

EZEK. 8:1 - 19:14

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D. Ezek. 8:1 – 11:25

1. A Tour of the Temple - 8:1-18

a. Fourteen months after his initial vision, Ezekiel is given a vision while sitting in his home in Tel Abib with the community leaders who had undoubtedly come to inquire of the Lord. He has a vision in which he is taken to Jerusalem.

b. Outside the north gate of the inner court that surrounds the temple, Ezekiel sees an idol, quite possibly an image of Asherah, the mother-goddess of the Canaanite pantheon (having reappeared after Josiah's reformation - see, 2 Ki. 21:7). Though God's glory was still present in the Temple, he tells Ezekiel (v. 6) that this idolatry is driving him away.

(1) There is only room for one God in God's temple. He will not share his place of worship with anything. Faith in God is exclusive, an all or nothing proposition.

(2) In the N.T., both the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:6) and individual Christians (1 Cor. 6:19) are referred to as the temple of God. If we want God to remain with us, we cannot worship anything in addition to him. God can have no rivalries for our devotion. As Jesus said in Mat. 6:24, "No one can serve two masters."

c. Ezekiel is then shown the leaders of Judah engaging in full blown pantheistic idolatry in a hidden chamber in the temple. They were worshipping the "divine" as expressed in the life of animals.

(1) This blatant rebellion was being rationalized with the claim that God had abandoned the land and no longer "saw" (cared) what went on there (v. 12; see also, 9:9). They reasoned from their hardship that God was not there and concluded that their sin would go unpunished.

(2) However much it may appear that God does not exist or does not care or does not have power to bring to judgment, do not be deceived; he knows your sin and will hold you accountable.

d. Ezekiel is shown women in the outer court of the temple weeping over the death of Tammuz, the Sumerian-Babylonian god of plant life, who was thought to die each fall and return to life each spring. At the very door to the temple, a group of men, almost certainly priests, were literally turning their backs on God to worship the sun!

e. God promises to judge the people for these abominations.

2. Divine Executioners - 9:1-11

a. God summons his executioners, and six of them appear at the temple, accompanied by a seventh who is dressed in white and carrying a writing kit. He then instructs the man in white to put a mark on the foreheads of those who mourn over the sin of the city.

b. After demonstrating his readiness to judge by moving his glory to the threshold of the temple, God commands the executioners to follow behind the marking angel, slaughtering everyone in the city except those with the mark. They do so, beginning with the elders in front of the temple.

c. The vision makes or reinforces several points:

(1) The coming destruction represented God's judgment, not simply a Babylonian military success.

(2) There are so few (any?) within the city who are righteous that the bodies being piled up in the temple courts prompt Ezekiel to cry out to God in fear that all would be killed. God's response is simply that the slaughter is in proportion to their sin, which suggests that the point of the vision is the amazing extent of the city's wickedness.

(3) V. 11 may indicate that some in fact were marked (though not necessarily). The additional point in that case is that despite the magnitude of the slaughter, it would not be complete; God would preserve a righteous remnant. (If so, 21:3-4 indicates that the vision is not to be taken literally; some righteous people were killed along with the wicked, and probably some wicked people survived.)

3. The Throne Chariot at the Temple - 10:1-22

a. The throne chariot of chapter 1 appears, and the Lord commands the "man" in white linen to fill his hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and to scatter them over the city. This symbolizes God's holy wrath. These coals are part of God's glory and purity, and they consume all that is not holy.

b. God's glory is in the process of departing the temple, a movement which accelerates in chapter 11. In v. 18 his glory moves from the threshold of the temple to the east gate, poised to leave the city (which it does in 11:23).

c. As a footnote, the ox face of the cherubim (1:10) is said in 10:14 to be that of a cherub. This probably means that cherubim were commonly depicted with an ox or bull face (e.g., statues of winged bulls and lions were stationed at the entrances to public buildings in Assyria

and Babylonia for protection - ISBE, 1:643). 10:20-22 make clear that the faces were the same in the two appearances.

4. Judgment on Jerusalem's Evil Leaders - 11:1-13

a. At the east gate Ezekiel observes an assembly of twenty-five city officials. God declares that they plot evil and give wicked advice, saying "Is it not nearly time to build houses? This city is the pot, and we are the meat!"

(1) As leaders they were claiming that the threat of further Babylonian deportation was about taken care of, probably crediting their diplomacy and fortification strategy. In other words, they were falsely preaching that security was all but achieved, despite their continuing wickedness and contrary to God's prophetic word.

(2) Being the meat in the pot means they saw those left in Jerusalem as the desirable part that is kept, as opposed to undesirable parts that are discarded (as the deportees had been).

b. Ezekiel prophesies about this state of affairs.

(1) God knows their thoughts, that secretly they fear the sword (vv. 5-6, 8), and well they should. They had murdered many in Jerusalem, and it was those they murdered who were the "meat," the choicest parts of the citizenry.

(2) The leaders, on the other hand, were going to be driven from the city, captured, and executed by the Babylonians. Rather than being the meat, they would be thrown out as unfit to eat. This is precisely what happened in 2 Ki. 25:18-21.

(3) God again makes clear that this judgment is the result of their refusing to follow his decrees and laws; instead, they conformed to the standards of the nations around them (v. 12).

c. As he was prophesying, he saw Pelatiah, one of the leaders, drop dead. This present death brings home to Ezekiel the reality of the promised judgment, prompting him to cry out again on behalf of his people. He fears that Israel will be ended.

5. The Future of Israel Passes to the Exiles - 11:14-25

a. Those in Jerusalem (and probably a good number in Babylon) had deceived themselves into believing that the exiles were God's unclean castaways. They saw themselves as the true heirs of the holy city, and encouraged the exiles to "stay away." Rather than accepting God's clear and obvious revelation, they falsely read a message of blessing from their circumstances.

b. God tells the exiles that, contrary to conventional wisdom, it is they who are the future of Israel, not those left in Jerusalem!

(1) Despite how unlikely it appears, God is going to bring the scattered and powerless exiles back home, and they will rid Judah of its idolatry and rebellion. They will return a penitent people, a people serious about their faith.

(2) This is precisely what happened historically. Beginning with Zerrubabel's return in 538 B.C., down through Ezra and Nehemiah (458 - 433 B.C.), Jews returning from exile were correcting abuses and reestablishing righteous religion in obedience to Mosaic Law. (The language of 11:19-20 probably looks ahead to the spiritual renewal under the new covenant; see discussion of 36:16-38.)

c. The glory of the Lord proceeds out of the city, symbolizing that God's rejection of wicked Judah had come to pass. Ezekiel feels himself brought back to Mesopotamia, the vision ends, and he tells the exiles what the Lord had showed him.

E. Ezek. 12:1 - 15:8

1. Judah's Exile Enacted - 12:1-16

a. Those in exile, the future of Israel, are again described as a rebellious house, who do not see or hear Ezekiel's message. The truth of national destruction was so hard for them to swallow that they continued to doubt God's clear word through Ezekiel. God gives them another chance to understand. (Application: We become so obtuse when God has an unpleasant message for us.)

b. Ezekiel prepares an exile's bag and carries it to another location during the day. At dusk, he digs through "the wall," which symbolizes the breach in the city's defenses, and then carries the bag out like an exile, with his face covered in sorrow and shame.

c. Because some still did not understand, Ezekiel spells out that this symbolized exile for the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 10- 11), including Zedekiah, whose escape attempt and capture is elaborated on in vv. 12-14. Note the fulfillment of v. 13.

d. God would permit some to survive and go into exile so that they may tell of their wickedness and thus confirm that the exile was a demonstration of God's greatness, a fulfillment of covenant punishment, not some failure on his part. (Application: When we doubt God, we need to adjust our perspective.)

2. The Time Is at Hand - 12:17-28

a. Ezekiel acts out eating and drinking in fear. This depicts the fear and anxiety the besieged inhabitants will experience in the last days before the conquest. Again, it is coming because of their wrongdoing.

b. God is going to put an end to the proverb, "The days are prolonged, and every vision comes to nothing."

(1) The people of Jerusalem had come to ignore prophecies about the destruction of their city because such prophecies had circulated for so long without coming to pass. They belittled warnings of doom as something people were always claiming but which never occurred. (Prophecies of doom for Judah and Jerusalem had been around since the 8th century B.C., e.g., Amos 2:4-50; Hosea 5:10-14; Micah 1:8-9; Isa. 22:1-14.) Ezekiel is to tell them the reverse of their proverb: The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision!

(2) They mistook God's mercy and patience for inability or disinterest. People do the same thing today. See, 2 Pet. 3:3-10. For centuries skeptics have mocked the return of Christ as something always talked about but never occurring. Do not mistake God's forbearance for nonexistence or impotence. As surely as God judged Judah, "that day" will come.

c. Those who minimize Ezekiel's prophecy by claiming it is for the distant future are to be flatly corrected. His words will be postponed no more. (Application: There is no end to the excuses people can come up with for not taking God's word seriously.)

3. Prophecy Against False Prophets and Prophetesses - 13:1-23

a. Ezekiel prophesies against those who claim to speak for the Lord but really do not; they are simply making things up and attributing them to God.

b. Typically, they prophesy what the people want to hear. Rather than preach the coming judgment, so people will wake up and repent, they proclaim that all is well. Instead of helping the people avoid destruction by sounding the alarm, they lure them into believing there is no danger (v. 22).

(1) Thus, they are like "jackals in the ruins" (v. 4) in that they do nothing to shore up the people's vulnerability to judgment; they "whitewash" unsound walls (vv. 10-12), thus masking their inability to protect from the flood of judgment; they hunt the lives of God's people (v. 18).

(2) Today many are unwilling to sound the alarm to those living in sin. It sounds so unloving, so intolerant, to tell the homosexual, the drug abuser, the drunk, the adulterer, the liar, the thief, the fornicator that a judgment is coming on them. But we do no one any favors by deceiving them.

(3) As Paul told the Galatian Christians (Gal. 6:7-8): "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

c. They tickle ears instead of preaching the truth because it benefits them to do so (v. 19). It is the same today. People compromise the truth because they get "paid" with public acceptance or praise.

d. Such people, then (v. 9) and now (Jude 4), will be condemned.

4. The Idolater's False Comfort to Be Taken - 14:1-11

a. Certain leaders come to Ezekiel inquiring of the Lord, and God informs him that they are idol worshippers at heart, i.e., they are devoted to other gods. (Note: a comparison with 20:1-5, 30-32 suggests that they may have been secretly practicing.)

(1) God instructs Ezekiel to announce to them that he, rather than the prophet, will answer such people who inquire of him, and he will do so in accordance with their idolatry. In other words, he will, in some fashion, bring about their deaths (v. 8). Ezekiel, on the other hand, is to generally call the house of Israel to repent of their idolatry (v. 6).

(2) God's purpose in this is to seize the hearts of the people, to turn the people from their inner idolatry (v. 5), by preventing them from finding false comfort in bogus prophets.

b. Toward that end, prophets who are enticed to disobey, enticed to give false answers to such inquiries, will meet the same fate. Thus, God will have snared them in their own wickedness.

5. A Lie Dispelled - 14:12-23

a. It seems that one of the lies on which the false prophets built their prophecies of peace was that Jerusalem would be spared because of the righteous few within it (e.g., Jeremiah, Habakkuk).

b. It is true that in his mercy God was willing to spare Sodom if there were just ten righteous persons there (Gen. 18:32), but that was no guarantee of Jerusalem's safety. God is not precluded from judging a city in which righteous people live.

c. In fact, when he decides to bring a particular judgment, even the presence of such paragons of virtue as Noah, Daniel, and Job will not spare a city. How much more will the presence of a few righteous people in Jerusalem fail to spare it, a city so wicked that it deserves

multiple forms of judgment (sword, famine, wild animals, and disease)? (Application: Whatever form it takes, the claim that one can sin without consequences is a lie.)

d. To vindicate his justice before the exiles, God will even spare some impenitent Jews and send them into exile. The exiles will see firsthand why God destroyed the nation (v. 22-23). (Note: This shows that the vision of ch. 9 is not literal.)

6. Jerusalem: The Vine to Be Burned - 15:1-8

a. Israel is often compared to a grapevine in the O.T. It was God's grapevine, taken from Egypt and planted in the promised land (e.g., Ps. 80:8-11).

b. But a vine is only good for one thing: producing grapes for its owner. As far as its wood goes, it is not useful for anything but burning, and this does not change after it is partially burned up. So if it ceases to produce fruit, the only thing to do is to cut it down and burn it. And if it is partially burned up, as Judah figuratively was in 598/97 B.C., the only thing to do is burn what is left!

c. In Jn. 15:9-17 Jesus humbly refers to himself as the vine, portraying himself as God's servant who produces what God desires. We, on the other hand, are the branches of that vine, and we must remain attached to the Vine to bear the fruit God desires. Those who remain in him will produce good fruit (Gal. 5:22-23); those who do not will produce no fruit and, for lack of faith, be discarded.

F. Ezek. 16:1 - 19:14

1. Jerusalem's Tragic Life - 16:1-63

a. Jerusalem was founded by the pagan peoples of Canaan, the Amorites and the Hittites (see, Gen. 10:16, 15:16; Num. 13:29; Josh. 1:4, 5:1, 7:7, 24:15, 24:18; Amos 2:10). Yet, for generations it was neglected, barely surviving as a city. Jerusalem had a long history, going back at least 4000 years B.C. (according to carbon-14 dating), so the allegory has a vast historical sweep (vv. 1-5).

b. But God determined that this struggling city should "live," and at least by Abraham's time it had grown and developed into an independent city-state (Gen. 14:18-20) (vv. 6-7).

c. Following David's capture of the fortified part of the city (2 Sam. 5:6-9), he made it the nation's capital, moved the ark there (2 Sam. 6:15), and prepared for construction of the temple (2 Sam. 24:18-25; 1 Chron. 28:1 - 29:9). Jerusalem thereafter had a special status as God's chosen place (see, Deut. 12:5, 11, 14; 2 Chron. 6:6) (v. 8).

d. During Solomon's reign, God made Jerusalem a magnificent city. It was exceedingly wealthy and the site of God's beautiful temple. The fame of Jerusalem spread throughout the world (vv. 9-14).

e. Jerusalem did not remember that everything she had was a gift from God (v. 22). Instead, she became self confident (v. 15) and, as the city became more cosmopolitan (famous), began accommodating and embracing foreign gods, even to the point of offering child sacrifices (vv. 16-21)! (See, 1 Ki. 11:1-8).

f. Jerusalem multiplied its infidelity by pursuing spiritually illicit political relations with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. Rather than trust the Lord for security, she sold herself to foreign nations (which for Assyria and Babylonia normally included some demand to worship their gods). She was even worse than a whore because she paid to secure intimate relations with her neighbors (vv. 23-34).

g. God promises to judge Jerusalem for its flagrant infidelity. Through the surrounding nations, God is going to destroy the city; he is going to return it to the naked condition it was in when he first rescued it (v. 35-43). Just like an unfaithful wife, she will be humiliatingly executed.

h. Jerusalem is just like her mother, the pagan Hittites, and just like her sisters, Samaria and Sodom. In fact, her sins have been so outrageous that she makes Samaria and Sodom appear righteous by comparison (vv. 44-52)! Note that Sodom's prosperity gave rise to its sense of independence from God and thus to its sin (vv. 49-50).

i. God stings Jerusalem by saying he will change the fortune of Sodom and Samaria, by consoling them, through changing Jerusalem's fortune (i.e., by destroying it and exiling its inhabitants). They will be restored to their former circumstances in the sense they will lose their distinction of wickedness (Ezek. 37:22 shows that God is not talking about literally restoring Samaria; see also, Jude 7), and Jerusalem will be restored to its former circumstances in that it will again be naked and despised (vv. 53-58).

j. Despite Israel's (Jerusalem's) covenant disloyalty, God promises to remember his commitment to the Jewish people and to establish with them a new, everlasting covenant. Jerusalem will be elevated above all her sisters (no longer just Sodom and Samaria), the older ones and the younger ones, as the most blessed city/nation (see, Rev. 21:1-4, 22-27). (Re last clause of v. 61: God's new covenant was not legally required of him; Israel had broken its covenant obligations. The new covenant is purely of God's grace.)

2. Two Eagles, the Cedar, and the Vine - 17:1-24

a. Ezekiel delivers a riddle to the house of Israel and then explains it to highlight Israel's lack of wisdom.

(1) A great eagle takes the very top of a cedar of Lebanon back to a land of merchants and then plants a native seed in favorable circumstances. The seed became an established vine.

(2) But the vine turns its roots toward another great eagle, seeking water from it, and ignores the abundant water by which it was initially planted. This pursuit leads only to the withering of the vine and to its ultimate destruction.

b. Vv. 11-21 explain the riddle. It is about Judah's diplomacy from the exile of 598/97 B.C. to the coming exile of 587/86 B.C.

(1) Nebuchadnezzar took Judah's top leadership back to Babylon but placed Zedekiah, a descendant of David, on the throne as his puppet king. For a while Zedekiah was loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, but eventually he got ideas of rebelling and turned to Egypt for aid. This was suicide; Zedekiah's rebellion would be crushed, and he himself would be exiled.

(2) Note that ultimately this was punishment for Zedekiah's rebellion against the Lord (v. 19).

c. Vv. 22-24 speak of God's intention to install one of David's descendants as the Messiah, as the ideal ruler of Israel. It will be a kingdom of unparalleled splendor. Despite the upcoming disaster on Judah, God has no intention to renege on his promise to David (Ps. 89; 2 Samuel 7).

3. The Principle of Individual Responsibility - 18:1-32

a. The hardships coming on the land of Judah were being rationalized by the proverb "The parents have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." In other words, rather than recognize that they were being punished for their own iniquity, they blamed the prior generation. God says this must stop. It avoids guilt and obviates repentance. The truth is that one generation is not condemned for the sins of another; rather, judgment comes only on the deserving.

b. For instance, if a man does what is right, thereby indicating he is a man of genuine faith, he will live (not be condemned). If, on the other hand, his son is wicked, that son will be condemned by God, regardless of his father's righteousness. Then again, if the grandson does what is right, he too will live, regardless of his father's wickedness. Justification and condemnation are not inherited.

(1) This does not mean that when God punishes a *group* no righteous people will suffer. Rather, it means that no "righteous group" will be punished. The righteous who suffer as part of a wicked group are not being punished (i.e., they are not suffering for purposes of retribution). They retain God's favor throughout their suffering and into eternal glory.

(2) This also does not mean that sin can affect only one generation. God "visits the sin" of one generation upon another in the sense he allows sin to harm subsequent generations, but that is different than actually punishing subsequent generations. This helps expose the horror of sin.

(3) Notice that environment is not omnipotent. The son of the righteous can turn wicked, and the son of the wicked can turn righteous.

c. A person (and by analogy a nation) can change one's status from wicked to righteous and vice versa. The wicked who repent will live (not be condemned); their prior rebellion will not be remembered. On the other hand, the righteous who turn to iniquity will be condemned; their prior righteous deeds will be forgotten.

(1) Notice that habit is not omnipotent. People can choose to turn to God despite having lived evil lives.

(2) Some will object to this as being unfair (v. 25) because it is not a balance sheet accounting, but God declares that it would be unfair to accept rebels and condemn the penitent. He is interested in present hearts, not past lives.

(3) So the judgment God brings on Israel will be according to its ways. His desire is that they repent and avoid national death. He has no pleasure in the death of anyone.

4. Lamentable Leadership - 19:1-14

a. Ezekiel delivers these stories in standard lament cadence. Vv. 1-9 tell of the rise and exile of two Judean kings, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. They are the two lions who arise from the lioness Judah. Jehoahaz, who was disobedient to the Lord, was exiled to Egypt after reigning only a few months in 609 B.C. (2 Ki. 23:21-34). Jehoiachin, who also reigned only a few months in 598/97, was taken into exile by the Babylonians (2 Ki. 24:8-16).

b. Vv. 10-14 speak of the coming uprooting of the nation that will most immediately be triggered by Zedekiah's foolish rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. Judah will be left with no one fit to be king. Thus, any confidence placed in Zedekiah is misplaced.