

## Ezekiel Commanded to Preach, Prophecy

### Concerning the Sword of YHWH (Babylon)

#### That Is Coming Against Jerusalem and Rabbah (Chapter 21)

21:1<sup>Heb</sup> / 20:45<sup>Eng</sup> And YHWH's word was / came to me, saying: 20:46<sup>Eng</sup> Son of Adam / Humanity, set your face to (the) way southward; and drip / preach to (the) south, and prophesy to (the) forest of the field of the Negebh / southland. 21:3 / 20:47 And you shall say to a forest of the south, Hear YHWH's word! In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Look at Me—igniting a fire against you! And it will devour every moist tree in you, and every dry tree. Not a single flame will be quenched / (its) blazing flame will not be quenched—and all faces from south to north will be scorched by it! 21:4 / 20:48 And all flesh will see that I, YHWH, I burned it; it will not be quenched! 21:5 / 20:49 And I said, Aha! / Alas! My Lord YHWH! They are saying to / of me, Is he not a maker of parables / author of proverbs / allegorist? 21:6<sup>Heb</sup> / 1<sup>Eng</sup> And YHWH's word was / came to me, saying: 21:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 2<sup>Eng</sup> Son of Adam / Humanity, Set your face towards Jerusalem. And drip / preach to / towards (the) sanctuaries, and prophesy to (the) land of Israel. 21:8<sup>Heb</sup> / 3<sup>Eng</sup> And you shall say to (the) land of Israel, In this way YHWH spoke: Look at Me—against you (feminine singular); and I will draw out My sword from its sheath, and I will cut off from you righteous and wicked (people)! 21:9<sup>Heb</sup> / 4<sup>Eng</sup> Because I cut off from you (both) righteous and wicked, therefore My sword will go forth from its sheath to all flesh from (the) south / (the) Negebh (to the) north. 21:10<sup>Heb</sup> / 5<sup>Eng</sup> And all flesh will know that I, YHWH, brought forth My sword from its sheath; it will not return again! 21:11<sup>Heb</sup> / 6<sup>Eng</sup> And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, sigh--with brokenness of hips, and with bitterness you shall sigh, to / before their eyes. 21:12<sup>Heb</sup> / 7<sup>Eng</sup> And it will happen, when they will say to you, Over what did you sigh? And you shall say, To / at a report that it is coming. And every heart will melt, and all hands will sink, and every spirit will grow faint; and all knees will walk (on) water! Look—it is coming, and it will be done! (It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH. 21:13<sup>Heb</sup> / 8<sup>Eng</sup> And YHWH's word was / came to me saying: 21:14<sup>Heb</sup> / 9<sup>Eng</sup> Son of Adam / Humanity, prophesy and say: In this way my Lord spoke: Say: A sword! A Sword! It was sharpened, and also it was polished! 21:15<sup>Heb</sup> / 10<sup>Eng</sup> In order to slaughter slaughter it was sharpened; in order for it to be lightning, it was polished. Or shall we exult (in) a rod / staff / scepter, My son? One (feminine) rejecting all wood / tree(s)? 21:16<sup>Heb</sup> / 11<sup>Eng</sup> And He gave it for polishing to be grasped in the hand. It (is) a sharpened sword, and it (is) polished, to place it in (the) hand of one killing! 21:17<sup>Heb</sup> / 12<sup>Eng</sup> Cry out and howl, Son of Adam / Humanity! Because it was against My people! It (is) against all (the) princes of Israel, they were thrown to a sword with My people! Therefore slap upon your thigh! 21:18<sup>Heb</sup> / 13<sup>Eng</sup> Because (it is) a testing / trial. And what if (it is) also a rod / staff / scepter being rejected? It shall not be. (It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH. 21:19<sup>Heb</sup> / 14<sup>Eng</sup> And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, prophesy! And clap / strike, hand to hand! And let (the) sword be doubled, tripled—it is a sword of pierced / killed (people), a sword of (the) pierced / killed, the great one that surrounds them—21:20<sup>Heb</sup> / 15<sup>Eng</sup> in order to melt heart(s), and multiply the stumbling-blocks. Upon / at all their gates I have placed slaughter of (the) sword! Alas! It was made for lightning--polished / made bare for slaughter (synonym)! 21:21<sup>Heb</sup> / 16<sup>Eng</sup> Go one way or another! Turn right! Set to the left! Wherever your faces are fixed. 21:22<sup>Heb</sup> / 17<sup>Eng</sup> And also,

I will clap / strike My hand to My hand; and I will give My wrath rest. I, YHWH, I have spoken! 21:23<sup>Heb</sup> / 18<sup>Eng</sup> And YHWH's word came to me, saying: 21:24<sup>Heb</sup> / 19<sup>Eng</sup> And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, place / mark for yourself two ways for (the) coming of (the) king of Babylon's sword: from one land the two of them go forth. And create a hand / sign-post at (the) head / beginning: Way to a City--create (it). 21:25<sup>Heb</sup> / 20<sup>Eng</sup> A way you shall place / mark for a sword's coming to / against Rabbath of (the) Children of Ammon, and to / against Judah in Jerusalem--inaccessible / fortified. 21:26<sup>Heb</sup> / 21<sup>Eng</sup> Because Babylon's king stood to / at a mother of the way, at (the) head of (the) two ways, to divine a divination. He shook with the arrows. He asked / inquired by the Teraphim / Idol-God. He looked at the liver; 21:27<sup>Heb</sup> / 22<sup>Eng</sup> in his right hand was the divination--Jerusalem--to place battering-rams, to open a mouth with murder, to raise high a voice with shouting, to place battering-rams against gates, to pour out a (besieging) mound, to build a siege-wall / tower. 21:28<sup>Heb</sup> / 23<sup>Eng</sup> And it will be for them like a divination of emptiness; in their eyes--sworn oaths belonging to them. And he (Judah) is bringing iniquity to remembrance, for (them) to be seized! 21:29<sup>Heb</sup> / 24<sup>Eng</sup> Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Because of your (plural) causing your iniquity to be remembered, by your transgressions being uncovered, to cause your sins to be seen, with all your (evil) deeds--because of your causing to be remembered, with / in the hand you will be seized. 21:30<sup>Heb</sup> / 25<sup>Eng</sup> And you, profaned / pierced evil prince of Israel, whose day is coming / has come, in a time of iniquity--an end! 21:31<sup>Heb</sup> / 26<sup>Eng</sup> In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Take away the turban! And remove the crown! This--not this! That which is low, exalt! And that which is high, lower! 21:32<sup>Heb</sup> / 27<sup>Eng</sup> A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it! Also this did not happen until he comes, to whom belongs the justice--and I will give (it) to him! 21:33<sup>Heb</sup> / 28<sup>Eng</sup> And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, Prophecy! And you shall say: In this way my Lord YHWH spoke, to Ammon's children and to their reproach: and you shall say, A sword, a sword, unsheathed for slaughter, polished to consume, in order for lightning (to strike)--21:34<sup>Heb</sup> / 29<sup>Eng</sup> while envisioning for yourself emptiness, while divining for yourself a lie, to place you to / on (the) necks of wicked corpses--whose day has come in a time of iniquity--an end! 21:35<sup>Heb</sup> / 30<sup>Eng</sup> Return (the sword) to its sheath! In (the) place where you (feminine singular) were created, in a land of your origin, I will judge you. 21:36<sup>Heb</sup> / 31<sup>Eng</sup> And I will pour out upon you My indignation, with (the) fire of My fury I will blow upon you; and I will place you in (the) hand of cruel men workers of destruction! 21:37<sup>Heb</sup> / 32<sup>Eng</sup> For the fire you will be, for consuming; our blood will be in (the) midst of the land / earth. You will not be remembered. Because I, YHWH, I have spoken.

21:1<sup>Heb</sup> / 20:45<sup>Eng961</sup>

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961

The opening verses **21:1-2**<sup>Heb</sup> / **20:45-46**<sup>Eng</sup> tell of Ezekiel's call from YHWH to preach and prophesy concerning YHWH's "sword" that will come against Jerusalem and Rabbah. There follows a series of "sword oracles." The "sword of YHWH" is none other than Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. Ezekiel's expression of bitter grief is an acted symbol of that coming judgment. Here we hear "songs of the sword," with the prophet singing and striking his hands together as a symbol of the striking of the sword. Later verses contain the unique description of the King of Babylon using various methods (continued...)

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<sup>961</sup>(...continued)

of divination in order to ascertain the Divine Will for his battle-plan--both Jerusalem first, along with her prince Zedekiah, will be subject to the destruction of the Babylonians, and Ammon with her capital city of Rabbah will be next!

Rabbi Fisch states that “In this chapter the prophet repeats with solemn emphasis his solemn warning of the imminent invasion and fall of Jerusalem. At first he speaks in metaphors, then he passes on to plain language. The scene of the forest in the south devoured by fire is replaced by that of Jerusalem devoured by the sword. He proceeds to describe in vivid terms the drawn sword in the hand of the Babylonian king who would execute [YHWH’s] judgment unsparingly. After the oracle on the devouring sword comes a description of Nebuchadnezzar standing at the cross-roads and practicing divination to decide whether he would first attack Ammon or Jerusalem. The lot fell on the latter; but Ammon, too, would eventually be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 132)

Reimer entitles **21:1-37<sup>Heb</sup> / 20:45-21:32<sup>Eng</sup>** “Fire and Sword.” He states that “The chapter division in English versions can obscure the relationship of **20:45-49** to the following oracles. In the Hebrew text, **20:45** begins a new chapter. The abrupt change in subject, from fire to sword, reinforces this confusion. However, the conjunction of fire and sword appears in both literal (e.g., **Judges 1:8**) and theological contexts (**Isaiah 66:16; Nahum 3:15**). Seeming frustration at the symbolism of the ‘fire’ oracle (**Ezekiel 20:45-59<sup>Heb</sup>**) prompts its unpacking in terms of the ‘sword’ (**21:1-32<sup>Heb</sup>**). Once the sword symbolism is introduced, it is developed in a cascading series of oracles linked by their common theme. Formulaic language (e.g., ‘the word of YHWH came to me,’ and concluding formulas) help to demarcate distinct movements.” (P. 1528)

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 1-5<sup>Heb</sup> / 20:45-49<sup>Eng</sup>** “The Conflagration in the Forest.” Reimer entitles this section “The Parable of the Fire.” He comments that “The command to set your face, distinctive in Ezekiel, and the orientation to the southland are both reminiscent of **Ezekiel 6:2**, which introduces another ‘sword of YHWH’ passage. Here, however, all-consuming fire is the destroying agent, clearly announcing the totality of coming Divine judgment (destroying both green tree and dry tree). But what of the addressees: the ‘southland’ (Hebrew *teman*), the south (*darom*), and the forest of the *Negeb*? This inclusive breadth of territory rather than the fiery content itself, seems to prompt the outcry of **20:49**, Ah, [יְהוָה יְהוָה! אֲנִי וְהַצִּדְוֹן, my Lord YHWH!] Once before, Ezekiel similarly cried out on his own behalf (**4:14**; compare **9:8; 11:13**).” (P. 1529)

Darr, in her overview states that “In four interrelated oracles (**20:45-21:7<sup>Eng</sup>; 21:8-17<sup>Eng</sup>; 21:18-27<sup>Eng</sup>; and 21:28-32<sup>Eng</sup>**) Ezekiel traces the military ‘career’ of a sword unsheathed by Yahweh, sharpened and polished for battle, handed over to the king of Babylonia, and finally destroyed by the fiery breath of God. The collection is remarkable for its rhetorical intensity, dazzling imagery, and befuddling ambiguities. Impassioned prophecies are interspersed with dramatic gestures that reflect blazing wrath, bitter

(continued...)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's word was / came to me, saying:

21:2 / 20:46<sup>Eng</sup>

בֶּן־אָדָם

Son of Adam / Humanity,

שִׁים פְּנֶיךָ דְרֹךְ תִּמְנָה

set your face to (the) way southward;<sup>962</sup>

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<sup>961</sup>(...continued)

grief, and terror. Judah's world turns topsy-turvy; social structures collapse and, with them, many of Israel's most cherished beliefs about what it means to be the people of Yahweh." (P. 174)

“Befuddling ambiguities”? What are such things doing in a biblical “prophecy” inspired by YHWH? Once again we remind ourselves of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12** where we are taught to expect the visions and dreams of Israel's prophets, unlike the Face to face revelations through Moses, to be characterized by “riddles,” by “enigmas.” When we expect such things to occur in biblical statements by prophets and apostles, we quit expecting / demanding that their oracles always be consistent, understood literally. This acknowledgment will keep us from getting involved in the ridiculous attempts to understand the biblical oracles literally, and date their occurrences exactly—seeking to put them all together into a “roadmap into the future.” Yes, thank you Ms. Darr—“befuddling ambiguities.” However, we do not find **chapter 21** as difficult to read as Darr does (and others), and wonder if some of the ‘befuddling ambiguities’ are not attempts to get around what the text is saying. See what you think as you read through the chapter, translating the Hebrew text.

<sup>962</sup>

Rabbi Fisch states that Ezekiel is commanded to “Turn in the direction of the south, i.e. the land of Israel which lay due south of Babylon where the prophet was living.” (P. 132) This is obviously not the case, as Babylon lay due east of Jerusalem, a little over 500 miles as the crow flies. But that is straight through the Arabian desert, and the only practical route in biblical times was to go to the northwest along the “fertile crescent,” until reaching Syria and then turning to the south, southwest to come to Jerusalem, meaning a much longer distance.

Hilmer comments on the phrase “Set your face,” that it is “a posture required eight times of Ezekiel (here [20:46]; 13:17; 21:3; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2).” That he was to set his face “toward the south” means “toward Judah and Jerusalem, the object of all Ezekiel's prophesying in these chapters. Any Babylonian invasion would traverse Palestine from north to south (see 26:7, Nebuchadnezzar will come against Tyre ‘from the north’).” (P. 1254)

(continued...)

וְהִטָּף אֶל-דָּרוֹם

and drip / preach<sup>963</sup> to (the) south,<sup>964</sup>

וְהִנְבֵּא אֶל-יַעַר הַשָּׂדֶה נֶגֶב:

and prophesy to (the) forest<sup>965</sup> of the field of the Negebh / southland.<sup>966</sup>

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<sup>962</sup>(...continued)

Darr states that “‘Teman’ can be construed either as a place-name (a northern district of Edom; see 25:13) or as ‘south’...At this early stage in the oracle, the reader has no basis for deciding between these two possibilities.” (P. 175) Ambiguities? Yes, indeed.

<sup>963</sup>

The Hebrew verb here is הִטָּף, *hatteph*, the hiphil imperative masculine singular from the root נָטַף, “drop,” “drip,” used of a prophet’s dropping or dripping speech / words. For occurrences in the **Hebrew Bible** with this meaning, see: **Amos 7:16**, where it is parallel to הִנְבֵּא, “prophesy.” The same thing is true of **Exodus 21:2** and **7**; and **Micah 2:6** and **11**.

Rabbi Fisch states that “The verb means in the first instance ‘to drop (words)’ and so ‘to preach.’ In later Hebrew the noun for ‘preacher’ was derived from this root.” (P. 132)

<sup>964</sup>

The Hebrew noun דָּרוֹם, *darom*, according to Darr, “may designate a locality (in Mishnaic Hebrew, a region of Judea lying north of Beersheba and south of Beth-Gubrin). Elsewhere in Ezekiel, however, it means ‘south’ (e.g., **Ezekiel 40:24, 27, 28; 41:11**; see also **Job 37:17; Ecclesiastes 1:6; 11:3**). With the addition of this second term, the reader may lean toward interpreting both Teman and Doran as common nouns, rather than proper names.” (P. 175) Again we say, “Ambiguity”?

<sup>965</sup>

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Jerusalem is compared to a forest. As a forest has good and bad trees, so Jerusalem harbored righteous and wicked inhabitants (Kimchi). An indication that Jerusalem will be devastated, and free for anyone to enter like a forest or field (Rashi). The whole of the land, not only the capital, was threatened (compare **verse 7**).” (P. 132)

But we wonder. The text has אֶל-יַעַר הַשָּׂדֶה נֶגֶב, literally “to a forest of the field, *negebh* / south.” Is that a description of Jerusalem? We doubt it, even though Rabbi Fisch / Kimchi / and Rashi may think Jerusalem is meant. And we also wonder where, in the far south of Israel, there is or was a “field” or a “forest”? We have driven through and flown over the Negebh, and we see no signs of any

(continued...)

21:3 / 20:47

וְאָמַרְתָּ לְיַעַר הַנֶּגֶב

And you shall say to a forest of the south / *negebh*

שְׁמַע דְּבַר־יְהוָה

Hear YHWH's Word!<sup>967</sup>

כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

הֲנִי מְצִיחַ־בְּךָ אֵשׁ

Look at Me—igniting a fire against you!

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<sup>965</sup>(...continued)

“forest” there, nor evidence of there having been one in biblical times. It is solid wilderness / desert—not “forest.” Ambiguity? Puzzle? Yes, indeed!

In the light of this, Darr states that “Hence ‘forest land’ is misleading and better rendered ‘scrubland.’” She adds that “Hence, all three terms (rendered as place-names in the **Septuagint**) can specify a single compass point [‘south’]. Their precise meanings to this point in the oracle remain ambiguous, and we can assume that competent ancient (and modern) readers might have understood them in different ways.” (P. 175) Yes, indeed. This is ambiguous language at its best.

<sup>966</sup>

Notice the three different words for “south” in this verse. First there is the word תִּימָנָה, *teymanah*, literally “to the right,” while facing east; therefore “southwards”; second is the word דָּרוֹם, *darom*, “south”; and third is the word נֶגֶב, *neghebh*, “south.” And we wonder, why these three different words here for “south”?

<sup>967</sup>

Of course, a “forest” cannot listen to or hear YHWH’s Word. And because of this, we recognize that Ezekiel is using the word “forest” metaphorically, for certain people, who can hear that Word. And we begin to think of the people of Jerusalem as the addressees, even though Ezekiel is speaking in Babylonia to the exiles, but whose message will be carried from there to Jerusalem. What do you think?

וְאִכְלָהּ בְּךָ כָּל-עֵץ-לֶחֶט

And it will devour every moist tree in you,

וְכָל-עֵץ יָבֵשׁ

and every dry tree.<sup>968</sup>

לֹא-תִכְבֵּה לַהֲבַת שְׁלֵהֶבֶת

Not a single flame will be quenched / (its) blazing flame will not be quenched--<sup>969</sup>

וְנִצְרְבוּ-בָהּ כָּל-פָּנִים מִנֶּגֶב צְפוֹנָה:

and all faces from south to north will be scorched by it!<sup>970</sup>

21:4 / 20:48

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968

Rabbi Fisch holds that the moist / green tree and the dry tree constitute “a figure for the righteous and the wicked.” (P. 132)

Darr comments that “The oracle itself, addressed to ‘the forest of the Negeb,’ begins with a summons to hear Yahweh’s declaration, followed by the messenger formula (‘Thus says the Lord God’). Yahweh intends to kindle a fire in the territory that will consume every tree—green and dry. Ezekiel often speaks metaphorically of God’s judgment as fire (e.g., **5:4; 10:2; 15:4-7; 19:12, 14**). Would the ancient reader, like some moderns, have been disconcerted by the image of a forest fire raging through territory that was not densely vegetated, and so suspect that the oracle’s addressee is something other than the southern scrubland?” (P. 177) We say Yes, this is truly enigmatic speech. Readers, ancient and modern, are hard pressed to say what the meaning of this kind of language is.

969

Rabbi Fisch’s translation is “it shall not be quenched, even a flaming flame,” and he comments that “The literal translation...is “a flame, an intense flame, (which) shall not quenched.’ Any resistance which the Judeans will oppose to the Babylonian army (the *flame*) will not overcome it.” (P. 132)

970

Rabbi Fisch comments that “All the inhabitants of the land will suffer from the cruelty of the invader, even the righteous.” (P. 132)

Hilmer states that the phrase “from south to north” expresses “totality, not direction; [it is] equivalent to saying, ‘from border on the right [south] to that on the left [north],’ assuming that the person speaking is facing east. (P. 1254)

וְרָאוּ כָּל-בָּשָׂר כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה בַּעֲרִיתֶיהָ

And all flesh will see that I, YHWH, I burned it;<sup>971</sup>

לֹא תִכְבֵּה:

it will not be quenched!

21:5 / 20:49

וְאָמַר אֲהָהָה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

And I said, Aha! / Alas! My Lord YHWH!<sup>972</sup>

הֵמָּה אֹמְרִים לִי

They are saying to / of me,

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971

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The destruction will be of such a nature and extent that all the world will recognize it as an act of Divine retribution.” (Pp. 132-33)

972

Darr comments that “In a manner uncharacteristic of the prophet, Ezekiel responds with a complaint to Yahweh consisting of ‘Ah!’, a cry of alarm, direct address, and an indirect quotation of the people: ‘They are saying of me, ‘Is he not...a ‘teller of parable’ / ‘riddlemonger’ / ‘maker of allegories’...

“The oracle does not fit the conventional understanding of parables (stories told to make a moral or theological point). It is not, strictly speaking, either a riddle (through all metaphors have a ‘riddling’ quality) or an allegory. Allegories present ‘an abstract or spiritual concept in the guise of concrete images and events.’ With this oracle, Ezekiel engages in the latter activity. In subsequent verses (21:1-6<sup>Eng</sup>) he will disclose the underlying subject (‘tenor’) of his metaphorical ‘vehicle’ (the oracular utterance), clarifying some of its terms through the substitution of ‘literal’ equivalents, while replacing others with different metaphors.

“What is the gist of the people’s quote, and why does the prophet complain of it to Yahweh? Does he despair of recurring gripes from the exiles that his oracles are unintelligible? (So, Zimmerli) Does he fear that the ‘richness of his repertoire’ inclines his audience to appreciate him as an entertainer, but not to take his word seriously (see 33:30-33)? (So, Greenberg) Either view is possible, though Yahweh’s immediate interpretation of the metaphorical oracle especially commends the former.” (P. 176)



הֲלֹא מְמַשֵּׁל מִשְׁלֵי הוּא:

Is he not a maker of parables / author of proverbs / allegorist?<sup>973</sup>

973

We think the exiles are correct in calling Ezekiel “a maker of parables / author of proverbs / allegorist.” Indeed, his “vision-stories” make up a profound contribution to the **Hebrew Bible**, and prepare us for the coming King–Messiah—who constantly speaks in parables / allegories.

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Ezekiel’s contention is that since his oracles are delivered in the form of metaphors [we say, ‘vision-stories’], the people do not take his messages seriously, but regard him merely as a skillful composer of parables [or, we might say, ‘allegorist’]. Thereupon he is told to translate his figures of speech into plain language.” (P. 133)

We are reminded of a similar incident in the life of Jesus, as depicted in **John 16:25-30**,

- 25 Ταῦτα ἐν παροιμίαις λελάληκα ὑμῖν·  
These things I have spoken to you (plural) in proverbs / parables / allegories /  
figures of speech.  
ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμίαις λαλήσω ὑμῖν,  
An hour is coming when no longer in allegories etc. will I speak to you,  
ἀλλὰ παρρησίᾳ περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπαγγελωῦ ὑμῖν.  
but rather with plainness I will announce to you concerning the Father.
- 26 ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ  
In that day  
ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου αἰτήσεσθε,  
in my name you will ask,  
καὶ οὐ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα περὶ ὑμῶν·  
and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father concerning you;
- 27 αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ φιλεῖ ὑμᾶς,  
for the Father Himself loves you,  
ὅτι ὑμεῖς ἐμὲ πεφιλήκατε  
because you have loved me.  
καὶ πεπιστεύκατε ὅτι ἐγὼ παρὰ [τοῦ] θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον.  
And you have believed that I came from(the) God.
- 28 ἐξῆλθον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς  
I came from the Father,  
καὶ ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον·  
and I have come into the world;  
πάλιν ἀφήμι τὸν κόσμον

(continued...)

21:6<sup>Heb</sup> / 1<sup>Eng974</sup>

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's word was / came to me, saying:

21:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 2<sup>Eng</sup>

בֶּן־אָדָם

Son of Adam / Humanity,

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<sup>973</sup>(...continued)

again I am leaving the world,  
καὶ πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα.  
and I am going to the Father.

29 Λέγουσιν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ·

The disciples of his say,  
ἴδε νῦν ἐν παρρησίᾳ λαλεῖς  
Look—now you are speaking plainly,  
καὶ παροιμίαν οὐδεμίαν λέγεις.

and you no longer are speaking an allegory!

30 νῦν οἶδαμεν ὅτι οἶδας πάντα

Now we know that you know all things;  
καὶ οὐ χρειᾶν ἔχεις ἵνα τίς σε ἐρωτᾷ·

and you have no need that anyone should ask you [what you mean];  
ἐν τούτῳ πιστεύομεν ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθες.  
in this (way) we believe that you came from God.

Hilmer notes that “For other ridiculing of the prophet see **12:21-28** and **33:32.**” (P. 1254)

974

Reimer entitles **21:6-12**<sup>Heb</sup> / **21:1-7**<sup>Eng</sup> “The Drawn Sword.” He states that “The opening words directly correspond with those of **21:2-3**<sup>Heb</sup> / **20:46-47**<sup>Eng</sup>: *set your face, preach, prophesy, and say* all appear in the same order in those preceding verses. Now, however, the addressees are identified with clarity. The ‘southland’ is Jerusalem, the ‘south’ is now sanctuaries, the ‘forest land’ is the land of Israel (in Ezekiel’s distinctive phrase; see **Ezekiel 7:2**). No doubt remains about the focus of [YHWH’s] judgment, while the destroying agent is translated into the metaphor of the drawn sword (**21:3**).” (P. 1529)

שִׁים פָּנֶיךָ אֶל־יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

Set your face towards Jerusalem.<sup>975</sup>

וְהִטָּף אֶל־מִקְדָּשִׁים

And drip / preach to / towards (the) sanctuaries,

וְהִנְבֵּא אֶל־אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

and prophesy to (the) land of Israel.

21:8<sup>Heb</sup> / 3<sup>Eng</sup><sup>976</sup>

וְאָמַרְתָּ לְאֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל

And you shall say to (the) land of Israel,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

In this way YHWH spoke:

הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ

Look at Me—against you (feminine singular);

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975

Rabbi Fisch comments that “toward Jerusalem” explains the vague expression *toward the south*, in **verse 2**. *Preach toward the sanctuaries* is the interpretation of *Preach toward the south*; the plural “sanctuaries” denotes the various building which together comprised the temple. The *land of Israel* defines *the forest of the field*. (P. 133) In our eyes, a mighty strange definition!

976

Reimer comments on **21:8-9**<sup>Heb</sup> / **21:3-4**<sup>Eng</sup> that “The righteous and wicked correspond to the ‘green’ and ‘dry’ trees of **20:47**. Whereas elsewhere the fate of the righteous has been marked off from that of the wicked (e.g., **9:4-6**), and the teaching of **chapter 18** also points in a different direction, here [YHWH] predicts a judgment that will come on the whole nation and will affect everyone, righteous and wicked alike. Sometimes the right-eous suffer not as judgment for their own sin but simply as a trial that is part of life in a fallen world. One must allow here for [YHWH’s] freedom to judge as He will. This is not the first or last time in Scripture that the righteous experience the heavy hand of [YHWH] (e.g., Job; compare **James [Jacob] 5:11**).” (P. 1529)

וְהוֹצֵאתִי חֶרְבִי מִתַּעֲרָה

And I will draw out My sword from its sheath,<sup>977</sup>

וְהִכַּרְתִּי מִמֶּךָ צְדִיק וְרָשָׁע:

and I will cut off from you righteous and wicked (people)!<sup>978</sup>

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977

Rabbi Fisch states that *My sword* is “symbolized by the flame.” *The righteous and the wicked* is the meaning of *every green tree and every dry tree* (**verse 3**).

He comments that “The indiscriminate punishment of the righteous and wicked, as proclaimed here, is not only in contradiction to Ezekiel’s teaching (compare **Ezekiel 18:20**), but is also contrary to the doctrine of **Genesis 18:23, 25**...

“This difficulty did not escape the attention of the Rabbis. Commenting on the verse, they observe that the righteous spoken of here were not righteous in the full sense of the word, but were relatively so in comparison with the extreme wicked (**Abodah Zarah, 4a**). In an alternative explanation, they remark that once permission is given to the destroying angel to carry out his task, he makes no distinction between the good and the bad, and even begins with the former (**Mechilta to Exodus 12:22; Baba Kamma 60a**).” (P. 133)

What do you think? Are you satisfied with these Rabbinic explanations? We are not, and think a much fuller explanation is required, one having to do with the overall interpretation of the **Scroll of Ezekiel**, with its blunt depiction of the sinfulness of Jerusalem / the people of YHWH, including the exiles, and its depiction of Divine clemency for the worst of sinners—meaning Jerusalem and its people.

Hilmer comments that “For the sword of [YHWH’s] judgment see **Isaiah 31:8; 34:6; 66:16**. This [**verses 1-7**] is the first of five sword oracles (see **verses 8-17, 18-24, 25-27, 28-32**). Here the sword refers to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar (**verse 19**).” (P. 1254)

978

It seem obvious that the phrase “the righteous and the wicked” means “everyone, with no one excluded.” And as the text goes on to say, this means all the people of Israel, from the south to the north. Rabbi Fisch states that “against all flesh” means that “the judgment upon Israel will be an occasion for judging all other peoples” (p. 134), but we doubt that this is the case. It seems rather that what Ezekiel means by “all flesh” is “all Israel’s people.”

Hilmer states that “‘both the righteous and the wicked’ indicates the completeness of the judgment that is about to come on Israel. No one will escape its devastating effects, not even the  
(continued...)

21:9<sup>Heb</sup> / 4<sup>Eng</sup>

יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר־הִכַּרְתִּי מִמֶּנִּי צַדִּיק וְרָשָׁע

Because I cut off from you (both) righteous and wicked,

לְכֵן תֵּצֵא חֶרְבִי מִתַּעֲרָה

therefore My sword will go forth from its sheath<sup>979</sup>

אֶל־כָּל־בָּשָׂר מִנֶּגֶב צָפוֹן:

to all flesh from (the) south / (the) Negebh (to the) north.<sup>980</sup>

21:10<sup>Heb</sup> / 5<sup>Eng</sup>

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<sup>978</sup>(...continued)

righteous in the land. Contrast the deliverance of Noah (**Genesis 6:7-8**) and Lot (**Genesis 18:23; 19:12-13**).” (P. 1254) If YHWH never changes, why this difference?

Darr comments that “Yahweh’s announcement appears to contravene Ezekiel’s prior assertions that God does not punish the righteous and the wicked indiscriminately (**9:4-6; 14:12-20; 18:1-32**). Again, we must recognize that the prophet was no systematic theologian. But if Ezekiel’s pair, ‘righteous and wicked,’ brings to mind Abraham’s argument with God concerning the fate of Sodom (‘Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from You! Shall not the Judge of the earth do what is just?’ (**Genesis 18:25 NRSV**), it nonetheless speaks realistically of warfare. When, for example, the prophet asserts that Yahweh’s ‘X’ on the foreheads of those Jerusalemites who moan and groan over abominations committed in their city will protect them from the executioners (**9:4-6**), he ignores the fact that warriors draw no such distinctions (see **14:12-20**).” (P. 177)

<sup>979</sup>

Darr comments that “Among Yahweh’s arsenal of weapons (e.g., famine, pestilence, wild animals, fire), the sword figures most prominently in **Ezekiel’s scroll (5:1-2; 6:3, 8, 11-12; 11:8, 10; 12:14, 16; 14:17, 21; 16:40; 17:21)**. Elsewhere, it appears among the curses consequent upon Israel’s abrogation of its covenant obligations (e.g., **Leviticus 26:25, 33; Deuteronomy 28:22**). **Amos (9:4)** and **Jeremiah (47:6-7)** tell of Yahweh’s commanding the sword to slaughter; in **Amos**, and also in **Jeremiah 9:16**, it pursues the people in exile. While fire and sword are equated in no other **Hebrew Bible** text, Ezekiel may have borrowed the idea from Babylonian literary culture. In the Erra Epic, a poetic account of Babylon’s downfall, Ishum...the agent of Babylon’s destruction, is first addressed as ‘torch.’ In the following line, however, he is called ‘the broadsword: slaught(erer).’” (P. 177)

<sup>980</sup>

See **20:47**, with its footnote 885.

וַיֵּדְעוּ כָּל-בָּשָׂר כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה

And all flesh will know that I, YHWH,

הוֹצֵאתִי חֶרְבִי מִמְתַּעְרָה

brought forth My sword from its sheath;

לֹא תָשׁוּב עוֹד:

it will not return again!<sup>981</sup>

21:11<sup>Heb</sup> / 6<sup>Eng982</sup>

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981

It is a terrifying depiction of Divine punishment coming upon all Israel—righteous and wicked—with no one excepted. And of course this seems like a contradiction to Rabbi Fisch, just as it does to many Christians. Religious people like to think of themselves as “righteous,” not meaning “perfect,” but in comparison with others, especially those who are not outwardly religious. Ezekiel sometimes uses language reflecting such a view (**chapter 18**), but in his depictions of coming Divine punishment, he mentions no such thing—the Divine punishment will be upon all, with no exceptions! And, we would add, if that means “all Israel,” it would for certain include all other people on earth! Rabbi Fisch says it “will be an occasion for judging all other peoples,” and that the sword of judgment will not return “until it has completed its destructive work.” (P. 134)

And we say, the reason for this is to make all the brighter Ezekiel’s conviction that beyond that Divine judgment is Divine grace—loving forgiveness—that gives hope to all Israel, and to all humanity. In terms of the vision-story of **Ezekiel 16**, it means restoring the fortune of history’s most notorious prostitute cities. In terms of the vision-story of **Ezekiel 47**, with its river of life, it means bringing life and healing to the deadest place on earth—the overwhelming or “swallowing up” of death (compare **Isaiah 25:6-9**)! What do you think? Do you dare to share in such a hope?

982

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 6-7<sup>Heb</sup> 11-12<sup>Eng</sup>** “Ezekiel to Sigh Over What Is to Come.” He comments that “The prophet must have been deeply affected by [YHWH’s] revelation to him; he should not hide his emotion but openly display it.” (P. 134)

Hilmer’s translation has “groan...with broken heart and bitter grief.” He comments that “Ezekiel’s display of intense grief is to serve as another prophetic sign and as an occasion for a new message of impending judgment.” (P. 1254) Matties comments on these two verses that “A sign-action epitomizes the situation: groaning the imminent losses, Ezekiel models the appropriate response to the oracle of the fire / sword.” (Pp. 1185-86)

וְאַתָּה בֶן-אָדָם הָאָנֹחַ

And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, sigh--

בְּשִׁבְרוֹן מְתָנִים וּבְמִרְרוֹת תֵּאָנֹחַ

with brokenness of hips,<sup>983</sup> and with bitterness you shall sigh,

לְעֵינֵיהֶם:

to / before their eyes.<sup>984</sup>

21:12<sup>Heb</sup> / 7<sup>Eng</sup>

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983

The Hebrew phrase **בְּשִׁבְרוֹן מְתָנִים**, **bishibhron mothnayim** means literally “with breaking / crushing of loins / hips / waist.” Translations vary, from “breaking of *thy* loins,” to “with tottering limbs,” to “with breaking heart,” to **ἐν στυπρῖβῃ ὀσφύος σου**, “with rubbing together of your waist / loins.” Rabbi Fisch holds that this mean “with shattering emotion,” in contrast to an active and confident attitude. (P. 134) **Brown-Driver-Briggs** holds that the phrase means “emotional distress”—a strange way to express it, wouldn’t you say? Ezekiel is commanded to let his emotions overwhelm him, and to let his brokenness be seen by the exiles.

But then when the announcement comes to Ezekiel that Jerusalem has fallen, at the very time Ezekiel’s wife died, he is forbidden to express his emotions of grief—see **chapter 24**. And we ask Why? Why mourn when you foretell the fall of Jerusalem, but then when it falls, and your wife dies, withhold all your emotions? This seems very strange and inhuman to me—what about to you?

984

Darr comments that “Yahweh...addresses Ezekiel, twice commanding him to ‘moan’ with ‘breaking heart’ and ‘bitter grief’ in the exiles’ presence. This sign act...a dramatic performance directed by the Deity, intends to evoke a question from the prophet’s audience...’Why do you moan?’ God scripts the reply: God is moaning on account of ‘the news that is coming’...What is this news? Critics have offered several explanations, but the most compelling identifies it as a report of the massive slaughter described in the immediately preceding oracle and its interpretation. The arrival of that report will bring on massive physiological and psychological expressions of anguish: enfeebled hands and loss of bladder control, such that urine wets one’s knees...This first oracle ends with Ezekiel’s assurance that the news is coming, and God’s oracle will be fulfilled.” (Pp. 177-178)

וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמְרוּ אֵלַיךָ

And it will happen, when they will say to you,<sup>985</sup>

עַל־מָה אֶתָּה נֹאנֵחַ

Over what did you sigh?

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־שְׂמוּעָה כִּי־בָאָה

And you shall say, To / at a report that it is coming.<sup>986</sup>

וְנִמַּס כָּל־לֵב

And every heart will melt,<sup>987</sup>

וְרָפוּ כָּל־יָדַיִם

and all hands will sink,

וְכָהָתָה כָּל־רוּחַ

and every spirit will grow faint;

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985

Hilmer says to “compare **Ezekiel 12:9** for the people’s response to Ezekiel’s behavior. This is Ezekiel’s seventh symbolic act.” (P. 1254)

986

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “because of the tidings,” and he comments that this means “the disastrous news of the destruction of the temple which will reach the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The prophet was to behave as though he had actually received the tidings.” (P. 134)

987

Rabbi Fisch comments that “So long as the temple was still in existence, the exiles cherished the hope of returning to their homeland. But with the destruction of the temple, that hope would be lost.” (P. 134) Yes, and it meant that YHWH had not answered their prayers, but instead had sent the Babylonians to destroy their temple and homeland—as punishment for their sins! No wonder that their hearts would melt, and their hands sink!



וְכָל-בְּרָכָיִם תִּלְכָּנָה מַיִם

and all knees will walk (on) water!<sup>988</sup>

הִנֵּה בָּאָה וְנִהְיָתָה

Look—it is coming, and it will be done!<sup>989</sup>

נֵאֻם אֵלַי יְהוָה:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH.

21:13<sup>Heb</sup> / 8<sup>Eng990</sup>

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988

That is, with slippery, uncertain step. Rabbi Fisch had earlier commented on this phrase that “Most moderns understand the phrase metaphorically as ‘expressive of complete paralysis of strength’ (Davidson). The Jewish commentators explain it of sweat caused by fear. The **Septuagint** [Greek translation of the **Hebrew Bible**, our ‘Rahlfs’] gives it a literal interpretation: ‘and all thighs shall be defiled by moisture,’ and this is supported by Ehrlich. He quotes the definition by **Siphre** [Rabbinic commentary on **Numbers-Deuteronomy**] of the *faint-hearted* who is exempt from enlistment in the army (**Deuteronomy 20:8**), viz., ‘water descends upon his knees.’ The meaning is, accordingly, they are unable to contain themselves through cowardly terror.” (P. 37)

989

Ezekiel assures the exiles that what he is predicting is not hear-say; it is the truth. It will happen! And, in fact, it did happen, when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, burst through the walls / gates of Jerusalem, conquering the city and destroying the temple built by Solomon.

Reimer states that “This passage...infers that all have at some level been defiled and provides a precedent within Ezekiel for the totality of judgment expressed in **21:3-4**.” (P. 1529)

990

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 13-22**<sup>Heb</sup> “God’s Sword Is Prepared to Strike.” Darr entitles these same verses (**8-17**<sup>Eng</sup>) “The Sword in the Slayer’s Hand.” She comments that “Any treatment of this oracle, Ezekiel’s second concerning the sword, must be regarded as tentative. Hals summarizes the problems it presents to text critics and interpreters: ‘Not only are two lines (**verses 10b** and **13b**) in comprehensible and beyond translation, but much of the rest is so corrupt that virtually every line is rendered uncertain by the conjectures necessary to make any sense of it.’ Hals goes on to suggest that the text has suffered in preservation on account of its extremely imaginative poetic content and form.” (P. 178) We think this is an extreme statement, and will evaluate the text as we go through it.

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's Word was / came to me saying:

21:14<sup>Heb</sup> / 9<sup>Eng</sup>

בֶּן־אָדָם הַנְּבִיא וְאָמַרְתָּ

Son of Adam / Humanity, prophesy and say:

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי

In this way my Lord spoke:

אָמַר חֶרֶב חֶרֶב

Say: A sword! A Sword!<sup>991</sup>

הוֹחֲדָה וְגַם־מְרוּטָה:

It was sharpened,<sup>992</sup> and also it was polished!<sup>993</sup>

21:15<sup>Heb</sup> / 10<sup>Eng</sup>

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991

Hilmer comments that this repetition, “A sword, a sword” is the beginning of “a sword song...possibly accompanied by dancing or symbolic actions. Such songs may have been sung by warriors about to go into battle.” (P. 1254)

992

The Hebrew הוֹחֲדָה is from the verb חָרַר, “be sharp, keen,” here in the hophal, meaning “having been sharpened.”

993

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The sword to be drawn by God (**verse 8**) is ready for action. The repetition *a sword, a sword* is intended for emphasis. According to the Targum, two massacres are predicted: by Nebuchadnezzar and by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah at the instigation of Ammon (compare **Jeremiah 41**).” He adds that the sword’s being polished (his “furbished”) was “so that it flashes and strikes terror in the heart of the people.” (P. 135)

לְמַעַן טִבַּחַּ טִבַּחַּ הַיּוֹתֵדָה

In order to slaughter slaughter<sup>994</sup> it was sharpened;

לְמַעַן-יִהְיֶה-לָּהּ בְּרֶק מִרְטָה

in order for it to be lightning, it was polished.<sup>995</sup>

אוֹ נְשִׂישׁ שִׁבְט בְּנֵי

Or shall we exult (in) a rod / staff / scepter, My son?<sup>996</sup>

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<sup>994</sup>The meaning of “slaughter” here is, we think, “that which is to be slaughtered.”

<sup>995</sup>

The Hebrew מִרְטָה is from the verb מָרַט “make smooth, bare, bald; scour, polish.” The form here is pual perfect, 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, “scoured, polished.” The meaning of the two statement together is that the sword is ready for slaughter, and it will come as quickly and as devastating as lightning.

<sup>996</sup>

Rabbi Fisch’s translation of this line is “Against the rod of My son, contemning [regard with contempt] every tree.” Rabbi Fisch states that “There is nothing in the Hebrew to correspond with *against*, and the verb מָאָס, *ma)as* means ‘to reject’ as well as ‘to despise.’ The translation may accordingly be: ‘(the sword) is the rod of My son, it rejects every (other) tree.’ The word *rod* is commonly used for [YHWH’s] chastisement (compare **Isaiah 10:24; 30:31; Lamentations 3:1**), and the instrument of human punishment (compare **Proverbs 13:24**, ‘he that spares his rod hates his son’). Since Jerusalem is compared to a forest (**verse 2**), the nations are referred to as ‘trees.’” (P. 135)

Our translation is “Or shall we exult in a rod / staff / scepter, My son?” And we take this to be YHWH’s question to His people / Jerusalem / Judea, asking if they should understand the polished sword to be an emblem of rulership which YHWH is placing in their hand. And of course, the answer is, Not at all, My son—it is for your execution!

Both of these explanations are sadly mistaken. The sword is coming against all of Jerusalem and its people from south to north—it’s not coming for Israel’s enemies, but for Israel itself! And it is not polished and shining because its bearer is going to lead the Judeans in folk-dancing! No, it is coming to do deadly work in Israel’s midst...It is no laughing matter! And it is not coming to cut down trees or to pick at the walls—it is being placed in the hand of one coming for us, to kill us and our families—we are facing certain death!

(continued...)

מֵאֶסֶת כָּל-עֵץ:

One (feminine) rejecting all wood / tree(s)?<sup>997</sup>

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<sup>996</sup>(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch's translation of the third line of **verse 15** has "or shall we make mirth?" He comments that "the second half of the **verse [15]** is extremely difficult and most modern commentators resort to speculative emendation of the text. The **American-Jewish Translation** interprets this clause as parenthetical, expressing the thought of the Judeans that, far from being terrified at the sight of the sword, they should rather rejoice because it will not be used against them but against the other nations. Another explanation is: is there cause for complacency that the sword is drawn only against Israel's enemies?" (P. 135)

Hilmer comments that "To think that the Babylonians would conquer every other country except Judah was a false hope." (P. 1254)

<sup>997</sup>

Translations of verse **15**<sup>Heb</sup> / **10**<sup>Eng</sup> vary greatly:

**King James**, "I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that *their* heart may faint, and *their* ruins be multiplied: ah! *it is* made bright, *it is* wrapped up for the slaughter."

**Tanakh**, "Thus hearts shall lose courage and many shall fall. At all their gates I have appointed slaughter by the sword. Ah! it is made to flash brilliantly, it is honed for slaughter."

**New Revised Standard**, "therefore hearts melt and many stumble. At all their gates I have set the point of the sword. Ah! It is made for flashing, it is polished for slaughter."

**New International**, "So that hearts may melt with fear and the fallen be many, I have stationed the sword for slaughter at all their gates. Look! It is forged to strike like lightning, it is grasped for slaughter."

**New Jerusalem**, "To make hearts sink and make sure many fall, I have posted the slaughtering sword at every gate to flash like lightning, polished for slaughter."

**Rahfs**, ὅπως σφάξης σφάγια ὀξύνου ὅπως γένη εἰς στίλβωσιν ἐτοίμη εἰς παράλυσιν σφάζε ἐξουδένει ἀπωθοῦ πᾶν ξύλον, "so that you may slaughter victims, be sharp; so that you might be for shining, ready for breaking open; slay! Treat with contempt! Reject every tree!"

Darr comments that "The second half of this **verse 10**<sup>Eng</sup> is, for moderns at least, largely unintelligible; many critics simply dismiss it as a garbled secondary addition (a judgment all too easily reached when the meaning of a text eludes us). Yet it is represented in the versions. According to the **NRSV** translation, Ezekiel dissuades his audience from thinking that they are not the sword's intended victims. Because they have despised Yahweh's rod of discipline (like the stick brandished by parents and teachers in order to punish obdurate children), the sword is wielded against them. The **NIV**, by contrast, interprets the verse as an admonition not to rejoice in Judah's rod (i.e., the royal scepter...of its kings), for  
(continued...)

21:16<sup>Heb</sup> / 11<sup>Eng</sup>

וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְמִרְטָהּ

And He gave it<sup>998</sup> for polishing

לְתַפְּשׁ בְּכַף

to be grasped in the hand.

הִיא־הִוְחָדָה חֶרֶב

It (is) a sharpened sword,

וְהִיא מִרְטָהּ

and it (is) polished,

לְתַת אֹתָהּ בְּיַד־הַרְגָּה:

to place it in (the) hand of one killing!<sup>999</sup>

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<sup>997</sup>(...continued)

the sword ‘despises’ (i.e., will destroy) every such scepter...So much for hopes of deliverance based on God’s covenantal promises to the house of David (**2 Samuel 7**) and on Jacob’s blessings that the royal scepter would never depart (the tribe of) Judah (**Genesis 49:10**). There is every reason to believe that ancient, like modern, interpreters stumbled over this line. In the light of the reference to מְשָׁלִים, ‘royal scepters’ in **19:11**, however, the reader is inclined to interpret **verse 10a**<sup>Eng</sup> as a threat against Judah’s royal house.” (P. 179)

<sup>998</sup>

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The Hebrew is literally ‘and He gave it,’ viz. God, Who had drawn the sword from its sheath (**verse 8**), has handed it over to be furbished [our ‘polished’] and then delivered into the hand of the executioner.” (P. 135)

It is a gruesome picture indeed! YHWH, the Judge of His people, has placed a sharp, polished sword in the hand of the executioner—Nebuchadnezzar—to put YHWH’s Own people to death! Rabbi Fisch quotes Lofthouse as remarking that ‘the vagueness of the last clause heightens the weirdness and mystery of the whole.’” (**Ibid.**) We do not agree. The verse is gruesome—it is the scene of a preparation for the execution of YHWH’s people, beginning with their princes / kings—but it is not vague, or weird, or mysterious.

<sup>999</sup>

(continued...)

זַעַק וְהִילַל בֶּן-אָדָם

Cry out and howl, Son of Adam / Humanity!

כִּי-הָיָא הִיָּתָה בְּעַמִּי

Because it was against My people!<sup>1000</sup>

הֵיא בְּכָל-נְשִׂאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

It (is) against all (the) princes of Israel,<sup>1001</sup>

מִגִּנְרֵי אֶל-חֶרֶב הָיוּ אֶת-עַמִּי

they were thrown to a sword with My people!<sup>1002</sup>

<sup>999</sup>(...continued)

Darr comments that “**Verse 11a**<sup>Eng</sup> refers only to ‘the palm’ that grasps the sword, but **verse 11b** further specifies that this hand belongs to a (though unnamed) warrior.” (P. 179) Hilmer states that the one killing, the slayer, is “Nebuchadnezzar (**verse 19**).” (P. 1254)

<sup>1000</sup>

Darr comments that “With **verse 12**<sup>Eng</sup> Yahweh again orders Ezekiel to engage in dramatic actions (see **verse 6**<sup>Eng</sup>). On the one hand, he must ‘cry and wail’ (= shriek loudly) because, God says, the sword’s victims will be ‘My people,’ including ‘all the princes of Israel.’” (P. 179)

<sup>1001</sup>

Rabbi Fisch comments that the phrase “the princes of Israel” alludes “to the last kings of Judah and Zedekiah’s children.” (P. 136)

<sup>1002</sup>

Reimer notes that “The princes of Israel may refer to the tragic events at Riblah (**2 Kings 25:6-7**,

6 וַיִּתְפְּשׂוּ אֶת-הַמֶּלֶךְ

And they seized the king,

וַיַּעֲלוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל רִבְלָה

And they brought him up to Babylon’s king to Riblah.

וַיְדַבְּרוּ אִתּוֹ מִשְׁפָּט:

And they discussed with him (Nebuchadnezzar) a penalty.

7 וְאֶת-בְּנֵי צְדָקָהוּ שָׁחֲטוּ לְעֵינָיו

(continued...)

לָכֵן סָפַק אֶל-יָרֵךְ:

Therefore slap upon your thigh!<sup>1003</sup>

21:18<sup>Heb</sup> / 13<sup>Eng</sup>

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<sup>1002</sup>(...continued)

And Zedekiah's sons they slaughtered to / in his eye-sight;

וְאֶת-עֵינָיו צִדְקִיָּהוּ עָוְרָ

and Zedekiah's eyes they blinded;

וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ בַּנְּחֹשְׁתִּים

and they bound him with bronze (chains);

וַיְבִאֵהוּ בַּבֵּל:

and they brought him (to) Babylon.

“This prompts one of the two gestures narrated here: strike...your thigh is an action associated with lament.” (P. 1529) See **Jeremiah 31:19**,

כִּי-אַחֲרַי שׁוּבִי נִחַמְתִּי

Because after my returning, I changed my mind;

וְאַחֲרַי הוֹדַעְתִּי סָפַקְתִּי עַל-יָרֵךְ

and after I was instructed / came to know, I slapped upon (my) thigh--

בְּשֹׁתִי וְגַם-נִכְלַמְתִּי

I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated,

כִּי נִשְׂאתִי חֲרַפַּת נְעוּרָי:

because I bore (the) reproach of my youth.

<sup>1003</sup>

Rabbi Fisch states that this is “a gesture of grief and dismay.” (P. 136)

Hilmer's translation has “Cry out and wail...beat your breast.” He comments that this is the “eighth symbolic act [of Ezekiel the prophet].” (P. 1254)

Darr comments (compare her earlier statement in footnote 1000) that ‘On the other hand, he must ‘strike the thigh,’ gesture of grief.” (P. 179)

כִּי בַחֵן

Because (it is) a testing / trial.<sup>1004</sup>

וְמָה אִם-גַּם-שֶׁבֶט מֵאֵסֶת

And what if (it is) also a rod / staff / scepter being rejected?<sup>1005</sup>

לֹא יִהְיֶה

It shall not be.<sup>1006</sup>

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1004

Rabbi Fisch states that “The portrayal of the furbished [our ‘polished’] sword serves as a test to see whether the people will take the warning to heart. Rashi’s interpretation of the verse is preferable: ‘(My son) has been tried,’ by other but less drastic punishments of God. ‘What, then, (will become of him) if also the sword which rejects (the other nations should strike him)? He will cease to exist.’” (P. 136)

We think the verse makes much better sense if it is understood to mean, this whole matter of the polished sharp sword is a test / trial of whether or not the people of YHWH will listen to the prophet’s voice, and take warning of the coming destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Will they dismiss the warning, and believe that Nebuchadnezzar is going to put a scepter in their hand instead? Or will the warning bring them to repentance, as Ezekiel intends it?

1005

Hilmer comments that “The question anticipates the final interruption of Davidic kingship, which came in 586 B.C.E. (see **verses 25-27**).” (Pp. 1254-55)

1006

The first three lines of **Verse 18**<sup>Heb</sup> / **13**<sup>Eng</sup> are given greatly varying translations:

**King James**, “Because *it is* a trial, and what if *the sword* contemn even the rod? it shall be no more.”

**Tanakh**, “Consider: How shall it fail to happen, seeing that it even scorns the rod?”

**New Revised Standard**, “For consider: What! If you despise the rod, will it not happen?”

**New International**, “Testing will surely come. And what if even the scepter, which the sword despises, does not continue?”

**New Jerusalem**, “for this will be an ordeal.”

**Rahfs**, ὅτι δεδικαίωται καὶ τί εἰ καὶ φυλὴ ἀπώσθη οὐκ ἔσται, “Because it has been justified; and what if also a tribe was rejected, it will not be.”

This verse is another example of how the prophetic message is characterized by enigma, by puzzling statements that make little sense—such as we have found so often in **Isaiah**. Simplistic claims  
(continued...)



נֶאֱמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH.

21:19<sup>Heb</sup> / 14<sup>Eng1007</sup>

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<sup>1006</sup>(...continued)

concerning the biblical text that it is clear and infallible are demonstrated to be false by verses like this. What do you think?

Darr comments that “**Verse 13<sup>Eng</sup>**, like **verse 10b<sup>Eng</sup>**, has resisted the best efforts of translators. The two texts appear to be related in some way; they share the noun ‘rod’ (or ‘scepter’) as well as the verb ‘despises.’ Again, and not surprisingly, the **NRSV** and the **NIV** go separate ways in their respective renderings. The former emphasizes that the sword wielded against God’s people and their princes is the inevitable consequence of their rejection of Yahweh’s (disciplining) rod. The latter speaks of a time of testing (or what or whom?) when the scepter of Judah will be destroyed by the sword. By this (better) construal, **verse 13<sup>Eng</sup>**, like **19:10-14**, portends the end of Judah’s royal house. Between **verse 10a<sup>Eng</sup>** and this verse, the reader has encountered a specific reference to the sword’s execution of ‘all the princes of Israel’ in **verse 12<sup>Eng</sup>**.” (P. 179)

<sup>1007</sup>

Darr comments that “The second half of this oracle (**verses 14-17<sup>Eng</sup>**) commences with God’s com-mand that Ezekiel prophesy and ‘strike hand to hand.’ The latter directive appeared in **6:11** (accompanied by stamping of the feet). Although the significance of this gesture is not clear, its reappearance in **verse 17a<sup>Eng</sup>** suggests that it expresses anger (‘I [Yahweh] too will strike hand to hand, I will satisfy My fury’). Is the clapping of the hands itself (non-verbal) communication? Or should the following line (‘Let the sword fall’) be placed in His mouth? In **verses 14b-16<sup>Eng</sup>**, as Block observes, two descriptions of the sword’s action (**verses 14b, 16<sup>Eng</sup>**) frame statements of its consequence / function (**verses 14-15<sup>Eng</sup>**). The sword is called to double and triple itself—that is, to strike so rapidly as to create the visual illusion of more than one weapon (**verse 14b<sup>Eng</sup>**). Subsequently, Yahweh commands it to slash in all directions (‘Attack to the right! / Engage to the left’), whichever way its sharpened blade (‘your face’) is pointed (**verse 16<sup>Eng</sup>**). People caught in its paths will be incapacitated by terror. Even Jerusalem’s walls offer no protec-tion, for Yahweh has positioned the sword at every gate. **Verse 15b<sup>Eng</sup>** echoes imagery and vocabulary found especially in **verse 10a<sup>Eng</sup>**: the sword flashes like lightning...It is grasped for bloody massacre...If the identify of the warrior into whose hand the sword is placed remains a mystery (**verse 6**), there can be no doubt that ultimately, it is Yahweh’s weapon—effecting Divine judgment upon God’s Own people. The carrying out of its murderous mission will have a cathartic effect upon the Deity: “I will satisfy My wrath...the same Hebrew phrase appears in **16:42**, immediately following Yahweh’s description of the multiple lethal punishments (including stabbing with swords) inflicted upon Jerusalem, God’s unfaithful wife.” (Pp.179-180)

וְאַתָּה בֶן-אָדָם הַנְּבִיא

And you, Son of Adam / Humanity, prophesy!

וְהָךְ כָּף אֶל-כָּף

And clap / strike, hand to hand!<sup>1008</sup>

וְתִכְפֹּל חֶרֶב שְׁלִישֶׁתָּהּ

And let a sword be doubled, tripled—<sup>1009</sup>

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1008

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "smite your hands together." He comments that "The Jewish commentators understand the action as indicating sorrow, but **verse 22** rather suggests anger. The prophet is to strike his hands together to summon the agent of destruction." (P. 136)

Reimer holds that this statement concerning clapping Ezekiel's hands mentioned twice, "As in **Ezekiel 6:11**...communicates agitation, perhaps in anticipation of the imminent judgment." (P. 1529)

1009

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "let the sword be doubled the third time," and he comments that this is "an obscure phrase which the Jewish commentators take to mean that Ezekiel is urged to announce that the third disaster, that which overtakes Zedekiah, will be twice as formidable as the two previous calamities in the reigns of Yehoyaqim and Jehoiachin. Another interpretation reads into the words an instruction to brandish the sword with a double motion, backward and forward, three times." (P. 136)

Hilmer suggests that to understand the phrase "Let the sword strike twice," to compare **2 Kings 13:18-19**, where Elisha tells the king of Israel:

18 וַיֹּאמֶר קַח תַּחֲצִים וַיִּקַּח

And he said, Take the arrows! And he took (them).

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמֶלֶךְ-יִשְׂרָאֵל הִךְ-אֶרֶץ

And he said to Israel's king, Strike (the) ground!

וַיִּךְ שְׁלֹשׁ-פְעָמִים וַיַּעֲמֵד:

And he struck three times, and stood / stopped.

(continued...)

חֶרֶב חֲלָלִים הִיא

it is a sword of pierced / killed (people),

חֶרֶב חָלָל

a sword of a pierced / killed person,

הַגָּדוֹל הַחֲדָרֶת לָהֶם:

the great one<sup>1010</sup> that surrounds them—<sup>1011</sup>

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<sup>1009</sup>(...continued)

19 וַיִּקְצֹף עָלָיו אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים

And the man of the God was angry over / with him,

וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַכּוֹת חֲמֵשׁ אוֹ-שֵׁשׁ פְּעָמִים

and he said to strike five or six times—

אֲזַ הַכִּיתָ אֶת-אַרְם עַד-כִּלְאֵה

then you struck Aram / Syria until finishing / completion.

וְעַתָּה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים תַּכֶּה אֶת-אַרְם:

And now, three times you will strike Aram / Syria.

1010

Translations of the last two lines of **verse 19**<sup>Heb</sup> / **14**<sup>Eng</sup> vary:

**King James**, “it is the sword of the great *men that are* slain, which entereth into their privy chambers.”

**Tanakh**, “a sword for great carnage, that presses upon them.”

**New Revised Standard**, “A sword for great slaughter-- it surrounds them”;

**New International**, “a sword for great slaughter, closing in on them from every side.”

**New Jerusalem**, “that sword for a great victim, threatening them from every side!”

**Rahlfs**, ἐστὶν ῥομφαία τραυματιῶν ἡ μεγάλη καὶ ἐκστήσει αὐτούς, “It is the great sword for casualties, and it will amaze them.”

Rabbi Fisch’s translation is “the great one that is to be slain.” He comments that “The reference is possibly to Zedekiah (compare **verse 30**). Alternatively, the singular has collective force. The meaning will then be: the sword will devour many, and among them will be eminent men, kings and princes.” (P. 136) However, it is to be noted that the singular is used, “the great one,” not the plural.

1011

(continued...)

לְמַעַן | לְמוֹג לֵב

in order to melt heart(s),

וְהִרְבָּה הַמְכַשְׁלִים

and multiply the stumbling-blocks.

עַל כָּל-שַׁעְרֵיהֶם נָתַתִּי אֶבְחַת-חֶרֶב

Upon / at all their gates I have placed slaughter<sup>1012</sup> of a sword!

אֵחַ עֲשׂוּיָהּ לְבָרָק

Alas! It was made for lightning--<sup>1013</sup>

מְעֻטָּה לְטִבַּח:

polished / made bare<sup>1014</sup> for slaughter (synonym)!<sup>1015</sup>

<sup>1011</sup>(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "which compasses them about." He comments that "The devouring sword will surround them like a besieging army so that few, if any, will escape." (P. 136)

<sup>1012</sup>

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "the point." He comments that "The Hebrew noun אֶבְחַת, **iybchath**, occurs nowhere else [in the **Hebrew Bible** making it impossible to be sure of its meaning]. Some Jewish commentators hold that it is the equivalent of *tibchath*, 'the slaughter of,' and most moderns emend accordingly. Others suggest a connection with the Arabic noun meaning 'conservation.' [Others] depart from the order of the Hebrew which is: 'That their heart may melt, and their stumblings be multiplied, against all their gates I have set the point of the sword.'" (P. 137)

<sup>1013</sup>

It is a cry of alarm. The glittering sword is deadly as a lightning strike! It is no plaything, no ornament, no sign of nobility!

<sup>1014</sup>

The Hebrew word מְעֻטָּה, **me(uttah**, is a feminine singular adjective, evidently meaning "made bare." Rabbi Fisch's translation is "it is sharpened," and he comments that "this translation adopts the

(continued...)

21:21<sup>Heb</sup> / 16<sup>Eng</sup>

הַתְּאַחֲרֵי

Go one way or another!

הַיְמָנִי הַשְּׂמִינִי הַשְּׂמִינִי

Turn right! Set to the left!

אֵנָּה פְּנֵיךְ מְעֻדָּת:

Wherever your faces are fixed.<sup>1016</sup>

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<sup>1014</sup>(...continued)

emendation *merutah* for *me'uttah*. The Masoretic Text must be rendered: 'it is wrapped'...to preserve its sharpness.'" (P. 137)

<sup>1015</sup>

Translations of verse 20<sup>Heb</sup> / 15<sup>Eng</sup> vary:

**King James**, "I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that *their* heart may faint, and *their* ruins be multiplied: ah! *it is* made bright, *it is* wrapped up for the slaughter."

**Tanakh**, "Thus hearts shall lose courage and many shall fall. At all their gates I have appointed slaughter by the sword. Ah! it is made to flash brilliantly, it is honed for slaughter."

**New Revised Standard**, "therefore hearts melt and many stumble. At all their gates I have set the point of the sword. Ah! It is made for flashing, it is polished for slaughter."

**New International**, "So that hearts may melt with fear and the fallen be many, I have stationed the sword for slaughter at all their gates. Look! It is forged to strike like lightning, it is grasped for slaughter."

**New Jerusalem**, "To make hearts sink and make sure many fall, I have posted the slaughtering sword at every gate to flash like lightning, polished for slaughter."

**Rahfs**, ὅπως θραυσθῆ ἡ καρδία καὶ πληθυνθῶσιν οἱ ἀσθενοῦντες ἐπὶ πᾶσαν πύλην αὐτῶν παραδέδονται εἰς σφάγια ῥομφαίας εὖ γέγονεν εἰς σφαγὴν εὖ γέγονεν εἰς στίλβωσιν, "so that the heart may be broken in pieces, and the ones who are weak / sick may be multiplied upon every gate of theirs. The have been given over to slaughter (by the) sword. Good! It has happened for slaughter. Good! It has happened for flashing / shining.

<sup>1016</sup>

Verse 21 / 16 is given varying translations:

**King James**, "Go thee one way or other, *either* on the right hand, *or* on the left, whithersoever thy face *is* set."

(continued...)

21:22<sup>Heb</sup> / 17<sup>Eng</sup>

וְגַם־אֲנִי אֶכֶּה כַּפִּי אֶל־כַּפִּי

And also, I will clap / strike My hand to My hand;<sup>1017</sup>

וְהִנַּחְתִּי חֲמָתִי

and I will give My wrath rest.<sup>1018</sup>

אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי:

I, YHWH, I have spoken!

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<sup>1016</sup>(...continued)

**Tanakh**, “Be united, go to the right, turn left; whither are you bound?”

**New Revised Standard**, “Attack to the right! Engage to the left!-- wherever your edge is directed.”

**New International**, “Slash to the right, you sword, then to the left, wherever your blade is turned.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Be sharp, on the right, be ready on the left, whichever way your blade is needed!”

**Rahlfs**, διαπορεύου ὀξύμωρον ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἐξ ἐνωπύμων οὐ ἂν τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἐξεγείρηται, “Go though, sharpen on (the) right, and on (the) left, wherever your face may be raised.”

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The verbs have the feminine form indicating that the ‘sword’ (a feminine noun in Hebrew), representing the king of Babylon, is addressed. He hesitated at the crossroads and cast lots whether to attack Judea on the right or Ammon on the left (**verse 26**). So he is urged to reach a decision in which direction he will advance.” (P. 137)

<sup>1017</sup>

Compare **verse 19**, where the prophet Ezekiel is told to clap his hands and let the sword come down. Here, YHWH says that He will do the same thing.

Hilmer comments that the striking of the hands is done “in scorn and in harmony with God’s command to Ezekiel in **verse 14**.” (P. 1255)

<sup>1018</sup>

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “I will satisfy My fury,” and he comments that “When God has carried out His sentence, His anger will be appeased (compare **5:13**).” (P. 137)

We say, No, not “appeased,” but “caused to rest,” both here and at **5:13**. See also **Ezekiel 16:42**, where this same hiphil form of the verb is used, הִנַּחְתִּי, **hanichothiy**, “I will give rest to My wrath.” At **Ezekiel 24:13** the hiphil infinitive occurs with the same meaning. YHWH is in control of His emotions; He doesn’t have to “appease” His wrath, pacify His wrath by acceding to its demands.

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי

And YHWH's Word came to me,

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1019

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 23-28<sup>Heb</sup> / 18-23<sup>Eng</sup>** “Nebuchadnezzar at the Cross-Roads.” Reimer entitles **verses 23-34<sup>Heb</sup> / 18-29<sup>Eng</sup>** “The Sword of Nebuchadnezzar,” and comments that “In **verse 11<sup>Eng</sup>** the sword was committed to the ‘hand of the slayer,’ identified here as the king of Babylon. This sets a new trajectory for this ‘sword’ oracle, as the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar is imagined (**verses 23-28<sup>Heb</sup> / 18-23<sup>Eng</sup>**), as well as its threat to Jerusalem (**verses 19-22<sup>Heb</sup> / 24-27<sup>Eng</sup>**) and its application to Ammon (**verses 33-34<sup>Heb</sup> / 28-29<sup>Eng</sup>**).

He adds that “Ezekiel performs another symbolic action [we say ‘vision-story,’ or ‘acted out vignette’] (see **chapter 4**), drawing (presumably on the ground) a map with a forked road, and supplying road signs. It is unknown how much of the rest of the action was actually performed or whether it was simply narrated. It depicts Nebuchadnezzar at his camp, probably somewhere in Syria, deciding whether to bear west toward Jerusalem or east toward Rabbah (**21:25<sup>Heb</sup> / 21:20<sup>Eng</sup>**, modern Amman). He decides to attack Jerusalem.” (Pp. 1529-30)

Matties states that “Nebuchadnezzar applies three forms of divination: choosing arrows, consulting cultic objects / Gods, and reading marks on the livers of animals. To the surprise of its inhabitants, Jerusalem is chosen and their culpability is confirmed by their captors. The irony cannot be missed. [YHWH] uses a forbidden technique to accomplish the Divine purpose.” (P. 1186)

Darr entitles **verses 18-27<sup>Eng</sup>**, “The Sword of the King of Babylon.” She comments that in this “Third of Ezekiel’s cluster of oracles concerning the sword...Yahweh instructs Ezekiel to perform yet another sign act: He must mark out two roads originating in the same land, alternative routes upon which the sword of the king of Babylon might proceed. The text does not indicate how, or on what, these ‘roads’ are to be represented. The reader likely recalls Ezekiel’s brick, upon which was drawn or incised a representation of Jerusalem (**4:1**). At the ‘mother of the way’—that is, the fork (‘head’) of the road (**verse 21**)—he must carve a signpost identifying the two directions Nebuchadnezzar’s forces could take; one road leads to Rabbah of the Ammonites, the other to Judah and fortified Jerusalem. Characteristically, nothing is said of Ezekiel’s implementation of Yahweh’s command.

“Critics appropriately associate this oracle with Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign against the west in 589-588 B.C.E. When Zedekiah joined with the rulers of Tyre and Ammon in rebelling against their overlord, to whom he had sworn an oath of loyalty, the king of Babylon responded quickly, besieging Jerusalem in 588 B.C.E...The prophet’s scenario at the fork in the road is not, of course, an actual episode, but an exercise of his imagination intended to create suspense and foster fear.” (P. 180) We say, Not an exercise of Ezekiel’s imagination, but rather a Divine vision-act given by YHWH to Ezekiel.” (P. 180)

לְאמֹר:

saying:

21:24<sup>Heb</sup> / 19<sup>Eng</sup>

וְאַתָּה בֶן-אָדָם

And you, Son of Adam / Humanity,

שִׁים-לְךָ שְׁנַיִם דְּרָכִים

place / mark for yourself two ways<sup>1020</sup>

לְבוֹא חֶרֶב מִלֶּךְ-בָּבֶל

for (the) coming of (the) king of Babylon's sword:<sup>1021</sup>

מֵאֶרֶץ אֶחָד יֵצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם

from one land go forth their two.<sup>1022</sup>

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1020

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Ezekiel receives a command from God to make a drawing of a road which, at a certain point, branches in two directions, one leading to Jerusalem and the other to Ammon.” (P. 137)

We suspect that here we are again in the midst of a “vision-story,” being enacted by Ezekiel before the leaders of the exile community. Ezekiel is told to “place / make for himself” the two ways / roads. We know of no such road running down the Jordan valley, with a cross-roads or the one road becoming two roads, one to the east to Rabbath, and the other to the west to Jerusalem. All of this Ezekiel is to put in place, to “create.”

1021

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The imagery of the *sword* in the previous section now receives precise definition.” (P. 137)

As Hilmer states, it is “Nebuchadnezzar [king of Babylon].” (P. 1255)

1022

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The two diverging paths issue from one road which has its beginning in Babylon.” (P. 137)

(continued...)



וַיֵּד בָּרָא בְּרֵאשׁ

And create a hand / sign-post<sup>1023</sup> at a head / beginning:

דֶּרֶךְ-עִיר בָּרָא:

Way to a City--create (it).<sup>1024</sup>

21:25<sup>Heb</sup> / 20<sup>Eng</sup>

דֶּרֶךְ תָּשִׂים לְבֹא חֶרֶב

A way you shall place / mark for a sword's coming

אֶת רַבַּת בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹן

to / against Rabbath of (the) Children of Ammon,<sup>1025</sup>

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<sup>1022</sup>(...continued)

Hilmer notes that “the same country” may mean Babylon, but also may mean “Aram (Syria)–Nebuchadnezzar headquarterd at Riblah in northern Aram (see 2 Kings 25:6).” (P. 1255)

Yes...and we assume that the path has proceeded from Babylon via the fertile crescent, to northern Aram / Syria (Riblah), and then descended south to a point, a few miles north of both Rabbath, the capital city of Ammon, and Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. The king is apparently somewhere in the Jordan valley, where he faces the decision of whether to go to his left, to Rabbath, or to his right, to Jerusalem—both of them cities which he intends to conquer. But which should come first? It is there that the king is depicted in Ezekiel's vision-story as practicing divination, consulting the liver, and choosing between two arrows, one marked “Rabbath,” and the other marked “Jerusalem,” in order to make his decision. He is no atheist; he devoutly believes in God / the Gods; and he does not want to make his decision without consulting the God / the Gods.

<sup>1023</sup>

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The noun for *sign-post* is literally ‘hand’ and may be understood as the figure of a hand with its finger pointing towards a road.” (Pp. 137-38)

<sup>1024</sup>

Note the two uses of the verb בָּרָא, **bare**), the qal infinitive “to create,” used like an imperative—there is no sign on the road, but now, in his vision-play, Ezekiel is to create one.

<sup>1025</sup>

Hilmer notes that Rabbath or Rabbah was the “Capital of Ammon (**Jeremiah 49:2**); the modern city of Amman, capital of the country of Jordan.” (P. 1255)

וְאֶת־יְהוּדָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם בְּצוּרָה:

and to / against Judah in Jerusalem—inaccessible / fortified.<sup>1026</sup>

21:26<sup>Heb</sup> / 21<sup>Eng</sup>

כִּי־עָמַד מִלְּךְ־בָּבֶל אֶל־אֵם הַדְרֹךְ

Because Babylon's king stood to / at a mother of the way,

בְּרֹאשׁ שְׁנֵי הַדְרָכִים

at a head of the two ways.<sup>1027</sup>

לְקַסֵּם־קַסָּם

To divine a divination,<sup>1028</sup>

קָלְקַל בַּחֲצִים

he shook with the arrows.<sup>1029</sup>

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1026

Rabbi Fisch notes that “A contrast is drawn between Rabbah, a city which would be taken without difficulty, and Jerusalem with its strong walls which would require a long siege to capture. This consideration might induce Nebuchadnezzar to make the former his first objective, but he will decide by using the art of divination...which assumed three forms to make the outcome more certain.” (P. 138) The three forms are the shaken arrows, the teraphim / Divine idols, and the inspection of the liver of a sacrificed animal.

1027

Lines 1 and 2 in the Hebrew use figurative language for the place in the road where suddenly it becomes two roads, one leading to the left (to Rabbath) and one leading to the right (to Jerusalem). That place is first called the אֵם הַדְרֹךְ, “mother of the road” in line 1, and then is called רֹאשׁ שְׁנֵי הַדְרָכִים, “head / beginning of the two roads” in line 2, i.e., the mother road has given birth to twins, to two roads, which means the king of Babylon will have to make the decision of which road to take.

1028

1029

Darr asks, “Which city will be Nebudhadrezzar’s target? So momentous a decision calls for Divine input, and so his oracle-priest carries out certain divinatory techniques (לְקַסֵּם־קַסָּם, ‘to consult an omen’). The first involves the manipulation of arrows, a practice known as belomancy or rhabdo-  
(continued...)

## שָׁאֵל בַּתְּרָפִים

He asked / inquired by the Teraphim / Idol-Gods,<sup>1030</sup>

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<sup>1029</sup>(...continued)

mancy, which consists of shaking inscribed arrows, then drawing one (from the quiver?) On the presumption that the God or Gods will determine which is chosen. This technique is not attested in extant ancient Babylonian literature. The second entails consulting (‘ask[ing] the teraphim [household Gods] . Little is known of these objects, though from **Genesis 31:30** one might deduce that they were small representations of Deities. This practice also is not mentioned in extant Babylonian texts. The third technique, examining the liver (hepatoscopy), by contrast, is well known from Assyrian and Babylonian sources (but referred to explicitly nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**). Archaeologists have recovered models of livers (used as teaching aids?) that have been divided into numerous sections and bear markings (significant for interpretation), as well as extensive texts regarding such markings and their import in previous divinations.” (Pp. 180-181)

From **Wikipedia**, we quote: “*Belomancy*, also *bolomancy*, is the ancient art of divination by use of arrows. The word is built upon Greek βέλος **belos**, ‘arrow, dart’ and μαντεία **manteia** "divination". *Belomancy* was anciently practiced at least by Babylonians, Greeks, Arabs and Scythians. The arrows were typically marked with occult symbols and had to have feathers for every method. In one method, different possible answers to a given question were written and tied to each arrow. For example, three arrows would be marked with the phrases, God orders it me, God forbids it me, and the third would be blank. The arrow that flew the furthest indicated the answer. Another method involves the same thing, but without shooting the arrows. They would simply be shuffled in the quiver, worn preferably on the back, and the first arrow to be drawn indicated the answer. If a blank arrow was drawn, they would redraw. This was an ancient practice, and probably that mentioned in the **Scroll of Ezekiel 21:21**.” (7/19/2020)

Hilmer comments that the casting of lots with arrows refers to “Divination with arrows, for the purpose of seeking good omens for the coming campaign—a practice not elsewhere mentioned in the **Bible**. Apparently arrows were labeled (e.g., ‘Rabbah,’ ‘Jerusalem’), placed into a quiver and drawn out, one with each hand. Right-hand selection was seen as a good omen (see **verse 22**).” (P. 1255)

<sup>1030</sup>

The plural masculine noun תְּרָפִים, **teraphim**, evidently means idol Gods, objects of reverence and as this passage, **Ezekiel 21:26** shows, a means of divination. They are depicted as being small enough to be portable, **Genesis 31:19, 34, 35** (called אֱלֹהִים, “God,” or “Gods” **verse 30**); but also sometimes depicted as the size of a human being, **1 Samuel 19:13, 16**; used in household shrine, **Judges 17:5; 18:14, 17, 20; Hosea 3:4**; condemned, **1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24**; and depicted as giving empty oracles, **Zechariah 10:2**.

רָאָה בְּכַבֵּד:

he looked at the liver,<sup>1031</sup>

21:27<sup>Heb</sup> / 22<sup>Eng</sup>

בְּיַמִּינוֹ הָיְתָה הַקֶּסֶם יְרוּשָׁלַם

In his right hand was the divination—Jerusalem—<sup>1032</sup>

לְשׂוֹם כְּרִים

to place battering-rams,<sup>1033</sup>

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1031

The inspection of the entrails of sacrificial victims, and especially of the liver, was believed in the ancient Near East to be a means of ascertaining the will of the Gods— something familiar to every reader of classical literature. This passage in **Ezekiel** depicts the king of Babylon using a liver in just this way, giving him guidance in which direction to march his troops, whether to the left, to Ammon, or to the right, to Jerusalem, long before the time of Rome.

“In the religion of ancient Rome, a *haruspex* was a person trained to practice a form of divination called *haruspicy*, the inspection of the entrails of sacrificed animals, especially the livers of sacrificed sheep and poultry.” (**Wikipedia**, 7/18/2020)

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The clay model of a sheep’s liver, divided by cross lines and inscribed with omens in each division, may be seen in the British Museum.” (P. 139)

Hilmer notes that “Looking at the color and configurations of sheep livers to foretell the future was common in ancient Babylonia and Rome, but the practice is not mentioned elsewhere in the **Bible**.” (P. 1255)

1032

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The inference appears to be that he drew an arrow with each hand, but the one drawn by the right hand provided the required indication.” (P. 139)

Darr states that “**Verse 22** records the result of Nebuchadnezzar’s divination. The omen appears on the liver’s right side. Next stop, Jerusalem! The remainder of the verse describes the fate awaiting Judah’s capital: battering rams set up at the gates; the terrifying sound of battle cries (see **Isaiah 42:13**; **Zephaniah 1:14**); siege towers erected.” (P. 181)

1033

(continued...)

לְפִתּוּחַ פֶּה בְרִצָּח

to open a mouth with murder,<sup>1034</sup>

לְהָרִים קוֹל בְּתִרְוֵעָה

to raise high a voice with shouting,<sup>1035</sup>

לְשׂוּם כְּרִים עַל-שְׁעָרִים

to place battering-rams against gates,<sup>1036</sup>

לְשַׁפֵּךְ סִלְלָה

to pour out a (besieging) mound,<sup>1037</sup>

לְבַנּוֹת דִּיק:

to build a siege-wall / tower.

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<sup>1033</sup>(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The fact that Jerusalem was strongly fortified is to be ignored by Nebuchadnezzar, so the divination informed him. By the use of his military machines he would overcome the city (compare **Ezekiel 4:2** [where Ezekiel builds a miniature city of Jerusalem on a large clay brick, surrounding the city with siege-towers].” (P. 139)

1034

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “*to open the mouth for the slaughter*, i.e. to proclaim the annihilation of Jerusalem; an assurance of victory for the Babylonian army.” (P. 139)

1035

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “to lift up the voice with shouting,” and he comments that this means “battle-cries to terrify the inhabitants of the city which was being attacked and throw them into panic.” (P. 139)

1036

Compare this fifth line of **verse 27** with the second line, both of them having to do with the placing of the battering-rams.

1037

Rabbi Fisch holds that the mounds refer to “earthworks erected by the city walls from which to attack the defenders standing upon them.” (P. 139)

וְהָיָה לָהֶם (כְּקִסּוּם) [כְּקִסּוּם] שׁוֹאֵא

And it will be for them like a divination of emptiness;<sup>1038</sup>

בְּעֵינֵיהֶם שְׁבַעֵי שְׁבַעוֹת לָהֶם

in their eyes—sworn oaths belonging to them.<sup>1039</sup>

1038

Rabbi Fisch comments that “When the inhabitants of Jerusalem hear of Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to march against them, they will not treat it seriously, relying upon the false prophets who were assuring them that the city was inviolable.” (P. 139) For one such false prophet, see the story of Hananiah in **Jeremiah 28**.

Hilmer states that “The leaders of Jerusalem, once submissive to Nebuchadnezzar but now in rebellion (**2 Kings 24:20**), hoped that the result of the omen-seeking (**verses 21-22**) was misleading.” (P. 1255)

1039

Whereas for the Judeans the results of the divination will be considered a total falsehood, in the eyes of the Babylonians the divination will be considered “sworn oaths of the idol-Gods.”

Fisch comments that “When the inhabitants of Jerusalem hear of Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to march against them, they will not treat it seriously, relying upon the false prophets who were assuring them that the city was inviolable.” (P. 139)

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has the phrase שְׁבַעֵי שְׁבַעוֹת לָהֶם, **shebhu(ey shebhu(oth lahem**, as “who have weeks upon weeks!” Our translation is “eyes—sworn oaths for / belonging to them. Translations vary from “to them that have sworn oaths,” to “the oaths they had sworn to them,” to “they have sworn solemn oaths,” to “those who have sworn allegiance to him,” to “for they have received sworn guarantees.” The phrase is omitted by **Rahlfs**.

Rabbi Fisch suggests that “Perhaps the meaning is: so sure were the inhabitants of Jerusalem of the futility of the divination practiced by the Babylonians that they even swore again and again that the omens would never come true.” (P. 139)

Darr comments that **verse 23a** is difficult. ‘Them / they’ cannot be the Babylonians, since Nebuchadnezzar’s troops would have presupposed the efficacy of their divinatory techniques, and a campaign against rebellious Jerusalem was a reasonable next step. Hence, Ezekiel must be talking about his compatriots back home. They are portrayed as dismissing the Babylonian oracle-priest’s techniques as  
(continued...)

וְהוּא־מִזְכִּיר עֲוֹן

And he (Judah) is bringing iniquity to remembrance,<sup>1040</sup>

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<sup>1039</sup>(...continued)

false divination—an orthodox assessment (see, e.g., **Deuteronomy 18:10**; **2 Kings 17:17**) that buttresses their persistent (but, in Ezekiel’s view, misfounded) confidence that Yahweh will protect their city against all foes. The following expression, ‘they have sworn solemn oaths’ (**NRSV**), is especially elusive. Does it refer to Zedekiah’s oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, sworn in Yahweh’s name but abrogated when an opportunity for rebellion arose (see **17:11-22**)? If so, the people likely are criticized for having held that oath in the same contempt accorded Nebuchadnezzar’s empty divination. Alternatively (and in line with **29:16**—a passage not yet encountered by the ancient, sequential reader), Ezekiel’s accusation may allude to Judah’s ill-conceived confidence in Egypt’s promises of assistance.” (P. 181)

1040

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “it brings iniquity to remembrance,” and he comments that “This complacent attitude of the Judeans adds to their guilt and hastens their downfall.” He adds that Rashi translates “he (Nebuchadnezzar) brings iniquity to remembrance,” and the meaning is then ‘Nebuchadnezzar’s presence is an accusation before God of the king and the people because of their breaking their allegiance to Him...The consequence of this accusation, or bringing guilt to remembrance, is that they shall be taken, i.e. captured, the city and the people, by the foe’ (Davidson).” (Pp. 139-140)

We at first translated by “And He (YHWH) is bringing iniquity to remembrance,” thinking the passage means YHWH, by sending Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and its temple, and to take Judah into captivity, is doing so because of Judah’s iniquity—thus causing the iniquity to be remembered. But in fact, the subject of the verb is ambiguous, and any of these translations could be correct—it, or he (Nebuchadnezzar or Judah), or He. The next verse makes it clear that Judah is meant.

Darr comments that “**Verse 23b** poses even greater problems. Clearly, what it describes spells disaster for the Judeans, since it will lead to capture by Nebuchadnezzar. Beyond that assertion, however, its meaning is unclear and admits several interpretations (as in the quite different translations of the **NRSV** and the **NIV**). The conundrum resides the phrase וְהוּא־מִזְכִּיר עֲוֹן, literally ‘and he [it? that?] will cause iniquity to be remembered’). To what does הוּא refer? What is called to remembrance, and in whose mind? Greenberg translates הוּא as ‘that’ (i.e., Judah’s [and the exiles’] belittling of Nebuchadnezzar’s omens, grounded in misguided trust in Egyptian aid). Pagan divination may be so much hocus-pocus, but when Yahweh is involved, ‘even liver omens speak ‘truth.’” (Greenberg, **Ezekiel 21-37**, p. 441, 447) Israel’s resistance to Yahweh’s verdict (paradoxically revealed through Nebuchadnezzar’s divining) brings to *God’s mind* its long-lived history of iniquity (i.e., trusting in other Gods and political alliances) and results in Jerusalem’s capture by Nebuchadnezzar. One finds an analogous use of the phrase ‘bring X’s iniquity to mind’ in **1 Kings 17:18**, where Elijah’s Phoenician hostess complains  
(continued...)

לְהִתְפָּשׁ:

for (them) to be seized!

21:29<sup>Heb</sup> / 24<sup>Eng</sup><sup>1041</sup>

לָכֵן כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

יְעַן הַזְכָּרְכֶם עֲוֹנוֹכֶם

Because of your (plural) causing your iniquity to be remembered,

בְּהַגְלוֹת פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם

by your transgressions being uncovered,<sup>1042</sup>

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<sup>1040</sup>(...continued)

that his presence in her home has drawn Yahweh's careful scrutiny ('brought my iniquity to [God's] mind'), resulting in her son's death as punishment for her guilt (which might otherwise have gone unrequited?)...

“But other critics (e.g., Zimmerli, Wevers) adopt H. G. Reventlow's hypothesis that מִזְכִּיר עוֹן is the title of a judicial official, the ‘public prosecutor’ (see **2 Samuel 8:16; 20:24; 1 Kings 4:3**). Ezekiel accords that role to Nebuchadrezzar, whose divination techniques elicit from Judah a response that brings its iniquity (broadly defined) to God's mind, leading to Divine judgment at the hands of Babylon-ia's king.” (P. 181)

<sup>1041</sup>

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 29-32<sup>Heb</sup> / 24-28<sup>Eng</sup>** “Deposition of Judea's King.”

Reimer comments that “With the sword committed to the Babylonian king, impending judgment is announced on Jerusalem. Although this section begins with plural refer-ences, it quickly focuses on an individual, the ‘wicked’ prince of Israel, who must be Zedekiah.” (P. 1530)

<sup>1042</sup>

Rabbi Fisch comments, “Let the people of Judea not delude themselves with false hopes. Overwhelming disaster is coming upon them, because their more recent misdeeds are so glaring and challenging that they call their former iniquities to remembrance before God. He cannot overlook the record of their wilful disobedience which demands the most severe punishment.” (P. 140)

(continued...)



לְהִרְאוֹת חַטֹּאתֶיכֶם

to cause your sins to be seen,

בְּכֹל עֲלֵילוֹתֶיכֶם

with all your (evil) deeds--

יַעַן הַזְכָּרְכֶם

because of your causing to be remembered,

בְּכַף תִּתְפָּשׂוּ:

with / in the hand you will be seized.

21:30<sup>Heb</sup> / 25<sup>Eng</sup>

וַאֲתָהּ חָלַל רָשָׁע נָשִׂיא יִשְׂרָאֵל

And you, profaned / pierced evil prince of Israel,<sup>1043</sup>

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<sup>1042</sup>(...continued)

We say, Be careful when you claim YHWH “cannot” do something. YHWH is free to do whatever He desires. If He wants to forgive and forget, that is His prerogative. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

1043

Rabbi Fisch states that here, “the allusion is to king Zedekiah.” (P. 140) Hilmer agrees.

Darr comments that in **verses 25-27**, “Suddenly Ezekiel shifts to second-person address in a scorching rebuke of Zedekiah (**verses 25-27**), here called a ‘defiled wicked prince of Israel.’ His day (of death) is coming (see also **1 Samuel 26:10**), an announcement that alludes to the terrible ‘Day of Yahweh,’ a time when, according to certain of Israel’s prophets (e.g., **Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah**), God will war against The Lord’s Own people (see **Ezekiel 7:1-27**).’ ‘The time of final punishment’...suggests that the day is ripe for Zedekiah’s amassed iniquity to be punished. Yahweh addresses him specifically ‘thus says Lord God’), demanding that he remove the turban / crown, the symbol of royal authority. The following phrase, literally, ‘this, not this, is in effect a call for total social upheaval. What was low is raised up; what was high is brought low (see also **Ezekiel 17:24; Psalm 75:8**). The following, thrice-repeated (signaling the superlative) noun עֲנָה עֲנָה עֲנָה, from a root meaning ‘to bend, twist,’ is nicely translated as ‘topsy-turvy.’ Yahweh is turning Judah’s world upside down. Critics have discerned in **verse 27b** an ironic twist on **Genesis 49:10**, part of Jacob’s blessing of Judah: ‘On Ezekiel’s lips

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר-בָּא יוֹמוֹ

whose day is coming / has come,<sup>1044</sup>

בְּעֵת עֲוֹן קֵץ:

in a time of iniquity—an end!<sup>1045</sup>

21:31<sup>Heb</sup> / 26<sup>Eng</sup>

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוּדָה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

הַסִּיר הַמִּצְנֶפֶת

Take away the turban!<sup>1046</sup>

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<sup>1043</sup>(...continued)

**Genesis 49:10** is not about tribute and subordination of the world to Judah, but about the judgment of Judah by the principal representative of that world which was to bow before Judah.” (P. 182)

1044

The form of the verb here, **בָּא**, **ba**), is ambiguous. It can be the qal perfect, “it came”; and it can also be the present active participle, “it is coming.” Four of the five English translations we are using have the perfect tense, “has come”; one (**New Jerusalem**) has “is approaching.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the perfect ἤκει, “has come.”

1045

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “in the time of the iniquity of the end.” He comments that He [Zedekiah] will be deposed when the guilt of Judah has its sequel in the end of the dynasty and the time of the captivity. The phrase occurs again in **verse 34** and **35:5** [but nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**].” (P. 140)

**New Jerusalem** has “an end to your crimes.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has ἐν καιρῷ ἀδικίας πέρας, “in a time of injustice, an end.” For occurrences of the noun קֵץ, qets, “end” in the **Hebrew Bible**, see end-note 3.

1046

Hilmer notes that the noun הַמִּצְנֶפֶת, hammitsnepheth, “the turban,” is “only here mentioned as royal headwear. Elsewhere it is worn by priests (**Exodus 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28, 31; Leviticus 8:9;** (continued...))

וְהָרִים הַעֲטֹרָה

And remove the crown!<sup>1047</sup>

זֹאת לֹא-זֹאת

This—not this!<sup>1048</sup>

הַשְּׁפֹלָה הַגְּבוּהָ

That which is low, exalt!

וְהַגְּבוּהָ הַשְּׁפִילָה:

And that which is high, lower!<sup>1049</sup>

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<sup>1046</sup>(...continued)

**16:4**, as a setting for the crown (**Exodus 28:36-37; 29:6; 29:31; Leviticus 8:9**). It was made of fine linen (**Exodus 28:39; 39:28**).” P. 1255)

1047

Rabbi Fisch comments on **verse 31** that Zedekiah “will be removed from his throne and will never again rule over Judea. Although *mitre* [our ‘turban’] is elsewhere used of the headgear of the high priest, it signifies a ‘turban’; and the king, as well as the high priest, may each have worn one of a distinguishing type.” (P. 140)

Hilmer comments on the words “lowly...exalted...exalted...brought low,” that they refer to “a common biblical expression for the reversal of human conditions because of the intervention of [YHWH]—see **Ezekiel 17:24; 1 Samuel 2:7–8** [the song of Hannah]; **Luke 1:52–53** [the ‘magnificat’ of Mary].” (P. 1255)

1048

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “this shall be no more the same,” and he comments that the text is literally ‘this not this’; ‘everything will be flung into confusion (Lofthouse). There will be an upheaval in which Zedekiah’s throne will be upset.” (P. 140)

Does that sound to you like what the phrase “this not this” means? The English translations we are consulting vary, from “this *shall not be* the same,” to “This shall not remain as it is,” to “things shall not remain as they are,” to “It will not be as it was,” to “Everything will be changed.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has αὕτη οὐ τοιαύτη ἔσται, “this not such will be”—but what does this mean? We think the phrase is enigmatic, and that these translations are no more than guesses as to its meaning. What do you think?

1049

(continued...)

עֲנָה עֲנָה עֲנָה אֲשִׁימְנָה

A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it!<sup>1050</sup>

<sup>1049</sup>(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "that which is low shall be exalted," and "that which is high abased." He comments that this means that Jehoiachin, now in disgrace in Babylon, will be restored to honor (compare **2 Kings 25:27-29**)...and Zedekiah, who now occupies an exalted office, will be degraded." (P. 140)

However, the Hebrew text is

הַשְּׁפִלָה הַגְּבִיָּה

That which is low, make high / exalt!

וְהַגְּבִיָּה הַשְּׁפִילָה:

And that which is high, make low / abase!

The last verb in both lines is imperative, a command—not a description. It is not a prediction of something that is going to happen, but rather, a command to do something: make high, exalt what is low; and make low, abase what is high. The Judean exiles did not have the power or the authority to either exalt or debase Zedekiah.

What do you think this means? Does it mean that the value systems of the Judean exiles were wrong, that they needed to be reversed? And if it is a relevant Divine command, what does it mean for us today? Can it mean that American values are out of whack? That we value what is ultimately of little value—power, possessions, pleasure--and at the same time we dismiss as of little value, what might be the means to our redemption—serving lowly people, giving rather than getting, devoting our time and energy to constructive projects rather than being slaves to pleasure and the entertainment media? What do you think?

<sup>1050</sup>

Rabbi Fisch comments that "The repetition of the noun points to the completeness of the impending disaster." (P. 140) Where the Hebrew text has three nouns, עֲנָה עֲנָה עֲנָה, "ruin, ruin, ruin," the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has only two, ἀδικία ἀδικία, "injustice, injustice."

Hilmer comments that "Threefold repetition [is] for emphasis (see **Isaiah 6:3** ['set-apart, set-apart, set-apart is YHWH of Armies']; **Jeremiah 7:4** ['YHWH's temple, YHWH's temple, YHWH's temple'])." (P. 1255)

(continued...)

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<sup>1050</sup>(...continued)

What do you think this “Ruin, ruin, ruin” is talking about? Can it be for the end of the Davidic kingship, the “House of David”? Note here the probable reference to **Genesis 49:10**, with its prediction that the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes...” Here, it seems, Ezekiel is witnessing to the end of that kingship, and makes a play on the **Genesis 49:10** passage. See Darr’s comment in footnote 1043. And we ask, did the Davidic kingship end with the death of Judah’s kings following the Babylonian captivity? We think it did—the scepter departed from Judah, and the ruler’s staff from between the king of Judah’s feet.

Matties comments on **verses 26-27** that “After an extended echo of **verse 23b**, [YHWH] addresses the vile, wicked prince (probably Zedekiah) directly, announcing literally his ‘day’ and an ‘end’ (**verse 25**; see also the use of both words in **chapter 7**). Power structures will be transformed (**verse 26** [‘take away the turban, remove the crown’]), but it will be a sinister transformation. Alluding to **Genesis 49:10**, but reversing its expectation, this one whose right is given by [YHWH] is none other than Nebuchadnezzar who acts as [YHWH’s] sword.” (Pp. 1186-87) Compare **Jeremiah 22:30**,

22:30 חִי־אֲנִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה

As I live—(it is) a saying / oath of YHWH—

כִּי אִם־יְהִי כְּנִיחוֹ

that if Coniah, son of Jehoiachim, King of Judah, should be

בְּנֵי־יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה

—(the) son of Yehoyaqiym, king of Judah--

חֹתָם עַל־יָד יְמִינִי

a seal / signet-ring upon My right hand--

כִּי מִשָּׁם אֶתְקַנְנֶךָ:

that from there I would pull you (off)!

22:25 וַנְּתִתֶיךָ בְּיַד מְבַקְשֵׁי נַפְשֶׁךָ

And I will give you into (the) hand of those seeking your innermost-being / life,

וּבְיַד אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה יָגוּר מִפְּנֵיהֶם

and into (the) hand which you were dreading before them,

וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל

and into (the) hand of Nebukhadhretsar,

וּבְיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים:

and into (the) hand of the Chaldeans!

(continued...)

<sup>1050</sup>(...continued)

22:26 וְהִטַּלְתִּי אֹתְךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָתְךָ  
And I will hurl / throw you and your mother who gave you birth,  
עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲחֵרָת  
upon / into the other land,

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִלְדָתֶם שָׁם  
where you (plural) were not given birth;  
וְשָׁם תָּמוּתוּ:  
and there, you will die!

22:27 וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־הֵם מִנְשֵׂאִים אֶת־נַפְשָׁם לָשׁוּב שָׁם  
And upon / to the land which they are lifting up their innermost-being to return there,  
שָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּבוּ:  
they shall not return there!

22:28 הֲעֶצֶב נִבְזָה נָפוּץ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה כְּנִיָּהוּ  
Is this man Konyahu a despised, shattered vessel / pot?  
אִם־כְּלִי אֵין חֶפְצֵן בּוֹ  
Or a utensil in whom there is no delight?  
מִדַּע הוּטְלוֹ הוּא וְזָרְעוֹ  
For what reason were he and his descendant(s) hurled / thrown,  
וְהִשְׁלָכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ:  
and were cast upon / into the land which they did not know?

22:29 אָרֶץ אָרֶץ אָרֶץ  
Land, land, land!  
שִׁמְעֵי דְבַר־יְהוָה:  
Hear / obey YHWH's word!

22:30 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה  
In this way YHWH spoke:  
כָּתְבוּ אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה עֲרִירִי  
Write / record this man (as) stripped / childless,  
גִּבּוֹר לֹא־יִצְלַח בְּיָמָיו  
a (strong) man (who) will not prosper in his days;  
כִּי לֹא יִצְלַח מִזֶּרְעוֹ אִישׁ  
for not a man from his descendant(s) will succeed,

(continued...)

גַּם-זֹאת לֹא הָיָה

Also this did not happen<sup>1051</sup>

עַד-בֹּא אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ הַמִּשְׁפָּט

until he comes, to whom belongs the justice--

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<sup>1050</sup>(...continued)

יָשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא דָוִד

sitting upon David's throne,

וּמִשֵּׁל עוֹד בִּיהוּדָה:

and reigning again in Judah!

We say, the prophets of Israel, who lived in that time of the fall of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar, and the end of the House of David, so eloquently depicted in this passage from Jeremiah, still prophesied concerning the future coming of a 'new David,' a continuation of the royal house of Judah. See **Isaiah 9:6; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5; 30:9; 33:15, 17, 19-22, 23-26; Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zechariah 12:7-8, 10, 12; 13:1.**

1051

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "*This also shall be no more, etc.*, and he comments that "Even the restoration of the crown to Jehoiachin, referred to in the preceding verse will only be temporary. The ultimate restoration will happen at an unspecified time in the future with the advent of the Messiah. The phrase *until he comes whose right it is* recalls the Messianic prophecy in **Genesis 49:10.**

לֹא-יִסּוֹר שֵׁבֶט מִיהוּדָה

It will not turn aside, a (ruler's) staff from Judah,

וּמִחַקֵּק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו

and a commander's (staff) from between his feet,

עַד כִּי-יָבֹא (שִׁילוֹה) [שִׁילוֹה]

until (the time) when Shiloh will come;

וְלוֹ יִקְהַת עַמִּים:

and to him (belongs the) obedience of peoples.

Hilmer comments that it is "The Messiah [the one to whom it rightfully belongs]; apparently an allusion to **Genesis 49:10.** Or possibly the reference is to Nebuchadnezzar, translating '...whose is the judgment' or '...who pronounces sentence.'" (P. 1255)

וְנָתַתִּי:

and I will give (it) to him!<sup>1052</sup>

21:33<sup>Heb</sup> / 28<sup>Eng</sup><sup>1053</sup>

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1052

Translations of **verse 27<sup>Eng</sup>** vary:

**King James**, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no *more*, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it *him*.”

**Tanakh**, “Ruin, an utter ruin I will make it. It shall be no more until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; and I will give it to him.”

**New Revised Standard**, “A ruin, a ruin, a ruin-- I will make it! (Such has never occurred.) Until he comes whose right it is; to him I will give it.”

**New International**, “A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored until he to whom it rightfully belongs shall come; to him I will give it.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Ruin, ruin, I shall bring such ruin as never was before, until the rightful ruler comes, on whom I shall bestow it.”

**Rahfs**, ἀδικίαν ἀδικίαν θήσομαι αὐτήν οὐδ’ αὕτη τοιαύτη ἔσται ἕως οὗ ἔλθῃ ᾧ καθήκει καὶ παραδώσω αὐτῷ, “Injustice, injustice I will place / make it. Not even this will be such, until (the time) when he shall come, to whom it belongs / is proper, and I will give / hand it over to him.”

1053

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 33-37<sup>Heb</sup> / 28-32<sup>Eng</sup>** “Threat Against Ammon.” Darr entitles these verses “The Sword Resheathed.”

Rabbi Fisch quotes Lofthouse as saying, “The prophet’s excitement, growing in **verse 32<sup>Heb</sup>**, now rises higher; he seizes the sword again, but this time he turns it against the Ammonites who might have thought that they would escape when Judah was invaded. The full force, however, of the prophet’s mood is spent, and as the sword is sheathed (**verse 35**) the prophecy ends with a prediction of ruin at once general and vague.” (P. 141)

Reimer holds that “The point here is that the visitation of the sword against Jerusalem does not preclude its coming to Ammon as well.” (P. 1530)

Darr comments on verses **28-32<sup>Eng</sup>** that “The prophecy is said to concern the Ammonites and their taunts. Ezekiel 25:1-7<sup>Eng</sup>, the first of the prophet’s oracles against foreign nations and rulers (25:1-32:32<sup>Eng</sup>), condemns the Ammonites for their derisive delight at Judah’s destruction. Given the reference to Rabbath Ammon in verse 20<sup>Eng</sup>, Zimmerli explains, the prophet fittingly turns to the city lying along the road not taken, depicting its destruction by the sword (Nebuchadrezzar and his forces) in terms just used to describe God’s judgment upon Jerusalem and its prince. Rabbah has not escaped for long. But  
(continued...)



וְאַתָּה בֶן-אָדָם

And you, Son of Adam / Humanity,

הַנְּבִיא וְאַמַּרְתָּ

Prophecy! And you shall say:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוּדָה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke,

אֶל-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְאֶל-חֲרָפְתָם

to Ammon's children and to their reproach:<sup>1054</sup>

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<sup>1053</sup>(...continued)

it is difficult to see how **verses 28b-29** are related to the Ammonites. B. Lang, who attributes the oracle to Ezekiel, argues that the reference to the Ammonites is secondary; originally this ruthless judgment pronouncement was aimed at Judah. Greenberg believes that the oracle can only be understood if we ignore the reference to the Ammonites altogether, for it is intentionally misleading. Ezekiel's real target is Babylonia, but because a prediction of its destruction risks reprisal, he resorts to a code name (**Ezekiel 21-37**, p. 435). Block, by contrast, identifies **verses 28b-29**<sup>Eng</sup> as a quotation of the Ammonites' version of the earlier sword song (**verses 9-10**) by which they taunt Israel following Nebuchadrezzar's decision not to advance against their city. Again we say Ambiguity? Yes, indeed.

“Given the explicit designation in **verse 28a**<sup>Eng</sup>, the reader will most likely construe **verses 28b-29**<sup>Eng</sup> as a description of Nebuchadnezzar's future attack against Ammon. An initial double vocative ‘sword, sword,’ is followed by a varied form of **verses 9b-10a**<sup>Eng</sup>. Nebuchadnezzar's unsheathed sword, polished and flashing like lightning, turns against Ammon. The reference to false visions and lies is obscure, but it recalls the Jerusalemites' assessment of Nebuchadnezzar's divinatory techniques. Zimmerli suggests that Ammon's own diviners have erred by issuing favorable oracles. Now the Babylonians place the sword (addressed in the second person) over the necks of the Ammonites for whom, like Judah's ‘vile, wicked’ prince, the day of death has come.” (Pp. 182-183)

1054

Rabbi Fisch's translation has “concerning their taunt,” and he comments that “The Ammonites were hostile to Judea at the time of crisis when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Yehoyaqim (compare **2 Kings 24:2**). They were not to imagine that they would escape a like fate at his hands.” (P. 141)

Hilmer says to see **verse 20**, and adds that “After judgment on Jerusalem, the foreigners would be dealt with (compare **Isaiah 10:5**).” (P. 1255)

וַאֲמַרְתָּ חֶרֶב חֶרֶב

and you shall say, A sword, a sword,

פְּתוּחָהּ לְטַבַּח

unsheathed for slaughter,<sup>1055</sup>

מְרוּטָהּ לְהַכִּיל

polished to consume,<sup>1056</sup>

לְמַעַן בְּרָק;

in order for lightning (to strike)--<sup>1057</sup>

21:34<sup>Heb</sup> / 29<sup>Eng</sup>

בַּחֲזוֹת לְךָ שׁוּא

while envisioning for yourself emptiness,

בְּקִסְם־לְךָ כֶּזֶב

while divining for yourself a lie,<sup>1058</sup>

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1055

Compare **verses 14-16** concerning this matter of sharpening the sword. It is Nebuchadnezzar's sword that is meant.

1056

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The sword is prepared to its extreme sharpness to be an effective instrument of punishment.” (P. 141)

1057

We assume the meaning to be the sword will strike the Ammonites like lightning, at the very time they are divining for themselves lies, and envisioning empty things.

Rabbi Fisch thinks this refers to “the hopes of victory which the Ammonite soothsayers were holding out [but which] were nothing but misleading falsehoods.” (P. 141)

1058

(continued...)

לְתֵת אוֹתָךְ אֶל-צְוֹאֲרֵי חַלְלֵי רְשָׁעִים

to place you to / on (the) necks of wicked corpses--<sup>1059</sup>

אֲשֶׁר-בָּא יוֹמָם

whose day has come

בְּעַת עֵוֹן קֵץ:

in a time of iniquity--an end!<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1058</sup>(...continued)

Hilmer notes that “Apparently Ammon also had false prophets of peace.” (P. 1255) See **verse 10**. Also see **13:10; Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11-12**.

1059

We take this line to mean that the lightning struck corpses of the Ammonites will fall upon the necks of others already slain, in a mass burial.

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Contrary to the assurance of the Diviners, Ammon will share the fate of Jerusalem, and its slain, as it were, fall upon the dead bodies of the Judeans and form one heap.” (P. 141)

1060

Translations of **verse 34<sup>Heb</sup> / 29<sup>Eng</sup>** vary:

**King James**, “Whiles [middle English for ‘at times,’ ‘occasionally’] they see vanity unto thee, whiles they Divine a lie unto thee, to bring thee upon the necks of *them that are* slain, of the wicked, whose day is come, when their iniquity *shall have* an end.”

**Tanakh**, “Because they have prophesied falsely about you and have Divined deceitfully concerning you, you shall be wielded over the necks of the dishonored wicked ones, for their day has come, the time set for their punishment.”

**New Revised Standard**, “Offering false visions for you, divining lies for you, they place you over the necks of the vile, wicked ones-- those whose day has come, the time of final punishment.”

**New International**, “Despite false visions concerning you and lying divinations about you, it will be laid on the necks of the wicked who are to be slain, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax.”

**New Jerusalem**, “while you have empty visions and consult lying omens-to cut the throats of the wicked, whose doom is approaching to put an end to their crimes.”

**Rahlfs**, ἐν τῇ ὀράσει σου τῇ ματαιῇ καὶ ἐν τῷ μαντεύεσθαι σε ψευδῇ τοῦ παραδοῦναί σε ἐπὶ τραχήλους τραυματιῶν ἀνόμων ὧν ἦκει ἡ ἡμέρα ἐν καιρῷ ἀδικίας πέρας, “in your vision, the vain / empty one, and in the false divining (for) yourself, to hand yourself over (continued...)”

<sup>1060</sup>(...continued)

upon (the) necks of lawless wounded ones, for whom the day has come in a time of injustice, an end.”

Compare the earlier **verse 30<sup>Heb</sup>**.

<sup>1061</sup>

Reimer entitles **verses 35-37<sup>Heb</sup> / 30-32<sup>Eng</sup>** “The Sword Sheathed and Judged.” He comments that “The instruction to return the sword to its sheath is the counterpart to the action begun in **verse 8<sup>Heb</sup> / 3<sup>Eng</sup>**. With its work done, the ‘tool’ is now itself subject to judgment. In this, Babylon is like Assyria in **Isaiah 10:5-19**. The conclusion in **Ezekiel 21:36-37<sup>Heb</sup> / 31-32<sup>Eng</sup>** points in two directions: fire of My wrath refers back to the parable of the fire that began this oracle complex (**20:45-49**), and it anticipates the conclusion to the oracle that follows (**22:31**); so too in **21:37<sup>Heb</sup> / 32<sup>Eng</sup>**, fuel for the fire points back to **20:45-49**, while the reference to blood prepares the way for **chapter 22**.” (P. 1530)

Matties likewise comments that “The sword oracles end with [YHWH] addressing a judgment against the sword itself, Nebuchadnezzar (**verses 35-37<sup>Heb</sup> / 30-32<sup>Eng</sup>**). That Nebuchadnezzar was *created* (**verse 35<sup>Heb</sup> / 30<sup>Eng</sup>**) for the purpose of judgment by no means leaves him unaccountable for his violence (**verses 35-36<sup>Heb</sup> 31-32<sup>Eng</sup>**). The fire that began the conflagration (**21:3<sup>Heb</sup> / 20:47<sup>Eng</sup>**) now consumes the agent himself (**21:36<sup>Heb</sup> / 32<sup>Eng</sup>**).” (P. 1187)

We say Yes! And we wonder, would not this same judgment fall on Joshua and the Israelites, who came in devastating, merciless judgment on the inhabitants of Canaan, depicted in **Joshua**, and on David for his murderous, merciless raids depicted in **1 Samuel 29** and **30**? We do not hear any such conclusions being drawn by biblical theologians, and wonder why this is so. What do you say? Is not the sauce that is good for the goose (Nebuchadnezzar) also good for the ganders (Joshua and David)?

Darr comments that “Most critics agree that **verses 30-32<sup>Eng</sup>** address Nebuchadnezzar. The initial imperative, ‘Return it to its sheath,’ stands in stark contrast to **verse 5**, where it was said that Yahweh’s sword would never return to its scabbard. Now the king of Babylon (the sword) is to reenter his homeland, there to face God’s judgment. The reader who is familiar with the idea that God uses foreign nations as instrument of judgment against Israel, only to turn against them when their usefulness has ended (see, e.g. **Isaiah 31:8-9**, against Assyria), will not be surprised to discover that the ‘sword’ also will suffer Yahweh’s outpoured anger. **Verses 31-32<sup>Eng</sup>**, like **20:47-48**, contain fire imagery. But while the earlier verses spoke of a forest fire, Ezekiel now casts Yahweh in the role of a smelter whose bellow-like blowing melts the sword with the fire of Divine wrath. Moreover, God will hand the weapon over to barbarians, master craftsmen of destruction (an allusion to the Medes? See **Isaiah 13:17**). With the reference to ‘your blood,’ the human referent Nebuchadnezzar and his subjects) intrudes. Yahweh’s final

(continued...)

הָשִׁב אֶל־תַּעֲרָה

Return (the sword) to its sheath!<sup>1062</sup>

בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־נִבְרָאת

In (the) place where you (feminine singular) were created,

בְּאֶרֶץ מְכוֹרְתֶיךָ

in a land of your origin,

אֲשַׁפֵּט אֹתְךָ:

I will judge you.<sup>1063</sup>

21:36<sup>Heb</sup> / 31<sup>Eng</sup>

וְשִׁפַּכְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ זַעֲמִי

And I will pour out upon you My indignation,

בְּאֵשׁ עֲבָרְתִי אֶפְיַח עֲלֶיךָ

with (the) fire of My fury I will blow upon you;<sup>1064</sup>

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<sup>1061</sup>(...continued)

threat, ‘you will not be remembered,’ bespeaks permanent annihilation. The concluding formula, ‘for I Yahweh have spoken,’ grounds the foregoing oracle in the certain fulfillment of God’s Word.” (P. 183)

<sup>1062</sup>

We assume that all of this is part of a vision-story, being acted out by Ezekiel, with sword in hand, in the presence of the Judean leaders in exile. Rabbi Fisch evidently holds a similar view, as he states that “The symbolic action by Ezekiel who flourished the sword is to end; it will be followed in due course by [YHWH’s] judgment and retribution.

Hilmer note that the phrase “Return the sword” is “addressing Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 1256)

<sup>1063</sup>

Rabbi Fisch comments that this is “a prediction of the invasion of Ammon by the Babylonians.” (P. 142)

<sup>1064</sup>

(continued...)

וּנְתַתִּיךָ בְיַד אַנְשֵׁים בְּעָרִים

and I will place you in (the) hand of cruel men<sup>1065</sup>

חֲרָשֵׁי מְשַׁחִית:

workers of destruction!<sup>1066</sup>

21:37<sup>Heb</sup> / 32<sup>Eng</sup>

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<sup>1064</sup>(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that “As fire grows more intense through the blowing of the bellows, so will [YHWH’s] indignation against Ammon grow fiercer.”

And we wonder—are we to think of Ezekiel holding a bellows in his hand, blowing on coals of fire in the presence of the Judean leaders, to emphasize his point? Could it be that there were Ammonite leaders there also? We think it possible.

1065

Hilmer’s translation has “brutal men,” and he says it refers to “The people of the East, as in 25:4,” (P. 1256)

לָכֵן הִנְנִי נֹתֵנָךְ לְבְנֵי-קֶדֶם לְמוֹרָשָׁה

therefore look at Me—giving you to (the) children of (the) east for a possession,

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ טִירוֹתֵיהֶם בְּךָ

and they will set their encampments among you,

וְנִתְּנוּ בְךָ מִשְׁכְּנֵיהֶם

and they will place their dwellings among you.

הֵמָּה יֹאכְלוּ פְרִיֶךָ

They will eat your fruit,

וְהֵמָּה יִשְׁתּוּ חֲלִבֶךָ:

and they will drink your milk.

1066

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The Babylonians are described as ruthless so that the Ammonites could expect no mercy at their hands.” (P. 142)

But we ask, is this referring to what is going to happen to the Ammonites, or to the Babylonians, after they destroy Ammon? The language of the oracle is not clear enough to reach certain conclusions.

לֹא־שָׂרְיָהּ לֹא־כֹלֵלָהּ

For the fire you will be, for consuming;

דָּמְךָ יִהְיֶה בְּתוֹךְ הָאָרֶץ

your blood will be in (the) midst of the land / earth.<sup>1067</sup>

לֹא תִזְכָּרִי

You will not be remembered.<sup>1068</sup>

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1067

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Unlike Judea and Egypt (compare **22:15; 29:12**), the Ammonites will not survive in dispersion, but be destroyed in their own land.” (P. 142) And again we ask, Is this referring to the Ammonites, or to the Babylonians?

1068

Rabbi Fisch quotes Cooke as stating that this is “In striking contrast to Israel’s destiny. The neighboring nations and their religion led to nothing; whereas Israel, in spite of many failures, both survived and grew, a clear proof of the distinctive character of Israel’s faith.” (P. 142)

This is also the case if the Babylonians are being referred to. But is the prophecy true that Babylonia would not be remembered? Here we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, remembering Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom of Babylon.

Darr reflects on **chapter 21** that “Even in their ‘glory days,’ the nations of Israel and Judah were little more than petty kingdoms. Situated along the traversable corridor of land linking Egypt with the ‘megapowers’ of Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Babylonia, they were routinely trapped between the political and economic ambitions of all three. In the intervals, they fought off other peoples struggling to gain a foothold in their territories and squabbled with neighboring nations.

“It is little wonder that in a world of insatiable empires, Israel envisions its national Deity as a Mighty Warrior Whose sword was unsheathed against His foes. What faith was required to assert, often in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that Yahweh was a God of unparalleled power, Whose dominion over human history was absolute! And when the northern kingdom finally succumbed to Assyria, and Jerusalem’s collapse was imminent, what tenacity of faith was required of those who pointed the finger of blame at the victims, Ezekiel among them! Ezekiel stands with those prophets and historiographers who refused to ascribe national tragedy to Divine apathy, capriciousness, or Yahweh’s defeat at the hand of rival Deities, insisting that Israel’s ruin be read as God’s just and proportionate

(continued...)

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<sup>1068</sup>(...continued)

punishment of a relentlessly sinful people who, as beneficiaries of Yahweh's election and laws, should have known better.

Even as modern faith communities wrestle with Ezekiel's fundamental presupposition that God directly controls human history, rewarding the righteous but punishing the wicked, it behooves them to acknowledge the courage of his convictions. 'Peace, peace' is always the most popular message. In times of crisis, words of comfort can be panaceas for the soul. Ezekiel eschews peace when there is no peace and, from the readers' perspective, doles out hope in rare and compact packages. Who dares to stand beside him as he takes on his own community's deeply rooted beliefs?

The Jesus of **Matthew's Gospel** cautions his disciples not to think that he has come to bring peace to the earth: 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword' (**Matthew 10:34 NRSV**). That sword severs even family ties, a foundation of social stability. But militaristic images of God and of a sword wielding savior rest uneasily within many a contemporary faith community. If we must speak of weaponry, let it be in affirmation of Isaiah's vision, wherein people beat their swords into plowshares, and nations neither raise their swords nor study war anymore (**Isaiah 2:4**; see also **Micah 4:3**). Among the great hymns of the church, 'Lead On, O King Eternal' proclaims the paradox that God's Kingdom comes 'not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums,' but with 'deeds of love and mercy.' 'We've a Story to Tell to the Nations' speaks of a song that will 'conquer evil and shatter the spear and sword.' And while 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' proclaims the coming of one who 'hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword,' readers may recall that its place within certain recent hymnals was secured only after a 'battle' of sorts.

"Ezekiel admits no paradox that would transform Yahweh's clashing sword into an instrument of 'love and mercy.' The story He tells to His nation is of a God Who has 'loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword' against the Lord's Own people.

"Militaristic imagery may have its place in religious oratory, and many a person of faith has taken up the implements of war to fight for causes imbued with our most cherished religious values. But like so many of our symbols, the sword cuts both ways—an unbearable cliché within this context, but one worthy of reflection. Affirming that behind the swords of nations stands God's sword is a dangerous enterprise that should force us to our knees in prayer. Casting our lot with Ezekiel's insistence that Yahweh presses the sword against us, and also against our foes, in direct response to human sin privileges one biblical image of God to the neglect of others. It casts the Lord in the role of a Big Warrior Whose solution to the problems posed by fallible creatures is the very violence that, elsewhere in his scroll, Ezekiel denounces as Israel's greatest sin against God (see the Commentary at 22:1-31 and the Reflections on 22:23-31). Dare we say that God's imagination cannot move beyond the militaristic means by which human communities have sought to assert their power, resolve their conundrums, and enslave their neighbors?" (Pp. 183-184)



כִּי אָנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי:

Because I, YHWH, I have spoken.<sup>1069</sup>

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1069

So, Ezekiel claims. And we are amazed at his courage and doggedness in proclaiming what he has heard from God. At the time of his proclamation, he was surrounded by prophets speaking in the name of YHWH—a completely opposite message. Ezekiel could easily have lost his life because of his insistence on this message of doom that he was declaring to his beloved nation. But when the end came, and Ezekiel’s message proved to be the truth. That’s how his scroll got into our Bible! He told the truth, even though his words were sharp, and hurtful, and difficult to listen to. And we add that Ezekiel’s message, like that of all the prophets of YHWH, was filled with enigma, with puzzling statements and words that we oftentimes are not sure of their meaning. Like the Apostle Paul, Ezekiel “sees through a mirror, darkly” (**1 Corinthians 13:9-12**). We cannot take his message literally, and pretend that we understand it fully. But we must listen again and again to his message, acknowledging that truly here is a Prophet of YHWH, a Master of allegory and symbolism, a Story-Teller who seeks to unveil the truth!