

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Ezekiel - To Know that He is the Lord

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*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

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Introduction

The Church as a New People Group

1 Peter 2:1-12

Message Overview

Aim To call the church to its identity as a new people group in exile in this world.

- Agenda**
- To expound Peter’s argument and apply it to our contemporary culture and our up-coming study in Ezekiel.
 - To establish New Testament connections to Ezekiel through the shared metaphors.
 - To develop a Biblical model for ethnic, cultural identity in the church.

- Summary**
- As babes, hunger for Christ in the Word (2:1-3)
 - As living stones, trust Christ as a treasure (2:4-8)
 - As the people of God, proclaim Christ’s excellencies. (2:5-9)
 - As pilgrims, glorify God by holy living (2:10-12)

Discussion Questions

Discuss the relationship between the Old Testament types, pictures and metaphors and their New Testament counterparts. Emphasize the shadow-reality aspect.

Discuss the practical implications for us as pilgrims and exiles. Note the two the text draws, and then draw out more.

Discuss the impact of prejudice and bigotry on our outreach. What steps can we take to *intentionally* reach out to people who are of different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds?

Introduction – Ethnicity and Exiles

ILLUSTRATION: Many years ago, while I was ministering in another church in Sandusky, God in His mercy called and saved a young carpenter and his wife. They had several children. They began to attend church and grew very quickly in the Lord. He was a very skilled tradesman and was offered a job in a southern state that was very hard to turn down. We prayed together over this decision, seeking for wisdom from God. He decided to take the job. They packed up and moved. We had given them the names of churches in the general area to start looking. We got interesting and at times encouraging letters as they sought a place to plant themselves among God's people and grow and serve. One day, we got a letter – it said, "We have been attending at such-and-such a church now for these past months. The preaching is great. The people seem nice. We went forward to join the church. We could not believe it when they said, 'You are welcome to attend her. But we do not allow blacks to join our church.'" "

What will we do if over the next two months, God is pleased to call out and bring to this church through the Spreading the Gospel of God ministry, people who are oriental, Hispanic, black or just plain different? How do we here and now reflect in our worship and ministry the reality of heaven where gathered are people from every tribe, tongue, and people group? Do we just have a Korean church, and an African-American church – if so, why don't we call ourselves the white, Anglo-Saxon church? In fact, if all this is legitimate, why don't we have a Blue collar and White collar church? A male and female church? I understand that a church ministering to a people group who speak a different language ought to have services in that language – but should it be a separate entity?

Dan and I attended a conference where we wrestled with some of these issues, focusing primarily on how the black experience of slavery affects the present unity of black and white believers. Much of the discussion was stimulating – and much was unsatisfactory. I came away thinking that we had missed the clear language of a text, this text, which speaks to this.

As I meditated on this text, trying to come to grips with my own thinking, it struck me that this text gives us a model for unity while at the same time, it gives us the connections between us as the church and the book of Ezekiel. We can come to the book of Ezekiel with interest fueled largely by our fascination with prophecy. You don't even have to be a Christian to have that interest – witness the explosive sales of the *Left Behind* series. But I want to suggest to you that our connections to the Book of Ezekiel are deeper, richer and more satisfying than that. The Book of Ezekiel is to and about God's people who are *EXILES*.

So I hope you will bear with my breaking of a fundamental homiletical principle: have one primary purpose in a message. I have two threads this morning that I hope to unpack from our text

Our Shared Relationships

(v.1-3)

Peter begins by showing us how deeply connected are our vertical and horizontal relationships. You treat people the way you do because you think of God the way you do.

Command: Deal with Sin

(v.1)

The verb here will not allow for casual exercise. It is set forth as a self-consciously deliberate action of ridding oneself or taking off or setting aside. The word often was used for the act of removing one's clothes. It is an active, not a passive verb.

We must get rid of these things:

- Malice – Intent to do harm in all its inward imaginations and outward expressions.
- Deceit – Misrepresentation of ourselves or the truth in all its forms.
- Hypocrisies – It refers to all the ways in which we image or posture or position ourselves which do not correspond to inward realities. The word is in the plural either to measure the power it has over us or to unmask its diversity in our lives.
- Envy (envyings) – Not of the things a person has, but of the regard or respect they are held in.
- Slanders – To use words to destroy another person's character, work or respect. The plural here combined with *all* (all slanders) means that we must rid ourselves of every way of speaking that wrongly misrepresents what a person is, what they are doing or what they have accomplished.

Obedying truth and loving saints means we will rid ourselves of all these things. They emerge so often in churches where there are divisions and diversity. This command points to the very things that have been the flame of racial and ethnic division in the church. You hear it in bigoted speech. And you hear not just from whites. I contend that if Christians in the past would have taken this (and other texts like it) seriously, the church would have been a haven for real, God-honoring ethnic unity instead of being, like it is now, on Sunday Morning, the most segregated hour in America anytime.

Comparison: Desire the Word

(v.2)

The solution in Peter's mind is a putting off of these heart and behavior sins and a longing for the Word. You are to hunger for it, to be eagerly reaching for it. The imagery is that of a little baby eagerly reaching for its bottle. What you ought to crave is pure milk – unadulterated, unmixed with contaminants, untainted by frameworks, filters and foreign elements.

Why? So you may grow up in your salvation. Obeying truth and loving saints while hungering for the Word *is the only route to maturity*. All the how-to's on the religious market are doomed to long-term failure.

Peter is making an unbreakable connection between how love conducts itself and how love sustains itself. If we are to be pure in our relationships, we must be nourished by the Word.

Condition: Delight in God (v.3)

Is this statement true of us? Have you tasted the sweetness and nourishment of God in the Word? Has your reading and meditating and engrafting of the Word become a taking in of God, of enjoying and having a want-to-do-it-again experience of God? Have you really tasted the *GOODNESS* of God in such a way that it causes to long for more of Him in true spiritual milk?

It may well be that some of us struggle with relationships and expressing love Biblically because we have not truly tasted the kindness and goodness of God in the Word in a way that causes us to behave and to love with kindness.

Our Shared Realities (v.4-10)

Peter makes two major Old Testament – Church connections here that are critical to our dual topics.

Our Continuity as the Temple of God (v.4-8)

Peter assumes his readers are generally familiar with the Old Testament and its redemptive categories. He is not hesitant to simply say that the Old Covenant worship points to the greater, New Covenant realities, first in Christ and then in the church. We come to Christ, who was chosen and precious to God as a Living Stone. We are now the Temple as its present spiritual reality on earth.

	Christ	Church
Living stone	Corner stone	Building blocks
Priesthood	High Priest	Holy priests
Sacrifices	Of self for sin	Of self in service

Christ came as God's chief cornerstone, the one to be believed in, trusted and treasured. (v.6, citing Isaiah 28:16). God has made Him to all peoples as the test of saving belief. There is no one else who can save you. He alone, and through Him alone, is there salvation from sin. Trust Him; believe in Him today.

Yet, Christ was rejected by His people and was cast aside. While appointed the Savior, He became the cause and occasion of their stumbling. They rejected Him. Peter informs us as to why their unbelief disobeys the Word: God appointed them to both the means (stumbling) and the end (condemnation). There are those who are appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48) and those who are appointed to disobeying the gospel (v.8b). This is because the saving grace of God is effective in those on whom He chooses to have mercy (Romans 9:10-26).

That this is the correct interpretation is borne out by the "but" that begins verse 9. They were appointed to stumble; but, you are a chosen people.

So how does this relate to the almost universal struggle of living out here and now the unity in diversity we see in heaven? Do we just simply shrug our shoulders and say, “We’ll wait till then?” I think not. I believe that we need to think through and become intentional in our efforts to demonstrate to the world that we are a new people group. Yes, in liberty, there is opportunity to express our ethnic backgrounds. But our primary orientation is to be how we can become now as God’s people here what we truly are in heaven.

Certainly, I cannot and will not work this out in any satisfying measure in this message. I put this in front of you just to challenge us to three important tasks:

- *TO EXAMINE* our own attitudes to be sure that there is no remaining vestiges of worldly and sinful prejudice and bigotry.
- *TO INITIATE* intentional strategies to both proclaim the gospel to all the people groups around us.
- *TO TRANSFORM* our own thinking of ourselves so that we primarily identify ourselves as *GOD’S PEOPLE*.

So here we are, the reality to which the Old Testament pointed. We are God’s Temple, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people owned and mastered by God. We are all these things so that we can make much of God – we can proclaim His marvelous excellencies.

Our Shared Responsibilities

(v.11-12)

We may be the temple of God and the people of God, but we are still aliens and pilgrims living in hostile territory. Therefore, this is how we are to live.

Its Required Perspectives

(v.11)

We must hold our minds to thinking in certain ways and maintaining certain attitudes. If we maintain these attitudes we will be enabled to abstain from fleshly desires.

We must constantly view it as a pilgrimage. We must see ourselves as exiles. We must always recognize that we will never receive in this life all that it means to be a Christian. We must never settle down at home here. This has huge implications for adopting a radical, wartime mentality in ministry.

We must think of our lusts as in open and destructive war against our soul. Do we think of our sinful desires as waging war against the best and the excellent of our holy happiness? Our hearts are desire factories. They were made that way by God. That those desires may be satiated by illicit pleasure diverts them from being satisfied by eternal joys. Since lusts’ satisfaction in sinful expression is corrosive, destructive and ends in death—then it is in war against the great pleasures and eternal joys that are at God’s right hand.

Its Glorifying Purpose

(v.12)

Having a good conduct whose good deeds, though they may be slandered now, will magnify the worth and greatness of God in the day He comes in judgment on the pagans (civilized or not) among which you live.

So here is our other connection to Ezekiel. Ezekiel was written to God's people in exile. They were there because they were being punished. They were not to lose their identity as God's people, but they were also to feel the enormous weight of God's glory and wrath against their sin. We also are exiles. We also are God's people away from home. But we are not exiles because of being chastened for our sin, but in order to proclaim the gospel. We also must never lose our identity as God's people and we also must be pleasing to him in every way here. A great deal of what we will connect with the exiles in Ezekiel will be by way of contrast – do not be like this.

So the Exodus points to our Redemption, and the Exile points to our present state.

Conclusion

- As babes, hunger for Christ in the Word (2:1-3)
- As living stones, trust Christ as a treasure (2:4-8)
- As the people of God, proclaim Christ's excellencies. (2:5-9)
- As pilgrims and exiles, glorify God by holy living (2:10-12)

When the Lord Displays His Glory

Ezekiel 1

Message Overview

Aim A call to see God and be humbled.

- Agenda**
- To set the background and context for the book of Ezekiel.
 - To dazzle us with the wondrous vision of God and His glory on His movable throne.
 - To see the incredible realness of God.
 - To call for a self-humbling response to seeing God and His glory by faith.

- Summary**
- Ezekiel ministering for God among an exile people.
 - God's awesome mobile throne and its thematic connections to Scripture.
 - God's glorious self-disclosure prefiguring the incarnation.
 - Ezekiel's self-effacing, humbled response to such a glorious God.

Discussion Questions

Discuss and clarify the historical background for the book.

Reinforce how the Hebrews being in exile made their worship impossible for them. Yet God moves to reveal Himself to them and to be near them.

How does the strangeness and awesomeness of this vision help us in our view of God?

Shows how different and how magnificent God is, yet not so utterly different that we cannot use "likeness" and "appearance". However, it is that we are like Him, not He like us.

Discuss the connections between the glory in this vision and the glory in face of Christ: Ezekiel 1 and 2 Corinthians 3-4

Very important for us to see God's glory in Jesus and to be satisfied with Him.

Reflect together on Ezekiel's response and how it should both shape our own response to God's glory as well as expose those whose claims are false.

Humiliation and self-effacement are the authentic response.

Introduction

We live in declining times.

The prevailing Biblical illiteracy within evangelical churches.

The shaping power of our culture on churches and Christians.

The loss of objective truth resulting in moral relativism.

The overwhelming focus on the present with its demands on God for the now.

Ezekiel lived in declining times.

Exile – we know little of what it means to be uprooted from our home by an enemy, to see it wasted by war and to feel a sense of desolation and abandonment of our God. We know little of what it means to have our identity as a people tied to a city. We know little of what it means to be so connected in our worship of God to place that we cannot obey fundamental commands of God because of where we are.

But this is the thrust of the book of Ezekiel. This is a book about God and His people when God moves with certain and devastating power to judge. This is a book of how God moves away from His people because His people have moved away from Him. Ezekiel's indictment of Judah and Israel (remember, the nation is a divided kingdom) encompasses her allies, lovers and co-conspirators against God. But God's people may be destitute and desolate, but there remains a hope – an eschatological hope, framed in the language of their worship, focused on Christ in all He is and on the cross in all it means and fulfilled over time in the unfolding of redemptive history towards the Day of consummation.

So this book will feel a bit like archeology – it is about people long dead in a world and time long gone with a worship long sense replaced under a judgment now complete. So while spooning among brick and bones and old dust may be attractive to many, it raises the question – why do we even care about this book?

There are many reasons to come to Ezekiel –

- The book has significance because it is in the Bible – it must carry its immediate meaning and its thematic message and we will be deficient in our view God, His way and will if we ignore it.
- The book is clear about how and why God rejected the physical sons of Abraham as a nation of people. While many would say that is temporary and to be reversed later, the New Testament points to a remnant not a restoration.
- The book speaks powerfully of God as the sovereign Lord and Ruler over all the universe. He is not merely a tribal deity – He is not merely one among many gods, even if a superior one at that.
- The book shows how God's people as exiles are to remain distinct and proclaim the glory of who He is. So while we are exiles, away from heaven's home now, we will learn much from Ezekiel by way of *contrast* and *warning*.

- The book's very mystery ought to stir up curiosity. I suspect (because I have already been partaking of the food while I have been cooking) that there is meat for the soul and sweet riches of delight in God here.

One word, and an important one – this is also truth to be believed in an obeying way with right affections. If you come here merely to settle your curiosity about esoteric prophetic details, I will doom you to almost certain disappointment. So while we think of prophetic books as being primarily about future things, the prophetic books are more about sin, judgment and the powerful promises of God to redeem and rule over His people.

I plead for your prayer and for your patience – this is almost wholly new ground for you as a church and not a much traveled path for me. But this I know: at least 67 times in Ezekiel, God declares and does so that His people may *KNOW THAT HE IS THE LORD*.

I want to acknowledge my own indebtedness to D.A. Carson, *The Glory of God and a Collapsing Culture*, a series of messages on Ezekiel 1-11; Ian A. Duguid *Ezekiel: The NIV Application Commentary* and Douglas Stuart, *Mastering the Old Testament: Ezekiel*. Many other authors have been helpful, but these have been my companions.

So God moves with sovereign power and splendorous glory to pronounce His judgment on covenantal unfaithfulness and to proclaim His faithfulness to His covenantal promises. While we sense the power of God's wrath against the wickedness around us, we are secure within the redeeming love and sanctifying grace of God who calls us as exiles to purity and proclamation until our sojourn ends.

Since God's prophets and preachers must always be men with a high view of God and a humble view of themselves, Ezekiel opens with when God displays His glory.

Its Historical Circumstance

(v.1-3)

What unfolds for us here is the redemptive historical setting in which God displays His glory.

The Time of His Ministry

After the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was split between his two sons with the ten northern tribes being called Israel and the two southern tribes called Judah. The history of the divided kingdoms is checkered with mostly bad, evil kings and a few bright spots of God-fearing kings doing their best with mostly ungodly people. There is a long carnage of wars, both with outside kingdoms and between the north and the south accompanied by a long list of God-defying alliances and betrayals. Finally, the patience of God gives out and the 10 northern tribes are taken into captivity by the Assyrians (of Nineveh fame). The policy of the Assyrians was a "melting-pot" process – that is, to take a captive people and to spread them throughout the kingdom and force them to be assimilated through intermarriage and cultural integration. The result was the virtual destruction of the ethnic and national identity of the northern kingdom and the settlement of most of northern Israel by a Jewish half-breed people later known to us as the Samaritans. Nineveh fell to Nebuchadnezzar's father in 612 BC and at the battle

of Carchemish in 605 BC, the Assyrian and Egyptian alliance was destroyed, also effectively ending any hope for the 10 northern tribes.

The two southern tribes known as Judah whose capital was Jerusalem, were warned again and again about their alliances with Gentile nations. Yet, they did not listen and often went to bed with idolaters and wicked kings (something the prophets rail against constantly as “spiritual adultery.”) After the destruction of Assyria, the Babylonians moved on to drive the Egyptians out of Judah. Jehoiakim, who was king then and allied to Egypt, switched sides to save his bacon. As was the custom, hostages were taken from among the nobles and the leadership. Daniel and his three friends found themselves traded to Babylon to be trained there in this 1st deportation. A word here about the different policy of the Babylonians. They tended to take subjugated people to the center of the empire, train leadership in their ways, and allow the people to live in ethnic enclaves as long as they contributed to the cultural, commercial and political life of Babylon.

Jehoiakim broke his covenant with Babylon and rebelled. Nebuchadnezzar returned to swat the fly. In three months, Jehoiakim was taken into captivity along with a number of the people, including many priests and the temple treasures. Ezekiel was one the captives in this 2nd deportation. A man named Jehoiakin (with an N not an M) was made king and renamed Zedekiah. The first part of the book of Ezekiel is written and covers this period of time. Some of Ezekiel’s prophecies are warnings to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and foretelling its fall and destruction. Zedekiah unwisely rebels, and Nebuchadnezzar has had enough. He moves across Judah, destroying every city and stronghold in his path. As one writer put it, “The lights began to go out all across Judah.” In a year’s siege of Jerusalem around 587-586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar finally starved the city and breached the walls. He punished Zedekiah dreadfully. He tore down the walls and the Temple and burned the city to the ground. He hauled off all but a very few of the inhabitants to Babylon. Ezekiel spans this horrible time of around 20 years centered around the arrival of the exiles with the news of Jerusalem’s fall (24:27 and 33:21-22). He begins his ministry on the fifth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile: that is, July 31, 593 BC on our calendar.

Ezekiel was a priest who was deported in the 2nd wave. He was called and commissioned by God to prophecy to Judah, both in exile and about those still in Jerusalem until its fall. His writing is elegant and yet somewhat old style, sort of like reading King James in our day. The first three verses reflect that the book had an editor – notice the first person “I” in verse 1 and the third person “he” in verses 2-3. Yet, apart from this, it is the only prophetic book written entirely in the first person with the result that it is intensely personal. While the book may have some editing, it still stands as an inspired, inerrant and infallible part of the canon.

For us today, the message of Ezekiel is about the supremacy and glory of God who moves with real wrath against sin, preserves an elect people and begins to unfold the fulfillment of promises and prophecies in a Christological and transformational way. While the ethical imperatives may have bearing on our lives, they have a powerfully exposing and condemning effect on the collapse of the pagan cultures around us. So, we learn to live as exiles, not under the direct

judgment of God, but as a hopeful, heaven-ward people who carve places of rest and redemption here and now as God's people together in community until the King comes.

The Place of His Ministry

Where is Ezekiel? He describes himself as being among the exiles at the Chebar Canal in Babylon. He later pinpoints it as at Tel-Abib. So, ok, where is he? He is in modern day Iraq, in the southern part where in his day a great irrigation canal had been carved to carry water from Nippur in a large semi-circle down to the city of Uruk. Tel-Abib probably was a ruined city that the exiled Judeans were supposed to rebuild. If you can imagine a modern day refugee camp at the base of a rather large archeological mound with a huge irrigation canal flowing nearby, you will have a good feel for the place of his ministry. One thing though just to have it all right: all the records of that day show most of the Tigris-Euphrates delta to be a lush and fruitful land, not the desert it is today.

The Revelation for His Ministry

Ezekiel is not just a priest charged with preserving and transmitting and preaching the Scriptures. He is also a prophet who receives direct revelation from God. He sees visions (v.1) and receives the Word of God (v.3).

The Authority upon His Ministry

Ezekiel's ministry is authorized by God for God's hand of approval and control is upon him. This was a common way of speaking among God's people to recognize the authentic and authoritative voice of God through His prophets.

Its Awesome Experience

(v.4-28a)

When God displays His glory, there is an experience - a series of events that crash into his life. He describes this for us. His description presents several challenges:

- How literal are we to take what is being described? This is apocalyptic and prophetic literature which means that there is a use of imagery and metaphors.
- Are we supposed to be able to sketch this or is the description meant to send tingles down our imaginations? It seems to me that Ezekiel's description is meant to dazzle us, to cause us to hold our breath with awe.
- What is the significance of this event itself? Just simply this: God is not confined to the Temple at Jerusalem; He hovers over and shows Himself mighty to His people even when they are exiled away from home.

The Living Creatures out of the Whirlwind

(v.4-14)

Ezekiel sees this great storm moving upon him filled with roaring and lightning and fire. It is significant that it comes from the north, which is often used in Old Testament language as God's dwelling in the highest of the northern heavens. Often when God comes to appear, He comes in a storm and great whirlwind. He

spoke to Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38) and took up Elijah out of a whirlwind (2 Kings 2).

Out of this storm comes this magnificent and radiant being seated upon a sapphire throne surrounded by a crystal dome resting on four fearsome creatures and their awesome attendant wheels. Here is no less than the movable throne of God. What is amazing is the correspondence of this movable throne with other Scriptures. We'll mention them in a moment.

We are first introduced to what are in chapter 10, called cherubim. These four faced, four winged guardians of God's presence and bearers of God's chariot-throne are described in amazing, but inscrutable detail. We must remember that all that is not God is created and has or can be manifested in physical form. The cherubim appear all throughout the Scriptures as arrayed around the throne of God. They have four faces as represented here. They have four wings, two of which arch up to carry the crystal dome and lock together to form winged buttresses. Two wings cover their bodies and have hands underneath them. They appear to glow and pulse with inward fire. They do not have to turn, but simply move in any direction they desire.

Here is an amazing thing: when Israel camped or moved through the wilderness, they were to do so with 3 tribes arrayed around on each side of the Tabernacle. When they camped or moved, the tribes were to tent or travel in a prescribed order with the standard of the center of each of the three tribes to face outward. Thus, there were 4 standards, each facing outward. Want to guess what was on each of those standards? Yes, a man, a lion, an ox, an eagle just like these four faces. So Israel moving through the wilderness with cloud of Yahweh's Presence on the throne of the Ark of Covenant was surrounded by these four "faces".

The Awesome Wheels as the Vehicle (v.15-21)

Now it gets even more remarkable and difficult. Beside each of the cherubim are four sets of intersecting wheels with massive rims and glowing eyes all around the rims, one for each cherub. We do not know from the Hebrew whether these wheels were at right-angles or were inside one another. They glowed with a yellow-green hue like burnished gold overlaid with beryl. Twice we are told that the spirit of the living creatures dwells in the wheels – so the wheels and cherubim are a composite being. These awesome wheels have eyes all around, either as portholes or denoting intelligence and omniscience. They accompany the living creatures, moving without having to turn to the direction they go.

The Vast Expanse as the Crystal Dome (v.22-25)

Stretched out over the four cherubim is an expanse – space or firmament (same word as used to describe the stretched out heavens). Yet it appears to be solid, like a massive crystal dome. It is described in the book of Revelation as a sea of glass. The cherubim are arrayed underneath it in a square. From each cherub, two wings stretch out to the two nearest along the side. Their wings lock together and bear up the crystal dome.

When this magnificent structure moves, it sounds like a roaring cataract over a waterfall, or the thunder of incoming surf, like the pulsing, thudding reverberation of an army's march. For they move at the voice command of God.

The Human Likeness as the Son of God (v.26-8a)

On top of this massive crystal dome glittering like ice sits a throne carved out of what appears to be a single, massive translucent, faceted, azure-blue sapphire. And seated on this likeness was the likeness or appearance of a human-like shape. (I am trying to convey Ezekiel's struggle to describe what he is seeing). From the waist up, he appeared as if in gleaming bronze with a glowing fire within that extended from the waist down. The glory of the Lord shone out from and refracted into a multicolored brightness all around him like a rainbow.

Ezekiel is clear that he has seen a Theophony – he has seen a likeness and appearance of God, but he has not seen God directly. If he had, he would have died instantly. The apostle John sees this same sort of gloriously radiant being with the awesome cherubim as guardians around, the crystals sea of glass and aa brightness like a rainbow around in Revelation 4. As Ezekiel writes, “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.”

Its Powerful Affect (1:28b-2:2)

Anytime and every time people see the glory of God, what flows from it is not a warm, cozy feeling but a powerfully face-down affect.

Humiliation before God (v.29)

When he saw the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God arriving in smoke and storm and lightening on a magnificent movable throne attended by these fearsome guardian cherubim, he fell on his face. This is ever and always the right response – God is near and I am humbled.

Communication from God (2:1-2)

Though this belongs to the next message, let me just point to something here. He hears the command from God, receives the Spirit of God and stands before the presence of God. Ezekiel stands between the testaments as God's spokesman – and thus he himself points us to Christ, who will come to demonstrate in His person, power and performance the glory of God and will deliver His people.

Conclusion

The situations of our ministry may be difficult and we may be exiles and pilgrims and foreigners here – but God is not absent nor far away. He moves with haste and speed in His providences for us. This world is not ruled by Satan as much as he thinks so – God's people in exile know that their King is an awesomely majestic and mighty One moving with power and purpose towards the end He has declared.

We must not merely be transfixed by God's glory, but transformed by it and transmitters of it. The glorious vision that overwhelmed Ezekiel *is not what we seek today* nor is it available to us today. Why? Because God has placed the visible locus

of His glory in our Lord Jesus Christ. So listen to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:7.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We do not seek visions of glory like Ezekiel's, rather He is seen by faith in the Word of God. We seek to see and savor the glory of God in the face of Christ.

When the Lord Issues a Call

Ezekiel 2:1-3:27

Message Overview

Aim To call us to clear, courageous and uncompromising proclamation of God's truth.

- Agenda**
- To be motivated by the illustration of God's enlisting and enabling of Ezekiel.
 - To distinguish what is unique to him and universal to us.
 - To embrace persistent and powerful preaching of truth even in the face of resistance and rejection.
 - To see Christ as the penultimate watchman and spokesman for God.
 - To be launched into New Covenant witness to a fallen and failing culture.

- Summary**
- God calls Ezekiel as a prophet to stand, speak and submit to Him.
 - The nature of his work and the rebellious stubbornness of his audience requires courage and consistency.
 - God authorizes, authenticates and empowers such ministry.
 - Obedience to the starts and stops is critical in aligning ourselves with God's agenda.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the ways that Ezekiel's call is unique (not for us) and universal (for us).

Be sure to distinguish call, prophetic office, audience and even message

Discuss the ways we do and ought to select the "audience" for our witness.

How does each subheading's content affect our attitude, approach and activity in witnessing and teaching?

Point to the challenges of loyalty to God, God's message and God's point-of-view.

Introduction

Iain Duguid reminds us that:

Throughout history, mystics have sought to experience visions of God. They have often gone to great lengths in their pursuit of this ultimate experience, subjecting their bodies to innumerable hardships in order to attain to a great spiritual “high”. They have traveled to the ends of the earth and undergone fasting, lack of sleep, isolation, self-denial and self-flagellation in search of [immediate] contact with the Divine. In contrast, God comes to Ezekiel entirely unsought and reveals Himself to the prophet not for the sake of giving him the quiet time to end all quiet times but rather to commission him for a task and to entrust to him a message. The message that Ezekiel is to proclaim is not his own, but God’s; for that reason, only God can empower him and authorize him to deliver it.” (Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel: Life Application Bible*, p.67).

Paul warns us that a present pursuit of these sorts of experiences now disconnects us from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ who reveals Himself and His glory to eyes of faith feasting on the Word of God.

Gerard van Groningen summarizes these chapters so well for us.

Ezekiel, the priest, is also called and commissioned to be a prophet. As Isaiah had witnessed the glory of God when he was called (Isaiah 6:1-4), so has Ezekiel (Ch 1). As Isaiah and Jeremiah were given specific mandates to speak to the covenant people (Is. 6:8-10; Jer. 1:4-11), so Ezekiel is sent (2:3). He is not to be a missionary to foreign nations, but is called, sent, and commissioned to speak to the rebellious, obstinate, and stubborn sons of Israel (2:3-8). He is to speak so that it is known that a prophet was among them. Ezekiel is instructed to speak Yahweh’s words to the Hebrews. Isaiah has his lips prepared by a live coal (Is. 6:6); Jeremiah had the hand of Yahweh touch his lips (Jer. 1:9); Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat (2:9-3:3).

Ezekiel emphasizes one very important fact: the Spirit came to him and raised him up (2:2) and spoke as Yahweh to him. Thus, Ezekiel speaks directly about the Spirit’s role in qualifying him and giving him the word of divine revelation for God’s people. Ezekiel has his call to be a prophet confirmed by visions. So in addition to a verbal call and commissioning to be a prophet, he sees and experiences the presence of Yahweh and his means of communicating with and supporting his spokesman.

There is a definite relationship between the two prophets Ezekiel and Jesus. Both were certain that they spoke for Yahweh and that they had to communicate truths concerning Yahweh in order that people might know Him; both spoke in parables, allegories and eschatological images. Both referred to themselves as the “son of man”. Indeed, Ezekiel as a prophet was a prophetic forerunner, prefigurement and type of Jesus Christ. (Gerard van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, p.736-737.)

So what does the commission of Ezekiel as prophet call him to?

~ Read the text in conjunction with each major heading. ~

To Stand as God's Man and Be Fearless (2:1-8)

We open with Ezekiel on his face having seen the magnificent appearing of the likeness of the glory of God. He is stunned and humbled. We can hardly imagine the devastating effect of such a vision on a person. But Ezekiel constantly points to the trembling that overwhelms in the Presence of Yahweh. Yet God's call is to stand as God's man and be fearless.

An Unfailing Help from God's Provision (v.1-2)

First, Ezekiel is to stand face to face with God. God raises him up so that God may speak to him. It strikes me that being overwhelmed and devastated by the glory of God prepares us to hear Him, but is not the position in which to hear Him. Then God speaks to Ezekiel and He is filled with the Spirit of God, who causes him to stand on his feet. He hears God speaking. The Biblical connection between the Word of God and the Spirit of God is evident here. Ezekiel receives God's Spirit and Word together. While some would take pains to sever this relationship, God's Spirit and Word are so interconnected that severing them destroys them.

An Unbending Resistance against God's Prophet (v.3-5)

To face what he is about to, He must be commissioned by God. So he is sent from and by God. This call and commission seems in the Bible to be unique to prophets and apostles. There is little evidence of a special call and sending of pastor/elders. Yet here, several times God repeats that Ezekiel is being sent by God. He is on a mission for another; he is the servant voice of another. I love the language here, "I am sending and you will say." This is the unique place of prophets and apostles – they are sent by God to speak the very words of God. Thus authority and accuracy mark the work of their ministry.

Shockingly, he is sent to a rebellious, resistant and unresponsive people. Verse 3 is striking in its reversal: God's chosen people, the *bene Israel*, have become *goyim*, gentile and unchosen. The long, persistent and unremitting rebellion of Israel in her fathers and in the descendents brings Ezekiel to a people who are a rebellious house. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel know from the outset that their ministry will not be successful in outward terms. They cannot measure their ministry by fruit, but by faithfulness. If he is faithful to speak God's Word, they will know for certain that he has been God's voice to them, a prophet among them.

So will he fail if the people do not repent? No, he will fail if he does not speak God's Word and if he does not get it right. This redefines the measure of success for us as well. Since God grants repentance and since those who are appointed to salvation believe (Acts 13:48), then the Christian witness and preached word will yield according to God's purpose and effectual calling. Therefore, like Ezekiel, we must not measure ultimately by fruit in conversions, but by faithfulness to the content and the communication of the message.

An Uncompromising Courage in God's Providence(v.6-8)

Since he is going to prophesy to a rebellious and stubborn people, he must not be afraid of opposition. He is not to be afraid of *them* nor of their *words*. Ezekiel is

to expect that he will be actively opposed and persecuted – that he will be made to suffer. Whatever the level of threats, from looks to words to deeds, he is called to uncompromising courage. He is not to fear – he is to be courageous. Why? Because the where, when and to whom of his ministry are determined by God’s purpose, plan and outworking providences. He is sent and sustained in life to finish whatever prophesying God has planned for him. Though they threaten, they cannot snuff out the prophet until God is done with him.

And he must be persistent in proclamation. It is not enough merely to be present, but he must continue to prophesy. Opposition is never to silence the messenger. Even when the message is laden with doom and damnation, even when people resist and rebel against the message, Ezekiel is to speak because God has given him what to say and has sent him to say it.

What a challenge this is to us in our day. When we have God’s Word with its clear and often condemning message, we must speak with persistent courage and be fearless in the face of resistance and rebellion. We are assured that the work of the Word and Spirit is how God does His work in the hearts and lives of men and women. Whatever righteous judgment or transforming renewal God does, He will do through the Word. So, let us stand as God’s men and be fearless.

To Speak God’s Word and Be Unmovable (2:9-3:15)

The second aspect of God’s call is to speak God’s Word and be unmovable. This part of the call shifts from *COURAGE* in the face of opposition to *AUTHORITY AND ACCURACY* in the face conflict.

An Unswerving Loyalty to God’s Perspective (2:9-3:3)

This is one of the enactment prophecies. Ezekiel is going to record doing something which will have in itself a message. It is to stir up both curiosity and consternation. Like much of these enactment rites, it is strange when you think about what he actually does. He is handed a scroll – not a piece of paper, but rather a rolled up sheet of leather written on both sides with words of emerging from judgment. And God tells him to eat the scroll. Now Ezekiel’s surprise is not that he can eat it, but that rather that it was sweet as honey.

So what is the point? The scroll of God’s righteous judgment is written in lamentation, mourning and woe. God is declaring His impending judgment, full and final. Ezekiel must eat the scroll and find it sweet to his taste. In other words, he must identify with God’s perspective on sin and judgment. What God is drawing out from Ezekiel is an unswerving loyalty to God’s perspective. He is to see, hear and taste the awful and righteous judgments of a holy God and it is to be *SWEET* to his taste. He is to identify with God’s point of view. Much that he will speak and prophesy to Israel will be words of doom, destruction and damnation. He must not draw back because judgment has a bitter taste in his mouth. He must be unswerving in his loyalty to God and His perspective.

An Unmovable Duty in God's Proclamation (v.4-11)

The work to which he is sent will be hard, not because he is going to unfamiliar people and an unknown language, but to a rebellious people. In fact, God says that if Ezekiel had a ministry to the nations, they would listen. This is such a cut on Israel – the message they reject would be welcomed by the Gentiles. O, what a foreshadowing of the day when the Apostles turn away from the then rebellious house of Israel and take the gospel to the Gentiles, among whom God had many He called His own.

The primary barriers to his message and ministry are not culture or language; they are *moral*. Thus, God explains that Israel is unwilling to listen to Ezekiel because they are unwilling to listen to God (v.7). Their rebellion is not against Ezekiel, per se, but against God. We must be careful in how we apply this to ourselves, but we certainly see all through the Bible and even including Christ, sinful rejection of God's messenger was caused by a sinful rejection of God. So, he must have a forehead of granite to bang against their threats. No matter how hard headed they may be, God will make him harder than emery or flint. This is an interesting picture: God will make him able to butt heads with the worst of the rebellious house of Israel.

He must speak what he hears. He is to get God's Word right and to speak it with courage, clarity, conviction and completion. He must speak exactly what he hears from and he must speak all he hears from God. This is so important. The message is not ours to invent, it is ours to clarify and communicate. He is to master the message – hear it and memorize it (receive it in his heart). Then he is to speak what God tells him to. And he is to do so with God's authority, "This is what God says." And he is to do this whether they will listen or not.

An Overwhelming Sense of God's Power (v.12-15)

To carry out such a message, Ezekiel needs an overwhelming sense of God's power. He is confronted with the striking and shaking presence of God. It is evident from this that when he is standing, he is hearing the voice of God out of the movable throne and its great glory. Here, the voice of God and the movement by God is like an earthquake – it is shaking and shattering. And what a word is announced, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place." In spite of being sent to what we would think of as a mightily discouraging ministry, God's glory from its place brings blessing to him in his place.

He is confounded by the moving and majestic power of God. He is taken by the Spirit to the exiles themselves at Tel-Abib and deposited there. Yet he goes in bitterness and burning of heart. For seven days, he just sits stunned among them. He has seen both the holiness of the glory of God and the hardness of the judgment of God. What a lesson this is for us. To be unmovable before men we must be overwhelmed before God. To be properly shaped for ministry, we must often be shattered before entering ministry. Natural brashness and fearlessness before man must never be substituted for the courage arising from deep reverence before God.

To Submit to God's Authority and Be Faithful (3:16-27)

When God issues a call, there is an accompanying responsibility to be submissive to God's authority and be faithful. Ezekiel is no good as God's man if he is not submissive and obedient to God.

An Inescapable Responsibility to God's People (v.16-21)

God begins by assigning him as a watchman over Israel. He is to stand guard over the exiles and to warn them when, even in exile, they are tempted to disobey God. Now the words of warning are not to be of his own making, he is to speak the words he hears from God's mouth (v.17). This is a solemn warning to Ezekiel that what he is being sent on is not a volunteer task. If he is not faithful, then he will be accountable for not warning and for the sins that ensue.

Now, I have to correct a common misuse of this text. You will often hear this preached in evangelistic or missions contexts. Ezekiel was a watchman who had to warn; we are watchman who must warn. This is an example of two problems: ❶ Of taking the unique, personal narrative and directly making it universal, public imperative and ❷ of coming directly to us now without coming through Christ and the New Testament. We are not Ezekiel. Being this sort of watchman is unique to his call and commission. This responsibility does not entail us directly. While we must be faithful, as the New Testament calls for, I do not find a parallel for us in the New Testament. In fact, even in the unique and not repeated role of the apostles and prophets, I do not find this sort of application. So the sort of application that says that if we do not tell the gospel to everyone we can, we may well have their blood on our hands simply won't stand up to exegetical and hermeneutical scrutiny.

However, notice that this accountability is given to one who is identified as the "son of man" (2:1,3; 3:1,3,4, 10). Jesus over and over again identifies Himself as the "Son of Man." Jesus comes to His people a faithful prophet and priest who speaks God's Word with clarity and courage. He is the ever faithful watchman over our souls whose Word and Spirit together warn us from our wandering ways. Praise God for that ever greater Son of Man who was born, lived, died and rose again on behalf of His people. Both then and now, He is faithful to warn, faithful to speak, faithful to disclose Himself through the Word until He comes in glory, faithful to His promises.

An Unwavering Obedience to God's Precepts (v.22-27)

If the prophet of God is to speak the words of God, he must have an unwavering obedience to God. He must have a habit of obedience that carries over in to obedience in his speaking. This is what this paragraph is all about.

Further, we have here (and we have mentioned it already) what are called enactment oracles. Now, an enactment oracle is simply a message in dramatic actions – attention gained and or message given through an acted out drama. So for the linguistically adept, an *enactment oracle* – and for the rest of us, a *prophetic drama*. Ezekiel will do these prophetic dramas a lot and some of them are exceedingly strange.

What God does here is to demonstrate to Ezekiel's listeners through his immediate and unquestioning obedience that Ezekiel is a man under God's authority and who speaks with authority. Thus, this paragraph begins with, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." He first is sent to the valley (possibly, the plain) where God moves to meet him in His movable throne with His awesome glory. Then God sends Ezekiel to his house, there to be bound up with rope so that he is confined to his home. This is accompanied by first being unable to speak and then released by the power of God to speak. This drama is designed to show that Ezekiel is bound to God to do God's will, to be silent when God demands and to speak when God directs; that is, he is God's prisoner. The unwavering obedience of the submissive prophet is contrasted to the resisting refusal of a rebellious people (v.27). The judgment upon them begins with God's binding His prophet and shutting his mouth so that the very reproof they needed is withheld from them.

We see this unwavering obedience to God in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely his being unable to sin by virtue of his deity. He "learned obedience through what He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). In one sense, Jesus' obedience is the natural outflow of being righteous. But is not merely passive, but is an actively pursued thing in the context of suffering and hardship. He is resisted as God's spokesman, speaks what His Father has given Him to speak, does not say some things, leaving those for the Spirit to teach when He came. And in Paul we have an example of a being-saved, being-glorified sinner utterly committed to submission to God in ministry. And so it ought to be with us. The authenticity of New Covenant ministry is not tied to some internal call or commission nor is it to external signs – it is tied to loyalty to God and fidelity to Scripture.

Conclusion

It is difficult to know sometimes how to bridge the gap from the uniqueness of Ezekiel's person, place and position to our own situation of ministry. We certainly know that we cannot come directly for the office that Ezekiel filled was fulfilled by Christ. But from him to us comes a responsibility for all of us to witness with courage and an unwavering and swerving commitment to God and truth.

One clear overarching lesson is that we are to allow God to choose our audience. We tend to think that the gospel (both in its bad news that we are sinners and its good news that Jesus is our Savior and Sovereign) is to go an audience that is friendly, open and receptive. One lesson from Ezekiel that is evident all over the New Testament that Christians sow seed in all sorts of soil and preach the Word to all kinds of audiences. Do we really think that God's saving grace can only reach and regenerate those who are open? What we learn from Ezekiel is that there is a responsibility for courageous proclamation even to those who might be openly rebellious and resistant.

So God calls us, not to a prophetic office, but to this kind of proclamation. So, beloved:

- May we *STAND* as God's people and be fearless, with a reliance on an unfailing help from God's provision in the midst of an unbending resistance with an uncompromising courage.
- May we *SPEAK* God's Word and be unmovable out of an unswerving loyalty to God's perspective, to an unmovable duty to God's proclamation enabled by an overwhelming sense of God's power.
- May we *SUBMIT* to God's authority and be faithful because of an inescapable responsibility to God's people and an unwavering obedience to God's precepts.

So, we need ❶ to be courageous, ❷ to get it right and ❸ to be obedient.

May God move to accompany such an uncompromising and courageous proclamation with the power of His saving and sanctifying grace, here in our church, in our community, all over this city and to all the nations.

When the Lord Shoots to Kill

Ezekiel 4-5

Message Overview

Aim To highlight the seriousness of sin in the uncompromising justice of God.

- Agenda**
- To demonstrate God's faithfulness to His promises to bless and curse.
 - To emphasize the seriousness of the God's warnings.
 - To bring the impending judgment against our own sins forcibly to our minds.
 - To highlight the cross as the ultimate time when God shoots to kill.
 - To encourage us to flee to Christ from the wrath to come.

- Summary**
- God announces his judgments against the Hebrews through prophetic dramas.
 - God indicts the Hebrews for their sin.
 - God declares His purposes for judgment.
 - God's wrath was poured out on Christ for the sins of His people.
 - God will do whatever it takes to vindicate His awesome glory.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the relationship between the character of God, the sin of man and God's wrath.

Very important that people see that God's wrath is just and that it is not merely an Old Testament idea.

Discuss the impact of Ezekiel's use of drama and its accompanying discomfort.

Show how this functions then much like a visual aid. Also discuss how the privations of the prophet are also a part of his communication.

Discuss how in the language of this wrath, we can be brought both to the wrath to come and to the cross of Jesus.

Introduction

The Weirdness of Ministry

Well, Ezekiel's ministry begins – he has his office, his books, his appointment calendar and the times and places and dates of his preaching and prophesying ministry. NOT. Ezekiel's ministry begins with building a model of Jerusalem and then lying outside tied up as people pass by for over 14 months. His call to stand, speak and submit begins to unfold in prophetic dramas. So, Ezekiel's first movement in prophetic ministry was as much visual as verbal. He had an uncomfortable message to bring to the people of Jerusalem and God required that the message be delivered in an uncomfortable way.

We might find Ezekiel's method of conveying his grim message unorthodox, even amusing or embarrassing. It appears at this time that his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. Thus he would only be able to speak when he had an oracle to declare (3:26–27). This partial loss of speech continued until news of the fall of Jerusalem reached him (33:22; *cf.* 24:27). There would be other prophetic dramas too (12:1–16; 17–20; 24:15–27), but this first one surely established his reputation as one of Israel's oddest of prophets.

So, by parable and explicit words – by prophetic enactment and preaching, Ezekiel describes for us what happens *when God shoots to kill*.

The Warning to Israel

Deuteronomy 28

Now, does God move to mightily judge Israel without justice – without an adequate warning? Are Noah's generation and Sodom and Gomorrah better off than Israel? No. This doom and destruction and damnation was warned and prophesied by Moses in his sermons just before Israel entered the land.

We will not be able to expound on Deuteronomy 28 in any detail, but there, God pronounces the blessings attending obedient submission to God and the curses coming upon disobedient rebellion against God. The curses reach every part of life (v.15-19) including disease in body and field (v.20-24). They will be defeated, diseased and destroyed in frustration and futility (v.25-35). They will be ruled by foreigners and not reap the bounty of the land (v.36-44). At the center of the curses is this great word:

Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, **48** therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.

So it is not mere outward conformity, but serving the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart when all was well. Otherwise, they would serve their enemies in crushing hardness with a yoke of iron ending in destruction.

What follows then is a prophecy of the coming captivities in Babylon (v.52-63) and Assyria (v.64-68). At the center of these two sets of promised judgments are the rationale for why God would shoot to kill.

If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, 59 then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. (Deut 28:58-59) And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. (Deut 28:63)

Please, my beloved, if there is anything I want you to see with absolute clarity is that God is utterly committed to His glory and therefore our joy and he will move with swift and savage judgment against the sin and sinners who place it at risk. God's seriousness about sin is not a thing by itself. Nor is it merely a function of His great holiness. It is the concern of His bright and burning glory. God is passionate that we fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord our God (v.59). So Ezekiel, preaching to a people upon whom these very curses fell, aims that they will know that He is the LORD!

The Word to Us

1 Corinthians 11

Now, while we are not participants in that covenant and now are united and connected to Christ, we are still vulnerable to God. In Acts, Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with over their sin (Acts 5:1-11) resulting in great fear coming upon all the church (v.11). In 1 Corinthians 11, many were "weak and ill and some had died" (v.30) because of abuses at the Lord's Table. Now these are not *punitive*, as in Ezekiel. Rather, they are fully and finally - *corrective*.

So let's shake a bit of the dust of these texts and hear with trembling awe that God is so concerned for His glory that, at times, He shoots to kill.

Understand the Reality of God's Judgment

(4:1-5:4)

Through these three prophetic dramas, Ezekiel is to clearly portray the awful reality of God's judgment against Israel and Jerusalem.

The Siege of the City

(v.1-8)

In what he is commanded to do first, he acts out the siege of the city. In silence, He takes a clay brick and inscribes it with an outline of Jerusalem. Then he is to build a siege wall or ramp, surround it with battering rams and in the outer ring, tents. This was conventional military strategy of the day. What he enacts here Nebuchadnezzar carries out with devastating effect. Then he does something interesting. He is to take a plate of iron used as a griddle over a cooking fire and to set it into the ground as a barrier between him and the city as he faces it. Then he is to act out the siege. Here is a prophecy with an elaborate GI Joe setup.

Next, in silence, he is to lie down on his side, with the plate between him and his model. Every day while the people are passing by, for 390 days, he is to lie on his left side, wrapped up in cords. Then he is to lie down on his right side every day for 40 days. So, for 430 days, just over 14 months, probably at strategic times of the day designed to most powerfully be seen by the exiles, he is lying by this model of Jerusalem. Why? The 390 days symbolize the time beginning when the glory of God entered Solomon's Temple up to the captivity, years of accumulating sin and rebellion. The 40 days represent the years of judgment in which Israel

remained rebellious. Further, what is remarkable here is that Israel was in Egypt for almost 400 years and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The significance of this would not be lost on any thoughtful Jew trying to figure what he is doing.

We do not know exactly what symbolic action was used to show him bearing or carrying the sins of the people. Maybe they were written down and placed on him or in some other symbolic way, shown to be borne by him.

What does all this mean? Simply this, God had put up with the sins of Israel all these long years. It had erected a barrier between God and His people. God had set His face against Israel and sent, in accordance with Deuteronomy 28, a foreign oppressor to conquer as an extension of God's powerful judgment. So Jerusalem is doomed.

The Starvation of the People

(v.9-17)

Yet this is not all. While he is carrying out the siege, his bread is to be made from a strange mix of grains and beans. He is to mix just a small portion each day and bake it into bread to eat. While we can buy and eat Ezekiel bread today, if it were prepared like his, there would no market for it except to punish your children (been naughty today, here, you are having Ezekiel bread for supper).

He was to bake this bread over a fire made from dried human manure which would have made the bread ceremoniously unclean. This triggers quite a response from Ezekiel. He has never violated the dietary law. He is appalled. This is exactly the reaction God intends to provoke. While Jerusalem is being besieged, the people will go into such a state of starvation they will be willing to bake this bit of bread over a defiling fire. Yet God relents, and allows Ezekiel to cook it over a cow pat. But God will not relent of His punishment for Israel will rot away in thirst and hunger as the battering rams thud and Babylonians ring the city.

The Sundering of the Nation

(5:1-4)

Then, at the end of the time, Ezekiel is to shave his head and beard with a sharp sword. He divides the hair carefully in thirds by weight, showing that the judgment inflicted by God was carefully chosen and measured out. Then the three parts and what he does with them shows how God divides up His punishment so that it is not only carefully measured but also finely meted out. The nation was to be utterly conquered and shamed. The city and inhabitants are destroyed by fire, sword and scattering. And there is a tiny remnant shielded in the folds of God's goodness and grace, but even they are not immune.

In our video jaded day, we are still struck by the powerful affect of this prophetic drama. Imagine, each day for 430 days, in front of a mock up siege works, a tied up prophet lies on his side with his rather gross bread being baked over cow pats. Then you come by one day and he is sitting with his head and beard shaved, with bits of his hair strewn around him, some of it burning and a bit sticking out of his pocket. And you know that in exile you may be in the safest place of all.

Reflect on the Reasons for God's Judgment (5:5-12)

In our ears today, this sounds harsh. But Israel, as well as we, need to reflect on the reasons for God's judgment.

Destroyed God's Reputation (v.5-10)

First, they had destroyed the reputation of God. They were set in the center of the nations to walk in God's ways so as to be a light for the peoples. Israel, in their worship, was to be witness to God and examples of what it meant to walk with God. This witness was to display the unique and solitary glory of the only one and true God. Thus, they were to call the nations to believe in Yahweh and to bow to Him. Yet, they rebelled against God's Law and corrupted their lives. They rejected God's rules for them and thus His rule over them. They did not even see fit to live by the common rules of the nations around them by common grace.

Therefore, God moved to vindicate His Name by punishing them in the sight of all the nations. God declares that He is against them (v.8). God will move, yes often with long patience, but with sure power against those who are destroying His holy reputation. There is nothing more frightening than to have an all glorious and holy and powerful God be against us.

Defiled God's Sanctuary (v.11-12)

But this was not the end of it. They had defiled the dwelling place of God. They were to be a holy people unto the Lord, sanctifying and serving in the tabernacle and Temple where God dwelt. Yet they brought into it all their detestable abominations. How lovely in its holiness is the dwelling place of God almighty. How ugly in its horribleness is the corrupting wickedness of sinning people.

Therefore, God declares that He will withdraw from them (v.11). Here is both the hope and horror of God on His movable throne. He may come to show His glory to exiles far away from the place of His dwelling. And He may move that glory from resting between the cherubim of gold over the mercy seat covering the Ark of the Tabernacle.

What we have here then is the moving of God to deal with covenant breakers. He is the Sovereign King and Israel were His covenant bound people. This aspect of judgment against covenant breakers shows us that the judgment is neither arbitrary nor unjust. (Duguid, p.100). God has not lost his temper and is striking out at Israel in a fit of rage. Rather, it is the solemn execution of long promised curses upon vassals who broken their suzerainty treaty with their Lord.

This is both encouraging and disconcerting. It is encouraging to know that God is not at the whim of His emotions. His wrath is under His control. But it is still wrath and it may be long in coming, but it will surely come. So the peace and safety of the moment may evaporate like the morning dew under the brightness of the sun of God's fury.

Realize the Purposes of God's Judgment (5:13-17)

So, we had better realize the purposes of God's judgment. Some of this is hard for us. But we have to let the text simply speak. I found that I kept wanting to soften what God is saying and recast it. But God calls us to an unwavering loyalty to His point of view – so the scroll of woe and lamentation must be sweet to us as well.

Why then is God both moving against and departing from Israel?

To Vent His Anger (v.13)

His first purpose is to pour out and expend His fury. God does not bottle up His wrath forever. At some point, against sin and sinners, His wrath is poured out in judgment to His satisfaction. Israel was to know this. We are to realize this. Be awakened, my friend, to your precarious position if you have not believed and bowed to this great and holy and just God.

To Humble Them (v.14-15)

His second purpose is to humble them. The language here points to God's way of judgment as designed to knock them off their high horse. They had become, even sinful as they were, insufferably proud. God meant to strip them of their dignity in front of all the nations and parade their nakedness so that they would be a joke, a by-word, a taunt to the nations. And this humbling work would also stand as a warning to the nations – that is, to us – that God will not be trifled with and God will not tolerate the pride of man.

To Destroy Them (v.16-17)

Finally, God has purposed to destroy them. The deadly arrows and stalking pestilence will bring them to their desolate end. Know this, that God will design the implements of His judgment to exactly suit the sinfulness of its objects.

While all this looks grim and is full of gloom, there are those represented by the bit of hair gathered in the folds of Ezekiel's clothes. A remnant will remain. While now their future does not look bright, there is hope in the protecting power of God.

Conclusion

The Judgment at His Coming

While this has mostly been about prophecy of a judgment that has now been long past, it points us to the sure judgment to come. Sinners will face the God whom they have long rejected and lived in rebellion against. The doom and damnation that awaits is horrid beyond words and beyond imagination. In the midst of real and eternal burning, there is the never ending and hopeless *absence* of God. So will you not plead for the mercy of God? Call on Him today to be saved!

The Judgment at the Cross

The wrath of God against the sins of His redeemed has been vented. O, the loveliness of our Redeemer. For He has stepped into the very path of the wrath of God whose arrows for us pierced Him. God has vented His fury on His Son until He has satisfied Himself so you and I may be free. Isaiah says, "He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." With this agrees the New Testament. "God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And, "He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

O weary souls, draw near Him;
To you I can but bring
One drop of that great ocean,
One blossom of that spring;
Sealed with His kiss, my lips are dumb,
My soul with awe is still;
Let him that is athirst but come,
And freely drink his fill.

Gerhard Tersteegen 1697-1769

When the Lord will be Known

Ezekiel 6-7

Message Overview

Aim To awaken us to the greatness and terribleness of our judgment outside of Christ.

- Agenda**
- To help us understand that judgment is not something to be taken lightly.
 - To call us to serious consideration of ourselves, our pet idols and how reprehensible they are to God.
 - To call for sinners to flee the fury of a justly angry God.
 - To cause us to swell with God-honoring gratitude for the cross and our Redeemer.

- Summary**
- God will not tolerate the idolatrous whoring of His people after other gods.
 - God will judge in such a way as to turn His people away from their sins.
 - God sends His messengers sometimes with cries of alarm to awaken us from our carnal and worldly slumbers.
 - God will tailor His judgment to exactly suit the shape and size, the contours of sin and wickedness

Discussion Questions

Discuss how this text is spoken to exiles about and to people in Jerusalem.
Draw out the purposes here: to purify, to cultivate hatred for sin, to bring to know that God is God alone and Lord.

How do you respond inwardly when the Bible seems so unrelenting in its thundering against sin? How do you evaluate that response?
Does it cause us to tremble? To examine ourselves? To be resentful?

How does the idea of “idolatry” impact us? What real idolatries do we tend to practice and need to repent of?
Initiate with the ones from the text: power and sex

Introduction

Most people in most places have something about themselves that they take pride in. Americans generally take pride in the Statue of Liberty as one of the enduring symbols of America as free and open. The strike against the WTC and the Pentagon on 9/11 were meant to not only kill many, but to swing the ax against two emblems of American pride and power – our commerce and our military might.

Israel had such emblems as well. There was the Temple and its city Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God and His people. It was a beautiful and an elevated city. Every Jewish household was to worship there at set seasons as established by the Law. So, even the most distant Jew had a deep love for his place of worship and the great city. Israel also had her mountains. One author noted that while the borders of Israel may shift through time and war, the mountains of Israel were the constant and never changing place “par excellence”- they were “Israel’s home turf.” (Duguid, p.106) The Psalms are full of illusions to the mountains as representing the grandeur of God, His very great majesty and eternal, unchanging stateliness. The Prophets anticipate a day when Jerusalem and the mountains of Israel will exalted and lifted up, the Gentiles streaming in from every nation and people group.

But there is an ominous da-dum, da-dum rhythm that rings through Ezekiel 4-7. God will move against the city of Israel, Jerusalem with devastating judgment. God will move against the mountains of Israel with dreadful finality. God will destroy Jerusalem the pride of Israel and the mountains of Israel their place of hope. Here are so clear the reasons for, reality of and results of the judgment of God.

But also ringing all through these two chapters is God’s intended purpose for his inescapable punishment. He is moving against them in this way, not merely to destroy them, but so that they will know that He is the Lord. What He does means that He cannot be known in a merely theoretical, academic or distant way. The exquisite wisdom of God tailors the particulars of their punishment to exactly fit the size and shape of their wickedness. The punishment will fit them like an expensive suit.

So the Lord will be known when He claims exclusive loyalty and in his call of warning alarm.

In His Claim of Exclusive Loyalty

(6:1-14)

God is aiming this prophecy, not just against the mountains, but what are on the mountains. Scattered all across them were “high places”; that is, open air groves or chapels for the cultic worship of Canaanite gods. While some Israelites gathered in the remains of these to worship Yahweh, what prevailed down through Israel’s history was a pagan, cultic worship of Baal and Asherah. These idols were served by some of the most horrible pagan rites imaginable including the sacrificing of babies and sex orgies. Those involved in this worship could not be saved by their idols. So while judgment is coming as a punishment, it also is designed so that the worshippers at the high places would come to know that their gods were false and that Yahweh was real. (From, *New Bible Commentary*, D.A. Carson, Ed.)

God is Hostile

(v.1-3)

This oracle opens with God's warning that He is against them. Ezekiel is to set his face against the mountains and speak to the high places. He is to declare that God is against them. This is a massive theme through this part of Ezekiel. Israel needed to understand that their privileged position came through covenant faithfulness, first on God's part to initiate and on their part to respond with joyful fealty, a loyal obedience. Israel's history is one of ever increasing disloyalty and covenantal disobedience to God. So the Word of God through which they were bound to their Lord now comes to speak warning and judgment. He will move with a sword and will bulldoze their groves and chapels.

We simply must hear this message in this day. God is sovereign and supremely glorious. He is worthy of love and loyalty. And since He is worthy of it, He demands it. To spurn not only the love of God but the glory of God in Christ through our rebellion simply calls down on our impenitent heads the hostility of heaven.

God is Housecleaning

(v.4-7)

Because God demands exclusive loyalty, He is going to set about housecleaning. He will cut off their worship and graphically demonstrate for them how revolting this worship actually is. He will destroy and desecrate the places of false worship. He will not only tear them down but He will also chop up the dead corpses of the fallen worshippers and scatter them over the ruins of the alters, groves and chapels. These places of disloyalty and disgrace and disgust will now be the rancid and rotting feasting ground for crawling worms and carrion birds.

So why do we care? No one here has burned a baby in sacrifice. We haven't had an orgy here? These are not the mountains of Israel and I am not Ezekiel. So why do we care that God demands this kind of faithful loyalty to Him and responds, frankly, with unthinkable fury. After all, God loves us and intends the best for us; we have our problems, but Israel surely was different. Well, maybe not so much as we think. The idols and altars here are to the gods of power and fertility. As one writer put it, "Baal and Asherah were in effect the patron gods of sex and guns and [rap], promising to deliver a potent mixture of satisfaction to the desires for power, success and pleasure." (Duguid, p.112)

So we had better care. The church at large has sold out to power and pleasure. We worship being up front and in the lead. People in churches will deceive themselves about their abilities, lie about their qualifications and destroy anyone who gets in their way. Our counseling gives us a slice of the religious landscape where people are worshipping sex and pleasure. Men are enslaved to the pornography of pictures and web sites. Women are enslaved to the pornography of erotic romance novels and magazines. While power and sex do not appear in our culture as overt religious things (you don't go to the Temple of Venus to hire a prostitute), they become our idols and functional gods when we crave them, serve them and are so controlled by them that we participate in them.

God gives Hope**(v.8-10)**

But into this dark picture comes these encouraging, hope-giving words, “I will leave some of you alive.” The hope comes in two exquisite ways.

God moves sovereignly to save and preserve a remnant alive *through* exile. These exiles in Babylon and the ones who would arrive in the next wave are here because God has moved to save them and deliver them. The exile becomes the place of safety and the disclosure of God’s covenant faithfulness.

God has been broken in heart over their whoring hearts and unfaithful ways. When they are awakened to their sorry state in exile, they will repent and hate themselves and their sins. They will know that God is their Lord. They will know that what He has done *is not in vain*. It will accomplish this repenting and restoring and returning work.

So while it often looks bleak in our culture and churches, God will preserve His elect people and will sanctify them. He will bring us to the point where we hate our sin and love our Savior. This fills me with expectant and joyful hope. While the diagnosis looks bleak the great physician is near. While the wound looks deep, He will carry us up and make us whole. Praise God!

God is Homing-in**(v.11-14)**

That awakening ministry comes through the dire prophecies. Clap your hands!! Stomp your feet!!! Wake up! Listen. God is circling in. He is an eagle who has the prey in His sights and is spiraling in for the kill. So while God will preserve and protect, because He is a gloriously jealous husband and regent, He will not be slighted. He will not be cuckolded. And through the sword and starvation and suffering, a whoring nation will know that He is Lord alone.

Make no mistake, my beloved. God has exclusive claim to the worship and love and obedience of every living soul. And those who have declared their allegiance to God through faith and repentance must worship this God alone, corporately with God’s people and personally in all spheres of life. In other words, God will be God alone to you. C.S. Lewis puts it this way, “It would seem that the Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot understand what is meant by the offer of a holiday as the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” But beyond this, when we are so easily pleased by the idolatrous desires that drive us, we are not pleasing to God. Thus, what follows is judgment terrible to consider.

In His Call of Warning Alarm (7:1-27)

We have heard around our homes in the last year or so, the warning wail of tornado sirens. We hear an alarm that danger is near. In olden days, sentries and watchmen on the walls would have trumpets who would blare out the alarm. And so we have here. The God who claims our exclusive loyalty sends messengers who call out a warning alarm.

There is a shift in the tone and tempo of the language here that is difficult to convey in English. The sentences becomes fragments, somewhat disjointed with poor grammar and a potent sense of brevity and breathlessness. It's as though the messenger has collapsed from his horse and is panting for his breath and in broken, desperate language is pointing to a doom that is just outside the door.

Why is this doom and judgment so alarming?

God's Involvement is Personal (v.1-9)

This portion is filled with first person pronouns. God is personally and intimately involved in their judgment.

In its Summary (v.1-4)

God Himself will bring the punishment to all points of the compass, to all the people for all their sins. He will be personally relentless in bringing upon them what they deserve. He will ensure that He Himself has no pity. This is so that they will know that God is the one who is the Lord of their being judged.

In its Specifics (v.5-9)

The warning of judgment to come is given in a very neat, tight way. To catch the essence of it, we would render it like this: "The end comes. Comes the end." The placing of the two words for "comes" next to one another serves to draw our attention to the magnitude and the amplitude of God personal commitment to bring judgment. It will not be a day of rejoicing but of weeping and great agony.

God's Judgment is Pervasive (v.10-27)

In counseling we talk about the need for wide angle and microscopic data gathering – we gather details about a number of events and then on an event establishing patterns and heart themes. God's judgment is portrayed like this. It is seen as wide angle – affecting all and microscopic – particularly affecting each one.

The Announcement of Impending Judgment (v.10-11)

The announcement is styled a "doom". This is not just dooms day preaching, but recognition of what God's judgment will really look like. In an arresting allusion, the judgment is compared to Aaron's rod that budded where the act of budding confirmed Aaron as the priest. So the budding of their wickedness and ways has simply confirmed the rightness of God's judgment.

The Application of Inescapable Judgment (v.12-27)

Thus, that judgment is inescapable. This is unpacked in two sets of threes. There is a chiasitic structure here that helps us with the flow. The first set of threes shows us the judgment in general terms as affecting all people. The second set of threes shows us the judgment in particular terms with specific impacts. (PPT Slide will represent this structure.)

a. Futility of Commerce (v.12-13)

God's judgment will destroy their prosperity and their economic strength. The siege will render it ineffective and powerless, closing it down into an ever smaller circle of transactions.

b. Debility in Circumstances (v.14-15)

God's judgment renders the people incapable of responding to a call to battle. The disease and famine have so weakened them that an army cannot even be effectively raised against the invader.

c. Universality of Disgrace (v.16-18)

God's judgment simply humiliates the people who mourn, grieve and are shamed. They sit wrapped in burlap, ashes in their hair, rocking and hugging their knees.

A. Futility of Money (v.19-20)

The judgment reaches the point to where money is worthless. Even what we think of as being impervious to disaster, as financial havens are no longer useful. After all, you cannot eat gold and silver.

B. Robbery of Temple (v.21-24)

Unable to fight the enemy, the Temple is overrun, sacked and desecrated. The pitiful state of the people is reflected in even being unable to resist this final humiliation.

C. Individuality of Desolation (v.25-27)

In waves upon waves of ruin, reaching even to all of the leadership approaches the desolating judgment of God. From the religious leaders to the politicians to the people in the street, the judgment of God is chosen and applied to exactly suit who they are and the way they are.

What a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of a living God! Look at the devastation that awaited a rebellious people. And so, we must worship and serve our God with awe and reverence for He is a living, consuming fire. I know that we want to bask in the love of God for us and grace of God to us in the loveliness of Christ. But we will ever more treasure and savor our salvation and the God who brought it to us, and us to it, when we realize deep in our souls the frightful doom that awaited us.

Conclusion

God is passionate about His exclusive glory. He will tolerate no contender among His people. While the outward expression of our idolatry may look different, its inward reality is not: sadly, even among God's people, power and sex are often worshipped.

It is possible to be utterly sincere in our religious commitment and utterly in error. Being truly committed to the God who is there is a matter of faith, of believing God in an obeying way. If one is thinking wrongly of God, it is doubtful that one is thinking of God at all. As Daniel Block has written, "The course of human history is strewn with the shattered remains of human imagination, and the corpses of deluded idolaters." (Daniel Block, *Ezekiel*, p.238)

The church, not our nation, is to hear these words in a trembling way. There is no special covenant relation to God by any nation today. The people of God today are the new people group called by God's Spirit living in exile till our King returns. We are His virgin bride and betrothed. Shame! Shame! Shame on us when we stain ourselves with whoredom with the world!

The love of God can be most appreciated only when we see how vile we are and the mercy of God best appropriated only when we see how wicked we are. All the efforts to ground God's saving initiatives in human worth, value and dignity are a delusion. God saved me in spite of my wickedness not because of my wonderfulness.

The bell of this chapter has rung repeatedly warning of the Day of the Lord. This is not just any day in which the judgment of God falls. Ezekiel's prophecy here connects him to both Hosea and Zephaniah. The Day of the Lord was to be this horrible period in which the fury of the wrath of God is poured on Israel. But this Day of the Lord prophecy has both its near and immediate fulfillment in what unfolds in Babylon and its far and distant fulfillment in a Day of Wrath which has not yet come and will surely yet come upon all flesh. My beloved, there is a day in which God will come and will pour out unimaginable fury and wrath upon the world. This is the Day of the Lord, the wrath of God. In that day, those alive will call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them to end the terrors of their misery, not knowing it will simply usher them into the darkness of damnation and eternal doom. But we need not fear that Day of Wrath, those who have fled for refuge to Christ. Be warned of that Day. Be invited today to trust the Lord Jesus Christ who has suffered the wrath of God in our place. Believe in His saving work on the cross and bow to His Lordship over your life, now. Lest, the Day of the Wrath of the Lamb overtake you.

When the Lord is Jealous

Ezekiel 8-9

Message Overview

Aim To examine our worship in the light of God's evaluation of Israel's worship.

- Agenda**
- To identify the corresponding areas of corrupt worship and warn against them.
 - To show the relationship between idolatry and ideas.
 - To show the affect of corrupt worship on the worshippers and their vulnerability to God's decisive judgments.
 - To call for grief and heaviness over the prevailing corruption of worship and walk in the church at large.

- Summary**
- God's glory is contrasted to corrupted, faithless, disloyal worship.
 - The abomination of Israel's idolatry is exposed along the lines of Deuteronomy 5 as a justification of God's implacable fury and outpoured judgment.
 - God's judgment is accompanied by mercy on those whose love for Yahweh is expressed in grief and sighing over sin.

Discussion Questions

Be sure that the Flock is clear about how untrue thoughts about God are the essence of idolatry.

While idols may be functional around our wants, they are formed within our thoughts. Eventually, all idols will take some outward expression in conduct.

Discuss the Biblical Theological theme of God marking and protecting His own in the midst of judgment.

Use this as an encouragement and incentive to endurance when there is persecution, pressure and punishment

Take the categories of false idols as listed and discuss illustrations of them in our context and culture.

Introduction

From the events of 9/11 have emerged a revealing of the national character like we not seen in this generation. Heroism, sacrifice, determination and just raw grit were not expected given the pervasive portrayal of Americans as soft, sentimental and self-centered. But other, more disturbing things have emerged as well. Some of us watched the interfaith memorial service conducted at the National Cathedral. We watched as a parade of idolaters offered varying words of condolence to the grieving and words of prayer to their false gods. Now that may not be what you think you saw, but this is what happened. I wish I could say that the God of the Bible was represented by the men claiming his Name – but I think not. It is disconcerting when what is done makes it look as though each one speaking is representing a real and worthy deity.

While this might be expected out in the world, it ought to be wholly unexpected in the church. In an effort to include as many as possible claiming the Name of Christ as their redeemer, we have now emasculated God, stripping Him of His omniscience and His sovereignty. Some claiming to be evangelicals are even suggesting if not outright declaring that people may be saved through other religions. The Evangelical Theological Society in a non-binding resolution stated that the society believes "the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all events past, present and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents." The resolution passed on a vote of 253 in favor to 66 opposed with 41 abstentions after a long and heated debate. In other words, 66 professing evangelicals believe that God does not know the future and 41 believe that we should not make it a distinctive, binding doctrine. This means that in the premier evangelical union in the United States, 1/3 of its membership are at least open to if not believers in Open Theism. The President of the Society, Darrell Bock argued that sharp boundaries should not be drawn for the evangelical movement. Instead, he argued, evangelicalism may be likened to a "village green," which is defined more by the center than by the boundaries. (See the *Openness of God View Rejected by the ETS*, by Russell D. Moore in [The Banner of Truth](#).)

All that is well and good (actually not), but how do we take an evaluation of worship which is primarily focused on external ritual and use it to examine worship which is primarily focusing in internal realities? In other words, how does God's jealous demands for pure worship in a Temple relate to God's delight in pure worship among and in His people?

Regardless of the vehicle or cultural expression for our worship, Biblically authentic worship delights a God whose glory fuels His jealousy. In other words, it is not the changing time and place and structures in which worship takes place that is significant. It is the nature and character of God that defines whether the worship being rendered is pure or profane. And it is vital for that revealed nature and character to be truly perceived, proclaimed and prized.

Why, chapters 8-9 in Ezekiel show us that our God, jealous for His glory, exposes and exterminates corrupt worship.

God will Display His Glory

(8:1-4)

This section, though connected thematically to what has gone before, has an obvious divider: we know exactly when this happened. On our calendar, it is September 18, 592 BC.

The Visit by God

(v.1-2)

There is a meeting of the elders of Judah in the living room at Ezekiel's home. While we are told the stated purpose for their meeting, we know that they were there because of the authoritative power of God on Ezekiel. The practice of the Hebrew leadership sitting before the prophet of God for instruction as well as to be present when and as he receives a word from God is well established in the Bible.

From the way it is described, it seems as though God appeared to him, but without the movable throne. Here it is somewhat like Revelation 1 in its description. So here is a pre-incarnate (before He is born) appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Vision from God

(v.3-4)

The scene now shifts from its physical reality to a vision. In the vision, the Lord reaches out a hand and takes Ezekiel by the hair and transports him to Jerusalem to give him a tour of the present corrupt and abominable worship of the Hebrews remaining in the land. In apocalyptic and prophetic writing, we would not necessarily expect that this is literally Ezekiel grabbed up by his pony-tail and flown to Jerusalem to see all that follows occurring at the same time. It is a vision. Ezekiel is very careful to relate that he goes there "in visions of God".

The visions of Daniel and of John on the Isle of Patmos have this same sense. The writer is not physically transported but sees what he does through the vehicle of a vision. This may not be real significant for interpreting Ezekiel, but it is critical for interpreting Revelation where the "then, I saw" intimate not, what happens next in time, but rather what he saw next in the vision.

Ezekiel is brought to the gate on the north side where there is sitting an image that provoked God to jealousy. And there he sees the movable throne of God as earlier in the book. In other words, here, in the Temple is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God, Yahweh, the Lord. In the very presence of the glory of God is an intruder, an image, an abomination.

God will be known when He displays His glory where it belongs. And when God's glory shines the brightest, it illuminates all that is false, all that is error, all that makes up a corrupt worship.

God will Expose Corrupt Worship**(8:5-18)**

We are shocked by wickedness and debauchery. We can be sickened by the flaunting of scandalous sin at Mardi Gras or spring break. And the Hebrews have enough disgusting wickedness to go around. But you know what God is saying here? The really shocking thing about you is that you do not worship God – corporately or personally. The really shocking thing here is that you have corrupted the worship of God. What then does corrupt worship look like?

False Refuges**(v.4-6)**

The image here is probably one of the Canaanite gods. It is here at the gate to protect the Hebrews from being overrun. The image here is to be a defender of Israel against her enemies. This idol is being relied on as a refuge, a place of safety and security. From the King's view, what is needed is syncretism. We need to accept a plurality of gods for our safety and security. From God's view, it is an image of abomination – it is disgusting. *CORRUPT WORSHIP INVOLVES PUTTING TRUST IN FALSE REFUGES.*

False Ideas**(v.7-13)**

In the vision, Ezekiel has to dig into a hidden place inside the Temple where images were drawn on the wall and incense was offered up. These images are described as being of non-kosher animals and insects. Here is the worship of all that false gods of Egypt. Incense was burned in worship by the 70 Elders of the house of Israel there. Ezekiel is not afraid to identify one of them by name. These false images represent the way in which worship is corrupted by false ideas. Where do I get that? Look at verse 10. See the phrase, "For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" They do what they do because they think what they are thinking. Neither of these statements is true. God does see them. They know that in their souls – after all they doing this in the dark, in secret rooms and with forbidden rites. And God has not forsaken the land – at least, not yet. *CORRUPT WORSHIP ARISES FROM FALSE IDEAS.*

False Hopes**(v.14-15)**

As we move now in the vision to the gate of the Temple itself, we pass these women who are weeping for Tammuz. Now what is the big deal here? Who is Tammuz and why is weeping for him an abomination? Tammuz was an ancient nature deity worshiped in Babylonia. A god of agriculture and flocks, he personified the creative powers of spring. He was loved by the fertility goddess Ishtar, who, according to one legend, was so grief-stricken at his death that she contrived to enter the underworld to get him back. According to another legend, she killed him and later restored him to life. These legends and his festival, commemorating the yearly death and rebirth of vegetation, corresponded to the festivals of the Phoenician and Greek Adonis and of the Phrygian Attis. The Sumerian name of Tammuz was Dumuzi. This was celebrated by a period of lamentation and grief for the loss of fertility. Here in the court of women in the Temple are women lamenting for a dead god and hoping for the resurrection of their sexual vigor and fruitfulness. It is the pathetic delusion of perpetual sexual power and cycles of fertility. *CORRUPT WORSHIP BANKS ON FALSE AND ILLUSIONARY HOPES.*

False Devotion

(v.16-17)

“You think that is bad,” God says, “Let me show you this.” In the vision we now see in the inner court of the Temple, 25 men whose backs are to Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was. They are on their knees, facing east and worshipping the sun. Their worship of the sun has physically and spiritually caused them to turn their backs on God. It should give all Christians pause when we think about sun rise services and rabbits and Ishtar eggs – when we blur the distinctive and unique resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with pagan worship celebrating sex and fertility and spring. *CORRUPT WORSHIP BLENDS THE TRUE AND THE FALSE.*

Daniel Block points out that it is no wonder that God keeps characterizing these corrupt worships with words like disgusting and associations that less elegantly and more pointedly could be called dung.

The progression here in this vision follows progression in *THE WARNING* in Deuteronomy 5:15-31. There, God’s people are not to make any image in a human likeness, nor of anything in the animal kingdom to be worshipped as either representing Yahweh or as a god in and of itself. Further, they were not to worship the heavenly bodies, the sun moon or stars, in bowing down to them and serving them. These things were supposed to be revelatory of God to all the peoples. If they, the out of Egypt called people, disobeyed, God would punish so that they would utterly perish from the land.

Further, the progression here is related to *THE SOURCE* of their idolatry. It begins with the Canaanite’s around them, the Egyptians they were rescued from and the Babylonians they were being conquered by.

But there is one question arising from this. Why is my jealousy a vice and God’s jealousy, a virtue? Dr. D.A. Carson says that “It is wrong for me to be at the center of my world’s relationships; but it is glory for God.” Only God can be jealous in this way because only God can demand this kind of unswerving loyalty and absolute worship. If I am jealous it is because I am trying to be something I am not. If God is **not** jealous He is trying to be something He is not. Since God will not share His glory with another, then He is jealous to prize and protect that glory – and so should we.

False and corrupt worship then tends *TO REPLACE GOD* with gods of our own making and design so that while we think they are serving us, we are actually serving them. Here we are tempted by false refuges – we will trust the gods of science and psychology and money to bring us the safety and security from the ravages of sickness and sin.

False and corrupt worship tends *TO THRIVE IN IGNORANCE AND DARKNESS*. This is why there must be an open and clear preaching of all the truth. Here we are tempted by the value of silence – some truths are kept silent. You see, we change the God who is worshipped by the truths we do not teach. Corrupt worship may be intentional, against better knowledge. But frankly, it is often grown in the fertile soil of ignorance.

False and corrupt worship tends *TO INCORPORATE THE FALSE AND THE TRUE*. There is a great tendency to allow syncretism to creep into worship. So in Brazil it is possible to see images of Mary and of demons sold side-by-side in front of Catholic churches. Some of what is taught as being within the “village green” of evangelicalism is nothing but paganism with a smiling face. Years ago, Rheinhold Niebhuur wrote of the liberal, pseudo Christianity of his day that they picture “a God without wrath, who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment, thorough the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

Corrupt worship then is not about style or length or music or liturgy – corrupt worship is about the object of our worship: who is the One we worship. And it is corrupting, not just in our public services, but to all of our lives. We will become more and more like what or whom we adore.

God will Deal with Corrupt Worshippers (8:17-9:11)

Finally, God says He has had enough. One writer has paraphrased verse 17 like this, “Your corrupt worship has developed such moral pus that it is a stench in God’s nostrils.” (D.A. Carson, *The Glory of God in a Collapsing Culture*, lectures). Block thinks that it is likely that God is here indicating that the Hebrews have such contempt for God that what they are doing is simply making a vulgar sign to God. The point here is for Ezekiel and his audience in all ages to sense how God feels about this. Authentic, God-honoring worship is not about what is meaningful to us, but about what God approves and requires. Worship is then not just exaltation and exposition on Sunday, it is also how you love and live in the grind through the week.

God will not put up with corrupt worshippers. He will deal with them. He will do a little shouting of His own (9:1-2).

God Authorizes Those Sent against Corrupt Worship(v.1-2)

This is a scene that just begs for dramatic staging. With a loud voice, the Lord summons the appointed men to execute His judgment. They are called “the executioners.” They come prepared to carry out their task. And they are accompanied by someone whose role and office is different, because he is clothed in linen and has a writing case with him. So here is a squad of executioners (think dark cloaks, hoods and long heavy swords) accompanied by a clerk (think white linen with a briefcase.)

The place where they are authorized reminds us of God’s judgment and God’s mercy, the bronze altar. The bronze is consistently used in the Bible to represent God’s judgment against sin. The altar is the place where man can meet God to have his sin dealt and can receive the pardoning and forgiving grace of the Lamb.

God Exempts Those Grieved by Corrupt Worship (v.3-4)

God is personally engaged in identifying and protecting those who are grieved by corrupt worship. The movement of the glory of God here is similar to how the chapter opens. Rather than the whole mobile throne moving, the representation of the glory of God Himself, moves up from the doorway and instructs the clerk in his task.

The Lord marks all those who are to be delivered from the impending execution. The clerk is to identify everyone who is grieved and who sighs over the sins and corrupt worship of people around them. It is more than finding those who don't participate – it is a seeking out of those whose loyalty to God aligns them with the affections and attitudes of God. They are weighed down in spirit and are broken in heart over the terrible abandonment of God by His people.

There is a great lesson for us here. Several times in Scripture, Jesus comes face-to-face with disloyalty and covenant unfaithfulness, even in His own disciples. So we find Him heavy in spirit and even weeping over Jerusalem, not out of frustration, but in sighing over the pain and punishment they are about to bear. It sets the tone for us. While we must at times thunder against sin, it should not predominate in our lives and ministries. Particularly, the sins of the church must not only be *not* participated in, but must be wept and grieved and sighed over.

God Destroys Those Involved in Corrupt Worship (v.5-11)

Then God sends the executioners to their grisly task. While at the Passover, only firstborn sons died, here all died except those marked by the gracious instruction from God. But what looms huge in Ezekiel's mind is the utter and universal destruction: men, women, boys and girls without exception and without pity. And this is to begin at the very place where God is supposed to be worshipped, but was not – His sanctuary. In Israel's history, when people in the sanctuary who were to be executed were taken out into the courtyard so their blood would not stain nor defile the Temple. In a powerful gesture, God simply shrugs about all that and says, "Defile the [Temple] and fill the courts with corpses." It simply doesn't matter any more.

These executors of God's will and word move with speed and deliberate obedience. There is no hesitation. They do what they do, not because the task is pleasant or suits them, but because the God of heaven commands them.

And Ezekiel is stunned. He cries out in anguish. It is so hard to believe. While the prophecies about Jerusalem's inhabitants being destroyed by starvation, sword and scattering were terrible, it suddenly seems to have hit Ezekiel what this is going to mean. This vision has shown Ezekiel what he has seen before and spoken of before. But now it has been designed to show and shock Ezekiel so that he really feels what is going on.

God responds by reminding Ezekiel of the justice of His judgment. The really shocking thing here in God's eyes is not the utter destruction of wicked and corrupt worshippers. The really shocking thing here is that they do not worship God.

Ah, but mercy is not entirely absent. The clerk appears having completed his task. He has marked out godly people grieved over sin and thus, by implication, preserved them from destruction. These are those who will come into exile later.

This is a very sobering text. If worship of God that disgusts God is a matter of ideas and inward images that leads to sinning and corrupt practices, then this severe mercy of God is near. May we grieve and sigh and weep over the lack of Godwardness that prevails all over our churches, all over our land and all over the world.

Conclusion

Connections

The allusions here to Exodus 12 are intentional and widespread. Ezekiel intends to make a connection yet redemptive-historically as a contrast. At the Passover, most of the people of God are waiting under the blood for protection from the avenging angel and deliverance by exodus out of the pagan slavery of Egypt. In Ezekiel, a few of the remnant are waiting under the signet seal of God for safety from the executioners and deliverance into exile out of the corrupted worship of Israel.

The language in Ezekiel 8 is unpacked in several New Testament texts. There is an image raised up in the future that will be animated by Satanic power and worshipping it will be required. Those who are sealed by God as His elect will not worship it and will be martyred as a result. This is called the abomination of desolation. It marks the turning point in the middle of the last 7 years of human history. So the history of Israel culminates in this in Ezekiel and the history of the world culminates in a like image. Here is a Biblical theological theme that begins in the garden with man being enticed to be like god and Satan's placing himself before man as the supreme object of worship and the thunderous wrath of God that falls.

As the people of God, we must warned:

- Of the importance of *THINKING TRULY ABOUT GOD*. The great exchange in Romans 1 begins with exchanging truth for the lie and ends in exchanging the worship of God for the worship of creation leading to moral failure and corruption.
- Of the danger of *PRIMARILY SEEKING IN OUR WORSHIP AND WALK WHAT IS MEANINGFUL TO US*, rather than what is approved by God. Yes, we want our praise of God to be authentic, not only in its content, but also in its form. But we must be clear and discerning in our approach, our analysis and our application. While we aim to be contemporary, let us guard against becoming merely carnal.
- Of the need *FOR GRIEF AND SADNESS, AS WELL AS SEPARATION* from corrupted worship. That God is not honored and glorified and magnified as He ought should weigh on us and fuel in us a passion to see His revitalizing work in all His people.
- Of how we in our world *BANK OUR TRUST ON FALSE REFUGES, FALSE IDEAS, FALSE HOPES AND FALSE DEVOTIONS*. So much of our technological and material riches as well as our psychological sophistication lure and lull us into trusting them and the promises of good for us they hold out to us.

So, bank your hope in our Redeemer and Ruler. Trust in His great, unending and perfect promises that hold out to us the reward of God Himself as our desire and our delight. As we rest in those promises, through that faith comes the transforming grace to become like the Lord Jesus. May He do that work among us for His glory.

When the Lord Departs

Ezekiel 10-11

Message Overview

Aim To cause us to long for and to live in the light of glory of God in Christ

- Agenda**
- To inspire awe at the fearsome presence and power of God and His heavenly attendants.
 - To show the folly and futility of rejecting God's Word and warnings.
 - To invoke a sense of loss, of grief and groaning at God's departure.
 - To connect us to the wonderful, hope-filled promises in the New Covenant.

- Summary**
- God's indignant and stately departure is described as His movable throne is seen in greater clarity and His obedient servants scatter the coals of judgment.
 - Israel's leadership denies danger and is judged by God.
 - God assures by promises of newness for God's people in a future day.
 - God departs and destruction falls.

**Discussion
Questions**

Introduction

Does God ever give up on people? Now before you answer this, you need to think Biblically about the question.

- The wickedness of all of the world's population except for one family, Noah, brought upon them the world-wide destruction of the flood.
- In Romans 2, the great exchange of truth for the lie, God for idols, purity for perversion ends in God handing them over to the consequences of their sin.
- In 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation, we find God moving with terrible fury and awesome wrath to bring unrepentant people to the eternal damnation of hell.

So Israel is not exempt. When God gives up on people, He gives them over to what they want to do. He gives them over to their sin. Then He judges them. So it is with Israel – they have wanted the gods around them and the pleasures and promises they held out to them, so Yahweh hands them over and moves to judge them.

So what was begun in Ezekiel 8-9 reaches its full and final end as the glory departs.

The Fearsome Majesty

(10:1-22)

[Read the chapter.] We have seen this majestic and fearsome movable throne of God and the glorious One who is seated there in Babylon (ch.1) and now in Jerusalem (Ch.9-10). The message is clear. The God of the Bible, Yahweh, is not just a tribal god. Nor is He just a temple god. And He is no local deity. He is not confined to some immovable pedestal. When He comes and actually appears to and for the sake of His people, His coming and going is accompanied with regal dignity. He is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. The umbrella of His authority and ability, of His Presence and Power is not just over Jerusalem, not just over this small world, but extends out through the sea of stars to the farthest reaches of all that is. Therefore, it is of utmost importance when the one and only Sovereign Lord *is preparing to depart*.

In the Description of His Attendants

In chapter one, we were introduced to this movable throne and the living creatures who bore it up. Now, we have the clear identity of the living creatures as cherubim. These amazing beings are always associated with the throne of God and the Ark of the Covenant. In the Scriptures, they are:

MIGHTY PROTECTORS OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD. After the Fall, they were stationed at the entrance to the Garden to guard and guide the way – to guard against contamination of God and to guide fallen man to the place where they may meet with God. In Isaiah 6 they announce continually God's triune holiness.

MIGHTY ATTENDANTS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. Whether in their physical appearance in the garden, with the vehicle or around the throne in heaven, or as the golden statues overlooking the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle and Temple, their presence indicates God is near.

MIGHTY LEADERS OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD. In the book of Revelation, the four living creatures around the throne exalt and exult in the sovereign Lord who is the saving Lamb. Their thundering voices like roar of a falls or the crashing waves, leads all the hosts of heaven in antiphonal praise. What a scene is depicted as we proclaim in responsive acclaim, in a round, the worth and wonder of God.

And just a note in anticipation of Ezekiel 28. In the beginning there were five cherubim – one who was mighty, wise, beautiful and who spread his wings over the throne of God. This is the one in whose heart sin arose, who aspired to be god and led the foul rebellion, first in heaven, then throughout the cosmos till the Day of his destruction, begun at the cross and consummated at Jesus' coming. This one was known then as Lucifer, Son of Light and is now, Beelzebub, Prince of Darkness –Satan, the devil, the deceiver, the dragon, the enemy of God and His people, the accuser of the brethren.

Ezekiel's view of the movable throne and the cherubim comes from a different perspective. He can both see more detail and clarifies other aspects. The movable throne is enveloped in a cloud of brightness that does not hide, but actually enhances its beauty. The cherubim and their accompanying wheels are covered in eye-shaped jewels the sparkle and in whose depths there appears life and intelligence. The crystal dome appearing like ice is held up by the arched wings of the cherubim who are arrayed in a square underneath it. There appears to be a bed of glowing coals suspended beneath the crystal dome, pulsing with fire. The living creatures are once again described as having four-faces, but now the calf face from Ezekiel 1 is identified as the cherub's face. We can only surmise that what Ezekiel is intending is that the self-awareness, the consciousness of the cherub looks out through the calf's face. Further, now the wheels are described as spinning – he is emphatic that this is so because he says that he heard them actually called, "the whirling wheels." And there is on the top of the dome the splendid throne carved from a single jewel. At first it appears empty. Then the pillar of glory and the appearance of a Man, Lord God, sits upon it.

This second description might seem redundant to us. But the point here is that this divine chariot is drawn up to the south side of the Temple as far from the abominations of chapters 8-9 as possible. God and His glory are the central focus of this chapter as they were supposed to be the central focus of the people of God and the worship of God and the city of God. The departure that is to come should be awful and agonizing to His people – but it is hardly recognized.

In the Directions to the Angel

In the midst of all this splendor, the voice of God commands. The angelic being from chapter 8-9 who appeared as a clerk to mark out those who grieved and groaned is summoned. He is ordered to turn from his work of salvation, its rescue and deliverance, to a work of condemnation, its ruin and destruction.

He is to go in between the cherubim and take out some of the burning coals and to scatter them over the city. While the coals on Isaiah's lips in Isaiah 6 purified him from his sin and prepared him for his prophetic ministry, these coals are to punish Israel for their sin and to pour out on them the fiery indignation of God.

As this angelic clerk, this linen clothed man, moves to obey, one of the cherubim reaches out with his hand underneath his body-covering wing, picks up the coal and gives it him. Such stately unity of purpose to obey the Sovereign Lord in every detail of His commands!

In the Departure from the Temple

Verse 15 is stunning, “And cherubim mounted up!” They lift up their wings in a thunderous roar. As they prepare to rise up, the glory of the Lord that dwelt between the earthly cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant, having moved to the threshold of the Temple, now moves with stately dignity and is seated on His throne. And so the glory of God in His splendid and stunning chariot rises from the Temple and moves to the east gate of the city. There He pauses once again to show Ezekiel two things: the horribleness of the ongoing false counsel and the hope of newness in the future covenant.

Why this long description of the awesome vehicle and the fearsome creatures and the stately splendor of God in His glory? It is to show us that God is not being chased out, but is leaving on His own. God is not fleeing as one who has been defeated by the gods and the power of Babylon. No. The very departure of God ensures the destruction that will follow. What we see is a great sense of indignant and offended majesty – He sweeps out.

The False Counsel

(11:1-13)

Ezekiel is now taken by the Spirit of God in his vision to the east gate of the Lord’s house. This is the first time in these 4 chapters that the Temple, which has been called “the house,” is now designated as “the house of the Lord.” There is both a sense of irony and deep loss. It is the house that God possess and yet is now not where God dwells. So here is Ezekiel, in the eastern gate of the Temple, looking out over the city to the eastern gate over which the divine vehicle, the glorious chariot of God now hovers. And he sees these 25 men who are the leaders of Israel. God now unveils their destructive and deceptive counsel.

Their Assertion arising from Smug Arrogance

(v.1-4)

These men, who ought to be proclaiming the Word of God and reinforcing the warnings from God, are comforting the people with false counsel. These political leaders have taken over since the 2nd deportation. God quotes them in order to indict them. The couplet here in verse 3 demonstrates their God-rejecting arrogance.

ALL IS WELL BECAUSE THEY ARE SETTLED. They have no need to build houses now. They have taken over both the rule and the riches of the departed leadership.

ALL IS WELL BECAUSE THEY ARE SECURE. They are safe in the city. They are like an expensive cut of prime beef safely stored in a caldron whose lid is on tight to keep out bugs, vermin and rot.

God's Answer declaring Sure Judgment (v.5-13)

So God commands Ezekiel to "Prophesy, prophesy against them." Here is the folly and futility in rejecting and denying reality and truth. Effectively He says, "So that's what you think. I know what you are thinking. But here is what I say."

Then God turns their little saying against them. Yes, they are the meat and the city is a cauldron. But they are chopped up stew and are being cooked by the fire of the fury of God. While they think they are safe in the pot (Jerusalem) God will take them out of their supposed safety and destroy them outside the city. He will do this because they have not loved nor honored God by obeying Him and walking in all His ways.

Suddenly, while Ezekiel is prophesying, one of the leaders, Pelatiah, falls over dead! Again, Ezekiel is stunned. He has seen the executioners move at the command of God and now his very words seem to have had a judging affect. So he responds with the very same question, "Will God utterly destroy all, including the remnant?"

The Future Hope (11:14-21)

The answer to Ezekiel's question is "No." God will not utterly destroy. Even though God punishes His people in their sins, He also protects them and promises to unfold the realities of His covenants to them.

In God's Protection (11:14-16)

The remnant that God is delivering is not those who are left in the city. Ezekiel is looking in the wrong place for the surviving remnant. God will scatter those He intends to save and then will be a sanctuary for them wherever He has scattered them. His remnant He removes from the place where His judgment will fall. Where they are sent, there God surrounds them with His protecting care.

This is an important message of hope for the exiles, both to those already with Ezekiel in Babylon as well as those who would be arriving shortly in the final deportation. This is so important for them to understand. While the exile appeared to be a bad thing, it actually is what God was using to purify, protect and preserve them. They were scattered to the safety of God's sanctuary.

By God's Promises (11:17-20)

If God scatters them, then He will also gather them. These promises are to arouse hope in them while pointing forward to New Covenant realities encompassing not only the remnant, but Jew and Gentile. While the greatness of what is being promised is over the horizon and thus not visible to them (nor to Ezekiel, probably), what is near should draw out trust and gratitude.

THE PROMISE OF A PURIFYING RESTORATION. God promises to gather them and to give them the land of Israel. When they return, they will purify the land of its abominations and its idols. Out of the exodus they entered the land and out of the exile they will return to the land.

THE PROMISE OF A TRANSFORMING REGENERATION. God promises to change their hearts by giving them a new spirit. The Holy Spirit would transform them giving them hearts for God and placing in those inner beings the fullness of the Word of God. He will do this so that they will obey God from the heart and do all that He commands.

THE PROMISE OF AN ABIDING RELATIONSHIP. God promises to secure and sustain His relationship with them. He will empower them so that they will never turn away from God. He will do so because He will never turn away from them.

Through God's Punishment

(11:21)

But God will not cancel out His glory nor His holy demands. Neither He nor His promised benefits are to be taken for granted. He deserves an unswerving loyalty and fealty to His Name – that is, to be lovingly trusted and obeyed from the heart. But if those who are gathered out of the exile return to their sinful ways, then God will bring upon their heads their full and final end. As we know now, that is what happened in 70 AD when Jerusalem fell, the Temple was burned and the Jews scattered upon their rejection of Christ in the flesh and later, in the apostolic preaching.

The Final Departure

(11:22-25)

The majestic glory leaves inaugurating the awful destruction.

In its Grave Progression

(11:22-23)

One writer comments, “Yahweh abandons the city by His own decision, for His own reasons, in His own time and by His own means.” (*Ezekiel*, Block, p.360.) God's glorious presence has moved from the Holy of Holies to the gate of His house, the Temple. There, mounted upon His divine chariot, He moves to the gate of the city. Now, the cherubim lift their wings and in a decreasing rumble move to the mountain on the east of the city, the Mount of Olives.

From Ezekiel's vantage spot, the Mount of Olives would be on the horizon. So the glory of God departs upward over the horizon, presumably to heaven.

In its Sad Proclamation

(11:24-25)

The Spirit of God now moves Ezekiel in the vision back to his home. The vision ends. And he relates to the exiles all that he has seen. The Spirit of God has given Ezekiel the Word of God that he must now, however hard or unwelcome, declare to the people of God.

Conclusion

Its Future Return

And the glory that departed did not return with the homecoming of the exiles. It did not return with the building of the second temple. It did not return until the day it walked the marble stones in the Lord Jesus Christ. For, John writes, "We beheld His glory, full of grace and truth." There will be a day when in sovereign and supreme glory He will come again to set foot on the mount and consummate in joy the beauty of the bride and splendor of the city. He will make His tabernacle with man. And it will be done. But not yet... not yet.

Its Final Reality

Now the promises in chapter 11 are echoed in other texts being called there the New Covenant promises. While not designated so clearly here, any well read Hebrew would make the connections to other texts. While the return from exile at the end of the captivity was a small beginning of the fulfillment of these promises, the great reality does not unfold till Jesus comes and inaugurates the fulfillment at the cross. We know this because in the Lord's Table, Jesus calls on us, Jew and Gentile, to remember Him and that the cup represents the New Covenant in His blood. The Apostles understood that the prophets were pointing to Christ and to the grand fulfillment of these promises in Christ. These promises incorporate the old (Land) and the new (heart transformation) are fulfilled, not just for ethnic Jews, but for Jew and Gentile as one new man in Christ. These are fulfilled in larger and greater ways than could be imagined. We see in Acts how Jesus' resurrection and ascension is the inauguration, the beginning of the fulfillment with the consummation, the completion yet to come. In your own reading, look carefully at Peter's sermons in Acts. In Acts 2:29-36, Jesus' resurrection and ascension are seen as fulfilling the Davidic Covenant. See this in Peter's understanding in Acts 3:17-25 also, noting especially verses 24-26. Further, read Paul's sermon in Acts 13:26-43, noting verses 32-39.

The presence of God is not now in any building or sanctuary. It is not a matter of an earthly Jerusalem. It is a matter of God's chosen people, united together as a body, called to be a holy nation and built up as living stones for an eternal habitation for God by the Spirit. The glory that departed that sad day has returned in the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been sent to us in the Spirit who dwells in us. It will come once again one day when every eye shall see Him.

Listen to these words, these sad and sweet, groaning and glorious words from 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Exile Cometh

Ezekiel 12

Message Overview

Aim To show the significance of spiritual blindness for a God-centered ministry.

- Agenda**
- To understand the prophetic dramas and how they were to impact the exiles.
 - To show the importance of faithfulness even when a ministry is largely to the spiritual blind and deaf.
 - To show the danger of resisting the Word and Warnings with simple statements.
 - To show how spiritual blindness and deafness is a Biblical Theological theme that affects ministry today.
 - To present the gospel so that blind eyes may be opened.

- Summary**
- Ezekiel is reminded of the nature of his ministry.
 - The exiles are hoping that Zedekiah's rebellion means a soon return.
 - God gives two enactment oracles designed to underscore the veracity of the prophecies.
 - God responds to two proverbs quoted by the people to deflect the force of the prophetic warnings.

Discussion Questions

Describe what spiritual blindness was like for some in the flock before they were saved.

Would be helpful to draw out self-righteous blindness that does not see self-sinfulness.

Discuss more fully the connections between the Hebrews and ourselves as it relates to blindness and the need for the gospel.

Discuss the danger of dismissing the truth and force of the Word

Discuss real change that has occurred as a result of hearing this message.

Introduction

Story of chicken little – the sky is falling, the sky is falling!

The dot.com bust marvelously illustrates how people can hide from the realities of life and business. All these companies were floating stocks and investors just to fund the existence of the company, its plans and ideas when no marketable product or service was being actually sold. In other words, there was no real revenue, just enormous amounts of money from investors. One commentator said dryly, “correction in the market is inevitable.”

Israel was like this – they thought the predicted exile would not happen. They thought the judgment of God could be stayed and might not happen. The message from God through Ezekiel here is that “market correction is inevitable” and so is the judgment of God.

Depiction – The Rebellious House’ Character (v.1-2)

Up to this point in the book of Ezekiel, the accusing finger of God has been pointed largely at the sinning Hebrews in Judah. The exiles have been rescued into exile so as not to be crushed by the judgment of God in Judah. They have been preserved and protected for God’s purposes. But all is not well.

Repetition – Prophetic Accusation

Ezekiel is given a phrase that depicts the character of Israel, not just those who are left in Judah, but also those among whom he lives. They are a rebellious house. Listen to the repeated accusation.

As the context of this chapter - Ezekiel 2:5-8; 3:9, 26-27

In the content of this chapter – Ezekiel 12:2, 3,9,25

So All of Israel is a rebellious house. Whether he is prophesying to those yet in Judah or to those in exile, he will be speaking to a people who will not hear, will not heed and will resist and rebel against God’s message and messenger.

Now why do we say the exiles are also a rebellious house? Because Ezekiel is told that he, personally, is dwelling among, that is, in the midst of and with, a rebellious house. So, the ministry context for Ezekiel is to a people not inclined to trust and obey. This is what we would expect of the exiles when we read that Isaiah’s ministry will be to a people who will not turn and will not repent (Isaiah 6).

Particulars – Prophetic Description

Now what particularly marks them out as a rebellious house? In verse 2, they “have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear and do not hear.” That is, they have the physical eyes but are spiritually blind, physical ears but are spiritually deaf. While this may have been a common idiom or expression (like, “pulling someone’s leg” or “put your foot in your mouth”) the Bible picks this up and invests it with large and important significance. Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry, even to the exiles, will fall on the eyes and ears of the spiritually blind and deaf.

Departure – The Rebellious House Captured (v.3-16)

Ministry to people like this often involves attention arresting methods. So the prophetic dramas that follow are designed to show the exiles what is about to happen to those who were to arrive later. Why this now? It seems possible that news of Zedekiah's uprising against Babylon has reached the ears of the exiles, stirring up hope of a near return to home. Rather than this rebellion leading to a return of the exiles, it actually becomes the stimulus for Nebuchadnezzar to flatten Judah.

Instructions – Prophetic Drama (v.3-6)

The instructions here are explicit. Get an exile pack – now don't think of a L.L. Bean back pack; think a large tanned, animal skin with some meager food stuffs and clothes rolled up in it and used on the trip as a sleeping mat. This pack would have been recognizable to everyone in exile.

So here it is – the crazy prophet is at it again. As people are going by in the day time, he is to take the pack out and leave it outside. In the evening, he is to go outside himself. In order to take the pack out and to go out himself, he is to dig a hole in the wall of his house. This will surely get their attention. Further, he is to heft the pack on his back and he is to cover his face – probably wrap his turban down over his eyes and face so that he cannot see – as he does all this.

All this is so that maybe, they'll get it. He and his own actions are a sign for the rebellious house.

Action – Prophetic Obedience (v.7)

So, he does what he is commanded. His rehearsal of what he does clarifies the instructions. He simply carries out the prophetic drama as God had instructed him. Can't you just see the exiles all gathering around to see what wacky thing he is going to do – and then the dawning realization of the meaning of what he is doing?

Explanation – Prophetic Clarity (v.8-16)

No, they don't get it. God through Ezekiel is now going to have to explain it.

Response to their Curiosity (v.8-10a)

We are now introduced to a motif, a repeated idea, in Ezekiel that is designed to get our attention. It is this enactment of prophetic drama that is explained, "in the morning." We are going to find this three times in the book with increasing and startling significance. Now, it just looks like that the exiles got together and asked him what he was doing and what it meant. Now God releases him to explain it. But their seeking is not the spiritual seeking of awakened sinners; it is the worldly curiosity of a rebellious house.

What is given to them is both an oracle and a burden. The word in verse 10 carries both meanings, as most of our translations bear out. It is a message from God that is a burden carried by the messenger. The idea then is that of the importance of the message, its heaviness and weightiness.

Reality of their Captivity**(v.10b-14)**

What is this weighty message? It concerns the prince of Israel, Zedekiah, and the people of Judah. It affirms what God has been saying all along. They will go into exile. Even the prince will be reduced to fleeing like any commoner. The attackers will dig through the wall in their siege and take the exiles out. Zedekiah will be brought into exile into Babylon and yet he will not see it. The people and the army will be destroyed and scattered.

Results of their Conquest**(v.15-16)**

The reality of their coming destruction is designed by God's purpose so that they will know that He is truly God and God alone. Even in his mercy upon those Yahweh allows to escape, He is working to humiliate them and then to show them Who He is. The point here in their declaring their abominations is to undermine their self-sufficiency so that Godwardness and selflessness may be cultivated and grow.

PROBLEM: When we read the Scriptures about how this prophecy was fulfilled, it appears that the prophecy was incorrect in some details. Zedekiah does not go out through the wall, while the Babylonians enter through the breach. What are we to make of this? This prophecy is enigmatic, even in its explanation. How many would have concluded that Zedekiah would be *blinded*, his eyes put out. A principle is unfolding in Ezekiel that, while many prophecies are fulfilled in exacting literal ways, many do not. These prophetic dramas and their explanations are meant to both reveal and hide. They are meant to gain attention to the weightiness of the warning, to give a sense of reality to what is not yet happening and to send most away scratching their heads. The prophecy then is related in terms that the exiles can understand (exile backpacks, holes in walls and shame-covered heads) but about realities that they cannot yet understand.

IRONY: I do want to point to an irony here. One of the major problems for the rebellious house of Israel is that they, having eyes, cannot truly see. However, their rebellious king, Zedekiah, in his own exile and death, will not even have eyes at all. His own horrid, eyeless condition and demise will become a sign of the spiritual blindness and death of the rebellious house of Israel.

Devastation – The Rebellious City Crushed**(v.17-20)**

God now turns from the rebellious prince and his judgment to the rebellious people and their punishment. This paragraph relates another prophetic drama to remind them that it is not just the prince who will suffer, but they will as well.

Illustration – Prophetic Demonstration**(v.17-18)**

Ezekiel is instructed to eat a meal of bread and water and to do so with quaking and trembling. Several unsaid things are obvious. He is to do this where people can see him. It is a public enactment. So he probably sits out in front of his, possibly with his exile pack at his side, and he is to eat and drink, pantomiming the fear and anxiety. He is to show fear and worry.

Message – Prophetic Declaration (v.19-20)

Why is he to do this? So as to gain the exiles attention and declare the impending devastation upon Jerusalem.

Deprivation – Anxiety over lack

The terrible year of siege and the journey into exile would be filled lingering deprivation and want. They would be scavenging the city and the land down to the last morsel. Every bite of food, every sip of water would be partaken of in a painful awareness that there was no more where that came from.

Desolation – Ruin complete

Here is the impact of Israel's sin on the land they lived in. They were supposed to be good stewards of the land. They had clear instructions as to how to manage and maintain the fruitfulness of the land. Thus there were the Sabbath cycles of resting the land every 7 years and every 49 years. But now what they have done is destroying the land and bringing it to ruin. The violence they have committed in it brings upon their own heads the final violence that destroys it.

Denial – The Rebellious Speech Confronted (v.21-28)

How do they respond to all this? Are they hushed with awe-struck fear and reverence? Do they call for prayer? Do they plead with God? Do they seek to wait patiently for God to complete His purposes? Do they speak to one another in ways designed to help each other to really know God?

No, they are in denial. The rebellious house speaks rebellious words.

Sureness - The Prophetic Word (v.21-25)

First, they respond by saying, "Yeah, sure. We have heard this all before. We have had those who have seen vision and have given prophecies, but we have not seen them fulfilled." As time passes, visions and prophecies seem to come to nothing. Further, verse 24 points to the danger of error and false teaching (prophecies) to undermine the authority and hearing of God's Word.

God challenges their saying by asserting the sureness of the prophetic word. He will put an end to the proverb by bringing about what has been prophesied. Not only will His word be fulfilled, but His powerful, declaring, sovereign word will bring it about. He will speak and it will happen. This is meant to point back to the Genesis account and gather up the texts that point to the power of God's speech. So God will speak and what He speaks He will do. The prophetic word is sure; stop talking and acting as though it were not. There can be no other outcome than what God has decreed and what He has declared.

Nearness - The Prophetic Warning (v.26-28)

Second, they respond by saying, "Yah, sure. But the fulfillment of what has been prophesied is a long way off – in fact, it is for a later age, another time." Some will grant the sureness of God's Word, but will deny the nearness of what that prophetic Word pronounced. This is so common in rebellious people who want to

deny that what God has spoken is to them. They will grant that the Word is true, it is just not for them, now, in their life.

God challenges their saying by asserting that the pronounced disasters will no longer be delayed. God has spoken, both in terms of his decree and his declaration. What He has planned will now, and I mean now, will fall. No more delay. No more time. Behold, the exile cometh, *NOW*.

We love to hear that what God has promised, He will perform. Herein is our anxiety and our assurance – God will punish and God will save. Be assured.

Conclusion

Let's bring this to a close in this way.

The Problem of Spiritual Blindness

Spiritual blindness in people is no new nor a long gone thing. In Isaiah 6:8-10, Isaiah sees the glory of God, receives cleansing from God and is sent on mission for God. But he is preaching to these very same people – and his prophetic ministry will cause them to persist and continue in their spiritual state. It is no wonder that he says, “For how long?”

We find spiritual blindness and ministry in Jesus' own life and time in Matthew 13:10-17. The disciples are puzzled about parables. “People aren't getting it,” they complain. Precisely. Since Israel is still in the condition that was in Isaiah's day and Ezekiel's exile, Jesus is teaching in parables so that only those with spiritual sight will see the truth. How blessed is it then to be among the number to whom God has granted spiritual sight! Why is this? John 3 tells us that the condition of spiritual blindness is the result of spiritual death and is reversed by regeneration. We are blind because we are dead! Unless we are born from above we cannot see nor enter the Kingdom of God.

But praise God, He has not left us in that condition. In a dramatic metaphor that signals the giving of spiritual sight, both to Israel and to the Gentiles, Paul is saved and sent on His mission according to Acts 26:12-23 so that “they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ] me.”

This is the terrible plight of the lost and the difficult barrier to our evangelism. We are speaking the gospel to the spiritually deaf. Now they can hear us physically and this confuses us. The challenge for our evangelism is to remind ourselves that God has chosen to use words of truth to ears that are deaf to bring life to souls that are dead.

The Power of Saving Promises

And so, here is our hope – 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. What is not seen by blinded eyes is the glory of Christ. So it is imperative that we are pointing people to the saving supremacy of Christ – to His greatness and glory, and not to ourselves. He is to be preached as Lord over all. And when we do, then God is pleased, like at creation, to shine light into darkened, dead hearts, bring life and sight and hearing so that the knowledge of the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ may be seen.

Here is the power of God's saving promises. He will bring life and light to lost souls. So turn to Him and trust Him. Bow before Him. Beloved, do so now lest the doom and damnation for your sins soon overtake you. Repent and believe. Call on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Jackals among Ruins

Ezekiel 13

Message Overview

Aim To warn against the counterfeits in the church.

- Agenda**
- To connect the false prophecy of Ezekiel's day with the counterfeit preaching and teaching of ours, both in its characteristics and in its condemnation.
 - To show where and how the counterfeit powers of Ezekiel's day are prevalent in the culture and the church in our day.
 - To awaken the church to the dangers of the counterfeit, both to the health of their own souls and the stability and ministry of the church.
 - To call for discernment and separation from the counterfeit.

- Summary**
- God confronts the false prophets who pretend to speak for God.
 - God confronts the false prophetesses who are using occult amulets to gain power over the people.
 - God explains and exposes them for what they are.

Discussion Questions

When is it wrong to point out error?

Let this discussion play out. Respond to overstatements or narrowing of this responsibility to the levels addressed by the message.

What are some of the dangers of false preaching and teaching?

Steer the discussion towards both the immediate dangers to people, the church and to the larger implications for eternal salvation. Point to how people live out of what they have been taught and believe.

Discuss the implications for the Christian as this message relates to (1) Charismatic error, (2) eastern philosophy and practice and (3) non-physical alternative medicines.

Try to get people to see the need for skepticism and alert discernment.

Are messages like this from Ezekiel needed for today?

Introduction

Our Prevalent Danger

There are voices all around us claiming to be the authentic preaching and power of God. But are they all they claim to be? Are they misguided and ignorant Christians or are they dangerous? Wonder what the Hebrews thought of the people described in this passage?

Our Present Difficulty

How do you respond to the danger when explaining truth and exposing error is identified as part of the problem? In other words, how do you say that something is wrong when saying something is wrong is itself wrong. Here is our present difficulty – we are surrounded and confounded by error – but part of that error is to deny the holiness of exposing error and wickedness.

Ezekiel is faced with exposing the wickedness of His day *regardless of the criticism*. So let us consider this text and may God give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Read Text

Scavenging Jackals: Counterfeit Prophecy (v.1-16)

The prophets of Israel are the group of professional religious prophets, possibly arising from the long-line of those trained in the school of the prophets started by Elijah. As with any institution, the school degenerated into providing the Kings of Israel with a group of religious professionals who were primarily interested in promoting themselves and protecting their favored status.

Listen to the opening of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles from Jeremiah 29:1-10:

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jehoniah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.

These prophets are the ones being addressed, whether they were in Jerusalem approving Zedekiah's rebellion or in the exile, giving false hope of an early return.

The Charges against Them

(v.1-7)

What is the indictment from God against them?

THEY ARE DECEPTIVE (v.2-3). They are prophesying out of their own hearts and are passing off their words as being from the Lord. They claim to have insight but have seen nothing. They are described as foolish. The word here, *nabal*, is used to describe one who is arrogant (Prov. 30:32), crude in speech (Prov. 17:7); spiritually and morally dull-witted (Job 2:10), a scoundrel (Job 30:8) who denies God (Psalms 14:1; 53:2) and blasphemes God (Psalm 74:22). The fullest description of this kind of fool is given in Isaiah 32:5-6. They are therefore deceptive as to their own character, the source of their prophetic ministry and the content of its message.

THEY ARE DISGUSTING (v.4). In a jolting metaphor, Ezekiel describes them as dirty scavengers, scrabbling among ruins looking for scraps. This would have been a common sight in the devastation wrecked by Babylon. The jackals would feed on what even the starving, besieged Hebrews would not. These prophets are described then as thriving in the midst of ruin, its destruction and decay.

THEY ARE DESTRUCTIVE (v.5). In a second metaphor, they are described as not fulfilling their true office. They ought to have been building up and strengthening the people for the day of battle. While Ezekiel as the true and authentic prophet of God stands in the gap, they have refused to stand in the breach and have contributed to the collapse of Israel.

THEY ARE DELUDED (v.6-7). They are pretending to speak for God. Their delusions even lead them to think that their prophecies are going to be fulfilled. As Block points out, “one may not manipulate Yahweh by simply attaching his signature to a pronouncement, as if the imprimatur itself possessed some quasi-magical power... they may forge Yahweh’s stamp on their own utterances, but this will not mask their futility or the prophetic claimants’ personal lack of authority.” (Block, *Ezekiel*, p.402-403.)

The Condemnation of Them

(v.8-16)

God responds to them with the severest of condemnation. How?

GOD OPPOSES THEM (v.8-9a). God says that because of what they are doing, He is against them. He will reach out with His mighty hand and He will strike them. The God of truth cannot and will not tolerate lying, false teaching and error. The construction here is designed to highlight the blasphemous nature of what they are doing. Because of it, He will stand against them and He will strike them.

GOD EXCLUDES THEM (v.9b). In the ear of a Hebrew, this three line judicial sentence would have made their blood run cold. God pronounces them to be outside the covenant. They are removed from the community of faith, the civil census and the covenantal promises and privileges. They are excommunicated from the assembly, have their citizenship revoked and are denied entrance into the land. In other words, they are no longer HIS PEOPLE.

GOD EXPOSES THEM (v.10-16). Finally, God says that He will expose them for exactly what they are. He uses the metaphor of builders who cover up their shoddy

work with plaster. The wall is built with inferior brick and poor technique. Then they plaster over it so that its deficiencies and weakness cannot be seen. This weak, plastered over wall represents the prophets and their ministry. They have prophesied and promised peace where God has predicted and promised punishment. It is inferior in its construction, yet it is presented in such a way as to be attractive and admirable, hiding its true problems. God warns them that walls like this will not stand up in the storm. Wind, hail and rain will tear the wall down, exposing it and its foundations for what it really is. In the same way, men and the message of false prophesy and preaching will be exposed for what they are in the midst of the wrath of God. He will send the wind, hail and rain of suffering that will expose the falseness and futility of their ministry, its foundations and building.

APPLICATION: Where does this charge and condemnation apply today?

Against the false preachers, prophets and teachers today whose words to God's people are from themselves, not initiated by God, are disconnected from the Word of God and threaten to destroy the people of God. We are surrounded by self-styled voices of God claiming to be prophets from God. I am talking about within the Christian church. They claim to receive divine insight into the Word or into other's lives – they are deluded and dangerous and deceptive.

Against the professional clergy filling pulpits today. To many, the ministry is nothing more for many than just another vocation, another job. Even many conservative preachers see themselves in a way that is little different from the professional prophets of Ezekiel's day.

This passage serves as a warning to all of us to mark out and avoid all counterfeits. Block suggests that the frauds of Ezekiel's day have these characteristics in common with the false of our day. (Block, *Ezekiel*, p. 409-410).

- They claim divine authority, even when they speak only from their own inspiration.
- They proclaim messages that people want to hear, especially when truth is painful.
- They are more interested in their own status than the welfare of the [ministry] community.
- Their utterances characteristically die with them; being deficient in authority and integrity, their words also lack effective power.
- They stand under the judgment of God

One writer reminds us that, "We should recognize that the current cacophony is not simply the result of disagreement among family members. Satan's strategy is to imitate God's means of self-revelation in order to confuse the message." (Duguid, *Ezekiel*, p. 179.) Thus we must be ever vigilant in our pursuit and preaching of God's Word.

Soul Hunters: Counterfeit Power

(v.17-21)

God now turns the prophetic denunciation in this shorter section, on the so-called “daughters of your people”, who are on the prowl among God’s people to bring them into spiritual bondage.

The Charges against Them

(v.17-19)

THEY ARE UNAUTHORIZED PROPHETS (v.17). Once again, like the counterfeit prophets, they are speaking out of their own minds. Ezekiel cannot even bring himself to address them as prophetesses – as legitimate occupants of a holy office. They are pretenders and unauthorized, not because they are women, but because their prophecy is self-initiated and self-formed.

THEY USE OCCULTIC POWER (v.18a). These women, as prophetesses, were making jewelry and shawls or veils to sell to the Hebrews. But these amulets and veils had been invested with occultic power in order to bring the wearer under the spiritual control of demons. It is almost unbelievable that under the guise of the ministry of God, these women were enslaving people to Satan.

THEY HUNT DOWN GOD’S PEOPLE (v.18b). Ezekiel’s language here is meant to point to the predatory attitudes and actions of these women. This is no innocent game, but rather is a deadly hunt. While the counterfeit prophets are jackals, scavenging among ruins, these women are hunting, killer lions preying on unsuspecting people. This charge ends with this penetrating question: do you think that you can bring others into spiritual bondage without being spiritually bound yourself?

THEY PROFANE GOD’S PERSON (v.19a). Now read this very carefully, because the wording is unusual. Most of the time in the Old Testament, it is God’s Name that is profaned – but here, God Himself in His person is being profaned. God is personally offended and affected by their horrible actions.

THEY TRAFFIC THEIR POSITION (v.19b). For the sake of crumbs of bread and wheat, they are willing to sell out their office, their place among God’s people. They see the position they hold as a way to gain (no matter how meager – after all, a siege is going on).

THEY DESTROY LIVES (v.19c). The spiritual bondage effected by their wicked practices destroy lives. On the face of the words, these witches were actually involved in causing the death of some and protecting the life of others.

The almost unbelievable aspect of the charge is that they are using evil spiritual powers to bring unsuspecting people into bondage. They are doing so from the office and position of being God’s prophet. But the fault also rests on the people for they are willing to listen to the lies (v.19).

The Condemnation of Them**(v.20-21)**

The condemnation is given in two verses or stanzas that are parallel in their structure. It looks like this: (adapted, Block, *Ezekiel*, p. 417).

	God's	Magical Amulets (v.20)	Magical Veils (v.21)
A	Action	I will tear them from their arms	I will tear them off
B	Aim	I will set them free	I will deliver them
C	Purpose	So they may [fly away]	So they may not be in your hand

One writer puts it this way, “Yahweh will personally invade the witches’ private and spiritual world, destroy the tolls of their magical trade, and thereby annul their grip on His people. In the process, through His salvific action on behalf of His people, they will acknowledge His person and His presence.” (Block, *Ezekiel*, p.417).

APPLICATION – We could only wish this were not true today. But sadly, it is so. Where do we find the connections today?

In those who use wicked spiritual powers through culturally accepted vehicles. There is the open practice of occult power and healing in voodoo, New Age necromancy, spell casting and outright witchcraft. In the invasion of eastern mysticism and its unique occultic practices, now widely accepted, there is a great danger that modern spirituality is binding people to satanic power. Then there is the difficult area of alternative medicine and healing where there is so much counterfeit and so much confusion. But wise Christians must be cautious and discerning, assuming that effective non-medicinal or non-herbal remedies have occultic overtones. I am of the conviction that the burden of proof is on them given the origin and current practice of them.

In those who counterfeit the power of God through the power of Satan within the church. It is both with grief and with holy anger that I point this morning to the huckstering of the power of God by so many faith-healers and miracle-workers. So much of what happens is nothing but fraud and deceit. It is not possible for a man or woman who denies or alters essential doctrine to be doing miracles by the power of God. They are doing them by the power of Satan. And they do them in the name of Christ in churches all over the world.

Sovereign Lord: Authentic Freedom**(v.22-23)**

In the light of this may God bring us His sovereign deliverance!

His Denunciation of Them**(v.22)**

God denounces them both for their discouraging of the godly and the encouraging of the wicked. They are preaching peace when punishment is coming and promising the power of God and giving people over to bondage to Satan. Their counterfeit ministries have not warned the wicked to turn away from sin so as to turn unto God and be saved.

His Deliverance from Them

(v.23)

God intervenes to deliver His people. He will cut off the source and means of false prophecy and divination. He will release the traps and bonds holding His people. He will set them free.

And everyone, the punished and the saved will know that God is God alone. There is no other.

Conclusion

Testing the Counterfeit

As we approach the end of the age, a religious environment and cultural context will be shaped in which the appearance of world-wide leaders claiming supernatural backgrounds and powers will appear normal. We may be seeing the beginning of that. Even if not, Satan's strategy is to counterfeit true preaching and spiritual power so as to delute if not destroy its effectiveness. And he does this through the nicest, kindest of people who are persuasive and polished. My beloved, be on the alert and on guard. When the culture is collapsing we are very vulnerable to adopting whatever appears to be a remedy. So we must constantly test the counterfeits: those who preach error or just ignore the Bible text itself as marginally relevant. And we must guard against all attempts to manipulate spiritual powers (God or otherwise) to serve us.

Teaching the Authentic

How do we do this? By preaching and practicing the authentic. Out of godly lives and ministries of love and grace, we must both affirm the truth and deny the errors. Not just to say that we do, but which ones, articulated how by whom to what effect. Just like banks teach people what genuine money looks like so that counterfeits are easily spotted, this is what we aim to do.

Trusting the Deliverer

But at the end of the day, we must trust our deliverer. We must rely on Him. We may well be heading into spiritual captivity or tribulation – but we must rest in Christ. He is our perfect prophet who always speaks the truth to us. He is our perfect, life transforming power – Word and Spirit in us by faith.

In the bleakness of such a description of the way things are, let us turn to the brightness of all that God is for us in Christ. Whether we are surrounded and vulnerable to scavenging jackals or soul hunters, we have a deliverer who will bring us through such suffering times to such a glorious place.

A Multitude of Idols

Ezekiel 14

Message Overview

Aim To develop idolatry as a root of sin.

- Agenda**
- To take this text and relate to our lives in terms of heart idols.
 - To help people see that they may be serving heart idols.
 - To bring people to repent of their heart idols.

- Summary**
- God confronts the elders of the exiles with their heart idolatry.
 - God affirms the surety of the coming judgment, regardless if there are godly people in Israel.
 - God states that there will be some who survive into exile, but that their righteousness will not save Israel.

Discussion Questions

What do people expect when they come to counseling?
(Do you think the elders consulting Ezekiel expected what they got?)

How can we identify heart idols?
Partially with the phrase, “What do I want so bad I will sin to get it or sin when I don’t have it.”

What common idols of the heart do we tend to serve?
Try to get people to use the sentence above to open up and talk about where their struggles are.

Introduction

Doesn't the constant struggle with sin and failure become discouraging and disheartening? Why is it that even when we know what we ought to do and what we ought not to do, we still do the opposite? Listen to some sound bites from the counseling room.

Folly and Failures

"I would do anything if he would just..." "I try and try but I just can't seem to beat this..." "Well, I know what you're saying, but I just want to..." "She just makes me so upset – all she has to do is..." "O, I would never spank my child..." "O, when he doesn't want to do what he should, I just keep after him until he does..."

Help and Hope

How do we give help and hope to people who seem to want what is right, yet respond to those situations in such ungodly ways? How do we get beyond just being moralists and behaviorists, helping people to see where their heart issues are? And what has any of this to do with our text this morning?

We believe, just as God does in this chapter, that we need to confront people about their heart idols. While this is a short and somewhat simple message this morning, it may be of lasting significance for us.

The Idolatrous Root of their Sin

(v.1-11)

This chapter opens like Ezekiel 8 opens – with the elders of Israel sitting before Ezekiel, inquiring of the Lord. We don't know why they are here, what has brought them to seek the Lord at the feet of the prophet. But here they are.

The Characteristics of Heart Idols

(v.1-5)

The Lord shows Ezekiel that these men are worshipping idols. Now they are not the idols of the Babylonians, nor are they the pantheon of idols that Israel worshipped. These are called heart idols. They are heart treasures and trusts that are the root of sin. Here, sin is portrayed as a disorder of worship. Something or someone is being served rather than God. Rather than being something outside of themselves as in Ezekiel 8, they are something inside themselves.

These idols then are the root of their sin, their iniquity. They have set their sin right in front of their faces. If you put your hands right in front of your faces, you will see that your hands become the focus of your sight and your vision beyond that is blocked. This is what sin does to us. It dominates us and it blinds us.

And notice that they come with a multitude of idols. They are poly-idolaters. They are not simply bowing down to one thing, but to many. Their hearts have desires and wants that are not aligned with God's desires and wants. We are not told what the idols were – only that they exist and that they are the root of their sin.

This leads then to an important question: how does God respond to a person with heart idols and behavioral sin? Will God counsel such a person? Will God be

sought and found by these elders? Yes, the Lord will answer them, but with a most startling purpose. He will answer them even as they come with their multitude of idols so that He can get hold of their hearts. God aims to get hold of the hearts of all those whose heart idols have distanced them from God.

The Condemnation of Heart Idols (v.6-10)

God begins by calling on them to repent of their heart idols (v.6). They must turn away from them and turn to the Lord. This idea of turning is fundamental to repentance. True repentance is not just when you have stopped doing your sin, but when you have turned from it to the Lord.

God warns what He will do if these men persist in worshipping and serving - being mastered by their heart idols. If they will not repent, then He will set His face against them. God will move with sure and steady power against them. And He will do so *even when He answers their inquiries from Him* (v.7).

He moves to expose them, isolate them and remove them from among His people (v.8). All this is to say that God will judge them – quickly, publicly and with finality. The God of heaven both deserves and demands unswerving loyalty. If God's people follow other gods, even in their hearts, God will deal with them.

He moves to respond to them. Even if the prophet is fooled by them, God has allowed it so that He may finish His dealing with them, even when they seek counsel from God's man (v.9-10). If there is not repentance and God's man is deceived by them, God will cause them to bear their punishment.

The Correction of Heart Idols (v.11)

Why does God do this? God does this to anchor wandering, drifting, idolatrous hearts and to identify Himself with His people. We recognize that much that had gone wrong in Israel was a result of their hankering after other gods. They wanted what those idols promised, both in blessing and in passing pleasures. But here, God says that it is not just their outward idols that brought about the exile, it was their heart idols as well.

So God will change them from going astray and following their sin to being God's people. What is mentioned here is unfolding now in Christ in the church as God calls His people out of every nation, including the Jews. What a glorious day it will be when no more will we wander – and we will be God's and He will be ours.

The Inescapable Ruin of their Sin**(v.12-23)**

While the elders are sitting before Ezekiel, a second word comes to him. God will surely stretch out His judging hand against those who act faithlessly. Here the idolatry of verses 1-11 is now characterized as unfaithfulness to the covenant. Thus, their sin is now characterized and condemned by God as adultery. They are unfaithful to their covenant with God. They have flirted with and flung themselves at the wicked nations around them. Later on in Ezekiel, what is only alluded to here is filled out in graphic and horrifying description.

Their ruin in judgment is so sure that even the presence of Noah, Daniel and Job would not deliver them. God is saying that they have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's pleading with God to spare those cities for the sake of a righteous few who might be there is alluded to here. Lot's presence in Sodom could not save it, yet God delivered him from its judgment. This is a slap in the face from God – Israel, you have become in all your sin just like Sodom.

Why these three men (as opposed to any others)? Let me suggest that each of these men represent righteousness in the midst of ruin. Thus, Noah – righteousness in the ruin of the world; Daniel – righteousness in the in ruin of a nation; Job – righteousness in the ruin of a family. It is important to remember that God had removed Daniel from Jerusalem and brought him into exile. While Noah and Job are historical figures in the Scriptures, to the Jews, Daniel would be a famous exile in high places living a God-honoring life. So, Israel's doom and ruin is beyond saving.

The Surety of the Coming Judgment**(v.12-20)**

Now, these paragraphs represent the sureness of the impending judgment. From other prophecies, this is what God said He would do. Without unpacking every detail, note that in each judgment, there is total ruin and limited rescue.

The Coming of Famine**(v.12-14)**

The fall of Jerusalem would be a time of terrible famine. While the righteous might be rescued, their godliness would not protect the rest.

The Coming of Wild Beasts**(v.15-16)**

God will judge Israel's unfaithfulness by sending wild animals to ravage the people. While the righteous might be rescued, their godliness would not protect the rest.

The Coming of the Sword**(v.17-18)**

God will judge Israel by sending death by enemy armies, that is, the sword. While the righteous might be rescued, their godliness would not protect the rest.

The Coming of Pestilence**(v.19-20)**

God will also judge Israel by sending pestilence or disease to sweep through the land. While the righteous might be rescued, their godliness would not protect the rest.

Mark what God is saying – the coming judgment will be a terrible time of famine, disease, death and dangerous, ravaging animals. His judgment is sure and unremitting. He will not tolerate the idolatry and adultery of His people. Not even the presence of godly men among the people will alleviate the suffering of the whole. Almost makes you wonder if this is what the elders had come to ask. Did they think they might be able to negotiate the punishment down?

The Surprise of the Coming Judgment (v.21-23)

But there is a big surprise. There will be survivors. God will preserve some alive and they will come into exile. So God will rescue some. They will comfort the rest of the exiles. And they will know that God is not capricious or erratic, but is working with purpose. He will accomplish what He intends

Conclusion

So how are we to think about all this in our time?

Controlling Effect of Heart Idols

Christians today serve heart idols. These heart idols may be the desire for evil things. And sometimes, they are an inordinate desire for a good thing. How can a good thing become a heart idol? A heart idol is when you want even a good thing so bad you will sin to get it or sin when you don't have it.

So let me illustrate with several categories and examples of hearts idols...

There is the heart idol of having a godly spouse that becomes the root of nagging (sinfully trying to make a spouse godly) or anger (sinfully responding when a spouse is not godly).

Many people make idols of their children. They center their lives around their kids, their kids wants and schedules.

Many people make idols of their homes and possessions. They spend more money and time than they have, usually with the result of robbing God of both.

Many people turn their ministries into heart idols. They are more devoted to what they do for God and His people than to God Himself.

Teens have heart idols of acceptance and independence – expressing itself in bowing to peer pressure and rebellion against parents and authority.

Some singles have turned wanting a family into a heart idol. They will then displease God in how they interact with people or will become despondent and angry over their singleness.

Do you see the theme running through this? Anything we trust or treasure more than God is an idol.

Transforming Power of Heart Repentance

So what should you do? I want to call for repentance at the heart level...

Identifying the heart idols in your life. Ask yourself what things in your life are you sin to get or sin when you don't have them?

Confessing them as sin and turning away from them to trusting and treasuring God. Turn from the love of the idol to true love of God.

Turning towards God and aiming to be pleasing to Him, regardless.

Going to those affected by your idols, humbling yourself and asking forgiveness for displeasing God over them and affirming that you aim to trust and treasure God.

Changing whatever practical issues of life that either made the serving of the heart idol possible or is the affect of serving the heart idol.

Finally, if you have been listening this morning and it has struck you that you have never truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and never bowed to Him as your Lord and Master, turn to Him now.

Useless and Faithless

Ezekiel 15-16

Message Overview

Aim To call God's people to personal usefulness and faithfulness to God.

- Agenda**
- To show the effect of allowing sin to make us useless for God.
 - To warn against the terrible effects of spiritual adultery.
 - To show God's response to those who are unfaithful.
 - To hold forth the promises of God to sustain spiritual fidelity.

- Summary**
- Israel, due to their sins and God's pruning, had become useless vine trimmings fit only for burning.
 - Jerusalem had been cared for and married by God, blessed and provided for.
 - Jerusalem had gone a whoring after the gods and nations around her, descending into the worst kind of adultery, idolatry and decadence.
 - God moved to publicly expose and punish her for her sin.
 - God affirms His covenantal faithfulness and promises to redeem her and atone for her sins.

Discussion Questions

Is it possible for a Christian to reach a point of being useless?
Discuss Paul's fear of being set aside...

Discuss how we tend to down-play the idols/sins that are common among us and to be upset at the "moral" sins we don't do much.
The point here is to get people to see themselves the way God does.

NOTE: Questions on the graphic nature of the text.

Be careful going into much more detail. Note however, that God is not as squeamish about these things as we tend to be. This may be an area where we are moralists and legalists. However, the reason the text has the shocking impact it does is because God generally does not talk like this.

Introduction

Every once in while, you wake up to realize that the way you have selected texts and divided out things is not the best. We are there today. In fact, I am quite upset with myself in that the divisions as they should have been would have been complete messages on their own. But, we are all learning. So, let me take a moment to show you how all this ought to hang together.

How It Hangs Together

Ezekiel 14:12-15:8 are a unit. How do we know that? Because the unit opens and closes with the indictment that Jerusalem has acted faithlessly (14:13; 15:8). And it provides a real bridge into chapter 16. The idolatry of the leaders (14:1-11) is accompanied by the faithlessness of the nation (14:12-15:8) exposing the adultery and prostitution of God's people (Ch 16).

So I want to take a brief look at Chapter 15 as a part of the introduction and give most of our time and emphasis to Chapter 16.

The Metaphor God Uses

In this portion, God comes after Israel in her unfaithfulness using a metaphor to show her uselessness. The imagery is that of pruning a vine and the dried clippings that are gathered up. They cannot be carved or used as a peg on a wall – they are only good to be burned away. They do not even make a good fire for warming or for cooking. They are useless.

The Message God Intends

God says that Israel has become like these clippings – useless. So, He will consume them in the fire of His wrath and the hot blaze of the coming judgment. Some fires refine and some fires destroy. Israel has come to the place that what God is doing is not refining them, but rather is destroying them. And even in this destruction, Israel will come to know that God is the Lord.

They have acted faithlessly so that God will move to bring them to utter and everlasting ruin. The few righteous among them will not be able to save them, because they have become like the useless grass trimmings from my yard – fit only for the fire.

From this text comes the language of Jesus and the New Testament that is so startling to us as it was to the Jews who heard it. While God will keep His promises to the true sons of Abraham, some of whom are sons by physical lineage, Israel as a nation is done. Jew and Gentile are now grafted into the true vine, the Lord Jesus.

Now this sounds hard and harsh – why would God move with such finality against this nation of people and this city to which He had attached His name and reputation? The next chapter tells us why.

<<Read Chapter 16>>

There are two concerns about this passage that I want to deal with briefly, up front.

- *WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THE VERY GRAPHIC LANGUAGE HERE?* Frankly, our translations tend to not be as graphic as the original is. Some of what is described and how it is described is shocking. Let me suggest first that we cannot be more moral than the Bible. While we might be disconcerted by the language here, that is in fact its intent – to shock and disconcert. Second, the explicitness does not need to be commented upon in order to convey the message of the passage (unlike, the Song of Solomon). So I will be careful. I don't think you will need to cover the ears of your children.
- *WHAT ABOUT SOME WHO SEE GOD HERE AS SIMPLY AN ABUSIVE HUSBAND?* I was startled by this. But the commentators raise the issue. I think it is absurd! God as a heavenly husband who has been cuckolded this way has the right to do what He pleases. Further, let us remember that this is a metaphor by which God is relating a larger history and truth.

So let's hear what Ezekiel is saying. What we have here is an extended metaphor loosely mapped out over the history of Israel. God wants them through this to understand the horribleness of her sinful, adulterous idolatry.

Her Terrible Plight

(v.1-5)

Notice straightaway that God is addressing Jerusalem. Certainly, Israel as a nation is in view, but some of what He is going to say is spoken about Jerusalem's own history.

Her Heritage and Depravity

(v.2-3)

God reminds her of her Canaanite beginnings. Jerusalem existed as a city before God made her His own. She is being reminded that her parentage is steeped in sin and depravity. There was no natural goodness in her that would cause God to see her and desire her. She was not of a noble family, but born to an Amorite and a Hittite.

Her Birth and Abandonment

(v.4-5)

She was not only of a bad family, but she was abandoned, uncared for at her birth. She was thrown out in the field, her umbilical cord dangling, covered in after-birth, unwashed and left to die. She was deserted and helpless. No one had compassion on her. She was a garbage can baby. While we today are distressed by abandoned babies, it was a common practice (and still is in some places) to abort or abandon baby girls.

So her plight was terrible. She was helpless and hopeless – till God came by.

God's Gracious Provisions**(v.6-14)**

God is portrayed as a casual, but compassionate passer-by. He sees her terrible condition and moves in mercy to do something about it.

Adopted and Cared for as a Child**(v.6-7)**

God is portrayed as doing two things for her. First, using the common method of the day, he adopts her. The emphasis here is not on bringing her to life (as though she were dead) but to bring her into his care. This would not make her a part of His family as we would think of it (otherwise, verses 8-14 are incest). No, he declares His protection and His provision over her. And He causes her to flourish. She grows up and matures into a desirable, but vulnerable young woman who is described as being ready for marriage.

Married and Clothed as a Wife**(v.8-14)**

Then He comes by and sees that she is ready for marriage. First He is betrothed to her for He spreads His garment over her, thus declaring to others His intention to marry her. Then, He enters into the marriage covenant with her and becomes her true husband. As a gracious and generous husband, He bathes her, clothes her, oils and perfumes her, adorns her with jewelry and makes her His queen. She who was beautiful before is now exquisitely arrayed to enhance her beauty so that her fame and reputation is wide spread. God had taken the abandoned foundling of evil parents and transformed her through all the splendor He had lavished on her. All that she had become was because of His loving grace and lavish generosity.

Her Treacherous Promiscuity**(v.15-34)**

O, but that she had remained faithful, but she did not.

Trusted in Her Privilege and Forgot Her Past**(v.15-22)**

She trusted her beauty, her blessings and her privileges. She began to spend her beauty on others. She took the very things God had given her to heighten her beauty and began to use them to serve her lusts. She made shrines out of her clothes, male images out of her gold and silver and offered her perfumes as incense. Her very blessings became a snare to her and she lusted after other gods. She also took their children and burned them as sacrifices. Israel practiced this abomination in the worship of the Baals. God strikes the note of His horror – was not her whoring enough that she also had to slaughter her children?

She did this because she had forgotten where she had come from. She did not remember her helpless and hopeless condition. The New Testament warns us of this as well. 2 Peter 1:9 says that a believer who is not actively involved spiritual growth has forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Pursued the World and was not Satisfied**(v.23-29)**

She now actively pursues her lovers by setting up public places for her prostitution. Jerusalem's alliances with Egypt and Philistia and Assyria are portrayed as prostitution – she went whoring after her neighbors. She set up these beautiful

booths and placed herself on display in them to attract her lovers. She aggressively pursued the world.

God intervened to diminish her place and her prestige. But even this could not stop her wandering and her whoring. She could never be satisfied. She never could get enough. Her appetite for wickedness could not be satiated nor satisfied. The more she pursued, the more she wanted.

Enslaved to Sin and became Perverted (v.30-34)

The phrase that opens these verses points to her enslavement to her sin. Her heart is filled with lustful thoughts and desires that cause her to become brazen beyond even what she has done before. She has sunk to the level that, instead of receiving payment for her favors, she gives payment along with her favors. She has become perverted in her adultery. She so serves her sin that she will pay money to gain its pleasures and promises.

Against such a loving and merciful and generous God, Jerusalem has played the whore – offering herself, selling herself and finally giving herself away. In language that our translations have been quite discreet about, God has shown her wandering heart and her wicked adultery and her whoring ways.

God's Righteous Punishment (v.35-43)

Now God moves to deal with this evil wife. God is righteous and holy and will not be treated as though His goodness and graciousness should cause Him to overlook His holiness and His divine and sovereign rights, not just as God alone, but also as a blessed benefactor and heavenly husband.

At the Hands of Her Lovers (v.35-41a)

Now remember that this metaphor is representing Israel's and Jerusalem's history. So now God moves to deal with her. What does He do? He gathers all her lovers and around her and then exposes her for what she is. He shames her before them and then gathers them to judge her. In Israel, an adulteress was to be charged, tried and condemned publicly. Then she was to be taken out and publicly executed so that God's Name would be cleared, His people restrained from sin and His enemies rebuked. In these verses, that very punishment is laid out in exacting detail.

It is interesting to note that God has brought upon Jerusalem judgment at the hands of those whose gods and idols and promises and pleasures she lusted after. She and pursued them. Now God has punished her through them.

For the Purposes of Her God (v.41b-43)

Why does God do this? So that He can make her stop her sin and so that His wrath can be satisfied. In an interesting play on words, Jerusalem could not be satisfied in her sin, but God can be satisfied in His wrath. He is enraged (v.43) at the slighting of His grace and generosity, at her callous disregard for His love and His loyalty. He is fully justified in the punishment He brings.

Her Excessive Provocations**(v.44-58)**

Then, God goes on to further show the greatness of Jerusalem's sin and wickedness. Just in case we don't get it yet, we better now.

As Similar to Her Family**(v.44-46)**

First, she is wicked like her family. Using this parable, like mother like daughter, God points to the fact she has done exactly as would be expected given the wickedness of her mother and the wickedness of her sister. Jerusalem has become little better than Samaria and Sodom. Believe me, this is a sharp slap in the face of Israel. God wants them to be startled and disconcerted at His comparing them to these two very wicked places.

As Greater than Her Family**(v.47-52)**

Further, she is not only little better but is actually more corrupt. In fact, she is so corrupt and wicked that the wickedness of Sodom looks like righteousness in comparison. Now if this really strains us, that is because we have our categories reversed. Sodom's rampant and wicked homosexuality does not even begin to compare in scope to the dreadful wickedness of, having been loved and graced by God, we go whoring after our idols, even if they are *merely* idols of the heart.

As Different from Her Family**(v.53-58)**

What a startling thing God says here. He will restore the fortunes of Sodom and Samaria. But because she has become despised and reproached by the nations she was to be a witness to, she will bear the penalty of her sin and wickedness. What is God saying here? Simply that whatever God does in the future to restore Jerusalem, will be done in such a way that she will never again bring disgrace and shame upon God and His reputation.

God's Assuring Promises**(v.59-63)**

After all this, God now moves to further show the greatness and the grandness of His grace and mercy. It is one thing to see her as a lost, abandoned, helpless infant and then a beautiful, vulnerable young woman and to move with grace and generosity to provide and to marry. But, now, what great grace moves to affirm and assure with words like these.

That He Will Keep His Covenant**(v.59-62)**

God will keep His Word, His covenant. While Jerusalem has broken the marriage and covenant bonds, yet God asserts His commitment to His promise. Yes, He will punish her, but He will also keep her and cleanse her and make her beautiful once again. She will see and know her Lord and will be ashamed of her sin.

That He Will Atonement for Her Sins**(v.63)**

God also will deal with her sins for He will atone for her. She cannot atone for herself. It is long beyond that. So He will provide for her atonement. All she can do is be quiet and ashamed over her wickedness. And she can marvel at His great graciousness.

Conclusion

How glorious it is to know that when we could do nothing for ourselves, when we were enslaved to our sin and whoring after the world, God Himself provided our redemption, its forgiveness and cleansing. He not only moved to atone, but provided that atonement itself. He provided Himself, that is, His Son to pay the price and bear the penalty. His righteous wrath was satisfied on our lovely Redeemer.

We must never forget from whence we have come. Praise God, some of you were saved out of drunkenness and debauchery and lust and lives of debased sin. Praise God, some of you were saved out of lives of materialism and wealth and place and position. And praise God, some of us were saved out of the deadliness of religious self-righteousness and legalistic holiness. Whatever God has saved you from, never forget your helplessness and hopelessness in your lostness. If you do, you will be blind and near sighted spiritually and you will not work hard at growing in grace and holiness, in maturity in Christ.

We must never become so wrapped up in our blessings that they become our idols. We are so blessed, both physically and spiritually, that we are in great danger of taking the very beauty and bounty and blessing of God turning it to pursue the world and go whoring after the gods of our hearts.

We have to understand and loathe our heart idols. Here it is. These two metaphors have been given to Ezekiel to preach to these elders who sit before him with their multitude of heart idols. In other words, what Jerusalem has done in pursuing her lovers we are doing when we trust or treasure something or someone more than our great God. Whatever we want so much that we will sin to get it or sin to have it *is acting like Jerusalem in her whoredom*.

The New Testament picks this language up and addresses it to believers in James 4:4ff - *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

We have been espoused to God as His betrothed. We are awaiting the day when He comes for us to take us to Himself in the joyously great wedding and feast. Let us then keep ourselves pure and holy to that day so that we will not be ashamed, but full of holy and humble confidence at His appearing.

Two Eagles and a Vine

Ezekiel 17

Message Overview

Aim To see how living under God's authority affects our integrity and submission.

- Agenda**
- To understand the fable and its interpretation to the exiles.
 - To learn from their failure what God expects of us as it relates to submission to governments.
 - To further illustrate a principle of interpretation that sees fulfillment in Christ.
 - To stir up a longing for the return of Christ.

- Summary**
- Ezekiel confronts the exiles with a fable.
 - God interprets the fable, mapping it over the history of Zedekiah's revolt.
 - God challenges the exiles to continued submission and contentment.
 - God fuels hope for the future by expanding on the fable.

Discussion Questions

Be sure everyone understands the history surrounding these events.
The introduction has the background, as well as the exposition on Chapter 12.
See 2 Kings 24:8-20; 2 Chronicles 36:9-13; Jeremiah 37; 52:1-7.

Discuss the importance of submission to the government God has placed over us.

Be sure that it is informed by this text and Romans 13.

Discuss the fulfillment of verses 22-24 in Christ and His Kingdom.

It is important to get people to see that the fulfillment of these texts is not merely in the Millennium. It is first in Christ, through the church and culminated in His rule and reign, first in the Millennium and then in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Introduction

Reading about traitors can be a fascinating subject. In view of this text, I have done some reading this week on it. It is instructive to remember that one side's traitor is another side's hero. So what do you think of when you think of Benedict Arnold? Isn't his name infamous as the first American traitor? Yet, did you know that he fought brilliantly for the American cause for six years. He was badly wounded twice. Drawing deeply into his own purse to pay expenses, he was never reimbursed for most of them, nor honored by Congress for his victories. Crestfallen and melancholy, he was approached by a smooth-spoken spy for the British. Arnold made the worst decision of his life...he switched sides. He died in England, at age 60, and was buried in a "jumbled, unmarked grave" without military honor or notice. His last years were full of misery and bitterness.

This text this morning is about being a disloyal treaty-breaker. Yet the Jewish exiles in Babylon had pinned their hopes on him. Now it is time for God to speak.

Its Allegorical Expression

(v.1-10)

Here is one of only two or three fables in the Scripture. Ezekiel is showing an amazingly sophisticated literary dexterity and ability. He is telling a story that is interesting and ironic, entertaining and enigmatic. While there is a humorous note to it, there is the visibly subtle allusion that entices and engages the mind.

We want to allow this text to develop on its own terms. So, I want to be sure that we know what the fable is saying without giving away what it means till we get there in the text (v.11-15).

The Fable that is Told

Ezekiel is told to give a riddle and a parable. It is a riddle in that it is to draw the listener into solving the questions it raises. It is a parable in that it is a story using the world of common things to explain spiritual things. Because it takes animals and plants and gives them human characteristics, the Greeks would call this a "fable". So it is a story whose meaning is hidden but can be understood if one thinks deeply about the animal characters and their actions.

The Greater Eagle

(v.3-6)

This bird is described in all his splendor – he is an eagle *par excellence*. He is large and beautiful and powerful. The fullness of his plumage is meant to cause admiration and respect. This is a massively majestic and to be respected bird of prey.

He is described as doing two things. First, he cuts and brings the cedar crown to a place mysteriously described as a land of trade and a city of merchants. Next, he takes a seed(ing) and plants it in fertile soil beside much water. It grows up into a fruitful and prosperous vine, deeply rooted, well-nourished and inclining towards its benefactor.

The Lesser Eagle

(v.7-8)

This eagle is described as attractive and beautiful, but without the superlatives of the greater eagle. While the Hebrews words the same, they lack the superlative modifiers. Thus, while this is still an eagle, it is certainly an inferior, lesser one, particularly when compared to the first. This one is notable for its lack of activity. It does not do anything. It is simply there in all its attention getting attraction.

The vine turns its roots and its branches towards this second eagle. In a humorous spin, the vine is portrayed as turning its roots and twisting its branches towards the lesser eagle. This is clearly seen to be a problem since the story further relates that the vine was planted where it was on purpose. It was intended to grow well, produce much and become a “noble vine.” Yet, it has turned from its great benefactor and turned to a lesser who has done nothing.

The Questions that it Raises

(v.9-10)

Ezekiel asks a basic question with two clear implications. He asks, “What do you think, will it thrive?” The answer in both cases expects the answer to be, “No, it cannot thrive.” Using rhetorical questions, he helps his audience to see and understand the great vulnerability of the vine.

The first implication is that the vine is vulnerable to the great eagle uprooting it and destroying it. It will not take a great effort on its part to bring an end to the vine. If the great eagle had the power and authority to plant it where he did expecting from it what he does, then it will not take much for him to deal with the vine.

The second implication is that the vine is vulnerable to the regular, natural dangers of its environment. The east winds here refer to the desert siroccos that came up to blow across the land and wither the weak, un-watered plants in its path. The idea here is to show that the vine has weakened itself and harmed itself in the choices it made.

Its Historical Explanation

(v.11-15)

The Lord points Ezekiel to the rebellious house. Remember that this phrase has been used to describe the Israel to whom God is speaking in strange way. Their rebellion has been the cause for God to confront them with unusual forms of communication. God’s addressing them as a rebellious house begins to open up the meaning of the fable itself. The insightful exile hearing this story should see that the vine represents Israel.

Ezekiel begins by challenging the hearers to interpret the fable. “Do you get it?” he asks. We are not told whether or not the audience has any clue as to what the fable means. Commentators speculate that it is only in hindsight that we have any idea what is actually being referred to. It is the function of a fable to tantalize and entice people to try to figure it out. Part of the challenge here is just simply to be sure that people are taking this fable is just one the idiosyncrasies of Ezekiel’s strange behav-

ior and sometimes bizarre communication methods. No, there is something to be learned.

The Interpretation that is Given

(v.11-15a)

He then gives the divinely authorized interpretation. He maps the recent history of Israel, the two southern tribes, to the fable. The correspondence is remarkable. In the following simple outline, I want to preserve the parallel with the major headings in the fable. The great eagle is the king of Babylon and the lesser is the pharaoh of Egypt. The first cedar bough is Jehoiachin and the vine is Zedekiah. So here is the story.

The King of Babylon

Verse 12 reminds the hearers that Nebuchadnezzar had come and taken Jehoiachin, the King of Israel, captive to Babylon. Thus the allusion in the fable to the cedar bough being taken to a land of trade and a city of merchants points to this historical fact known to all the exiles. They in fact have come into exile through this same event. This designation of Babylon as a place of material wealth and commerce is a very important motif used through the rest of the Old Testament and in the New Testament, especially in the Book of Revelation.

Also, verses 13-14 relate what was well known to the exiles that the King of Babylon had taken Zedekiah and appointed him as the King over Israel. Zedekiah entered into a treaty or a covenant with Nebuchadnezzar establishing a vassal-lord relationship. It is obvious that this was intended by God and had His approval. It was Nebuchadnezzar's intention to keep Israel in a subservient place and it was God's intention to humble and chasten Israel.

The Pharaoh of Egypt

From verses 15 and 17, we find that the lesser eagle represents the pharaoh of Egypt. Zedekiah is spoken of as rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar, the great eagle, by sending requests to Egypt, the lesser eagle, for military aid and assistance. He sent his ambassadors according to this text. History tells us that was an appeal to unite with Egypt in order to overthrow Babylon. Then there was summons to Babylon in which Zedekiah was called into account.

The Question that Follows

(v.15b)

The natural question follows: will Zedekiah prosper? Can someone who breaks his oath of fealty to one as powerful as Babylon while appealing to one as weak and ineffective as Egypt be expected to escape Nebuchadnezzar's wrath? The answer is, "No, of course not."

This must have sent a shiver down the spines of the exiles. It seems on at least two occasions, the exiles have put their hope for an early deliverance in the revolt of Zedekiah. God through Ezekiel means to crush those false and illusionary hopes.

Its Theological Examination

(v.16-21)

It is so appropriate that God confronts and challenges Israel, the oath breaker by declaring his won oath. “As I live” is oath language. God is grounding absolute sureness of what He is going to carry out in the very essence of His existence. “If I am a living God, then I will do what I say.”

The Human Rebellion

(v.16-18)

Zedekiah is condemned as a rebel. He broke his oath and treaty with Nebuchadnezzar. He sought the help of Egypt. But God warns him that this mighty eagle will do nothing. While the great eagle did much to cause him to flourish, this lesser eagle will stand by. The Pharaoh would not help and would stand idly by while Babylon moved with sure and stunning power to siege and destroy Jerusalem.

Verse 18 is so significant – it roots Zedekiah’s rebellion in his heart. When he broke the covenant it was an act of despising the oath he had made. Instead of submitting to the authority that God had placed over him, Zedekiah had no respect for his promise and no integrity. He sought to allay himself with Egypt. So, he will not escape.

The Heavenly Reaction

(v.19-21)

Zedekiah has not just despised a political treaty whereby he was put in power. He has broken his covenant with God. God sees behind Zedekiah’s political rebellion a spiritual rebellion as well. This is because God was the one who placed Babylon in power and who allowed Israel to fall and brought Zedekiah to power through them. So, the consequences at Babylon’s hands are ultimately consequences at God’s hands. God is seen as the ultimate cause and Babylon the direct agent, but there would be swift and sure punishment.

The point here is clear. There is no hope for an early return by the exiles because of Zedekiah’s attempt to shrug off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. These actions by Zedekiah will bring upon him the very wrath of God through Nebuchadnezzar. God has done this so that Israel and particularly the exiles, will know Yahweh is God and God alone.

Its Eschatological Expectation

(v.22-24)

While the false hopes of the exiles are being dashed, their true hopes are being built up by the sure promises of what God will perform. This is done by God's picking up the elements of the fable again and grounding their hopes in the future of God's work. We have been given the key through the earlier interpretation of the fable so that we should be able to interpret this part. I suspect that the exiles would still have made understood these promises to be local and near. But, I believe they point to a larger and greater hope of glory.

Framed by the Continuing of the Fable

While the great eagle was God's tool to accomplish His purposes, now the great eagle is God Himself. What emerges throughout this paragraph is the powerful assertion that God projects His power along the trajectory of His purposes affirmed by His Word. He will do, He will perform, He will accomplish.

So what is it that God will do? He will take the sprig from the crown of cedar and will plant it in a high and lofty mountain where it will flourish and spread into a massive and fruitful tree. It will be the nest and rest of all sorts of birds.

The effect of this work of God will be that every tree of the field will know that He is the Lord who tears down the strong and raises up the weak and causes the failing to flourish. I love the final sentence here (v.24) where the character of God and the Word of God guarantee that God will do it: *I am the Lord; I have spoken; I will do it.*

Fulfilled in the Coming of Christ

So how are we to interpret this parable? What were the exiles to make of it. Do you sense that this whole chapter is aimed at arriving at this point? Do you sense that there is something greater behind and beyond these words than just the exiles one day returning to their land with a king over them?

Since the cedar sprig represents a true king in the Davidic line in verse 3-4, 12 then it does in verse 22 as well. But this king is planted on the mountain, not just the mountain of Jerusalem, but the high and lofty mountain of Mt. Zion. There, he and his kingdom will grow and flourish and spread. Using a common idiom and imagery of the day, this king and his kingdom will provide a secure nesting and resting place for his people. And at that time, all other kings and kingdoms will know for certain that God is God alone, doing all that He has declared He will do.

Let us note that this spreading tree imagery is used of Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 4:12). It seems to me then that this imagery is not a unique description to be applied to Israel alone, but was a common way of describing a prosperous ruler and his extensive kingdom. This is then used in Matthew 13:31-32 to describe the Kingdom of heaven. Yet it is quite possible that Jesus intends to use this analogy in Matthew to show how what God promised He would do in Ezekiel would actually be fulfilled.

In other words, God is promising that He will raise up a true son of David to sit on the throne and He will rule and reign over the Kingdom until all kingdoms are

brought to bow to the Lord God. That true son is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has been raised from the dead and is now sitting on the throne of David at the right-hand of God.

How can I say that? Listen to Gabriel's announcement to Mary of Jesus' birth in Luke 1:32-33 (ESV), *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Listen to Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost from Acts 2:29-36. Turn with me there.

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:29-36, ESV)

At the resurrection and ascension, Jesus assumed the throne and has begun from heaven to rule until the day He comes to rule here on earth. Even if I don't have all the details of the schema in order, I know this for certain. Why? Because God has said it and He will do it.

Conclusion

Submitting to Authority

Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon was a rebellion against God. Romans 13:1-2 tell us in our day as Christians the same thing. Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Rome under the wicked rule of Nero. *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*

So while we must pray for our leaders and pay our taxes, we must realize that God has placed the government over us, whether it is the relatively benign rule we have or some tyrannical one arising later. Let us be a people who, in submission to the invisible God, submit to our visible authorities.

Keeping our Promises

While this phrase conjures up all sorts of odd ideas about men gathering in large stadiums, what Zedekiah did arose from his not valuing keeping his word. The oath he took did not weigh on him. Our magnificently excellent God, who keeps His promises and covenants, places on us the high value and extensive responsibility to keep our promises. And we are to trust and treasure our great promise keeper, the Lord Jesus, banking by faith on His righteousness as our own.

Anticipating His Kingdom

All praise to God who has begun to fulfill this promise as Christ has initiated His great kingdom rule which will be consummated when He returns in visible power and authority to punish all the wicked nations and to bring them to bow to His sovereign authority. Until then, we will nest and rest in the spreading branches of our great Redeemer and Ruler. And we will look for and long for that day when every one will see Him exalted publicly and visibly and every knee will bow, whether it is things in heaven, on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2).

He is the Lord;
He has spoken;
He will do it!

Responsibility and Ruin

Ezekiel 18

Message Overview

Aim To get us to take responsibility for our sins and repent of them.

- Agenda**
- To show the common ground of lies and myths by which the exiles and the moderns excuse sinning and not changing.
 - To press home the truths which in this text transform us from excusers to repenters.
 - To issue a clear and clarion call to stop excusing our sin and to repent of our sin.

- Summary**
- A common proverb, reflecting the exiles philosophy of life, is quoted and responded to.
 - Three case tests are examined to illustrate God's thesis.
 - The objections people have to the truth are anticipated and answered.
 - The people of God are called on to repent of their sin.

**Discussion
Questions**

Introduction

Can we escape the consequences of the past? Is a person responsible for actions caused by things outside of them – their past, their parents, their situation? Let me give you an illustration to think about.

Illustration used to set up a “no” answer.

This chapter in Ezekiel addresses this problem, this way of thinking. Here, God wants to turn His people from being excusers to repenters.

The Issue He Confronts

(v.1-4)

Ezekiel begins with a question as he confronts the exiles with the way they are thinking.

Expressed in Their Proverb

(v.1-2)

The proverb was in common use as is evident from its being quoted directly in Jeremiah 31:29. Stewart detects two underlying ideas in the proverb: *fatalism*, where the current generation cannot help themselves and *blame-shifting*, where the current generation is not responsible. If they have *inherited* this they cannot possibly have *caused* it (Stewart, p.153). Clearly, these two responses to the consequences of sin are evident today. We all know people who say: “I cannot help my situation” or “I am not responsible, someone else is.”

But, what is really being asserted by this proverb? What is believed by the Israelites that causes them to say this proverb? What do they think and believe that this proverb represents? Are they attacking the justice of children being judged for the parents’ sins? It seems to me, because of verse 19 that they believe that it is right for one generation to suffer for the sins of a prior generation. In other words, the proverb is not sarcastic nor an indictment. It represents what is believed.

However, what is believed is that the sins and iniquity of one generation *inevitably* dooms the succeeding generations. Therefore the responsibility to acknowledge their own sin and repent in order to please God and live long is unimportant or even denied because there is no way to avoid the consequences.. This proverb then is a statement of fatalism that denies the actual involvement of God in this world and therefore the real administration of justice.

I know this sounds confusing, but we today would put it like this, “Well, my parents were alcoholics so I drink.” Or, “I was abused as a kid, so I can’t help how I feel.” Or, “My family were slaves and therefore I will never have the opportunity to do well.” Do you see how this is working out? It is a view that my present circumstances are inevitable and I can’t change them.

Countered by God’s Response

(v.3-4)

God responds by a command (v.3) and a counter-thesis (v.4).

God commands them to stop using this proverb. He does so because it is the expression of how they think. People do what they believe. And how and what we say tends to express and reinforce our belief system and therefore our actions.

The way to begin to change is to stop thinking and saying what is not true. For example, when a person who says, “I hate myself” is telling themselves a lie. The truth is that they love themselves so much that they hate the way they are. Frankly, if you hated yourself, why would it matter? So, a person who is saying they hate themselves must start the process of change by saying the truth to themselves – that is, what they are doing and how they are feeling are coming from the fact that they love themselves too much. So, in counseling, we would tell a person to stop saying that. This is what God is saying, “Stop saying that proverb *because it isn't true*. When you say it, you reinforce it in your thinking and it will affect what you do and how you feel.”

Because one cannot think nothing, God says stop thinking this and begin thinking that. He offers a counter-thesis, truth instead of the myth or lie they are believing. This counter truth has two important elements:

- First, *GOD IS SUPREME OVER ALL*. He owns everything and everyone. All souls are His, no matter what generation. So it is not an impersonal fate or capricious chance that is governing what is going on, it is a personal, active, involved God who created it all and owns it all.
- Second, *EACH PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEMSELVES*. While a person's situation has an effect on them, the choices they make bring their own consequences. A person is responsible to God for their sins *regardless of the situation*.

God responds to the fatalism and passivism of the exiles by asserting His supremacy and their accountability. While the generations that have preceded them were wicked, they can still respond to the God in whose hand their lives are held.

The Examples He Provides

(v.5-18)

To prove his point, Ezekiel brings forward three illustrations. The language of his argument draws heavily from his Levitical background. The thrust has the language and force of case law. While he does not quote the Old Testament law directly, he certainly ties the cluster of vices and virtues to the Law. These lists may have been common tests among the Israelites. Just as we tend to have a set of virtues and vices by which we evaluate the godliness of a person, these particular ones are probably used because they are familiar to the exiles.

We are going to encounter the “he shall live” and “he shall die” language. We must remember that Ezekiel is using this in the context of their covenant with God and their community as the people of God. We must be very careful not to read back into it eternal blessing and punishment. The blessing and curse, the live and die under Law mostly related to whether one would live long in the Covenant and Community as righteous, prospering and advancing in happiness or whether one would either be accused before the Community and punished as a Covenant breaker, including expulsion from the community or execution at the hands of the Community.

The Righteous Man**(v.5-9)**

The first case is that of the righteous man who does what is just and right. That he is righteous is demonstrated by the way he lives. The list of virtues here seem to form something of a chiasm.

- A *IN HIS REJECTION OF IDOLATRY* – he does not participate nor depend in the idols prevalent in his day.
- B *IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS NEIGHBOR* – he is careful in his sexual and financial dealings.
- B *IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEEDY* – he takes note of needs and meets them with care and justice.
- A *IN HIS OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WILL* – he walks in, keeps and acts faithfully to God’s Word.

This righteous man will live. Just a reminder here – the Old Testament sees righteousness as a matter of living Godward in the Covenant and among God’s people as Community. While being a righteous man from our perspective means that he is a believer, this is not primarily how the exiles would hear this.

The Wicked Son**(v.10-13)**

The second case is the wicked son of the righteous man. He is not declared to be unrighteous – no declaration is needed. This is just what we are unless a change has taken place. Further, the list of his vices defies placing into any order or structure. As opposed to the careful order of his father’s righteousness, his wickedness is a chaos of sin, sensuality and self. Now, will this man live? No, he shall bear the guilt of his wickedness and shall die. His guilt and accountability is for him to bear.

The point here is that he is sinful even through he did not see his father do these sins. Just because his father was righteous does not mean that he inevitably will be as well. He has chosen a path of sin against God and community that breaks the covenant and ends either with his expulsion or execution.

The Righteous Grandson**(v.14-18)**

The third case is the righteous son of the wicked man (grandson of the righteous man). Instead of fatalistically succumbing to his father’s sins, He turns away from the very wickedness he observed and does differently. What is fascinating is that now his righteousness is described in the orderly disciplined fashion of his grandfather, not the sinful chaos of his father. Will this man live? Yes, he is not doomed to die because of his father’s wickedness and will live and do well because he walks in God’s will and Word.

The key is in verses 17-18: the righteous son lives and is blessed while the wicked father is punished and dies. The wickedness of the father is actually observed and intentionally rejected as the son seeks to be a righteous man in the Covenant and Community.

It is curious to me that in our own culture with its huge emphasis on individualism and self-determination, there is still the very same fatalistic determinism that sees my situation as being determinative, not merely contributive. So here I am, the rugged individual with all my self-esteem at the mercy of the sins of others or my genes or my background. It's almost laughable. So we need to hear these words as well. Each person, no matter what their background or situation, is responsible to God for their sin – there is no excuse and there will be accountability.

The Objections He Anticipates

(v.19-29)

Ezekiel anticipates that the exiles are going to object. Instead of waiting for the objections to come, he answers them ahead of time.

Objection 1 – This is the Way Things Are

(v.19-24)

Their Assertion

(v.19a)

Ezekiel expects that they will be shocked by what he is saying. Their objection runs like this, “Well, why shouldn't the sons suffer the consequences. This is just the way things are. It is only to be expected that one's situation, one's parents, one's personality will determine one's fate.

God's Answer

(v.19b-24)

God responds by stating four basic universal truths.

THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY (v.19b-20). Personal accountability for sin is at the heart of God's justice. Each person is responsible before God for their own wickedness.

THE PRINCIPLE OF REPENTANCE (v.21-22). This is at the heart of responding to the Hebrew exiles. Real repentance is both possible and consequential. Thus, one ought to turn from one's wickedness and when one does, it is acknowledged by God.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD (v.23). This searing question aims at those who see the holiness and justice of God moving against sin and sinners with joy and glee. This is not in alignment with God's character. While He absolutely will judge, it is not pleasurable to Him. God delights to see people repent and change.

THE PRINCIPLE OF APOSTASY (v.24). Finally, when a person turns away from doing what is right to doing what is wicked, he will stand accountable for it. It is not a matter of placing the good and bad on a scale – the wickedness simply cancels the righteousness. Thus, under the Law, a person who had obeyed the Law all their life could still be stoned for one unrepented of act of adultery.

Objection 2 – God’s Ways are not Just**(v.25-29)****Their Assertion****(v.25a)**

Now, Ezekiel anticipates the objection we still get when we assert that one is responsible for sin *regardless* of the background, situation, family or genes or whatever. People will rise up and say that it is not fair (just) to hold a person responsible for their present responses to having been abused, molested, etc. in the past. The exiles were going as far as to say that God’s ways then are not just. When people say that it is not fair or just, they are making an assertion about God.

God’s Answer**(v.25b-29)**

How does God respond to this accusation?

THE EXPOSURE OF THEIR INJUSTICE (v.25b, 29). God points out their own injustice. Human measure of fairness cannot be used to judge God, but in fact must be adjusted to conform to God. To say, “That is not fair for God to do it that way” is apply our sinful measure of fairness and justice to God instead of learning what God says is just and living our lives accordingly.

THE EXPLANATION OF TRUE MERCY (v.26-28). He goes on then to illustrate how their own thinking was unjust as it applies to those who repent. The point here is that they are unjust *in not recognizing nor acknowledging* when a person changes either way. Block points out that, “Instead of theologizing about Yahweh’s (mis)administration of justice, they need to repent of their rebellious ways and to reorder their lives according to Torah.” (*Ezekiel Vol. 1*, Block, p.557).

How timeless is the Word of God – man’s sinful ways of thinking regardless of time and culture tend to be the same. And God’s character and unfailing mercies are the bedrock of our faith and hope. One further note. It has been my experience that people today who function like the exiles, will refuse to label their responses sin. So a person who commits the sins of anorexia may simply call it a disease stemming from either a genetic problem or having been abused or molested as child. Let’s take it even further – let’s suppose that it can be proven that the propensity to be a homosexual is genetic, is the person still responsible not to desire or fornicate with someone of the same sex? YES. What the Bible clearly labels as sin is sin regardless – it can be avoided and can be repented of by God’s grace. Committing sin is not inevitable nor is it inescapable.

The Call He Extends

(v.30-32)

So here it is. If the exiles are wrong and God is right, then they can and must turn from their sin to serve God with a whole and pure heart.

Because of the Warning of Judgment

(v.30)

They can and should repent because they, each one of them, and each one of you, is personally and individually accountable to God, regardless of the contributing factors to your sin. Your sinfulness and depravity are sufficient causes in and of themselves for your sin. While your past, your parents, your propensities may *contribute* to your sin, they never *cause* your sin. If you go on excusing your sin and keep on sinning, it will lead to your ruin. We see this all around us all the time. Why are we as Christians so hesitant? Why do we buy in to the world's way of thinking? Why do we not call for repentance? So will you repent today? Will you turn, first from the excuses for your sin and then from the practice of your sin? Will you avoid the ruin that awaits the soul that keeps on sinning?

Because of the Necessity of Change

(v.31)

Listen to the New Covenant language here. Put off your sin and put on a new heart and new spirit! How wonderful it is for us to hear this now as pointing us to put off the old man we were and to put on the new man we are becoming, to cast away our sin and to clothe ourselves in Christ.

The challenge here is to awaken the exiles, the house of Israel. Why would you persist in a course that will lead to individual death and to national destruction? And this challenge comes to us as well. Will we go on sinning when we have received the clear Word of God that we never have to sin and when we do sin, we have a High Priest who hears our confession and forgives our sin and sends grace to help that we might not continue to sin.

Because of the Character of God

(v.32)

Finally, the love and mercy, the delight of God in repenting people, is held out as motivation to turn from our sin to our Savior. Now we know that God will punish – this verse cannot be taken to say that since God does not delight in the death of the wicked, that He therefore does not punish the wicked – but we are encouraged to regard God as one who is thrilled at our repentance and who leans toward it with anticipation. Some of my reformed friends have simply got this wrong. They want a God who is stern and severe and who can't wait to crunch the wicked. This is not the Bible picture – the picture for us is of Christ, standing over the rebellious and rejecting city of Jerusalem with tears in eyes, yet the glory and holiness of God declared and defended.

Conclusion

So here is what is desperately needed in our day.

We need a deeper sense of our sinfulness. We have all sorts of blame-shifting, blame-excusing myths that allow us to see ourselves as full of worth, needed by God, victims of life and life's experiences, and saved for personal success and self-fulfillment. Where is the groaning and crying over our sinfulness? Where is the worm theology that fills the pages of our hymnals?

We need a fuller acknowledgment of our accountability before God. At the end of the day, it does not matter what people think about us, but what God knows to be true of us. We must live consciously and intentionally as living before the face of God.

We need to be a repenting people. True Christians repent. True Christians acknowledge their sin, grieve over their sin, confess their sin and turn from their sin. They do this in their hearts, in their thoughts and desires as well as in their behavior and feelings.

So, my beloved – turn and live.

A Lament

Ezekiel 19

Message Overview

Aim To show how we can have grief over sin.

- Agenda**
- To show the irony of the lament as a funeral dirge.
 - To show the consequence of sin and pride.
 - To bring us to Christ as One who is different and thus to honored, not lamented.

- Summary**
- The lament opens with the first lion, set into place by his mother, ruling destructively and carried off into Egypt.
 - The lament describes the second lion, also appointed by his mother, ruling with appalling devastation and carried off into Babylon.

Discussion Questions

How do we respond to a text like this? Without altering the message and meaning, how do we make it real for our lives and situations?

Try to get people to wrestle with the text and its difficulties. Be sure that they see that application of the Bible may be as much about attitudes as it does actions.

In what ways do we use people to get the things we love instead of using our things to love people? (2nd commandment)

Help people to see that this is the difference in an attitude at church that is primarily oriented towards what I get out of it rather than what I must sacrifice and serve for its sake.

If there were to be a “lament” over Clearcreek Chapel, what would it contain?

The point here is draw out people’ evaluation of life and ministry at the Chapel. It can be primed by asking, “If you could change any one thing at the Chapel, what would it be and why?”

Turn these into matters of prayer.

Introduction

Funerals are hard things. There is the overarching sadness and grief and loss that permeates every word and act. Funerals bring us to the end of a life. Often, there is then deep reflection on the way and worth of a person's life. Sometimes, we even contemplate ourselves. Deaths and ends have a way of causing us to think and evaluate over against something outside of ourselves.

I think of the funeral of a good friend. He had died of cancer and suffered greatly. Yet he had determined to die well by grace and for God's glory. We wanted to leave a legacy for his wife, children and church that this is how a Christian dies. He worked in the nuclear power plants near Joliet, IL. At his funeral, the church was filled with men and women from the plants whose lives were touched by Elliot's simple and kind godliness. He was not accomplished in the sense of doing something great or spectacular, but his death and his way through it, shone brightly.

But then there are times when it is not like this. There are many in our world whose death will mostly bring a sad evaluation of a life wasted. At times like this (think of Saddam Hussein or Bin Laden whose death may actually be greeted with rejoicing) what we see is simply the failure and futility of a life lived for love of self and seeking of power and place in the world.

In the context of the last 3 verses of Ezekiel 18, God instructs Ezekiel to take up a funeral dirge, a lament. There is the appeal from God to turn and repent (18:30-32) followed by His ironic lament over the folly and failure of the David dynasty (19:1-14).

<<< Read Text >>>

Approaching the Lament

Its Character

What we have in this chapter appears to be a Hebrew lament. This is in one chapter what the book of Lamentations is in a whole book. A lament is a way of expressing grief for the dead. It is not a eulogy where the dead are honored. Rather, it expresses grief over a life largely marked by futility, fruitlessness and failure.

At the time of this lament Zedekiah was king. The date was 592 B.C., five years before the fall of Jerusalem. Thus Ezekiel was taking up a funeral dirge even though the death was still in the future. Jerusalem and Judah's fall was so certain that Ezekiel considered it inevitable. While this lament may trace the fate of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin—two of the three kings who preceded Zedekiah, it was not intended to be over individual kings. Ezekiel is singing this lament for the Davidic dynasty and the death of its rule. [Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*].

But there is also an ironic note in this funeral dirge. First, the actual literary rules are not followed closely. Block points out Ezekiel calls it a lament, composes it

as a song with lyrics, and then introduces elements into it that are alien to a lament. This dirge then is meant, through its irony, to jolt the listener into thinking much more deeply about its message than would be normal. Second, the irony is in the fact that one king and the dynasty itself being lamented over has not yet fallen, is not yet dead. It has terminal sin. Its demise is sure and soon. Therefore, the *lament* functions as prophecy and has a sense of inevitability.

Now, let us take a few minutes to be sure that we engage the text itself...

Its Content

Lioness – The Tribe of Judah

Ezekiel draws from the common idea of Kings as lions to point to the character of Judah. She is the lioness from which the kings of Judah come. What is given here is not just tribal or genealogical necessity. Her character is being described. She is the one bringing forth and putting forward these rapacious kings. This image then is of a mother lioness who takes one of her cubs to be the leader of the pack. After the capture of her first cub and the loss of her hope to reign, she selects a second cub and makes him a king.

Lions – The Davidic Dynasty

It was common for kings to be represented in literature as lions. Even further, the crest for the tribe of Judah was a lion. This language can point either to particular kings or to the dynasty represented by a king and his sons.

The Lion taken to Egypt

(v.3-4)

The first lion is almost certainly Jehoahaz, the King of Judah, who was hauled off to Egypt by the Pharaoh Neco in 609 BC according to 2 Kings 23:33-34. He had only been king for around 3 months. Yet, here, Ezekiel describes him as a hunter for men. But he does not last long. His reign ends with his abrupt capture and captivity in Egypt.

The Lion taken to Babylon

(v.5-9)

The identity of this second lion has been much debated. It may be either Jehoiachin who into exile with Ezekiel or Zedekiah who was the present soon to be disposed ruler. This second lion is described more fully and as being more destructive. He not only hunts men, but he also seizes widows. He lays an appallingly destructive waste to his own land.

The nations rise up against him, take him captive and haul him off to captivity in Babylon. The description of his fall is given in quite a lot of detail that would be more in line with this being Zedekiah. He is taken so that the roaring of his voice may no longer be heard on Israel's mountains.

Vineyard – The Jewish Nation

The second image is that of a vineyard. Once again the source of the kings, the nation and Judah as the root and branch from which Israel's rulers and the David dynasty come is highlighted. The subject of this image shifts from the failed princes to the fallen nation.

Success leading to Pride

(v.10-11)

The vine, representing the nation of Israel, is portrayed as planted well, growing strong and bearing fruit. This vine produces strong branches that grow to tower over the others. The words paint a picture not only of success and strength, but of pride.

Judgment leading to Destruction

(v.12-14)

But the One who planted her and fostered her growth, now moves in wrath to judge her. She is plucked up and thrown down. Her branches are stripped and dried by the east wind and consumed by fire. She is uprooted and transplanted from the fruitful place to a desert land. There she languishes and declines. She finally reaches the point that she is beyond all hope. She will not be able to produce a king. The dynasty seems to fail.

This funeral dirge laments the last of Israel's kings and the apparent end of David's dynasty. Both the nation and the tribe from which the lions and the strong branches come are being destroyed by judgment.

Its Connections

Why does Ezekiel do this now? What does he hope to accomplish? What connections can be made that will turn this helpless and hopeless condition around?

Out of the lament over failed and fallen kings and a judged nation emerges a *LONGING FOR THE TRUE KING*, the Messiah and His glorious kingdom. Isaiah had predicted that there was to come the Branch and Lion of the Tribe of Judah who would come to redeem and rule His people. The natural lineage alone could not produce the Messiah. Yahweh must perform according to His promises and power to bring forth the Messiah, the Branch and the Lion.

We are also *BROUGHT TO CHRIST HERE BY WAY OF CONTRAST*. He is not a roaring, devouring lion. He is the Lion of God, the Lamb come first in meekness and yet to come in majesty. He is not selected by the lioness and placed as head of the pack. He does not hunt and wound and destroy. And one day, all kings and pharaohs and people will bow to Him; He will be the great hunter of souls and capturer of hearts.

Applying the Lament

From the intersection of the teaching we have sat under this week at CCEF and the text we are examining this morning emerge several important and powerful insights.

What has happened here turns the 2nd great commandment on its head. See how these kings take their strength and riches and power and turn them to destroy people. God calls us to use the resources He has given us as a means to love the people in our lives. We tend to use people to get the things that we want in our lives.

How does the greatness and glory of David and Solomon turn into the sad and sorry plight of Zedekiah? How do the fires of Sunday Morning aspirations and commitments turn into Monday afternoon ashes? Why does this happen?

Because we live by our functional God replacements, our idols -
 These are glory wars – we are meant to live for glory, to be dazzled by glory. We were designed to be dazzled by the glory of God.

We are glory deceived – dazzled by lesser or false glories

We are glory thieves – be at the center of my world, take control (illus: rehearsing prayer in your heart before praying it publicly).

Sins move from being subtle to being dominant and destructive in relationships. There is a downward progression of sin as it gains a stronger and stronger hold on our life. What begins with simple and subtle compromises soon binds and crushes in its boa constrictor grip.

Israel often fails to see that God is in their difficulty. Their troubles and trials more often cause them to accuse God than to trust God. It is not so different with us. Do we ask the right questions in our trouble? Is God in my trouble? Is God large in this trouble? How is God in this trouble? Why?

Is Ezekiel's ministry truth in love? This is an important question. Here is a ministry that is often confrontational and uncomfortable. Yet, he loves God. And he is God's representative. This is why we must function in this world and among one another as ambassadors. We are not representing our own agenda, but God's.

How will it be at the end of our lives? Will a lament be a fitting end to a life largely marked by spiritual futility, fruitlessness and failure? Or will we be leaning towards the gateway to glory, longing with all our loving and serving and sighing and sacrificing to hear from the lips of our Redeemer and Ruler, "Well, done."

Rebellion and Return

Ezekiel 20:1-44

Message Overview

Aim To show how God's initiative to change His people by calling them from idolatry is rooted in His promises and power.

- Agenda**
- To continue to emphasize the role idols play in our disobedience
 - To show how God indicts Israel for her sin, yet holds out an eschatological hope for salvation and sanctification.
 - To challenge some commonly held errors today.
 - To uphold the centrality of God's Name, His reputation and fame.

- Summary**
- Israel inquires of God through Ezekiel and is rebuffed.
 - God indicts Israel, arguing His case from the history of the exodus generation, the wilderness generation and the exile generation.
 - God asserts His purpose and promise to redeem the House of Israel.

Discussion Questions Discuss and assert the right of God to pursue His own glory, His name and fame and to demand it of all.

Ask and respond to issues over the idea of self-loathing.

What ever has happened to grieving and groaning over our sins!!!

Discuss the important difference between God's punishing Israel and God's chastening of believers.

Introduction**(v.1-4a)**

<< Read each section of text with its heading >>

Indictment and charges in court as an opening illustration

The language and vocabulary of the judicial system is now much more familiar to us than it used to be. Most of us had to take US History and Government in school. We can remember, very vaguely, mind you, that there are multiple court systems, but the processes and procedures in criminal cases are much the same. But now we have shows like *Law and Order*. Now most of us know what it means to be charged, to be indicted, to be tried, to be convicted and to be sentenced.

This helps us to understand what is going on in Ezekiel 20. This has both the indictment of Israel and the initiative of God as Israel appears before God.

The gist of the indictment runs as follows: if your forefathers would rebel in the days of promise and deliverance, how much more wicked is rebellion in the days of punishment and destruction.

So what about God's response to seekers?

Do you see this here in this text? Here are inquirers of the Lord. They have come to the preacher/prophet to see what the Lord will say. The last time they appeared, God pointed to the idols of their heart, called for them to repent and affirmed that He is willing to be sought and approached.

But now, the tone is different. From chapter 14 to chapter 20, God's willingness to be sought and inquired of has changed. He is now a stern judge, prepared with clear charges and a compelling case. Israel, rather than becoming a people largely characterized by ever more turning away from their idols are more and more brazen in the embracing of their idols.

And God has had enough. While God will be approached by seekers who come willing to hear and heed God, to recognize and repent of their heart idols, God will not be sought by people who intend to merely include God in their life, not have God as Ruler over their life.

It will be helpful as we approach the text to see the cycle or structure that lies underneath this massive indictment. Following Ian Duguid (p. 260), it lays out somewhat like this:

- The Lord *reveals* Himself to His people.
- The Lord *requires* exclusive devotion.
- Israel *rejects* the Lord and *rebels* against Him.
- The Lord *readies* His wrath.
- The Lord *restrains* His wrath for the sake of God's reputation.
- The Lord *responds* with an act of limited judgment.

Let's listen carefully to God and map these over our own lives today.

Rebellion - The Indictment of Israel (v.4b-32)

This large section is a three-part indictment of Israel. The central problem of Israel's idolatry is placed over against God's great concern for His own fame and reputation.

Indictment of the Exodus Generation (v.4b-17)

The indictment is first leveled against the fathers - those who lived in Egypt and were part of the slave/exodus generation. This is the generation that refused to cross over at Kadesh-Barnea and perished in the wilderness.

In the Land of Egypt (v.4b-10)

God gives them *HIS PROMISES* to bring them out to the land, the good and bountiful land of His Covenants (v.5-6). There is no mistaking the agenda of God. He is moving on their behalf to bring them out to what that He had promised. Twice, God speaks of having sworn to what He would do. There in the slavery of Egypt, God holds out the promise of what can hardly be imagined.

He also gives them *HIS PRECEPTS*, requiring that they should stop their idolatry (v.7). God's privileges are rooted in precepts. God's people are freed from sin to live surrendered to the will of their Ruler and Redeemer. There is no other way. And it is not merely a matter of conforming our outward behavior, but of putting away our heart idols.

Israel refuses to hear God and *PERSISTS IN THEIR IDOLATRY* so that God considers pouring out His wrath right there in Egypt (v.8). There is an interesting insight here that Israel, while groaning under the hardship of Egypt, still hungered for the food and follies of Egypt. They evidently see God as coming to deliver them on their terms, to meet their felt needs. So while they do not want Egypt's tyranny, neither will they bow to God's throne.

God decides for the sake of *HIS REPUTATION* to rescue them, bringing them out of Egypt and into the wilderness (v.9-10). He contemplates pouring out His wrath. But He delivers them in order to declare His own glory. Here is what it means to be God. God exists for the sake of His own glory. He moves on Israel's behalf *because it is going to increase His fame*. All the people groups will take notice of the character of God.

In the Wilderness (v.11-17)

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF to them through what He requires of them (v.11-12). He wants them to know Who He Is. He gives them His Law to walk by. In order to mark them off as His own, to set them apart, He gives them the sign of the Sabbath. It is important for us to realize that circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sabbath is the sign of Mosaic Covenant. Through the Sabbath, God points backward to sin that interrupted the creation rest and forward to the cross where redemption rest may begin.

ISRAEL REBELED AGAINST GOD (v.13a). From the beginning of their deliverance from Egypt right up to Kadesh-Barnea, Israel refused to obey God and profaned His Sabbaths. These behaviors arose from both formal idols (outward,

religious objects of worship) and functional idols (inward, controlling heart wants and desires).

GOD RESTRAINS HIS PUNISHMENT for the sake of His fame (v.13b-17). Because God had tied His fame and reputation to Israel's future, He spares them. The publication of His character to the nations is through the megaphone of His greatness on behalf of Israel and His goodness to them. Again, God points to the their heart idols as being the roots of disobedience.

So, here is God's final statement over that generation (v.17). He spared them, did not destroy them nor bring them to an end. That generation was called out to know and love God and was preserved because of God's concern for His own reputation.

Now, I need to stop here because some of you may be uncomfortable with this. It is evident that in a human being, this would be self-centered and thus wicked. How can God be primarily concerned about His own reputation and still be holy? Why isn't this just arrogance and wickedness? The God-centeredness of God is because He is God. If He were centered on anyone or anything else, then that, whatever and whoever it is, is God. The whole witness of Scripture is that the God-centeredness of God is the grounds of our greatest good. Being infinite, His gladness in Himself overflows into good for others. If God does not love Himself, then He is violating the first great commandment. And this is why self-love in us is wicked – we are not God. When we love ourselves, we are our own idol, our own god. So this is why the essence of sin is to fall short of the glory of God. And why, all that our Redeemer and Ruler is doing for us will in the end put the greatness of God on public display – in other words, God will be glorified.

Indictment of the Wilderness Generation (v. 18-26)

In the light of this, God turns His indictment on the children, on the wilderness generation. These are the ones who are born or grow up after Kadesh-Barnea. They are the ones who witness the great provisions of God and grievous punishments by God in the wilderness. Every day there are both manna and funerals.

In their Rebellion (v.18-21a)

GOD WARNS THEM in the wilderness not to follow the example of the prior generation (v.18-20). And He exhorts to them to the obedience their fathers rejected. He points them to His statutes and His Sabbaths. And He promises them that they will then know Him truly.

But *THEY REBELLED AGAINST GOD* as well. They follow in their father's footsteps and reject God. They did not devote themselves to careful obedience. They profane the Sabbath's and thus deny God's rule over them and their rest and trust in His promises of redemption.

In their Punishments (v.21b-26)

The first reaction of God is just like to their fathers – He would restrain the outpouring of His wrath in order to maintain the fame of His Name. He had taken them out of Egypt, brought them into the wilderness, now would He do

all this simply to destroy them there? No, He would continue to move to change them and to bring them into the fullness of His promises.

However, He warned them that there was coming a day where He would disperse them among the nations and destroy them. This warning in Deuteronomy has been the grounds of Israel's condemnation all throughout the book of Ezekiel. What they were experiencing in the exile was the fulfillment of that promise and prophecy. Notice again in verse 24 that outward disobedience and inward idolatry are the issues. Their eyes are gazing, set and fixed on their father's idols. They did not learn. They will not listen. They will be destroyed.

Now they are handed over to laws and statutes that were originally designed for their good, but will now bring about their destruction. Here is the Romans and Galatians understanding of the Law, right in the Old Testament itself. The point here is as one commentator points out, "These 'not good' statutes, laws that led not to righteousness and life but to defilement and death... meant not only death for them but death for their firstborn sons, offered up in the fires of Molech. The end point of Israel's story is thus the utter reverse of the goal at the beginning. Israel, the Lord's 'firstborn son' (Ex. 4:22) was to be freed from Egypt so that he could offer pure worship in the Promised Land." (Duguid, p. 262) This sets the stage for God to bring His own firstborn son into the world who would be the new Israel of God (Matthew 2:13-15) and gather for the fame of His name a people from every people group (1 Peter 2:9-12).

So the hand of God that had been raised to promise them good is now raised to promise them grief.

Indictment of the Current Generation (v.27-32)

Now the indictment turns to the present generation, the generation that is inquiring of God while immersed in their iniquity and idolatry. It is interesting that the generations in the land are not brought forward as a part of cycle of the indictment. This appears to be because God has book-ended the history of Israel by an exodus into the land and an exile from the land. In both, there is a going out – then, a going out to the place of God's promise and now, a going out to the place of God's punishment.

By God's Precedent (v.27-29)

Here is the logic – since God has done all this to those generations, then and therefore, God will do what He is about to do. Once God had brought them into the Promised Land, all they did there was to defile and defame God by their sin. They not only had disobeyed His statutes, dishonored His Sabbaths, defamed His Name, but then they had defiled the land.

By their Practice (v.30-32)

Now, they have simply perpetuated what every generation before them had practiced. They were offering up their children to Molech and worshipping their idols. God's declaration stands over all this sin – "As I live, I will not be

inquired of by you.” So here is the answer to the beginning of the chapter. They want to come to inquire, but is God available to be inquired of? The answer is an emphatic, “No.” Further, God will not only thwart their wants but their thoughts. They will never become what they think is best, like the other nations.

Restoration - The Initiative of God

(v.33-44)

But thank God it does not end there. The solution to all this is not a nice, benign God who wrings His hand over people who reject Him and rebel against Him. God in a sense, stands up and takes the initiative to bring about what He has ultimately purposed.

God expresses His restoring initiative in a simple, yet compelling chiasmic structure. Your outline and the slide reflect this structure.

a – God Will Change Them

(v.33-38)

Notice the assertive of God, "I will..." God has purposed; God has chosen; God will redeem; God will complete. The unfolding of redemptive history (of which Israel's is a part) is not just happening at the whim of man but by the will of God. Their rejection and rebellion has been folded into the larger plan and purpose of God to restore them as a part of the people of God. This greater purpose is unveiled with greater clarity in Ephesians and 1 Peter. There, these assertive, "I will's" of God are seen to relate to the Lord Jesus Christ, to all that being *in Christ* means.

The key to this change is in the phrase, "I will be King." God is not simply asserting a title, a position over them. He is declaring His authority, His right to command and to control. This is something we have to be sure we understand. We tend to compartmentalize our Christianity in such a way that allows us to think of ourselves as God's people, but not necessarily God's subjects. Some would say, "God being King is His position; but, I can be one of His people without necessarily surrendering or submitting to His rule." THIS IS NOT TRUE. People who consciously reject the authority of God cannot be the people of God. Where Jesus does not rule, something or someone else does. This is why you will most often hear us speak of Jesus as our Redeemer and our Ruler. One requires the other.

God asserts that He will change them. It involves gathering them out of their scattering, judging them over their sinfulness, bringing them once again into a covenant with Him and purging them of rebels and rebellion. The New Testament interprets this as being inaugurated in His saving work in Christ and culminated when, at the end of the times of the Gentiles, God saves the elect remnant of the Jews. So God had and still has a purpose for people descended physically from Abraham and completes that purpose by making them spiritual descendents in Christ.

b – God Will Not Tolerate their Idolatry (v.39)

Here is a powerful interjection by God. “If you will not listen to me, then go serve your idols. But you will no longer be attached to my Name. You will not sully my reputation for I will not call you by my Name.” While God has restrained His wrath and has meted out partial judgments, He is now declaring an end to that restraint. God will vindicate His Name and sustain His reputation by carrying forward His purposes in redemptive history.

a' – God Will Accept Them (v.40-44)

Those purposes will be realized in a future day when all the House of Israel (this is a term in prophetic writing that denotes the elect remnant – it is not referring to every Jew) will be gathered on God’s holy mountain. Beyond the hope of gathering in the city of Jerusalem is the assurance of a gathering on Mt. Zion, the mountain of God. There, all the redeemed will serve Him.

The key feature of this gathering, this returning, is that God will accept them. Their sacrifices will be pleasing and God will unveil, will manifest His holiness among them before all the people groups. Then and there the purpose of God to uphold His fame and reputation will be realized. And they will know, truly know that God is the Lord.

When God’s self disclosure and holy display takes place, the people of God recall all their wicked ways and loathe themselves (v.43). God does not view this as a bad thing. It is a good thing when we contrast the horrid corruption of our sin with the holy beauty of God’s character, that we loathe and hate our sinfulness. Now the Bible will not let us construct a neat entity called sin that resides in us but is distinct from us – so some would say hate the sin, but don’t loathe yourself. But this is not what this says – when our sin is filthy, when we are disgusting, then we ought to be disgusted.

Then the glorious and grand conclusion (v. 44)...

Three features fuel our joy and gladness in this kind of God:

- That *WE CAN TRULY KNOW THAT GOD IS THE LORD*. This is not a theoretical theological assertion; rather, it can become a personal realization and a practical reality. It is not that we make Him Lord – He is that already – it is that we confess that He is Lord by believing and bowing to Him.
- That *GOD DEALS WITH US FOR HIS OWN FAME AND REPUTATION*. God is not promoting me nor raising my self-esteem; God is promoting His own glory by putting it on public display in His redeeming and ruling over me. What a relief that it is not about nor my fame; what a serious joy it is that is all about His.
- That *GOD DOES NOT DEAL WITH US ACCORDING TO OUR SINS*. See, we are in a greater privilege than the Old Testament saints. We are being dealt with as sons, not sinners. Our being dealt with as sinners is a matter of the cross; our being dealt with as sons is a matter of chastening. God is not punishing us for our unholiness but rather is training us in His own holiness.

Conclusion

The perspective on seekers...

In this day in which we shape church to attract seekers, this text should call for sober self-examination. Not all who seek to inquire of God will be inquired of by God. There must be an honest and humble bowing before Him as King. For such seekers God seeks; in fact, it is God's initiative that creates such seekers.

The priority of God's fame...

God promotes and defends His great fame and reputation.

We must not defile, demean, or deny the fame & reputation of God

How we tend to do it – by raising up our idols in our hearts, our own thinking and wants that we serve and master us.

What we must do to change – repent of wrong ways of thinking and wrong ways of wanting – dealing with our idols – so that we surrender and submit to our Redeemer as our Ruler.

The place for self-loathing...

(v.43) When the greatness and goodness of God is fully apprehended and appreciated by God's people, their loathing of themselves as sinners is a right and necessary consequence. Is not our affirmation of our worth and value simply evidence that we are not seeing God truly?

The problem with idols...

All rebellion is against a God of love and grace. It is also a rebellion against His rule and dominion. Idolatry, whether formal or functional, replaces God with something or someone else. We have talked about idols as promising us something we want and eventually enslaving us to them. But here the theme is that of satisfying and feasting and pursuing. Heart idols, functional wants, become replacement satisfactions. They are substitutes for the sweetness of being satisfied in God. And while they may smell like chocolate and look like chocolate and taste like chocolate, they are actually dung. And sadly, we may gain a taste for dung as chocolate as long as we don't have to go to God for the real thing.

The power of promises...

All through Ezekiel and through the Bible as a whole, believing God's promises imparts enabling grace to please God. Jesus challenges His disciples over and over again about their doubt and its accompanying disobediences. So, we are to live by faith, to live by believing what God says in an obeying way. Ezekiel here affirms the promises that a covenant making and keeping God has given. He expects that God's people will gain hope and help from them. And so should we.

So I want to call you to surrender and submit, to believe in an obeying way. The challenge today is before you – will you hear and heed!

The Song of the Sword

Ezekiel 20:45 – 21:32

Message Overview

Aim To forcibly bring the danger of the sword of God's wrath before God's people

- Agenda**
- To reinforce the importance and usefulness of metaphorical and imaginative communication.
 - To show that Israel's rejection of God's chastening rod has brought upon them God's punishing sword.
 - To challenge us not to reject God's chastening.
 - To threaten the lost with the sword of God's judgment.

- Summary**
- Attention to the message is gained through a cryptic parable explained
 - The impending judgment of God is unfolded through the metaphor of a sword.
 - Babylon moves against Israel as God's sword bringing destruction upon Jerusalem, accompanied by a diatribe against Zedekiah and taunt by Ammon.
 - God prophesies the utter destruction of His sword, Babylon

Discussion Questions

Introduction

I have *A FASCINATION WITH SWORDS*. I love the great moments in tales of King Arthur when Excalibur is drawn from the stone. I love the great blades of Gandalf and Aragorn and short swords of Bilbo and Sam.

We think of some swords as being used for deliverances...

We think of some swords as being used for destruction...

This chapter *HIGHLIGHTS AGAIN EZEKIEL'S LITERARY SKILLS*. Here is another example of the wide variety of Ezekiel's communication of God's message. The dire predictions of doom and destruction for Israel and Ammon, hurled by engaging imagery, zing into hearts.

Here God is drawing His sword against Israel.

The Sword is Drawn

(20:45-21:7)

In our English Bibles, the chapter break and verses are different from the Hebrew. The unit break ought to be here at verse 45. Here the song of sword is introduced by the consuming flame. Except for the last section, each major section is introduced with this formula, "The word of the Lord came to me." So Ezekiel is speaking by Divine inspiration, carried along by the Holy Spirit so that his words are God's Word.

Expressed in a Riddle

(v.45-49)

He opens with another of his enigmatic riddles or parables. He is told to face the south and to preach against it. Against its forests he is to say that a destructive fire will be kindled by God, a conflagration that cannot be quenched and will ravage the land. All shall see this mighty forest fire sweeping across the south-land and shall know that surely, God has been the fire-starter.

So Ezekiel does what he is told. He gets the reaction that he has gotten in the past. The people are baffled and dismiss him. He is a speaker of parables and cannot be understood. Why should they listen? This becomes a question, a proper spiritual complaint to God. Why would God want His prophet to be a babler?

Explained in its Reality

(21:1-5)

This paragraph is remarkably parallel to the one before it. It answers the three main questions that arise:

1. Where or who is the southland?
2. What is the forest?
3. What is the flame or forest fire?

In response to these questions, Ezekiel is to turn his face towards Jerusalem and to preach against its sanctuary or sanctuaries. He is to declare that God is about to draw His sword of judgment and send it scything through all the land, slaughtering the righteous and wicked alike. These places of refuge, whether religious or secular, whether the Temple of God or the idolatrous pagan shrines, will be no

place of safety. And when Yahweh wields *His* sword, everyone will know that He is Sovereign.

So, in these two powerful and graphic metaphors, Israel's doom and destruction at the hand of God are prophesied. By the flame and by the sword, God will carry out His judgment with such an effect that all will know that Yahweh is the One behind the destruction and that He is utterly supreme and sovereign.

Expressed in his Response (v.6-7)

In response, Ezekiel is to sit in public and moan and groan with grief. He is to show in his outer manner an inner broken and grieved heart. And he is to do it such a way as to draw out the exilic community to ask why.

This prophetic drama is to warn the exiles that the much prophesied doom of the Hebrews in Israel is about to take place. The news will come. It will be a year of news causing spiritual and emotional turmoil. The coming disaster in Judah will bring despair among the exiles. God wants the exiles to understand, to really see that what He has spoken will be fulfilled.

The Sword is Prepared (v.8-17)

The metaphor of the sword is now extended. The sword has not only been drawn from its sheath, but now it is being prepared for battle. In a day of guns, we know little of sword-lore. Yet this imagery is still vivid and frightening.

It is Sharpened and Polished (v.8-13)

The Lord takes His drawn sword and draws the oiled stone along the steel's edge. The air is rent with the ringing slink of a honed edge. The burnishing cloth and oil are vigorously applied until the long blade glints of bright danger. It is ready to be handed over to the swordsman, to the slayer. There is both a thrill and a terror in the words – what a beautiful sword, what a deadly sword.

But why has the sword now been taken up? While the Hebrew in the end of verse 10 is very difficult, I think the ESV translators are on good ground because of verse 13. In Psalms and Proverbs, parents are exhorted not to withhold the rod and sons are exhorted not to despise the chastening rod. But Israel has. God had dealt with them as sons, using the rod of chastening to correct them and to change them. But they despised God's correction. Do they think they will get away with it? Do they not see that the hand that once wielded a rod for their instruction is now the hand that wields a sword for their destruction.

My, beloved, we have this same exhortation in Hebrews 12. We must not despise the chastening of God for by it He corrects us and He assures us. He deals with those things in our life not pleasing to Him. His chastening hand is the evidence of His love for us and His fatherhood over us. So in the words of the great Puritan, Thomas Brooks, we must “learn to kiss the hand that wields the rod.”

O hear me, there is coming a day when the wrath of God will move with unremitting judgment and the sword of justice and vengeance will destroy the wicked. Where will you be on that day?

It is Swung and Hefted**(v.14-17)**

The skilled swordsman of God takes the now drawn and sharpened sword and gets its measure. These are swords, not of penetrating tips, but of slicing edges. You've all seen this. The sword is drawn and then swung slashing through the air – glittering right and left, down and across. Its weight and reach and swing are all measured for maximum effect.

What we are to feel is the *threatening* power of God's judgment. This through-the-air swishing sword threatens the corrupt comfort of sinners. That sense of threat, of God being dangerously against sinners, is acted out here in another way as well.

In our culture, we generally applaud in approval. It expresses appreciation and praise – it is meant to encourage and uplift and in some settings, (like sports) to call for greater efforts. But in the Jewish culture, there was thing called “clapping against.” In this the person would lean toward another, and clap his hands moving toward them (illustrate). It would express displeasure. It was a threatening gesture. God here claps His hands against His sinning people. He is not approving them, but threatening them. His claps are accompanied by His words, “I will satisfy my fury.”

The Sword is Wielded**(v.18-29)**

So the sword will be wielded. It has been drawn. It has been sharpened and polished. It has been measured and wished about with threatening vigor. Now it is put in the hand of the slayer, Babylon.

The Irony of Babylon's Decision**(v.18-23)**

The swordsman of God is the king of Babylon. But he has a problem, a decision to make. Should they attack the Ammonites or the Israelites? They are at a sign post pointing two ways. Which should they take? Israel and Ammon were just across the Jordan from one another. They were both joined in the rebellion against Babylon. They were both the objects of Nebuchadnezzar's anger. To which one should the sword of judgment come now?

In a lovely twist of irony, the very pagan rites that Israel has practiced in the past to choose what to do, the king of Babylon uses to decide which road to take. He shakes the arrows, something like our drawing straws. He consults his household idols here called teraphim. He looks into the liver, a common practice of divination and witchcraft. And all the signs point him to Jerusalem. He is now moving to bring his weapons and forces and siege towers against the people of God. His determination has, in his mind, divine approval. Now, of course, Israel says those methods are wrong. And in a final twist, God has pointed Nebuchadnezzar along the path of God's will even through pagan rites. Daniel Block writes, “A pagan king employs strictly forbidden techniques of divination and discovers the will of Yahweh. The people of Yahweh adopt an orthodox stance in the rejecting the omens as false, but in doing so seal their own fate.” (Block, p. 688).

The Totality of the Prince's Destruction (v.24-27)

Now there is a sudden and dramatic shift in voice and an increasing vehemence of tone. Ezekiel seems almost personal in this as he speaks for God. He turns his words on the ruling prince of Israel, Zedekiah. With ever increasing venom, he condemns this wicked king.

His, as well as Israel's wickedness is now uncovered. They had a sworn oath of loyalty to Babylon and how they were breaking it. They denied their sin and covered their sin and now were unashamed when their sins were paraded around in the light of day.

Listen to this in verse 25-26. He is addressed as profane and wicked, as irreligious and corrupt. He has no fear of God and is full of iniquity. Thus, his day of punishment is near. In fact, he is ordered by God to remove the symbols and insignia of his office, to step down from authority. He will be made low. The throne will be made empty. The Davidic dynasty has now come to ignominious end. It will lie crumbled in ruins.

But in the midst of this thunderous theme of doom and destruction, Ezekiel takes a promise to which Israel has tacked her hopes and twists in a final nail. There is no hope of deliverance. While traditional interpretation has seen in verse 27 an allusion to Christ, the one to whom judgment is delivered is Nebuchadnezzar. There is no hope at this point. The whole tenor of the text is to melt hearts and cause the knees to shake because the sword is on the move – the dynasty is doomed, the prince is damned and city will be destroyed.

The Folly of Ammon's Derision (v.28-29)

Now God through Ezekiel confronts the relief and the taunts of Ammon. The word here translated "reproach" might better have been translated, "Derision". Thus, the Lord is prophesying against the *taunt* of Ammon which sounds remarkably like God's sword song (v.28). They are mocking Israel's misfortune in that the "false divination" has brought upon Jerusalem its final destruction. God now picks up their taunt and repeats against them. They will also feel the hand of God's judgment. The sword will march against them as well.

The Sword is Sheathed (v.30-32)

Then the abrupt end of this song of the sword. The sword is ordered to be sheathed. And Babylon herself will also be judged. The instrument of God's judgment will soon become the object of God's wrath.

The Extent of God's Judgment (v.30-32a)

God has brought Babylon into existence and has raised them up to the place of power and prominence. He has made them and He will break them. He has fashioned this sword and He will put this sword to the flame. God will deliver them to judgment at the hands of others just as Judah was given into their hands.

And ultimately this judgment will be utter destruction. Ruined cities and destroyed kingdoms can be rebuilt. But God promises that they will not even be remembered anymore. While the final realization of this awaits the coming the

Lord Jesus, Babylon as a city and system will be utterly demolished and pass beyond memory in the certain glories of future reign of Jesus.

The Certainty of God's Judgment

(v.32b)

All this will happen because the Lord has spoken. Do you see the great sense of surety and finality here? This is the rattling crash of the gavel of God's pronouncement. There is no appeal. There will be no reversal of judgment. The King has spoken.

Conclusion

Let's think carefully over the significance of this text.

METAPHORS AND IMAGERY ARE POWERFUL WAYS OF COMMUNICATING GOD'S REVELATION. All through the Bible, God speaks and authors write to impact the imagination. Jesus constantly teaches by using descriptions and metaphors and analogies. And so should we. Merely stringing simple, declarative sentences together in teaching and sermons guts the communication of its passion and its power. Thus, one of our aims in preaching and teaching is to speak, not in pale pastels, but to paint with vivid colors, the delights and dangers of our God.

THE BIBLE PORTRAYS GOD AS BEING A GOD OF BOTH DELIGHTS AND DANGERS. There is a beauty to the holiness and love of God to design salvation, to love sinners, to do good to His enemies and to eternally exalt His glory through His Son. But God is also dangerous. His holiness must not be violated, His love never spurned, His glory always upheld, lest God move against us with great and furious and holy wrath.

GOD IS FREE TO USE ANY MEANS AT HIS DISPOSAL TO BRING ABOUT HIS PURPOSES AND PLANS. The sword of God for the punishment of Israel is a pagan and wicked nation. This great lesson is good for us to learn, lest we kick against God when He uses disease, financial failure, car accidents and a whole host of unwelcome and possibly even wicked things to deal with His people.

WE MUST NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING ROD OF GOD. God is moving with Fatherly love to discipline us for our good. He knows exactly the means to use. Though those disciplines may be hard, though they may hurt, they will never, never harm. Along with His chastening rod comes His enabling grace. Let us endure chastening like Jesus endured the cross, because we are looking away from our present pain to future joys.

FINALLY, THE SWORD OF GOD'S WRATH IS DRAWN AND SHARPENED AND READY TO CLEAVE THE WICKED. We have preached much in this day to this generation of the love of God. But we have done so in a way that has removed the threat of God's wrath. Listen to me my beloved, the eternal and unending wrath of God against sinners is real, potent and fiery. It is a great and horrific danger facing us at the end of the world. But it is facing you today, as well. The mighty sword of God is unsheathed, sharpened and polished and upraised over our casual, carnal and corrupt lives. Will you not now flee to the safety of the cross – to bow to Him and trust Him? Lest that sword fall like lightning and cleave you in judgment.

Charged and Condemned

Ezekiel 22

Message Overview

Aim The show the sinfulness of sin through the judgment leveled against sinners.

- Agenda**
- To show the thoroughness of God as a prosecutor.
 - To demonstrate the rightness of God's judgment against the Hebrews.
 - To call for a deeper sense of the sinfulness of sin.
 - To draw the charged and condemned to the cross for help and hope.

- Summary**
- The Hebrews are charged from the Law.
 - The judgment of God will:
 - Scatter them throughout the nations;
 - Gather them in the crucible of His wrath.
 - The Hebrews are charged according to the Prophets.

Discussion Questions

Has showing and demonstrating the underlying structure of these texts (1) helped with understanding them and (2) motivated to see it elsewhere?

Help people to see and appreciate the literary structure and complexity of the Bible without being intimidated by it.

Discuss the relationship between the sins of leaders and the sins of people.

Draw out the affect leadership has and the importance and necessity for godly leadership.

Discuss how understanding the wrath of God increases our appreciation for the mercy of God and the cross.

In our outreach to the lost, what role does the threatening of Scripture play?

Through discussion, get your flock to rethink the prevailing preaching of the gospel merely as an expression of God's love. Think in terms of third way, there is an imperative for the gospel to comfort and confront.

Introduction

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart has moved the world with his powerful music. He was a musical prodigy and a prodigious sinner. He died a terrible death while still very young. In the last of his life as he was very ill, he was approached by a mysterious stranger who commissioned a Requiem Mass. He was convinced that this was an angelic visit and the Requiem was to be for himself. He died while composing it and it was completed by a student working from his notes. One of the songs in this Requiem Mass sets to music an ancient Latin hymn, *Dies Irae*. It is sad to think of this dying genius composing to these words just days and hours before facing His Creator.

Day of wrath! O day of mourning!
 See fulfilled the prophet's warning-
 Heaven and earth in ashes burning!
 Oh, what fear man's bosom rendeth,
 When from heav'n the Judge descendeth,
 On Whose sentence all dependeth!
 Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth,
 Through earth's sepulchers it ringeth,
 All before the throne it bringeth.
 Death is struck and nature quaking,
 All Creation is awaking,
 To its Judge an answer making.
 Lo! The book exactly worded,
 Wherein all hath been recorded,
 Thence shall judgment be awarded.
 When the Judge His seat attaineth,
 And each hidden deed arraigneth,
 Nothing unavenged remaineth.

We rarely find such powerful portrayals of the Day of Judgment in our worship today. But this text brings us forcefully and powerfully to judgment, to being charged and condemned by the God of heaven.

Jesus tells the story of the deaths of a rich man and a man named Lazarus. When the rich man in hell pleads to have Lazarus return and warn his brothers, Abraham responds with, "They have the Law and the Prophets..." That was a common way of dividing the Old Testament – Law and Prophets. So God stands as the chief prosecutor and draws his charges from the Law and the Prophets.

This text's underlying structure:

- A – The charges drawn from the Law
- B – The judgment of scattering
- B – The judgment of gathering
- A' – The charges drawn from the Prophets

Lets hear the words of this text and be moved to lift high our Redeemer and Ruler.

The Charge Drawn from the Law

(v.1-12)

First, the Lord draws His charges primarily from Leviticus 18-20 and 25. One commentator writes that “[This Holiness Code] was a powerful summary of the covenant relationship. It pointed to God’s initiative of grace in the exodus redemption (11:45) and the corresponding requirement on Israel to fulfill their distinct role in the world as a holy nation.” (D. A. Carson, Ed, *New Bible Commentary*) These charges are aimed at the different categories of wickedness outlined in the Law.

Another question strikes the modern reader: why the emphasis on the shedding of blood? Ian M Duguid (from whom I have drawn much of this message) points out that behind this text and these charges are the defiling power of shed blood. While we might be repulsed by the idea of blood on the hands, the Hebrews had been taught that blood and the life it represented, was to be treated with reverence and respect. This reached its culmination in the shedding and sprinkling of blood at the sacrifice – here a life is poured out in behalf of another. Further, the judgment that was about to fall on the Hebrews was justified by the sins they had committed. They had shed blood in their sinning and now God was going to spill their blood in their judgment. They have lost their distinctive identity as the people of God so God is going to judge them just as He does the nations around them

The Summary of the Charge

(v.1-5)

The charges are summarized against the city, against Jerusalem (v.3). Thus, all the inhabitants are identified as culpable for sin and vulnerable to judgment. The charges are summarized under two major headings (v.4).

THEIR SOCIAL SINS – they are guilty because of the blood they have shed. Their rebellion against God has a horizontal dimension. They commit sins against their neighbors. Here they stand guilty, charged and condemned by the second great commandment and the second table of the Law.

THEIR RELIGIOUS SINS – they are defiled because of the idols they have made. They have constructed false gods to worship – false gods of their imaginations and thoughts (error) and false gods of wood and stone. They have formal idols (things they make) and functional idols (what is thought and desired in such a way that they sin). Here they stand defiled, corrupted and contaminated by their violations of the first great commandment and the first table of the Law.

As a result, God has destroyed their reputation and standing among the nations. They were supposed to be a witness to the greatness and holiness of God in a positive way by being a holy people. Now, they will still be a witness to the greatness and holiness of God by being a judged people.

All sins have a vertical dimension, even when we sin against others. This has been so clear in Ezekiel. Our age presses us to redefine or articulate sin as being primarily relational and against others. God defines even our sins against others as having a vertical dimension. Now, this may be clear to most here – but it needs to be said over and over again. Man’s primary problem is not his brokenness and his fallenness and its resulting relational carnage. Man’s primary problem is God, His violated holiness and spurned glories.

The Specifics of the Charge

(v.6-12)

In this paragraph, the charges are specified. They follow the primary categories of sin as listed in Leviticus and interpreted and applied in Deuteronomy.

THEIR SINS OF OPPRESSION (v.6-7). The sins that are cataloged here are ones of oppression of the vulnerable. The Law required a keen attention to those who were weaker, more vulnerable and worthy of respect. Almost every group you could think of have been oppressed in their culture: the financially vulnerable, the elderly, the widows and orphans and the foreigners.

THEIR SINS OF IRREVERENCE (v.8-9). These are sins in the religious realm. They have rejected and defiled the holy things of God. They have broken faith by not keeping the Sabbath. Instead, they have destroyed one another by words, participated in the cultic practices at the mountain shrines where they have eaten and fornicated.

THEIR SINS OF IMMORALITY (v.10-11). The charge at the end of verse 9 links the sins of irreverence and the sins of immorality. They were just like the nations around them. God had establish boundaries for sex that they had transgressed. God's Law was clear – in fact, it had gone into exacting detail as to the kinds of immorality that were forbidden. To our mind, God could have just said, "You may have sex with your spouse alone and your spouse must be of the opposite sex." That would have covered it all. But because the nations around regularly practiced even extremes of perversion, God then details those perversions as forbidden. Yet Israel had practiced them all. Make no mistake; we live in a culture that does all these as well.

THEIR SINS OF FINANCE (v.12) The charge here is against a gross materialism and pursuit of profit and wealth outside the boundaries God had established. Notice that each item here involves gain for the person. They take bribes, unlawfully charge interest and practice extortion. Each of these practices were strictly forbidden. God's people must learn to be content with the level of God's provision.

CONCLUSION OF THE CHARGE: You have forgotten the Lord God (v.12). Inattention to God, to His person and promises and provisions has caused these sins. What a sad and terrible thing, to forget the Lord God. Yet we do it all the time – we go through hours and days and maybe even weeks in which we rarely if ever, think about god. We forget Him. It is no wonder that we are not much different from the Hebrews in our behavior when we are not much different from them in our hearts.

The Condemnation by the Lord

(v.13-22)

At the center of this charge are two paradoxical judgments. God stretches out a hand of judgment that cannot be resisted and will not be stayed.

The Judgment of Scattering

(v.13-16)

The first is the judgment from God that scatters the Hebrews. He will take them out of their land and their city and will disperse them among the nations. God had prophesied in Deuteronomy that their breaking of His covenant with them would result in their being scattered. That judgment is near at hand.

The Judgment of Gathering

(v.17-22)

The second is the judgment from God that gathers the Hebrews for the fire. They have become a metal that needs refining, that needs fire for purification. So God will gather them in the furnace that Jerusalem was to become. There, He will submit them to the fire of His wrath to be burned and melted.

Both of these judgments were fulfilled. All the countryside of Judah gathered in Jerusalem to escape the onslaught of Babylon. In the siege year of horrific suffering, God wrought the judgment of gathering. Then, when Jerusalem fell, the Hebrews were carried away and their judgment of scattering, begun with the Assyrian captivity is now completed in the Babylonian captivity.

CONSEQUENCE OF THE CONDEMNATION: You will know that I am the Lord. This is God's agenda all that He has done. This oft-repeated phrase and over-arching theme in Ezekiel reveals why God is doing what He is doing. God is aiming, not just that they will know there is a God, but that their God is the sovereign Lord. He is their ruler. He governs and guides the universe and He will be acknowledged by His people.

The Charge Drawn from the Prophets (v.23-31)

The last charge is from the prophets, primarily drawn from Zephaniah 3:3-4.

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God. Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law. The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame. [ESV]

Zephaniah sets the framework for us: there is a rebellious and defiled city (v.1-2) whose righteous God is among His people as a just judge (v.5). These charges then are aimed at the different classes of leadership in Israel.

The first pronouncement is to show that the present judgment of the Hebrews is incomplete and insufficient. In an illusion to the Genesis Flood (not just some drought), God says that they have not been cleansed and have not received that sort of cataclysmic judgment yet – but they will.

Against the Prophets (v.23-25)

In an incredible indictment of the prophets, God charges them with conspiracy, assault and murder. The prophets who were to represent God, His word and will, have moved with violence against God's people. Rather than confronting and comforting God's people, they were moving among them like ravaging lions among a flock.

This is evocative of Jesus' and Paul's warnings to God's people. We are in constant danger that wolves in sheep's clothing will arise to devour and destroy the flock. We must take care to ourselves first and then be on guard. This danger to the flock may be both physical and spiritual. It is the responsibility of the shepherds to stand guard, to speak up, to teach truth, to expose error and to defend the flock. Woe on all of us, shepherds and flock alike, if we do not.

Against the Priests (v.26)

Next, the priests are charged with gross violations of their high and sacred office. They were to be the examples of holiness, honoring God and His ways. They were to teach the people and to apply God's Law to life and living. But the priests were involved in the very sins the people were. They failed in almost every area of their ministry before the Lord. They failed to model reverence, to teach truth, to apply the Law (expressed here as making distinction between clean and unclean, right and wrong) and to keep the sign of the covenant. Is it no wonder then that the people also did these very things? It leads you to wonder if the people learned and excused their sin from the priests.

Against the Kings (v.27-28)

The political leadership of Israel, here called princes, are charged as well. The charge is first in the corrupt use of their powers and authority (v.27). They who ought to be representing the Lawful rule of God and restraining the sin of the

people, move among the people destroying them. The second part of the charge is the conspiracy they have entered into with the prophets (v.28). The prophets have protected them and have not exposed them. The kings had turned the prophets into their own servants, using them for public relations and to certify their decisions. If you read the book of Jeremiah, you will see the wickedness of the school of prophets which was filled with false prophets serving at the pleasure of and for the profit of the Kings

Against the Leadership (v.29-30)

The final charge is against the grass roots leadership. The phrase “people of the land” is here talking to the rich who led at local levels and used their positions of power and prestige to oppress, steal and defraud. This class of people, the landed and moneyed rich, comes in for some particularly scathing condemnation in the prophetic writings. The exilic community to whom Ezekiel was preaching would have had a large number of this group in it.

CULMINATION OF THE CHARGE: You will get just what you deserve (v.31). God will return their way upon them – that is, their punishment will be in the same category of their sin. They will reap what they have sown.

THE LACK OF A MEDIATOR (v.30-31). God announces that He had looked for someone to mediate, to stand in the breach caused by sin who would stay the wrath and judgment of God. But He found none. No prophet, no priest, no king, no rich man. None were qualified, none were willing. Thus the judgment would fall.

Thank God that is not the case for us and our sins. God sent a man among us, His very own Son in human flesh who was qualified and was willing and stood in the breach. He was holy in all His life. He willingly gave Himself to mediate for His people. He stood in front of the wrath of God. The judgment fell on Him, so that it might not fall on us. Covenant breakers were redeemed by the perfect covenant keeper who became sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God, in Him.

Conclusion

The frightening wrath of our God.

Loved ones, we need a greater sense of the frightening wrath of our God. The more we see the implacable and terrible wrath of God against sin and sinners, against the people of Noah’s day, against Sodom and Gomorrah, against Egypt, against the Hebrews of Ezekiel’s day, against us, the more we will truly appreciate the greatness of His mercy. Knowing and understanding the wrath of God will keep us from turning His love and merciful kindness to us into mere sentimentality. What fires of reverence fear and gratitude will burn bright in such hearts.

The exceeding sinfulness of our sin.

We are not convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of our sin. We think we are pretty good people who have oddly wrong. It matters that this is so, but not too

terribly much. We fail to appreciate the corrupt, corrosive, contaminating and contagious nature of our sin. To see the horror of our sin, we look to the cross. The terrible wickedness of our sin is put on public display by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus – not just in the killing of Jesus, but in the penalty and price we owed that He paid. The cross does not exhibit the worth of man that compels God to save. Rather, it shows the wickedness of man that God saves us from.

The compelling greatness of our salvation.

If we know that exceeding sinfulness of our sin and the frightening wrath of our God, then we will be overwhelmed by the compelling greatness of our salvation. The author of the hymn that read at the beginning of this sermon did not end with the terrible wrath of God, but with a glorious humble supplicant's plea.

What shall I, frail man, be pleading,
Who for me be interceding,
When the just are mercy needing?
King of majesty tremendous,
Who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us!
Think, good Jesus! My salvation
Caused thy wondrous Incarnation,
Leave me not to reprobation.
Faint and weary Thou hast sought me
On the cross of suffering bought me;
Shall such grace be vainly brought me?
Righteous Judge! For sin's pollution
Grant Thy gift of absolution,
Ere that day of retribution.
Guilty, now I pour my moaning,
All my shame with anguish owning,
Spare, O God, Thy suppliant groaning.

A Tale of Two Sisters

Ezekiel 23

Message Overview

Aim To show the exceeding repulsiveness of spiritual adultery.

- Agenda**
- To carefully handle the graphic elements of this text without losing the impact of its message
 - To show how God feels about the spiritual adultery of His people.
 - To challenge God’s people to hate and flee all idolatry, idols of the heart and life.
 - To uphold the purity of the Bride of Christ as not only a spiritual ideal but as a practical aim.

- Summary**
- God identifies who the sisters are and who they represent.
 - God describes and condemns the adultery of Israel and Judah.
 - God promises judgment and punishment for their sin.
 - God equates their adultery with idolatry.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the penetrating power of metaphors and analogies.
Explain that this is important in our reading and *preaching* the Bible.

Discuss the importance of understanding our heart idols and how God sees them as adultery.

If we fail to get our flocks to “see” this, then we have missed the point of this text.

Give opportunity for people to be transparent about their heart struggles.

Introduction

Charles Dickens, the English novelist, tells the story of two families facing hardship and heartache in his *Tale of Two Cities*. In this great work, he uses the families and the cities to represent the great struggles of his day between the rich and poor, the rule by law and the rule by mob.

In the text before us, Ezekiel wants to forcefully and graphically show us the abhorrent and repulsive corruption of Israel's sin as he tells us the tale of two sisters.

Make no mistake about it, this text is shocking.

- *IT IS SHOCKING IN ITS GRAPHIC LANGUAGE.* It makes a difficult and awkward public read (in fact, the Pharisees forbid its reading in public, not a good sign for those who would ban it in church as well.) God means for Israel to understand how repulsive they have become to Him.
- *IT IS SHOCKING IN ITS PORTRAYAL OF THEIR SIN.* In our world, serial adultery is placed before us as the norm, as something to be admired or to strive for. Why is what these sisters doing so terrible?
- *IT IS SHOCKING IN ITS TREATMENT OF WOMEN.* This troubles us because of our culture, not because what is described here is actually evil. Some feminist commentators have actually said that this text portrays God as planning and condoning the abuse of women. What this text portrays and warns of is the horrendous consequences of sinning against a holy God.

So with careful attention to the power and perversity of our own sin and sinfulness, let us listen to this tale of two sisters.

<< Read the Text at each major heading >>

Their Identification

(v.1-5)

In his usual way, Ezekiel relates his prophetic role and this revelation from God. This is the Word of the Lord. And this is very important. We cannot come to this with some horizontal, man centered, social engineering agenda. This is the Lord's Word, divinely given through the prophet. So we come to this with deep humility and careful attention.

By their History

(v.2-4)

The metaphor and analogy begins by identifying the two sisters with the history of the Hebrews. They were from one mother, thus were family. They were spiritually adulteresses in Egypt. There God, as one writer put it, "made honest women of them." He married them and made them His, even though they were not pure. In other words, God's mercy and unfailing love is highlighted here as the backdrop for their wickedness.

They are named here, Oholah and Oholibah. There does not seem to be any special significance in the meaning of their names, their names being chosen for the rhythmic sound, somewhat like Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

By their Association

(v.4b)

Just so that there is no mistaking who God is talking about, the two sisters are clearly related to Israel and Judah. At this point, Oholah, Israel has already lost her identity with God's holy city and is now associated with Samaria. Oholibah, Judah is associated with Jerusalem.

This helps us a bit as we move into their sin. We see that these two sisters are not literal people, but are metaphors and analogies for the northern and southern tribes of the Hebrews. So the description of their sin is not meant to tantalize us with salacious images, but is meant to stun us with their horrific wickedness, with the enormity of the sinfulness of their sin.

Their Immorality

(v.6-21)

The lust and adultery of these two sisters is not something snicker over. It is the measure of our insensitivity to the horrid sliminess of our sin that we can hear this and snicker.

The Wickedness of Oholah

(v.6-10)

Here is the adulterous heart of the ten northern tribes, Israel (v.6-8). Oholah lusts after and pursues the Assyrians. She desires them. Her appetite for this sin was cultivated in Egypt and is now bearing fruit in her seeking to have relations with the Assyrians. She loves their beauty, their strength, and their idols. She allows her sin to master her and she gets in bed with a godless nation.

God hands her over to her lovers for her judgment (v.9-10). She is exposed for what she is, put to the sword, loses her children and becomes a joke to the nations around her. She is utterly humiliated and destroyed. This had already happened when Ezekiel penned these words. The 10 northern tribes, Israel, were already overrun and destroyed by Assyria.

The Wickedness of Oholibah

(v.11-21)

While God has briefly unfolded the whoredom of Israel, the 10 northern tribes, He is speaking to and warning Judah over her own sin. So the Lord goes into much more extensive detail of her sin, its corruption and its consequences.

While the sin of Israel with Assyria had been great, Judah becomes even worse. Two things stand out here as making her sin more abominable.

- *SHE OUGHT TO HAVE LEARNED* from the example of her sister. She observed her sister's sin. She knew what God thought of it. She witnessed her judgment. She ought to have known better. She not only has no excuse, but now has become inexcusable.
- *SHE WAS EVEN WORSE IN HER SINFULNESS* than her sister. There is a very clear sense of progression and worsening of her sin. Several times this text has a "she not only did this, but she was even more corrupt" sense.

There are several aspects of Oholibah's sin that emerge here:

- *SHE TURNED HER ATTENTION ON HER LOVERS BECAUSE OF PICTURES OF THEM* (v.12-15). She saw them portrayed on walls in paintings. So, it was not that she had fallen in love with a man or even men, but she has lusted after an object.
- *SHE PURSUED THEM IN HER SIN* (v.16-18). Instead of being the one who is seduced, she becomes the seductress. She has become forward and aggressive. She fits the portrayal of the wicked woman in Proverbs 7. Finally she turns away from them in disgust and begins to flaunt herself and practice her wickedness with whomever.
- *SHE BECOMES DEGRADED AND DEPRAVED IN HER SIN* (v.19-21). She attempts to relive her youth while becoming more and more degraded in her passions. Her sin has callused her resulting in ever more wickedness needed to satisfy her.

Now what are we to make of this?

- There is *AN OBSERVABLE PATTERN AND PROGRESSION* to her sin that simply rings true. All sin is addictive. All sin degrades and debases. And the word of the Scripture and the witness of sinners is that it takes more and more of any sin to get the same pleasure from it.
- The description has both *A HISTORICAL REALITY AND A SPIRITUAL ASPECT*. What Ezekiel narrates has unfolded in Judah's history. As a nation, she fell in love with the culture and beauty of Babylon. She admired Babylon's might. She made treaties and agreements with Babylon that displeased the Lord and exposed her idolatrous and unbelieving heart. She was committing spiritual adultery as she admired, served and worshipped the gods of Babylon.

So how is God going to respond to all this wickedness?

Their Indictment**(v.22-35)**

Since she has sinned like this, then God declares what He will do. His move against her is a result of her sin against Him. The “therefore” is huge in this text.

By Those Raised Up Against Her**(v.22-27)**

First, God will raise up all those with whom she has sinned to come against her from all sides. She had given herself to them and turned away from them in disgust. Now God would punish her through them. God commits His judgment (v.24) to them and directs His jealousy (v.25) through them. The judging hand of God through her former lovers will destroy her beauty and her children. The aim in this judgment is to bring an end to Judah’s adultery.

By Those She Is Delivered Over To**(v.28-35)**

Next, God will deliver her into the hands of those she hates. This is the second aspect of her judgment. Not only will they move against her, but God will deliver her over to them. God here exposes her and her sin. Since she has not learned from the example of her sister, God will now hand to her the cup of her sister’s punishment. She will drink deeply from its bitter dregs.

Once again, God connects their forgetting of God with their sin (v.35). They have thrown Him behind them so that they can sin without conscience. Now, they must bear the consequences of their sin.

Their Idolatry**(v.36-49)**

At the root of these sister’s sins, at the root of Israel and Judah’s wickedness is idolatry. The idolatry of the Hebrews has been a repeated theme in Ezekiel. Once again, there are formal idols – things that are made and worshipped and there are functional idols – what is desired and wanted in such a way that one sins. Intertwined through this text are both real, formal, man-made idols and functional, heart, desire driven idols.

Its Character**(v.36-42)**

Spiritual idolatry and spiritual adultery characterize the sin and evil of the Hebrews. They had broken their covenant with God (v.37-38), offered their children to Molech (v.39) and defiled the Temple of God (v.39). Verses 40-42 describe their use of their own beauty and the utensils and implements of worship in the Temple to entice and ensnare. Behind this analogy is the history of Judah’s last several kings who sought friendship and alliances with Babylon, even offering at one point the gold and silver utensils from the Temple as payment.

Its Condemnation**(v.43-45)**

Their wickedness is condemned by a contrast. There are the evil men who go in to Judah and consort with her. They use her own sin to satisfy themselves. Thus Babylon played on the wicked weaknesses of the Hebrews to eventually bring about their destruction.

In contrast, righteous men go out from Judah and condemn her. They recognize her sin for what it is and pass judgment on her. Ezekiel is clearly drawing a line in the sand for the exiles. Are they not only going to accept the righteous judgment of God on the terrible wickedness of their countrymen, but will they align themselves with God's agenda? This is a constant challenge for those to whom Ezekiel is ministering – will they as righteous people condemn the unrighteousness of Judah and really see the justice of God's punishment?

Its Consequences

(v.46-49)

Finally, the consequences of their idolatry and its punishment is once again described. There will be total destruction at the hands of a huge army. God will through this judgment bring an end to the formal idolatry and adultery of Israel.

God's great aim is that they will know the He is the Lord God. And that is His aim for us as well.

Conclusion

Understand our connection to OT texts.

While we are not Israel and this text is not written to us directly, it is written for us that we might not lust after the same things as they did. Listen to Paul's warning from 1 Corinthians 10:6-14.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. [ESV]

So we are vulnerable to idols and adulteries and immoralities of heart and body that are like Israel's. No, we are not being tempted to make alliances as a church with Babylon (Iraq). But we are tempted to think like the world and want what the world offers so that we hanker after them, spend our time and money on them and eventually are mastered by them. We need to hear powerful texts like Ezekiel and constant reminders like 1 Corinthians 10. And we need these last two verses of 1 Corinthians 10 to remind us:

- We do not have to sin (v.13). It is not inevitable. We are not presented with insurmountable temptations. Like everyone else in the Bible, we are facing the same enemies with a great God and enabling grace.
- We must not sin (v.14). While God is for us in our temptations, we also must do our part to resist and to flee. Passive Christians faced with sin will fall. We must flee idolatry.

See our sin as God sees it.

We need to stop using the language of the world to describe sin against God. We no longer commit fornication or adultery, we have affairs. We are no longer homosexuals; we have an alternative sexual preference or lifestyle. We are no longer drunkards, we are alcoholics. We need recovery, not salvation. We are diseased not depraved.

So, the thundering of prophetic texts that announce with graphic words the violent wrath of God simply sound like the Bible is screaming at us. I am a sick, hurt victim and you want to scream at me! Listen to me beloved, if sin revolts God and God is moving with implacable wrath against sinners, then we had better stop fooling around with recovery and psychological categories and we had better call people to repent. At some point we need to recognize that what people around us need, what WE need, is salvation. We need the cross and our Redeemer whose love moved to pay the penalty and cut the power of sin.

Be gripped by our relationship to Christ.

The Bride of Christ, the church, the people of God are Jesus' fiancée. So hear Paul's aim for those to whom he ministered in 2 Corinthians. 11:1-3.

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. [ESV]

We are espoused, engaged to Christ. We are to be a virgin bride. Paul's concern was for the church's purity- not thinking here primarily about moral purity in terms of outward behavior. Rather, he is concerned that we become seduced and deceived as Eve was by Satan's temptations. The sullyng of the Bride's virtue is first in our thoughts and in our devotion. What Paul wants for us more than anything is a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Here's my point. Israel was the wife of Yahweh; we are the bride of Christ. Undivided devotion and unswerving loyalty are expected, not just outwardly, but also inwardly. The unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah is denounced as both idolatry and adultery. These are not overstatements. They are what our wrong thinking and misplaced desires are. When Eve believes Satan's lies and tilts toward her lusts, then she has begun to commit adultery in her heart against God.

And those adulteries and idolatries of the heart soon produce behavior. Pure and sincere devotion to Christ are not first emotions. They will produce emotions, but they are first and foremost right thoughts about God and desiring with all our souls the God we are thinking rightly about. This will look like values and treasures and priorities. Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and might looks like putting the Kingdom of God first. It is "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" in minute by minute decisions.

So while it is easy to evaluate ourselves as being good Christians because we meet some external measure – we certainly are not the lusting, whoring, pleasure-panting adulteress that the Hebrews were – we are in fact loving and longing and lusting after our own much caressed heart idols. And brothers and sisters, I

know this is true because it is true of me as well. It is unbelievably revealing to sit down and think long and hard about why you made the decisions you have yesterday, last week, last month, and last year.

Some of you tremble because of the fact you are fearful that some judgment will fall on this nation like what fell on Israel and Judah. I tremble that it may well fall on our heads, on my head. After all, does not judgment begin with the house of the Lord?

But in my trembling turns to trusting. All I can do is hide myself in my Redeemer and cling with holy passion and trust to my Ruler, Jesus Christ my Lord.

And I call you to this as well. I call you, now, to a moment of silence and reflection – of examination and confession – of holy renewal of our betrothal to our groom. What will He do for and what can He do with people who truly have a sincere and pure devotion to Him?

Siege and Sorrow

Ezekiel 24

Message Overview

Aim To exalt the Lord as worthy of all losses.

- Agenda**
- To display the wrath of God against the corruptions of sin.
 - To hold up Ezekiel as an amazing marvel of an obeying faith.
 - To challenge us to sacrificial giving of all we are for all He is.

- Summary**
- The news of the siege reaches the exiles.
 - The Hebrews are compared to a contaminated and uncleansable pot.
 - The Hebrews are confronted by the messenger's loss and the message of the Lord.

Discussion Questions What do we think of God doing this to Ezekiel?

Discuss ways in which God calls people to sacrifice like this for His sake?

What attributes and characteristics of God are essential to this sort of obeying faith?

Introduction

January 15, 587 B.C. A black and terrible day for Jerusalem. On that day, according to (v.1), the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel in exile and the armies of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the city. What Ezekiel has prophesied is now coming to pass. Darkness is falling across the land of Judah. 18 months of unimaginable horror are ahead of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

On that very day, God's word comes to Ezekiel. Here is ministry for him in what will be the bleakest day of his life. And yet we find him moving through siege and sorrow with such utter faith in God and obedience to God. What, O brothers and sisters, will we do on such a day of calamity for us?

Siege – The Assault on the City

(v.1-14)

We are familiar with food encrusted pots and pans. We are not so familiar with the sacrificial meal in the Old Testament worship. The audience to whom this chapter in Ezekiel would have recognized right away the allusions that are, for the most part, somewhat obscure to us. So let me take a moment to give some background that will help us make sense of the first part of this text.

When a Hebrew brought certain sacrifices, they were to take the choicest parts of the lamb or calf, cook it and eat it together. They were not only to see the sacrifice as the grounds of forgiveness, but as the place of fellowship. So, the priest had a fire going, took a pot, carved the best cuts off of the sacrificial meat and threw it into the pot – sometimes it would be boiled in water and juices and sometimes it would be grilled. So, faithful Jews would be familiar with this sort of ritual in the Temple.

The Parable of the Pot

(v.3-5)

This parable may have been a little ditty sung by the Israelites as a way of remembering and rejoicing in their forgiveness and fellowship before the Lord. It has a musical and metrical feel to it. As Ezekiel gives it, you can see the smiles of recognition on the faces around him. Maybe even a little clapping and people singing it along with him under their breath.

Bring the pot,
Set it on,
In goes the water;
In goes the meat,
The best from the thigh
The best from the shoulder
Fill it with the choicest bones.
From the best of the flocks
With the stacking of the logs
Fanning up the flame
Cooking it deliciously well.

(Adapted from the text: R. Kennedy)

The Woes upon the City

(v.6-12)

Then abruptly, the pretty little ditty is given an ominous air. With heart stopping suddenness, the Lord turns the pot from a source of delight to a place of despair.

THE FIRST WOE IS A PRONOUNCEMENT UPON HER CORRUPTION AND CORROSION (v.6-8). The reference here is to the corrosion building up on the inside of an unwashed pot that is used over and over again. The comparison to pouring out blood and leaving it uncovered is designed to make their sin even more revolting. The Law required that at the butchering or sacrificing of an animal, when the blood was drained onto the ground, it was to be covered up. Israel is not only a nasty pot but she is a fly infested, open pool of blood on a rock.

THE SECOND WOE IS A PROPHECY OF HER DAMNATION AND DESTRUCTION (v.9-12). In almost jovial language, the fire is stoked, the spices mixed, the meat put in and Israel's goose is cooked. Then the food is left into the pot until it becomes a charred mess and is burned to a crisp. In a jolting shift, the term for bones now is *human* bones. Then pot is heated until it is red hot, at the point of refining. God is seeking to cleanse the very vessel of his judgment, but to no avail. Finally, the pot is upturned in the fire, signifying its uselessness and eventual abandonment.

The Reasons for the Judgment

(v.13-14)

These woes come because Judah would not be cleansed. She had become a fouled pot, a skillet so burned and crusted with food that no Pot-scrubber was going to get it clean. It was going to take extreme measures.

God is emphatic about what He is about to do. The verbs here ring with the sureness of God's judgment: He is the Lord. He has spoken. It will happen. He will do it. He will not go back. He will not spare them. He will not relent. They will be judged.

Dark is this day for Judah – the black hordes of Babylon's might are camped around the city and God has sent them. The pot of his judgment is about to be stirred and simmered and brought to a red-hot heat. The siege has begun.

Sorrow – The Loss of the Beloved

(v.15-25)

The news from Jerusalem is followed by a further word from the Lord through Ezekiel for the Hebrew exiles. This is the Sovereign Lord speaking. What He does and what He requires of Ezekiel is stunning.

In the Life of the Messenger

(v.16-18)

If I were to say to you, "Tonight, you will have the most precious thing in your sight taken away from you," what would you think you are about to lose? What is the delight of your eyes? What or who lights up your life? For many of you it is your children. For others, it is your extended family. For many, it is your spouse. Sadly, for some, it is something material or physical.

God tells Ezekiel what He is about to do. He is going to take away the delight of Ezekiel's eyes. I know that the words here are used to prepare us for the next

paragraph. But nevertheless, we have a glimpse here into the personal life of Ezekiel. It is the measure of Ezekiel's relationships and character that this is all that God has to say. Ezekiel knows whom God is referring to.

What is it that God requires? Well, when this happens Ezekiel was not to mourn or grieve publicly. In his outward conduct, he was not to express his inward groaning. None of the normal things a grieving person would do in their culture were permitted him. He was to put on his regular clothes, his turban and to appear in public as though nothing has happened.

So, in the morning of this day he speaks to the people the oracle that occupies the first part of this chapter. He carries out his ministry *knowing full well what is about to happen*. And in the evening, his wife dies. His beloved, delight of his eyes and soul, his sweet spouse is taken by God. What sorrow! What grief and groaning. She is the light of his life and a help just fitting for him. And now, she is gone.

So he gets up in the morning, and obeys the Lord. He did as he was commanded.

This has happened because God wants to communicate something to His people. Isn't this stunning? Isn't this horrifying? God has taken Ezekiel's wife, not in chastening, not in a long slow character building disease – but suddenly and that for the sake of Ezekiel's ministry. What kind of God is this? What if God did this among us? Or to you?

For the Sake of the Message

(v.19-24)

The exiles realize that this is not normal. They recognize that Ezekiel is not among them as just any other person. He is God's ambassador, God's prophet, God's spokesman. The man now has become the message. What he is doing has significance for them. What is it?

Now that Ezekiel (and God, for that matter) have the Hebrews attention, he speaks the message intended by his actions. God is about to take away "the pride of their power, the delight of their eyes, and the yearning of their souls" as well as their sons and daughters. He is about to profane his sanctuary, the Temple. He is about to make it useless for worship. He is about to bring about its destruction. The siege of Jerusalem will end in the destruction of the Temple.

Now it is a bit hard for us to appreciate the enormity of this. While the attack on the World Trade Center was a horrendous event, and while for many it was the symbol of their god of materialism and commerce, the centrality of the Temple to all of Jewish thought, worship and life meant its loss was an immeasurable disaster.

So the response of the Hebrews to this is a bit difficult. Three questions emerge.

IS THE HEBREWS INDIFFERENT RESPONSE MERELY BEING DESCRIBED? Have they become so uncaring about what really matters that this whole paragraph is really dripping with sarcasm? They are indifferent about the destruction of the Temple thus God is being sarcastic about their love for and delight in His place of worship. This is highly unlikely given all that surrounds this text.

ARE THE HEBREWS BEING TOLD OR COMMANDED NOT TO WEEP AND MOURN? Is God calling on them to restrain their outward grief because this is GOD's judgment? Inappropriate grief at this point arises from a heart not aligned with God's purposes to punish. There may be an element here of this as there has been throughout the book of Ezekiel. When God judges, God's people need to accept that judgment in a way that makes Him look large in their lives.

ARE THE HEBREWS SO OVERWHELMED WITH ENORMITY OF THE JUDGMENT THAT THEY ARE JUST NUMB? As Duguid writes, "The usual social structures of mourning rites will be overwhelmed." (Duguid, p. 315). Like many on that September morning who just sat and stared unbelievably as the towers fell and thousands died, they simply cannot absorb and process the overwhelming loss.

What the Hebrews must see is that God has struck them right at the center of their hearts. Like the taking of Ezekiel's wife who was apple of his eye, caused pain and sorrow, the judgment of God *is meant to hurt*. They are to know and feel and experience the rejection and sorrow that God has over their sin, its adultery and idolatry. They were rotting away in their iniquities (v.23b). But God has done this so that they will know the He is the Sovereign Lord – they have seen it in the sharp contrast between the trusting obedience of Ezekiel and their own sinful rot.

To the Ending of His Muteness (v.25-27)

This is a momentous day. While September 11 will not be forgotten by this generation, January 15 would not by that generation. They not only have God's Word on what is unfolding, but they have the eyewitness of a survivor (v.26). It is no longer a far off and far away possibility, but now a terrible reality.

On this momentous day of groaning, of the death of a spouse and news of destruction, Ezekiel's tongue is loosed. All that Ezekiel has been allowed to speak are words of judgment and condemnation for the Hebrews, for Israel and Judah. His muteness has not been absolute; he has been prophesying. But now that what he has been foretelling is now unfolding, his tongue is loosed. It was bound to speak words of judgment for Israel. Now it is freed to speak other words. And this is what clearly happens. The rest of the book is divided into two sections: the prophecy of judgment upon the nations and the promise of restoration for the house of Israel. Now that judgment has fallen on the house of the Lord, it can be pronounced against the nations. And hope will be fueled for in an unimaginable glory in the future, the promises will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

How do we take such a sobering text and think about for ourselves?

Dealing with our Harvest

All choices have consequences. All sin has consequences. One of the challenges from this text is, “How are we going to respond when we are harvesting what we have sown?” When, having repented of and having forsaken our sin, we experience the consequences of our sin, do we plunge headlong into new sins of self-pity, anger against God, rebellion, rejection or escape from our situation?

Responding to our Chastening

God can and will remove legitimate spiritual privileges in order to teach us to lean on Him. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple were not the taking away of something evil, but the removal of a proper and ordained privilege. Do not think that we are exempt from that as well. God will and may do whatever it takes to knock down our idols and to draw out trust and obedience.

Sacrificing for our Ministry

God is intent on deepening our life's roots, before spreading our life's message.

Could God trust us like He here trusted Ezekiel? And would we trust Him?

What would be your response if He took away that which you hold most dear?

Understanding our God

Our struggle with the problems of dealing with our harvest, responding well to chastening and being ready and willing to die for ministry are all connected to who you think God is.

If God is primarily here for you, then we will not understand and have deep questions about the hardships of sacrificial and holy Christian living.

If God is primarily here to give you an abundant life here and now, then the purifying and chastening hand of God will be very difficult for you.

If God is primarily here to give you emotional well-being, then what He did to Ezekiel is appalling – and that He might ask this of you, frightening.

But if God is sovereignly pursuing his purposes of good for us and glory for Himself, then I will love Him and lean on Him when all is not well – when the pot of my life is boiling and deeply loved and treasured delights are taken away, even if only so as to enable or enhance my ministry.

One of Martin Luther's hymns brings a fitting close:

And though they take my life, goods, honor, children, wife;
Yet is their profit small: these things shall vanish all
The city of God remaineth.

The Nations Will Know

Ezekiel 25-27

Message Overview

Aim To show God's judgment on the thematic sins of cultures and people groups (nations).

- Agenda**
- To show how God focuses judgment on cultures and nations, as well as individuals.
 - To underscore the correspondence between a nation's thematic sins and the specifics of how God judges them.
 - To apply the warnings to us today, personally and corporately.

- Summary**
- God moves to judge the five nations showing His justice and His dealing with their enmity against Israel.
 - God moves to judge Tyre (Phoenicia) who aims to supplant Jerusalem.
 - God exposes the seductive deceptions of power and wealth.

Discussion Questions

Introduction

When God's people are suffering, they need a deep sense of the justice of God outside of themselves and their own situation. David can write in Psalm 73 that he was envious of the prosperity of the wicked particularly in the times of his own distress. But when he went to worship and there was reminded of their ultimate end, he gained hope in the faithful holiness and justice of God. That is what the next major section of Ezekiel is talking about. If Israel is to fall under the horrific judgment of God, what about these nations around them?

Seven nations are selected out. The oracles select five of them beginning to the east in the Transjordan and going clockwise around the points of the compass. Then two are selected out for larger and more extensive declarations of judgment. Sevens figure prominently in the structure of the text – those sevens tend to occur in 5's and 2's. I am intending to read all this text and to be brief in my comments on them. Yet, because of the exegetical controversies and challenges in Ezekiel 28, we will take a bit more time with that chapter. It is very important to remember that these are intended to be read and thought of as a unit.

I'll also ask your patience as we read and consider a very large section of text. But I want the weight of this to rest on us so we will love the redemption and deliverance our Lord Jesus brings us.

Five Nations: Knowing He is the Lord (25:1-17)

At the center of the condemnation of these nations is an exposure of a heart of hatred, malice and envy. They act as they do, not just because they are sinners or they are Gentiles – they have a cluster or theme of actions and behaviors that all come from a single set of roots. They harbored hatred and malice for God's people.

Rejoice Not - Ammon (v.1-7)

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them. 3 Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, 4 therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. 5 I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 6 For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, 7 therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Ammon is judged for rejoicing and dancing over Israel's fall. They had a "you've had it coming" attitude that took unholy joy in what God was doing. As a result, God was going to move against them to destroy them in the same way.

Disdain Not - Moab and Seir

(v.8-11)

8 "Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,' 9 therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. 10 I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, 11 and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Moab and Seir are condemned for failing to honor the unique position that Israel had. Ironically, the Hebrews' own hankering to be like the nations around fueled the practice and cultivation of sin just like the surrounding nations. They were not to conclude from the visitation of judgment on Israel that God had cast them off as His people and thus to reject Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews. They had opened their border with Israel to invading armies, so God would open their flank and make them vulnerable to invasion.

Revenge Not - Edom

(v.12-14)

12 "Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, 13 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. 14 And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord GOD.

Edom was condemned for participating in the demise of the Hebrews. This is what the book of Obadiah is about – the judgment of God against the Moabites who sided with Babylon. They opened their roads to the Babylonian armies. They hunted down and handed over the fleeing Hebrew survivors. Edom's revenge against Israel was going to invoke the judging vengeance of God.

Hate Not - Philistia

(v.15-17)

15 "Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, 16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. 17 I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I lay my vengeance upon them."

Philistia is condemned for settling old scores with Israel. Israel and the Philistines had been in some level of conflict almost since the conquest of the land. They hated the Israelites and did all they could to make their lives miserable.

They did so out of what is called, “malice of soul” and a “never-ending enmity.” Thus, in judgment, they would also recognize the sovereign power and authority of God.

Tyre: Coming to a Dreadful End (26:1-27:36)

The judgment of God now turns to a place called Tyre. Tyre was the island city capital of ancient Phoenicia. She traded widely and amassed enormous prosperity, power and prestige. She was in a strategic location and of a great beauty and wealth. One commentator describes, “She was the Hong Kong of the ancient world, a bustling trading city at the crossroads of the east and west.” (Duguid, p.336)

Unlike the rest of the nations who saw themselves as being against Israel, she saw herself as being a substitute for Israel. While Jerusalem and Israel had reached a high point during the reigns of David and Solomon, they were in no way comparable to Tyre in the days of her decline and exile. Tyre and her kings come in for special judgment from God as they strove to be the gate to the world and displace Israel as the gate to God.

The judgment against Tyre is given in 3 panels. We will look at the first two in the remainder of our time and the last one next week.

The Seduction of Invincibility (26:1-21)

The first panel is an oracle, a prophecy leveled against Tyre for her arrogance and sense of invincibility.

The Promise of Judgment (v.1-6)

In the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken; it has swung open to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste,’ ³ therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. ⁴ They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers, and I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock. ⁵ She shall be in the midst of the sea a place for the spreading of nets, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. And she shall become plunder for the nations, ⁶ and her daughters on the mainland shall be killed by the sword. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Because Tyre has seen Israel’s decline and fall as clearing the way for further ascendancy, God promises a judgment that will be devastatingly destructive. God will see to it that she is leveled to the ground.

The Instrument of Judgment (v.7-14)

⁷ “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers. ⁸ He will kill with the sword your daughters on the mainland. He will set up a siege wall against you and throw up a mound against you, and raise a roof of shields against you. ⁹ He will direct the shock of his battering rams

against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. ¹⁰ His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you. Your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that has been breached. ¹¹ With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will kill your people with the sword, and your mighty pillars will fall to the ground. ¹² They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise. They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses. Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters. ¹³ And I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more. ¹⁴ I will make you a bare rock. You shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the LORD; I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.

God declares that He will bring Nebuchadnezzar against them as well. They want to be a gathering place for the nations in prosperity; God will make them a gathering place for punishment. All that they hold as valuable in their construction (v.7-10), her commerce (v.12) and in their culture (v.13-14) will be brought to an irreversible end. By the time of Alexander the Great, this has been literally fulfilled. And to this day, the ancient site of Tyre is little more than a bare rock where fishing nets are spread.

The Response to Judgment

(v.15-18)

¹⁵ “Thus says the Lord GOD to Tyre: Will not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when slaughter is made in your midst? ¹⁶ Then all the princes of the sea will step down from their thrones and remove their robes and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground and tremble every moment and be appalled at you. ¹⁷ And they will raise a lamentation over you and say to you,

“‘How you have perished,
you who were inhabited from the seas,
O city renowned,
who was mighty on the sea;
she and her inhabitants imposed their terror
on all her inhabitants!
¹⁸ Now the coastlands tremble
on the day of your fall,
and the coastlands that are on the sea
are dismayed at your passing.’

The magnitude of their destruction is emphasized by the greatness of the grief and groaning over her fall. The fall of such a center of commerce and culture almost certainly will mean the failure of prosperity in the nations and peoples she trades with.

The portrayal here and lament that is raised is evoked in the Apostle John’s description of the judgment and response to Babylon’s fall in the Revelation.

The Results of Judgment**(v.19-21)**

19 “For thus says the Lord GOD: When I make you a city laid waste, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will make you go down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among ruins from of old, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I will set beauty in the land of the living. 21 I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more. Though you be sought for, you will never be found again, declares the Lord GOD.”

Tyre’s judgment will not only be in commercial and cultural destruction, but also in being plunged into the dark depths of Hades, the place of the dead. The language here evokes being swept away under water and sinking down into the deeps, an apt picture for an island city.

So Tyre will be punished, plundered and will perish in a dreadful end.

The Seduction of Materialism**(27:1-36)**

The second panel is a lament, a funeral dirge, a wonderful song that uses a seafaring metaphor. Tyre is described in terms of a beautiful and powerful ship. There is a deep irony here as Tyre was a seafaring, merchant nation. Her wealth came from all over the world as she traded and traveled.

So God is judging the material wealth of Tyre.

The Beauty of Her Ships**(v.1-7)**

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Now you, son of man, raise a lamentation over Tyre, 3 and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrances to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, thus says the Lord GOD:

“O Tyre, you have said,
‘ I am perfect in beauty.’
4 Your borders are in the heart of the seas;
your builders made perfect your beauty.
5 They made all your planks
of fir trees from Senir;
they took a cedar from Lebanon
to make a mast for you.
6 Of oaks of Bashan
they made your oars;
they made your deck of pines
from the coasts of Cyprus,
inlaid with ivory.
7 Of fine embroidered linen from Egypt
was your sail,
serving as your banner;
blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah
was your awning.

Tyre's ships were designed and built with consummate skill. Remnants of their design were incorporated into the Norse and Viking ships. They were not only elegant in design, but also beautiful to the eye in their lay and line.

The Skill of Her Mariners

(v.8-9)

8 The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad
were your rowers;
your skilled men, O Tyre, were in you;
they were your pilots.
9 The elders of Gebal and her skilled men were in you,
caulking your seams;
all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you
to barter for your wares.

As everyone well knew, the sailors of Phoenicia were some of the best in the world in almost any day. Their travels and exploits are mind-boggling. In what appear to us to be small and fragile vessels, these intrepid sailors left artifacts all over the globe, including the north and south Americas.

The Power of Her Warriors

(v.10-11)

10 "Persia and Lud and Put were in your army as your men of war. They hung the shield and helmet in you; they gave you splendor. 11 Men of Arvad and Helech were on your walls all around, and men of Gamad were in your towers. They hung their shields on your walls all around; they made perfect your beauty.

Because her own men were largely men of the sea, Tyre's kings had filled her armies with mercenaries from some of the most fierce and formidable nations of their day. She was someone to be reckoned with because her wealth allowed her to buy the best.

The Extent of Her Trade

(v.12-24)

12 "Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of every kind; silver, iron, tin, and lead they exchanged for your wares. 13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they exchanged human beings and vessels of bronze for your merchandise. 14 From Beth-togarmah they exchanged horses, war horses, and mules for your wares. 15 The men of Dedan traded with you. Many coastlands were your own special markets; they brought you in payment ivory tusks and ebony. 16 Syria did business with you because of your abundant goods; they exchanged for your wares emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and ruby. 17 Judah and the land of Israel traded with you; they exchanged for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, meal, honey, oil, and balm. 18 Damascus did business with you for your abundant goods, because of your great wealth of every kind; wine of Helbon and wool of Sahar 19 and casks of wine from Uzal they exchanged for your wares; wrought iron, cassia, and calamus were bartered for your merchandise. 20 Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding. 21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they did business with you. 22

The traders of Sheba and Raamah traded with you; they exchanged for your wares the best of all kinds of spices and all precious stones and gold. ²³ Haran, Canneh, Eden, traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad traded with you. ²⁴ In your market these traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of colored material, bound with cords and made secure.

This long recitation of the variety and value Tyre's commerce demonstrates the source of her pride and power. She loved her wealth. She traded all over the world in almost every commodity to be had. The more she had, the more she wanted and more she pursued. Make no mistake, when such a nation falls, great will be the impact all over the world.

The Enormity of Her Fall

(v.25-27)

²⁵ The ships of Tarshish traveled for you with your merchandise. So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas.

²⁶ “ Your rowers have brought you out
into the high seas.

The east wind has wrecked you
in the heart of the seas.

²⁷ Your riches, your wares, your merchandise,
your mariners and your pilots,
your caulkers, your dealers in merchandise,
and all your men of war who are in you,
with all your crew
that is in your midst,
sink into the heart of the seas
on the day of your fall.

What a picture here. This heavily loaded ship setting out with crews and traders, sinks. Just like a ship may flounder so Tyre will be destroyed and sink and come to a terrible end. Tyre will disappear underneath the waves, a Titanic of commerce and culture.

The Response to Her Judgment

(v.28-36)

²⁸ At the sound of the cry of your pilots
the countryside shakes,

²⁹ and down from their ships
come all who handle the oar.

The mariners and all the pilots of the sea
stand on the land

³⁰ and shout aloud over you
and cry out bitterly.

They cast dust on their heads
and wallow in ashes;

³¹ they make themselves bald for you
and put sackcloth on their waist,
and they weep over you in bitterness of soul,

with bitter mourning.
32 In their wailing they raise a lamentation for you
and lament over you:
‘ Who is like Tyre,
like one destroyed in the midst of the sea?
33 When your wares came from the seas,
you satisfied many peoples;
with your abundant wealth and merchandise
you enriched the kings of the earth.
34 Now you are wrecked by the seas,
in the depths of the waters;
your merchandise and all your crew in your midst
have sunk with you.
35 All the inhabitants of the coastlands
are appalled at you,
and the hair of their kings bristles with horror;
their faces are convulsed.
36 The merchants among the peoples hiss at you;
you have come to a dreadful end
and shall be no more forever.’”

Everyone connected to her sees her judgment and laments her loss. This is not only because of the destruction of such a beautiful place and powerful people, but because they will be terribly affected as well. Yet they have a such a shortened view of wealth and power. Will there ever be another like Tyre? Well, yes. Babylon, Greece, Rome, Venice, Britain and America have all risen to heights equaling of not surpassing the greatness of Tyre and Phoenicia.

Conclusion

Warnings

The words against the five warn us about how we respond to chastening and even judgment on others.

REJOICE NOT – We must be very careful not to wrongly exult when others are caught out in their sin. At all levels, until the day of glory, judgment evoking sin should draw out grief and groaning from us.

DISDAIN NOT – While we are careful to be distinct and articulate in our understanding of Scripture, we must take great care not to look down on others. I am concerned that while we love truth, we can tend to disdain others who need the truth we confess. Further, it is pretty difficult to minister to people you look down on.

REVENGE NOT – God calls us to be a people who do not strike back at others. Our lives are to be characterized by a deep, Christ-like meekness and humility that does not seek to take revenge. We must not occupy the place of God's justice by taking our own revenge.

HATE NOT – The nations around Israel hated her and harbored long-standing enmity against her. This eventually led to their destruction. Let us first be people who love – and show the love of God even for enemies. Justice will come – but for now, let us comfort and call with the gospel, first for ourselves and then for others.

Seductive Draw of Sin

The two sections against Tyre warn us about the seductive power of sin.

THE SEDUCTIVE TEMPTATION OF INVULNERABILITY (Ch 26). We are deeply warned to pay attention to the examples in the Bible of people who thought they were invulnerable and fell terribly. It is pride that makes us think we will never fall and inevitably leads to that fall. Let us be filled with humility so that we will be dependent upon inflows of enabling grace to stand in the evil day.

THE SEDUCTIVE TEMPTATION OF MATERIALISM (Ch 27). What is there to say to us in this culture about materialism? Our hearts pursue where our treasures are. In other words, what we value draws out our thoughts and wants. What the world offers us are the bright baubles of Tyre's commerce and culture. What God offers us are the bright realities of all that He is for us in Christ, now and forever. We are constantly exchanging the lesser for the greater. Let us be like Moses who left the passing pleasures of Egypt for the scorn of the world because he was looking to a greater and eternal reward who is God.

Sin is seductive. Sin is attractive. Sin is an exchange of something less for something greater. Sin is addictive. Sin is destructive. We have been delivered from its power. But we can yield ourselves either to it to control us or to God to control us – which will it be for you, today?

A Prince and a King

Ezekiel 28

Message Overview

Aim To expose the destructive consequences of pride.

- Agenda**
- To show how pride and self-idolatry go hand-in-hand.
 - To show how pride reflects the self-exaltation of Satan.
 - To show how God moves to destroy pride.

- Summary**
- God exposes the self-idolatry of the prince of Tyre
 - God exposes the pride and personage behind the king of Tyre.
 - God reveals His holiness in keeping His promises, His promise to judge the wicked and His promise to gather His people.

Discussion Questions Discuss the importance of your attitude(s) for profiting from preaching.
List both helpful and unhelpful attitudes.

How does our own desire to be the god/ruler of our lives show itself?
Help the flock to see outward behavior and emotions associated with being self-centered as in this category.

Be prepared to answer and discuss questions on the nature, character and conduct of Satan.

Always close this kind of discussion by pointing your flock to the Lord.

What promises have been trusted and relied recently?

Introduction

Profiting from OT preaching

I want to take a moment this morning to encourage your profiting from OT preaching.

AS WE APPROACH THE TEXT, come to it expecting to learn more about God, His ways and His will. The whole Bible is profitable for us. While we live under the New Covenant, the Old Testament is still to be a part of our regular spiritual diet.

AS WE LISTEN TO THE SERMON, look to grasp and understand and apply what you can. We as elders try to craft what we preach so as to be profitable to everyone. That does not mean you will understand every thing you hear –don't expect to and don't bail out – but there is always something for you, regardless of whether you are a babe in Christ or have walked with him long. Let me say this, profiting from preaching requires a heart inclined to listen. If you come wanting and looking for what you can get from it, you will get much more than if you come and highlight everything you don't understand.

AS WE HAVE QUESTIONS AND NEED HELP, please ask. We provide time at flock for questions. The pastor who preaches is available afterwards. Send an email. Ask questions. Please assume that we want you, all of you to understand and apply the message. If you understand and someone in your family or among your friends does not, explain it; apply it. We are in this together for each other.

Unmasking pride...

Benjamin Disraeli was a novelist and playwright who became a member of the British parliament. He was a great champion of the common man and the down trodden. Yet, he was an eccentric man and he was known as man of great self-esteem. He once wrote in an article, "When I want to read a good book, I write one." The novelist and philosopher, George Bernard Shaw wrote, "I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation." Carl Sandburg commenting on this subject reflected that "the earth is strewn with the exploded bladders of the puffed up."

While we can see pride a mile away because it is so large, C.S. Lewis pointed out that "The more we have it [pride], the more we dislike it in others." Someone has quipped that the bigger a man's head is, the easier it is to fill his shoes. Some have trouble accepting compliments only because they have the nagging suspicion that not enough has been said already. [quoted] Parodying pride is fun, but it can be folly as well. While we can easily see it in others, we do not so easily see it in ourselves.

Some would say, "I don't have a problem with pride. In fact, I struggle with self-pity." Let us never forget that pride can be expressed in two, opposite ways. John Piper writes, "Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. Boasting sounds self-sufficient. Self-pity sounds self-sacrificing." He goes on to point out that boasting is pride acknowledging my worth. Self-pity is pride when my worth is not acknowledged by others. But at the end, both boasting and self-pity are functions of pride.

Why all this talk about pride? Because this is the theme of Ezekiel 28.

The Man Who Thinks He is a God

(v.1-10)

Here is a prophetic word to expose the heart of the King of Tyre and to warn him of the judgment about to come.

In His Deification

(v.1-5)

The Phoenicians' pagan religion believed that their rulers were appointed by their god, but they had not historically elevated their leaders to the rank of deities. This king, Ittobaal II whose name means, "Baal is with him" (Stewart, p.270), seems to elevated himself. We do not know whether this is a formal deification of himself as king of Tyre, but certainly there is an inward self-exaltation. At varying degrees, we are all prone to self-idolatries and self-deification.

His Wisdom

(v.1-3)

His pride boasts in his wisdom. His claim to being a god is supposedly grounded in his great knowledge. He is compared, rather sarcastically, I think, to Daniel. While some commentators have balked at this being the Daniel of the Bible, pointing this to being a reference to another, legendary figure whose name is DANIEL. We must remember that this prophecy is written to the exiles about Tyre – they would certainly have caught the irony of the prince of Tyre claiming the wisdom of Daniel, who would have been well known to them. Here is a classic case of "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and their foolish hearts were darkened" and they exchanged the worship of the Creator for that of creature (Romans 1).

His Wealth

(v.4-5)

His pride boasts in his wealth. Yes he rules over the fabulous trading power and prestige of Phoenicia. Yes, their application of knowledge to the problems of ships and global trading had netted them enormous wealth. Here is the great danger of great wealth – that we will swell with pride and not recognize the giver of all and think of ourselves as having gotten it all ourselves.

For His Destruction

(v.6-10)

God's judgment comes because of this pride. Because he had a heart that thought about himself in self-centered ways and desired to rule his world like a god, Yahweh brings destruction Great is his pride; great will be his fall.

Its Instrument

(v.6-8)

He will be destroyed by a foreign nation who will come against him. We already know from chapters 25-27 that this is a succession of rulers beginning with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and ending finally with Alexander the Great of Greece. His wisdom, beauty, wealth and power will be destroyed in order to show the God is God alone.

Its Implication**(v.9-10)**

In a sarcastic question (v.9) God asks, “Do gods die? Will you claim to be a god in the presence of your executioners? Will you go out into death still holding yourself to be the absolute ruler and master of your universe?” How can Ittobaal II possibly make any claim to be a god when he is about to be dead? Not only will he die, but he will be slain by his enemies and, as we would put it, die like a dog. He is in so little control of his world that he cannot even overcome his enemies.

This will happen because Yahweh, the Lord God, the true and real potentate of the universe says so. He is the true God. He is able to bring about the fall and ruin of this prideful king simply by the word of His decree. Here then is the true God.

What is the correction to this sort of self-importance and self-idolatry? Jeremiah is preaching the correction to Judah and Jerusalem in the very same time period. Listen to Jeremiah 9:23-24

23 Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” [ESV]

The focus of our boasting is not to be in self or what self gains, but rather in God and in knowing His character. Pride is countered by a Godward humility that seeks what delights and pleases God. Instead of wisdom, power and wealth, let us value love, justice and righteousness.

The Cherub Who Wants to be God**(v.11-19)**

This section is full of exegetical difficulties and differences of opinion. I have been much helped in the rest of our studies by both Daniel Block and Ian Duguid. But, here, I have them unwilling to read the text and the metaphor for what it says. What seems to be alluded to here is dismissed as imaginative exegesis by the church fathers. I have found Dr. Charles Feinberg to be a most careful and helpful exegete, not only on this text but also on many others in Ezekiel as well.

The fundamental question is this: does Ezekiel here use a common pagan mythology or an adaptation of the Genesis narrative as a way to grab attention and make a connection with his audience? Or is Ezekiel using the metaphor to point to a greater and more sinister personage behind the prince of Tyre? In other words, is this merely a literary device to show the pride of the ruler of Tyre or is it a literary device to show us a spiritual reality behind the throne? While the idea of the use of a literary device is attractive, particularly to modern interpreters, Feinberg “cannot follow those views which inject without support a foreign and false mythology, a legendary atmosphere or a hypothetical ideal personality.” (Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p.161). And neither will I.

One another literary note: this is a lament, a funeral song. Here is a lament over this one who was created and appointed to such a high position and now has fallen so

low. It sounds like and is probably referring to the same personage and events as are referred to in Isaiah 14:12-21. There, like this text, an earthly king is being addressed but in language that is meant to point us to something more behind it.

Maybe the following analogy will be helpful. Most of us have some understanding of the planets as orbiting the sun. This model is used then to explain and teach us about the construction of an atom. Just as there are planets orbiting the sun, there are electrons orbiting the nucleus. Now, if we were using a metaphor like this text does, we would say, “electrons, you are planets orbiting the sun, the center of your smallest of universes.” This text is like this. Through the King of Tyre, we are to see Satan, the enemy of God and of His people.

His Perfection

(v.11-14)

These verses describe an original perfection at creation. Lucifer was perfect, full of wisdom and beauty. Like the King of Tyre in his jewel-decked festival robes, Satan glittered with multi-faceted and complex brightness. He was in the Garden of Eden, which the Genesis narrative states. He was the anointed guardian or covering cherub. He was on the mountain of God, the Bible’s way of speaking of the place in creation/cosmos where God has placed His throne and from which He rules. He moved among the stones of fire, signifying he was in the very presence of God. In the book of Ezekiel, we have already seen that the throne of God is surrounded by four cherubim who also carry the throne. Lucifer was the fifth cherub associated with the throne of God. Depending on the meaning of the Hebrew word, he was either the throne’s guardian or its covering. Historically, translators have favored the word “covering”. This would place Satan as hovering over the throne of God where the rainbow representing God’s promises of redemption now is.

Why am I fairly certain that this is more than just irony (God is making fun of the claims of the King of Tyre) or hyperbole (Ezekiel is quoting the claims of the King of Tyre and using the Genesis narrative to communicate it)? I cannot get around verses 14 – 16. Even metaphorically, how can these words describe the King of Tyre? For this to be a metaphor, there has to be a corresponding reality behind it. The corresponding reality behind is Satan. What Israel must see then is that Satan is behind Gentile thrones and their extravagant claims are nothing but the echoes of Satan’s self-exaltation and ambition.

His Corruption**(v.15)**

Here is the core of it. Satan was blameless from the day he was created until unrighteousness was found in him. That unrighteousness is expressed in Isaiah 14.

“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
¹³ You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’
¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit.
¹⁶ Those who see you will stare at you
and ponder over you:
‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
¹⁷ who made the world like a desert
and overthrew its cities,
who did not let his prisoners go home?’ [ESV]

Without going into any detail, the Scriptures imply that sin began with Satan. He is its father and originator. The one who was perfect and blameless and beautiful lusted to become God.

His Punishment**(v.16-19)**

In three sets of “because you are, then I will...”, God declares his punishment. Here, the language requires more than just an earthly king.

HE IS CAST OUT OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD (v.16). Because of his sin, he is ousted as profane from the holy presence of God, from his holy mountain and stones of fire. For a while he may have had access to the throne, but he cannot dwell there and only enters there at God’s bidding and permission.

HE IS CAST DOWN TO THE EARTH (v.17). Because his perfections of beauty and wisdom corrupted him, God cast him down as a defeated enemy. While this verse does not show us a long timeline for this, we know from other Scriptures that Satan is the usurper god of this world, the prince and power of the air and that he has already lost the battle due to the cross and resurrection. Now he is awaiting (not patiently, mind you) his full and final doom.

HE IS DESTROYED BY HIS OWN LUSTS AND BY FIRE (v.18). Satan is pictured here and so is the King of Tyre, as being not only consumed by what he wants, but is burned up and destroyed by it. Certainly, his eternal damnation in the lake of fire is intimated here.

HE IS EXPOSED BEFORE ALL AND BROUGHT TO A DREADFUL END (v.19) This verse bring us back to the person being addressed. Certainly, Satan will be brought to a dreadful but glorious-to-God end. The dreadful end here reminds us that what is being spoken of here also applies to the physical King of Tyre.

Now, I know that I am giving you a glimpse into the doctrine of Satan that some of you have never heard or have heard only in bits and pieces. You only know of Satan as the enemy of God and the accuser of the saints. Assuming that this text and Isaiah 14 are actually referring to Satan (and I acknowledge that many modern commentators disagree), here is a summary of who he is.

Satan was created by God as a perfect, sinless, beautiful cherub. I believe that cherubim are not angels, so Satan is not fallen angel – he is a fallen cherub. It is part of his deception that he comes as both an angel and an angel of light. He had some high and lofty position in heaven, related to the throne of God. He wanted to become God, to sit on the throne and to rule. He led a rebellion against God in which 1/3 of the angels followed. Through the temptation of Eve and Adam, and their fall into sin, he brought the human race into that rebellion, its slavery and judgment. Throughout history, he has attempted over and over again to prevent the coming of the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was defeated at the cross and by the resurrection. In the last days, he will seduce the earth to worship him through the Anti-Christ and then gather the kings and nations of the earth in a final war against God when God comes. He will be defeated and is eventually cast into the lake of fire that was prepared for him. While there is much more in the Bible about him, about what he has done throughout history, this gives you *curricula vitae*.

One final word – while Satan is powerful and wise, he is not omnipresent nor omniscient nor omnipotent. He cannot be everywhere. He does not know everything. And he only can do what God allows him to do. Further, he can be defeated by resisting him and by not presenting ourselves to sin so that we become enslaved to him. Praise God, we have been transferred from the realm of his dominion to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Ruler. Praise God, we are free. Praise God, we are victorious even in the midst of terrible warfare. Put on the while armor. Resist him. Stand in grace. Love truth. Pray without ceasing.

The God Who Manifests His Holiness**(v.20-26)**

Finally, in contrast to the self-exaltation of the King of Tyre and his dark master, God will manifest His own great glory and holiness. In one sense these two paragraphs stand somewhat alone as God moves against Sidon and moves on behalf of His people. Here will be groaning and gathering. I am linking these two paragraphs around the fact that over against the sinfulness of the prince of Tyre and the King over Tyre, here is the God who will manifest His holiness (v.22, 25).

Through His Judgments**(v.20-24)**

God will put His holiness on display through the exercise of His justice, its wrath and punishment. The holiness and glory of God are seen in His judgment. The glories of the mercies of God stand out more fully when seen alongside the greatness of the holiness and justice of God. Sidon's sins are not listed, but she has rejected God and sided with Israel and Judah's enemies. So God will move against her and destroy her.

Here is hope for Israel (v.24). There will come a day when all the thorns in Israel's side will be removed. The nations around her will be destroyed and she will no longer be harmed by them. This is not just for Israel's safety and security, but that all may know and acknowledge that God is God alone.

Through His Faithfulness**(v.25-26)**

Further, God will manifest his glory and holiness by keeping His word to His people. Ezekiel is fanning the flames of their hopes in God. God will gather them out from the nations among whom they were scattered. And then in a curious wording, God will bring them into the land *promised to Jacob*. Why Jacob? I think that here is another hint that this gathering is going to be greater and more magnificent that they can imagine. It will be of the "You are looking for a ford Pinto (which is great if you're walking), but you are going to get a BMW." They are looking for a small strip of land along the Mediterranean sea – God is going to bring the new heavens and the new earth, not only to them, but also to all the true sons of Abraham.

Then the final sentence. For the first time God will not just be known as God alone, but as their very own God. What a wonder and a glory. We can not only say that we are God's, but that He is ours as well.

Conclusion

Let me conclude this with some simple observations and applications.

JESUS IS RIGHTFULLY GOD AND KING. This text shows the importance of Jesus' claims in the New Testament. It is no small thing to claim to be God and to aspire to the throne of God. But this is precisely who Jesus is and what He has done. He claimed to be God and everyone around Him knew what He was claiming. His heavenly Father affirmed His claim and the Scriptures assert that claim. Unlike the prince of Tyre, this is a true claim. He is God, the second person of the Trinity. And He has the right to the throne of God and of David in heaven and on earth and over all the universe. By virtue of His resurrection and ascension He is seated and rightfully and gloriously so, on the throne.

AT THE ROOT OF SIN IS SELF. At the root of self is the desire to be our own gods. Satan knew exactly what he was doing when he tempted Eve by saying that they would be as God. Brothers and sisters, this is so important for us to understand about ourselves. This is why the gospel calls for us to believe and to bow. That call is to you today. You are not god. God is God alone. Bow to Him.

PRIDE IS DEADLY. Pride is dangerous. Pride will damn you. Pride destroyed the prince of Tyre. Pride destroyed the king of Tyre. Pride will destroy Satan. Sadly, pride has infested the people of God. It is the humble who receive grace. And we are in deep need of an inner work of the Spirit to humble us and cause us to bow low before our great High King Jesus.

WE HAVE A GREAT, BUT DEFEATED ENEMY. I know that behind much of what we call politics and economics and history is the devious plots and plans of Satan. But this I know, that he is under the mighty hand of God and cannot move but where God allows to do what in the end, only what God has determined. So, we will respect him as a malignant and malevolent enemy, but we will not fear and will stand in grace and resist him knowing that his greatest tool, death, has been defeated.

THERE IS GREAT HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISES. God, who cannot lie, has promised salvation. He has promised forgiveness, peace, joy and life everlasting. He has promised His presence in pain, His hope in despair, His peace in turmoil, His provision in life and His care in death. He has promised you good in your suffering and glory for your sacrifice. And besides all this, He has given His Son as the very reality of all these promises. Believe those promises, pray them, trust them, bank in them and be patient to wait on them through your whole life. And trust God for them even if He chooses to wait till heaven to fulfill them.

The Ruin of a Fallen Kingdom

Ezekiel 29-30

Message Overview

Aim To show how God will destroy reliance on false things.

- Agenda**
- To show the wickedness and destruction of Egypt.
 - To show the mighty hand of God moving in human history.
 - To relate Egypt as a metaphor for the world and worldliness.
 - To call for reliance on the sureness of God and His Word rather than the false and substitute illusions of the world.

- Summary**
- God describes and denounces Egypt's pride and treachery.
 - God exposes and promises to destroy Egypt's trusts.
 - God breaks and strengthens as He wills.

Discussion Questions Discuss how the Bible uses Egypt to represent the world, its values and allurements.

Discuss how Egypt/sin is represented as a place of slavery from which God's people are delivered.

How does fulfilled prophecy give confidence in the Scriptures? What should we conclude then about God's promises and unfulfilled prophecy?

Discuss how this text helps us to find comfort in the midst of our own uncertain days.

Introduction

All eyes are turned to the Middle East. Iraq appears to be in Mr. Bush's crosshairs. Iran and Egypt as well as lesser countries are trembling to know what will happen. The Palestinians are waging a war of terror against Israel. Everyone is wondering what horrors Iraq will unleash.

These nations now filling the front pages and screaming headlines of our papers were the primary nations and city states of Ezekiel's day. Egypt and Israel we recognize. Iraq is modern day Babylon. Iran is modern Persia. While this may be a time that brings fear to many, I read with both wonder and amazement the words of God against Egypt and Tyre and eventually, Babylon with hope in a mighty, powerful and sovereign God.

Historical Background

We must remember that while Israel figures prominently in the story of the Bible, even in the heights of her glory under David and Solomon, she was still a relatively minor world power in contrast to Egypt, Babylon, Tyre and Nineveh. Egypt had not only been Israel's captor, but also her tempter, her harasser, her southern nemesis and at times, her ally. No denunciation of the nations around Israel is going to be complete without a prophetic word for Egypt. And here it is.

During the decline of Assyria and Phoenicia, Egypt had arranged her alliances so as to maintain and even increase her status as a superpower. With consummate diplomatic skill, she had cynically maneuvered other nations to rise up against the overlords so as to occupy Babylon's attention and leave Egypt alone. Again and again, she promised aid and help while encouraging resistance and rebellion, then stood by while the hammer fell.

But she was not going to get away with it for long. Her doom was coming...

Biblical Connections

The Scriptures consistently use Egypt as a symbol and metaphor for the world, the sphere of the flesh and the natural man. The exodus of Israel out of Egypt points to our redemption. The hankering and longing for the pleasures and morsels of Egypt speaks to our own taste for the world.

And now, the total ruin and destruction of Egypt has both a "for the exiles immediacy" and an "in the Day of the Lord" ultimacy when God destroys this world system and brings into culmination the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

As Being a False Trust

(29:1-21)

January 587 BC, eleven years into the captivity and almost a year into the siege of Jerusalem, this word comes to Ezekiel against Egypt. Here is a time where Jerusalem is wavering back and forth between bowing to Babylon and heeding Egypt's exhortations to rebel and resist.

Their Foolish Pride

(v.1-6)

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; ³ speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.’

⁴I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales; and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams, with all the fish of your streams that stick to your scales.

⁵And I will cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; you shall fall on the open field, and not be brought together or gathered.

To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the heavens I give you as food.

⁶ Then all the inhabitants of Egypt *shall know that I am the LORD*.

Pharaoh is here portrayed as a great crocodile lying with self-sufficient pride in the headwaters of the Nile. He claims ownership over the whole Nile and the land through which it flows. God responds by saying that God will go fishing for crock, catching him and all the little fish that cling to him. God will hook, reel him in and then fling him up on the shore. He will be left there for the carrion animals and birds. The great dragon of the Nile will end up fertilizer.

Their False Power

(v.7-9)

“Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel; ⁷ when they grasped you with the hand, you broke and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke and made all their loins to shake. ⁸ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will bring a sword upon you, and will cut off from you man and beast, ⁹ and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then *they will know that I am the LORD*.

The Pharaohs Nebopolassar, Psammetichus and Necho II all pretended to be allies and helpers to Israel. Israel had leaned upon Egypt as a crutch. It would be like putting your weight on a crutch whose screws were not tightened. It folds up and you fall down. Egypt is compared to a crutch made out of a reed. It might look able to do the job, but it is weak and bends. The Lord says He will chop up such a false reed, such a weak crutch. His sword (possibly, machete) will hack and hew and bring to an end anyone’s reliance on such a false power.

Their Coming Punishment

(v.10-12)

“Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine, and I made it,’ ¹⁰ therefore, behold, I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Cush. ¹¹ No foot of man shall pass through it, and no foot of beast shall pass through it; it shall be uninhabited forty years. ¹² And I will make the land of

Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated countries, and her cities shall be a desolation forty years among cities that are laid waste. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries.

The Pharaohs have thought of themselves as divine source of the Nile. Rather than seeing themselves as dependent on the Nile for their prosperity, they see the Nile as dependent upon them for its flow. The Lord moves against such pride and hubris by drying up the Nile and changing its course so that Egypt becomes a wasteland and wilderness. Present day excavations have uncovered that many of the pyramids and many of Egypt's great ancient cities were built along the original course of the Nile [See National Geographic studies and magazine]. God would bring Egypt the desolation and scattering that He had brought to Israel. The 40 years may be a metaphor for a period of testing, but also to a real period of time in history.

Their Lowly Position

(v.13-16)

¹³ “For thus says the Lord GOD: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered, ¹⁴ and I will restore the fortunes of Egypt and bring them back to the land of Pathros, the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. ¹⁵ It shall be the most lowly of the kingdoms, and never again exalt itself above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will never again rule over the nations. ¹⁶ And it shall never again be the reliance of the house of Israel, recalling their iniquity, when they turn to them for aid. Then *they will know that I am the Lord GOD.*”

Just as Israel was scattered and gathered, so God would scatter and then gather Egypt. When they were re-gathered, they will be a weak and insignificant nation. They would never regain their former greatness. They would never again be the threat or the temptation to Israel that they had once been. We have seen this unfold in history. God shattered the power and might of Egypt. While she has regrouped as a nation, she has never ascended to the place she once held, either politically or economically. Egypt is a place of former, not present wonders.

Their Humbling Payment

(v.17-20)

¹⁷ In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁸ “Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off its wealth⁴ and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army. ²⁰ I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they worked for me, declares the Lord GOD.

This paragraph has generated an interesting controversy. Is Ezekiel here giving an apology or an explanation for why his earlier prophecy against Tyre apparently was not literally fulfilled by Babylon? This paragraph is 16-17 years later

than chapters 25-28. For most of that time, Babylon had attempted over and over to enter the city but could never breach the walls from the sea. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar accepted an enormous and ruinous tribute. So, is Ezekiel defending his creditability? Was the prophecy not to be limited to Nebuchadnezzar but was to see him as the beginning of Tyre's fall which was completed later? It seems to me that both are in view: Ezekiel is showing that the earlier prophecy points to Nebuchadnezzar as beginning Tyre's destruction while showing what God's immediate agenda is.

According to Dan Block, we have here Nebuchadnezzar's labors (v.18) and His reward (v.19-20). Babylon is pictured as having worked hard to overthrow Tyre, laboring to the point of rubbing the hair and skin off. So God makes Egypt the payment. Egypt is Nebuchadnezzar's reward for his hard work against Tyre.

So Egypt stands condemned and ripe for destruction because of her pride (v.1-6) and her treachery (v.7-9). Egypt had been a false trust for God's people. God will destroy that false trust.

As Having a False Reliance

(30:1-19)

Egypt not only was foolishly trust by Israel, but she relied on false things to protect and preserve her power. In a cycle of oracles, Ezekiel exposes these false reliances and how God would bring them to nothing.

The Day of Her Reckoning

(v.1-4)

The word of the LORD came to me: ²Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD:

“Wail, ‘Alas for the day!’

³For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near;

it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

⁴A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and her wealth is carried away, and her foundations are torn down.

Here is Ezekiel's first use of *The Day of the Lord* motif. This important phrase points to the judgment of God. The day of the Lord is the time when He Himself will directly intervene to judge in pouring out His wrath. Many texts point us to short term judgments that highlight and illuminate that great and terrible day that is yet to come. Generally, the Bible treats those *Day of the Lord* texts as having a near and far fulfillment. The near fulfillment anticipates the later judgment.

The Doom of Her Allies

(v.5-9)

⁵Cush, and Put, and Lud, and all Arabia, and Libya, and the people of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword.

⁶Thus says the LORD:

Those who support Egypt shall fall, and her proud might shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall within her by the sword, declares the Lord GOD.

⁷And they shall be desolated in the midst of desolated countries,

and their cities shall be in the midst of cities that are laid waste.

⁸ Then *they will know that I am the LORD*, when I have set fire to Egypt, and all her helpers are broken.

⁹ “On that day messengers shall go out from me in ships to terrify the unsuspecting people of Cush, and anguish shall come upon them on the day of Egypt’s doom; for, behold, it comes!

First God moves against Egypt’s reliance on her allies. They are doomed. They will be broken. Most are in ruins today. But God will utterly destroy them in that day. The irony here is that most of these nations saw Egypt as their helper, little realizing that Egypt was using them as a buffer against other rising world powers like Babylon.

The Destruction of Her Wealth

(v.10-12)

¹⁰ “Thus says the Lord GOD:

“I will put an end to the wealth of Egypt,
by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

¹¹ He and his people with him, the most ruthless of nations,
shall be brought in to destroy the land,
and they shall draw their swords against Egypt
and fill the land with the slain.

¹² And I will dry up the Nile
and will sell the land into the hand of evildoers;
I will bring desolation upon the land and everything in it,
by the hand of foreigners; *I am the LORD; I have spoken.*

Next God moves against Egypt’s reliance on her wealth. She will be invaded and plundered. Her wealth in the Nile, her people and the land will be broken. He will bring poverty and desolation on Egypt. He will do this, not by internal decay or disaster, but by external destruction that leaves the slain stacked in her streets.

The Demolition of Her Cities

(v.13-19)

¹³ “Thus says the Lord GOD:

“I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis;
there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt;
so I will put fear in the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ I will make Pathros a desolation and will set fire to Zoan
and will execute judgments on Thebes.

¹⁵ And I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt,
and cut off the multitude of Thebes.

¹⁶ And I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium shall be in great agony;
Thebes shall be breached, and Memphis shall face enemies by day.

¹⁷ The young men of On and of Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword,
and the women⁴ shall go into captivity.

¹⁸ At Tehaphnehes the day shall be dark,
when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt,
and her proud might shall come to an end in her;

she shall be covered by a cloud, and her daughters shall go into captivity.
¹⁹ Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt.
 Then *they will know that I am the LORD.*”

The extent of Egypt’s judgment is seen in Yahweh’s destruction of her principal cities. While the pyramids are amazing and awesome, historical documents indicate that the cities near the pyramids were even more amazing. All of these cities who are objects of God’s judgment were the great cities in Egypt during Ezekiel’s day. Most of them were magnificent in their day. We do not see that grandeur today – what is left today is mostly foundations and broken walls, covered in sand.

As Becoming a Broken Power

(30:20-26)

Many of the Hebrews in Jerusalem and in exile had held out a vain hope that Egypt might be able to rescue them from Babylon. Jeremiah 37:5-11 relates that Egypt sent out a force at Zedekiah’s request who attempted to confront the Babylonian army. Nebuchadnezzar lifted the siege for a few weeks while he went to deal with Egypt. Without too much trouble, he drove the Egyptians back into Egypt. [Stuart, p. 290.] This is what is alluded to here. Using the metaphor of an arm, Ezekiel contrasts the broken arms of Egypt and the strengthened arm of Neuchadnezzar.

The Broken Arm of Egypt

(v.20-23)

²⁰ In the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ²¹ Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and behold, it has not been bound up, to heal it by binding it with a bandage, so that it may become strong to wield the sword. ²² Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. ²³ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the countries.

In this God speaks of breaking the arms of Egypt. First, one is broken that only partially heals. Later, both broken with permanent effect. The first breaking is what Babylon will do when she drives them back into Egypt. The second will come later when God Himself permanently destroys the might and power of Egypt. Further, God says that it is not just the power of the nation that He will break, but the power of the Pharaohs. What an amazing thing to see how this is so, even to this day.

The Strengthened Arm of Babylon

(v.24-26)

²⁴ And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand, but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded. ²⁵ I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. ²⁶ And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then *they will know that I am the LORD.*”

In these verses, God says that He will strengthen the arms of Nebuchadnezzar so that Babylon may be able to break and destroy Egypt. What has rung clearly through these two chapters is God's intention that He will be known. He will be known as the sovereign ruler over history. He is working through even pagan Gentile kings to bring about his determined purpose. Yet, they are responsible for their wickedness and evoke further judgment from God.

Conclusion

Our Relying on False Trusts

Like Israel, we as God's people often put our trust in weak reeds, unreliable crutches. The Psalmist often contrasts the solidity and reliability of the Lord over against false trusts and reliances. We need so much to think about what we are counting on to bring us safety, security and satisfaction.

We count on our country, our privilege as Americans. There is a very subtle mindset that thinks of ourselves as invincible, and thus safe. Our hope as Christians must be in God, who is our stronghold in times of trouble. We count on jobs to bring financial security. We put our hope in wealth - and loved ones, we have lots of it. Tyre and Egypt had wealth almost unimaginable for their day. Their very reliance on their wealth invoked the judgment/anger of God. We count on human relationships and look to them to bring us a sense of satisfaction and well-being. Bless God for strong families and loving marriages and sweet friendships. But we need a deep inner reflex of the soul that leans on God when any or all of these fails.

Loved ones, let us lean with all our souls on God.

Our Responding to False Expectations

The world holds out the promise of pleasures and blessings so that we will respond by embracing them instead of God and His pleasures. False trusts lead us to false expectations. If Israel counts on Egypt for help, then she will expect Egypt to help with the crushing effect in the emotions when Egypt proves to be a weak reed not a strong crutch. Disappointments and discouragements come from counting on what turn out to be false hopes.. When what we expected and what we counted on fails us, we have than sense inwardly that the Bible calls being heart sick, downcast.

Our Resting on True Foundations

Instead being counting on the world, we need to rest on the Lord Jesus. I know that at first this does not seem to be "practical." When we rest in the Lord for our safety, security and satisfaction, we will be very different people than if we count on the world. At the end of the day, we either believe God's Word in an obeying way or we do not. And when we do we have a sense of peace and joy and love that cannot be matched.

What are you counting on? Will you rest in Jesus?

The Rulers of a Fallen Kingdom

Ezekiel 31-32

Message Overview

Aim To show the dreadfulness of hell and the greatness of the cross.

- Agenda**
- To show the devastating affects of pride.
 - To underscore the providence of God in the history of the nations.
 - To authoritatively affirm the reality and justice of eternal punishment in hell.
 - To warn of the horrors of hell and the hope in Christ.

- Summary**
- Egypt is compared to a great tree whose rise and fall is at the pleasure of God
 - Egypt is compared to great beasts who are slain and lie decaying in the land.
 - All the people groups are portrayed in hell, yielding a warning and a call to the proud and the pagan.

Discussion Questions

What are some of the objections to the doctrine of hell as eternal, conscious punishment?

Ask and answer those objections.

How should we respond to those who say that eternal punishment for a short life of sin is not just?

J.Piper – It is not the shortness of the life of sin but the greatness of the glory sinned against. When we do not see the justice of hell we are not dazzled by the glory of God.

How should such a horrific doctrine affect us?

Discuss the areas of self-inspection, gratitude, proclamation, and apologetics.

Introduction

These two chapters are about the demise and destruction of the Pharaohs of Egypt. Here are the fall of great trees and great beasts, of a great cedar and a great lion and crocodile.

- The place, priority and power of metaphors in Christian teaching.
- The folly, failure and fall of great peoples because of pride.

Watch how these two chapters have similar structures. Possibly use the structures in both outlines.

May God help us to see how we also think of ourselves as great trees and great beasts so that we will avoid their failure and fall.

Egypt compared to Great Trees

(Ch. 31)

Immediately we are faced with a bit of a language difficulty – should this read, “Behold, Assyria was...” or “Behold, consider a cypress, a cedar in Lebanon.” Both are possible and make good sense. One would sound like, “Remember Assyria, how great like this cedar she was? Her fall will be your fall as well. She was like... This is you.” Or it can simply be a powerful introduction to the metaphor. Either way, the point is to draw Egypt into the message by using a common metaphor and possibly, an allusion to a fallen ally.

The Description of Heights

(v.1-9)

In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude:

“Whom are you like in your greatness?

*3 Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon,
with beautiful branches and forest shade,
and of towering height, its top among the clouds.*

*4 The waters nourished it; the deep made it grow tall,
making its rivers flow around the place of its planting,
sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field.*

*5 So it towered high above all the trees of the field;
its boughs grew large and its branches long
from abundant water in its shoots.*

*6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs;
under its branches all the beasts of the field
gave birth to their young, and under its shadow
lived all great nations.*

*7 It was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches;
for its roots went down to abundant waters.*

*8 The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it,
nor the fir trees equal its boughs;
neither were the plane trees like its branches;
no tree in the garden of God was its equal in beauty.*

*9 I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches,
and all the trees of Eden envied it, that were in the garden of God.*

American Redwoods are some of the most magnificent trees in God's creation. Redwoods are the tallest living trees; they often exceed 300 feet in height, and one has reached 367.8 feet. Their trunks reach typical diameters of 10 to 20 feet or more, measured above the swollen bases. The redwood tree takes 400 to 500 years to reach maturity, and some trees are known to be more than 1,500 years old. [*Encyclopedia Britannica*]

The equivalent in the mid-east is cedars. They were the great trees of their world and their day. The comparison then is to great, beautiful, towering cedars. These were so large, so beautiful, so majestic that they would have even evoked the envy of the trees in Eden. Here was a tree in whose branches the birds would come to nest and rest.

It was common in the culture to think of the greatness of a kingdom, and its ruler in particular, in terms of a mighty tree, deeply rooted in the fertile soil, watered by the streams and rivers, stretching up high into the sky. It would cast its protecting shadows over other nations and invite them to come and rest in its mighty boughs. God says that He was responsible for the greatness and power of Assyria and therefore, by extension, of Egypt and her pharaohs. He had created them and He had caused them to rise in their ascendancy.

The Destruction from Heaven

(v.10-14)

10 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, 11 I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. 12 Foreigners, the most ruthless of nations, have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it. 13 On its fallen trunk dwell all the birds of the heavens, and on its branches are all the beasts of the field. 14 All this is in order that no trees by the waters may grow to towering height or set their tops among the clouds, and that no trees that drink water may reach up to them in height. For they are all given over to death, to the world below, among the children of man, with those who go down to the pit.

But pride had filled the heart of the Gentile kings and the Egyptian pharaohs. Rather than humbled by the work of God, they attributed their achievements to their own personal greatness. So, God does some forestry management and sends out his woodcutters. Among the trees of the nations, the sound of the ax and hammered wedge is heard. These are not the nice, friendly woodcutters of fairy tales, but dark cloaked and doom faced and ruthless. They will cut it down. It will crash to the ground and lie there in ruins, to slowly rot away into oblivion. The picture here is of a savage and indiscriminating clear cut. God's judgment against such prideful rulers will bring an irreversible ruin.

The Descent in Hell

(v.15-18)

15 "Thus says the Lord God: On the day the cedar went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I closed the deep over it, and restrained its rivers, and many waters were stopped. I

clothed Lebanon in gloom for it, and all the trees of the field fainted because of it. 16 I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the world below. 17 They also went down to Sheol with it, to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were its arm, who lived under its shadow among the nations.

18 "Whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? You shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below. You shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. "This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God."

In these two chapters Ezekiel introduces us to *Sheol*, the place of punishment for the wicked dead. The word is used in some texts to refer primarily to what we think of as the grave, the state and condition of being dead. In other texts, like here in Ezekiel, it is more than just being dead, it is so much more, so much horribly more. It is described as a place, a dark and terrible place, a deep filled with shadows and gloom. It is an underworld, using vocabulary that would have brought shudders to a pagan audience familiar with their mythologies.

More to the point, this is the place where all the prideful trees go. While leaders may fall from power, they eventually descend into the grave, into Sheol, into hell. In a lovely twist of irony, all of those who are there will be comforted when Egypt's pharaohs arrive. While the actual reality of the present place of torment and punishment for the wicked dead is inaccessible to us, the Bible uses metaphors to describe horrors and terrors beyond our imagination.

[I want to speak to something here – our knowledge of hell (and heaven, as well for that matter) is gleaned entirely from the Scripture. Put no stock in the tales of those who have supposedly died and gone to hell and now live to tell about it. The only accurate descriptions are those that are exactly like the Bible's and thus we have no need of them. If Abraham would not send Lazarus back to warn the rich man's wicked brothers because they had the Scriptures, then let us give heed and hear the Scriptures alone. I do not need your delusions to convince me of the horrors of hell- and I loathe the descriptions of heaven as being pale and weak and insipid compared the Bible-soaked meditations and expectations of my heart.]

Hear me well. The wicked die and go to the grave and hell. There they are punished until the judgment day, the great white throne. Then they are cast into the Lake of Fire that burns forever away from the presence of God and from the brightness of His glory. There is no second chance. There is no purgatory. There is no blessed relief in annihilation after an appropriate time of punishment. There is ever and always unrelenting and unending torment. Hell is eternal because Jesus is glorious. It is not the brief lifetime of sin committed, but the unimaginable holy glory sinned against that justifies hell. I call you even now to carefully consider yourselves and flee, run to Christ. Cry out for His mercy lest you descend into hell where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die and smoke of their torment arises up forever and forever.

Pharaoh compared to Great Beasts

(Ch. 32)

Now Ezekiel turns from one cedar and possibly one nation, Assyria to all the nations whose remains litter the graveyards of history. See all these great beasts? See all these great nations? You will be like them.

The Magnified Heights

(v.1-2)

In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him:

*"You consider yourself a lion of the nations,
but you are like a dragon [crocodile] in the seas;
you burst forth in your rivers,
trouble the waters with your feet,
and foul their rivers.*

Over a year later than the prior chapter, Ezekiel is to raise a funeral dirge, a lamentation, a sad song over the demise and death of Egypt's once mighty Pharaoh. That pharaoh had no problem with his self-esteem. He considered himself to be a great lion and a great crocodile who lay in wait and attacked and snapped and devoured the nations as his helpless prey. But God says that his very greatness has caused trouble and a fouling of his own river.

Here is the trouble with pride – we are never what we think we are, yet we act as though we are. This lofty view of self, this high view of ourselves is folly and fouling – it is folly to not think of ourselves as God knows us to be and it is fouling of our lives and those around us.

The Message from Heaven

(v.3-16)

*3 Thus says the Lord God: I will throw my net over you
with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet.
4 And I will cast you on the ground; on the open field I will fling you,
and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you,
and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you.
5 I will strew your flesh upon the mountains
and fill the valleys with your carcass.
6 I will drench the land even to the mountains
with your flowing blood, and the ravines will be full of you.
7 When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens
and make their stars dark I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.
8 All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you,
and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord God.*

9 "I will trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries that you have not known. 10 I will make many peoples appalled at you, and the hair of their kings shall bristle with horror because of you, when I brandish my sword before them. They shall tremble every moment, every one for his own life, on the day of your downfall.

11 *"For thus says the Lord God: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you.
12 I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of mighty ones, all of them most ruthless of nations.*

*"They shall bring to ruin the pride of Egypt,
and all its multitude shall perish.*

13 *I will destroy all its beasts from beside many waters;
and no foot of man shall trouble them anymore,
nor shall the hoofs of beasts trouble them.*

14 *Then I will make their waters clear,
and cause their rivers to run like oil, declares the Lord God.*

15 *When I make the land of Egypt desolate,
and when the land is desolate of all that fills it,
when I strike down all who dwell in it,
then they will know that I am the Lord.*

16 *This is a lamentation that shall be chanted; the daughters of the nations shall chant it;
over Egypt, and over all her multitude, shall they chant it, declares the Lord God."*

Here is stunning message from heaven, "You think you are a great beast, well I am an even greater hunter." Yahweh has the Pharaoh in His sights. He is bringing His net and His spear and His sword. He will hunt him down, capture him in his net and slay him with his spear and sword. The spear and sword will be in the hand of the king of Babylon. Yet, God is clearly showing that He, God, is behind the demise and death of Pharaoh. This is no mere accident of history. All who think themselves to be great trees and great beasts, even we who think we are a great eagle, we had better take heed. Whatever measure of greatness we are given is at the pleasure of God. He may just as well place us in His sights – and be assured – He is great marksman.

Not only will God hunt him down, but he will be left in the field to decay and rot. He thinks of himself in mythological proportions – God will destroy him in like manner. His blood will foul the waters. His carcass will drape the land. The rumble of his crash to the earth will shake all nations. The stars will wink out and the sun and moon dim. Here again the Day of the Lord vocabulary is invoked. John, in the book of Revelation, draws on texts like these to point to the awful day of God's wrath and the massive devastation when God enters into battle with the wicked.

In a hint of hope, God says that in the day of ruin there will be a cleansing of the rivers. The lamentation will turn to laughter as the God who struck them down hints at a day when He will take them up once again.

The Multitudes in Hell

(v.17-32)

17 *In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: 18 "Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, and send them down, her and the daughters of majestic nations, to the world below, to those who have gone down to the pit:*

19 *'Whom do you surpass in beauty?
Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised.'*

20 They shall fall amid those who are slain by the sword. Egypt is delivered to the sword; drag her away, and all her multitudes. 21 The mighty chiefs shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: 'They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.'

22 "Assyria is there, and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, 23 whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

24 "Elam is there, and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread their terror in the land of the living; and they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. 25 They have made her a bed among the slain with all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for terror of them was spread in the land of the living, and they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit; they are placed among the slain.

26 "Meshech-Tubal is there, and all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they spread their terror in the land of the living. 27 And they do not lie with the mighty, the fallen from among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose iniquities are upon their bones; for the terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living. 28 But as for you, you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword.

29 "Edom is there, her kings and all her princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the pit.

30 "The princes of the north are there, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who have gone down in shame with the slain, for all the terror that they caused by their might; they lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.

31 "When Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted for all his multitude, Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, declares the Lord God. 32 For I spread terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God."

Two weeks later, after time to meditate and reflect on awesomeness of Egypt's destruction, Ezekiel brings us to consider the awfulness of Egypt's descent. Death and descent into hell are the great equalizers. She thought she was unmatched in her beauty? The grave and hell await and there she is no more and no less than all the rest of the uncircumcised of heart and body. Verses 20-21 portray the horrendous scene of the dead being dragged to the edge of hell's pit and dumped into the miry pit.

There she joins the vast multitude of pagan peoples who have gone into eternity without redeeming grace. While the imagery here has both the feel of Milton and the look of Dante, we probably should not think of hell as having suburbs partitioned according to nationality. The tour here is to remind Israel and to warn the

nations that no one is exempt. All the great nations and all the small peoples of the past and present and therefore, the future will be there.

The contrast between the greatness of their power on earth and the brokenness of their condition in hell is meant to stir humility in the proud and hope in the persecuted. Assyria is there. Elam is there. Meshech-Tubal is there. Edom is there. The princes of the North and the Sidonians, they are there. This is not an exhaustive list, but an illustrative one. What happened to all the pagan lost who died without the gospel, without God? What happened to those who lived in God's creation, breathed God's air, ordered and bettered themselves through reasoning obtained from God using truth borrowed from God and twisted to serve sin and self in rebellion against God? They went to hell. We must not compromise on this. We must not be gleeful about this nor must we shrink from it. Here is a tearful, but righteous truth. All the lost of all time go to hell for all eternity.

Conclusion

Challenge - how does this chapter advance our understanding of hell? The description uses the language from the mythologies of the underworld, the place of the dead. Yet, it is clear that Ezekiel intends for the listener/reader to draw some conclusions about the "pit", the place of punishment of the dead. Several things from this text are corroborated from other texts as well.

- *THE PIT/GRAVE/HELL IS A PRESENT PLACE OF PUNISHMENT.* At the final judgment, death, hell, Satan and his followers are all cast into the lake of fire, the permanent place of eternal punishment.
- *THE WICKED DESCEND INTO THE PIT OF HELL IMMEDIATELY UPON DEATH.* There is no soul sleep nor is there purgatory. Their descent is immediate and final.
- *IT IS A PLACE OF CONSCIOUS PUNISHMENT* - they know what is going on. Hell is a place of *awareness* and *awakeness*. It will be felt.
- *IT HAS DEGREES OR LEVELS OF PUNISHMENT.* This is borne out by a number of texts where language like, "It will be worse for ____ than for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment" is used.
- *IT IS THE BEGINNING OF WHAT WILL BE UNENDING TORMENT.* There will be neither annihilation nor reconciliation to give release. There will ever and only be just and unending pain.
- *IT WILL BRING GLORY TO GOD.* He will be seen as great in His holiness and justice. The cross will be exhibited as even more marvelous. And His mercy and grace to His people will be brighter and greater and ever more savored.

But now, today, mercy is extended. You will face that judge one day. That day is sure and it is soon. But today, repent. Turn from your sin and self. Turn to Jesus Christ as your Redeemer and Ruler, as your Savior and Sovereign. Flee, o loved one, the wrath to come.

The Watchman

Ezekiel 33

Message Overview

Aim To confront and call us to seriousness in our relationship with God.

- Agenda**
- To show how Israel continued in impenitence even in the midst of punishment.
 - To explain the true nature of Ezekiel's commission as a watchman.
 - To help us stop excusing our lack of genuine repentance.
 - To expose our dependence on self-righteousness.
 - To awaken us out of a casual and unengaged hearing of God's Word.

- Summary**
- Ezekiel's commission as a watchman is established.
 - Israel's lack of repentance is exposed.
 - Ezekiel's ministry is encouraged.

Discussion Questions On what do we tend to rely for the assurance of our salvation?

What kind of rationalizations do we give for our sins? How should we deal with them?

Discuss the approach to the warning passages – “they function primarily to sustain perseverance, not give a test to expose apostasy (though they do that).”

Discuss the tendency to hear, but not heed the Word.

Introduction

What happens when guards fail...

<An illustration that shows the importance of watchman>

What happens when books turn...

This chapter is a turning point in the book. If the whole book were arranged on chiasmic structure, this would be the center. We are turning here from judgment to hope. This long section of Ezekiel has been book ended by the watchman texts.

The Commission of the Watchman Ezekiel 3:16-27

The Confirmation of the Watchman Ezekiel 33:1-9

The arrival of the survivor and the loosening of Ezekiel's tongue to speak of the future restoration of God's people are the fulfillment of a faithful warning work and a confirmation of his watchman task.

The Confirmation of the Watchman

(v.1-9)

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, 3 and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

7 "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8 If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

Its Common Reference

(v.2-6)

All of us are familiar with the sirens that blare in our neighborhoods to warn us of approaching dangerous weather. There are people who man radar stations and watch the developing systems and approaching thunderstorms and tornados, When one of them threatens a locale, the alarm is sounded and we are to seek safety.

Whenever an army is in hostile territory, a guard is set. Some of the soldiers are responsible to keep watch for the enemy during the night. They are both the first line of defense and must warn the rest. They must not sleep on duty. They must stay alert. They must pay attention. And they must warn. If not, they are liable to charged with dereliction of duty and possibly treason if the enemy had bribed them.

In ancient times, on every city wall in the tower over the gate there was stationed a guard, a watchman. His responsibility was to keep lookout over the approaches to the city and to warn of it of impending danger. If he warned the people and they refused to hear and heed his warning, then they would be accountable for their own failure and destruction. But if the watchman failed to warn when the danger came, though the people would be destroyed because of their own sin, God would hold the watchman accountable as well.

His Personal Responsibility (v.7-9)

God had appointed Ezekiel as a watchman to warn Judah. That commission in Ezekiel 3 is here confirmed. He is still responsible to carry out his task. He has not been relieved of duty. He must still speak for God. He must still warn Judah and the exiles. And he is accountable to God for the continued faithful exercise of his prophetic ministry.

Now, there are several important things I want to point out from this text.

- This is a commission given to Ezekiel. Applications of this that make every Christian responsible in the same way as Ezekiel was are misguided. Our general responsibility to evangelize and warn the wicked is defined and delimited by the New Testament. The greater responsibility given to elders in this regard is shifted from this “watchman” metaphor and placed primarily in the “shepherd” metaphor.
- Ezekiel’s warnings are messages relayed from God. While he stands as a watchman, he is trying to figure where the danger is coming from. God will tell him what to say and how to warn. He is then responsible to speak for God.
- Faithfulness, not effectiveness is the standard. Ezekiel must proclaim and warn regardless. It is evident from other texts and from history that Israel refused to hear and heed and were destroyed as a result. Yet, we find Ezekiel penetratingly faithful to God’s word and to warning the people.

So, while Ezekiel’s tone and message are about to take a more hopeful note, his responsibility to speak for God is being affirmed. I am struck by the reversal of this in our own minds. We would find it easy to be faithful to a hopeful message. God sees the real danger that in the midst of a hopeful message, we will lose the sense of impending danger and the voice of the warning message. Is that not exactly what has happened today? Are we not surrounded by shallow preaching that is primarily designed to get people to feel good about themselves and to have their felt needs met? Why in the world do we need such soft, hopeful preaching when we are little aware of the danger and doom that awaits? We need the old Puritan emphasis which says that true Biblical preaching ought to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

The Confrontation through the Watchman (v.10-20)

Here is a dialog between God and the Hebrews through Ezekiel. There is a definite back-and-forth that flows through this portion. Here, God confronts the Hebrews, those in Jerusalem and the exiles in Babylon, through the watchman He has appointed. This confrontation deals with the reasons that Israel refuses to repent.

Of their Complaining about Judgment (v.10-11)

10 "And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' 11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

God confronts them about their failure to repent because of whining about their judgment. They recognize that their present situation has come because of their practice of sin. Rather than repent of their sin, they are complaining that they are just rotting away in their judgment and have no hope of change.

God responds by showing them how they are simply living out what they think. Underlying their complaint is the thinking that God is taking more delight and pleasure in the death of the wicked than in their repentance. God denounces this as both a false view of God and as the heart issue preventing true repentance. It is a kind of blame-shifting. Israel is effectively saying, "Why should we repent when God is more interested in punishing us than in accepting us?" They have turned God's punishment from a sign of his displeasure of their sin into a personal pleasure.

God declares that He is much more delighted in your repentance and change. Why would you go on in rebellion and its dire results when God is poised to delight in your repentance? Are there some of you today who need to hear this word? O listen to me. Turn away from your sin and turn to God, for He will abundantly pardon. Do not charge God and blame Him for your own unwillingness to believe and bow.

So there are people who will not repent because they believe that God is more interested in their punishment than in their repentance. These people must be confronted with their wrong belief, challenged with the truth and called to respond and repent.

Of their Complacency in Self-Righteousness (v.12-16)

12 "And you, son of man, say to your people, 'The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. 13 Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. 14 Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16 None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.'

God confronts them about their failure to repent because of a trust in self-righteousness. Israel had all sorts of self-righteous views that caused them to think they were OK with God when they were not. Even in the midst of judgment over their sin, they thought they were accepted by God. How many Israelites all through the OT died and woke with a shock in hell?

Dependence on self-righteousness or dependence upon religion in the face of on-going wickedness will close our ears to God's calls to repent. If you think that you have no need to respond to God because:

1. You are a good person who has done lots of good things; or
2. You have made a decision for God, but you live in sin and wickedness relying on the one-time decision to get you to heaven;

Then you, my friend, are deeply deceived. We must trust Christ alone for His righteousness alone by faith alone in such a way that we, in dependence upon grace alone, persist in constantly recognizing and repenting and rejecting sin.

Please hear me – the truly saved cannot lose their salvation. But the Bible also teaches that the truly saved will not be casual about their sin and will not trust their religion or their righteousness. You maintain that trust in Christ and turning away from sin (called perseverance) by being warned from the Word that sinners do not go to heaven. The warnings are God's way of sustaining perseverance. This is the function of this text and this part of the message. This is not much the way we talk today, but it is the way the OT and the NT talk. *Be sustained to rely on Jesus and repent of sin and resist temptation because if you do not you are going to hell.*

So there are people who will not repent because they are trusting in their own religion and righteousness. But if you repent and trust in Jesus alone, believing in Him and His work for your salvation along and bowing to Him as God and Lord of your life, then you will have eternal life. Don't be complacent or casual about your sin – rather repent and believe God in an obeying way all the way to glory.

Of their Charges against God (v.17-20)

17 "Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just,' when it is their own way that is not just. 18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. 19 And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by them. 20 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

God confronts them about their failure to repent because of a charge of injustice against God. Here is the fundamental problem of the Old Testament and the argument of Romans. How does a just God justify the unjust and remain just? While this text does not attempt to answer that, it still points to the folly of unjust humans charging the God of all the universe with being unjust. And then to refuse to repent because it is unjust for the unrighteous to repent and then be treated as righteousness is almost stupid. There is almost a "how dare you" in the tone here. To justify remaining unjust because it is unjust to repent to become just and accuse God of being unjust to do so?

Rather, God calls us to glory in the cross where the justice and mercy of God meet – where a just God justifies unjust sinners because His justice has been satisfied in the punishment of the sins of His people in their innocent representative. So turn and repent and trust and delight in the cross where we are accounted righteous by and for the sake of Jesus, our Redeemer and Ruler.

The Condemnation by the Watchman

(v.21-29)

21 In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been struck down." 22 Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

23 The word of the LORD came to me: 24 "Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.' 25 Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat flesh with the blood and lift up your eyes to your idols and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? 26 You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land? 27 Say this to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence. 28 And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and her proud might shall come to an end, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that none will pass through. 29 Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed.

Verses 21-22 bring us to the arrival of the survivor with the news of Jerusalem's fall. As prophesied, Ezekiel's tongue is loosed so that now he can speak more than words of condemnation. But before he can bring hope, there must be a final dashing of false hopes.

Their False Dependence

(v.23-24)

Even as the land is being swept away and the city falling, foolish reasoning is mustered to give hope. They argue, "If Abraham, who was only one person, got possession of the land, then, we who are many will surely keep possession." A false dependence has led them to foolish self-deception. Even though the land is actually being taken away and the city is in the very process of being destroyed, they are in denial of the reality of God's judgment.

This, beloved, is a serious mistake. False reasoning summoned to serve self-deception about the sure reality of judgment and chastening will ultimately be exposed for the foolish reliance it is. True deliverance comes to those who truly see the danger and run to Christ and hide in Him.

Their Clear Disqualification

(v.25-27)

Ezekiel points to their covenant-breaking sins as disqualifying them from possessing the land. God says, "If you do all these sins, do you really think that you will possess the land? Can't you see that your sins disqualify you from the blessing?" Their sin put them under the curses of the covenant, not its blessing. Fur-

ther, the possession of the land was an Abrahamic privilege that was extended to true sons and daughters, whom we know now through Galatians first to be the Lord Jesus Himself, and all those, Jew and Gentile who are the spiritual sons of Abraham. Mere physical lineage nor large population guaranteed them nothing.

Their Sure Destruction

(v.27-29)

As a result of their clear disqualification, God asserts their sure destruction. The watchman must be faithful to confront the wicked, to afflict the comfortable, to warn them. Ezekiel is not here just speaking out of his own general spiritual knowledge; he is speaking the word God has given him. So he is fulfilling the commission even here as he warns them of the destruction to come and calls them to repent, even then.

The Contempt for the Watchman

(v.30-33)

³⁰ "As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' ³¹ And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. ³² And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. ³³ When this comes—and come it will!— then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Now God turns to Ezekiel and both warns and comforts him. While his ministry has been an attention attracting enigma up to this point, his increasing popularity is not a signal of effective ministry.

Their Casual Treatment

(v.30-32)

Now the exiles begin to see the actual fulfillment of much that Ezekiel has prophesied. So, they begin to come, to sit at his feet and to listen. They are there as God's people to hear God's man. That should be encouraging.

Except, in deft turn of metaphor, God says they are like people who are listening to the music but are not hearing the message. They are tapping along and humming along and seemingly enjoying it – but they will not do it. They are like a lot of people who come to church, sing along with the music, open their Bibles, take lots of notes, say "Amen" and not their heads – then go out and do not do what they have heard. They are listening to the music but not hearing and heeding the message.

In other words, they are gaining knowledge without coming to believe. They, the exiles and you know what is being said. You know what God is saying in the Bible and through His man, but you don't believe it. If you believed it, you would do it. You do what you believe, not necessarily what you know. I know what you believe by what you do. So lots of people here on Sunday are only lots of people here on Sunday – the measure of God's grace among us is how many of the lots of people believe God in an obeying way.

His Final Testimony

(v.33)

God's people will know that God's man and God's message is true when what is taught and preached and sung comes true. That was true of the exiles. It will be true of you as well.

Conclusion

Our Carnal Self-deceptions

We are fooling ourselves about our condition and not aware of our dangers. Our very wealth and ease may not be a blessing, but a curse from God. He can give us the desires of our hearts and send leanness to our souls. Awake, O my friends to the dangers that are near and pressing upon you and upon us.

Our Complaining Self-centeredness

We are whining about our chastening and not repenting of our sins. We are self-absorbed and self-focused. We are in great need of turning away from our selves to our Savior. Repentance is about changing our thinking and wanting. It is about a real turn from serving self to submission to God.

Our Casual Self-indulgence

We are listening to the music and not hearing the message. It is easy to hear the words and write down the outlines – it is imperative that we change because of the truths. Too many of you are here in a very casual way. Too many of your teens are just along for the ride. But you are not on the ride to heaven if you take the privileges of a Christian family and Biblical church lightly. You are not here to just give God token time. As He did the nation of Israel who heard Ezekiel's dire prophecies of doom and damnation, God confronts you with the specter of eternal punishment. Your joking, casual way will ring pretty hollow when you are standing before the God of all the universe.

Our Call to Self-denial

We are called to discipleship and to taking up our cross. This is not a second-tier option for the super spiritual. It is the basics of being Christian. Cross bearing and discipleship define being a Christian. Won't you take it up today – and you will find it full of sweetness and glory and delight regardless of the cost.

False Shepherds and a True Servant

Ezekiel 34

Message Overview

Aim To hold up Christ as the true Shepherd who saves and satisfies His people.

- Agenda**
- To expose the characteristics of false shepherds.
 - To challenge elders as to their primary responsibilities in care for the flock.
 - To point to Jesus as our model of good shepherding.
 - To encourage us in the promises and provisions of Christ.

- Summary**
- The false shepherds are characterized and confronted.
 - God moves to become their true Shepherd.
 - God places His great servant-ruler over them to shepherd them.
 - God brings the bounty and blessings of His covenant with them.

Discussion Questions *Due to OACH presentation, no questions prepared*

Introduction

It's a cold dark morning. The stars are winking like fireflies in the velvet sky. The sun is just beginning to purple the steep hillsides awakening the world. You awaken to wrap yourself even more tightly in your rough cloak, shifting to find a more comfortable position on the hard ground. You reach out with your cudgel to prod the slumbering fire into flickering wakefulness. Then you raise up on your elbow to look out over your flock. Most of the sheep seem to be resting quietly, dirty white lumps scattered tightly in the thorny enclosure - yes, thorny, you have the new wounds and old scars on your hands and arms of years of dragging thorny hedges into a circle of small safety. You finally sit up and stretch aching bones and knotted, stringy muscles to look over at the last villain who attempted to take one of your charges. His pelt is nicely beginning to tan over the smoking fire. This wolf was a bit trickier than most - but, in the end, your well timed swing had landed with a quite life-ending crunch on the top of his head. You move slowly toward the sheep to awaken them and move them to water and then to pasture. Another long, hard day begins for an ancient shepherd.

Now we must be a bit careful in thinking about shepherds. Today we have a very romanticized and pastoral view of shepherding that is not very realistic of shepherding and looks very little like the shepherding of the days of the Bible. One commentator pointed out that the rough, dangerous and outdoors life of ancient shepherds was actually more like the range cowboys of the early west. It was a rough, dirty and dangerous job. There is a certain disconnect between the elegant riches of most kings and the rough poverty of most shepherds.

A long tradition in the ancient world thought of rulers and kings as shepherds. The Middle Egyptian period is notable for its great shepherd leaders. The kings of Israel were also compared to shepherds. This way of thinking about Israel's kingship was meant to help the rulers overcome the sinful tendency to rule harshly and for their own gain and greatness. The greatest king of Israel, King David, was a shepherd in his youth.

It is this familiar metaphor that runs all through this text. The indictment of Israel's failed shepherd kings illuminates the problems that plague pastoral ministry today. While the details here are drawn from what their kings actually did, it is still so applicable to those of us to whom God has committed the shepherding and governing of His blood-bought flock.

Their False Shepherds

(v.1-10)

The history of the kings of Israel is largely a sad one. Few were truly godly men who sought the Lord and shepherded God's people well. For the most part they were wicked as religious hypocrites or outright idol worshippers. It is probably fair to say that the people suffered as much from the hands of their rulers as they did at the hands of their enemies. Here then is Ezekiel's description of those false shepherds.

Who Take Advantage of the Sheep

(v.1-6)

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

These words are against the false shepherds, particularly the one still alive and all those who might follow. But they are aimed at the sheep. God's people were to know what God required of those shepherds who wanted to please Him.

The purpose of shepherds is to take care of the sheep. Now it would seem to us that this ought to be obvious. Sheep care is what shepherds are all about. That care involves both their provision and their protection. Shepherds were to provide food and water as well as healing balms to the hurt and sick. Shepherds were to protect from the elements and the enemies. This called for great care and great skill, for compassion and competence.

Sadly, the false shepherds of Israel served themselves. They used their place, position and power to take advantage of those entrusted to their care. Instead of providing and protecting them, they used them and abused them. With callousness and not care, they ruled the sheep. They were self-serving and self-seeking in the ministry God had placed them in. This showed itself in two primary ways:

- They sought to enrich themselves off the sheep. They took the best and consumed it themselves. Their shepherding served primarily to enlarge and enrich themselves.
- They refused to care for the sheep. The weak, sick and defenseless were left without care. Those who strayed were allowed to go. They were not contributing to their gain so they let them desert, decline and die.

Brothers and sisters, it is not much changed today. The current cadre of shepherds are little better. The pastorate for many has become a place for power and wealth. The flock is used and abused to serve their own self-focused agendas. Some even seek the eldership, not to serve with their lives and abilities, but to seek their own advancement and achievement. Praise God for the men who serve here. As elders and shepherds (pastors) we hold each other accountable for humble compassion and care of this flock. It is our prayer that God will grant us the grace and His kind providences to both bring us more of such men and sustain those who now serve in this office.

Look carefully at what is expected of the shepherds of God's people. We must feed the sheep, care for weak, pursue the wandering, comfort and bandage the wounded, sick and lame. We must not govern with force and harshness, but rather with clear Biblical persuasion and patient tenderness and kindness. Otherwise, we, like the failed kings of Israel will be foolish and false shepherds.

Who Destroy the Sheep

(v.5-9)

5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. 6 My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. 7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

Look at the effect of false shepherds. Their very shepherding destroys the sheep. The sheep become prey for wild beasts and they scatter and wander without a fold. God is clearly placing the blame for the consequences of Israel's sin on the shepherds. Israel had fallen to foreign powers and was scattered in exile and throughout the world because her shepherds had failed them.

Brothers, we will be responsible if we fail to be good and godly shepherds for our flock becoming vulnerable to error and wicked leaders. We are responsible to teach and touch, to care about and care for the sheep. If we do not, then they will be eaten alive by the wolves that prowl around out there and even some who might enter and seek to destroy and devour the flock.

Who are Removed from over the Sheep

(v.10)

10 Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

Finally God steps in to remove the kings over Israel. They were false shepherds and destroyed the flock. God is against them and brings them into an accounting. They will no longer be shepherds. God will rescue His people from their hands.

May God have mercy on shepherds over God's church when He moves with anger against them to bring an end to their ministries. God will rescue His people and bring them true shepherds. This raises a difficult question: how do we explain false shepherds over churches who seem to prosper and never are removed? Without meaning any unkindness, there are two explanations: (1) God is waiting patiently and will yet move or (2) the false shepherd is over a false church. If that is the case, then God will judge them all together at the time of His own choosing. Where God's interest lies is with true sheep in an authentic fold where there are false shepherds.

Their True Shepherd

(v.11-24)

Israel in exile and upon their return never had true kings again. Yes, some took the throne; they were usurpers. God had removed the false shepherds in order to one day, bring forth the one great, true Shepherd of the sheep.

Who Cares for His Sheep

(v.11-16)

11 "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

God, Himself, will be their true shepherd. As we have read this, what an amazing thing when God says, "I will be their shepherd." God asserts this by all the things He will do for His sheep. Because they are scattered, He will begin by searching them out and gathering them in. He will take them to best places to feed them, in lush meadows along the mountains of Israel. In a picture of His care and their contentment, He makes them lie down, invoking the words of Psalm 23. He will seek, return, bandage and strengthen His sheep. And He will deal with the unruly. *True shepherds care for the sheep.*

Who Deals with His Sheep

(v.17-22)

17 "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. 18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? 19 And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? 20 "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, 22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

The true Shepherd will deal with the unruly sheep. In a flock, there will always be those sheep who try to dominate the weak, butting their way ahead and getting the best for themselves. Fallenness affects sheep as well. Some sheep will wade into the stream, face up stream to drink while mud runs off them to the flock downstream from them. Their selfishness pollutes everything for everyone else.

So shepherds are not the only problem with God's flock. There are selfish and sinful sheep who need to be dealt with. The good shepherd deals with them in justice – and so should we. All true and properly taught shepherds understand the need for confrontation, correction and if needed, discipline in the flock. If there is no dealing with the wicked and unruly, then the vulnerable and weaker sheep suffer. *True shepherds deal with the sheep.*

Who Rules over His Sheep**(v.23-24)**

²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

The last characteristic here is that true shepherds are servant leaders. God says that He will set up over them the true servant leader as shepherd. It is likely here that God is referring through David to Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. God will set Him on the throne where He will shepherd as a true servant.

Ah, here we are, the flock of God, God's people and Jesus is the Shepherd, the Pastor. He is the good shepherd, the great shepherd and the chief shepherd. He is the only one of whom it can be truly said that He is *the pastor* of the church. All of us are under-shepherds, looking to Him as our chief shepherd, leaning on Him as our grace-giving shepherd, loving Him as the shepherd who gave His life for us. This is why we are careful here about our plurality and parity. There is no Moses here among the elders. There is no "the pastor" here (and we don't refer to a senior pastor either). The true Moses has come. The true chief Shepherd, head pastor is in heaven. We are all His servants set aside to shepherd in His absence.

But there will come a day when Jesus will rule, will shepherd His people directly. What a day of joyful service and praise that will be! God will bring about the fulfillment of His promise and prophecy far beyond our imagination. But I still love to ponder it in my mind and long for it in my heart. Jesus, our Shepherd-King.

Their Covenant God**(v.25-31)**

That God will do this is sure because God keeps His promises. In the redemptive historical unfolding of redemption, God is moving through Israel's history to bring on the scene the true redeemer and ruler. God will replace false leadership with the one true Lord. God has purposed in the end that all history will culminate in the ascension of Christ to His throne. God promises to bring about not only that great day, but all the blessings and bounty that accompanies it. Then God moves in history to make it happen. And it will.

Who Provides for Them**(v.25-29)**

²⁵ "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹ And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations.

God's New Covenant will be one of peace, not punishment. It will return and restore and renew His people. It will bless them beyond measure. What is pictured here is the overflowing results of a harmonious relationship with God. [Duguid,

p.396]. The farming language here is meant to ring true with the Hebrews. For them there was no greater blessing than a bountiful harvest. But I am telling you that God will bring about more than just agricultural fullness; He will bring about a peace and prosperity and pleasures that flow unrestrained from His right hand to His glorified people. Then we will be safe and secure, no more persecuted nor scattered. No more will we be afraid. We will dwell in safety under the protection and with the provision of our great and good Shepherd. We will be able to celebrate in the words of the 103rd Psalm.

Whose Presence is with Them

(v.30-31)

³⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. ³¹ And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD."

Finally, Israel will know that God is the Lord, not out of punishment but out of good to them. Up till now, they know He is the Lord when He deals with their sin. Then, they will know when He brings them all the grace and good and glory He has promised. He will bring them all that He has promised them.

The greatest good is that He will be with them. While we can rejoice and take heart in all the good that God does for us, what a great thing it is to rejoice and take heart in God with us. When sending the church out in the great commission, He who redeems and rules announces for our comfort and courage that He will be with us till the end of the age. At the end, when all things are done, then God culminates His dwelling with His people. Listen to the words of Revelation 21:1-6:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. [ESV]"

I do not know what you long for more than anything else in this world or in the world to come – but I hope that it is this. Paul says that our present troubles are of little count while we are looking away to eternal realities. So here it is – until the Chief Shepherd comes and makes His rule visible, then we the under-pastors will shepherd the flock for their good and God's glory.

Conclusion

Let me close with this from Ian Duguid.

Jesus is not merely the model shepherd who makes contemporary pastors feel guilty by how far short we fall. He is Himself the One of whom Ezekiel 34 speaks. He is the One in whom all the covenants of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. HE is the ultimate Shepherd-King, who fulfills the Davidic covenant, as the crowds recognized during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9). He fulfills the Mosaic covenant both as the Law-giver [and the Law-keeper]... He is the Second Adam, who through His obedient life, death and resurrection fulfills the covenant of creation (1 Cor. 15:45-49). He is the One who ushers in for His people the blessings of the covenant by being the covenant-keeper in our place. In Him, we have peace with God; in Him, we have peace with one another; in Him, all creation finds peace.

All of these blessings have both a “now” and “not yet” aspect to them. We see them in part now, but we do not yet see them in all their fullness. Creation still groans with anticipation as it awaits the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth and of ourselves as sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:19-23). In the meantime our experience frequently continues to be “trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword” (Rom. 8:35). But these are momentary light afflictions in comparison to the glory that awaits us (Rom. 8:18) One day Christ will return, and all will be gloriously fulfilled as God gather His worldwide flock from many nations into His Presence. Then there will no more suffering, no more pain, no more disharmony with God, my neighbor, or the world. As Revelation 7:17 puts it, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” [Duguid, p.401]

The Lamb who is our shepherd invites you to come and partake of the streams of living water, today. Come and drink and be satisfied.

Against the Mountains

Ezekiel 35:1-36:15

Message Overview

Aim To contrast the present and future conditions of both the wicked and God's people.

- Agenda**
- To show how Edom's heart issues produced their sins.
 - To connect the warnings for Edom to us.
 - To warn the wicked of their sure punishment by God.
 - To foster faith and hope in the promises and purposes of God.

- Summary**
- Edom is confronted with her sin and punishment.
 - Israel is comforted with her salvation and restoration.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the relationship between Jacob and Esau and how it carried on between Israel and Edom.

This will help fill in the historical background.

Discuss how Edom's heart that wanted and desired was the source of her sin.

Focus on the particular sins mentioned: hatred, envy and pride

Through discussion make connections to other inward/outward sins

Discuss how what we hope for and expect affects us now.

Important aspect of understanding why the Bible places great importance on believing present promises even when it appears there is little hope of fulfillment.

Introduction

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC to Babylon. The city was destroyed and most of the inhabitants were either dead or were carried off into captivity. The nation lay in ruins, with no real government or military. Its economy was shattered. Chaos and desolation was everywhere. Edom, Judah's neighbor to the south, with Babylon's permission, took advantage of their weakened condition and moved in with their armies. They occupied most of the country and harassed and harmed the poor, starving, defenseless survivors. Word of this had reached Babylon. The future for Judah looked grim. They were in the thrall of one great nation and at the mercy of a lesser, but more fiercely dangerous nation.

Edom was Israel's neighbor and ancient rival. These two nations were ethnically close, yet maintained ancient enmities. The land of Edom lay on Israel's eastern border, running south from the Dead Sea. Edom, like much of Israel, was a mountainous country. It was commonly referred to as we see it here in this text as Mount Seir. Mount Seir itself overlooked Israel's eastern border. From there the Edomites could "monitor Israel's misery when it befell her." [Carson, *NBC*] Stewart points out that "contrasting the two hilly nations is an effective way of remembering their similarities (as brother nations historically) while at the same time emphasizing their very different futures in the plan of God." [Stewart, p. 325]

At first it seems strange that this oracle appears here. But if we think about it for a moment, the flow emerges. In chapter 34 God fosters hope and encouragement by promising and prophesizing the reestablishment of the Davidic throne under the coming Shepherd-King. In this section God promises to restore the land. Historically, before the land can be restored, Edom its occupier, must be destroyed. It is important to remember that the Edomites were the descendents of Esau. So the ancient hostility between Jacob and Esau reaches a climax. But God will not let the situation stand – He will move to oust Edom and restore Judah.

The Judgment for the Mountains of Edom

(35:1-15)

Its Future Ruin

(v.1-9)

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. 4 I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the LORD. 5 Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment, 6 therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you. 7 I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go. 8 And I will fill its mountains with the slain. On your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. 9 I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

God exposes *EDOM'S ATTITUDES* that give rise to their wickedness. Why would Edom act like this? Why would she move with such viciousness against her neighbor? They “cherished a perpetual enmity” (v.5) against Israel. The long root of bitterness that extended down through history from Esau had been cherished; it had been nursed and nourished. There was a hatred for Israel that foamed and frothed in their hearts. And so, they left Judah to the misery of her ruin and then moved in when Babylon left. The betrayed Israel and then occupied her. They did so with gleeful hatred.

In view of Edom's taking advantage of Judah's weakness and vulnerability, here are *GOD'S ACTIONS* against them. What God will do to them is characterized by the word *desolation*. With only 3 exceptions, this word only occurs in the prophetic books in the Old Testament. It means empty, barren and waste. God will turn them into a waste land. He will pour out their blood in that waste land. Their rivers and ravines will flow with the blood of their slain. It will be a time of calamity, disaster and sword.

In other words, they will experience what has happened to Judah. They will be in the same condition as Israel when Edom overran them. Judah was desolated and destroyed. She lay open and vulnerable. And Edom took stock and measured her weakness and moved in to occupy her when she had little with which to resist. The calculating callousness that led to their conquest is denounced by God. God declares that He will deal with them. And in the end, they will know that He is the Lord, that Yahweh is Sovereign.

We are deeply warned here about the danger of cultivating and cherishing hatred. There can be a great sense of satisfaction and self-righteousness. But in the end, we may move against people we dislike at times when they are vulnerable and destroy them. In my view, taking advantage of someone who is weak and vulnerable and exposed, even when it is the result of God's punishment, is an expression of hatred. There may not be the visible emotions, but there are the visible actions. Brothers and sisters, remember that John warns us that those who do not love the brother they see cannot love the God they cannot see. And some people will nurse their hatred like a drunk his drink until their self-control fails and they erupt in explosive anger and destructive actions.

Its Present Reasons**(v.10-15)**

¹⁰ "Because you said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them'—although the LORD was there— ¹¹ therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them. And I will make myself known among them, when I judge you. ¹² And you shall know that I am the LORD.

"I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, 'They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour.' ¹³ And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against me; I heard it. ¹⁴ Thus says the Lord GOD: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. ¹⁵ As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

God justifies His punishment of Edom by giving His reasons. He has already exposed their hatred. But why would they hate so badly? What kind of anger and bitterness would, pardon the analogy, rape a mugging victim?

Their Conquest Causing Envy**(v.10-12)**

First, they envied Judah. They wanted what Judah had. They hankered for her land. They wanted to "possess" Judah – to enfold her into their boundary, "even though the Lord was there." What an interesting phrase. They envied Judah even though there was something there quite unattractive to them, Yahweh! Their anger seems then to be against God who had chosen Jacob the younger to love and to save and to prosper. Thus they wanted what God had given Judah without desiring the God who had given it.

The underlying heart desires that lead to sinful grabbing are just as true of us as individuals as they of nations. Envy is doubting that God has given us His best good for us and wanting the good that God has done for another for ourselves. That want/doubt dynamic fuels emotions of jealousy, anger and choices of "conquest", of acquiring and possessing that are displeasing to God.

Their Scorn Causing Pride**(v.13-15)**

Second, they slandered Judah. Their self-importance drove them to try to diminish Israel. It caused them to rejoice over Israel's doom and desolation. In magnifying themselves they were diminishing Israel and speaking against God. They scorned God's people and thus scoffed at God.

One of the heart issues that causes us to look down on others is pride. Self-importance will seek to make others look small, to diminish them through our words and our ways. While we may disagree with people and while sinners are sinners, we will not (nor can we) minister to people we look down on. And when our pride fuels words of scorn, we ought to be careful. Now I am not saying there is not a place for critique, concern and confrontation of those who are wicked, otherwise, Ezekiel (and God for that matter) are sinning in this very text. But when we make others look small in order to magnify our self-importance, we are against God and God is against us.

The Jubilation for the Mountains of Israel (36:1-15)

Chapters 35 and these verses of chapter 36 are a single oracle. They have a very neat, chiasmic structure that I have tried to represent in the headings. Edom's future ruin is parallel to Judah's present ruin. Edom's present reasons are parallel to Judah's future restoration. While Edom may appear to be on the top now, they are headed for sure destruction. And while Judah appears desolate now, they are headed for sure restoration in being freed and filled.

Their Present Ruin (v.1-7)

"And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. ² Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy said of you, 'Aha!' and, 'The ancient heights have become our possession,' ³ therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people, ⁴ therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around, ⁵ therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I have spoken in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey. ⁶ Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations. ⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach.

In an interesting turn, God says their present ruin became a reason for their future restoration. This whole section is the because of what follows. Since Judah is experiencing the present displeasure of the Lord, then she will later experience the bounty from the Lord. God's displeasure is seen in the success of Judah's enemies. They have been the instrument of God's punishment with the effect that Israel is destroyed, desolate and deserted. She is scorned by the nations who have defeated her and by Edom who has moved in on her.

Yet God is against the very tools He has implemented. This is a very important piece of our theological grid. God may use the wicked for His own purposes, even the punishment of His people. But just because God has used them does not excuse them. They will stand before Him condemned for the very actions He has used to accomplish His purposes. Now, be careful if you react against that. This is how the cross comes about. God purposes in eternity past to redeem His people through the punishment of their sins in a substitute. This substitute will go to a cross. There, wicked people will disobey their own laws, slanderously accuse and falsely charge and convict the sinless Son of crime. Then they wickedly use the governmental justice system to execute Him. Yet Peter says that these people who carried out the foreordained plan of God still crucified Jesus with wicked hands and needed to believe, repent and be saved from the judgment and wrath to come.

So while, Edom's present prosperity is temporary, her future punishment is permanent. And Judah's present punishment is temporary, her future restoration will be everlasting.

Their Future Restoration

(v.8-15)

8 "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. 9 For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. 10 And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt. 11 And I will multiply on you man and beast, and they shall multiply and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 12 I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children. 13 Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they say to you, 'You devour people, and you bereave your nation of children,' 14 therefore you shall no longer devour people and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord GOD. 15 And I will not let you hear anymore the reproach of the nations, and you shall no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples and no longer cause your nation to stumble, declares the Lord GOD."

Here is being freed and being filled. There is an agricultural and pastoral fullness and prosperity being described that would ring true and fuel hope to the Hebrews. There would be a day, contrary to the emptiness and devastation of their cities and countryside, that there would be an amazing fullness. The cities will be teeming with people. The land will glisten with well watered farms. The harvests would be full and wide. There will be peace and safety. Their enemies will be destroyed and none will bring them harm.

While there are differences of opinion about when and how this will come about, it is only Biblically reasonable to know that it will. In my own thinking, this day of unimaginable peace and prosperity will unfold for all God's people. It will be for the Jews and Gentiles who will be God's people in that day. And it will be eternal. It may begin in a Millennial Era, but it will not be fulfilled by that time. This is the kind of fullness that includes and encompasses the eternal new heavens and new earth.

So rather than having a view of the restoration of the Hebrews limited to a Millennial Era, I have a view that encompasses the Millennium and Eternity – both being the literal reign of Jesus on earth among His people. And there will be peace and prosperity and pleasures in that day that are utterly beyond our words to conceive or to convey. All we can do is compare it and contrast it and taste it like we can just *know* how good the dessert is by looking at its picture.

So it is not just Jews who can long for something greater, but all of God's people who together stand on tiptoe hoping and longing for the day of Jesus' appearing when He will be displayed in all His glory and His promises will be completely fulfilled. We shall see His face, know His pleasure and enjoy His gifts. And, it will be *good*.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by summarizing briefly three important applications to us.

The Doom of the Enemies of God

There is once again a dire warning to the enemies of God. There is a certain, unchangeable and eternal punishment awaiting you. Now you may not think of yourself as an enemy of God – you may be moral or even religious. But if you have never believed in Jesus and bowed to His sovereignty, then you are His enemy. You are a rebel against Him. Your rebellion is evidenced by all sorts of small to large attitudes and actions of sin. It may be a petty jealousy here, a sharp word there, a disobedient moment then or even theft or hatred or adultery or, whatever. But thank God, when we were still enemies of God, He gave His only begotten Son to die for us. So there is both the warning of doom and the offer of hope. You may continue to reject God and rebel against Him. Or, you may believe in Him and bow to Him and escape the judgment to come.

The Opposition from the Enemies of God

It should not surprise us that we experience opposition from the enemies of God. God's people in this world are the most visible and vocal manifestation of God. Those who hate God; those who oppose God; those who just don't want to have to include God in their lives will in small to ever increasingly painful ways, oppose the people of God. In some places these are relatively mild aggravations. But in much of the world today, this means loss, starvation, deprivation, torture and even death. We should not expect nor seek the friendship of the world. But we must, with the enemies of God, still have the stance, the poise, of reconciliation. We represent God to them, His message and His call. No matter what it costs us.

The Hope for the People of God

These hopes are expressed so well in these two words, freed and filled.

Our joy is in that we have been freed from the penalty and power of sin. Our great hope is for the day when we will be freed from the presence of sin. While we trust God for and receive grace for ever-increasing obedience, we long for the day when we will have neither sin in us nor sin around us – all will be aligned with the glory of God.

Our joy is that we have been filled with presence and power of God by His Holy Spirit. He indwells us as a seal of ownership to empower and enable us. The Holy Spirit is Christ in us and the very presence of God with us always. But we have an even greater hope when this pain and suffering and hardship is over and all creation will be filled with greatness and glory of God.

Regenerated and Restored

Ezekiel 36:16-37:27

Message Overview

Aim To foster gratitude for the greatness of God's saving acts for His people.

- Agenda**
- To help people grasp this text both in its original setting and as Christians.
 - To show how the resurrection/regeneration Biblical theme runs through this text to much that we recognize in the New Covenant.
 - To encourage us to patience in waiting on promises.
 - To remind us of God's plan in Redemptive History.
 - To provide lots of fuel for praise and gratitude.

- Summary**
- The honor of God's Name is at stake.
 - God will bring His people to life in fulfilling what He has promised.
 - God will bring His people to unity to fulfill what He has promised.
 - God will bring His people to home to fulfill what He has promised

Discussion Questions

How does Israel's condition under judgment parallel our condition in sin?
Draw out the consistent use of deadness to represent this in the Bible.

Discuss the inseparable connection between Word and Spirit.

The Bible keeps the Word and Spirit together – the Word came through the Spirit and now the Spirit comes through the Word. Further, they are joined together and should never be separated.

Discuss how Jesus uses this text in John and how it impacts our understanding of this text.

Jesus sees the fulfillment as beginning with His ministry and the inauguration of the Kingdom which will be consummated in eternity. Further, He sees the text as having personal, spiritual application.

Conclude with prayers of thankfulness for God's saving acts for His people.

Introduction

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;	Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread	Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace;
He plants His footsteps in the sea; And rides upon the storm.	Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head.	Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

These words of William Cowper set our sails for this text this morning. What will God's people think when all is dark and dim – where is God and our hope in Him?

Reputation – God Defends His Honor (36:16-37)

One of the startling truths in the Bible and starkly so in Ezekiel is the God-centeredness of God. This is not the way we think about God today. We accept the fiction, the myth, that God is man-centered. So what you are about to hear may well sound strange to you.

Purpose – God's Overarching Aim (v.16-23)

¹⁶ The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷ "Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. ¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. ¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰ But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.' ²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. ²² "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Do you hear it here? Israel's sin was not just disobedience to God, but a profaning, a staining, a dishonoring of His Name. God's Name in the Bible is not just an identifying label, it points to His character. His name is what He is known for, His reputation. So Israel's sin profaned His Name, soiled His reputation. And God was not going to let it pass. Their present punishment came about because this is what they had done. But, God was not punishing them just to "get even", to balance the scales of justice. Rather, what He was doing in dealing with them in their destruction and their deliverance was to vindicate His Name. God will defend His honor. He will be known for who He really is, not for how His people misrepresent Him.

So, here once again we are confronted with the fact that God is doing all He is doing to promote His glory, to put it on public display so that it will be acknowledged. God is saving us in order to magnify Himself. This is not self-centered in a wicked sense. In fact, if God is centered on anyone or anything else, then whoever or whatever that is would be god. But God aims to be acknowledged as God alone worthy of the honor and respect He requires. You see, God wants us to bow to Him, not just because we must, but because He has dazzled us.

Provision – God’s Saving Acts (v.24-30)

²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. ³⁰ I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

So, God will move to provide for His people a salvation that will promote His glory. Here is a New Covenant oriented list of God’s saving acts. They are given in reference to Israel, but are not limited to her. It is very important to see this, not only here, but also in what follows. God is speaking through Ezekiel to Israel. Thus what He is saying is about them. But His saving acts are not limited to physical sons and daughters of Abraham alone. The New Covenant saving acts of God reach outward to all the people groups.

Now look at what God says He will do.

He will gather and cleanse His people. He will give them new hearts and the Spirit to indwell them. He will enable them to walk with Him in obedience and to dwell in what He has promised them. He will establish an unbreakable mutual relationship. He will deliver them from the power of sin and bring them unimaginable bounty. He will secure His fame by what He does for them and for us.

Perspective – God’s Humbling Work (v.31-32)

³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. ³² It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

In the day of their salvation, they will be so struck by the depth of their sin that they will despise themselves. There is a proper loathing of ourselves as sinners. That emotion of godly self-loathing comes from a right view of our sin and our Savior. If we are casual about sin, then we will not loathe and we will not hate it. That we do not is evidence that we have a low view of God and a high view of ourselves. God commends to us through this text a *reflection* on our sins and a *reliance* on Christ so that we will hate our sinfulness and continually trust and hope in Him for our righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, here is an important tenant in Biblical Christianity: our salvation is meant to humble us and honor Christ. While we do not advocate the false humility of morbid introspection, we are in real need of abhorring our sin and adoring our Savior.

Promise – God’s Satisfying Goodness (v.33-37)

³³ “Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. ³⁴ And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. ³⁵ And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ ³⁶ Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.

³⁷ “Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. ³⁸ Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

In a vocabulary that rang true with the exiles who had reported to them through the survivors the horrid desolation of Israel, God promises them fullness and fruitfulness. Even embedded in this prophecy are hints that here is more here than could be said then. The goodness of God will bring about a fullness and satisfying extravagance that will rival and even exceed the wonder of the Garden of Eden. This will come true for them and for us. There will be wonder upon wonders when Jesus rules and reigns over all. It will truly be paradise. All that is wasted, not just from the devastation of Babylon and Edom, but from the wrath of God poured out on the unbelieving world of that day will be made new. Ah, will Jews come back to this text and say, “Where is what You said?” No, they as well as all will bow in gratitude and praise for all that is given that is way beyond what was imagined to be promised.

Regeneration – God Gives His People Life (37:1-14)

Now, I want to hold these two chapters together as being a unit. If God is going to uphold His honor, how is He going to do that when the nation has been basically been destroyed and the funeral services held? Well, God will give His people life.

One word of caution: it is easy to read this text and too quickly hear it through new covenant ears without properly understanding its Old Covenant sense. So there are two opposite errors to avoid: (1) we read the Old Testament like we were OT Jews and never make connections through the cross and Christ or (2) we read the Old Testament as though it were written during the New Covenant and miss how it is supposed to bring us to the Christ. So, we will seek once again the third way: it is an OT text whose meaning is more clearly understood by those living on this side of the cross.

Representation - Its Present Illustration (v.1-10)

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come

upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

God is giving Ezekiel a prophetic illustration so that he will be gripped by the power of God’s message to His people and so that the prophetic word itself will have significance and meaning under the New Covenant as well. He is taken out to a valley or ravine that is filled with dry bones. This is not just the carcasses of the fallen, but the skeletal remains. This clearly implies that the regenerating work will not happen for quite a while – the carcasses strewn across the fields of Israel will become dead, dried up bones.

He is to prophesy to the bones. He is to proclaim the promise of God to bring about life anew. And He does. When he does, the bones come together and become whole, flesh covered bodies. Then he is to prophesy so that the breath of life enters them and they live. Now there is a vast host filling the valley.

Resurrection – Its Redemptive Explanation (v.11-14)

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’ ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

God explains what He means by the metaphor He has used. The dead bones are the house of Israel. They are dead, cut off from God, both in their sin and its consequences. But God will put His Spirit in them, causing a resurrection from the dead and life anew. And He will place them in their own land with the effect that they will acknowledge that He is the Sovereign Lord. He has said this will be so and He will do it.

It is clear that this text has national application for Israel. The illustration is meant to capture their spiritual and national condition. They are dead and they are desolate. Restoration will require more than just the physical descendants gathering in the land once again. There will be an accompanying life from the dead, a resurrection, as well. That life will be connected to the Word and Spirit.

Reunification – God Unites His People Together (v.15-23)

¹⁵ The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁶“Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ ¹⁷ And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. ¹⁸ And when your people say to

you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?' ¹⁹ say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. ²⁰ When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, ²¹ then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. ²² And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Metaphor – Divided Sticks Joined (v.15-16)

We are presented with a second metaphor. God speaks to the division of the nation. They are dead because of judgment. They were divided because of the sins of their leaders. Israel split after the death of Solomon into the 10 northern tribes called Israel and the 2 southern tribes, called Judah. These are represented by the two sticks that are joined together.

Meaning – Divided Nation United (v.17-23)

What does this mean? It means that just as the sticks were joined God will reunite Israel as one. They will be unified under one king in the land. They shall not be two nations any more. They will no longer backslide, no longer apostatize to follow idols and blaspheme God through sinful ways. God will cleanse them and God will change them.

What a great thing the purposes, promises and power of God are. Here are God's people dead and divided, destroyed and hopeless, ruined by sin and judgment. But God Himself moves to save, to make alive and to bring together. He does so in a way that keeps them and preserves them so that they cannot and will not ever fall away again. But this is not all...

Restoration – God Brings His People Bounty (v.24-28)

²⁴ "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

Submission – Under their King (v.24)

In the day of resurrection and reunification, restoration will place them under the rule of God through His servant, David. While this may possibly be David himself, it is also likely to be pointing to Christ. Jesus will truly rule over them and they will be righteous before Him, bowing in submission to Him.

Sustenance – In their Land

(v.25)

God confirms that He will bless them in their land. What He has promised them He will do for them. And what He will do is forever. It is not just for 1,000 years, though it will be for at least that. It will eternal. So however you think about this as it relates to end-times teaching, the fulfillment of what God has promised to Abraham and the patriarchs involves an unending fulfillment.

Sanctuary – With their God

(v.26-28)

All this will come about *through a new covenant*. While the promises of God do not fail and are never voided, they can and will be fulfilled through the vehicle of an even greater promise or covenant. It will be a new covenant and one characterized by peace and prosperity. It will involve the very dwelling of God in and among His people. They shall own Him as King and He shall own them as subjects. It will be a public demonstration of God's sanctifying of His people and His eternal and unending Presence in them forever.

Conclusion

Now, I know that many of you have been wondering when I was going to make the connections in this text. That is what I want to do as we wrap this up.

Jesus' Use of this Text

Read John 3:5-6. Jesus in his interaction with Nicodemus uses Ezekiel 36 to show that Nicodemus is a part of the dry bones group in need of cleansing and new life in order to see and enter the Kingdom. Jesus is reading Ezekiel and applying to His inauguration of the Kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel and the Spirit's regenerating work. In other words, it is impossible to interpret Ezekiel 36 in its fullness without seeing Jesus' use of it. Ezekiel is being fulfilled by the inauguration of the Kingdom that is begun by the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus and continues through eternity.

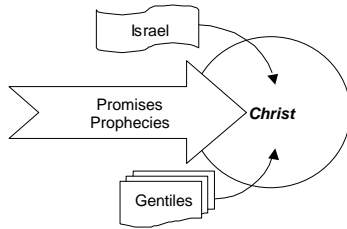
Paul's Development of the Mystery

It encompasses the spiritual gathering and regenerating of His people, first the Jews then outward to all people groups. Look at how Paul thinks about all this in Romans 11:25-32. To protect us further from our conceited elitism that would look down on the Jews who had rejected God, Paul tells us about a mystery. Now a mystery in the Bible is a truth that has been hidden in the past but is now being revealed, usually with Christ Himself as the key. This mystery is designed to humble all of us before the amazing wisdom and awesome love of God. It is to impel us outward to a wide and broad evangelism to all.

In our exposition of Romans, we discussed this in more detail. But let me summarize now. A partial hardening describes the present state of ethnic Israel. But all true Israel by election will be saved along with the full number of the Gentiles. And there will be a large ingathering of Jews near the end of the age according to the rest of Romans 11. I believe I am being honest with the text – and I know of no other way to have both the “until” and the “in this way”. So God is gathering up His people until all the elect are gathered in, including the fullness

of the Gentiles and the true Israel among the Jews, yes, even a large number at the end when the broken branch is grafted back in, they are accepted once again.

This will all happen just at the time when the Deliverer comes to banish ungodliness from Jacob for He will fulfill His covenant and take away their sins – that is, *THEY WILL BE SAVED*.



So all that God has promised and all that was prophesied is fulfilled in Christ. Thus we together receive its fulfillment, for we have been placed in Christ.

Paul shows us that ethnic Israel are enemies for the sake of the gospel, but elect Israel are loved and saved for the sake of the patriarchs. Thus God moves to bring about His purposes in salvation-history while upholding His faithfulness to keep all His promises to the patriarchs. God's character is underscored because He is faithful to the patriarchs and doesn't go back on what He has given and whom He has called. You can bank on God. God will accomplish what He has set out to do – to glorify Himself by calling out the people of His love so that He will be seen to be large in their lives and in the flow of history. He will work with elaborate planning and exquisite execution so that just when the end comes, the fullness of the Gentiles comes in alongside of a great ingathering of the Jews. Verse 32 shows the overarching design of God: all under disobedience so that all may be subject to mercy. In the end, God will do all He has promised just in ways that are gloriously unexpected and wonderfully great.

The Application to Us

Two important lessons for us:

- The Scriptures tell us that all the unsaved are like the dead bones of Ezekiel 36-37. We need the regenerating work of God's Spirit who applies the resurrection of Christ to us, giving life to deadness, raising us up out of sin, making us alive and seating us in the heavenlies in Christ. This is the sovereign work of the Spirit of God.
- This regenerating work is done by the Spirit through the Word. For Ezekiel, it is prophesying that stands for Word ministry. But it is clear from Ezekiel and many other texts that Word and Spirit are inseparable. This is why we must preach the Word to all – because through the Word the Spirit gives life.

God's people have much to delight and enjoy now, even in exile, until the fullness and consummation comes. May this be the substance of our gratitude even as we enter this Thanksgiving Week. God defends His honor. God gives His people life. God unites His people together. God brings His people great bounty.

Marching on Israel

Ezekiel 38-39

Message Overview

Aim To cause us to rejoice in the God who victory vindicates His Name.

- Agenda**
- To show how to handle a prophetic text that is encumbered with all sorts of various interpretations and applications.
 - To show the central purpose of the judging acts of God – that is, that God will be glorified.
 - To examine the *who* and *when* of the Battle of God and Magog.
 - To call for the wicked to repent before they face God in this way.
 - To help the saint to savor the love of God that vindicates His own Name.

- Summary**
- Gog gathers an vast horde from all over the nations to march against the people of God.
 - God draws them to the mountains of Israel through their coveting and envying in order that He might destroy them there.
 - Ezekiel graphically portrays the size and slaughter of this great army.
 - God outlines His overarching purposes for both the Gentiles and the Israelites.

Discussion Questions

It is likely that a lot of the discussion will focus on (1) why didn't we name the nations and (2) why didn't we say exactly when this battle was going to take place. Enter into that discussion with care and caution.

What is the main point of Ezekiel 38-39?

To show why, how and when God destroys the wicked.

Discuss the principle that *we know the love of God for us through His judgments of the wicked.*

Recognize that this is a foreign idea to many. Be careful not to convey the idea that God is just as glorified in one as the other – no, the weight of Scripture is that the greater glory is derived from the demonstrations of His mercy.

Introduction

Interest in end-times teaching...

Since the late 1880's, there has been a growing interest in end-times teaching. Now, with both religious and secular popular media there are radio shows, book series, and movies all purporting to predict from the Bible using prophetic texts what will happen in the future. The teaching was in serious decline in evangelicalism until the recent publication of the *Left Behind* series. Whatever you think of those books – they have had a massive impact in creating a resurgence of interest in eschatology. They have gone platinum multiple times over, netting enormous wealth for the two authors.

I wonder how many of you looked at the sign giving the title of this week's message and wondered what it was all about? Marching on Israel? What is that? Should we march on Israel because of her treatment of the Palestinians? Is Iraq planning something that is not generally known? Is Saddam the anti-Christ or is he "Gog" in the text before us?

How do we approach this?

Here is our struggle. How do we read this text for what it says, making the Biblical theological connections we ought, shading in our expectations and understanding of future things without creating detailed scenarios that we then use to trump other views or judge another's spirituality? We may disdain theology by novel – but at the end of the day, are we driven by a puerile interest in the future or are we genuinely interested to know how God wins?

God vindicated by His victory...

I do not plan to answer all your questions this morning. But I am going to clearly establish what I believe this text to be teaching. We will do so by connecting the words and phrases to other texts (though we may not be able to read them all) and then seeing where all this leaves us. But I have one great aim in the message this morning. It is this, that you will know with joy and gladness that God will vindicate His Name through His victory over the nations.

Daniel Block, in his commentary, helped organize this text for me. God, through Ezekiel, is using binoculars to look at a future scene in redemptive history. Rather than a telescope, it is binocular so that there is a wider and deeper field of view. Each view is divided into 4 sections. Both of these look out into a future final day when the nations arrayed against God meet their demise at His hands.

Let's think about that together...

The Defeat of Gog

(Ch. 38)

What we are going to find here are seven allied nations. There were seven nations judged in Ezekiel 25-32 and seven who accompanied Egypt to Sheol in Ch 32:17-32. God has denounced the nations around Israel for their invasions and destruction of God's people. Now, the circle moves outward to regions far beyond Israel's immediate neighbors. Here will be 4 nations of the far north and 2 nations to the far south and one to the east. The point then is that God's people will face a massive and worldwide gathering of the nations against them. Just when doom seems sure, their deliverance is near.

Its Gathering

(v.1-9)

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him 3 and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. 4 And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. 5 Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; 6 Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes— many peoples are with you.

7 "Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. 8 After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste. Its people were brought out from the peoples and now dwell securely, all of them. 9 You will advance, coming on like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.

Now, it is very important to remember that the context for these nation names is the table of nations after the flood in Genesis 10. There, Moses details the development and spread of the people groups and nations after the flood, the dispersion after Babel and the dividing of the earth. Every single one of these is mentioned there. Further, it is important to note here that Gog is a person (v.1), Magog a land and Meshech and Tubal small city states. Huge attempts have been by the commentators to align them with nations of Ezekiel's days and contemporary nations. There may be value in that, but let me say that there are two important points being made here:

- Gog represents a leader who will gather at God's instigation, a massive, world-wide alliance and a mighty army to march on Israel (v.1-6). Revelation 20:8 alludes to this text and says that these will be Gentile nations from the four corners of the earth.
- They will plan to attack Israel after she has been restored to her land (v.7-9). There are lots of time markers here: after many days, in the latter years and after the land is restored from war. It is clear that this text will happen after chapters 36-37 and the restoration of Israel.

So the *who* and *when* of the Battle of Gog and Magog are clearly answered in the Scripture, but not in the way or with the details that we would like. If we think of this text in the way I have presented it and then, observe world events as they un-

fold, we may begin to see the “historical setup” for these events and possibly even be able to identify them. Therefore our wide angle lens helps us to see more clearly and apply more appropriately than a photograph frozen by over application.

Its Motives

(v.10-13)

10 “Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme 11 and say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,’ 12 to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the center of the earth. 13 Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its leaders will say to you, ‘Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your hosts to carry off plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?’

Why will the nations go up against God’s people? Because at this time they are regathered, restored, rich and ripe. They are secure and safe in the land. All of the language here implies a sense of safety unknown in all of Israel’s history. She is described as dwelling in the “navel” or “center” of the earth. Jerusalem has become the center of the world. They have some great Benefactor who has provided for them and will protect them. The nations in their envy, believing Israel to be vulnerable, move to plunder her of her vast wealth in that day.

Its Advance

(v.14-17)

14 “Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? 15 You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army. 16 You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Feinberg says this text describes “a coming northern confederacy of nations about the Black and Caspian seas with Persia and North Africa, who will invade the Promised Land after Israel’s restoration to it.” [Feinberg, p.218]. Gog will move because he thinks Israel is vulnerable. But God is bringing this great alliance up like a low fog creeping across the land so that He may vindicate His holiness. They think they are advancing through their own cleverness for gain. Little do they know the hook is in their mouth and they are being drawn into the place for judgment.

Its Judgment

(v.17-22)

17 “Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them? 18 But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, my wrath will be roused in my anger. 19 For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 The fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the people who are on the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence. And the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. 21 I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the

Lord GOD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. 22 With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur. 23 So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Verse 17 is very interesting: is he expecting a yes or no answer? I think yes – Gog and their hosts are the final fulfillment of what Deuteronomy 28:49 predicted. Israel in exile had experienced the near fulfillment – the destruction at the hands of Assyria and Babylon. But there is coming yet another and greater fulfillment. Here though is hope for God's people – if that massive army under Gog is so mightily and thoroughly destroyed then there is hope for deliverance from exile when God pleases. That theme runs all through these two oracles.

Against this massive enemy God arises with sure and deadly wrath. That wrath is pictured in apocalyptic terms and in language drawn from the Psalms. The wrath of God will shake the earth, causing the beasts and birds to tremble. Mountains will fall. Fire, hail, stones and pestilence will rain down on their heads. There will be no mistaking the Divine source of their destruction. God will show His greatness and disclose Himself – then, they will know that He is the Sovereign Lord.

So here is the picture. God intends to destroy the wicked nations. He has placed Israel in safety and prosperity in her land. He moves to incite this Gog to gather the nations of the earth to march on Israel. And just as they begin to encircle, God pounds them into the ground. He wins.

The Disposal of Gog

(39:1-20)

The primary aim of this panel is to stun us with the vastness of the hordes arrayed against God's people and the massive destruction that accompanies their demise. One of the necessary ingredients to an accurate view of God is that *He is a Warrior*. It is one of the metaphors and analogies that God uses to describe Himself. As a warrior He goes to battle against His enemies and the enemies of His people. And while at times it may look dark, there is coming a final day when His victory is complete. You see, this is a part of the good news. God is a great and just king – and a mighty warrior. He is going to come to this rebel province and there will be an accounting from everyone. But until He comes, He has offered reconciliation and peace to the rebels through the payment made by His Son who came a long time ago. You accept His offer of peace by trusting that He is true and bowing to Him as King. Do so, now – lest you find yourself on the wrong side of a mighty, righteous and burning wrath.

Its Slaughter

(v.1-8)

"And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. 2 And I will turn you about and drive you forward, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north, and lead you against the mountains of Israel. 3 Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. 4 You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. 5 You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. 6 I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD.

7 "And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. 8 Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord GOD. That is the day of which I have spoken.

Once again, God emphasized His role and purpose. Gog and his allies march on Israel because God has drawn them to do so. God turns them, drives them, brings and leads them to the mountains of Israel. According to Revelation, these leaders will be deceived by Satan to do this. Thus God uses them both in order to destroy them both. Brothers and sisters, the sovereignty of God is not just that He is a King, a monarch; but that He is the omnipotent God free to do whatever is pleasing to Him.

God describes Himself as slapping the weapons out of their hands and slaughtering them on the mountains and fields of Israel. God has summoned two parties to the slaughter – the hordes of Gog for destruction and carrion beasts and birds for a meal. Further, God says that He will destroy with fire the places from which they came.

Verses 7-9 highlight the purpose and plan of God. He is not simply drawing and driving this confederacy so that He can turn them into a shooting gallery. No, Yahweh is putting His character and reputation on public display so that who He is and what He has said is vindicated. While there is some sense in which this has been unfolding since the cross, there is certainly a culminating fulfillment in the future. That day is spoken of here as "the day of which I have spoken" meaning

that it is a time and day referred to in the rest of prophetic scripture, otherwise known as *The Day of the Lord*.

Its Weapons

(v.9-10)

9 "Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years, 10 so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord GOD.

There are seven nation groups gathered against Israel. It will take seven years to burn the trash. The people of Israel will be gathering and destroying the weapons left on the battlefields for seven years. In a wonderful ironic twist, Israel will go among the fallen and gather up the spoils they had brought with them. The spoilers have become the despoiled.

Two questions arise from the details:

- What about all the archaic, wooden weapons? Here is where we make a difference between understanding what the text says and what it prophetically points to in the future. The detailed description here is of the implements of war as the recipients of Ezekiel would have understood. But the future implements of war may be the same or may be very different.
- What about seven years gathering? As the center of a triad use of the number seven (7 nations, 7 years, 7 months) it is possible that the number is meant to represent completeness. But, the variety of its use would tend to point us toward a more realistic, literal usage.

Its Burial

(v.11-16)

11 "On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers, east of the sea. It will block the travelers, for there Gog and all his multitude will be buried. It will be called the Valley of Hamon-gog. 12 For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. 13 All the people of the land will bury them, and it will bring them renown on the day that I show my glory, declares the Lord GOD. 14 They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, so as to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make their search. 15 And when these travel through the land and anyone sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog. 16 (Hamonah is also the name of the city.) Thus shall they cleanse the land.

In this and the next paragraph, Ezekiel is showing us the vastness of the hordes that come up against Jerusalem. Not only does it take 7 years to deal with the implements of war, but it will take 7 months to bury the bodies. It will be such a mammoth task that people traveling through the valley of slaughter will leave markers when bones emerge so that burial crews can collect them all.

Ezekiel is foreseeing the passion of God's people to purify the land. As the sanctified, Spirit-filled people of Ezekiel 37, restored to their land, they are zealous to obey God. They will not even allow the corrupting decay of the pagan armies to stain the land in which God has placed them.

Its Devouring**(v.17-20)**

17 "As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field, 'Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth—of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan. 19 And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. 20 And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,' declares the Lord GOD.

In language repeated over and over again, the wicked on the day of the Lord are said to be a sacrificial meal for beasts and birds. God invites them to come to a table spread with the best of the mighty and the rich and the powerful. There is no mistaking the hyperbole. We are meant to respond with disgust at the scene of vultures and hyenas crouched over the slaughtered carcasses of those who opposed God and His people.

Beloved, while this is a gruesome scene, it is also one that ought to inspire both fear of God and fealty to God. When I think of the power of God who will destroy the wicked and Satan with the brightness of His coming and the sword of His mouth, then I tremble and trust. I tremble before such a God so that I will please Him and be graced by His favor. But I also trust and hope and love Him. God's love is so powerful for His people that He will deal with the wicked. He will not do it secretly in a corner. He will judge openly and publicly. So I must call you who continue to rebel against God – turn, repent, believe and bow – now. Do not wait one more moment. Tremble and trust today.

The Designs of God**(39:21-29)****The Purposes for the Nations****(v.21-24)**

21 "And I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them.

God's glory is seen when He deals with sinners. What a phrase this paragraph opens with. "I will set my glory among the nations." How does He do that? When He judges them. There is glory to God when He vindicates His character and covenant in judgment. Now, I know that Ezekiel has thundered and threatened and judged – blood and wrath and vengeance have flowed.

But understand this – we know the love of God by how He cares for His own. And we know the love of God by how He opposes those who attack and harm His own. Now this is easy to illustrate. Even in this room with any little child here, what would we – any of you do – if some wicked person came in with a knife and took children, killing some and beating some and threatening some. Then this killer rejected all offers of mercy and clemency and threatened us. True

love would not simply sit idly by and gush emotional nonsense. True love would move (within the law I would hope) to protect and punish. If, love for our children means wrath and punishment against those who would harm them, then I am encouraged about the God's love for me when He moves to judge whoever violates His Name.

The Program for the Hebrews

(v.25-29)

25 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. 26 They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. 29 And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."

Finally, God now promises, having utterly destroyed the wicked confederacy against His people, their safety and security and eternal prosperity. He has gathered them, restored them, protected them and now promises everlasting fellowship with them. When will this be? When He pours out His Spirit on them. When will that be? Well, it started at Pentecost is continuing till this very day and will reach an escalating climax just before He Himself returns as Paul puts it in 2 Thessalonians 1: "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed..." [ESV]

Punishment on one hand when He comes to be glorified and marveled at. There it is.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, may there be both trembling and trusting.

The Vision Cast

May we have a high view of God. Without it, we will be distracted and despondent in the day of difficulty. I do not know what is ahead for us as a nation or as a church – but this one thing I know beyond a shadow of doubt. Whatever minor problems to massive persecutions may come, they are insignificant in contrast to the glory to come while we are looking away from the temporal and looking forward to the eternal. We know that God will vindicate His Name. We know that He will win the victory. In this confidence let us tremble before and trust in such an awesome God.

The Victory Celebrated

Let's celebrate the victory in the words of Psalm 46

- God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10 "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
- 11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

The Temple Approached

Ezekiel 40:1-4

Message Overview

Aim To give focus our hope and expectations on Christ while explaining our approach to and understanding of Ezekiel's final section

- Agenda**
- To lay a foundation for understanding and profiting from this next section.
 - To call for both integrity and humility in our theological frameworks.
 - To demonstrate the usefulness of even difficult texts
 - To fan hope for and anticipation of the exhibition of God's greatness and glory.

- Summary**
- The vision is located in its place in the book, in Israel and in time.
 - The purposes of the vision are explained in order to focus us on its central theme.
 - The practical implications are drawn out so as to profit from the text.

Discussion Questions

What do we tend to do when our understanding of a text is challenged?
Help people to work through the tendency to defensiveness and debate.

What can a lack of conviction over texts lead to?
Discuss the vulnerability to error in the midst of struggling over texts.

Discuss the dynamic (or tension) between being firmly convinced in one's own mind while still be humble and teachable.

Introduction

We return this morning to our study in Ezekiel. We have been on a long journey. We took a break and now we return. Let's take a moment to place ourselves and fill in some background and context.

Our Context – How We Got Here

Ezekiel is written late in Israel's history. She has failed again and again to love and worship and serve God as she ought. Now God's patience is exhausted and His wrath is beginning to fall. The 10 northern tribes go into Assyrian captivity that scatters them and destroys them. The two southern tribes are defeated by Nebuchadnezzar who carries away a large number of them to Babylon. Among this number are Daniel and Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar installs a puppet king and Israel submits and pays tribute. Foolishly, she rebels against Babylon, seeks Egypt's help and Nebuchadnezzar prepares to move against them and smash them.

It is during this period that Jeremiah ministers in Jerusalem and Ezekiel prophesies in exile in Babylon. Ezekiel's prophecies are saturated with a vision of God in His glorious movable throne and God's sovereign call and commission. His prophecies warn and exhort Israel to submit to God's judgment and not believe the messages that raise false hopes of deliverance. God had determined to punish and did. God removed His glory in a solemn procession from the Temple and the city and over the horizon. And the sword of God's wrath fell through Nebuchadnezzar's siege and victory. The book then moves outward to the judgment on all the nations, beginning with those who were near and Israel relied on then moving outward to those beyond the horizon of Israel's immediate gaze.

So all hope seems dashed. God has departed. The people are devastated. The land is desolated. The city is destroyed. Will God utterly and totally forsake His people? No. there will come a day of restoration. There will come a day when God will move to raise up and restore His people, placing them into their inheritance and then protecting them there.

It is in that context that we come to Ezekiel 40-48. The date of the vision was around April 573 BC. Hope has been placed before God's people – hope of a return, a regeneration and restoration. There will be the righteous rule of their Messiah King. It is at this point that Ezekiel experiences his vision. In his vision, he is brought to and walked around a new temple. He witnesses the glory of the Lord enter the temple and the Lord's declaration that He will abide there for ever. He sees the altar, is given the regulations concerning the prince, the priests, the sacrifices and offerings and feast-days. He watches as a miraculous river gushes from under the temple, ever widening, refreshing the land and even reviving the Dead Sea. The borders and divisions of the land are then specified. The oracle ends on a triumphant note bringing the book to an abrupt end in the declaration that the new name of the city will be 'THE LORD IS THERE' (Ezekiel 48:35). [Carson, *New Bible Commentary*].

Our Challenges – What We Face

As we unpack these chapters, we face several interesting and at some points, difficult challenges.

- *THE CHALLENGE OF A NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURAL FLOOR PLAN.* Much of what we will look at this and next week are the floor plans for a Temple Building. The present value of going into all the details is questionable. I am hoping that as we walk through this to do it in a way that will be interesting.
- *THE CHALLENGE OF LONG UNITS.* This unit on the Temple and the one on the Levitical system are rather long. Thus, I will not spend a great deal of time unpacking details, just summarizing the details that are in the text itself.
- *THE CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETATION.* It is not too difficult to relate to you what is described here. But, in the light of several statements in this section, and having the Book of Hebrews and Revelation 21:1-22:6, we have to wrestle with some thorny issues in how we handle the Bible.
- *THE CHALLENGE OF THINKING IN NEW WAYS.* For some of you, this text will challenge your frameworks. Many, if not most of you, come to this portion with a plan of future things, an eschatological schema, that will frame what you believe about when this text is fulfilled. It is not my intention to knock down that view, but rather to give you some things to at least consider and ponder.

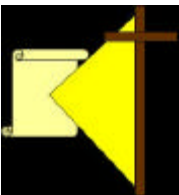
So, in view of these challenges, I ask patience, charity and some open-mindedness from you. It is essential that we understand the difference between those things over which we must agree and those things where we are still studying, learning and growing. Both our Truths We Treasure and the Truths We Teach allow for some differences in our views on future things. We are committed to the truths of the second coming without requiring an affirmation of a certain order of events.

Our Convictions – Shaping Principles

Over my years of study in the Scriptures, I have come to several important convictions



THE FOCUS OF THE BIBLE IS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. While all the Bible is not about the Lord Jesus, all the Bible is to point us to and shape our understanding of the Lord Jesus. I heard a Welsh pastor explain it this way. At the center of our theology is the Lord Jesus. If we move off the center, we will have areas of truth we will ignore and areas of error that we will embrace. The further off center we are the larger these two areas will be.



THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IS TO TESTIFY TO CHRIST. In Luke 24:25-27, Jesus showed the disciples how the Old Testament was designed to point to Christ. Paul, in Galatians, tells us that the Old Covenant was to bring us to Christ in a redemptive historical sense. The Lord Jesus is at the center of all of God's purposes, His promises and prophecies.

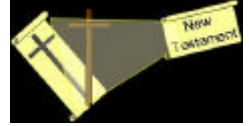
THE OLD TESTAMENT SHOULD BE READ IN ITS IMMEDIATE SETTING. It is foolish to attempt to see how the text connects us to its greater realities unless we understand

what we actually have in front of us. So it is imperative that we get it right just as it is.

THE OLD TESTAMENT ARE SHADOWS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT REALITIES. It is also imperative that we understand that in the Old Testament are not the realities, but shadows. The great reality is all the Jesus is in His life, death and resurrection. It is His future glory shining on His cross casting shadows into the Old Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT ILLUMINATES, INTERPRETS, EXPLAINS AND APPLIES THE OLD TESTAMENT IN WAYS THAT WERE NOT POSSIBLE FOR THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE. Now that Christ has come and the New Testament is complete, we can more fully understand the Old Testament than the Old Testament saints could. Frankly, I think that in eternity, much that remains dim and difficult about this age will be made so much clearer.

The roadmap of these principles will guide us through our study of Ezekiel 40-48. Just as we have in the rest of Ezekiel and in all our Old Testament studies, we will read and understand the text at the level in which it is given. Then we will look for markers in it that point us to New Testament texts that will help us illuminate and explain these more fully.



The Places of this Vision

As we consider this opening paragraph this morning, I want you to notice three important locations.

Its Location in Ezekiel

(v.1)

First, notice its location in Ezekiel. I do this partially because of the long break we have taken. But if we look back over Ezekiel 36 to 39, we find that God, in concern for His holy name, His fame and reputation, regenerates and restores His people (36:23-27). He uses the Word of God to raise up His people (37:13-14). He affirms His union with them and they with Him (37:24). He protects from Gog (39:21-22) and pours out His Spirit on them (39:29).

Immediately after this in the book, yet 12 years later in time, this vision occurs. The time of the book is very clearly marked. It is April, 573 BC. The 10th day of the first month of the year in the Jewish calendar is the first day of Passover. We must not fail to see the significance of this. There have been around 12 years of no new oracles. The Hebrews are in exile. The land is desolate. Jerusalem is destroyed. It is now the time of the feast cycle to begin the Passover Celebration. But they cannot. They have no temple, no priesthood, no altar, no sacrifices. Their sin has brought them the place where they cannot obey God according to the Mosaic Law. It simply is not possible.

It is hard for us to feel with this today. We are not tied to sacred spaces and sacrificial rituals as necessary elements of our worship. We may have a building, but having this building is not necessary to communion with God. But theirs was. Even in the transition from the Tabernacle to Solomon's Temple, the Ark of God and the holy vessels and utensils for sacrifice were moved. And the glory of God moved as well. But these were all destroyed, looted and lost.

So here, after the regeneration, resurrection, regathering and restoring of God's people, after their receiving the fulfillment of God's land and king promises, after the defense against and destruction of Gog, God now forms the new Torah, the new Law, the new Temple, the new Priesthood, the new City, the new Land and dwells there forever. There is both continuity and discontinuity. It is recognizable to them and connected to Mosaic worship. Yet it is very different with significant and startling changes in its realities, regulations and rituals.

Its Location in Israel

(v.2)

Second, notice the location of what is seen in this vision. It is striking and important. Ezekiel is transported in the vision to the land of Israel. He is placed on a high mountain on whose south side is a structure like, notice, *like* a city. The text then is book ended by the measurements of the Temple (Ch.40) and the city (Ch. 48). This suggests the possibility of a literary structuring of the text, which we will look at in a moment. The ambiguity of the location at the beginning is clarified by the ever increasing details and measurements given later.

Its Location in Time

Finally, the difficult question of *when*: when will this happen. Four major views have been proposed.

- This is what Israel was supposed to do upon their return to the land from exile and did not do. They were supposed to build this city and temple, redistribute the land according to these guidelines and to implement the new order of priesthood, sacrifices and services. Their disobedience to this simply sealed their doom. The primary difficulty with this view is that neither Ezra nor Nehemiah seem to be aware that this is what they were to do. It is difficult to reconcile their great godliness and ambition to please God in all ways with a radical disobedience to clear instruction, if that is what this is.
- This will be what the Jews will attempt to build during the 7 year period known as Daniel's Seventieth Week, sometimes miscalled the Tribulation. The rebuilding of Israel and the Temple, sponsored by the Anti-Christ and then desecrated by his satanic image will be according to this plan. While this may be what happens, it cannot fulfill the text. Everything in this vision points to the initiative and implementation by God Himself.
- This will be built during the Millennium, the 1000 year rule and reign of Jesus Christ on this earth at the end of this age (or beginning of the next age). Once Jesus returns and sets up His earthly Kingdom, all that is given in this oracle will be fulfilled. There are a number of parallel texts that seem to support this, all using the same apocalyptic language and all from the Old Testament. The difficulties with this view I will give in just a moment.
- This was intended to point to the greater heavenly reality, to Christ and the church. It will never literally be built somewhere on earth, but rather is an earthly, physical representation of a greater, spiritual reality. The only way to point to that greater spiritual reality is through comparisons or analogies to things familiar to us. Thus, there is a difference between what is described here and what it means. The difficulty here is the exactness of the measure-

ments and specifications. It is quite possible (in fact, I will do so next week) to do an architectural rendering of what is narrated here. This has the sort of exacting detail that the blueprint for the Tabernacle had. But not quite. Thus, while it may point to a greater reality, it still seems to require a literal implementation.

So, which is it? Now, I have to say that with all honesty and humility, I don't know for sure. I wish I could stand here and be certain. I cannot. Here are my reasons:

- There is language here that speaks of *forever* (43:7-9). This makes it difficult for me to limit it to a defined period of time.
- The purpose either of the temple or of the vision itself is to shame the Hebrews for their iniquities (43:10). Each element of the design has sin exposing and holiness directing aims (43:11-12). The locus of worship and holiness is in sacred spaces.
- There is an unmistakable connection between the sacrifices offered and God's accepting them (43:27). Here are animal sacrifices having the same function as the Levitical sacrifices (45:27). In view of Hebrews 7-10, I cannot see how a future return to animal sacrifices even as memorials can be warranted, particularly with the Lord Jesus Himself physically present in His glorified body.
- Circumcision of both heart and flesh is required for admission to the sanctuary (44:9). This would bar non-Jews from this place of worship as long as it stood. I suppose that it is possible that our glorified bodies will be circumcised, but that sure seems to beg the question.
- Given the loss of the familial and tribal lineages during the exile, it is difficult to understand how Jews will know what tribe they are from and who the sons of Zadok in the Levitical tribe are. The solution here may be that the sealing of the 144,000 in the book of Revelation includes God's identifying them by tribe.
- Are Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-12 where in Christ, the church is being built up as a spiritual temple in which the sacrifices of holiness and praise are lifted up by all believer-priests and Revelation 1:4-7; 5:9-10 where believers are a kingdom of priests pointing to the greater spiritual New Covenant reality of which this is an Old Covenant reality?
- Why does what Revelation 21-22, the only New Testament text that points directly to Ezekiel 40-48, describe realities that occur after the 1000 year reign, uprising and battle of Gog-Magog and the great white throne judgment of all the unbelievers? It seems to me that Revelation 21-22 places the fulfillment of Ezekiel 40-48 *in the new heavens and new earth*.

Brothers and sisters, I am just trying to show you what I have been wrestling with, in some measure since 1990 and much more in the last year or so. I do not want to dislodge any of you from your convictions. It is a glorious thing that our salvation does not depend on our views on Ezekiel's Temple. And let's keep the main things the main things and exalt and exult Christ in all things.

The Purposes of this Vision

Now, much more briefly, let's consider the purposes of this vision as given in the text itself. This will help us enormously to listen and learn the primary lessons God intended for His people.

To Explore Sacred Space (Ezekiel 40:3)

The first purpose is to measure and boundary sacred space. Everything about this vision establishes spaces and spheres of entry and exclusion, gates and boundaries. It is fascinating that you can do a blueprint, but an elevation drawing is much more difficult because few heights are given. Further, the exploration of God's sacred space, if you will, begins in the Temple and ends with the city walls.

Here is the literary construction of the text:

- The Temple measured (40:1-42:20)
- God's glory comes in (43:1-12)
- The Temple regulated (43:13-44:31)
- The Sanctuary measured (45:1-12)
- The Priests and Prince regulated (45:13-46:24)
- The living water flows out (47:1-12)
- The land and city measured (47:13-48:35).

To Exalt God's Greatness (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Three specific aspects of God's greatness are unfolded in this vision.

- *HE IS GREAT IN HIS GLORY.* Once again the glory of God returns to the Temple. This is significant in the light of the withdrawal of His glory from the Temple, Jerusalem and the land earlier in Ezekiel. The greatness of all this is not its own physical splendor, but in the glory that indwells it.
- *HE IS GREAT IN HIS INDWELLING.* In an ever increasing crescendo, this oracle exalts the wonder of God's dwelling with His people. So much so that the book ends with the name of city being, Immanuel.
- *HE IS GREAT IN HIS HOLINESS.* Boundaries and regulations fill this oracle in order to remind and reinforce the necessity for holiness. This essential and permeating attribute of God must characterize that which please Him and glorifies Him.

To Expose Man's Sin (Ezekiel 43:10; 44:13, 23)

Another purpose in this oracle is to once again show expose man's sin and to bring shame and repentance because of it. If we can hear this vision and not be shaken by our sinfulness and its capacity to separate us from God and incur His wrath, then we are not hearing this text as we ought.

To Elevate Christ's Sacrifice (Ezekiel 43:27)

In view of God's greatness and holiness over against our sinfulness, then the provision of a substitutionary, satisfying and sufficient sacrifice spotlights the cross. I tremble when I am more interested in the nooks and crannies, steps and

rooms, dimensions and directions of this oracle than the mighty, glorious, once-for-all sacrifice of our Redeemer that it celebrates.

To Explain Creation's Restoration (Ezekiel 47:9)

In anticipation of God's renovation of what sin has corrupted, this oracle shows the restoring work of God in everything. The place and way of worship, the land, the people, the city and even the Dead Sea and its surroundings are renewed and revitalized by the stream of living water from the Temple. The New Testament is full of texts that point to the physical completion in all creation of the work God has begun spiritually in the souls of men.

To Expect God's Indwelling (Ezekiel 48:35)

This vision throbs and thunders with the indwelling of God. The greatest thing about all of this is that God is there. Brothers and sisters, this must grip our souls. The marvelous story of God's love for us and His moving in time and history to redeem us and the glory of the consummation when all is done brings about the final residing of God with His people. And it is God who makes that glorious. Until then, we have the privilege of His Spirit indwelling us and the promise that He will never leave us until He comes, at which time, in and through us He will be admired.

The Profit of this Vision

How is what we are about to study to affect us today? No matter what your thinking about the if and when of all this, we know that the Word of God is profitable, useful for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

To Cultivate Humility

We are sometimes prone to think that we have every "T" crossed and every "I" dotted, that our theological systems are complete. Let us have the humility to remember that we are frail and in much need of grace. Let us have courage to defend truth and the faith against all error and heresy. I want to ever be teachable and open to the Scriptures while ever being vigilant for the gospel.

To Promote Holiness

I have come away from this oracle with a renewed sense of my own personal need for holiness. If the forks and fire pans and coal buckets in Temple service must be sanctified for God's use, how much more His living, breathing sons and servants.

To Ground Hope

Finally, my own questions and hesitations have actually caused me to joy ever more in the certainties of the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus. My longing and looking forward to His coming and the wonder that will unfold then burns bright in my soul. It is not a vain desire, but a sure hope. I may not know all the intricate details and schematics, but, my beloved, He will come with stunning glory to dazzle saints.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to make two important points that I believe with all my heart this vision gloriously declares.

Our King provides the sufficient sacrifice (45:16-18)

When we could not pay the price nor satisfy His righteous demands, God, the great King, put His Son forward as the Redeemer. He came to earth, lived without sin and went to the cross as our sin-bearer. There He suffered the wrath of God for me and then was raised from the dead and has ascended in heaven. There is no other name in heaven or in earth through whom we can be saved. For glory of His Name, the love of His Son and His people, God has provided the Lamb. Believe in Him and bow to Him, today.

Our King dwells with His people forever. (48:35)

I wish I had words to tell you and show what this means to me. This is the wonder of regeneration, God's Spirit indwells imparting life. This is sweetness of the Lord's Table – God is there, not in the elements, but in His people. This is the stunning and satisfying consummation – He will dwell in and among His people, forever.

Notes

Grandeur: The Temple Measured

Ezekiel 40:5-42:20

Message Overview

Aim To see the sacred space for the holy glory of God represented by Ezekiel's Temple

- Agenda**
- To follow the text and capture the tour of the Temple Compound.
 - To give some architectural sense for our own clarity.
 - To capture the sense of boundaries.
 - To capture the sense of ascent.
 - To show the beauty of holy order and symmetry.

- Summary**
- The outer wall and courtyard is approached.
 - The gates are described primarily through the details of the eastern gate.
 - The outer courtyard is viewed.
 - The inner courtyard is approached, entered and surveyed.
 - The Temple is approached and described.
 - The auxiliary space and structures for priestly ministry are described.
 - The outer wall is measured, with the overarching purpose for the vision declared.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the importance of determining and following God's agenda in a text.
This is an important observation from the last two messages. It is easy to come to Ezekiel's Temple with our own agenda.

Discuss the impressions that the text (and message) made on them.
See if people are moving towards the central point of holiness and indwelling.

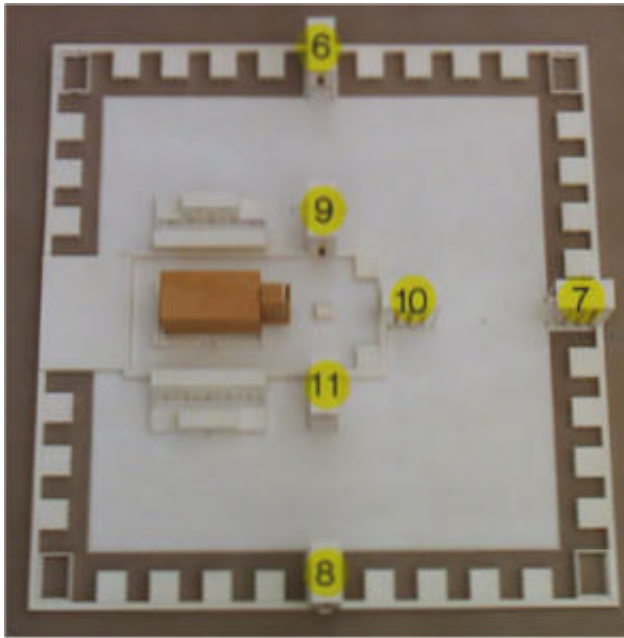
Deal with any major objections to the approach taken.
Remind people that some sense of open-handedness is very important for continuing to clarify eschatological texts. Also, watch for over-literal assumptions driving objections, particularly in the light of Revelation 21, which we will explore at the end of this series.

Introduction

The people of God need to clearly understand the difference between the holy and the profane. Everything we prize in our relationship with God is grounded in the holiness of God. His love for us is pure. The cross is the judgment of God to uphold His holiness. His glory streams with His holiness. But God's people down through the ages have little understood, little prized and thus often transgressed God's holiness. Yet God has shown that in every place and in every person He purposes to dwell, it must be set apart, sanctified as holy to the Lord.

Israel failed miserably to maintain the separateness of God in His holiness. The constant charge against Israel is that her profanation of God and His place of worship. It is with that dark background that we come to the brightness of this text. Since God intends to dwell here forever, then this will be a place separate off and bounded for holiness. If the glory of God will reside here, then this must be sacred space.

Reading through this text 10-15 times over the last two weeks, this is the indelible impression on my heart and mind. I am struck by the grandeur of this place. I am awed by the constant sense of ever increasing elevations, of a grand upward ascent. I tremble at the gates and walls and doors all designed to guard and grant access. The wicked are guarded out and the righteous are granted access. I thrill to realize that the point here is not to give us architectural grids, but frame a holy, sacred space for everlasting dwelling of Glory, the glory of God.



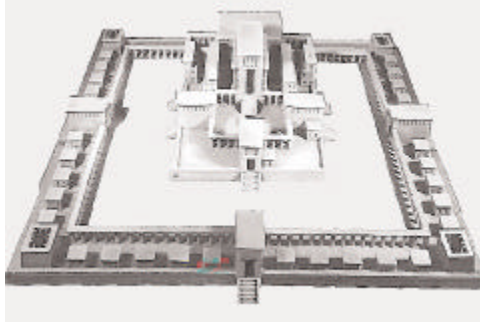
I have been struck even more forcibly this week that the measurements here are very precise, yet so many details are either left out, not clear, use obscure terms or assume information we simply don't have. Again, it is somewhat easy to lay out a floor plan, but it would be very difficult to build this without an enormous amount of detail being filled in by a very competent architect and builder. In fact, nowhere except in decorations are we told what this is constructed of. The building materials themselves, contra both the Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple are not specified at

Note

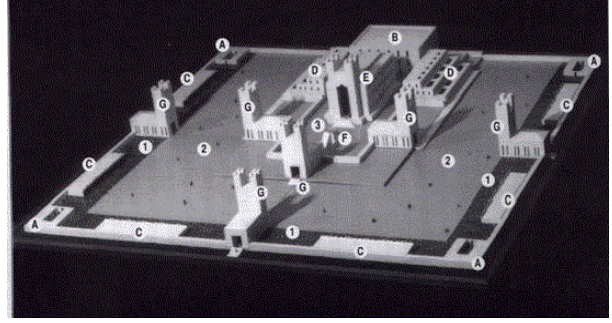
On the slides, all the diagrams are properly oriented North.

all.

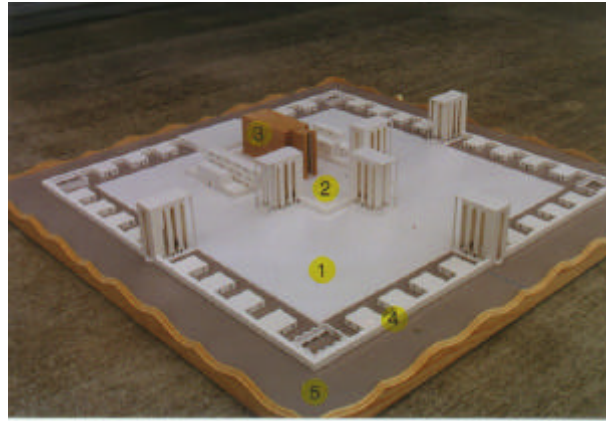
The following three elevation drawings will demonstrate one of the problems with an attempt to construct this temple. Notice how each rendering attempts to be faithful to the text and its dimensions. Yet, each one is giving us a very different style of building. You can also see differences in some heights, particularly the heights of the gates.



Solomon' Temple Style



Classical Medieval Style



Classical Modern Style

All photos for this chapter by Paul Jablonowski, except as noted.

In my study this week, I have been reminded again and again that this is a walking tour with a tape measure. Two other places of worship have been built, one with God's detailed directions and measurements-the tabernacle-and the other with God's approval, but not details as recorded in the Scripture-Solomon's Temple. If you compare (actually contrast) the detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle with these measurements, the impression of Ezekiel's description is quite different. There God was giving exact details for something to be built from what was given. Here, something already existing is being described and measured. It has become my conviction that what is here is important and what is not, should not be speculated on nor try to fill in with what we know about Solomon's Temple or contemporary buildings, both of which most commentators are at pains to do. Doesn't it sound reasonable: *this is a vision and God is giving the details He wants recorded for His purposes, not for our curiosities.*

This is a guided walking tour. We are met by our guide, a glowing bronze angelic figure. We have met this same figure in chapter 8 when Ezekiel is shown the desecration of the Temple. He has a cord in one hand and a measuring reed in the other. Think of the measuring cord as a tape measure on a reel for very long distances. The reed is six long cubits or about 10 feet long like a carpenter's folding rule. So let us walk with Ezekiel through this vision and see what he sees and try to diagram it in a way that will be helpful.

The Outer Court

(40:5–27)

Ezekiel approaches the outer wall, goes through the eastern gate and walks through the outer court. He observes and measures the wall that marks off this court, the gates in the wall and the pavement and out buildings along the wall. As we study, we will either highlight areas on this drawing or bring up detail overlays.

The Outer Wall

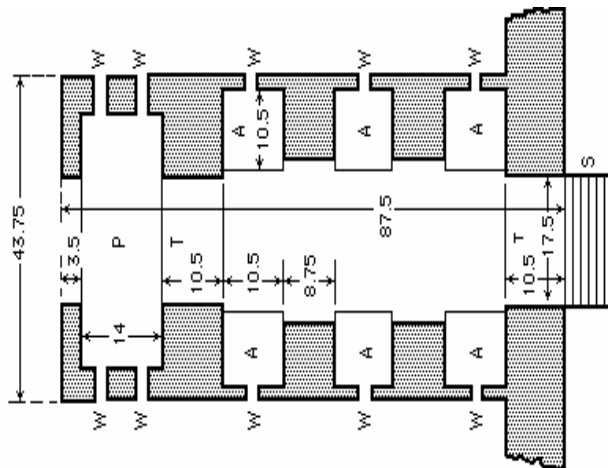
(v.5)

Ezekiel is shown the outer wall that surrounds the Temple Complex. It is massive, being as wide as it is high, 1 reed or about 10 feet square. It is the boundary between that which is profane and that which is holy to the Lord. It is intended to separate and to define this boundary. From the outside, it presents a formidable defense and guard against entry.

The Eastern Gate

(v.6-16)

The angel guide brings Ezekiel to the gate in the eastern side of the outer wall. As we will see later, all the gates have the same design.



A – Rooms for the guards (40:7a, 10,12)

B – Portico (40:8-9)

S – Steps (40:6a)

T – Thresholds (40:6b, 7b)

W – Windows (41:16)

The gate is approached by seven steps with an entry way at the top that cuts through the wall and makes a room or threshold there. As you pass through the gate you would see guard rooms on each side with windows facing out into the courtyard. In front of each guardroom was a 1 cubit barrier or possibly ledge indicating that the room was elevated. We pass through another room like the entryway and then into what is called a portico. This room is as wide as the gate, has windows into the courtyard and is about 14 long. Thus the gate is larger than the Chapel auditorium.

Notice that it is always inner spaces that are measured. We are not told the thickness of the walls of the gate, the height of the ceilings or roof. We are told nothing of the roof's construction. What we are being shown is a way through the wall, an entry that is huge and magnificent. Further, it is very unusual that a temple was walled and guarded like this. The distinct impression is that of a city on the outside and a temple on the inside.

The Outer Courtyard

(v.17-19)

We move through the gate out into the outer courtyard. All along the outer wall out to the depth of the gate is a tiled pavement called the lower pavement. On this pavement along the wall on the north, south and east sides are rooms or chambers whose use or purpose is not defined. There is a larger courtyard of about 175 feet, possibly raised, that extends from the inside of the gate (and edge of the pavement) to the outer edge of the inner courtyard of the temple proper. This courtyard again emphasizes the space and separation required of sacred space.

The Other Gates

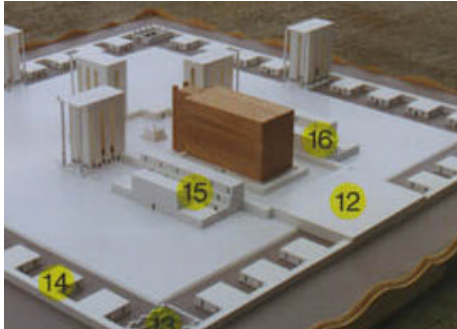
(v.20-27)

We are taken in the vision to the other 2 gates, one on the north and one on the south. They are exactly like the Eastern Gate in all respects. In the description here, a couple of important details are added. It is here that we find that there are seven steps up to the gate. Further, we find that much of the interior walls of the gates and door jambs are decorated with beautiful carvings of palm trees and fronds.

The Inner Court

(40:28-47)

Our guide now takes us across the outer court and through a gate directly opposite the southern gate. This implies that the inner court is walled. We also find that it is elevated and either surrounded by 8 terraces leading up to the wall or 8 steps leading up to the gate. In either case, there is a constant sense of increasing elevation: the outer 7 steps elevates the whole compound from its surrounds; the inner courtyard is elevated from the lower pavement and the inner, walled courtyard is elevated above the outer courtyard. The text is clearly showing us not only that sacred space is bounded but that it is elevated.



The inner courtyard and temple proper has many more structures and is much more complex. This lends some difficulty to understanding some of what will be described

The Inner Gates

(v.28-37)



Without too much expansion on them, Ezekiel relates that the gates between the outer and inner courtyards are exactly like the outer gates. They are directly line up with each other so that as you emerge from the outer gate, you would be able to see directly across the courtyard the next gate. These gates are approached from the outer court by eight steps or an eight

stepped terrace that surrounds the whole thing.

Two things we should note at this point. The inner gates are mirrors of the outer. That is, the inner gates are designed to guard access to the Temple Compound. The inner gates are designed to grant access. So, the vestibule room always looks out over the lower pavement and outer courtyard. You will have the same sense of passing through a guarded area when you entered the outer court upon leaving the inner court.

The second is that Ezekiel now recognizes that there are no western gates. The inner court and temple proper have structures on the western side that back right up against the outer western wall.

The Inner Chamber

(v.38-43)

We have a room here that is off the outside of the vestibule. The door to it is through the vestibule. The room is the place where the sacrificial animals are to be washed. Solomon had placed bronze lavers roughly in the same place in his temple. In the vestibule and on the outside of the gate are four sets of two tables adding up apparently to eight tables. They were carved from stone. These were where the sacrificial animals were to be slaughtered. On the walls near them were either hooks or ledges used to hang or store the implements of sacrifice.

The Priest-Guard's Chambers

(v.44-46)

On east side of both the north and south gates was a large chamber that was reserved for the priest's use. The rooms opened into the inner court. The Hebrew here is exactly parallel so that Temple and Altar are not meant to be distinguishing, but synonymous. Further, the words used here to refer to their "ministry" are used elsewhere to refer, not to priestly ministry at the altar, but to guard duties. So what we have here are the shift quarters for the priest-guards who are assigned to the gates.

This is further borne out by that fact that the priestly guards must come from the line of Zadok. Zadok was known both in Hebrew history and in Ezekiel as the priest who defended the sanctity and holiness of the Temple against contamination and corruption. He stood against the prevailing wicked desecration of the Temple and was rewarded with permanent service to the High King to guard His sacred space from the kinds of desecration referred to in Ezekiel chapters 8-11.

The Size and Altar Placement

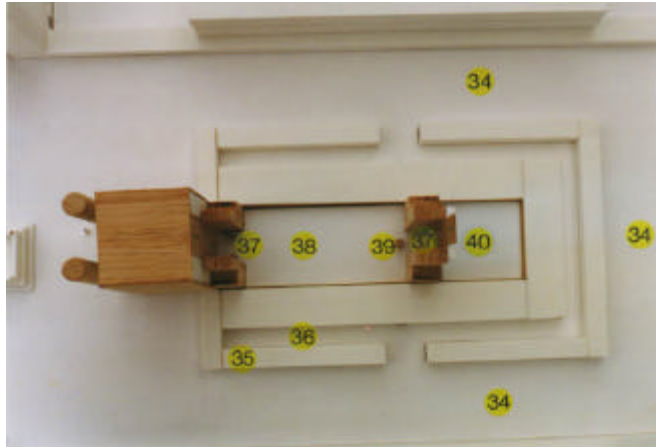
(v.47)

After exiting from the gate, looking around the inner court and seeing the connected chamber, the tables and the large guard-priest chambers, he now looks out over the courtyard. It is a perfect square of 100 cubits or 175 feet. To give you some idea, our building here at the Chapel is 120 feet long. His eye is drawn to notice the altar standing in front of the Temple itself. Most agree that, like Solomon's Temple, this altar would have been in the center of the courtyard in direct line with the gates, thus being visible as one came through the gates.

The Temple

(40:48-41:26)

It is curious that our tour sees, but does not at this point take us to the altar. Instead, we are taken to the Temple itself and enter it.



The Foyer

(40:48–49)

The entry way is described first as it appears from the ground level. The measurements give us massive door jambs over 8 feet square surrounding the entryway which was open to the outside. Standing either in front of or just inside the entry jambs were two large pillars. Their function in both Solomon's and Ezekiel's Temple are unknown. The corresponding pillars in Solomon's Temple were named Boaz and Joachim and were carried off by the Babylonians as spoil. Ezekiel, as a priest in the Temple, would have recognized these pillars.

It is at this point we must note that the inner courtyard and temple building are almost exactly like Solomon's Temple layout. While many pieces of furniture are not present, the general layout is identical. Ezekiel would have been very familiar with all of this, having served as a priest before his captivity.

Nevertheless, all the description here is meant to convey a sense of increasing majesty and elevation of the sacred space of God. This is borne out by Ezekiel noting that one ascended up from the inner court to the Temple building by way of ten steps. Most commentators are agreed that once again, what is being described is a terraced elevation going all the way around the Temple building.

The Great Hall

(41:1–2)

Moving out of the foyer, we pass through a massive entry into the great hall. The jambs around this entry are almost 10 feet square in an opening around 18 feet wide and 10 feet long. Once inside the great hall, the room is not really described at this point at all. It is simply measured: a perfect rectangle 20 cubits by forty cubits or 70 by 35 feet.

The Holy Place

(v.3-4)

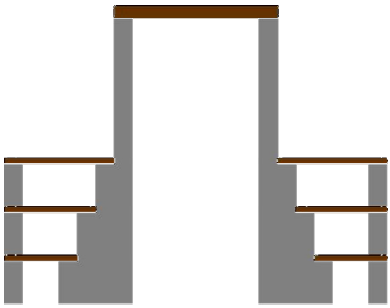
Next we move through an entry way that whose jambs are much smaller, enclosing a smaller doorway about 10.5 feet wide. At this point, the guide moves into the room and Ezekiel is not invited to enter. The room is a perfect 35 foot square. The guide turns to Ezekiel and announces that this is the Most Holy Place.

What is striking here is the total absence of any mention of furniture or decorations. What we are given here in the great hall and holy place is the measurement of space. And that is it.

The Exterior Structures

(v.5-12)

Now, comes the most difficult and enigmatic part of this text. After much reading, pondering and weighing, I am generally following Daniel Block in his proposal. He points out that this section is filled with arcane architectural references that assume a knowledge of Solomon's Temple construction that we do not have. It seems to me (and others) then that once again, it would be difficult to impossible to construct this in the future without further supernatural revelation. Curiously, Ezekiel and his contemporaries would have known what these were and could have built this complex.



First, we are told that the Temple walls are as thick as the outer wall, 10 feet. It rises three stories. Attached to the outside, each story has thirty rooms in it going around three sides of the Temple. It is interesting to note that the rooms are smaller than the temple walls. It appears that the rooms on each story are wider than the one below it, resting on supports not embedded in the Temple wall, but sitting on

ledges. The foundations of the three story structure were almost 10 feet thick. So we have a three story, external structure, with rooms in it but with open terraces in front of the rooms looking out over the inner courtyard. The rooms are accessed by an interior stairway, probably winding around a square that opens out onto each floor. They opened onto a five cubit terrace surrounding the outside looking out over a 20 cubit space to the surrounding external buildings.

One final exterior structure is described. Is against the western wall and stands between the wall and the temple building. It is a massive building, 157 by 122 feet, making it larger than the Temple itself. Yet, of the 90 rooms around the Temple and of this building, we are told almost nothing as to their purpose. All kinds of speculations abound.

The General Dimensions

(v.13-15)

Verses 13-15 give the external dimensions of the temple proper and building. The Temple is 50 cubits wide and 100 cubits long. It separated by restricted space or yard of 100 cubits.

The Interior Decorations

(v.16-26)

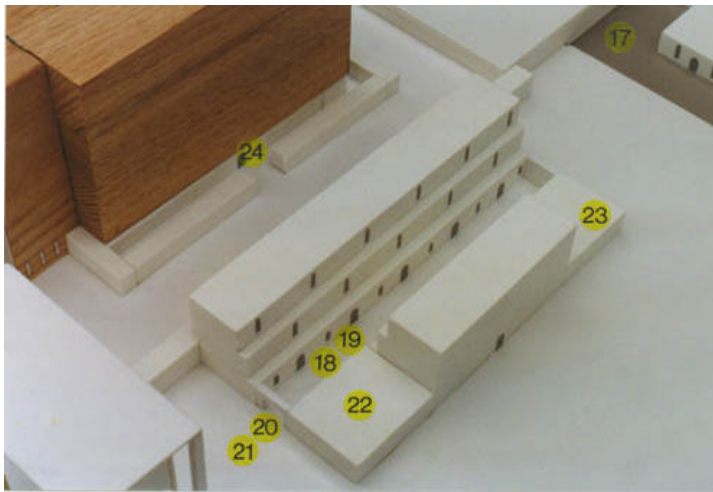
Finally, the first word about how the Temple was decorated. It appears that the interior of the great hall was lined with windows looking out and walkways or balconies facing in on three floors. Some have thought that these may be shelves with cornices under them. Regardless, the walls are paneled with wood in which are carved repeated patterns of palms and cherubim. One interesting note, the cherubim are portrayed in relief and therefore only show two of four faces, the human and the lion. From our post incarnation advantage, the union of the human

and divine in Christ, the heavenly and earthly regents, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants is signified.

Taking it a bit out of order, Ezekiel tells us that between the foyer and the great hall are two large doors and between the great hall and the holy place, two more. There is an awning of latticed wood over the outside doorway of the foyer. Everything is decorated in the beautiful carvings. He is baffled to see a wooden altar standing in front of the Holy Place. He is expecting to find two pieces of furniture, a table and an altar, both of gold plate. Yet, here is a wooden altar. The angelic guide tells him that in this temple, the table and incense altar are now merged into a single table-altar unit. Here again, after the cross, the place of the believer who shares in fellowship with God through partaking of the bread of life and responding with prayers to heaven.

The Priest's Chambers

(42:1–14)



We are not taken out of the Temple proper to view a complex of structures set aside for the ministering priesthood. Here again, the language is difficult and obscure. The point appears, as is through this whole vision, to point to the need for holiness and a proper approach to and use of sacred space.

Their Description

(v.1-12)

Initially, we are taken to the complex on the north side of the Temple facing north. What is described appears to be two, three story, terraced buildings, one 100 cubits long and the other 50 cubits long. The back wall of the long building is a part of or against the inner court wall. The stepped sides face each other. There is a 10 cubit wide and 100 cubit long walkway or terrace separating the long and short buildings. Below the smaller of the two buildings is an entry way from the outer court through the building leading to the walkway. There was a wall extending from the shorter building to shield the larger from view of the outer court and to provide a “yard” or gated space around the buildings. There is an exact replica of this on the south side of the Temple.

Their Use

(v.13-14)

These buildings are said to have several uses. They are used for storage of the offerings. They are the place for the ministering priests to leave their clothing, both their priestly vestures and everyday garments. It is place where they must change. They cannot wear their everyday garments in the inner court lest they desecrate the Temple. They cannot wear their priestly vestures out in the outer

court lest they improperly sanctify the people outside. The population of priests these buildings are meant to serve must be quite large.

The Overall Measurements

(42:15–20)

Both the close this tour and to prepare for what is next, the angelic guide takes us out into the outer court.

Its Particulars

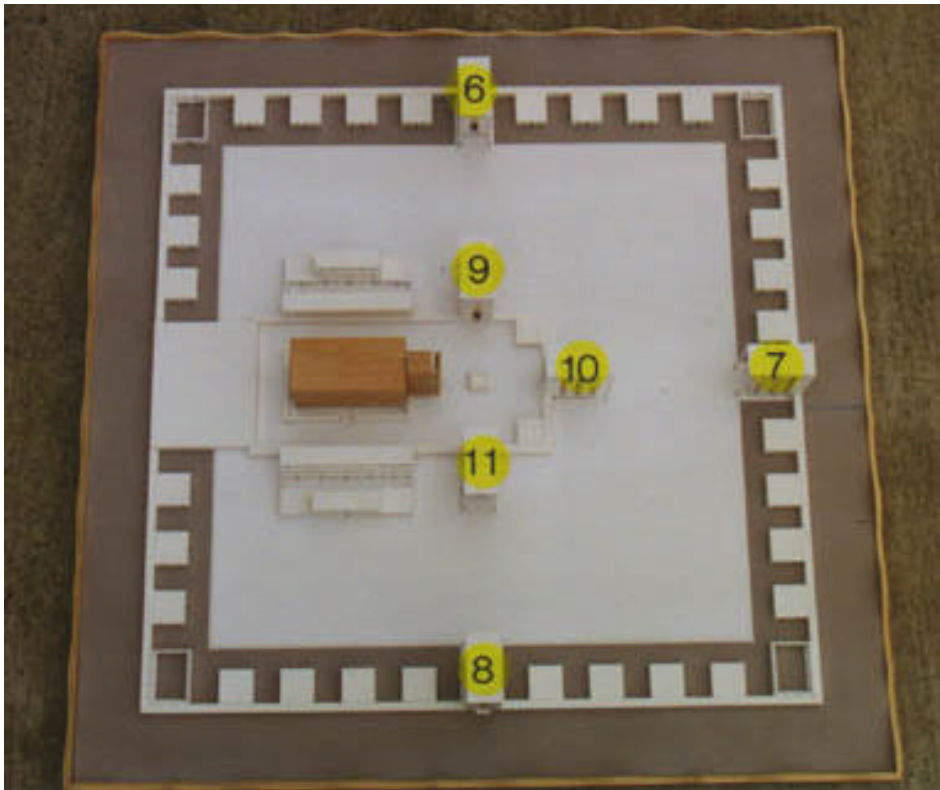
(v.15-20a)

Once there, he gives the particular measurements of the whole Temple Compound. Each side and wall is measured. It is a perfect square of 500 long cubits as measured by the reed. Thus it is around 875 feet on a side or close to three football fields.

Its Purpose

(v.20b)

Finally, we close the reminder of the central theme. Ezekiel's Temple is about sacred space, about the place and purpose of God's dwelling. The lesson we learn here is the great importance between the holy and the unholy. For within the bounds of the holy, there resides the glory of God.



Conclusion

I want to conclude with three important observations.

How is this Temple different?

- No wall of partition to exclude Gentiles (compare Ephesians 2:14) (Gentiles were previously welcome in the Outer Courts, but excluded from the inner courts on pain of death).
- No Court of Women (compare Galatians 3:28 (Outer Court and Inner Court only) No Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3)
- No Table of Showbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35)
- No Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12)
- No Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6)
- No Veil (Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 27:51)
- No Ark of the Covenant (Jeremiah 3:16, John 10:30-33)
- Major Changes to the Altar:
(Altar approached by a ramp from the East. Previous altars all approached from the South. Stairs to the altar, not a ramp as previously. The top of the ark now described by the Hebrew word "Ariel" [Isaiah 29:1] meaning "hearth of God" or "lion of God." [Rev. 5:5]).

The Order and Symmetry of God

This holy dwelling of the glory of God is perfectly ordered and hugely symmetrical. The order of God's holiness is once again contrasted to the chaos and disorder of sin and Satan and self's corruptions. Yet this is not an order of exact sameness, but of widely diverse variety, maintained and sustained in ordered symmetry. This is the essence of beauty. So it is utterly true to say that the holiness of God is beautiful. Yes it is awful, grand and pure. But it is also full of order, symmetry, variety and stately grandeur. It is defined by boundaries and spaces. It moves and elevates. It sets processes and functions in particular places and provides for transitions and movement. How glorious it is to worship God in His holiness, His order and symmetry.

The Grandeur of Glory and Holiness

And finally, all that is truly significant about this Temple Compound is the distinctions and boundaries that mark off holiness. Yet, there are gateways to both guard against the wicked and grant access to the righteous. And everyway gateway points to the altar.

Yes, this is a wondrous building. And for time's sake I have to stop here this morning. But frankly, I am stopping just before the real point. For what comes next is a glorious indwelling and a sacrificial altar.

The cross must be at the center of all our gateways. It will stand before the sacred space of God's dwelling. It will be surrounded by ever increasing ascent to the

pinnacle of God's rule. And His people, guarding and ministering believer-priests will move in and out to serve the great King forever.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Notes

Guidance – The Temple Regulated

Ezekiel 43:1-46:24

Message Overview

Aim To drive home the need for holiness and a valuing of the glory of the Lord

- Agenda**
- To summarize the main points of the Temple and sacrifice regulations.
 - To emphasize the convicting purpose of this oracle for the exiles.
 - To connect their sin to our own.
 - To hold up Christ and the cross as the object to which all this points.

- Summary**
- The glory of God returns to the Temple
 - The Altar is described and defined
 - The Access restrictions to the sacred space are declared
 - The Priests qualifications and responsibilities are given
 - The Holy District is allotted and divided.
 - The Feasts and Sacrifices are given

Discussion Questions

In what ways did each of these groups of people defile and disobey?
Priests in their responsibility to protect the holiness of the sanctuary
People in their fidelity and loyal obedience to God
King in his usurping the place of God and abuse of the people.

How do we tend to fall into the same traps?
Discuss the common condition of sinners in fallenness (1 Cor. 10) and our need to be more concerned about pleasing God than pleasing ourselves.

What conclusions did the flock draw from the restrictions and regulations?
Discuss how they responded to the sometimes seemingly arbitrary rules and regulations governing their holiness.

Discuss how the holiness of the Old Covenant is bound to a culture, but the holiness of the New Covenant is principled and trans-cultural.

Introduction

Whose glory is to be at center of believing worship? This is the fundamental message of this text and the challenge in our churches today. Will God be sovereign and Lord over His people, at the center of their worship, their trust and obedience? Will the departure and arrival of glory really mean anything to them? And so, here we are with a text whose prophetic vision sees the wonder and glory of Jesus.

The Glory Returns

(43:1-12)

Now that sacred space has been defined and described, the glorious presence of God may return.

Its Dazzling Approach

(v.1-5)

The glory of God is seen approaching from the east just as it had left. This is a mighty return. The presence of God is coming in His movable throne, His awesome chariot as was seen at Chebar and at Jerusalem. The brightness of His coming causes the earth to glow and shine.

And here is the humble response as we have seen all through the book of Ezekiel and all through the Bible – he falls on his face and bows low before the glory of the Lord. The glory passes by and enters the inner court and then fills the Temple.

Its Majestic Announcement

(v.6-9)

Out of the glory filling the Temple comes the voice of God. He announces that this will be the eternal dwelling place of God. No more forever will His great holy dwelling be defiled. He alone will be recognized as the King, for their kings may no longer erect memorials (or possibly residences) next to the Holy Place. God claims exclusive loyalty and fealty.

Its Shaping Aim

(v.10-12)

Further, God tells us the reason, the purpose for this description of this sacred space. Ezekiel is to give all the detail so that Israel will know how unholy they have been and be ashamed. This oracle is a teaching and prophetic tool to bring about conviction, contrition and confession over their sin. Further, it is also designed to bring about a commitment to covenant keeping loyalty to God, to holy obedience to the glorious Presence among them.

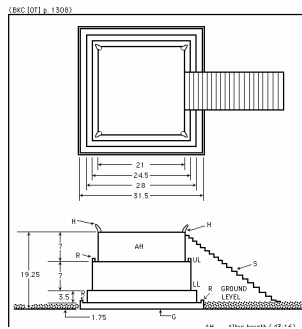
The Altar Restoration

(43:13-27)

If we have a gloriously holy God and a people who have violated that holiness and cannot approach the Holy One or His Holy dwelling (v.12), then a way is needed to deal with that sin so that the gates are full of people streaming in. So God provided the altar (which every gate points to and opens on.)

Its Measured Proportions

(v.13-17)



These verses give us the design and dimensions of the Altar. It is a place of sacrifice. This altar is typical of the period having a stepped, ziggurat style with horns on the corners, a large hearth and steps. It is almost 17 ½ feet high and 31 ½ feet around its base. It is different from all previous in that its steps lead up from the east. Thus, a priest offering the sacrifice is *never* facing east, a rebuke in itself to the idolatry of the Hebrews, even in the midst of Temple Worship!

Its Ritual Purification

(v.18-26)

The sacrifices to consecrate the altar are as follows:

Day 1) Bull of the Sin Offering - put blood on: the four horns, the corners of the ledge and rim around it. Then burn the bull in the appointed place of the temple.

Day 2) Cleanse the altar in the same way as the bull along with:

- A young goat (kid) for a sin offering
- A young bull for a burnt offering with salt
- A young ram for a burnt offering with salt

Day 3-7) Do the same as day 2 to make atonement for the altar, purify and consecrate it.

Once the altar has been sanctified and consecrated, the priests can now offer the people's burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar.

Its Godward Purpose

(v.26b)

The purpose and effect of these offerings is then given. The Lord will accept His people through them. In the phrase, "I will accept you", we see this is addressed first and primarily to the exiles. The sacrifices properly offered on a consecrated altar propitiate God and bring reconciliation so that an unholy people may be accepted. Here, in the Old Covenant economy, this is a pedagogical tool to teach that sin demands payment, a holy, set-apart sacrifice.

Therefore, having Hebrews as an interpretative lens that tells us that (1) Old Covenant sacrifices only pointed to a greater Redeemer Sacrifice and since (2) that final Redeemer Sacrifice Priest has come, there will be no more sacrifice – period. So, this must point to Jesus, our great substitutionary sacrifice on the altar of Calvary where the work is finished forever, signified by His resurrection and His final being seated in the heavenlies.

The Access Restrictions**(44:1-14)**

Because the rulers of the people were instrumental in leading them astray from God into idolatry and wickedness, then these restrictions and regulations throughout the rest of this oracle are placed on them. The lesson here is that the prince is just that – he may rule, but he is always to be under the rule of God.

For the Prince**(v.1-3)**

Now that God has entered the eastern gate, it is shut permanently. The heavenly Regent has entered through that gate and no other may. But the earthly prince may come into that gate through the vestibule and there eat the fellowship bread before the Lord.

Because of Pollution**(v.4-8)**

God does not leave them to wonder about the restrictions on access being placed on them. Out of His Holy Place and His infilling Glory He reminds of the absolute demands for the holiness of His sacred space. He charges them and indicts them for profaning it by not marking out believers from unbelievers. The place of God's dwelling is to be set aside for believers alone. There is a great responsibility that God's people maintain the boundary between the "foreigner", that is the uncircumcised in heart and the believer, those whose hearts are circumcised and transformed by the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

For the People**(v.9-14)**

There are access restrictions placed on two groups of people. The foreigners who are uncircumcised in heart and body may not enter the sanctuary. The place of God's dwelling is forbidden to them. Thus the holy place of God's residence is protected from unbelieving and pagan pollutions.

The former priestly lines are also restricted in their own access to the place and performance of Temple ministry. Verses 10-12 describe the reasons for their restriction. They encouraged Israel's idolatry in the very pursuit of their priestly ministry. Instead of pointing people to the worship of the Creator, they pointed people to the worship of creation and creature. So their right to access the very holy of holies and minister to God there is revoked, but they are allowed a more limited ministry to the Temple facilities.

The Priests Requirements**(44:15-31)**

Ezekiel now defines the who and what of priestly ministry that will be pleasing to the Lord.

In their Identification**(v.15-16)**

The Levites who were faithful to Yahweh when all of Israel went astray shall be the priests. These are known as the "sons of Zadok," and they will offer to the Lord the fat and the blood of the sacrifices. They will stand before the Lord and enter His sanctuary to come near to the Lord and minister to Him. Ezekiel lists several laws and ordinances which concern the priests:

In their Distinctives

(v.17-31)

The true priests ministering before the Lord are to be distinct and separate – this defines the boundaries of their obedience and holiness. Many of these are re-statements of the Mosaic Law. Where they are not, they are more strict.

- They shall wear linen garments (turbans on their heads and trousers on their bodies) when entering the inner sanctuary, wearing no wool or anything causing them to sweat. Then they shall leave these garments in the holy chambers when leaving to sanctify the people.
- They shall keep their hair well trimmed (not shaved or long).
- They shall not drink wine when entering the inner court, thus ministering before the Lord with a clear mind.
- They shall not have a wife who is divorced or widowed (unless she is a widow of a priest), but take virgins of Hebrew descent thus protecting the purity of the Levitical line and family of Zadok.
- They shall teach people the difference between the holy and unholy and discern between the clean and unclean. The teaching ministry of the priesthood is reinforced. Sadly, during the exile this was handed over in the synagogue to what became the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees.
- They shall stand as judges in controversy to deal with the questions of righteousness and obedience in daily life. This responsibility is being shifted from the elders of the city to the priests before the Lord.
- They shall not defile themselves by coming near a dead person, (except for father, mother, son or daughter, brother or unmarried sister). After he is cleansed, count 7 days and offer a sin offering for him in the sanctuary and then he may continue to minister before the Lord.
- They shall have no land possession in Israel "for I, the Lord, am their possession."
- They shall eat the grain, sin, and trespass offering. Every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs.
- They shall receive the best of every sacrifice or firstfruits offering. The effect of these two regulations is to provide vocational support for their work of ministry in the Temple.
- They shall not eat any bird or beast that died naturally or was torn by wild animals. Thus they may not function as scavengers.

The impression to be made on the mind of the OT Israelite in exile was that they had seriously failed before the Lord – they had polluted the Temple, disqualified all but one Levitical family from sacred service and had failed to recognize the sanctified and sacred demands made of those who would minister in the Lord's presence. Several times in this large text this lesson is driven home. I am convinced that this is the point of this last oracle. This is the final warning to God's people in exile that when they return they had better keep the covenant and obey God. If they are concerned about the departure of the glory of God and the de-

struction of the Temple and city, then they had better be even more concerned for holiness in covenant keeping. Yet, Nehemiah and Ezra both relate the almost immediate and sad failure of Israel to do this.

The Portions Redistributed

(45:1-9)

The distribution of the land begins with the locating of the sacred space, the Temple complex. The idea here is to show the centrality of God's dwelling and the important, but subservient place of the prince. This reverses the order of Solomon's Temple. David and Solomon's house was already built and then the Temple was located in the city. Returning to the tabernacle formulae, the Temple is located at the center surrounded by its attendants and governance with the people in properly arrayed and settled in their place.

The arrangement of this allotment is given now; its location is not given until chapter 48. That is because we are still in the section where sacred space is being marked off in order to convict the exiles of their sins.

The Place for the Temple

(v.1-5)

This way of allotting the land is a massive change from Solomon's arrangement where the Temple is in the city. That is no longer true. There is now a holy district or territory that is divided in half. One section is for the Levites who minister before the Lord and in the very center is a 500 cubit square to place the Temple complex in surrounded by a 50 cubit space where no one may live. The other section of this district is set aside for the rest of the Levites, their homes and farms. But none of the Levites own the land in this district, this is God's land.

The Land for the City

(v.6)

A section is allocated for the city. It is as wide but half as small as each of the Levitical districts. This is public land in that it belongs to the people and every shall have access to it.

The Allotment for the Prince

(v.7-9)

On both sides of the holy district for as long as it is wide, the prince is given his land. His land is divided by the holy and city districts. Verse 8 tells us why this is so – he must no longer oppress the people. This is highlighted by the startling and abrupt command in verse 9. The kings must be under law and they are responsible to execute the law. They are subservient to the Lord and His rule.

The most important thing to note here is that it is God who makes this allotment. The prince receives what he is given – it is not his place to make an allotment for the Temple nor to increase the size of his allotment. God is the dispensing patron and overlord.

Secondly, I want to emphasize again that at this point, the purpose of the Lord is being served. That is, these districts are being allocated in order to remind the priests, the people and the kings that they have sinned against God, defiling and desecrating what God had given them. This new division of the land points them to the Lordship of Yahweh and His holiness as the foundation of godly community.

The Sacrificial Regulations

(45:9-46:24)

This next section of the oracle centers Ezekiel as the new Moses for Israel. While the Old Covenant relationship with God is maintained, the application of it and the laws of its worship and ministers are clearly different.

In its Standards

(v.10-12)

Since the sacrifices and gifts are to be measured out, there must be a just and common standard among the people. The immediate aim of this is in reference to the sacrifices. However, there is a long term benefit for the economics of the kingdom. Here a just and objective standard is set for wet and dry measurement. Further, the denominations of currency and their relationship to one another in value is established.

For the Prince

(v.13-17)

The prince is to both receive these gifts from the people as a tax and he is obliged to provide sacrifices and offerings to the Lord for the people out of this gratuity. He is responsible to provide the sacrifices for the people. "He shall provide" is the repeated responsibility. What a great thing it is that even here in the Ezeke-
lian economy and sacrificial regulations, the sacrifice is provided by the King. This is stunning in its anticipation of the great provision by God of His Son for our redemption.

In the Sacrifices

(45:18-46:15)

Ezekiel is shown the offerings and feasts, which is governed by the those outlined in Leviticus 23. The Feasts of the Lord were the very heart and soul of Israel's worship system. Here is a list of the days that Ezekiel specifically mentions to honor with special sacrifices and worship.

- *1ST DAY OF 1ST MONTH:* Cleanse the Sanctuary with a young bull. The priest puts the sin offering blood on: temple doorposts, 4 corners of altar, and gateposts of the inner court gateways.
- *7TH DAY OF THE 1ST MONTH:* Do the same as day one above for everyone who has sinned unintentionally. This will make atonement for the temple.
- *PASSOVER:* on the 14th day of the 1st month prepare a bull for a sin offering.
- *FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD:* from the 15th-21st of the 1st month prepare each day 7 bulls and 7 rams for a burnt offering and a kid of the goats for a sin offering. And prepare a grain offering with the oil for each bull and each ram.
- *FEAST OF TABERNACLES:* from the 15th-21st of the 7th month do the same sacrifices and offerings as the Feast of Unleavened bread.
- *SABBATH:* Once a week on the Sabbath the prince shall offer:
 - 6 lambs: with the grain offering as much as desired.
 - 1 ram: with the grain offering and the oil.
 - The inner court east gate will be shut all week long except on the Sabbath when it will be opened for the prince to enter and stand in the vestibule by the

gatepost. The priests will prepare the required burnt offering and sin offering for the prince who will worship at this gate every Sabbath, and then the gate will remain open for the rest of the day. The people of Israel shall worship the Lord at the entrance of the east gateway on this Sabbath day.

- *NEW MOON*: Once per month at the beginning of each month (at the new moon) the prince shall offer:
 - 1 young bull: with the grain offering and oil.
 - 6 lambs: with the grain offering as much as desired and the oil.
 - 1 ram: with the grain offering and oil.
 - And the people shall worship like they do on the Sabbath day.
- *Festivals & Appointed Feast Days*:
 - for bulls: the grain offering is 1 ephah with the oil.
 - for lambs: the grain offering is as much as desired with the oil.
 - for rams: the grain offering is 1 ephah with the oil.
 - and the people shall worship like they do on the Sabbath day.
- *VOLUNTARY OFFERINGS*: The prince may offer voluntary burnt or peace offerings whenever he desires. The east gate will be open for him during the sacrifice and then shut when he is done. The offerings will be prepared just like on the Sabbath day.
- *DAILY MORNING SACRIFICE*: Every morning a burnt offering shall be prepared "as a perpetual ordinance" which includes:
 - 1 one year old lamb: with 1/6th of a ephah of grain offering and 1/3rd of a hin of oil to moisten the flour.

In the Inheritance

(46:16-18)

Now, still addressing the prince, regulations concerning the passing on of an inheritance is given. Inheritance gifts to sons are permanent and remain in the sons family. Inheritance gifts to a servant are temporary, lasting only until the next Jubilee and then it shall revert to the prince or his main heir. The prince may neither receive nor take an inheritance from the people or their property.

What is the point here? The Kings of Israel had been notorious for the way they confiscated and handed down properties. Ahab and Jezebel's handling of Naboth's vineyard is a prime example of the kingly abuse of power. But no longer – he is given his land, he may pass it down, but he may own no other than what was allotted him by God.

In the Preparation

(v.19-24)

Finally, the sacredness of the offerings is highlighted by returning to the Temple compound and pointing to two separate sets of kitchens. There is one set at the end of the three-tiered priest's chambers. This is where the guilt, sin and grain offerings are boiled or baked. This prevents the carrying of the holy sacrifice out into the outer court.

Second, in each corner of the outer wall, there is a kitchen for the preparation of the people's sacrifices. These four kitchens are for the people so that they can

prepare their sacrifices without having to enter the grounds reserved for the priests.

Conclusion

I see several important lessons for us today.

We must be a holy people.

There is no escaping the massive and majestic lesson here. Where God dwells, there must be holiness. While we do not want to become legalistic, we still must uphold the standard of God in holiness in every area of life.

We are vulnerable to dishonoring God.

I am reminded again and again that, like Israel, we must take heed in our pride lest we fall. We must know our hearts, our wickedness, our proneness to wander, to value lesser things and to fail to be sanctified and righteous in every area of life.

We must prize the glory of God.

The departure and the arrival of the God's glory must stir our imagination and fuel our passion for Him. But we are so dazzled by so many bright and flickering neon lights that we are little stunned by the marvelous beauty of our glorious God.

We must hold up the cross, the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus.

The point of having our sin exposed is to awaken our need of Jesus in His death, resurrection and ascended rule. God has provided the Lamb. Let us bow to the Lion. All praise to Jesus, our Redeemer and Rule.

We look forward in hope to the consummation of all things.

Whether literal or pedagogical or both, I am vibrating with anticipation when our great King comes. We will see Him and behold His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Until that day, let us offer as His spiritual Temple and Priests sacrifices pleasing to Him.

Notes

Where Are We Going?

Ezekiel 47:1 – 48:35

Introduction Are we there yet?! How much longer?! I'm bored! How long has it been?! I've gotta go to the bathroom!! As we approach vacation season, these announcements are frequently echoed in many a family vehicle. We often feel this same impatience in our life's journey. Looking for relief from misery, boredom, loneliness, and pain, we desire something more, something different. Couldn't today be a day of spiritual breakthrough? Couldn't tomorrow be one of new beginning? Couldn't my burden be lifted and a vision of glory rush in to fill my sense of emptiness and exhaustion? Could my fears really be changed to victory?

But instead we walk on, plodding mercilessly forward. We tread through this often barren desert-like life. We continue on with this caravan over this wasteland without any apparent oasis in sight! Our Bible studies and preaching can have this character as well. What's the big idea? What's the purpose of all this babbling? Are we close yet?!

We began this expedition into Ezekiel with a sermon from I Peter 2:9-11. We were confronted with the idea that as God's chosen people we are aliens and strangers in this world, never belonging, never content. We are exiles longing for home. In Hebrews we find a similar idea in chapter 11, verses 8-10 where Abraham is described as wandering, looking for a city. He could have settled in cities. It wasn't that cities were unavailable or yet to be discovered or built. But the city he longed for was designed and built by God. Why would he search for such a place? What would be so special about this type of dwelling that one would be willing to continue to wander, to live in tents and to never call a place "home?"

I laughed at Russ when he announced he was preaching through Ezekiel. I had my own fears of Ezekiel, its strange images, strange stories, strange lessons how can anyone make real sense of its message? Someone even asked Russ if he had planned on committing pulpit suicide! But we found at the end of this journey, a small excursion to help us on the greater journey of our lives, a clear view of the gospel, the power to change our lives.

We saw God's glory, His wonder, His splendor. We were able to have a glimpse of the power of His throne and its attendants. We were appalled at the representation of rebellion. We were sickened at the portrayal of sin without its coverings, without its trappings to make it socially acceptable. We couldn't leave without its shame being heaped upon our own consciences. But to top this off, we then heard clearly the pronouncement of judgment, of God's righteousness justice being carried out cleanly, perfectly with surgical precision. A precision more exact than anything the U.S. military can muster. Then we saw the grace of God explode upon us in images of restoration and revival. God himself builds his temple and erects his city for those whom He calls his own. All of this so that Ezekiel's readers would know, and have no doubt, that He and He alone is God.

So how does Ezekiel bring all this to closure? How do these last chapters close this journey and does it give us any power in our lives' journeys? Let's look at these last two chapters to excavate its message and bring to conclusion this fascinating and exhilaration journey through Ezekiel.

Living Water Project

(47: 1-12)

We need to read these words with the same open-mindedness that we read other images found in this book. These are word pictures, much like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics where the message is conveyed in symbols rather than letters and words. The key to interpreting these images is not left to our imagination. We do not have to search for some hidden clues to give us some coded meaning. The New Testament gives us often amazingly clear figures to grasp the meaning. Ezekiel has just finished displaying the wonder of reclamation and restoration by exposing us to images of a renewed Temple and temple worship. These images we clearly recognize as being fulfilled in Christ, our perfect sacrifice and the interface where God and his people can be reconciled. We now transition to an image of a river that flows from the temple, what could this mean for God's people in God's program?

The Exit of the River

(v.1-3)

Instead of the brazen Sea on Solomon's temple the image is transformed into a moving river. The Sea was intended for cleansing, literally and symbolically. It stood before the door to the temple after the altar. The differences are not subtle. The water is alive, it is moving. It has "power" in and of itself. It is moving outward from God's presence, toward the people to meet them and their situations and difficulties. It finds its exit from the temple itself and derived from the ministry and power it represented.

The Expanse of the River

(v.4-6)

These verses demonstrate the amazing growth of the river as it leaves the temple. At first perhaps a small trickle, not much to call a river, but eventually becomes an expanse that cannot be crossed. This growing of this stream is in itself a wonder with meaning so that the guide makes sure that Ezekiel recognizes what he has seen.

The Effect of the River

(v.7-12)

Next, we are told what would be the effects of this flood. It would refresh the desert, bring trees of abundant fruit and be teeming with fish. The fruit from the trees would bring healing and satisfaction to their weariness and pain.

For the exiles hearing this from Ezekiel there would be hope of newness, freshness and plenty. They would have been reminded of the rivers flowing from the heart of Eden the garden of God. They would remember the barrenness of the desert of their homeland as it was laid desolate by its Babylonian invaders. They would be mindful of the expanse of desert that lie between their location and the glories that could only be found "at home." And again they would see the source of their blessing as cen-

tered in the God of the Temple who meets with them as they are cleansed through its ministries. They can only meet with God in the context of atonement and washing. But flowing from that ministry are the blessings of abundance and healing. This healing is not just from the effects of sin but from the rebellion and sin itself.

Jesus himself used this water picture many times. In John 4:7-14 he points to himself as the source of living water that will eternally quench her thirst.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Later in John 7 we see Jesus' own interpretation of this metaphor. (Read John 7:37-39)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The work of the Holy Spirit, growing, always satisfying is the reality behind this image of water. It has its source in God, through the Son who makes our communion with the Father possible and is perpetuated by our own lives and works.

And the apostle John continues this theme by recording his vision of the consummation a new image of a river in the city of glory in Revelation 22 1-5.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Homeland Security

(47:13 – 48:29)

The exiles are now given a vision of their promised land and inheritance. They are shown the home to which they will return. The borders and sense of "division" capture the same images that Moses was given as to the allotment of the land, images that they would easily understand.

The Dimensions of the Land

(47:13-20)

The land they would be possessing has essentially the same borders and limits as that promised to Abraham. It is the nearly the same as promised to the Israelites by Moses, but is more extensive than ever actually possessed by the nation.

The Division of the Land

(47: 21- 48: 29)

This section after an introduction found in verses 21-23 of chapter 47, is arranged in symmetry, a chiasmic structure with the position of the city and temple shown in its center. The land is complete with each tribe included and also is extended to “aliens” who have joined in the true worship of God in this setting.

The exiles again would have been excited to hear of the restoration of their land to the glory that was promised to them through the Patriarchs. The land represented their identity, their home. We understand this even today when we ask someone where they are from. Possession of the land for the Israelite amounted to a completion or satisfaction of a debt. It signified an end to wandering, strife and turmoil.

Jesus sees this “rest” as having its fulfillment in himself. In Matthew 11: 28 he announces for all who are weary to come to him for rest. The author of Hebrews elaborates on this as well in chapter 4:1-11:

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We must see this “land” as inheritance as our inheritance that we find in Christ as our redeemer and king.

Sights of the City

(48:30-35)

These last few verses return our thoughts to that of this great city. This is in a very real sense a strange way to end this collection of oracles, but yet is quite appropriate. We see in this final description a concluding sense of perfection.

Its Perfect Symmetry

(v.30-34)

The first things we are pointed to are the exit gates of the city and their perfect symmetry and proportion. We have been impressed with the plan and patterns of this great city all along and even the final description details the evenness and solidness of this design.

Its Perfect Name

(v.35)

But the book ends with this final statement regarding the name of the city. Remember that in antiquity the name of a place or person was often connected to some meaning. It was a connection to some additional reality about a place. The patriarchs often named towns and locations by the events that occurred there. So it is not to be taken lightly that this city has a name. This name is special, it describes the purpose and reality of the city.

The exiles would have been relieved to hear the name of this special city of God's ministry. Jesus came to bring us the good things we already are now experiencing. We do not have access to God and purity of conscience through the old ways of external rituals and sacred tents or temples. Instead we are His people because of who Christ is and what He has done. Let's expand on this image a bit further as well.

Hebrews 11:8-10 speaks of Abraham's journey for a city:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Notice the themes of inheritance, promise, and foreign. But he looked for a city. He looked for a city that was being built by God. Keep in mind that the idea of city is not so much the buildings and structures as such but is the people and community that a "city" represents. It is a particular group of people, identified by common protection, government and place. When we turn to another passage we see more in this image.

I Peter 2:4-10 also speaks of a special city:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
 a cornerstone chosen and precious,
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."
 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,
 The stone that the builders rejected
 has become the cornerstone,"¹
 and

A stone of stumbling,
 and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his

marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter is speaking of a stone in the city of Zion laid as the cornerstone. The city built by God. A city built of living stones of whom the corner, the foundation, the ground, the substance without which the building fails and crumbles is Jesus himself. But verse 9 goes on and reinforces the idea that this city is one of people, now God's own people, even though, as verse 10 points out we were not his people, we have become his people because of his mercy.

But let's look at one further glorious text in Revelation 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. *(This is from Ezekiel 11:20)* He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

This city is also called "the bride" in verse 2 (and in verses 9,10). But also note the voice, "the dwelling of God is with man!" God is there! This city, these people, are now his people, they now will perfectly know him as their God. The chapter goes on and elaborates on its perfection in symmetry and glory. But the glory of the city, (of the people) is because God is there!

Conclusion

Let me bring this to some conclusions.

Ezekiel ends where he has been taking us all along. We will know that “I am the Lord” that Yahweh is the ruler, the victor, “the Lord.” We truly know Him when we are in perfect relationship with Him, in perfect communion with him, when we can be called “his people.”

At the beginning of this sermon we asserted that Ezekiel is a gospel, a presentation of the good news, indeed even the good news found in Christ. Early in the text we heard oracles of judgment. We heard messages of justice, power, and vengeance. All of this was so that we would know that “he was the Lord.” Let’s look at Ezekiel 5:13 to support this idea:

“Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the LORD—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them. Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the LORD, I have spoken—when I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

And a cursory glance at Ezekiel 36 supports the change that God’s mercy and grace brings about. Verse 23, “I will vindicate my name”, verses 25,26, “I will cleanse you, I will give you a new heart.” And it continues in verses 27,28 “I will cause you to walk in my statutes...and dwell in the land...be my people and I will be your God.”

Can we find faith to trust in Christ as our all in all? Are we looking to him and him alone for the power to walk in him in his statutes? Are we filled with the vision of his glory that gives us the hope to endure and the strength to persevere?

Christ is our temple and atonement before God, our only access to this relationship. Christ is our possession and our hope! He is where we are going! He is what enables us to be his temple! He is how we are placed in his “city” as his people!

Are you trusting him each day for the security that he gives? Do you know that he is the Lord?

Are you trusting him each day for the strength that he gives to run the race, face the obstacles and find the victory in life’s trials? Do you know that he is the Lord?

Are you trusting him for the grace to change your rebellious heart, to melt it and bring you to him for an inheritance that is forever, perfect, glorious and in the presence of our wonderful and merciful God? Do you know that he is the Lord? The wonder will be that God himself is there!

