

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 21

This chapter contains an explanation of a prophecy in the latter part of the preceding chapter; and a new one, concerning the sword of the Chaldeans, and the destruction of the Jews and Ammonites by it. The prophecy of the fire in the forest is explained, (^{21:1-5}Ezekiel 21:1-5), upon which the prophet is directed to show his concern at it by sighing, in order to awaken the attention of the people to it, (^{21:6,7}Ezekiel 21:6,7), then follows a prophecy of a very sharp and bright sword, which should do great execution upon the people and princes of Israel; and therefore the prophet, in order to affect them, with it, is bid to howl and cry, and smite on his thigh; and smite his hands together, and the Lord says he would do so; all which is designed to set forth the greatness of the calamity and the distress, (^{21:8-17}Ezekiel 21:8-17), next the prophet is ordered to represent the king of Babylon as at a place where two ways met, and as at a loss which way to take, and as determined by divination to go to Jerusalem first, (^{21:18-24}Ezekiel 21:18-24), and then Zedekiah, the then reigning prince of Israel, has his doom pronounced on him, and he is ordered to be stripped of his regalia; and an intimation is given that there should be no more king over Israel of the house of David until the Messiah came, (^{21:26,27}Ezekiel 21:26,27) and the chapter is concluded with a prophecy of the destruction of the Ammonites in their own land, which should certainly be, though their diviners might, say the contrary, (^{21:28-31}Ezekiel 21:28-31).

Ver. 1. *And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] Upon the above excuse or complaint about speaking in parables; wherefore the prophet is ordered to speak in plainer language to the people. It is very probable that the prophet delivered the prophecy recorded in the latter part of the preceding chapter in the figurative terms in which he received it; and he here is bid to explain it to the people, or to repeat it to them in clearer expressions.

Ver. 2. *Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, &c.*] Which shows that this city was meant by “the south”, (^{20:46}Ezekiel 20:46):

and drop thy word toward the holy places; which also are meant by the south in the passage referred to, even the holy land, holy city, and holy temple; or the temple itself is only meant, with the courts adjoining to it; or as consisting of three parts, as Kimchi, the porch, the temple, and the oracle; or the outward court, the holy place, and the holy of holies; and it may respect all other places for sacred worship, as their synagogues, both in city and country; which were not to be spared any more than the temple, nor were they, (^{כס"ח}Psalm 74:7,8). Jarchi thinks that the destruction both of the first and second temple is here intended; and which sense Kimchi also mentions.

And prophesy against the land of Israel: by which it appears that this is intended by the “forest of the south field”: even the numerous inhabitants of it in general, as well as the city of Jerusalem, (^{כס"ח}Ezekiel 20:46).

Ver. 3. *And say to the land of Israel, &c.*] The inhabitants of it, signified by the “forest of the south field”, (^{כס"ח}Ezekiel 20:47):

thus saith the Lord, behold, I am against thee; and sad it is to have the Lord against a people, a nation, a city, or a family, or a particular person; for there is no contending with him, or standing before him; there is always a reason for it, it is for sin when God is against a people, even his own professing people:

and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath; bring the Chaldean army out of Babylon; which interprets what is meant by the “fire” he would kindle in the land of Israel, (^{כס"ח}Ezekiel 20:47), namely, the sword of the enemy, which he would bring upon it; or war, with all its desolating train of judgments:

and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked; meant by the green and dry tree, (^{כס"ח}Ezekiel 20:47), who, though they shall not perish everlastingly together, yet may fall together in temporal calamities; the one may be chastised, and the other condemned; or the one be carried captive for their good, as Ezekiel and Daniel, &c. and others be cut off by sword and famine; and such as were captives, never the better for their captivity. The Targum is,

“I will remove out of thee thy righteous ones, that I may destroy thy wicked ones.”

Some think that only such who were righteous in appearance, or in their own sight, are here meant. R. Saadiah Gaon, as Kimchi quotes him, interprets them of such as were righteous to Baal, and served him continually, in distinction from such as were wicked to him, and did not serve him continually; and both were wicked before the Lord, and therefore justly cut off.

Ver. 4. *Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, &c.*] Some by the sword, some by famine, some by pestilence, and others by captivity; and, upon the whole, none spared, but the land left desolate:

therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh, from the south to the north; the Chaldean army shall go out of their own land against all the inhabitants of Judea, from Beersheba to Dan; this explains what is meant by all faces being burnt from the south to the north, (^{אֶזְכִּיאל}Ezekiel 20:47), namely, the general destruction of the Jews by the Chaldeans.

Ver. 5. *That all flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath, &c.*] The same with kindling a fire in Judea, (see Gill on “^{אֶזְכִּיאל}Ezekiel 20:48”):

it shall not return any more; that is, into its sheath, until it has done all its work; meaning that the Chaldean army should not return to their own land until they had executed the whole will of God upon the Jews; this is the fire that should not be quenched, (^{אֶזְכִּיאל}Ezekiel 20:48) and here ends the explanation of the said prophecy.

Ver. 6. *Sigh, therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins, &c.*] As if thy loins were broke, and go as if they were, and sigh as thou goest; or as a woman in travail, having her hands upon her loins as ready to break, and in the utmost distress; or heave, and groan, and sigh, till the girdle of the loins is broke, and by these motions and gesture show the miserable state of this people, and how much thou art affected with it:

and with bitterness sigh before their eyes; in the sight and hearing of the captives at Babylon; who would take care, by some means or other, to inform their brethren at Jerusalem of it, how the prophet sighed and groaned, under an apprehension and assurance of a dreadful calamity coming upon them; using along with his sobs and sighs, and brinish tears, doleful words and bitter lamentations.

Ver. 7. *And it shall be, when they say unto thee, wherefore sighest thou?* &c.] Which he was to do that purpose, that they might be put upon asking him the reason of it; whether it was on his own personal amount, or on account of his family or particular friends; or whether on a public account, either because of what should befall the captives there, or their countrymen in Judea and Jerusalem:

that thou shalt answer, for the tidings, or, the “report”^{f299},

because it cometh; the report of the Chaldean army approaching and invading Judea, and besieging Jerusalem, which he had from the Lord; and the thing itself was just at hand, and would shortly and certainly be; and that was the thing that affected him, and caused such sorrow and sighing:

and every heart shall melt; like wax, for fear of the enemy; even such who then disbelieved the report, and laughed at it as an idle story:

and all hands shall be feeble; and not able to hold a sword, or strike a stroke:

and every spirit shall faint; yea, such who had the greatest spirits, and were the most bold and undaunted, shall be quite dispirited, no heart nor courage to defend themselves or their country:

and all knees shall be weak as water; they shall not be able to stand upon their legs, and fight like men in their own defence; nor even be able to flee away, and make their escape: or,

shall flow with water^{f300}; either with sweat, or with urine, through fear of the enemy:

behold, it cometh, and shall be brought pass, saith the Lord God; let no man therefore put this evil day far from him, or treat this report as an idle tale, or a thing at a distance, and which may never come to pass; for it is now a coming, and in a very little time will be accomplished; for the Lord has said it, who cannot lie, whose counsel shall stand, and will do all his pleasure.

Ver. 8. *Again, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying.*] Either this is a new prophecy of another sword, distinct and different from that of the Chaldeans, even of the sword of the Romans, as Cocceius thinks or it is a further explanation of the former, and an enlargement upon it.

Ver. 9. *Son of man, prophesy and say, thus saith the Lord, &c.*] Deliver out the following prophecy in the name of the Lord:

say, a sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished; it is not only drawn out of its sheath, as before, but is made sharp and bright, and ready for use. It is repeated, either to show the certainty of it, or to express the terror and anguish of mind on account of it; persons in distress generally repeating that which is the occasion of it. The Targum interprets it of two swords, the sword of the Babylonians, and the sword of the Ammonites; first the one was to be used, and then the other: this latter, Jarchi and Kimchi observe, was fulfilled by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slaying Gedaliah, sent for that purpose by Baalis king of the Ammonites, (~~300~~Jeremiah 40:14 41:2,10), but if two distinct swords are meant, I should rather think the sword of the Chaldeans, and the sword of the Romans, are intended. Cocceius, before observed, interprets it only of the latter; but Abendana both of the sword of the king of Babylon, and of the sword of the Romans.

Ver. 10. *It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter, &c.*] To cut easily, and wound deeply, and make a slaughter of men, like beasts for sacrifice; a sacrifice to the justice of God for their sins, and so acceptable to him; and it is he indeed that sharpens it, or prepares the instruments of his vengeance, whether Chaldeans, or Romans, or both; and gives them might and courage to execute his will with great keenness of wrath and fury:

it is furbished that it may glitter; and so strike terror on those against whom it is drawn, and for whom it is prepared, as glittering armour does:

should we then make mirth? sing, and dance, and feast, and indulge ourselves in all kind of mirth and jollity, when this is the case, a drawn, sharp, glittering sword hangs over our heads? no, surely! there is good reason for you to lament and sigh, as I do; you ask me the reason of it, this is it; is there not a cause? there is; it is not a season for mirth; but for weeping and lamentation. The words may be rendered, “or let us rejoice”^{f301}; that is, if we can, ironically spoken.

It contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree; thus says the Lord God, this sword so sharpened and brightened despises the rod or sceptre (for so the word signifies) of Israel my son, my firstborn, and makes no more of it than a common stick, and cuts it to pieces, and destroys it; signifying hereby the easy destruction of the sceptre and kingdom of Judah by the

sword of the Chaldeans or Romans. Some understand it of Christ the Son of God. The words may be rendered, “it is the rod of my son, it despiseth every tree”^{f302}; this sword, prepared, is no other than the rod of iron, which the Son of God makes use of to rule his enemies with, and break them in pieces; and no tree, high and low, can stand before it; it cuts down all, and destroys them, be they what they will; (see ^{<900>}Psalm 2:7-9). Cocceius interprets the former clause, “or we shall make merry”^{f303}, of the Father and of the Son, and of their delight and pleasure, while wrath was executed on their enemies.

Ver. 11. *And he hath given it to be furbished, that it might be handled,* &c.] Either Nebuchadnezzar, or rather God, or the Son of God, prepared and brightened the sword, that it might be handled and made use of, either by the Chaldeans or Romans, to the destruction of the Jews. The Targum is,

“he gave their vengeance to be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.”

The sword is sharpened and furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer; either the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar; or the Roman emperor, Titus Vespasian.

Ver. 12. *Cry, howl, son of man,* &c.] Not only sigh, but cry; and not cry only, but howl; signifying hereby that this would be the case of the Jews when these calamities should come upon them; and, in order to affect them with them before hand, the prophet is ordered to act such a part, as well as to express his sympathy with them:

for it shall be upon my people; that is, the sword, or the calamity signified by it; this should be not upon other nations, but upon the Lord’s own people; such who professed themselves to be his people, and whom he had distinguished from all others; this is said, to affect the prophet the more, they being both the Lord’s people, and his also:

and it shall be upon all the princes of Israel; who were slain in Riblah by the king of Babylon, (^{<950>}Jeremiah 52:10), the sword spared neither people nor princes.

Terrors, by reason of the sword, shall be upon my people; upon the rumour of the invasion, and when besieged in the city, and when

attempting to make their escape by flight: or “my people are fallen by the sword”^{f304}, as some:

smite therefore upon thy thigh; as one grieved in spirit, in great distress and anguish; (see ^{<3819>}Jeremiah 31:19).

Ver. 13. *Because it is a trial*, &c.] As all afflictions and calamities are, especially to the people of God they try their faith and patience, and every other grace; and also to wicked men, they try them, whether they will repent or not:

and what if the sword contemn even the rod? the sceptre: the king of Judah, and his family; not only come upon and cut off the people and the princes, but the royal family also; and even overturn the tribe of Judah, as the word also signifies; and subvert the government of it, of which the rod or sceptre is an ensign; this would be a sore trial indeed, and yet it is intimated that so it should be:

it shall be no more, saith the Lord God; the rod or sceptre shall be no more in one of David’s line, of the tribe Judah, until the Messiah comes, (^{<3217>}Ezekiel 21:27). I should choose to render the words thus, “for it is a trial, but what?”^{f305} what an one is it? or for what is it? what will be the fruit, effect, and issue of it?

if also the sceptre despises; the king despises the trial, the affliction, the calamity, and is not brought to repentance by it:

it shall be no more, or “it shall not be”^{f306},

saith the Lord God; it, the sceptre, shall be taken away, and not restored to the house of David, until the Messiah comes.

Ver. 14. *Thou, therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite thine hands together*, &c.] As being in the greatest agony for what is coming upon thy people: or “strike hand to hand”^{f307}; clap them together, as encouraging the enemy with his drawn, sharp, and glittering sword, to make use of it, and do execution with it:

and let the sword be doubled the third time; some think this has reference to the three captivities of Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah: others to the threefold calamity in Zedekiah’s time; the first, the taking of him; the second, the taking of the city; the third, the carrying captive the residue along with Gedaliah: or to the three times the Chaldeans came against

Jerusalem, after this prophecy; first with Nebuchadnezzar, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, and took him and the city; then with Nebuzaradan, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, and burnt the city and temple; and again in the twenty third of Nebuchadnezzar, and carried away the remnant of the people, (^{261b}Jeremiah 52:5,6,12,30):

the sword of the slain: by which many should be slain:

it is the sword of the great men that are slain: of the sons of the kings, and of the princes and nobles of the land:

which entereth into their privy chambers; where they should endeavour to hide themselves from it, but in vain, none should escape; their privy chambers could not secrete nor secure them: or “which remains with them”; as that which is laid up, and reserved in a privy chamber, as Deuteronomy Dieu, from the use of the word in the Ethiopic language, renders it.

Ver. 15. *I have set the point of the sword against all their gates*, &c.] The word rendered “point” is nowhere else used, and is differently translated: by some the “fear” of the sword^{f308}, as Menachem and Kimchi; by others the “cry” of the sword, or of those that are slain with it, as Jarchi; and the Targum paraphrases it,

“those that slay with the sword:”

some, as both Jarchi and Kimchi, observe, by an inversion of the letters of the alphabet, called “athbash”, render it, the “slaughter” of the sword; and Deuteronomy Dieu and Dr. Castel, from the use of the word in the Ethiopic language, the “destruction” of it, or, the power of it. The meaning is, that the enemy, with their swords drawn, should be placed at every gate of the city of Jerusalem, or of their houses, pointed towards them; which would be very terrible, and sore destruction to them.

That their hearts may faint; seeing nothing but death before their eyes, and no way to escape it:

and their ruins be multiplied; of their families, and of their houses.

Ah! it is made bright; to terrify the more, as in (²⁵¹⁰Ezekiel 21:10), appearing as a flaming sword, and so causing fear; the prophet expresses his sorrow and concern for it. The Targum is,

“woe! the sword is drawn out to kill.”

It is wrapped up for slaughter; in its sheath or scabbard, that it might not rust or be blunted, it being furbished and brightened; but this seems contrary to its being drawn out of its sheath, as in (³²¹⁸Ezekiel 21:3,5). Kimchi renders it, therefore, “sharpened”, as in (³²¹⁰Ezekiel 21:10) and so the Targum,

“it is sharpened to destroy;”

the more easily and speedily.

Ver. 16. *Go thee one way or another*, &c.] Go to some one place: or “unite thyself”^{f309}; to other swords, or join other soldiers holding swords; the address is to the sword, to steer its course some one way, and slay as it goes along, sparing none:

either on the right, or on the left; or south, or north; so the Targum,

“unsheathe, and slay on the south, and destroy on the north:”

whithersoever thy face is set; or prepared, as the Targum, or appointed for destruction; this is the usual interpretation: but why may not the words be an apostrophe to the prophet, to go alone or single, either to the right or left, south or north, as his face was set, (³²¹⁰Ezekiel 21:2), sighing and crying, smiting his hands together, in order to affect the minds of the people with the sense of their calamities coming upon them?

Ver. 17. *I will also smite my hands together*, &c.] As well as the prophet was bid to do, (³²¹⁴Ezekiel 21:14), either expressing a concern for the calamity of the people, or indignation at their sins: or rather as encouraging their enemies to make use of the sword pointed at them, and, as it were, rejoicing at their destruction for the honour of his justice. The Targum is,

“and even I will bring vengeance upon vengeance:”

and I will cause my fury to rest; when the sword has done its business, and just vengeance is taken, the fury of the Lord shall cease; it shall proceed no further, it shall be kept within due bounds, and no more or further rage:

I the Lord have said it; who is omnipotent, and can do all things, and will do everything that he has said, whether in a way of promise or threatening.

Ver. 18. *The word of the Lord came unto me again, &c.*] Immediately after the former; for this respects the same prophecy about the sword, and the way of its coming, and the cause of it:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 19. *Also thou, son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come, &c.*] Describe or draw out upon a table or tile, as in (~~2001~~ Ezekiel 4:1), or on the ground, two roads, such as are described in maps; which it may be supposed the king of Babylon would take, either the one or the other, in order to make war against some king or another:

both twain shall come forth out of one land; both ways must be drawn as coming from one country, even Babylon;

and choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city; fix upon some spacious place, where Nebuchadnezzar may be supposed to bring his army, as a proper rendezvous for them to muster them in; and let be where two ways meet, that lead to cities, one to one city, and another to another: and it seems that upon the desert of Arabia, through which the king of Babylon came, there was such a place, where two ways met, and one led to Jerusalem, and the other to Rabbath; and this is the place the prophet was to describe, and where in fact Nebuchadnezzar came.

Ver. 20. *Appoint a way, &c.*] Mark out a way, describe a road, draw one out upon the ground, or point out one upon a table, or tile:

that the sword may come; in which the sword will come; or those that kill with the sword, as the Targum, even the Chaldean army under Nebuchadnezzar:

to Rabbath of the Ammonites; which was the metropolis of the Ammonites, and is now called Philadelphia, as Jerom writes; it is so called, to distinguish it from others of the same name; (see ~~1025~~ 2 Samuel 12:26):

and to Judah in Jerusalem, the defenced city; which was so both by nature and art; it had mountains round about it, and had been fortified by several kings from the time of David, as Solomon, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. Judah is said to be in it; though it would seem more properly that Jerusalem was in Judah, because that people from all parts of Judah, upon hearing of the king of Babylon's intention and near approach to invade their land, fled to

Jerusalem, being a fortified place, for security. Now the prophet is bid to describe a way hither; not that one and the same way led to Rabbath and Jerusalem; but he was to describe a way from the place where Nebuchadnezzar stopped, which led to Rabbath, and another which led to Jerusalem.

Ver. 21. *For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, &c.]* That is, he would stand there; the prophet knew that it was certain it should be, and therefore represents it as if it was; he had, by a spirit of prophecy, seen, that when the king of Babylon was come to such a place, on the borders of the desert of Arabia, where the road from Babylon parted, where two ways met, the one leading to Jerusalem on the right, and the other to Rabbath on the left, he should make a full stop with his army, and consider which way he should take, whether that which led to Jerusalem, or that which led to Rabbath. It is very probable, when he came out of Babylon, his scheme was to make an attempt on both these important places, and take them; but he had not determined which to attack first, and was still doubtful; and now being come to the two roads, which led to the one and the other, it was necessary to make a halt, consider, and conclude, which course to steer; to determine which, he thought proper “to use divination”, which was performed in the following manner:

he made his arrows bright; being made of iron or steel; in the brightness of which diviners looked, and made their observations, and accordingly directed what was to be done; as they did by looking into the brightness of a man’s nails, as David Kimchi observes; though his father, Joseph Kimchi, was of opinion that the word has the signification of casting of arrows, or causing them to fly in the air; and supposes that Nebuchadnezzar cast up arrows into the air, and observed on which side they fell, and so judged which way to take; to this agrees the Targum,

“with a bow he cast out arrows;”

so the Syriac and Arabic versions^{f310}. Jerom says the way of divining by arrows was this: arrows, with the names of the cities inscribed upon them, were put into a quiver, and mixed together; and the city upon the arrow which came out first was first attacked. To this agrees the Vulgate Latin version, which renders the words, “mingling the arrows”; and Dr. Pocock^{f311} prefers this sense of the word, which he observes so signifies in the Arabic language; and who gives an account of the use of divination by

arrows among the Arabians, who much used it; though forbidden by Mahomet, as Schultens^{f312} observes. Their custom was this; when a man was about to marry a wife, or go a journey, or do any business of importance, he put three arrows into a vessel; on one was inscribed,

“my lord hath commanded me;”

on another,

“my lord hath forbid me;”

the third had nothing on it. If the first he took out had the command upon it, then he proceeded with great alacrity: but if it had the prohibition, he desisted; and if that which had nothing inscribed on it, he laid it by, till one of the other two was taken out; and there is to this day a sort of divination by arrows used by the Turks; it is commonly for the wars, though it is also performed for all sorts of things; as to know whether a man should undertake a voyage, buy such a commodity, or the like. The manner of doing it, as Monsieur Thevenot^{f313} relates, is this; they take four arrows, and place them with their points against one another, giving them to be held by two persons; then they lay a naked sword upon a cushion before them, and read a certain chapter of the Alcoran; with that the arrows fight together for some time, and at length the one fall upon the other: if, for instance the victorious have been named Christians (for two of them they call Turks, and the other two by the name of their enemy), it is a sign that the Christians will overcome; if otherwise, it denotes the contrary. The Jews^{f314} say, that in the present case of Nebuchadnezzar, that when he or his diviner cast the arrow for Antioch, or for Tyre, or for Laodicea, it was broke; but when he cast it for Jerusalem, it was not broke; by which he knew that he should destroy it. This is that sort of divination which is called “belomancy”: he consulted with images; or “teraphim”; images in which, as Kimchi says, they saw things future; Heathen oracles, from whence responses were made; these were images for private use, such as were the “lares” and “penates” with the Romans; these Laban had in his house in which Rachel stole from him; and are supposed to be such as are made under certain constellations, and their influences capable of speaking; (see ^{<300>}Zechariah 10:2), as Aben Ezra on (^{<0334>}Genesis 31:34) observes, with which men used to consult about things future or unknown; and this is thought to be one reason why Rachel took away these images from her father, that he might not, by consulting with them, know which way Jacob

fled^{f315} with such as these the king of Babylon consulted, that he might know which way he should take:

he looked in the liver; of a beast slain, and made observations on that to direct him; as used to be done by the Aruspices among the Romans. This is that sort of divination which is called “hepatoscopy”, or inspection into the liver; for though the Aruspices or Extispices, so called from their looking into the entrails of a beast, and making their observations on them, used to view the several inward parts, yet chiefly the liver, which they called the head of the intestines; and if this was wanting, or the head in it, the chief part of it, it was an ill omen; thus, in the month that Claudius Caesar was poisoned, the head of the liver was wanting in the sacrifice; or if the liver was livid, vicious, had any pustules upon it, or any purulent matter in it; or was touched, cut and wounded with the knife of the sacrificer, it foreboded great evils and misfortunes; or if the extreme part of the liver, which is called the fibre, was so placed, that from the lowest fibre the livers were replicated, or there was a double liver, this was a token for good, and portended joy and happiness^{f316}: moreover, they used to divide the bowels or entrails into two parts, and so the liver; the one they called “familiaris”, by which they judged what would befall themselves and their friends; the other “hostilis”, what concerned their enemies; according to the habit, colour, and position they were in, they concluded what would befall the one and the other^{f317}. Lucan^{f318} and Seneca^{f319} particularly have respect to this: and the king of Babylon here having two people to deal with, the Ammonites and the Jews, he inspects the liver of a creature slain for sacrifice, that he might judge which was best and safest for him to attack; which was less threatening, and more easy to be overcome^{f320}: this divination used to be made with calves, kids, and lambs^{f321}.

Ver. 22. *At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, &c.*] All his divinations, whether by arrows, or by images, or by liver, all directed him to his right hand, to turn to that which led to Jerusalem; and thus what appeared to him to be the effect of divination was overruled by the providence of God, to direct him to go and do what he designed he should:

to appoint captains to open the mouth in the slaughter; upon which he appointed his several captains and officers their distinct bodies of men they were to lead on to the siege of Jerusalem; and give them the word of command when to attack the place, scale the walls, or make breaches in it, and fall upon the enemy, and make a slaughter of them. The word for

“captains” signifies “rams”; and Joseph Kimchi interprets it of battering rams, to beat down walls; but these are after mentioned; and is both by Jarchi and David Kimchi explained of general officers of the army; and so the Targum,

“to appoint generals to open the gates, that the slayer may enter by them:”

to lift up the voice with shouting; which is usually done in sieges, when a shout is made, and a place is stormed; both to animate the besiegers, and to terrify the besieged:

to appoint battering rams against the gates; to break them down, or break through them, and so make way for the army to enter in; these were engines used in sieges, to beat down walls, and make breaches in them, that the besiegers might enter; so called from the iron heads of them, which resembled rams; and are thus described by Josephus^{f322},

“the ram is a huge beam, not unlike the mast of a ship; the top of it is capped with a thick piece of iron, in the form of a ram’s head, from whence it has its name: this is hung by the middle with ropes to another beam, which lies across, supported by a couple of posts; and thus hanging equally balanced, is, by a great number of men violently thrust backwards and forwards, and so beats the wall with its iron head; nor is there any tower so strong, or wall so broad, as to resist its repeated strokes.”

Vitruvius^{f323} says it was invented by the Carthaginians at the siege of Cadiz; but Pliny^{f324} affirms it was invented by Epeus at the siege of Troy; but the first mention of them is made by Ezekiel here, and in (~~200~~ Ezekiel 4:2), and Diodorus Siculus^{f325} affirms they were not known in the times of Sardanapalus, when Nineveh was taken by Arbaces. The Targum interprets it of officers set at the gates, as before; and so Jarchi:

to cast a mound; made up of earth, to raise their batteries upon: and

to build a fort; to cast out their arrows from thence, and protect the besiegers; (See Gill on “~~200~~ Ezekiel 4:1”).

Ver. 23. *And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, &c.]* That is, the Jews shall laugh at this divination as a vain thing, as a Heathenish practice, and of which nothing would come; and even at the

prophet's account of it, and his prophecy concerning the king of Babylon coming to invade them; they looked upon them all as of a piece, trusting to their false prophets, who assured them that they should not be delivered into his hands:

to them that have sworn oaths; a description of the Jews, who had with their king Zedekiah sworn allegiance to the king of Babylon; which oaths they had violated, taking others to the king of Egypt; or, "because they were bound by oaths to them"^{f326}; meaning either the Egyptians, who had bound themselves by oaths to protect the Jews; and therefore they feared nothing from this pretended divination and prophecy, as they judged them to be, though they had not kept faith with the Chaldeans themselves; or the Jews, because of the Egyptians who had entered into an alliance with them, confirmed by oaths; and this had made them secure, on this they depended. The Targum takes the words as if they signified "seven times seven"; and gives this strange paraphrase of them, accounting for the vain confidence of the Jews;

"and their divinations were lies in their eyes, and the enchantments with which he enchanted them; for they knew not that he had observed forty nine times (i.e. his arrows, images, and liver), and an answer was returned upon the word, till the time came to him in which they should be delivered into his hands:"

but he will call to remembrance the iniquity: that is, Nebuchadnezzar would call to mind the perfidy and perjury of the king of Judah, in breaking covenant with him, and violating his oath. Some think that the Chaldeans that were with Nebuchadnezzar were not satisfied at first that it was a true divination that was made, they being set upon the taking of Rabbath first; but Nebuchadnezzar, remembering and putting them in mind of the treachery of Zedekiah, reconciled them to it, and determined them in the expedition against the Jews:

that they may be taken; as birds in a snare, or beasts in a net, and be carried captive.

Ver. 24. *Therefore thus saith the Lord God*, &c.] Because of their vain confidence, added to their perjury and perfidy:

because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered; their old sins, by committing new ones, both against the Lord, and against the king of Babylon:

in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; both in their religious and civil actions; in the worship of God, and in their covenants and agreements with men; their sins were exposed and manifest to all, not only to God, who was provoked thereby, but to men, to the nations round about; particularly to Nebuchadnezzar, who was enraged by them:

because, I say, that they are come to remembrance; both before the Lord, and the king of Babylon:

ye shall be taken with the hand; as easily as a bird is, when in the snare. The Targum is,

“ye shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon;”

which is no doubt the sense of the passage.

Ver. 25. *And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, &c.*] Meaning Zedekiah, the then reigning prince; who is so called, because he had profaned or violated the oath and covenant he made with the king of Babylon, as well as because of other sins he was guilty of; and his being a prince of Israel was an aggravation of his crimes: now, though it is “not fit” in common, or for ordinary persons, “to say to a king thou art wicked, and to princes ye are ungodly”, (~~183418~~ Job 34:18), yet a prophet from the Lord, and in his name, may say so; and he ought, when he has a commission from God for it:

whose day is come; the time of his downfall and ruin; and so the Targum,

“whose day of destruction is come:”

when iniquity shall have an end; a stop put to the torrent of it, both in the king and his subjects; they not having the opportunity and means of sinning in captivity as before; or when the measure of iniquity is filled up, then comes punishment; or when the punishment of iniquity shall be completed. So the Targum,

“the time of the recompence of his sins.”

Ver. 26. *Thus saith the Lord God, remove the diadem, and take off the crown, &c.*] That is, from Zedekiah; and as these are the regalia and ensigns of royal dignity, taking them off signifies the deposition of him as a king, the stripping him of his kingly power and authority: an earthly crown

is a corruptible and fading one, at most it continues but during this life, and sometimes not so long; it does not always sit firm; sometimes it is tottering and shakes, and sometimes quite fails off to the ground; it is taken from the head of one, and put upon the head of another, by him who gives the orders in the text, and has the sovereign disposal of crowns and kingdoms; who sets up one, and puts down another. The “diadem” was a royal tire of the head, wore in common; the “crown” was put on at certain times; both signify one and the same thing, royal dignity; though the former is sometimes used as an ornament of the priesthood, as the latter of kingly power; hence the Targum,

“remove the diadem (or mitre) from Seraiah the high priest, and I will take away the crown from Zedekiah the king;”

but the latter is only meant; besides, as Kimchi observes, it was not Seraiah, but Jehozadak his son, that was carried captive with Zedekiah:

this shall not be the same; this royal dignity shall not continue the same; the kingdom shall not be in the same lustre and glory, nor in the same hands:

exalt him that is low: either Jeconiah now in captivity; and which was fulfilled when Evilmerodach lifted up his head, and set his throne above the thrones of the kings in Babylon, (^{צפני} Jeremiah 52:31,32), or Zerubbabel, of the seed of Jeconiah, who was born in the captivity, and became prince of Judah; or rather the Messiah, who was of a low extraction; born of mean parents; was as a root out of a dry ground; appeared in the form of a servant, poor and lowly; yet, when he had done his work, was highly exalted at the right hand of God; far above angels, principalities, and powers; as well as set upon the throne of his father David:

and abase him that is high; the then prince upon the throne, Zedekiah; who was high and lifted up, but should be pulled down and humbled, as he was.

Ver. 27. *I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it, &c.*] The crown and kingdom of Judah; which being expressed three times, has not respect, as Kimchi thinks, to the three generations, in which the crown ceased after the captivity, as those of Asir, Shealtiel, Pedaiah; and in the fourth generation was restored to Zerubbabel; for he was no king, nor was there any of David’s line after; nor were the Maccabees or Hasmoneans properly kings; but the phrase denotes the utter abolition of the kingly power, and the

certainty of it, which could not be restored, notwithstanding the attempts made by Gedaliah and Ishmael; all their schemes were overturned, and so in successive ages and may also denote and include the troubles that were in the Jewish state, not only during the captivity, but from that time unto the Messiah's coming; there were nothing but overturnings, overturnings till that time came:

and it shall be no more; a kingdom governed by one of the seed of the then present family, or of the seed of David; there shall be no more a king of his race, as there was not till Shiloh came, intended in the next clause:

until he come whose right it is; the right of the crown and kingdom of Israel; which belongs to Jesus the Messiah, being descended from a race of kings of the house of Judah, and of the seed of David: or,

to whom the judgment is^{f327}; to whom the Father hath committed all judgment, (^{<B12>}John 5:22) all power of judging both his church and people, and the whole world:

and I will give it him; the crown and kingdom, which is his right; put him in the possession of it, as he was at his resurrection and ascension; and which will more fully appear in the latter day, when all kingdoms will become his; especially he has, and will appear to have, the throne of his father David, and of his kingdom there will be no end, (^{<D13>}Luke 1:31,32). This is understood and interpreted of the Messiah, by R. Abendana^{f328}, a modern Jew.

Ver. 28. *And thou, son of man, prophesy, and say, &c.*] Here begins a new prophecy, or rather an enlargement on part of the former; two ways being marked out for the sword of the Chaldeans to come in; the one leading to Jerusalem, the other to Rabbath of the Ammonites; the prophecy being finished concerning the former, here an account is given of the latter; how the sword should move that way, and what execution it would do:

thus saith the Lord God concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; Nebuchadnezzar, agreeably to the above prophecy, having taken his route to Jerusalem, as his divination directed him, and destroyed that, returned to Babylon, without making any attempt upon the Ammonites; which so flushed them, that they insulted the Jews, and laughed at their destruction, as if their God whom they served could not save them; attributing their safety and prosperity to the idols they worshipped; (see ^{<E21>}Ezekiel 25:1-7 ^{<A18>}Zephaniah 2:8-10):

even say thou, the sword, the sword is drawn for the slaughter; the same sword of the Chaldeans, which was drawn for the slaughter of the Jews, is now drawn for the slaughter of the Ammonites; and which is repeated for the certainty of it, and to inject terror; and this, as Josephus^{f329} says, was accomplished five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in the twenty third year of Nebuchadnezzar:

it is furbished, to consume because of the glittering; being brightened and made sharp, it not only terrified with its glittering, but was more fit and prepared to cut and destroy; (see ²⁷⁰⁹Ezekiel 21:9, 10).

Ver. 29. *Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine a lie unto thee, &c.*] The Ammonites had their seers, soothsayers, diviners, and false prophets, which they are bid to be aware of, and are cautioned against hearkening to, (²⁷⁰⁸Jeremiah 27:3,9), these told them they were in the utmost safety, and that the king of Babylon would not come against them; or, if he did, would not succeed, when his sword was drawn and furbished for the destruction of them:

to bring thee upon the necks of the slain, of the wicked; that is, of the Jews who were slain by the sword of the Chaldeans for their wickedness; and these diviners by their vain divination and lies would bring the Ammonites into the same condition, to be slain as they were; and as it were to fall upon their necks, as one slain person upon another; and so the Targum,

“to deliver thy neck as the necks of the slain, of the wicked:”

it may be rendered, “to put thee to the necks of the slain”^{f330}; or, as Kimchi, “with the necks of the slain”; though some understand it, as if the diviners by their lies, promising peace and prosperity, encouraged the Ammonites to insult the Jews, and as it were to trample upon the necks of the dead:

whose day is come, when their iniquity shall have an end; along with Zedekiah their king; a description of the Jews; (see Gill on “²⁶⁰⁷Ezekiel 21:27”).

Ver. 30. *Shall I cause it to return into his sheath?* &c.] The drawn and furbished sword of the Chaldeans? no, I will not; it shall never return or be put up until the Ammonites are utterly consumed. Some read these words in the imperative, as the Targum,

“return the sword to its sheath;”

so the Vulgate Latin version, “return to thy sheath”; and so may be considered as a direction to the Ammonites to put up their swords, and not stand in their own defence, since it would be to no purpose; though Jerom, and Grotius after him, take the words to be an apostrophe to the drawn sword of the Chaldeans to sheath itself, having done its work upon the Jews and Ammonites; or to the Chaldeans to return to Babylon, and where they also should be punished; and so interpret all that follows of the destruction of the Babylonians by the Medes and Persians; but the first sense is best:

I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity; not in the place where their father Ammon was born, which was at Zoar; but where they first became a kingdom and state, a body politic; or where the present generation of them were born; they should not be carried out of their own land, but destroyed in it.

Ver. 31. *And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee*, &c.] Like a mighty flood, which should sweep them away for their sins and transgressions; and particularly for their reproaches of God and his people, which caused his indignation to rise, and him to pour it out upon them in such a manner:

I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath; as men put metal into a furnace, and then blow upon it, in order to melt it, and consume the dross; and which fire, so blown, is exceeding fierce and very consuming; who can stand against such a blast as that of the wrath of God, not only kindled, but blown with his breath like a stream of brimstone?

and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men; or “burners”^{f331}; that burn with fierce anger, barbarous and inhuman, that would show no mercy nor compassion, such were the Chaldeans, (³⁰⁰⁶Habakkuk 1:6-8):

and skilful to destroy; though like brutes or beasts of prey for their cruelty; yet, like men, rational, cunning, and artful to devise ways and means to destroy men; well versed in the art of war; and thoroughly learned in all the lessons and methods of violence and destruction.

Ver. 32. *Thou shalt be for fuel for the fire*, &c.] Easily consumed, as briars and thorns cast into a furnace; such are wicked men to the fire of God’s wrath:

thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; such large numbers shall be slain everywhere, that the land shall flow with the blood of them; who shall lie unburied, and rot, and putrefy upon the ground:

thou shalt be no more remembered; but lie in everlasting oblivion, as they do to this day; the name of an Ammonite being nowhere mentioned and heard of:

for I the Lord have spoken it; who never alters the thing that is gone out of his lips; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than one word of his. The Targum is,

“for I the Lord have decreed by my word;”

and his counsel shall stand, and every purpose and resolution of his shall be accomplished.