

**Message #24****Ezekiel 21:1-32**

Just south of Cincinnati, in Kentucky, about 1/4 mile off I-75 is “the Ark.” It is a modern day replica of the Ark that Noah built in Genesis. It is 510 feet long; 85 feet wide and 51 feet high. Now we learn from Hebrews 11:7 that when God told him to build the ark because His judgment was coming, Noah believed Him. We know from the Apostle Peter that God patiently waited for Noah to complete the ark (I Pet. 3:20) and when it was finally built, he brought a judgment flood on the entire world and all were destroyed except Noah and seven other people (II Pet. 2:5). What is so tragic is that for all the years that it took Noah to build the ark, he kept warning of the judgment of God and no one believed him.

Now when Jesus was here He said that just before He returns things will be like they were back in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39). One of the things that will characterize most people is that they will hear warnings of the coming judgment of God and it won’t faze them. They will hear that God’s judgment is coming but they won’t face the sin and get right with God. They will just go along in life eating and drinking until they are destroyed by judgment.

There are very real threats and judgments in the book of Ezekiel that are specifically aimed at God’s own people. **Don’t ever forget this; when it comes to God, disobedience to God will always result in discipline from God.** That idea is clearly seen right here in Ezekiel 21.

**THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS COMING AGAINST ISRAEL FOR HER UNFAITHFULNESS; BUT THE PROBLEM IS MOST PEOPLE DID NOT BELIEVE THIS OR RESPOND TO THE WARNING.**

This has always been the problem with most people. They really don’t believe God is going to judge them. Even God’s own people tend to think we can just drift along just the way we are, even in rebellion against God, and in the end, everything will turn out okay. Most people really don’t believe judgment will come. Ezekiel 21 says, “yes it will.” The writer of Hebrews said, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

In the latter part of chapter 20, God used coming “fire” to communicate that judgment was on the way. We may recall that the response of the people is “Ezekiel is just speaking in parables.” They were not taking him seriously (**20:49**). In **chapter 21**, God uses the “sword” to communicate that judgment is on the way.

Now in Joshua 5 we may recall that Joshua was by Jericho and he looked and there was a man with a sword drawn ready to fight for Israel. That man was the captain of the host, who was none other than Jesus Christ. The fact that His sword was drawn against Israel’s enemies was a great encouragement. **But in Ezekiel 21, God’s sword is not drawn against Israel’s enemies; it is drawn against His own people.** This is something God’s own people better fear. Because when God turns against His own people in disciplinary ways, the entire world will fall apart.

Now the judgment described in this chapter is far reaching. I know of no place in history where some of the things in this chapter totally occurred. There were bits and pieces of things that did occur, but nothing like the totality of all that is described here. So my conclusion is this is still futuristic.

There is coming a time of horrible judgment that will be aimed at Israel. That time will be the “Time of Jacob’s trouble,” which will be a 3½ year period when the Antichrist will try to exterminate every Jew in the world.

There are four main sword pictures that are designed to communicate to Israel that devastating judgment is coming:

#### **SWORD PICTURE #1 – The sword is drawn. 21:1-7**

God spoke to Ezekiel (**v. 1**) and he told him as a prophet to set his face toward Jerusalem and verbally speak against the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel (**v. 2**). Ezekiel had originally been training to be a priest and now he must prophesy against the sacred buildings of the sanctuary and the Promised Land.

The first message he was to give Israel was scary. God says, “I am against you” and “I will draw My sword out of its sheath and start cutting off my people.” He would cut off those who said they were righteous and those who were wicked (**v. 3**).

When God sends His judgment against His people, all people connected to the organization suffer. Every now and then we learn of some company that was corrupt and when it goes out of business, both believers and unbelievers who worked for the company suffer.

God says this judgment will go after “all flesh” from south to north (**v. 4**) and all flesh will know this is a judgment of God (**v. 5**). God says when I draw this sword I will not put it back into its sheath until I have carried out My judgment. The judgment is coming and it will be ferocious.

We know from **verse 19** that this has immediate reference to the Babylonians who would be brought by God once again to Jerusalem to punish His people. We may recall that at this point Nebuchadnezzar had already invaded the land twice. The first time he took Daniel (605 B.C.) and the second time he took Ezekiel (597 B.C.) and now he was about to return and totally destroy it (586 B.C.).

Now God told Ezekiel what I want you to do is groan with great grief in their sight and when the people ask why you are groaning, you tell them the news of what I am going to do to them. Their response will be every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble and every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak. That will be their response when I do this (**v. 6-7**).

But do you see what response is missing? No repentance. People are scared; people are sad; but they do not turn to God and cry out for His mercy and grace because of their sin.

### **SWORD PICTURE #2 – The sword is sharpened. 21:8-17**

Once again God spoke to Ezekiel (**21:8**) and told him to say that God's sword was drawn, razor sharp and polished (**21:9**) and it was ready to slaughter the people so fast that the polished sword would look like flashes of lightning (**21:10**). This sword was so sharp and powerful that it could cut down every tree. God would allow many of His people to be mowed down.

Now I believe there is a hidden critical point seen at the end of **verse 10**. God's Son was nailed to a tree and God's judgment is coming because His Son has been rejected.

God's judgment sword was ready to be turned over to the hand of the destroyer (**21:11**).

God tells Ezekiel to cry out and wail because this judgment is against "God's people" and against all the leaders of Israel. God says I will deliver them all over to the sword for judgment (**21:12**).

God wanted Ezekiel to illustrate the horror of this judgment by wailing, hitting his own thigh and clapping his hand together and start swinging the sword two and three times (**21:12-14**). The slapping of the thigh was a sign of great grief. The clapping of the hands was a sign of approval. The brandishing of the sword a third time means a third attack would leave no place to escape.

This judgment will be a total and complete slaughter, moving to the right and the left (**21:15-17**). It will come with great speed.

God Himself will clap His hands together and appease His wrath. What Israel did to His Son is not only unacceptable, it is punishable.

The tragedy for most of God's people is that they thought they were secure. They never thought God would do anything negative to them. God says I will destroy My own people.

### **SWORD PICTURE #3 – The sword is aimed at Jerusalem. 21:18-23**

We may observe that again God spoke to Ezekiel (**21:18**). This time he says He is going to authorize the King of Babylon to come with his sword and go into the Promised Land and specifically up against Jerusalem (**21:19-20**).

What Ezekiel was to do was to draw a map in the dirt apparently in the shape of a "Y." Babylon would come straight into the Promised Land and then branch out and go two directions. One direction would be toward Jerusalem and the other would be toward Rabbah of the Ammonites.

Now according to **verse 21**, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, does not know God, but he was trying to figure out which way to go. He came to Riblah north of Damascus and he had to decide does he go west to attack Tyre or does he go south and attack Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39).

Since he did not know God, he tried to figure it out by some form of “shaking arrows,” by “divination,” by consulting “idols” and by looking at the liver (**21:21**). Looking at the entrails of an animal has always been a way pagans thought they could determine the will of the gods.

No one can determine God’s will by this. But God actually worked through this process and turn things so that he would head toward Jerusalem (**21:22**). God was so angry with His people that He actually sovereignly worked in this process to cause Nebuchadnezzar to do His will.

The people of Israel thought his divination was false (**21:23**) but what they did not realize is that God was the One bringing this against them because of their iniquity.

God says to Israel because of your terrible sin and because of your transgressions, God will allow horrible judgment to come (**21:24**).

God says in **verses 25-27** to the wicked Zedekiah, you will be totally and completely humiliated, a total ruin. The once proud and arrogant king will be stripped to nothing. Zedekiah lost his crown, he lost his sight and he lost his life.

His right to rule would be taken away and it will be that way “until He comes whose right it is and I will give it to Him” (**v. 27**).

Notice the end of **verse 27**. There will come one who will have the right to rule. There has been no king since the days of Nebuchadnezzar; but there will come one who will have the right to rule and God will establish Him as king. That one is none other than Jesus Christ.

There is in this verse the assumption that Israel will survive and one day a king will reign and that king will be Jesus Christ.

#### **SWORD PICTURE #4 – The sword will be aimed at Ammon. **21:28-32****

One more time God spoke to Ezekiel and said I want you to prophesy against the sons of Ammon. You tell the Arabs that I am coming after them. They are not getting off the hook.

The Ammonites lived on the east side of the Jordan and they took advantage of Israel during the days of the Babylonians. Those Arabs have made life miserable for Israel so God says to Ezekiel you tell them, I am coming for them.

Apparently when Israel is attacked they will assume they are free. God says no way. The sword has been polished and it will come right after you too. In fact, **verse 32** says you will never be remembered. Israel will be remembered, but not the Arabs who mocked her.

When God’s people refuse to obey Him, He will discipline them. He does not let His people get away with rebellion forever. That point is clear from Ezekiel 21.