

Ezek. 20:1 – 32:32

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G. Ezek. 20:1 – 22:31

1. Rebuke of Inquiring Elders - 20:1-32

a. Elders of Israel come to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. They want to be able to engage in idolatrous worship like the other nations (v. 32), so God will not permit them to inquire of him. Instead, he tells Ezekiel to rebuke them. (It is not mentioned whether God "cut them off" as promised in 14:8. It is possible that there is a distinction between their idolatry and that referenced in 14:4, 7; the latter may have been a secret practice rather than simply in the heart.)

b. Ezekiel rebukes them by rehearsing Israel's dismal love affair with idols.

(1) They did not forsake their idols when God promised to bring them out of Egypt (vv. 7-8). The O.T. does not elsewhere record that the Israelites were commanded to forsake Egypt's idols while still in Egypt, but it is clear that they had adopted Egyptian worship practices (e.g., Ex. 20:4-5, 23, 32:1-8; Josh. 24:14). Rather than destroy them in Egypt for their rebellion, God brought them out to keep his name from being profaned among the nations. God did not want their bondage to be misconstrued as a demonstration of his inadequacies.

(2) After the exodus and the establishment of God's covenant at Mt. Sinai, the people rebelled against God's laws because their hearts were devoted to their idols (v. 16b). This was a fountainhead of disobedience because it relativized the supremacy of God. God could rightfully have destroyed them all, but he decided out of pity and for the sake of his name simply to prevent the first generation from entering the Promised Land.

(3) The second generation also rebelled, which included setting their eyes on their ancestors' idols (v. 24; see, Numbers 25), and God again chose not to destroy them for the sake of his name. He did, however, swear to them in the wilderness that after bringing them into the land he would scatter them among the nations (Deut. 4:25-28). He brought them into the land and then gave them opportunity to fill up the cup of their sin in the form of immoral ordinances and practices brought to them by pagans.

(4) In Canaan they went idol crazy (vv. 28-29).

c. God shames them by asking if they (house of Israel) will go on defiling themselves in the manner of their ancestors. He flat tells them that he will not be consulted by such people, and he will never relent by permitting idolatrous worship (vv. 30-32).

2. A New Exodus: Restoration After Exile - 20:33-44

a. By his power, God is going to free the captives from their bondage and lead them through the Syro-Arabian wilderness back to Canaan. Those who return will be those of true faith, those who have been affected enough by their chastisement to endure the pain of relocation and the hardship of rebuilding the nation. (Note the reference to "covenant" in v. 37 is debatable - see RSV, REB, Zimmerli).

b. Vv. 39-40 are a call to choose. If they will not listen to God, then go and serve idols from now on, for God is weary of their idolatry.

c. He is going to reestablish the nation of Israel, and on Mt. Zion they will worship him properly, not idolatrously. The mercy of God's restoration will profoundly humble them.

3. Forest Fire and Sword - 20:45 - 21:7

a. Ezekiel preaches against the forest of the South, declaring that God will totally consume it by fire. His audience apparently accused him of preaching in a way that was too obscure or complicated to be understood (20:45-49). God then supplements the revelation to make the allegory plain.

b. The Babylonians will attack Judah from north to south, following the roads of the Fertile Crescent. Throughout the entire land, from north to south, the righteous and the wicked will be killed and exiled (20:1-5). This will be a *total* conquest and exile. As we said regarding chapter 18, righteous members of wicked groups are not exempt from suffering when God judges the group. Though God is not punishing them, and their eternal lives are secure, they are still affected by the judgment.

c. Ezekiel is to groan and sigh, and when people ask what he is doing, he is to tell them that they will groan in this fashion when the terrible news of Jerusalem's destruction arrives.

4. The Sword - 21:8-32

a. These oracles, along with the explanatory revelation of vv. 1-7, are grouped together because they all involve a sword. Vv. 8-17 speak of God's sharp, polished sword and make clear that warfare is coming on the Judah, and it will result in widespread bloodshed for the nation.

b. In vv. 18-27 Ezekiel depicts a road going from Babylon to Canaan with a marked fork: one road leads to Jerusalem and the other to Rabbah (the Ammonites conspired with Judah against Babylonia).

(1) He does this because it symbolizes the king of Babylon deciding which city to attack first. He engages several common means of divination, and Jerusalem is selected. V. 24 again makes clear that this is judgment for Israel's constant and severe sins against the Lord.

(2) Verses 25-27 indicate that Zedekiah will be stripped of his kingship. The status quo in Jerusalem will be turned upside down, and the city will be reduced to rubble. The kingship removed in this invasion will be restored only when Israel's rightful king is given the crown by God himself. This king, further portrayed in chapter 37ff., is the Davidic Messiah, not merely another Judean monarch.

c. Verses 28-32 are a prophecy against Ammonites. Though Nebuchadnezzar will first come against Judah, Israel's longtime enemy will not escape his wrath. Ammon will be invaded and conquered, which occurred in 581 B.C. Unlike Israel, they have no promise of restoration; their fate is to fade from world history, which is what happened.

5. Jerusalem the Bloody - 22:1-31

a. Verses 1-16 catalog the city's sins for which God is going to disperse them. They include shedding innocent blood, idolatry, abuse of power by the leaders, dishonoring parents, oppression of aliens, mistreatment of the fatherless and the widow, usury, and a variety of cultic and sexual sins. The "forgot the Lord" (v. 12c), meaning they rejected him, and now he will reject them.

b. In verses 17-22 Ezekiel employs the metaphorical language of a metal refining furnace to indicate the destruction coming on them in Jerusalem. Because they have become like worthless metals, they are going to be treated like metal; they will be gathered in Jerusalem, the furnace, and melted by the Babylonians withering siege. God's people cannot cling to false hopes (in this case of Jerusalem surviving).

c. Judah is destined for cursing (drought) on the day of its judgment (v. 24), and its leaders are guilty for helping it along the path.

(1) The kings have devoured the people in their quest for wealth (v. 25). This is probably a reference to excessive taxes. The king would foreclose on those unable to pay, putting the heads of households in debtors' prisons where they died, leaving their wives widowed.

(2) The priests have failed to teach the people what the Law required and thus failed to keep the nation cultically and ethically pure (v. 26).

(3) The government officials have become corrupt, seeking to make money for themselves rather than to administer justice (v. 27).

(4) The reputed prophets have covered up such sins with false prophecies rather than condemning them (v. 28).

(5) The prominent landowners have acted like the kings and officials. They used their power to help themselves at the expense of the poor and needy (v. 29).

(6) God searched for someone to fortify the city, someone to stand in the way of his entering to destroy it, but he found none (v. 30). This is hyperbole; after all, Jeremiah and Baruch were there. It means that the righteous were so few that the net effect on the city was as if no one cared about God's will. Therefore, God's judgment is coming (v. 31).

H. Ezek. 23:1 - 24:27

1. Two Adulterous Sisters - 23:1-49

a. Two sisters, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem), engaged in prostitution in Egypt (vv. 1-4). As we noted last week, the Israelites worshipped Egyptian idols, both in Egypt and afterward.

b. By the mid-eighth century B.C., Samaria (Israel) pursued relations with the Assyrians (Hos. 5:13). King Menahem, for example, thought that submitting to the powerful Assyrians was the best way to protect his nation and to insure his own rulership (2 Ki. 15:19-20), and the people acquiesced because they were impressed by the Assyrians' wealth, culture, and religion. Therefore, God gave them over to their Assyrian lover, who brutalized them (vv. 5-10).

c. Jerusalem (Judah) was not fazed by Israel's fate (vv. 11-35).

(1) Under King Ahaz, it too sold itself to the Assyrians in hope of gaining their favor (2 Ki. 16:7-8). Naturally, the religion of their new masters proliferated (e.g., 2 Ki. 16:10-18).

(2) As the Babylonians were rising in power, Judah was impressed and sent envoys to win her favor. Perhaps this is why Josiah fought to prevent the Egyptians from joining forces with the Assyrians against the Babylonians in 609 B.C. As foretold by Isaiah nearly a century earlier, the attempt to win Babylonia as an ally would not deliver them (2 Ki. 20:12-18; Isaiah 39). After Babylonia "responded" to Judah's overtures, Judah became disgusted with her (since she wasn't what Judah had in mind - 2 Ki. 24:1, 10-17). She then turned to Egypt for deliverance!

(3) God is going to hand Judah over to all her lovers, except they will come as rapists, invading and conquering the land. Jerusalem is going to face the ruin and desolation of her sister Samaria.

d. The crimes and judgment of the cities are restated in vv. 36-49.

e. Applications

(1) The history of Israel and Judah was characterized by a willingness to "sell out" or to compromise in order to win the favor of those nations which appeared most able to benefit them. They were more willing to trust what they could see. We are tempted to compromise to win or to maintain the favor of our employer, our peer group, or even our families.

(2) Note v. 39. We have an amazing capacity for hypocrisy. We can cheat or steal all day at work or spend the day watching porno movies and then come sing praises to the Lord. This is disgusting to the Lord (see, Prov. 15:8; Amos 5:21-24).

(3) Note v. 35. To reject God is to ensure disaster. You may fool yourself into thinking that you can do so without consequences, but when the storm of judgment comes, you will know otherwise (see, Mat. 7:24-27).

2. The Parable of the Cooking Pot - 24:1-14

a. On the day Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem (January 588 B.C.), Ezekiel is told to take a pot, fill it with water, throw in choice pieces of meat, and bring it to a boil (vv. 1-5). Verses 9-10 indicate that the fire is to be large and the meat is to be cooked so well that the bones are charred. According to v. 6, he is to empty the pot piece by piece, without casting lots for them. He is then to put the empty pot back on the fire until it glows red hot.

b. This is obviously about what God has begun to do with the siege of Nebuchadnezzar. The pot, which has so far resisted purification, is Jerusalem, the city of bloodshed. The choice meat represents the inhabitants who saw themselves as the desirable part, the part that would not be thrown out (i.e., that would remain in Jerusalem - see, 11:3-12). They will be charred by the heat of God's wrath, and the survivors will indeed be removed indiscriminately (vv. 10, 6). The city itself will continue to "suffer" after the exile (being decimated) as God seeks to burn off its impurities.

c. Application - We must guard against the false notion that our favor with God will immunize us from judgment if we rebel. If we rebel, if we reject God, we will lose his favor. As indicated in Ezek. 18:24, when the righteous/faithful cease to be so, their prior righteousness will not save them. See, Heb. 10:26-31.

3. Ezekiel's Wife Dies - 24:15-27

a. God informs Ezekiel that he is going to take his beloved wife's life and commands Ezekiel not to engage in any of the customary actions of mourning. That day Ezekiel spoke to the people, either about his wife's impending death or as though nothing was amiss, and that night his wife died.

b. Ezekiel complied with God's command not to publicly mourn his wife's death, and the people naturally wanted to know the significance of this very unusual action.

c. The meaning is that God is about to destroy his holy city, the pride of the exiles, and to put to death many of its inhabitants. Just as Ezekiel did not publicly mourn his wife's passing, neither will the exiles publicly mourn Jerusalem's destruction, lest it expose the depth of their sympathy for Babylonia's enemy (note that they will pine away and groan to one another). Fulfillment of this prophecy will be another sign that the One for whom Ezekiel speaks is the Sovereign Lord.

d. God lets Ezekiel know that he will be rendered unable to speak for some period of time until a messenger arrives from Jerusalem with news of the city's fall. This silence is to be a sign to the exiles that the matter is closed, that God is now carrying out his promised destruction. This was fulfilled in 33:21-22.

II. Oracles Against the Nations - 25:1 - 32:32

GENERAL COMMENTS

Chapters 25-32 form the second major division of the book. The first 24 chapters were concerned primarily with prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem. These eight chapters are oracles against foreign nations. God is not some local deity whose power is geographically limited. He is the Lord of all!

The fact God is judging Judah does not mean that he has taken up the cause of her enemies. He is not judging Judah in order to bless Ammon or Moab or Edom. On the contrary, these countries that hated Israel and her God are likewise going to feel his wrath. The very fact their hostility toward Israel is a key reason for their condemnation shows that, despite her outrageous rebellion, God has not given up on Israel; he is still her defender (see, Gen. 12:3). This divine commitment points to a promising future, a hope made explicit in 28:25-26.

Babylonia is noticeably absent from those slated for wrath, but this is probably due to the fact the nations discussed are limited to those who will experience God's wrath at the hands of the Babylonians. Other prophets (e.g., Hab. 2:6 - 3:15) make clear that Babylonia will also suffer God's wrath.

A. Ezek. 25:1-17 – Prophecies Against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia

B. Ezek. 26:1 - 28:26 – Prophecies Against Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) represented by its leading cities of Tyre and Sidon. The bulk of this (26:1 - 28:19) is directed toward Tyre.

C. Ezek. 29:1 - 32:32 – Prophecies Against Egypt