falls.

Their own diviners saw false visions for them, and the sword drawn against them will not return to its sheath until its work is done.

Ammon will be fuel for the fire, its blood in the land, remembered no more, a warning that mockery of God's people invites its own judgment.

The passage guards against the false comfort that Israel's enemies escape; God's justice reaches every nation in its time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Some assume only Israel faces judgment; this oracle shows the surrounding nations are equally accountable to God.

- The 'false visions' of Ammon's diviners parallel the false prophets within Israel, both leading their people astray.
- The finality 'remembered no more' is historical concerning Ammon as a nation and should not be pressed into speculation.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God judge the nations who mocked His people?
- How does false prophecy harm a people whether inside or outside the covenant?
- What false comfort do people take when they see judgment fall only on others?

Question 7

Student Question:

The king of Babylon practiced divination at the crossroads (21:21), yet the lot served God's purpose. How does this passage show God's sovereignty over even pagan nations and false religion without God being the author of their sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord asks Ezekiel to judge the bloody city and make known to her all her abominations, naming bloodshed and idols as her chief crimes.

Jerusalem has hastened her day by shedding blood and defiling herself with idols, becoming a reproach to the nations and a mocking to all lands.

The title 'bloody city' frames the chapter: a community whose violence and injustice have soaked the land in guilt.

Both near and far the nations will mock her, the very honor she sought from the nations through idolatry turned to shame.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'Bloody city' is sometimes read only of literal murder; it includes judicial murder, oppression, and the violence of injustice that costs lives.
- Idolatry and bloodshed are paired throughout, showing that false worship and social evil grow together.
- Some separate worship from ethics; Ezekiel binds them: a people false to God become cruel to neighbor.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture join idolatry and bloodshed so closely?
- How can a community shed blood without literal murder?

- What reproach does sin bring on God's people before a watching world?

Question 8

Student Question:

When you face a fork in the road, do you seek God's revealed will in His word, or do you, like the pagan king, look to omens, feelings, and signs of your own devising for direction?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The catalogue widens: princes use their power to shed blood, parents are treated with contempt, the sojourner is wronged, the fatherless and the widow are oppressed.

Holy things are despised and Sabbaths profaned, while slanderers stir up bloodshed and men commit lewdness and incest within their own families.

Bribery, usury, and dishonest gain are taken by extortion, and through it all the people have forgotten the Lord.

The list reaches from the throne to the household, showing that Jerusalem's corruption ran through every layer of society.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The breadth of sins listed shows that no single class held the guilt; the whole society was implicated.
- Oppression of the sojourner, fatherless, and widow names the most vulnerable as a measure of a society's righteousness, a theme through the Law and Prophets.
- Usury and dishonest gain are condemned as covenant crimes; care is needed not to flatten this into every form of modern lending, but the heart issue of exploiting the poor remains binding.

Discussion Prompts

- How does contempt for parents fit among crimes of bloodshed and oppression?
- Why does God measure a people by how they treat the vulnerable?
- Where does dishonest gain still corrupt God's people today?

Question 9

Student Question:

God says in 22:30 that He sought a man to stand in the breach before Him for the land, that He should not destroy it, but He found none. In light of this verse, of Ezekiel 18:20, and of the watchman's charge, what does it mean that judgment fell because no one would intercede,

repent, and warn, and how does this lay personal responsibility on you rather than leaving you to blame an inherited or unavoidable fate?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord strikes His hands at the dishonest gain and bloodshed, and asks whether their courage and hands can endure the day He deals with them.

He will scatter them among the nations and consume their filthiness, and they will know the Lord through the very judgment that purges them.

Jerusalem has become dross to Him, all of them brass, tin, iron, and lead, fit only for the furnace where He will gather and melt them in His fury.

The smelting image teaches that the exile is a refining as well as a punishment, separating the dross of a corrupt people in the fire of judgment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The furnace image can be read as mere destruction; it is also purifying, a fire that exposes and separates dross.
- 'You shall know that I am the Lord' recurs in the book and frames judgment as ultimately revelatory of God's character.
- Some treat scattering as God abandoning His people; rather it is disciplinary, with a remnant in view.

Discussion Prompts

- How is God's judgment both punishment and refinement?
- What does it mean that people come to 'know the Lord' through judgment?
- How does God's discipline aim at purifying rather than merely destroying?

Question 10

Student Question:

If God were looking today for one person in your congregation and community to stand in the breach, to warn the lost, to plead for the guilty, and to live separate from the bloody city, what one concrete step will you take this week to be that person?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter ends by naming the failure of every office: prophets conspire and devour souls, priests do violence to the law and profane holy things, princes tear like wolves for gain.

The priests made no distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean, and hid their eyes from God's Sabbaths, so that He was profaned among them.

The prophets daubed the people's sins with whitewash, seeing false visions and lying divinations, saying 'Thus says the Lord God' when the Lord had not spoken.

God sought a man to build up the wall and stand in the breach before Him for the land, that He should not destroy it, but He found none, so He poured out His indignation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whitewash of false prophets warns against teachers who soothe rather than warn; the duty of the watchman is to tell the truth even when unwelcome.
- 'No distinction between holy and common' indicts failed teaching; teachers and elders today bear the charge to mark God's distinctions faithfully.
- 'I found none' must be read with Ezekiel 18:20: judgment fell because of present, personal refusal to repent and intercede, not because of an inherited or unavoidable guilt that left them no responsibility.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is failure to distinguish holy from common such a serious charge against teachers?
- What does it cost a congregation when its teachers whitewash sin instead of warning?
- What does it mean for you to stand in the breach for a guilty people today?