

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 9: The Sword of the Lord and the Bloody City -- Ezekiel 21:1–22:31

In these two chapters the word of the Lord turns sharp and personal. The riddle and parable of chapter 20 give way to a sword that is drawn, sharpened, and polished for slaughter. God Himself sets His face against His own city and sanctuary, against the land of Israel, and against righteous and wicked alike who have shared in her guilt. This is not the rage of a tyrant but the settled justice of a holy God who has waited long and warned often.

Ezekiel is told to sigh with breaking heart before the people, and then to sing a grim song of the sword. The instrument of judgment is no longer hidden in figures of speech. The sword is the king of Babylon, and behind him stands the Lord who has summoned him. At the fork of the road this king pauses, shakes his arrows, consults his idols, and inspects a liver for omens, and the lot falls on Jerusalem. Yet even pagan divination cannot move the hand of God off its appointed course.

Into this dark song the Lord drops a single shaft of light. The crown is to be removed, the kingdom overturned, ruin upon ruin pronounced, until he comes whose right it is. Centuries before Bethlehem, the Spirit points past the failed sons of David to one rightful King to whom the kingdom belongs. The Christ who reigns now is the answer to Jerusalem's collapse, and the church studying these verses should hear in this word a promise as much as a threat.

Chapter 22 then unrolls the indictment in full. Jerusalem is the bloody city, a melting furnace of dross, charged with bloodshed, idolatry, contempt for father and mother, oppression of the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, dishonest gain, profaned Sabbaths, slander, and lust. Priests do violence to the law, prophets daub with whitewash, princes tear like wolves, and the people of the land practice extortion. God seeks one man to stand in the breach, and finds none. The lesson asks every reader whether we are standing in the gap today.

Group Discussion: Read Ezekiel 21:1–22:31 aloud together, dividing the song of the sword (ch. 21) from the catalogue of sins (ch. 22). Pause after the phrase 'until he comes whose right it is' and ask the class what hope a Christian reads there. Then list on a board every sin named in chapter 22 and ask which of them still tempt a congregation today. Close the group reading by noting where God looks for a man to stand in the breach.

Personal Reflection: Sit quietly with the image of God seeking one person to stand in the breach for a guilty people, and finding none. Ask honestly whether you are an intercessor for your family, your congregation, and your community, or whether you have grown silent while sin gathers. Let the sword song humble any pride, and let 'whose right it is' lift your eyes to the reigning Christ before you ever feel the weight of judgment.

Read Ezekiel 21:1–22:31

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Jeremiah 5:1, the Lord seeking one just person in Jerusalem to spare the city; Genesis 18:23–32, Abraham interceding for Sodom; Psalm 106:23, Moses standing in the breach to turn away wrath; Genesis 49:10, the scepter not departing from Judah until Shiloh comes; 1 Timothy 2:1–5, the church called to intercessory prayer for all people.

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