

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 14

C. Vision Three – (Eze 20:1 – 23:49) 7th Year, 5th Day, 10th Month

Eze 20:1 Now in the seventh year, in the fifth *month*, on the tenth of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.

Eleven months and five days had passed since the last vision began. Upon this occasion “**certain of the elders of Israel**” approached Ezekiel in the hope of receiving a word from the LORD. Not all the elders visited Ezekiel, just a portion of the whole. They entered Ezekiel’s home, surely invited in by the prophet and they sat in front of him. With this vision we will learn an important lesson. “*Sometimes when we approach the LORD to make a request of Him, He will not want to listen to us. Rather, He has something to say to us and He has been waiting for us to pay attention to Him.*” As we will see, the LORD had a lot to say to the elders of Israel.

1. Ezekiel’s Twenty-first Assignment from the LORD

Eze 20:2 And **the word of the LORD came to me** saying, **Eze 20:3** “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will not be inquired of by you.”’ **Eze 20:4** “Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers;

Notice that Ezekiel did not have to call upon the name of the LORD to get His attention; He already knew the elders were approaching Ezekiel and He was ready for them. Most assuredly, as soon as they sat before Ezekiel, the LORD showed Himself to the prophet in an instant and declared His disgust with these “**certain ... elders.**”

Ezekiel was to speak for the LORD, “**Do you come to inquire of Me?**” The LORD continued with “**As I live, ... I will not be inquired of by you. Will you judge them ... son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers....**” These “**certain ... elders**” most likely did not expect to hear this from the LORD. They came to inquire of Him; He shut them down. The LORD had a story to tell and these elders needed to hear it. These elders must have thought they knew their history, but the LORD knew what they knew, and it was His intention to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. Their fathers were guilty of committing disgusting things under the nose of the LORD. For that reason, these “**certain ... elders**” needed to know the truth.

“**As I live,**” the LORD said to the *elders*. The LORD swore on His own life. He could not die. No promise in this word can match the words “**As I live**” from the mouth of the LORD. He was serious. He had no intention of answering any question from these men. “**Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man**” was the LORD’s way of telling them “*Ezekiel, you are about to tell them exactly what they and their ancestors have done wrong.*”

a) The Choosing of Israel

Eze 20:5 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God,

Just in case these *elders* had forgotten, it was the LORD Who chose them, they did not choose Him. Well, they did choose Him as their God when they were in a horrible state in Egypt and wailed for help. But they did not expect that He would truly answer. For that matter, they did not expect Him to change everything about their lives. They were ready for a Savior, but they were not ready for a God.

b) The Promise to Israel

Eze 20:6 on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.

The issue at hand was the promise that the LORD made to the ancestors of these *elders* 874 years before. He promised them the Promised Land. Their 430 years in Egypt had turned into a horrific time of bondage. For the most part they were just 75 miles from the Promised Land, “**flowing with milk and honey, ... the glory of all lands,**” and they did not have a leader to take them there, up the road just a little way, less than three days’ journey. But, while they were in Egypt, the LORD picked that clan of tribes to be His, the heirs of the Promised Land. He would bring them out! He would care for them.

c) The Instruction to Israel

Eze 20:7 "I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'

The rescue from Egypt was not without restrictions and that meant the LORD had instruction for Israel. “**Cast away ... the detestable things ... of Egypt.**” The LORD wanted all of the abominations of Egypt out of their system once and for all! Why? Because He had sworn to be their LORD, He had sworn to be their God. In order to be their LORD God, they had to do something; they had to rid themselves of all they had become accustomed to in Egypt. They had to become a new people, a new holy people.

d) The Rebellion of Israel

Eze 20:8 "But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

The ancestors of these *elders* could not, or perhaps would not, forsake all they had learned in Egypt. The LORD’s response had to be punishment. Where were they punished first? In Egypt! The horrific bondage they experienced in Egypt was designed and directed by the

LORD as their punishment. The Israelites knew they were the chosen nation of the LORD even while they were living in Egypt. For that matter, they knew they were the chosen nation of the LORD before Joseph moved his father and family there. Joseph knew because Jacob knew. Jacob knew because Isaac knew. Isaac knew because Abraham knew. To Abraham the LORD said the following.

Genesis 15:13 ¹³ *God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.*

Even the LORD knew His chosen people would need to be punished and that is why He sent them to Egypt for four hundred years. We know the actual total time was 430 years before Moses led them out of Egypt.

e) The Grace to Israel

Eze 20:9 "But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Then, at just the right time, the grace of the LORD was offered to the Israelites in Egypt. It was in His timing, under a certain pharaoh who was struggling to hold on to the nations around him once controlled by other pharaohs that the LORD showed Himself to the people of Israel and the people of Egypt in order to facilitate an orderly exodus.

f) The Freeing of Israel

Eze 20:10 "So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. **Eze 20:11** "I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live.

Out of Egypt the masses departed. Egypt was supposed to be left behind, but it was not. The mass of humanity made it to Mount Sinai and there their LORD God told them what He expected of them. He had freed them. The statues and ordinances would free them more. Free them from sin and direct them in holiness and righteousness.

g) The Sign for Israel

Eze 20:12 "Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might **know that I am the LORD** who sanctifies them.

The LORD would not leave them to their own devices after His instructions were given at Mount Sinai. The people needed a reminder, a regular reminder, a weekly reminder. What would that be? His "**sabbaths!**" That was to be their reminder. That was to be their sign. Just between Israel and the LORD. A reminder that He *sanctified* them. *Sanctified* means *to be set aside for something special*. In this case, the *nation of Israel was chosen to be a different kind of people from all the rest of the people in the world*. Special!

What about these "**sabbaths?**" Had the LORD not set aside the sabbath day at the end of creation and declared it to be holy (Exodus 20:10)? A special day? A day created for man to rest and remember the LORD. The human body is made by the LORD so that it needs one day of

rest from the toil of providing for the needs of life every seven days. The soul withers if it is not observed. But on that day, the soul is nourished in its rest and the attention is turned to the praise and worship of the LORD. The *elders* were keenly aware of where the LORD was going with this message through Ezekiel. They were living in the Babylonian Empire and the ancient Babylonian calendar of that day divided the week into seven days and the seventh was called *Sabattu*. The Babylonian word means *a day of rest for the heart coupled with a day of completion of labor*. How could the Babylonian calendar be so on target and the Israelites be so far off target? Should we ever forget that the direct descendants of Noah populated the Babylonian region? Should we forget that after the *Tower of Babel* incident the descendants of the godly line of Shem remained in the Babylonian area? Should we forget that Abraham was born and lived for 75 years in the Babylonian area? Should we forget that Abraham was of the godly line of Shem which means Isaac, Jacob and all the tribes of his twelve sons were from the godly line of Shem? Should we then forget that the Babylonians were Shemites? They were distant cousins of the Israelites, chosen by the LORD to draw them out of their sin in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to rectify their conduct. The Babylonians were directed by the LORD. The Sabbath was the sign to the Israelites, given to them in Egypt to never forget and evidently, they had forgotten it. Oh, they worshipped on the Sabbath, but it was not worship of the LORD; they worshiped the images of phantom fabrications of gods.

h) The Waywardness of Israel

Eze 20:13 "But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. Eze 20:14 "But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.

Even in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, after hearing the voice of the LORD proclaim the Ten Commandments to them, even after the LORD provided for their every need, the people of the *twelve tribes of Israel* became rebellious. The wrath of the LORD was needed. He had sworn by His own life to give the *nation of Israel* the Promised Land, but that would have to wait. A generation needed to be punished. A generation needed to die unblessed. A generation needed to come into place that would follow the LORD's statutes and ordinances.

i) The Warning to Israel

Eze 20:15 "Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands, Eze 20:16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols.

The LORD gave them many warnings and many chances and finally He told them "*They would not see the Promised Land.*" Why? Because of what they had done with the required *sabbaths* and what they had done with *idol worship*.

j) The Compassion for Israel

Eze 20:17 "Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.

One generation needed to die. But the LORD did not intend that their heirs die too. The children were born to the rebellious lot and when they were old enough, their parents died and were buried in the sand.

k) The Lesson for Israel

Eze 20:18 "I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers or keep their ordinances or defile yourselves with their idols. Eze 20:19 'I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. Eze 20:20 'Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.'

As the departure from Mount Sinai came in the proper time, only Moses, Aaron and Mariam of the older generation were still alive, but not for long. Mariam would die when they camped at Kadesh on the way to the Promised Land. Aaron would die on a mountain as the nation attempted to circumvent the land of their Edomite cousins. Moses would die after the LORD had moved the camp near enough to let Moses see the Promised Land. From the plateau of Mount Nebo he most likely could see all the way north to the Sea of Galilee, all the way west to the Mediterranean Sea, and all the way southwest to Beersheba and Kadesh Barnea and maybe even to the Red Sea, and all the way south from where they had just come.

At that time, the LORD had a lesson for Israel. It was not a new lesson. It was the same lesson given to their parents and grandparents who journeyed from Egypt and were buried in the sands at the base of Mount Sinai in the land of Midian. *"Keep my laws and remember the sign of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is between me and you! Don't forget it."* That was the lesson given to the young and healthy *nation of Israel*.

l) The Childishness of Israel

Eze 20:21 "But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. Eze 20:22 "But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.

How quickly a nation forgets the downfall of those who came before them! The young healthy *nation of Israel* had a short memory of the tragic repercussions associated with the lessons their ancestors had learned. But then they forgot. Even before crossing the Jordan, they forgot. They were drawn in by the Moabite women to lustful associations and the worship of Baal. The LORD should have struck the whole nation down but He said of that time, **"I withdrew my hand and acted for the sake of my name..."** The LORD withdrew His hand and did not strike them. A bigger picture was in view than the sinful multitude on the east bank of the Jordan River. For the sake of the LORD, for the sake of His name, He needed to let them go unpunished at that time. His plan was still in place. He still needed them in the Promised Land. He still needed them to populate the land. He still needed them to fulfill many of His

promises to their ancestors. He still needed a people to be His people so that He might come as a Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. These were the ancestors of His chosen people and He “withdrew” his hand and brought them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land out of the wilderness.

m) The Promise to Israel

Eze 20:23 "Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands, ^{Eze 20:24} because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.

In the process of entering the Promised Land, the LORD needed to repeat His warnings to them before they began to break up the camp and settle in various parts of the countryside. In Deuteronomy 28 the LORD pronounced on the tribes the blessings and curses that would come upon them based on their following or rejecting His statutes and ordinances, which included the Sabbath and the topic of idols. Adherence to the instructions that would bring blessings was short-lived. Adherence to the instructions that would bring curses was quick to appear among the tribes.

n) The Law for Israel

Eze 20:25 "I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; ^{Eze 20:26} and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through *the fire* so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might **know that I am the LORD."**

What did the LORD mean when He said, “**I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live?**” Why would the LORD do such a thing? First, the statutes that the LORD gave them at that time pinpointed sin, sin that they were bound to indulge in. The LORD knew that the Israelites were going to commit such sins and He warned them against such actions knowing they could not, or rather, would not comply. Second, He also forewarned them of the penalty for practicing child sacrifice. The wrath of His judgment on those who committed such acts was to record for all eternity their deeds so that they would be without excuse when it came to their time of judgment.

o) The Blaphemy of Israel

Eze 20:27 "Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me.

The message of this third vision is a history lesson to the *elders of the house of Israel*. The LORD instructed Ezekiel to tell the elders their ancestor’s blasphemous downfall in sin against the LORD.

p) The Idolatry of Israel

Eze 20:28 "When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their

sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings. ^{Eze 20:29} **"Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day."**

The *nation of Israel* was barely in the Promised Land when the surroundings overcame them and they promptly provoked the LORD with false worship. **"Bamah"** is mentioned here. It means *high places* and refers to places of false worship. Some say that it was a particular place – one place specifically in the Promised Land. If it was, nothing remains of it to be found. The sin of idol worship would be on *high places* all over the Promised Land. In Hebrew, all the *high places* were called **"Bamah"** because that word means *high places*. Therefore, wherever idol worship occurred the place was called *Bamah*.

q) The Defilement of Israel

^{Eze 20:30} **"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? ^{Eze 20:31} 'When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you. ^{Eze 20:32} 'What comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: 'We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.'**

Once again, the LORD swore on His own life that He would not entertain any questions from this group of *elders* as long as they flirted with and continued the sins embraced by their ancestors.

r) The King of Israel

^{Eze 20:33} **"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. ^{Eze 20:34} "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;**

The remnants of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom were scattered throughout the known world that had been controlled by Assyria first and then expanded to include all of the Babylonian Empire. They were scattered from the Mediterranean Sea to the mountain range that led into India, all along the shores of the Indian Ocean and across the lands north to the frigid tundra we know as Siberia today. Swearing on His own eternal life, the LORD promised to one day be the King over all of Israel and gather them back from where they had been scattered. That prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. Some of the largest populations of Israelites still live in the area of the old Assyrian and Babylonian Empires.

s) The Judgment of Israel

^{Eze 20:35} **and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ^{Eze 20:36} "As I entered into judgment with**

your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord GOD.

No doubt this vision is now reaching far into the future, even into our future. When Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian Empire and allowed the Israelites to return to the Promised Land, very few made the journey; initially only about 43,000 according to the records of Ezra and Nehemiah. Many are living in the wilderness of the far east today.

Since the days of our LORD, the Israelites have also been scattered across Europe. Their descendants remain in those countries and have never returned to the Promised Land. To make matters worse, most Israelites do not worship the LORD today. He came, they missed Him and their salvation was given to the rest of the people of the nations of the world who would accept the Savior. Because of their rejection, doom still awaits many Israelite descendants including those from these *elders of Israel*.

t) The Covenant for Israel

Eze 20:37 "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

The rod of a king was his scepter. But this metaphor comes from sheep herding. The sheep would be gathered into a group surrounded by the herders. The shepherd would allow the sheep to pass by him one by one. His rod had been dipped in a bright red pigment. As the sheep exited the circle, the shepherd would count one to ten. The tenth sheep was marked with the rod and set apart to go to the house of the LORD as an offering. So, too, in this passage, Israel one day will pass under the rod, some will be marked for the LORD, others, the rebels, will be marked for destruction.

u) The Purging of Israel

Eze 20:38 and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

Passing under the rod of the LORD will one day bring about a purging of the *nation of Israel*. Those purged will not inherit the Promised Land. Even though the LORD will bring them from where they have been scattered, they will not arrive in Beulah Land because their sins of rejection and rebellion against the LORD will keep them from their place of honor there.

v) The Conversion of Israel

Eze 20:39 "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD, "Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.

The LORD invited the *house of Israel* to indulge in all the idol worship they desired. He had given them the warning and they had not yet listened to Him. Why should He expect them to listen now? One day they will listen, but then it will be too late. They will hear His words and we might interject here that those words will be similar to these. *"Go and serve the one you served while on earth! Find your place in eternal damnation!"*

w) The House of Israel

Eze 20:40 "For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.

Looking far into the future, thousands of years past these *elders of Israel*, the LORD can already see the **"whole house of Israel,"** the true house of Israel, worshiping Him. When will this happen? It will begin at the 7000th year since creation when the LORD will be King of kings and LORD of lords.

x) The Gathering of Israel

Eze 20:41 "As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. Eze 20:42 "And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.

Even though the LORD revealed all this prophesy concerning the future of the **"whole nations of Israel,"** at this time in the story of Ezekiel, it seems impossible that the *elders* of either Israel or Judah could have comprehended the full extent of the word of the LORD. We can only wonder how much of the LORD's revelation to Jeremiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Obadiah made its way to the exiles on the Chabar River. Nevertheless, this passage was a promise from the LORD for the descendants of these people thousands of years after they lived.

y) The Repentance of Israel

Eze 20:43 "There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.

Even when the Israelites will be gathered back on their Promised Land from all over the world, when the LORD marches right into the Temple yet to be described in the last eight chapters of Ezekiel and sits to reign as King of all, the Israelites will not forget the evil deeds of their ancestors, their heritage. Even then, they will grieve.

z) The Knowledge of Israel

Eze 20:44 "Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD."

And here we have a most revealing note from the LORD. Read what He says and accept what He does. The Israelites, basically as a whole, from their time in the thriving Northern and Southern Kingdoms, maybe as far back as the rule of Solomon and to the very end, deserve to be annihilated and wiped clean from the face of the earth. But the LORD will not do that. Why? Because He had promised that He would not destroy them! However, they deserve to die!

2. Ezekiel's Twenty-second Assignment from the LORD

^{Eze 20:45} Now **the word of the LORD came to me**, saying, ^{Eze 20:46} "Son of man, set your face toward Teman, and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev, ^{Eze 20:47} and say to the forest of the Negev, 'Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it will consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. ^{Eze 20:48} "All flesh will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.'"" ^{Eze 20:49} Then I said, "Ah Lord GOD! They are saying of me, 'Is he not *just speaking parables?*'"

Then the topic seems to change. From the doom of Israel, Ezekiel repeated the word concerning the Negev, concerning the capital of the Edomites, Teman. Ezekiel repeated the words and the *elders* questioned him, "Is he not just speaking parables?" What does a fire in Edom have to do with the Israelites in exile?

We have spoken many times about the use of directional words in the Old Testament. Here we must address them again. The LORD tells Ezekiel, who is in his home, to turn toward "Teman." Obviously, in those days, it was a reference to the abandoned capital of the Edomites. "Speak out against the south" means *what is to the right as you look from Jerusalem to the rising sun in the east*. The "Negev" lay to the south of Jerusalem too. Around Jerusalem was a forest of trees on the hills and in the valleys. The trees were cedars – one of the most flammable trees on the planet – evergreen, ever ready to ignite. The sticky sap of the cedar is just as flammable as lighter fluid. Once the tree is ignited, it will burn rapidly until the sap is consumed.

Early in Ezekiel we learned that when Nebuchadnezzar and his army stood outside the walls of Jerusalem, they would break down the north gate first to enter; however, they would ignite the cedar trees to the south of the city first with their flaming arrows and the smoke would force the inhabitants toward the north gate. And so, the city would burn! The burning forest of cedars could not be quenched until the sap was consumed. That would take far too long. It would be lit before the gate was breached. Although Nebuchadnezzar's men would light the fires, it was the LORD's plan and He was directing the destruction.

The words of the prophet took such a swift turn that the *elders* in Ezekiel's home rethought all that had been said up to that point and considered it all to be nothing but parables.

3. Ezekiel's Twenty-Third Assignment from the LORD

^{Eze 21:1} And **the word of the LORD came to me** saying, ^{Eze 21:2} "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel; ^{Eze 21:3} 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 from you the righteous and the wicked. ^{Eze 21:4} "Because I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword will go forth from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. ^{Eze 21:5} "Thus all flesh will know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath. It will not return to *its sheath* again.'" ^{Eze 21:6} "As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight. ^{Eze 21:7} "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."

The LORD did not seem to be interrupted by Ezekiel's plea. "*Prophesy against the sanctuary in Jerusalem,*" the LORD says. The holy Temple was in danger! It would be destroyed! Surely not! The *elders* had to be wondering about Ezekiel by this time. Surely the LORD would not allow Solomon's Temple to be destroyed. The LORD's Ark was in the Temple; His Shekinah glory was in the Temple; the LORD resided there in the Temple. The LORD promised that this destruction would almost be too much to bear, but it would occur, **"declares the LORD."**

The LORD then had a story to tell the *elders of Israel*. It is one about the mighty **"sword of the great one slain."** What does that mean?