

EZEKIEL

Cry Me a River

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 21:1-32

Topic

The Lord sighs with deep feeling as He draws His sword to bring judgment upon His people

Title

"The Sword In The Sigh"

You could probably name at least five famous swords.

- Excalibur is the traditional "Sword in the Stone."
- The Wallace Sword belonged to the beloved Scottish patriot, Mel Gibson.

J.R.R. Tolkien presents a grip of swords: Glamdring, Orcrist, Sting, and Narsil, which would be reforged as Andúril - Flame of the West.

Ezekiel mentions a "sword" 16 times.

It is the Sword of the Lord, who says, "I shall draw My sword out of its sheath."

Too bad that the LORD's sword is loaned to King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer His people, not to deliver them.

There is an emotional aspect we will explore. Twice in verse six Ezekiel represents the LORD as *sighing*. Let it sink in that God sighs.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 The Sword Of The Lord Is Unsheathed To Keep You**, and **#2 The Sighs Of The Lord Are Uttered To Caress You**.

#1 The Sword Of The Lord Is Unsheathed To Keep You (v1-5 & 18-32)

“Look among the nations and watch - Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up [Babylon], A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

They are terrible and dreadful” (Habakkuk 1:5-7).

Habakkuk was astonished that God used Babylon to discipline Israel, but He did.

He did it because they were, and they remain, His precious chosen nation.

Had God let them continue on their downward spiral they would have destroyed themselves.

Ezk 21:1 And the word of the LORD came to me...

Ezk 21:2 “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel;

Ezk 21:3 and say to the land of Israel, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you.

Ezk 21:4 Because I will cut off both righteous and wicked from you, therefore My sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south to north,

Ezk 21:5 that all flesh may know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore.” ’

The first sword appears in Eden after Adam and Eve’s rebellion. God placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the tree of life. It was a protective act, for their good.

The Jews could not comprehend the LORD allowing the Temple to be destroyed. He is more interested in His *people* than any *places*. In Psalm 8 David marvels at the stellar heavens. Then he says, “What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?” God’s attention is not on the marvels of the *microverse* or the *macroverse*. They are on you.

We talked about the righteous suffering along with the unrighteous. With a fallen race, with nations lusting for power, there is going to be universal suffering. Not God's fault.

We're going to drop down to verses 18-32.

Ezk 21:18 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying:

Ezekiel received another prophecy and obeyed immediately. "Of course," we say, "God spoke to him!" But God has spoken to us even *more* through His written Word.

Ezk 21:19 "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.

Ezk 21:20 Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem.

Jerusalem's Public Works Dept. is told to go to the fork in the road and install signage so that the invaders will know where they are headed, Jerusalem or Ammon.

The NT uses imagery of the broad way that leads a person to destruction, and the narrow road to eternal life. When you come to a fork, your way is marked by godly wisdom, meekness, humility, etc.

How will Nebuchadnezzar choose? The usual way - by consulting a liver

Ezk 21:21 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.

Ezk 21:22 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.

They used divination. Examining the liver of a sacrificed animal... *My personal favorite.*

All signs pointed to Jerusalem. The Babylonians prepared battering rams, siege ramps, and towers.

We must avail ourselves of our **spiritual** weapons in order to stand against **supernatural** enemies. It hadn't been that long since the Angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. He did it as the Jews prayed, repenting of sin, approaching God with humility.

Ezk 21:23 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.

The people of Judah dismissed Babylon's divination, believing God would overturn it. However, Zedekiah had sworn loyalty to Babylon, and God expected them to honor this oath.

Ultimately, it was the LORD who directed the Babylonian king, as stated in Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."

This isn't theistic determinism. We have genuine free-will. God's stepping in to keep His plan for redemption on track is consistent with both His sovereignty & man's free-will.

Ezk 21:24 "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.

Ezk 21:25 'Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end,

Ezk 21:26 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.

Ezk 21:27 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 Lord announced the end of Zedekiah's authority, symbolized by removal of his turban and crown.

Ezk 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 -

Ezk 21:29 While they see false visions for you, While they divine a lie to you, To bring you on the necks of the wicked, the slain Whose day has come, Whose iniquity shall end.

Ezk 21:30 'Return it to its sheath. I will judge you In the place where you were created, In the land of your nativity.

Ezk 21:31 I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow against you with the fire of My wrath, And deliver you into the hands of brutal men who are skillful to destroy.

Ezk 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.' "

While still in possession of the Lord's power and authority over other nations, King Nebuchadnezzar returns his attention to the Ammonites. Despite their false prophecies of victory, the Ammonites would be destroyed.

When is the last time you met an Ammonite?

The destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent Babylonian captivity, were awful. Israel left Jehovah no alternative. If they were going to survive as a nation and a people to bless all the nations of the world by bringing the Messiah, God must halt their apostasy.

#2 The Sighs Of The Lord Are
Uttered To Caress You (v6-17)

A few studies ago we encountered the Doctrine of Impassibility. It asserts that God does not experience emotional changes or suffering due to external influences.

Of course He does; He says so Himself multiple times in the Bible

Relational Sovereignty is one approach to countering impassibility. It posits that God's sovereignty is exercised in a dynamic and interactive relationship between God and His creation. God engages with humanity in a way that allows for genuine interaction, responsiveness, and mutual influence. God's will is both purposeful and flexible, accommodating human free will. Prayer is the most potent example. It is a genuine conversation that can effect Him. .

Ezk 21:6 Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes.

Ezk 21:7 And it shall be when they say to you, 'Why are you sighing?' that you shall answer, 'Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass,' says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel is representing God when he *sighs*. This is much more intense than it at first seems:

- “Knees weak as water” indicates loss of bladder control. This is *really* strong emotion!
- “Bitterness” is better translated *grief*.

The LORD’s emotions are set down in a song

The song is in verses 8-16. Songs in our Bible study should be approached less *analytically* and more *artistically*.

Ezk 21:8 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 21:9 “Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the LORD!’ Say: ‘A sword, a sword is sharpened And also polished!

Ezk 21:10 Sharpened to make a dreadful slaughter, Polished to flash like lightning! Should we then make mirth? It despises the scepter of My son, As it does all wood.

Ezk 21:11 And He has given it to be polished, That it may be handled; This sword is sharpened, and it is polished To be given into the hand of the slayer.’

“Slayer” was Nebuchadnezzar’s super hero name. (Punisher was already taken). The LORD gave the King of Babylon authority over other nations.

God’s “son” in this song is the nation of Judah.

Ezk 21:12 “Cry and wail, son of man; For it will be against My people, Against all the princes of Israel. Terrors including the sword will be against My people; Therefore strike your thigh.

Ezk 21:13 “Because it is a testing, And what if the sword despises even the scepter? The scepter shall be no more,” says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel’s gestures are choreographed. It doesn’t take away the emotion; it enhances it.

Ezk 21:14 “You therefore, son of man, prophesy, And strike your hands together. The third time let the sword do double damage. It is the sword that slays, The sword that slays the great men, That enters their private chambers.

Ezk 21:15 I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, That the heart may melt and many may stumble. Ah! It is made bright; It is grasped for slaughter:

What songs evoke strong emotion from you? That take you back to a terrible time?

It's not unusual for someone recently saved to ditch their music. Sometimes they bring it back. That's between you & the Lord, but take care. It can be a sign of your maturity, or just the opposite.

Ezk 21:16 "Swords at the ready! Thrust right! Set your blade! Thrust left - Wherever your edge is ordered!

Ezk 21:17 "I also will beat My fists together, And I will cause My fury to rest; I, the LORD, have spoken."

Putting His fury to rest reminds us that while the LORD expresses deep emotion, He is never out of control. He does not overreact. Yet, He fully understands my grief and sorrow. He comforts and holds me close, as One who knows what it is to be human, yet without sin.

Lets think back in Jewish history to 1445BC. After 40yrs of being prohibited from entering, Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land.

His first obstacle was the walled city of Jericho. He went out to reconnoiter. Suddenly Joshua sensed the presence of someone else. "He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but *as* Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy." And Joshua did so" (Joshua 5:13-15).

The 'Commander' was an appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity. It was Jesus. The sword of the Lord was unsheathed to give Israel victory-after-victory.

Eight centuries later, the sword is in Nebuchadnezzar's hand. The Jews would be forcibly removed & exiled from the Promised Land.

From that time until the modern era, Israel did not govern herself, and has had no king on the earthly throne. That all changed May 14, 1948 when the Jews returned to their homeland. It will change again at the 2nd Coming of the Lord; all Israel will be saved.

Israel started well, but fell away. Every Christian starts well... But finishing well can be elusive. Two teachings from the apostle Paul can help us:

1. "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3).
2. "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

BTW: Wednesday morning, at our Men's Study, Jacob reminded us that "be filled with the Spirit" is a command. I've heard it translated, "Go on being filled." It is something you need to be reminded about.

We start the Christian life well, believing Jesus for salvation. The Holy Spirit immediately, permanently resides in us. After, however, we tend to move away from His supernatural leading to depend on ourselves. God commands us to continue as we started, as those with the Holy Spirit.

"As for me, and my house..."