

Ezekiel's Prophecy to the Exiles—Yahweh's Avenging Sword (August 14, 591 BC)

Ezekiel 20:45–21:32

The Riddle of the Sword

20:45 The word of the LORD came to me:

46 “Son of man, turn toward the south, and speak out against the south. Prophecy against the open scrub land of the Negev,
47 and say to the scrub land of the Negev, ‘Hear the word of the LORD: This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look here, I am about to start a fire in you, and it will devour every green tree and every dry tree in you. The flaming fire will not be extinguished, and the whole surface of the ground from the Negev to the north will be scorched by it.

48 And everyone will see that I, the LORD, have burned it; it will not be extinguished.”

49 Then I said, “O sovereign LORD! They are saying of me, ‘Does he not simply speak in eloquent figures of speech?’”

The Meaning of the Riddle

21:1 The word of the LORD came to me:

2 “Son of man, turn toward Jerusalem and speak out against the sanctuaries. Prophecy against the land of Israel

3 and say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look, I am against you. I will draw my sword from its sheath and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked.

4 Because I will cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked, my sword will go out from its sheath against everyone from the south to the north.

5 Then everyone will know that I am the LORD, who drew my sword from its sheath—it will not be sheathed again!”

6 “And you, son of man, groan with an aching heart and bitterness; groan before their eyes.

7 When they ask you, ‘Why are you groaning?’ you will reply, ‘Because of the report that has come. Every heart will melt with fear and every hand will be limp; everyone will faint and every knee will be wet with urine.’ Pay attention—it is coming and it will happen, declares the sovereign LORD.”

The Song of the Sword

8 The word of the LORD came to me:

9 “Son of man, prophesy and say: ‘This is what the Lord says:

“A sword, a sword is sharpened,
and also polished.

10 It is sharpened for slaughter,
it is polished to flash like lightning!

“Should we rejoice in the scepter of my son? No! The sword despises every tree!

11 “He gave it to be polished,
to be grasped in the hand—
the sword is sharpened, it is polished—
giving it into the hand of the executioner.

12 Cry out and moan, son of man,
for it is wielded against my people;
against all the princes of Israel.
They are delivered up to the sword, along with my people.
Therefore, strike your thigh.

13 “‘For testing will come, and what will happen when the scepter, which the sword despises, is no more? declares the sovereign LORD.’

14 “And you, son of man, prophesy,
and clap your hands together.
Let the sword strike twice, even three times!
It is a sword for slaughter,
a sword for the great slaughter surrounding them.

15 So hearts melt with fear and many stumble.
At all their gates I have stationed the sword for slaughter.
Ah! It is made to flash, it is drawn for slaughter!

16 Cut sharply on the right!
Swing to the left,

wherever your edge is appointed to strike.

- 17 I too will clap my hands together,
I will exhaust my rage;
I the LORD have spoken.”

The Agent of the Sword

18 The word of the LORD came to me:

19 “You, son of man, mark out two routes for the king of Babylon’s sword to take; both of them will originate in a single land. Make a signpost and put it at the beginning of the road leading to the city.

20 Mark out the routes for the sword to take: “Rabbah of the Ammonites” and “Judah with Jerusalem in it.”

21 For the king of Babylon stands at the fork in the road at the head of the two routes. He looks for omens: He shakes arrows, he consults idols, he examines animal livers.

22 Into his right hand comes the portent for Jerusalem—to set up battering rams, to give the signal for slaughter, to shout out the battle cry, to set up battering rams against the gates, to erect a siege ramp, to build a siege wall.

23 But those in Jerusalem will view it as a false omen. They have sworn solemn oaths, but the king of Babylon will accuse them of violations in order to seize them.

24 “Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you have brought up your own guilt by uncovering your transgressions and revealing your sins through all your actions, for this reason you will be taken by force.

25 “As for you, profane and wicked prince of Israel,
whose day has come, the time of final punishment,

26 this is what the sovereign LORD says:

Tear off the turban,
take off the crown!
Things must change!
Exalt the lowly,
bring down the proud!

27 A total ruin I will make it!
It will come to an end
when the one arrives to whom I have assigned judgment.’

The Taunt of the Sword

28 “As for you, son of man, prophesy and say, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says concerning the Ammonites and their coming humiliation; say:

“A sword, a sword drawn for slaughter,
polished to consume, to flash like lightning—

29 while seeing false visions for you
and reading lying omens for you—
to place that sword on the necks of the profane wicked,
whose day has come,
the time of final punishment.

30 Return it to its sheath!
In the place where you were created,
in your native land, I will judge you.

31 I will pour out my anger on you;
the fire of my fury I will blow on you.
I will hand you over to brutal men, who are skilled in destruction.

32 You will become fuel for the fire—
your blood will stain the middle of the land;
you will no longer be remembered,
for I, the LORD, have spoken.”

Ezekiel's Prophecy to the Exiles—Woe to the Bloody City! (August 14, 591 BC)**Ezekiel 22****Indictment of the Bloody City**

1 The word of the LORD came to me:

2 “As for you, son of man, are you willing to pronounce judgment, are you willing to pronounce judgment on the bloody city? Then confront her with all her abominable deeds!

3 Then say, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: O city, who spills blood within herself (which brings on her doom), and who makes herself idols (which results in impurity),

4 you are guilty because of the blood you shed and defiled by the idols you made. You have hastened the day of your doom; the end of your years has come. Therefore I will make you an object of scorn to the nations, an object to be mocked by all lands.

5 Those both near and far from you will mock you, you with your bad reputation, full of turmoil.

6 “‘See how each of the princes of Israel living within you has used his authority to shed blood.

7 They have treated father and mother with contempt within you; they have oppressed the foreigner among you; they have wronged the orphan and the widow within you.

8 You have despised my holy things and desecrated my Sabbaths!

9 Slandorous men shed blood within you. Those who live within you eat pagan sacrifices on the mountains; they commit obscene acts among you.

10 They have sex with their father’s wife within you; they violate women during their menstrual period within you.

11 One commits an abominable act with his neighbor’s wife; another obscenely defiles his daughter-in-law; another violates his sister—his father’s daughter—within you.

12 They take bribes within you to shed blood. You engage in usury and charge interest; you extort money from your neighbors. You have forgotten me, declares the sovereign LORD.

13 “‘See, I strike my hands together at the dishonest profit you have made, and at the bloodshed they have done among you.

14 Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong when I deal with you? I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it!

15 I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you among various countries; I will remove your impurity from you.

16 You will be profaned within yourself in the sight of the nations; then you will know that I am the LORD.”

In the Smelter of God’s Wrath

17 The word of the LORD came to me:

18 “Son of man, the house of Israel has become slag to me. All of them are like bronze, tin, iron, and lead in the furnace; they are the worthless slag of silver.

19 Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: ‘Because all of you have become slag, look out!—I am about to gather you in the middle of Jerusalem.

20 As silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin are gathered in a furnace so that the fire can melt them, so I will gather you in my anger and in my rage. I will deposit you there and melt you.

21 I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my fury, and you will be melted in it.

22 As silver is melted in a furnace, so you will be melted in it, and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out my anger on you.”

The Unmanned Breach

23 The word of the LORD came to me:

24 “Son of man, say to her: ‘You are a land that receives no rain or showers in the day of my anger.’

25 Her princes within her are like a roaring lion tearing its prey; they have devoured lives. They take away riches and valuable things; they have made many women widows within it.

26 Her priests abuse my law and have desecrated my holy things. They do not distinguish between the holy and the profane, or recognize any distinction between the unclean and the clean. They ignore my Sabbaths and I am profaned in their midst.

27 Her officials are like wolves in her midst rending their prey—shedding blood and destroying lives—so they can get dishonest profit.

28 Her prophets coat their messages with whitewash. They see false visions and announce lying omens for them, saying, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says,’ when the LORD has not spoken.

29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have wronged the poor and needy; they have oppressed the foreigner who lives among them and denied them justice.

30 “I looked for a man from among them who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it, but I found no one.

31 So I have poured my anger on them, and destroyed them with the fire of my fury. I hereby repay them for what they have done, declares the sovereign LORD.”

Ezekiel's Prophecy to the Exiles—A Tale of Two Sisters (August 14, 591 BC)**Ezekiel 23****Introduction of the Accused**

1 The word of the LORD came to me:

2 “Son of man, there were two women who were daughters of the same mother.

3 They engaged in prostitution in Egypt; in their youth they engaged in prostitution. Their breasts were squeezed there; lovers fondled their virgin nipples there.

4 Oholah was the name of the older and Oholibah the name of her younger sister. They became mine, and gave birth to sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

The Indictment of Oholah (Samaria)

5 “Oholah engaged in prostitution while she was mine. She lusted after her lovers, the Assyrians—warriors

6 clothed in blue, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.

7 She bestowed her sexual favors on them; all of them were the choicest young men of Assyria. She defiled herself with all whom she desired—with all their idols.

8 She did not abandon the prostitution she had practiced in Egypt; for in her youth men had sex with her, fondled her virgin breasts, and ravished her.

9 Therefore I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians for whom she lusted.

10 They exposed her nakedness, seized her sons and daughters, and killed her with the sword. She became notorious among women, and they executed judgments against her.

The Indictment of Oholibah (Jerusalem)

11 “Her sister Oholibah watched this, but she became more corrupt in her lust than her sister had been, and her acts of prostitution were more numerous than those of her sister.

12 She lusted after the Assyrians—governors and officials, warriors in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.

13 I saw that she was defiled; both of them followed the same path.

14 But she increased her prostitution. She saw men carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans carved in bright red,

15 wearing belts on their waists and flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, the image of Babylonians whose native land is Chaldea.

16 When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.

17 The Babylonians crawled into bed with her. They defiled her with their lust; after she was defiled by them, she became disgusted with them.

18 When she lustfully exposed her nakedness, I was disgusted with her, just as I had been disgusted with her sister.

19 Yet she increased her prostitution, remembering the days of her youth when she engaged in prostitution in the land of Egypt.

20 She lusted after their genitals—as large as those of donkeys, and their seminal emission was as strong as that of stallions.

21 This is how you assessed the obscene conduct of your youth, when the Egyptians fondled your nipples and squeezed your young breasts.

The Sentencing of Oholibah (Jerusalem)

22 “Therefore, Oholibah, this is what the sovereign LORD says: Look here, I am about to stir up against you the lovers with whom you were disgusted; I will bring them against you from every side:

23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, all of them governors and officials, officers and nobles, all of them riding on horses.

24 They will attack you with weapons, chariots, wagons, and with a huge army; they will array themselves against you on every side with large shields, small shields, and helmets. I will assign them the task of judgment; they will punish you according to their laws.

25 I will direct my jealous anger against you, and they will deal with you in rage. They will cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors will die by the sword. They will seize your sons and daughters, and your survivors will be consumed by fire.

26 They will strip your clothes off you and take away your beautiful jewelry.

27 So I will put an end to your obscene conduct and your prostitution which you have practiced in the land of Egypt. You will not seek their help or remember Egypt anymore.

28 “For this is what the sovereign LORD says: Look here, I am about to deliver you over to those whom you hate, to those with whom you were disgusted.

29 They will treat you with hatred, take away all you have labored for, and leave you naked and bare. Your nakedness will be exposed, just as when you engaged in prostitution and obscene conduct.

30 I will do these things to you because you engaged in prostitution with the nations, polluting yourself with their idols.

31 You have followed the ways of your sister, so I will place her cup of judgment in your hand.

32 “This is what the sovereign LORD says: “You will drink your sister’s deep and wide cup; you will be scorned and derided, for it

holds a great deal.

33 You will be overcome by drunkenness and sorrow. The cup of your sister Samaria is a cup of horror and desolation.

34 You will drain it dry, gnaw its pieces, and tear out your breasts, for I have spoken, declares the sovereign LORD.

35 “Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: Because you have forgotten me and completely disregarded me, you must bear now the punishment for your obscene conduct and prostitution.”

The Charges against Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem)

36 The LORD said to me: “Son of man, are you willing to pronounce judgment on Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominable deeds!

37 For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and their sons, whom they bore to me, they have passed through the fire as food to their idols.

38 Moreover, they have done this to me: In the very same day they desecrated my sanctuary and profaned my Sabbaths.

39 On the same day they slaughtered their sons for their idols, they came to my sanctuary to desecrate it. This is what they have done in the middle of my house.

40 “They even sent for men from far away; when the messenger arrived, those men set out. For them you bathed, painted your eyes, and decorated yourself with jewelry.

41 You sat on a magnificent couch, with a table arranged in front of it where you placed my incense and my olive oil.

42 The sound of a carefree crowd accompanied her, including all kinds of men; even Sabeans were brought from the desert. The sisters put bracelets on their wrists and beautiful crowns on their heads.

43 Then I said about the one worn out by adultery, ‘Now they will commit immoral acts with her.’

44 They had sex with her as one does with a prostitute. In this way they had sex with Oholah and Oholibah, promiscuous women.

45 But upright men will punish them appropriately for their adultery and bloodshed, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.

The Sentencing of Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem)

46 “For this is what the sovereign LORD says: Bring up an army against them and subject them to terror and plunder.

47 That army will pelt them with stones and slash them with their swords; they will kill their sons and daughters and burn their houses.

48 I will put an end to the obscene conduct in the land; all the women will learn a lesson from this and not engage in obscene conduct.

49 They will repay you for your obscene conduct, and you will be punished for idol worship. Then you will know that I am the sovereign LORD.”

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