Ezekiel 21

The Sword Unsheathed: Until He Comes Whose Right It Is

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

The parable becomes a plain word: God's own sword is out of its sheath, and it won't go back until Jerusalem falls. A pagan king shakes arrows at a crossroads, but God is steering him. The last son of David on the throne loses his crown — yet God makes a promise in the rubble: the crown waits for the One whose right it is.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

Scripture in the text and key-verse cards: King James Version (public domain). Quotations in the notes: New American Standard Bible® (NASB 1995), © The Lockman Foundation; used by permission. Commentary sources: David Guzik, Enduring Word.

00 The Text

EZEKIEL 21 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold — God — His character & actions	Green — Command / instruction	Sky — Key repeated word
⚠ Rose — Sin / warning	★ Violet — Promise / blessing	Amber — Time / place / contrast

[1] And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

[2] Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel,

[3] And say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the LORD; ▲ Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee ⚠ the righteous and the wicked.

[4] Seeing then that I will cut off from thee ⚠ the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the south to the north:

[5] That all flesh may know that I the LORD have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath: ▲ it shall not return any more.

[6] Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes.

[7] And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and ⚠ every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD.

[8] Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

[9] Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, A sword, a sword ⚠ is sharpened, and also furbished:

[10] It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree.

[11] And he hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled : this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer.

[12] Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh.

[13] Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord GOD.

[14] Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite thine hands together, and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it is the sword of the great men that are slain, which entereth into their privy chambers.

[15] 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.

[16] Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set.

[17] I will also smite mine hands together, and ▲ I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said it.

[18] The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

[19] Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city.

[20] Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites , and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced.

21 For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver.

22 At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort.

23 And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken.

24 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, I say, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand.

25 And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end,

26 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high.

27 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.

28 And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning the Ammonites , and concerning their reproach; even say thou, The sword, the sword is drawn: for the slaughter it is furbished, to consume because of the glittering:

29 Whiles 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.

30 Shall I cause it to return into his sheath? I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity.

31 And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skilful to destroy.

32 Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire; thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; thou shalt be no more remembered: for I the LORD have spoken it.

Marked in the text

- **v2** set thy face toward Jerusalem
- **v3** Behold, I am against thee
- **v3** sword *(every occurrence)*
- **v3** the righteous and the wicked *(every occurrence)*
- **v5** it shall not return any more
- **v6** with bitterness sigh before their eyes
- **v7** every heart shall melt
- **v9** is sharpened, and also furbished
- **v10** it contemneth the rod of my son
- **v12** Cry and howl, son of man
- **v14** smite thine hands together
- **v17** I will cause my fury to rest
- **v19** appoint thee two ways
- **v21** stood at the parting of the way
- **v21** to use divination
- **v21** he looked in the liver
- **v23** he will call to remembrance the iniquity
- **v25** profane wicked prince of Israel
- **v26** Remove the diadem, and take off the crown
- **v26** exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high
- **v27** overturn, overturn, overturn
- **v27** until he come whose right it is
- **v28** concerning the Ammonites
- **v32** thou shalt be no more remembered

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 21:3 (KJV)

[3] And say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the LORD; ▲ Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my ⇄ sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee ⚠ the righteous and the wicked.

Setting

This chapter follows straight on from the forest-fire parable of 20:45–49 (in Hebrew Bibles those verses open chapter 21), so it belongs to the same period — about 591 B.C., in the seventh year of the exile. Zedekiah reigns in Jerusalem and is drifting toward rebellion against Babylon, with neighbors like Ammon as partners (Jer 27:3). The people called Ezekiel a teller of parables (20:49); now God drops the picture and names the weapon: a sword.

Structure

- vv1–7 — **the sword drawn:** "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem" (v2). "Behold, I am against you; and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked" (v3). "It will not return to its sheath again" (v5). Ezekiel must "groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight" (v6) — "Because of the news that is coming"; "every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble" and "all knees will be weak as water" (v7).
- vv8–17 — **the song of the sword:** "A sword, a sword sharpened And also polished!" (v9), "Sharpened to make a slaughter" (v10). "Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the officials of Israel" (v12). "For there is a testing" (v13). "prophesy and clap your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time" (v14). "I will also clap My hands together, and I will appease My wrath; I, the LORD, have spoken" (v17).
- vv18–23 — **the king at the fork in the road:** "make two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come" (v19) — one to "Rabbah of the sons of Ammon," one to Jerusalem (v20). "For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way … to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver" (v21). "Into his right hand came the divination, 'Jerusalem'" (v22), with orders "to set battering rams against the gates" (v22). To the people it looks like "a false divination" (v23), "But he brings iniquity to remembrance" (v23).
- vv24–27 — **the crown removed:** "Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered" (v24). "And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end" (v25). "Remove the turban and take off the crown; this will no longer be the same. Exalt that which is low and abase that which is high" (v26). "A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it. This also will be no more until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him" (v27).
- vv28–32 — **the sword turns on Ammon:** "concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach" — "A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for the slaughter" (v28). Their prophets "see for you false visions" and "divine lies for you" (v29). "In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you" (v30). "I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath" (v31). "You will be fuel for the fire … You will not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken" (v32).

Repeated words

sword (vv3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 20, 28); sheath (vv3, 4, 5, 30); sharpened (vv9, 10, 11); polished (vv9, 10, 11, 28); the righteous and the wicked (vv3, 4); melt (vv7, 15); clap … hands together (vv14, 17); divination / divine (vv21, 22, 23, 29); remembered / remembrance (vv23, 24, 32); I, the LORD, have spoken (vv17, 32).

Contrasts

the forest fire of the parable (20:47) ⟷ the sword of the plain word (21:3). The righteous ⟷ the wicked, cut off together in the same judgment (vv3–4). The king of Babylon's arrows and livers (v21) ⟷ the LORD who has spoken (v17). The turban and crown removed (v26) ⟷ "He comes whose right it is" (v27). "Exalt that which is low" ⟷ "abase that which is high" (v26). Israel has a future King (v27) ⟷ Ammon "will not be remembered" (v32).

Chapter theme (my words)

The parable becomes a plain word: God's own sword is out of its sheath, and it won't go back until Jerusalem falls. A pagan king shakes arrows at a crossroads, but God is steering him. The last son of David on the throne loses his crown — yet God makes a promise in the rubble: the crown waits for the One whose right it is.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 21:26 (KJV)

26 Thus saith the Lord GOD; ▲ Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: ▲ exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high.

God's sword against His own land (vv1–5)

Ezekiel set his face south in 20:46; now he names the target plainly — Jerusalem, the sanctuaries, the land of Israel (v2). The fire that took "every green tree … as well as every dry tree" (20:47) becomes a sword that cuts off "the righteous and the wicked" (v3). How does that square with Ezekiel 18, where each man dies for his own sin? Guzik reads this as temporal judgment, not final judgment: "When God's judgment came against the nation, it would not be against specific individuals." Smith, quoted in Guzik: "In temporal judgments, however, both often suffer equally." Godly men like Ezekiel and Daniel went into exile too; but their eternal standing was never in doubt (compare 9:4–6). And the sword "will not return to its sheath again" (v5) — this is settled.

The groaning prophet (vv6–7)

God doesn't want a cold messenger. Guzik: "God did not want Ezekiel to be an unemotional messenger of judgment." Ezekiel groans in public, with a breaking heart, so that people will ask why — and then he tells them. The news will turn the strongest men to water; Vawter and Hoppe, quoted in Guzik, take "weak as water" as "a euphemism for the loss of bladder control in moments of terror."

The song of the sword (vv8–17)

This is a fierce, almost chant-like poem: sharpened, polished, glittering, handed to the slayer. Verses 10 and 13 are among the hardest in Ezekiel to translate. "The rod of My son" most likely refers to the

scepter of Judah's king — the royal line God once called His son (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). The sword despises that scepter. Guzik on v13: "God's sword of judgment had no regard for his right to reign, for Zedekiah's scepter." "Doubled the third time" (v14) signals blow after blow; Clarke, in Guzik, notes, "Nebuchadnezzar came against Judea THRICE." Both prophet and God "clap" their hands (vv14, 17) — a gesture of anger and finality. God's wrath will come to rest only when it has done its work.

The fork in the road (vv18–23)

Ezekiel draws a map with a signpost. Nebuchadnezzar marches west to put down the revolt and must choose: Rabbah of Ammon or Jerusalem. He uses three kinds of pagan divination: shaking arrows (Block, in Guzik: "shaking two inscribed arrows and then drawing one as one draws a lot"), consulting household idols (teraphim), and reading the liver of a sacrificed animal. The lot falls on Jerusalem. Feinberg: "The king thought he was deciding by the help of his gods, but God was determining the course of his action." The people in Jerusalem will dismiss it as a false omen (v23) — they had sworn oaths to Babylon and now trusted their alliances — but God uses even a pagan's superstition to bring their sin to remembrance (Prov 16:33; 21:1).

The profane prince (vv24–27)

Guzik identifies "the prince of Israel (probably Zedekiah)." He broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar (17:13–19; 2 Chr 36:13). His end came in 586 B.C.: he fled, was captured, watched his sons killed, was blinded and taken to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:4–7). "Remove the turban and take off the crown" (v26): the word for turban is the one used elsewhere for the high priest's headdress, so some see both priestly and royal glory falling together; Feinberg says "the crown, of course, belonged to the king." "Exalt that which is low and abase that which is high" states the principle God always works by (1 Sam 2:7–8; Luke 1:52).

"Until He comes whose right it is" (v27)

The threefold "a ruin" is as strong as Hebrew can be. Yet the sentence ends in promise: the crown will be "no more" — until One comes to whom it belongs. Most interpreters, including the commentators Guzik cites (Alexander, McGee, Wright), hear Genesis 49:10 — "The scepter shall not depart from Judah … Until Shiloh comes" — and see Jesus, the Son of David. Wright, in Guzik: "Ezekiel 21:27 is one of the great Messianic promises of the O.T., although it is often overlooked." A minority reads "right" (*mishpat*, often "judgment") as meaning until the one comes to whom the judgment is given — Nebuchadnezzar, God's appointed judge. Even so, the larger flow of Scripture points beyond Babylon: no son of David reigned again until the angel told Mary, "the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32).

Ammon (vv28–32)

Ammon may have laughed when the lot fell on Jerusalem (compare 25:3, 6), but the sword turns on them too. Their own diviners promised safety (v29). Unlike Israel, Ammon is given no future: "You will not be remembered" (v32). Clarke, in Guzik: "This prophecy against them was fulfilled about five years after the taking of Jerusalem." Taylor, in Guzik: "no prospect of restoration, no continuance in succeeding generations, no memorial, not even a memory." The difference between Israel and Ammon is not that Israel was better — it is God's covenant promise.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **sword — *chereb* (H2719):** a sword, any cutting weapon.
- **sheath — *taʿar* (H8593):** a sheath; also a razor.
- **groan — *ʾanach* (H584):** to sigh, groan.
- **melt — *masas* (H4549):** to dissolve, melt, lose courage.

- **sharpened — *chadad* (H2300):** to be sharp, sharpen.
- **polished — *maraṭ* (H4803):** to polish, burnish, make bare.
- **rod — *shebet* (H7626):** a rod, scepter; a tribe.
- **divination — *qesem* (H7081):** an oracle, divination.
- **arrows — *chets* (H2671):** an arrow.
- **household idols — *teraphim* (H8655):** family idols used for divination.
- **liver — *kabed* (H3516):** the liver, the "heavy" organ.
- **prince — *nasi* (H5387):** a leader, prince.
- **turban — *mitsnepheth* (H4701):** a turban, especially the high priest's.
- **crown — *ʿatarah* (H5850):** a crown, wreath.
- **ruin — *ʿavvah* (H5754):** an overthrow, ruin.
- **right — *mishpat* (H4941):** justice, judgment, rightful claim.
- **indignation — *zaʿam* (H2195):** fury, indignation.
- **fuel — *ʾoklah* (H402):** food; fuel for fire.

Cross-references

Gen 49:10; 1 Sam 2:7–8; 2 Sam 7:12–16; 2 Kgs 25:1–7; 2 Chr 36:11–13; Ps 2:7; Prov 16:33; Prov 21:1; Isa 9:6–7; Jer 22:30; Jer 23:5–6; Jer 27:1–11; Ezek 9:4–6; Ezek 17:11–21; Ezek 25:1–7; Luke 1:32–33; Luke 1:52; Heb 4:12; Jas 4:10; Rev 19:11–16.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 21:27 (KJV)

27 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.

Command to obey — "groan in their sight" (v6)

God wanted His messenger's heart broken over judgment before his mouth spoke it. When I warn a man about where his sin is taking him, I want to do it with grief, not with a pointed finger. The men I disciple can tell the difference between someone who is disgusted with them and someone who is heartbroken for them.

Sin to confess — broken oaths

Zedekiah's undoing was a broken promise (17:13–19). I'll confess the commitments I've made and quietly dropped — to God, to my wife, to the men who count on me. A man's word is part of his witness.

Warning to heed — the sword doesn't go back in the sheath

There is a point where judgment is settled (v5). Grace is real, but so is the day of which God says, "Behold, it comes" (v7). For the man still flirting with the old life, the time to turn is today, before the consequences come that can't be undone in this life.

Promise to trust — "until He comes whose right it is."

When every crown in Jerusalem lay in the dust, God still had a King in mind. Jesus has the right to rule — "the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). For the man who feels like his life is "a ruin, a ruin, a ruin," the One whose right it is can rule even there and rebuild.

Example to follow — the low exalted

"Exalt that which is low and abase that which is high" (v26). God lifts the humble and brings down the proud. I want to take the low place on purpose: "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (Jas 4:10). That's where I want to meet the men coming out of prison and recovery — not above them, beside them.

Worship

God rules over kings and their crossroads; "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD" (Prov 21:1). He is holy enough to draw His sword against His own city and faithful enough to keep a throne for His Son through the ruins.

Prayer

Lord GOD, give me a heart that groans over sin and a mouth that warns with tears. Help me keep my word. Thank You that no superstition, no king and no crossroads is outside Your hand. Jesus, You are the One whose right it is — take the crown in every part of my life, and in the lives of the men I walk with. Amen.