

### God's Sword of Judgment

#### Ezekiel 21

Ezekiel 27:1-7: *"And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup>'Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel; <sup>3</sup>and say to the land of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you. <sup>4</sup>Because I will cut off both righteous and wicked from you, therefore My sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south to north, <sup>5</sup>that all flesh may know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore.'"<sup>6</sup> Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes. <sup>7</sup>And it shall be when they say to you, 'Why are you sighing?' that you shall answer, 'Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass,' says the Lord God."*

#### Background Notes

Ezekiel 20 closed with the parable of the forest fire. The devastating wildfire sweeping through the land represented the Babylonian forces that would invade Judah, and Jerusalem for a third time - and this time, everyone would be affected. At this point in Ezekiel's ministry, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies had already made two invasions of Judah, but many of the people remained unaffected. Only the captives who had been taken to Babylon (including as Daniel and Ezekiel) had been greatly affected.

The people who remained in Judah went about life as usual. King Zedekiah was negotiating with Egypt for protection from Babylon, so their thinking was that life could only get better - and certainly God would never let the holy city of Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord be destroyed!

Unfortunately, their thinking was way off base. The message of the forest fire parable was that Nebuchadnezzar's next invasion would be like a wildfire that would consume everything. *No one* would escape the effects, and the fire would not be quenched.

When the people of Jerusalem received the word of this parable, did they pay attention to the message and shape up? No, they did not. In response to this apathy and unbelief, the Lord directed Ezekiel to give the people a more intense expansion of the meaning of the parable of the forest fire. In four messages that could be grouped under the title "the sign of the sword," Ezekiel drove home the point that further judgment of Judah and Jerusalem was on its way.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The sign of the sword meant God's judgment of Judah would be sure, sudden, and unsparing.

The messages of the sword may have been given through drama. Ezekiel may have acted out certain portions of these messages, using a sharpened and polished sword as a prop.

**a.** The first message (verses 3-7).

The Lord said that His sword was drawn and both the righteous and the wicked would be cut off. When the Babylonian army swept into Jerusalem, they would show no mercy. Everyone, regardless of their righteousness or wickedness, would either be killed or taken into captivity.

As part of his dramatic presentation, Ezekiel was to sigh or groan publicly so that the people would ask him why he was sighing and groaning (v6-7). He was then to emphasize to them that the sword was coming. It was sure, and it would be unsparing.

**b.** The second message. A poetic song of three stanzas (verses 8-17).

i. - The first stanza of the second message (v 8-10): the sword was sharpened.

Ezekiel 21:8-10: "Again *the word of the Lord came to me, saying,* <sup>9</sup>"*Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord!' Say: 'A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished! <sup>10</sup>Sharpened to make a dreadful slaughter, polished to flash like lightning! Should we then make mirth? It despises the scepter of My son, as it does all wood.'*"

It appears that Ezekiel polished a sword and waved it around in slashing fashion so that it glinted in the sun. This indicated the coming slaughter at the hands of the Babylonian forces.

ii. - The second stanza of the second message (v11-13): the sword was polished.

Ezekiel 21:11-13 - "*And He has given it to be polished, that it may be handled; this sword is sharpened, and it is polished to be given into the hand of the slayer. <sup>12</sup>'Cry and wail, son of man; for it will be against My people, against all the princes of Israel. Terrors including the sword will be against My people; therefore strike your thigh. <sup>13</sup>'Because it is a testing, and what if the sword despises even the scepter? The scepter shall be no more,' says the Lord God.*"

This stanza emphasized that the sharpened sword would not spare God's own people, including the leaders. "Striking the thigh" (v12) was a sign of despair.

iii. - The third stanza of the second message (v14-17): the sword was used for slaughter.

Ezekiel 21:14-17: "*You therefore, son of man, prophesy, and strike your hands together. The third time let the sword do double damage. It is the sword that slays, the sword that slays the great men, that enters their private chambers. <sup>15</sup>I have set the point of the sword against all their gates that the heart may melt and many may stumble.*"

*Ah! It is made bright; it is grasped for slaughter: <sup>16</sup>“Swords at the ready! Thrust right! Set your blade! Thrust left - wherever your edge is ordered! <sup>17</sup>“I also will beat My fists together, and I will cause My fury to rest. I, the Lord, have spoken.”*

The third stanza emphasized that the Babylonian invasion would strike suddenly, like lightning (v15). Ezekiel was to stand with the sword in fighting position for dramatic fighting effect. The intensity of the “third time” (v14) probably indicates the greater severity of the coming invasion – Nebuchadnezzar’s third invasion. Striking the hands or fists together was a sign of derision aimed at the kingdom of Judah.

### c. The third message. (verses 18-27).

*Ezekiel 21:18-27: “The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: <sup>19</sup>“And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put it at the head of the road to the city. <sup>20</sup> Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup> For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver. <sup>22</sup> In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a siege mound, and to build a wall. <sup>23</sup> And it will be to them like a false divination in the eyes of those who have sworn oaths with them; but he will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken. <sup>24</sup> “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.”*

In dramatic fashion, Ezekiel was to go out to a crossroads, or perhaps diagram a crossroads on the ground and place two road signs, one pointing to Jerusalem and one pointing to Rabbah, the capital of the nation of Ammon. Then he was to act out Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army pausing at the crossroads in order to make a decision which way to go and whom to conquer. Nebuchadnezzar would use divination to decide, but there was no question that God would control the results and cause him to choose Jerusalem. He would conquer Judah and Jerusalem because of their sins.

*Ezekiel 21:25-27: “Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, <sup>26</sup> thus says the Lord God: “Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. <sup>27</sup> Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.”*

In verses 25 through 27, the prophecy looks forward to the “time of the end.” The second half of verse 25 can be translated “in the time of the iniquity of the end.” The same phrase is used in Daniel 11:25 for the End Times. So the wicked prince of Israel in Ezekiel 21:25 was not just wicked King Zedekiah. This verse looks forward to the antichrist of the last days, who will assume the role of both priest and king. But the turban of the priest and the

crown of the king will be removed from him and given to the rightful king and priest - none other than Christ Himself at His second coming (v 26-27). That was the good news for the future. The bad news was that the sign of the sword meant that God's judgment of Judah at that time would be sure, sudden, and unsparing.

## **2. The sign of the sword meant that God's judgment was not limited to Judah.**

Ezekiel 21:28-32: *"And you, son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach,' and say: 'A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for slaughter, for consuming, for flashing -  
<sup>29</sup> While they see false visions for you, while they divine a lie to you, to bring you on the necks of the wicked, the slain whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end. <sup>30</sup> 'Return it to its sheath. I will judge you in the place where you were created, in the land of your nativity. <sup>31</sup> I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow against you with the fire of My wrath, and deliver you into the hands of brutal men who are skillful to destroy. <sup>32</sup> You shall be fuel for the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall not be remembered, for I the Lord have spoken."*

This fourth message of the sword was directed toward the foreign nation Ammon. When Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, the Ammonites would be relieved, and think that they had been spared - but not so. Ammon would also be conquered, in spite of what her false prophets were predicting in verse 29. Ammon's doom would be worse than Judah's, because Ammon "would not be remembered" (v32) - and history has shown this to be true. Israel, however, would be restored. The sign of the sword meant that God's judgment was not limited to Judah.

## **Practical Application**

### **Don't rejoice when you should weep.**

Verse 10: *"Should we then make mirth? It despises the scepter of My son, as it does all wood."*

It's difficult to translate and interpret verses 10 and 13. The overall point of these verses seems to be that Judah had despised God's "wooden rods" of discipline in the past, so He was now about to bring a "sword" of discipline upon them – and this sword would remove them completely. Therefore it was not a time for mirth, but for weeping.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 says that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." When God has to discipline His people for their sin, it should be a time for weeping, not for continuing merrily along life's pathway. As God's present-day people, we should carefully and soberly pinpoint areas in our lives where God may want to see changes in our thoughts and actions – before He has to take disciplinary measures to bring it to our attention.

Don't rejoice when you should weep.