

# The Sword of the Lord

## Then the Messiah Comes, part 1

When we think about Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, we usually think about Genesis 3:15 which predicted the coming of one who is our Savior from sin. Then forty-six chapters later in Genesis 49:10, another prophecy was given about this Savior; but this time He is a king. It prophesies that the Messiah will rule some day upon this earth as a king. Here is the verse,

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh comes,  
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.  
Genesis 49:10 (NASB)*

The scepter in this verse refers to a king's scepter. Then we are told He will be from the tribe of Judah. The word Shiloh is a cryptic word that refers to the Messiah, and the statement that all of the people will be obedient reveals that His

kingdom will be worldwide. This is a tremendously important prophecy about the future Messiah. This prophecy is about Jesus Christ. Revelation 5:5 states that Jesus Christ is from the tribe of Judah. Philippians 2:9-11 tells us that some day everyone will confess that He is Lord. This is a great passage. It says,

*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
Philippians 2:9-11 (NASB)*

Another reference about the Messiah is Numbers 24:17. It calls the Messiah a star. It says the star is from Judah and that the star will arise from Israel. The ancient Jewish rabbis who lived before the birth of Christ stated that these passages referred to the Messiah.

Many other references about the Messiah occur in the

Old Testament such as 2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 110; Isaiah 9:6; Daniel 7:13-14, 27; Joel 3:17-21; Micah 5:2; and Zechariah 14. Also, there are prophecies about the Messiah in the book of Ezekiel. One of them is in Ezekiel 17:22-24. It promises



the people of Israel that some day their Messiah will reign as king over a worldwide empire.

Our study today is from Ezekiel 21. The chapter also contains three prophecies that are given to the prophet Ezekiel. Within these prophecies you will discover there are three short prophecies about the Messiah. I am going to divide the

chapter into two parts. This study will cover verses 1-17. This is a wonderful study because it is the Word of God.

**THE SWORD IS DRAWN.** The first prophecy is titled “The Sword is Drawn.” It would appear that this prophecy begins in verse 1 of chapter 21. But it actually begins with verse 45 in chapter 20. Verses 45-49 are a parable. Then verses 1-7 in chapter 21 are the interpretation. This occurred because of a bad chapter division. In the Hebrew text, the prophecy actually begins with verse 45 in chapter 20. That means verse 1 of chapter 21 should actually be verse 6.

I will not read the parable in Ezekiel 20:45-49. I will just give you a summary of its meaning. The parable is a prophecy about a forest in the south (v 46). The “south” refers to the kingdom of Judah in the southern region of Palestine. The prophet Ezekiel was to face Teman, which was in the country known as Edom. Since Edom was south of the Dead Sea, this helps us understand that there was a heavily forested area there in biblical times which included the Negev. The parable states that a fire would start in the forest and move to the north.

Historical records tell us that when the Babylonian army invaded Israel in 588 B.C. it moved towards the Mediterranean Sea, and then invaded Judah in the south. The army was like a fire spreading over the land. So, the fire in the parable refers to the invasion of the Babylonian army. That is the message of the parable.

Now the interpretation begins in verses 1-2 in chapter 21. The verses say,

**The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries. Prophecy against the land of Israel . . .” Ezekiel 21:1-2 (NASB)**

The identity of Jerusalem and Israel are clear to us. We also know that the city of Jerusalem was the capital of the nation of Israel. When Yahweh told Ezekiel to preach against the sanctuaries, He was referring to the temple. The term sanctuaries referred to the court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. So, the prophecy is against everything in Israel.

Verse 3 gives us the message that Ezekiel was to give to the people.

**Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked.” Ezekiel 21:3 (NASB)**

The prophet was to tell the people that Yahweh said, “I will draw My sword from its sheath.” That is why I titled verses 1-7 “The Sword is Drawn.” The word “sword” occurs seventeen times in this chapter. The word occurs more times in this chapter than in any other chapter in the Old Testament. That means this chapter is about “the sword of the Lord.”

Next, in verses 4-5, Ezekiel is told to say to the land of Israel that the sword of the Lord has been pulled from its sheath. It will be used to cut off both the righteous and the wicked.

**Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. And all flesh shall know that I am the LORD. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again. Ezekiel 21:4-5 (NASB)**

The message is clear that Yahweh will use His sword to kill many people, both the righteous and the wicked from the south to the north. Once again Yahweh is referring to the southern kingdom of Judah, and the northern region of Palestine. Yahweh’s point is that His sword will kill the righteous and the wicked all across Israel.

**KILLING BOTH THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.** Some people have struggled with the idea that God would allow the righteous to be killed. This seems to be contradictory given our studies in Ezekiel 9, 14, 18, and 19. So, before we go further, I want to make some important comments and then return to our study.

In our previous studies in Ezekiel, we have learned five important principles about sin and its consequences. First, we learned from Exodus 20:5 that a father’s sins will be visited on his child to the third and fourth generations if they hate Yahweh. Obviously, any children who are in the home will suffer from a father’s sins. But Exodus 20:5 is about the great, great grandchildren. They will suffer if they hate Yahweh. It is the consequence of their own sins. Righteous great, great

grandchildren will not suffer.

Second, we learned in Ezekiel 9:4-8 that Yahweh would protect all of the righteous in the city of Jerusalem, but the wicked would die. That means Yahweh planned to protect His righteous ones. This shows Yahweh's grace, love, and mercy towards His righteous ones.

Third, in Ezekiel 14:3-30, we were told that only a righteous person can save himself or herself. He or she may not be able to save someone else. This is a very important principle to remember. Fourth, we discovered in Ezekiel 18 that every person is responsible for their own sins. These two principles go together. A righteous person is one who humbly confesses their sins and maintains their day-to-day relationship with Yahweh.

Now we arrive at our fifth principle in this passage (v 4-5). This passage creates a question. When Yahweh said that He would use His sword to kill the righteous and the wicked during the Babylonian invasion in 588 B.C., how should we understand this? Why were they killed? First, we have discovered the righteous will not suffer for their great, great grandfather's sins. They will suffer only for their own sins. Second, Yahweh said that the righteous in Jerusalem would not die during the Babylonian invasion in Ezekiel 9:4-8. Therefore, that implies those righteous people who did die, died outside of the city. This means that the righteous died because of Yahweh's decision to judge Jerusalem, the temple, and Israel.

Next, we must remember that the righteous suffer for many different reasons, and not just due to sin. Therefore, I want to give you eight reasons why the righteous do suffer but not because of sin.

The first reason that God causes the righteous to suffer is to motivate us to not sin. An important example to remember is 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 which tells us the apostle Paul suffered due to a thorn in the flesh. The purpose was to motivate him to not be proud.

Second, God causes the righteous to suffer to cause us to grow spiritually (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:7-8). He allows difficulties into our lives to make us grow spiritually. Third, God tests the faith of the righteous according to Matthew 13:18-23 by positive and negative circumstances. Even positive

circumstances are tests to develop the different spiritual qualities.

Fourth, people suffer for the glory of God (John 9:1-3; 11:3-4). This may involve unexplained suffering. How we respond can be used by the Lord for His glory. The fifth reason we suffer is to take us to heaven (Psalm 116:15; Ecclesiastes 12:1). Dying often involves suffering. We forget about this reason. Sixth, God also allows us to suffer because we are like Christ and share in His sufferings (1 Peter 4:12-19). That brings God glory since it shows that our persecutors are children of the devil and we are children of God (1 John 3:10).

The seventh reason we suffer is that God must accomplish His will and consequently sometimes we must suffer (Job 1:18-22; Ezekiel 24:15-18). Notice that Job 1:18-19 says that when Satan caused the death of Job's children, we are not told they were righteous individuals. But it is difficult to believe that all of them were wicked people. The same is true for the Ezekiel passage. In that passage, Ezekiel lost his wife because Yahweh needed to take her life to send a message to the people. These are two good examples that demonstrate God must fulfill His own purpose and sometimes the righteous suffer but not because of their own personal sins.

Eighth, when the Babylonian army killed some of the righteous outside of the city of Jerusalem, we know one thing for sure. It was time to bring God's godly ones home for Psalm 116:15 says,

**Precious in the sight of the LORD**

**Is the death of His godly ones.**

**Psalm 116:15 (NASB)**

It was time for them to come home. He saved them from great sorrow and pain.

Now we will return to our study in verses 6-7.

**“As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight. And when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ you shall say, ‘Because of the news that is coming; and every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it comes**

and it will happen,' declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 21:6-7 (NASB)

Ezekiel let the people know how he felt about the coming slaughter. Earlier we read in Ezekiel 12:17-18 that Ezekiel himself was emotional over what was going to occur. I believe this reveals that the prophet was grieving because of what these prophecies said was going to happen. So Yahweh told him to not hide his grief but to let the people see his grief. Then Yahweh said, "Behold, it is coming, and it will be fulfilled." This prophecy was about the "The Sword Is Drawn."

**THE SWORD IS SHARPENED AND POLISHED.** Verses 8-17 tell us that the sword of the Lord is sharpened and polished. Verses 8-10 is a poetic song that the prophet was to sing.

Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,  
"Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the LORD.' Say,  
'A sword, a sword sharpened  
And also polished!  
'Sharpened to make a slaughter,  
Polished to flash like lightning!  
Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every  
tree?"  
Ezekiel 21:8-10 (NASB)

So Yahweh had drawn the sword in verses 1-7, and now we are told His sword is sharp and polished. It is ready to kill.

In verse 10 we read, "Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree?" The Hebrew text is difficult to understand because it says, "My son" which refers to the second person of the Trinity and the Hebrew word "rod" can also mean scepter. Therefore, it appears to refer to Genesis 49:10. Remember that Genesis 49:10 refers to the scepter in Judah and says that Shiloh was coming and the people would obey. It appears that Yahweh is asking the people, "Shall we all rejoice, for the Messiah is coming and He will reject every tree?" The "tree" refers to the people back in the parable in chapter 20. It appears the people were rejoicing because they expected the Messiah to come and rescue them. So, they were not worried about these prophecies.

So Yahweh warns them in verse 11 that His sword is sharpened and polished,

"It is given to be polished, that it may be handled; the sword is sharpened and polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer."  
Ezekiel 21:11 (NASB)

Yahweh says He will give His sword to the slayer. We will discover later in verse 21 that the slayer is King Nebuchadnezzar. So, what insight does this teach us? The insight is that God uses people to accomplish His will, He is the cause of what happens. He uses you and me to do evangelism. He uses you and me to teach His Word and minister to others. He also uses wicked people to accomplish His purpose. He will use King Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish His will to destroy the wicked and bring some righteous saints home.

In verse 12, Ezekiel is once again told to not hide his pain but to reveal it to others. Verse 13 refers again to the scepter or rod,

"For there is a testing; and what if even the rod which despises will be no more?" declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 21:13 (NASB)

The "testing" seems to refer to the warnings of the prophets. The point is they were ignoring the warnings! They were not repenting. So, Yahweh asked the rhetorical question, "What if the rod which is being rejected will be no more?" That is, what if the Messiah does not come and rescue you?

Then in verses 14-16, Yahweh tells the prophet to clap his hands in approval.

"You therefore, son of man, prophesy and clap your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword for the slain. It is the sword for the great one slain, which surrounds them, that their hearts may melt, and many fall at all their gates. I have given the glittering sword. Ah! It is made for striking like lightning, it is wrapped up in readiness for slaughter. how yourself sharp, go to the right; set yourself; go to the left, wherever your edge is appointed." Ezekiel 21:14-16 (NASB)

The prophet was told the sword of the Lord will be twice as effective, yes, even three times as effective. His sword is for killing. It will kill the great one. The great one in Jerusalem was King Zedekiah. This is another prophecy about the certainty of his death. The hearts of the people will melt and they will die. The sword will glitter as the sun is reflected off its metal as it swings right and left killing the people.

The last verse in this second prophecy states,

**“I will also clap My hands together, and I will appease My wrath; I, the LORD, have spoken.” Ezekiel 21:17 (NASB)**

Yahweh describes Himself as striking His hands together as an act of showing approval to King Nebuchadnezzar’s punishment for Israel’s rebellious behavior.

**CONCLUSION.** The ultimate judgment was near. Israel had refused to repent after a hundred years of warnings from Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many of the minor prophets. They indulged in gross sins and idol worship.

It is important for us to realize that God can judge or discipline a nation even though it is not the final judgment; just as He disciplines us, even though we have not committed the sin unto death that is mentioned in 1 John 5:16-17. He warns nations and individuals first. For example, when Jonah preached and warned the city of Nineveh, God wanted him to call the city to repent. Then when they repented, God spared the city.

But Israel was not like Nineveh. God had already said that Israel would refuse to repent. When the prophets preached, Israel refused to repent. We have already discovered some of the signs that reveal God is judging a nation. Some of the signs are: famine, wild beasts, war, pandemics caused by disease, killing of children, population decline, God’s refusal to listen to the prayers of leaders, and an increase in homosexuality. The preaching of the prophets was also a sign of judgment. These signs did not necessarily mean the final judgment had arrived upon Israel. They were given to motivate Israel to repent. But they were occurring because Israel refused to repent.

So, the sword of the Lord was unsheathed, sharpened and polished. It was going to be given to the slayer. The sword

of the Lord would slaughter and kill the great one—King Zedekiah. The edge of the sword was appointed to appease Yahweh’s wrath against their wickedness.

Sadly, they understood that the Messiah was coming and thought He would rescue them. They ignored Yahweh’s warnings while clinging to His promise of the Messiah. We should grieve for Israel just as Ezekiel did. We should grieve for our nation too! We should also understand how much Yahweh hates sin. So, let us repent of our sins, pursue holiness, and please our God!

Our next study is the conclusion of this chapter. In that study we will learn about an important Messianic prophecy and the climax of this series of prophecies about the sword of the Lord.