

EZEKIEL 22 – THE BLOODY CITY AND THE JUDGMENT TO COME UPON IT

A. The corruption of Jerusalem and her leaders.

1. (1-5) The guilt and the judgment of Jerusalem, the bloody city.

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations! Then say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself. You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to *the end of your years*; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries. *Those* near and *those* far from you will mock you as infamous *and full of tumult*.”

a. **Will you judge the bloody city?** With a double call, God told Ezekiel to pronounce judgment upon Jerusalem, **the bloody city**. Jerusalem was guilty of many sins, and large among them was injustice leading to death and violence. Perhaps Jerusalem was not as **bloody** as many pagan cities, but they had the word, prophets, and priests of God. They were rightly held to a much higher standard.

i. At this point in her history, Jerusalem was no longer the *holy city*, the *beautiful city*, or God’s special city. She was **the bloody city**, for her many crimes that showed disregard for human life. Many centuries later Stephen spoke of the bloodguilt of Jerusalem: *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?*([Acts 7:52](#))

ii. **The bloody city:** “Jerusalem is so named because of the many deeds of violence and oppression committed in her. The plural of the original for ‘blood’ points to numerous acts of bloodshed.” (Feinberg)

iii. “Ezekiel seems to have borrowed this phrase from Nahum, who had in the previous century arraigned Nineveh as ‘the bloody city’ par excellence.” (Block) *Jerusalem seemed as bad as Nineveh!*

b. **Show her all her abominations:** This refers to another of Jerusalem’s many sins, that of gross idolatry. Ezekiel noted, **she makes idols within herself to defile herself**. They were defiled by their unfaithfulness to God and by the actual immoral practices connected to the worship of these pagan idols.

i. **In her own midst:** “This aggravates their murders, and makes them more bloody, in that it was done where so many were, that should have been safety to the innocent; it was not done in a wilderness.” (Poole)

c. **You have caused your days to draw near:** The coming judgment upon Jerusalem was their own fault. God was gracious and patient with them over many generations, but eventually they had **come to the end of your years**.

d. **Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult:** Jerusalem could expect no sympathy from the surrounding nations, both **near** and **far**. They would be a **reproach to the nations and a mockery to all countries**.

2. (6-12) The many sins of Israel and her princes.

“Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you. In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow. You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness. In you men uncover their fathers’ nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity. One commits abomination with his neighbor’s wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father’s daughter. In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me,” says the Lord GOD.

a. **Look, the princes of Israel:** In the first five verses of [Ezekiel 22](#), God rebuked the sinful city. Then He focused His rebuke on the actual sinners in the city, beginning with **the princes of Israel**.

i. Though the twelve tribes of Israel did not exist as their own nation or nations for more than 100 years (since the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel), yet God still referred to the leaders of His people as **the princes of Israel**.

b. **Each one has used his power to shed blood in you:** Instead of using their **power** in ways that would honor God and serve His people, the **princes of Israel** used their power in violent, self-serving ways.

i. “The social disintegration within Jerusalem was reflected first and foremost in the manner in which power was exercised.” (Block)

ii. “Judicial murders were evidently intended (see [II Kings 21:16](#); [24:4](#).)” (Feinberg)

c. **In your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow:** These were those whom the princes of Israel should have cared for. Instead of caring for families (**father and mother**) and the vulnerable of society, they used and despised them.

i. “The Jews were commanded to honor their fathers and mothers ([Exodus 20:12](#)), and so are believers today ([Ephesians 6:1–3](#)). God even attached a special promise to this commandment—

‘that your days may be long upon the land’—and now the Jews were about to be exiled from their land.” (Wiersbe)

d. **You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths:** The sins of the princes of Israel were not only against their community; they were also against God Himself. They sinned against God’s glory when they sacrificed and feasted to idols **on the mountains**.

i. **Profaned My Sabbaths:** “The plural form indicates that the charge extends beyond the violation of the weekly Sabbaths to sacred days (and years) as well.” (Block)

e. **One commits abomination with his neighbor’s wife:** A further area of sin among the princes of Israel was their sexual immorality and perversion. They not only committed adultery (**with his neighbor’s wife**), but they also committed incest with a **daughter-in-law** or **sister**.

i. “No type of impurity could stay their evil desires ([Leviticus 18:19](#); [20:18](#)). In their excesses they acted more like beasts than creatures of reason. God has placed restraints in every realm of human life with infinite wisdom, and it is worse than folly to disregard these warnings.” (Feinberg)

ii. **They violate women:** “A double sin was committed when men ‘humbled,’ i.e., raped, a woman during her menstruous period.” (Smith)

f. **They take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase:** The final area of sin exposed among the princes of Israel was their financial exploitation against their own community. They lent money in unjust ways and **made profit from your neighbors by extortion**.

i. “The precise transgressions that are listed are less important than their cumulative effect that is the burden of Ezekiel’s charge.” (Vawter and Hoppe)

ii. This terrible list describes the sins of the *leaders* of Jerusalem and Judah. If this was the conduct of the leaders, it is to be expected that the conduct of the commoners was as bad or worse. In addition, the social cost of these sins was much worse among the commoners, who had fewer resources to help lessen the effects of their sins.

iii. **And have forgotten Me:** “But at the heart of all these outward displays of wickedness was the main cause: ‘You have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign Lord.’ When one forgets God and leaves his ways, the path into every kind of abomination opens before him.” (Alexander)

3. (13-16) God beats His fists against Jerusalem’s corrupt leaders.

“Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst. Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the LORD, have spoken, and will do it. I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I *am* the LORD.””

a. **Therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made:** In the strongest terms possible, God said He would oppose these corrupt leaders of Jerusalem. He hated their **dishonest profit** and the **bloodshed** that came from their dishonest courts.

b. **Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you?** After shocking them with His beating **fists**, God then spoke to the princes of Israel with clear logic. They should soberly consider if they could stand against the great judgment God promised to bring (**I, the LORD, have spoken, and will do it**).

i. **In the days when I shall deal with you:** “The Babylonians are but men, but I the Lord your God, whom you have provoked, am with them; they are my weapons of war and I strike by them, and thou shalt never be able to subsist under it. Flatter not thyself, the Lord will do it as he hath spoken it.” (Poole)

c. **I will scatter you among the nations:** As in previous passages, God promised to not only conquer Judah and Jerusalem but to **scatter** them in exile. When they sat defiled **in the sight of the nations**, then they would understand Yahweh and how He revealed Himself in judgment.

i. **Then you shall know that I am the LORD:** “Thou shalt know me by my punishments, whom thou wouldst not know by my benefits.” (Trapp)

B. The furnace of judgment.

1. (17-19) Gathering into God’s furnace of judgment.

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they *are* all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.

a. **The house of Israel has become dross to Me:** Once Israel was regarded as God’s precious possession. Through their sin and rebellion, God now regarded them as **dross** – the worthless impurities that come from the refining of metal.

i. “The prophet’s point is that far from being regarded as Yahweh’s special treasure, the house of Israel is nothing more than slag, the waste produced in the extraction of silver from ore.” (Block)

b. **I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem:** When Nebuchadnezzar’s army came into Judah, many in the surrounding cities and towns fled into Jerusalem, thinking it would be the safest place. They were really being gathered there for judgment.

2. (20-22) The judgment of melting in God’s furnace.

As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted

in its midst. As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My fury on you.”

a. **So I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you:** God promised to make Jerusalem like a great furnace. Not only would the armies of Babylon burn the city, but it would be a melting of Israel itself. God would **blow on** the refining fire to make it hotter.

i. “Ye must be put in the furnace, and subjected to the most intense fire, till your impurities are consumed away. No *ordinary* means will avail any thing; the most *violent* must be resorted to.” (Clarke)

ii. “In such an hour the methods of patience and mercy are useless; it is only by the fiery furnace that the dross can be destroyed, and the corrupted silver be recovered.” (Morgan)

b. **As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst:** This severe announcement of judgment had within it a glimmer of hope. When the refiner melts the **silver** (or other precious metal) it isn’t to destroy it, but to purify it. As terrible as the burning of Jerusalem and exile would be, it would purify Israel even through the judgment.

i. That metal is refined *at all* shows that there is the abiding presence of the refiner supervising the process, and that there is something precious that may be yet reclaimed and drawn out.

ii. “The OT references to fire or furnace (e.g., [Deuteronomy 4:20](#)) are symbols for excruciating pain and suffering. These also evoke the notion of fire as a purifying agent and of ‘smelting’ as a way to spiritual regeneration (cf. [Isaiah 1:25](#)).” (Vawter and Hoppe)

C. The sins of prophets, priests, princes, and people.

1. (23-25) The sin of Israel’s prophets.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, say to her: ‘You *are* a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’ The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

a. **You are a land that is not cleansed:** Israel’s corruption was so widespread and deep that it was as if the entire **land** was dirty and defiled. One of God’s great purposes in the coming judgment and exile was to spiritually and morally cleanse the land.

i. **Or rained on:** “According to Old Testament promise rain was one of the blessings in the material realm which attended a walk of obedience. It was withheld to turn their hearts back to the Lord.” (Feinberg)

b. **The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey:** The false prophets of Israel worked together in something like a **conspiracy**, taking from and

devouring the people instead of serving them. The sin of prophets who fundamentally take instead of give is still a great problem among those who promote themselves as prophets.

i. “The indictment of the royal house in Israel is based on their practice of exacting wealth from their people, almost certainly to the accompaniment of violence and murder.” (Taylor)

ii. **The conspiracy:** “A contrivance, or framing among themselves a design, to speak all alike flattering, smooth words, and give out promises of peace and safety, when there was no peace.” (Poole)

iii. **They have made many widows in her midst:** “The prophets were directly responsible for the multiplication of widows in the land because their husbands went out to battle against the will of the Lord after being deceived by the prophets of lies and flatteries.” (Feinberg)

2. (26) The sin of Israel’s priests.

Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known *the difference* between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

a. **Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things:** The **priests** of Israel did not take their appointed role to serve and teach the people. Their own lives were corrupt (**violated My law**) and they performed their priestly service in disgraceful ways (**profaned My holy things**).

i. “Even they whose lips should preserve knowledge, have not instructed the people: they *have violated my law*, not only in their private conduct, but in their careless and corrupt manner of serving in my temple.” (Clarke)

b. **They have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy:** This was one of the important jobs of the priests of Israel. They were to help the people understand how the law of God applied to their daily lives by declaring things and conduct as **holy** or **unholy**, as **unclean** or **clean**. But they did not know the difference themselves and so could not instruct the people they were intended to serve.

i. “The charge to Aaron in [Leviticus 10:11](#) to teach the Israelites all the statutes spoken by Yahweh through Moses is the most explicit. But Moses places this burden on the tribe of Levi in his final blessing: ‘They shall teach your ordinances to Jacob, and your law to Israel’ ([Deuteronomy 33:10](#)).” (Block)

c. **They have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths:** The priests failed in their basic responsibilities to honor God’s law themselves, and to teach the people to do so. Therefore God was **profaned among them**, when He should have been glorified among His own priests.

3. (27-29) The sins of Israel’s princes, prophets, and people.

Her princes in her midst *are* like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. Her prophets plastered them with untempered *mortar*, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD had not spoken. The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.

a. **Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey:** When the leaders should have been like faithful shepherds, they were instead like vicious wolves. Their interest was not in the glory of God and the welfare of His people; it was **to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain.**

b. **Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar:** The **false visions** and divined **lies** of the false prophets were spoken in the name of the **LORD**. Yet those supposed revelations were like a wall made with mortar that had no cement. It looked nice from the outside, but had no strength and could never stand on the critical day.

i. “The prophets had whitewashed their own impure motives and led the people astray by falsely claiming to have God’s authority.” (Alexander)

ii. “They were meticulous about claiming the same divine authority as the true prophets, even using the same sacred formula ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ but the Lord had no relation to their claims or messages.” (Feinberg)

c. **The people of the land have used oppressions:** The princes of Israel corruptly mistreated and abused others ([Ezekiel 22:6-12](#)). It was no surprise that the **people of the land** imitated the behavior of their leaders, preying upon each other and those who were weaker with violence and oppression.

i. “The people of the land were the prominent land-owning citizens ([Ezekiel 12:19](#)), often officers in the army, and they fell right in line with the princes and priests.” (Wiersbe)

4. (30-31) The vain search for a man to stand in the gap.

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD.

a. **So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall:** The image of the **wall** connects back with the false and weak wall of the false prophets just a few verses before this ([Ezekiel 22:28](#)). The false prophets built with *untempered mortar*; God looked for a man to bring strength, stability, and security to Israel.

i. *God looks for such men.* The problem isn’t that God doesn’t want such people or has not called them. If there is a problem, it is because God seeks and finds none. He **found no one** with the

character or wisdom or real relationship with God to build such strength, stability, and security among His people.

ii. “Presumably Jeremiah was an exception to Ezekiel’s general condemnation, but he had no kingly status and few listened to his words. Any nation which lacks godly leadership, as Israel did at that time, must surely be on the way out.” (Taylor)

iii. “Jeremiah himself had scoured the city, looking for a godly man ([Jeremiah 5:1-6](#)), but his quest was a failure.” (Wiersbe)

b. And stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land: The man God sought was not only a builder, but just as importantly was a man of prayer. Like Abraham ([Genesis 20:7](#)) and Moses ([Exodus 32:9-14](#)) and David ([2 Samuel 24:15-18](#)), God looked for one who would, through prayer, **stand in the gap** between a holy God and His disobedient, rebellious, profane people. This man **in the gap** would fight for and hopefully rescue God’s people in prayer.

c. But I found no one: Here is the tragedy. God hoped for one who would lead and pray to avert the judgment, but there was none. There were godly people to be sure (such as Jeremiah), but none to fill this role at that time.

i. “He then concluded by describing the utter hopelessness of the case. There was no man to stand in the gap, therefore the fire of wrath must proceed on its way.” (Morgan)

ii. Fortunately, *God did find a Man to stand in the gap*. This is a powerful description of Jesus and His work for His people. He is the wall of strength, stability, and security for God’s people. He is the one who ever lives to pray for His people ([Hebrews 7:25](#)). God **found no one** in Ezekiel’s day, but in Jesus Christ has provided this ultimate wall-builder and Man in the gap.

d. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them: Because of the great sin and corruption of the princes, prophets, priests, and people; because there was no one to lead or pray **in the gap**, the judgment God promised was sure to come. It could not be turned back.

i. “Thus, the reprobation of Israel was vindicated, not only on account of its pollution, but in order to its ultimate restoration, for there was no force in her which could lead her back to the God from Whom she had departed.” (Morgan)

ii. **I have...I have...I have:** “With the entire nation so given over to every displeasing act, and no one to intervene for them, judgment alone remained for them. So sure was this visitation that Ezekiel thrice expressed it as having already occurred.” (Feinberg)