

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Ezekiel: Effective Ministry To The Spiritually Rebellious

Part XXIV: Parable Of The Drawn Sword: Stressing The Extent Of Who Would Be Punished (Ezekiel 20:49-21:7)

I. Introduction

- A. Jesus in Matthew 23:1-36 pronounced woes of divine judgment against the Pharisees of His day. This was a shocking denunciation, for the Pharisees were theologically conservative in contrast to the Sadducees.
- B. Similarly, Ezekiel 20:49-21:7 tells of God's future punishment of "the righteous and the wicked" (v. 3-4), both those who were considered to be upright and those considered to be evil, what seemed harsh in Ezekiel's day.
- C. Nevertheless, God's punishment is always truly righteous, and we view this passage for our insight:

II. Parable Of The Drawn Sword: Stressing The Extent Of Who Would Be Punished, Ezekiel 20:49-21:7.

- A. Before approaching Ezekiel 20:49-21:7, we need to recall that in Ezekiel 18:1-32, God strongly countered the belief that the children would be punished for their fathers' sins. Indeed, the phrase repeated in that chapter is, "The soul that sinneth, **it** shall die," the pronoun "it" being written before the verb "will die" as an *emphatic* pronoun to mean *only the soul that sins will die for his sin alone*, Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Kittel, *Bib. Heb.*, p. 836.
- B. As we then view Ezekiel 20:49, we note the people of Israel in captivity had reacted to Ezekiel's giving of the parable of the forest fire in Ezekiel 20:45-48 by complaining that he was "just telling parables, or perplexing riddles," not understanding his prediction on Judah's coming destruction, *Bible Know. Com., O. T.*, p. 1267.
- C. When Ezekiel expressed his dismay to the Lord at this criticism, God was highly motivated to clarify His truth, so He provided a much clearer message meant to jar His spiritually dull people to the core. That message was of His drawn sword, stressing the *extent* of **who** in Judah would be punished, Ezekiel 21:1-5:
 - 1. God directed Ezekiel to set his face toward Jerusalem and preach against its temple sanctuaries (Holy Place and Holiest of Holies) and against the whole land of Israel, Ezekiel 21:1-2a KJV, NIV, ESV. This message was thus directed toward those who were considered to be the righteous, sanctified priests who served God in the temple sanctuaries as well as the rest of the people in the nation of Israel.
 - 2. Ezekiel was to pronounce God's Word, claiming the Lord was against them and would draw out His sword from its sheath and cut off from them **both righteous and wicked**, Ezekiel 21:2b-3.
 - 3. Since God was about to cut off from the nation **both righteous and wicked**, His sword would be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north in the land, Ezekiel 21:4. "In case anyone failed to understand the parable of the forest fire" in Ezekiel 20:45-48, "Ezekiel repeated" the "phrase" of "from south to north" to communicate the meaning of that "forest fire" parable, stressing "that all Judah would be judged" by the Lord in the coming Babylonian invasion, *Ibid.*
 - 4. In the end, everyone in the nation would realize that God was the Lord, that He had drawn His sword from its sheath and would not put it back again until its lethal work was thoroughly completed, Ezekiel 21:5.
 - 5. In view of the theology of Ezekiel 18:1-32, God in Ezekiel 21:1-5 was implying that among the *alleged* righteous priests in the temple sanctuaries as well as those throughout the countryside, there were people who might not have been considered wicked by other people, but who were not true worshipers of the Lord, so they with the more obvious idolaters would be slain in the coming Babylonian invasion. (*Ibid.*)
- D. In Ezekiel 21:6-7 ESV, Ezekiel was directed by God to "groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes" in acting out the grief they would experience when Jerusalem actually fell and so many of her people were slain in the Babylonian invasion, *Ibid.*
- E. When Ezekiel's audience would ask him about his grieving actions, he was to answer that it represented what their response would be when news of God's judgment on Jerusalem actually arrived, Ezekiel 21:6-7a.
- F. Nevertheless, this tragic event would surely occur according to the word of the Lord, Ezekiel 21:7b.

Lesson: *Though God would not punish the innocent for the sins of the wicked, many people in Judah who were considered to be righteous by way of appearance or calling (such the priests in the temple sanctuaries) failed to worship the Lord like more obvious sinners, so the sword of the Lord in the hands of the invading Babylonian army would devastate the alleged righteous along with the more obvious sinners, devastating the people of Israel.*

Application: *(1) May we realize that it is not good enough that we appear to be righteous before other people, for we will ultimately give an account to the LORD for our lives, cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-2! (2) If we see God severely punish another person for sin, may we examine ourselves and repent if needed. (Galatians 6:1)*