

Pentwater Bible Church

Book of Ezekiel
Message 42
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, Artist Unknown

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The Book of Ezekiel
Message Forty-Two

Divine Direction for Nebuchadnezzar

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Ezekiel 21:18-24

¹⁸The word of Jehovah came unto me again, saying, ¹⁹Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; they twain shall come forth out of one land: and mark out a place, mark it out at the head of the way to the city. ²⁰Thou shalt appoint a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and to Judah in Jerusalem the fortified. ²¹For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he shook the arrows to and fro, he consulted the teraphim, he looked in the liver. ²²In his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build forts. ²³And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, who have sworn oaths unto them; but he bringeth iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken.

²⁴Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand (ASV, 1901).

DIVINE DIRECTION FOR THE SWORD

Ezekiel 21:18-19

¹⁸The word of Jehovah came unto me again, saying, ¹⁹Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; they twain shall come forth out of one land: and mark out a place, mark it out at the head of the way to the city (ASV, 1901).

God speaks to Ezekiel in the midst of this parable of the sword coming upon Jerusalem and tells him to mark out a place where the king of Babylon shall come from and where he will go. The Lord tells him to essentially make a road map from Babylon to Jerusalem in Judah and Rabbath in Ammon. The army was marching and Ezekiel was charged with making a symbolic action of sort. The sword has been used symbolically and literally throughout this chapter to illustrate the Babylonian army under the command of king Nebuchadnezzar marching from Babylon to Jerusalem to destroy it. His starting point in Babylon would lead through the fertile crescent in the north and then south to the land of Israel. This section of Scripture describes the process whereby God directs Nebuchadnezzar and the Jewish elders in Babylon who are shown what will happen to Jerusalem by the illustrations the prophet will make under the Lord's direction. The roads which are described in verse 19 to both Ammon and Judah come from Babylon. South of

Riblah, Ammon was the road southwest that led to Judah and Jerusalem. Going southeast it went to Rabbath and Ammon. God emphasizes this command of “mark out a place” by repeating it.



Map of the Deportation Babylonian Empire

At the very beginning of this part of the sword prophecy it is not clear which city the Lord is talking about. God is saying that the coming sword will be coming upon one of the two cities.

After Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 597 B.C. he returned to Babylon. In 593 B.C. Jerusalem led a six-nation regional conference which was comprised of representatives from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, and Judah. The purpose of the six-nation conclave was to plan for a joint rebellion against Babylon to take place two years later (detailed in chapter 25).

Ezekiel 21:20

²⁰Thou shalt appoint a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and to Judah in Jerusalem the fortified (ASV, 1901).

Nebuchadnezzar realizing this had a decision to make as to which nation he will take down first. Tyre was the most difficult of the three cities to attack (chapter 26; 29:17–20), so Nebuchadnezzar decided not to make it his first objective. Will it be Rabbath, Ammon or Jerusalem, Judah? In Greco-Roman times Rabbath was called Philadelphia. Today it is

Ezekiel 21:21

²¹For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he shook the arrows to and fro, he consulted the teraphim, he looked in the liver (ASV, 1901).

So Nebuchadnezzar came south to the point of the division in the road where going southeast would take the army to Rabbah in Ammon or the southwest where it would lead to Jerusalem in Judah. He began his process of divination at the point of the fork in the road leading to the two conspirators against him. The text cites three different mediums Nebuchadnezzar pursued to reach the result he was looking for.

1. Shaking arrows
2. Consulting a teraphim
3. Examining an animal's liver

These forms of ancient divination were practiced by the pagans to seek communication and divine direction from the gods. All the modes of communication involved some level of chance of outcome. Other means not expressed in this verse included the analysis of stars, moon, lungs, weather, birds, and fetuses. Other phenomena included, dropping oil in water, drinking wine, calling the dead, and sprinkling water on an ox. Others which were more intuitive types of divination in the ancient Near East involved oracles, prophecies, and dreams. All these practices are still used in many areas of the world.

In the use of arrows the seeker would place some arrows in a quiver with one or more clearly marked as the direction arrow. They were shaken in the quiver then while not looking they were spilled out on the ground. The position of the arrows in relation to the one's identified would be considered a sign from the "gods" of direction for future activities.

Consulting a teraphim was another pagan practice which began as "house-gods," which were carried about by the primitive Mesopotamians as fetishes along with their family effects. These deities were in all probability worshiped at first as the most important divine objects known to the followers of this cult. The images may have originally represented the deified ancestors of the family which revered them. The teraphim were images of human shape and of considerable size (I Samuel 19: 13). Michal, the daughter of Saul, placed one in David's bed in order to conceal his escape from her enraged father. According to rabbinic tradition these were mummified children's heads. It is furthermore evident that some of them were not too large and easily portable (Genesis 31: 19). Rachel, without her husband Jacob's knowledge, stole the teraphim which belonged to her father, Laban, and, hid them among the camel's furniture and then sat upon them to conceal her theft (Genesis 31: 34).

In terms of examining an animal's liver in ancient Mesopotamia, it was thought that the reading of livers helped determine the future outcomes of actions that faced both commoners and kings. A sheep was slaughtered, its liver removed, and the markings of the organ "read" for an answer. This practice was called hepatoscopy. In the British

Museum there is Babylonian clay tablet with a sheep's liver covered with all kinds of lines and oracles representing this ancient method of divination.¹

The tenor of this whole chapter is that Nebuchadnezzar is really in the Lord's hand to do what ever He wants him to do. The fact is, that all things even heathenism is subject to the rule and guidance of Almighty God, and is made subservient to the accomplishment of the plans of both His kingdom and His salvation.

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever he will (KJV).

The king thought that he was deciding with the help of the "gods" but actually it was the Lord who was actually directing his paths.

Ezekiel 21:22

²²In his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build forts (ASV, 1901).

The arrow shaken out of the quiver and spilled upon the ground was marked for Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was to construct *battering-rams*, siege engines and mounds and forts to establish the siege which could last for many months. This verse provides the instruction in outline form for the engineering of the siege construction materials.

It is quite clear from many passages of Scripture that God uses sinful people and nations to bring His plans for this earth and its people.

God knows all things and controls all things whether through His causative will or His permissive will. That is, He creates and He also allows His children to suffer the consequences of their sin.

Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (NASB)

Judges 10:13-14 "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you."(Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress." (NASB)

As God is in control of all affairs on this earth He is also in control of the origin, development and destiny of the Nation Israel, even their persecutions. It is also important to realize that God does not move counter to what He has revealed in Scripture as "His will." Divine retribution is His choice always and not ours. God uses the sins of this fallen world to achieve His righteousness.

¹ Gaebelein, A. C. (1918). *The prophet Ezekiel: an analytical exposition* (p. 144). New York: Publication Office "Our Hope."

For example God encouraged the Assyrians that they should pursue their sinful warlike methodologies toward God's chosen children the Jews. He wanted to judge them and this is how He chose to do it. One may say this is wrong. God is a God of love He would never do this. The Scripture states otherwise. The Bible makes it quite clear that God uses sin and sinful people to achieve His will.

It was the Assyrian monarch, Sargon II (721-705 B.C.), who first forcefully relocated Hebrews after the conquest of Israel, the northern kingdom of the Hebrews in 722 B.C. The Assyrians were warlike and ruthless people. They lived for the glory of war and loved their military exploits. They had a highly advanced war machine using sheer terror to place their subjects into submission. Some of the methods they employed upon conquered peoples included burning them alive, flaying alive and blinded then beheading. Following this they impaled the heads on sharp stakes for other to see. The terror they produced was widely communicated to other nations.

God used these ruthless people to remove the Northern ten tribes of Israel because of the extreme sins they had committed in turning away from Jehovah. In fact God did not have to use much coercion to achieve His goals. To activate the Assyrians to come against Judah, He simply gave them the notion. God used this whistling or making them aware of an opportunity for conquest such as He did with the Egyptians and Assyrians in Isaiah 7:17-19. Because they were a sinful people the Assyrians only had to sense the notion God placed in their minds to carry out their desire to engage in war, torture and death with another nation. They did not realize that it was Jehovah God giving them the notion to attack the Jews (Isaiah 10:7).

God does judge all sin and He used the Assyrians to harm the Jews as a result of His judgment upon them for their sin. In keeping with this judgment upon sin and sinful people God then judged the Assyrians for being sinful. Both Isaiah and Nahum predicted the downfall of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were an overbearing and blasphemous people who were intoxicated with their own strength as so many despotic nations are. In 612 B.C. the allied forces of the Babylonians, the Medes and the Scythians captured the Assyrian capital Nineveh and it became a desolate ruin just as the biblical prophets predicted. Again in 609 B.C. the Medes and the Babylonians jointly attacked the remnants of Assyria and divided it among themselves. Nahum's prediction of their destruction is quite clear from a prophecy of eighty years or so earlier, prior to the Assyrian destruction.

Nahum 2:12; 3:1, 7. The lion tore enough for his cubs, Killed enough for his lionesses, And filled his lairs with prey And his dens with torn flesh. Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; Her prey never departs. And it will come about that all who see you Will shrink from you and say, 'Nineveh is devastated! Who will grieve for her?' Where will I seek comforters for you?" (NASB)

Therefore it is quite clear that God judges sin. Sometimes He uses sinful people acting out their sinful desires to achieve His goals.

Ezekiel 21:23

²³And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, who have sworn oaths unto them; but he bringeth iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken (ASV, 1901).

The people of Jerusalem primarily the princes and ruler thought this was strictly false divination. They did not think that Nebuchadnezzar would be successful. They may have realized that all of the false pagan practices were worthless and they would be safe. The problem was their sin (iniquity) which they refused to acknowledge and it would be brought to their *remembrance, that they may be taken*. God would enable them to finally realize that what the genuine prophets had told the king would come true. They would be captured and taken to Babylon.

Ezekiel 21:24

²⁴Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand (ASV, 1901).

You constantly commit new sins and as a result your old sins are remembered. God is essentially saying that He would forgive their past sins if repentance were seen but they keep on sinning with no end in sight. Their false assurance that was coming from the false prophets would prove hopeless.

Jeremiah 28:1-4

¹And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of Jehovah, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, ²Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of Jehovah's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried to Babylon: ⁴and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went to Babylon, saith Jehovah; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon (ASV, 1901).

NEXT MESSAGE: ISRAEL'S SINS ARE ENUMERATED

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