

September 1 : Scriptures Ezekiel 11-13

SUMMARY

And the glory of the Lord, the Lord's presence, leaves Israel!

The 25 men here are the same who earlier were shown to be blatant and unrepentant idol worshipers. The Spirit picks Ezekiel up and puts him at the eastern gate where the Lord's presence is resting for the moment. In the vision (in the Spirit), Ezekiel stands with the corrupt leaders, listening to their proud, arrogant assessment of themselves. The pot analogy they talk about is a pot used in Temple worship to cook the best parts of the sacrificial meat for consumption. The leaders think they're the best of the remaining people (unlike the remnant taken to Babylon) and believe they'll be spared because they live in Jerusalem, so isn't it time to build and expand their homes?

But the leaders are the ones who, through their sin, brought the Babylonians, and their sinful actions of abusing the people caused so many deaths in the city (11:6). But Yehovah says the dead in the sacrificial pot will fare better than the leaders. The Lord will remove the corrupt men from the city and judge them at the edge of their covenant land, their own personal and short-lived exile. The Lord says they'll be executed at the land's edge, which is what happened. The king and his administration were escorted to Riblah on Israel's northern border. Most of them were killed in front of King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:21). Even as Ezekiel prophesies in the vision, one of the leaders dies (11:13). Why does Ezekiel cry out about the diminishing remnant? Because one would assume the leaders would be among the remnant, but the Lord had already told them they wouldn't be.

The people remaining in Jerusalem regarded the exiles as being far from the Lord. After all, the Temple with the Lord's glory is in Jerusalem, not Babylon. Therefore, the remnant is far from God while He is with the Jerusalemites. Yehovah sets the record straight. Not so, says the Lord. "Though I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while *I have been a sanctuary for them* in the countries where they have gone" (11:16). God doesn't need a building to be with His people. The remnant may be far from the Temple, but the Lord overshadows them to protect and sustain them in exile. That's not the end because Yehovah will return His people to their land (11:17), and the horrible punishments and expulsion will have done their work preparing the returnees for a transformation.

When the Lord brings the Jews home from Babylon, their desire for idols will be crushed (11:18). God will give them "integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will

remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, so that they will follow my statutes, keep my ordinances, and practice them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (11:19-20). *Does this sound familiar?* It should be because it's the same message Jeremiah received about the New Covenant the Lord will make with His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Let's take a little bunny trail. The following is what the Lord promises Israel through Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Look for the overlap that connects their prophecies about the New Covenant:

Jeremiah 31:**People Regathered, Restored, Covenant Relationship, Forgiveness/Purifying.**

New Covenant, internal Torah (Torah obedience).

Ezekiel 11:**People Regathered, Restored, Covenant Relationship, Forgiveness/Purifying.**

New heart/spirit, their heart of stone to flesh (unresponsive to responsive), Torah obedience.

As you can see, what Ezekiel describes is what Jeremiah calls the New Covenant, and if we translate Hebrew correctly, it's actually a *Renewed* Covenant. From the Jewish perspective, this is the Sinai/Mosaic that will be adjusted to help God's people 1) reject idolatry, 2) embrace Yehovah with all their hearts, souls, and strength, and 3) obey His way of living.

Did God bring His people home to their land from Babylon? Yes. Therefore, did the New Covenant start? Nope. Although aspects of it seem to have happened, such as their rejection of idolatry and forgiveness for their previous sin, the key components that God can only create (new heart/spirit, My Spirit in you, internalized Torah). *This inner transformation could only come after Jesus' sacrifice made the means for forgiveness and cleansing, thus preparing a repentant person for the indwelling of God's Spirit when He was sent on the day of Pentecost/Shavuot (Acts 2).* Also, Jesus connected the New Covenant's start with His death (Luke 22:20).

From our Christian perspective, we can say the New Covenant started c. A.D. 30 and continues to this day. When Jesus returns, He'll fulfill the New Covenant fully by regathering and restoring His people to their land and relationship with His Father. The point is that even though human beings struggle with sin, God's intent has always been to bring everyone back to Himself, as many as were willing. Israel is a picture of all humanity. Some returned to God and will be saved. Others won't and will be lost. Those who refuse to repent will be like the disobedient in 11:21, "for those whose hearts pursue

their desire for abhorrent acts and detestable practices, I will bring their conduct down on their own heads.”

As for the Temple, something remarkable is about to happen. In Ezekiel’s vision, God’s divine throne, carried by the four cherubim, rises from the eastern gate and moves across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives (11:24). We’ll find out later that God has promised to return to His people from the very spot He left (Zechariah 14:3-4). After seeing God’s throne move to the Mount of Olives, Ezekiel snaps out of his vision and tells the exiles what he has seen. I wonder what their reaction was.

Chapter 12 shows Ezekiel dramatizing the Lord’s prophetic word to the exiles. It’s brilliant because it touches auditory and visual learners. Also, when an action connects to a prophetic word, it explains and “activates it” if it’s a genuine prophecy. It’s interesting to note the Lord tells Ezekiel to act it out first, and later, He reveals what it means so Ezekiel can relay it to his hearers. The prophet clearly illustrates King Zedekiah’s attempted escape from Jerusalem with his family and entourage of leaders, their capture, the king’s blinding and transport to Babylon, King Neb hunting down the leaders, the exile, and the remnant (12:12-16).

Next, Ezekiel dramatizes the fear that will soon come upon the Jerusalemites as he eats his food with trembling (11:17-20). It must have comforted the exiles in Babylon around Ezekiel to realize the Lord had put them in a safe place while all hell was breaking loose in their city.

The final section in chapter 12 deals with the same thing that has confronted many Christians. God makes a promise or a prophecy that takes *a long time* to happen. For humanity, it could take months, years, decades, centuries, or millennia to be fulfilled. For the Lord, time is but a moment. We people stuck in the flow of time may never see what God has promised. For example, how many of us heard that Jesus would return? If you’re a Bible-believing Christian, you have, likely repeatedly, and every time there’s massive upheaval in the world, Christians look up to see if Jesus is returning on the clouds. When it repeatedly doesn’t happen, we get jaded about biblical prophecy (or prophetic words) and take on a “Ho-hum! Same old, same old” attitude. This attitude is *precisely* what’s happening in chapter 12. God promised almost 900 years before the fall of Jerusalem that He would punish His people if they tossed Him aside to run after idols or disobey His covenant terms. Throughout that 900-year time, the Israelites sinned, and God spanked them, but He didn’t pull the pin on the ultimate covenant punishment grenade – destruction and exile. So when the prophets showed up to declare Yehovah’s coming judgment on Jerusalem, the people responded with, “Ho-hum! Same old, same old. The

days keep passing by, and every vision fails" (12:22). Well, here in Ezekiel God has had enough of that proverb. He assures Ezekiel that it's about to happen soon.

Furthermore, the people speak a proverb about how long it will take for God's word of judgment to occur, "The vision that he sees concerns many years from now; he prophesies about distant times." So, the Lord sets them straight. The oncoming light the Jerusalemites see isn't God's rescue. It's His Judgment Train barreling down the tracks straight at them!

Speaking of God becoming ticked off at false statements, He levels a *massive* rebuke against the false prophets, both men and women, who are imaginary "giving words of the Lord." How can we identify a false prophet? They speak lies "by saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace," and by denying the truth, "when a flimsy wall is being built, they plaster it with whitewash" (13:10). Such lies and deceptions will ultimately fail like a flimsy whitewashed wall when someone tries to rely on them or when the Lord pushes against them. Also, the Lord explicitly addresses the pagan prophetesses and their pagan rituals. After He stops them and frees His people, *they will know* there is a God in Israel and Who that is.

INSIGHT

I often tell my students to look for patterns in the Bible to help explain what God is doing. Check this out. Judah rejected God and followed their own ways. God's presence in Ezekiel 9-11 leaves the Temple because the leadership rejected Him and hovers over the Mount of Olives. According to Jewish tradition, the *Shekinah* (God's presence) hovered over the Mount of Olives for three years, waiting for His leaders and people to repent. When they didn't, the *Shekinah* rose to heaven. Was the Lord "gone" for good? No.

Malachi prophesied, "'See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,' says the Lord of Armies" (Malachi 3:1). The Lord's physical presence *did* return to Israel in the form of Jesus. Still, the leadership and most people rejected Him as God's Messiah. Jesus spoke God's word for three years, trying to get His people to repent and embrace the way (the New Covenant) His Father was revealing to them.

Because of their rejection, Jesus declared (similar to Ezekiel), "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is abandoned to you. I tell you, you will not see me until the time

comes when you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:34-35).

Did the Lord's presence return to Jerusalem as promised? Yes. Did it stay? No. 40 days after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, blessed His disciples with the High Priestly prayer, and ascended to His Father's throne, *ala* God's presence in Ezekiel 9-11. What Jesus did at His ascension (Acts 1:9), He had done before (Ezekiel 9-11). So, if God's presence left Israel and returned and left again, will it return when Israel is ready to repent and receive God, His New Covenant, and their rightful inheritance? YES!

Zechariah prophetically declares God's return to His people. His presence will return as Jesus returns to earth to defend His people and fulfill all His Father's promises to Israel. "Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and *they will look at me whom they pierced*. They will mourn for him as one mourns for *an only child* and weep bitterly for him as one weeps for *a firstborn*" (Zechariah 12:10). Also, "Then the Lord will go out to fight against those nations as he fights on a day of battle. On that day *his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:3-4).

Listen to what the angels say about Jesus' departure as a final promise. "While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven'" (Acts 1:10-11).

September 2 : Scriptures Ezekiel 14-16

SUMMARY

Well, you just can't fool the Lord. The scenario is simple. Some of the elders of Israel come to Ezekiel to hear the Lord's word, but they're idol worshipers. It's like wanting spirituality both—God's and your way. But God wants none of that, and it's all Him or your idols. Choose (Joshua 24:15). If the heart is set on idols, the Lord will answer that person according to their unfaithfulness with a rebuke (14:4). God rebukes His people so they'll turn back to him or risk being cut off from the Lord (14:8). It's not that hard to understand. But what if a lying prophet comes to a person caught up in idolatry? It's because the Lord sent them. Hey, if you don't want to listen to the Lord and obey Him, then have it your way. Be deceived and suffer the consequences (14:10). Jerusalem is about to suffer the consequences of famine, wild animals, war, and plague for turning from God (promised covenant judgments, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). The people evidently felt that disaster and punishment could be averted if a righteous person would pray for them. Not so. The decree against them could only be stopped if the people all repented. "Moral responsibility is not transferable; it is individual" (HCSB). If the people refuse to repent, not even the most righteous people – Noah, Daniel, or Job – could help them.

Chapter 15 has a simple message from God. You can't use a vine for anything other than fuel. A vine is supposed to produce fruit and grapes; if it doesn't, it will be burned. That's the only use for which it's suitable. The Judahites haven't borne the righteous fruit God wants (godly, obedient lives). Therefore, here comes the torch.

Chapter 16 has a blistering prophecy for Judah. It starts with Yehovah's take on Israel's birth and development. Israel was born in Canaan, i.e., the miraculous offspring of Abraham and Sarah. As a newborn baby (Abraham's family), "infant Israel" was helpless. Newborns had their umbilical cords cut, were washed with water (cleaned), scrubbed with salt (as a cleansing and disinfecting process), and wrapped in protective cloths. None of this was done to Israel. As was the day's custom, unwanted babies were thrown into a wilderness and left to die of exposure, animals, or neglect. Such was the case with Israel. No nations cared for them, only God.

In His compassion, God embraced infant Israel and nurtured them through "puberty." By saying, "I passed by you and saw you, and you were indeed at the age for love. So I spread the edge of my garment over you and covered your nakedness," this is marriage language, describing Israel as "marrying" God at Mount Sinai with Moses as the best

man. After the nuptials, Israel's husband lavished His love and gifts upon her. Israel became a powerful, attractive, and influential nation (16:8-14).

But then God's wife cheated on Him. "But you trusted in your beauty and acted like a prostitute because of your fame. You lavished your sexual favors on everyone who passed by. Your beauty became his." In other words, Israel broke her covenant marriage vows to God to remain faithful and exclusive to Him. She gave her attention and trust to idol gods and other nations. Not only did Israel cheat on God, but she took His love gifts to her and lavished them on her other lovers (gods, nations). Can you feel God's jealous rage building?

And then God's wife, Israel, took their children (literally) and sacrificed the little ones to these gods and false images – God's innocent children who should have been nurtured and raised to love Him!

And as the ultimate degradation and humiliation, Israel offered herself to any "lover" who walked by. (Remember what I said about Ezekiel getting graphic about Israel's sin, 16:25-26?) She lay back and let anyone who would have her take her sexually. This horrible image depicts Israel's total disregard for her God, her covenant husband, and giving herself over to unrestrained, rampant sin with nations that were more attractive to her than God.

What did Israel's Husband do? He cut off her allowance (food) and put her at the mercy of the surrounding nations that hated Israel, *nations that were embarrassed by Israel's lewd spiritual conduct*. Imagine. Israel behaved worse than the loose, ungodly women around her. Israel slept with the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Honestly, this made Israel the regional whore, politically and spiritually speaking. She was willing to sell herself to whoever would promise her support and security rather than stay faithful to her divine Husband (16:27-29). Usually, men pay prostitutes to have sex with them. Israel was such a wanton prostitute and consumed by lust God says she paid her lovers to sleep with her (16:33-34).

So what's God's covenant punishment for His trashy wife? He's going to gather all her lovers and expose her to them. In a manner of speaking, God will strip Israel naked and expose her to the nations around her in humiliation. He will punish her for her "adultery" and the shedding of innocent blood (child sacrifice). All her lovers will gather to strip her, abuse her, cut her, burn down her house and leave her naked and destitute on the ground (16:39-41).

God will act like a betrayed husband whose wife is just like her family of origin – rank pagans (16:44-45)! But Judah acted worse than the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and Sodom, and it was only a matter of time until their wickedness corrupted Judah (16:47).

In brief, Judah is compared with northern Israel and Sodom, and God declares them *worse* than them! “But Samaria did not commit even half your sins. You have multiplied your detestable practices beyond theirs and made your sisters appear righteous by all the detestable acts you have committed” (16:51). Judah, along with Israel and Sodom, will be scorned for her wickedness.

But there is a time when the Lord will “remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish a permanent covenant with you.” Despite Israel and Judah’s gross sin, the Lord will atone for them and forgive their sin. Again, this is the promised New Covenant. But when Israel finally enters this permanent New Covenant, they will be incredibly humbled.

INSIGHT

How often have we cheated on God? It’s easy to read this section and point the finger at wayward Judah and declare we would never worship idols or make unholy alliances in our lives. Oh, really? Anything that we trust more than God is a “lover.” Anything we rely on more than Jesus is an illicit affair. Just the thought of a woman cheating on her husband (or vice versa) makes my blood boil. How much more does this betrayal anger a holy and loving God who has given us so much in return for so little, and yet we spit in his face to run after other thrills (sins)?

September 3 : Scriptures Ezekiel 17-19

SUMMARY

What the heck does the eagle analogy mean in chapter 17? It's pretty simple. The first eagle is King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and the second eagle is the Pharaoh of Egypt. The vine is the nation of Israel, specifically Judah. The top of the vine is King Jehoiachin, who was deposed and deported to Babylon along with Ezekiel in 597 B.C. The "land's seed" is King Zedekiah, who was installed as Judah's king by Nebuchadnezzar.

Under the new arrangement, Judah prospered in its humbled condition (17:6). However, King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and turned toward Egypt for an alliance, "this vine bent its roots toward him!" (17:7). Because King Zedekiah broke the covenant with King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon will come to Judah to "tear out the vine" (17:9-10). After the analogy (17:1-10), Ezekiel explains its meaning (17:11-21).

The chapter ends with a cryptic prophecy of another sprig taken from a tall tree and planted on Israel's high mountain, Mount Zion. This sprig will become a majestic cedar offering protection to all birds that will rest under its branches. This cedar analogy is about Israel's Messiah King. All the tall trees – the earth's kings and rulers – will know Messiah is God's chosen king and that He is sovereign. He cuts down mighty rulers and raises whom He will. By the way, this becomes a critical lesson for Nebuchadnezzar in the next book, Daniel.

Chapter 18 starts with a proverb, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." What does this mean? This proverb refers to what God promised in Exodus 20:5 "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me." In other words, a parent's sin can have terrible consequences and influence their children. This is so true! As a parent, I see my good and bad traits reflected in my children. Today, it's the fashion to blame one's sins, faults, and bad behavior on one's upbringing. Oh yeah? That does have an effect, but much of a person's character and conduct is their responsibility. Many outstanding and upstanding people have come from dismal and rotten backgrounds. So enough with the blame-throwers!

In Ezekiel's day, the people "misconstrued this reality (of generational curses and punishments), as reflected in this proverb accusing God of unfairness" (18:25, HCSB). Yehovah is setting the record straight. "A person's sin may outlive him and have negative repercussions on other people (Ezekiel 18:19-32), but God does not punish the innocent for the sins of others" (HCSB). The person who sins is the one who will die (18:4).

Therefore, the blame for a person's sin rests solely on the individual, and they can't pawn it off on others, especially their parents.

Ezekiel's illustrations are clear:

- 1) A righteous man who does right is right (18:5-9).
- 2) If the righteous man's son acts unrighteously, that son is responsible and will die (18:10-13).
- 3) If an unrighteous, wicked man has a son who does what's right, the son will not suffer for his father's sin. The son will live (18:14-17), but the father will die for his sin (18:18). Why? "The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him" (18:20).
- 4) If the wicked man turns and lives right, he will live. If the righteous man turns away and lives wickedly, he will die (18:21-24).

But doesn't the Lord love to punish evil, wicked, mean, and nasty people? Doesn't He wait in heaven, ready to strike down the sinner? No. Let this sink in: "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Instead, don't I take pleasure when he turns from his ways and lives?" (18:23). There's the heart of God showing through His word. God judges when He *must*. Until then, He gives us many opportunities to turn around and live right.

Now comes the kicker. This illustration was a setup for God to encourage His people to repent. They're not too far gone to change; regardless of what their ancestors did, they are not responsible for what they haven't done. "So repent and live!" (18:32).

We have another analogy in chapter 19, likening Judah's final kings to lions. The mother lion is the nation, producing kings in Judah's line. The first lion (19:3-4) is King Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, who Egypt deposed while Assyria led some of Judah's people away ("nations" reference). The second lion is King Jehoiachin, who reigned in Jerusalem for only three months (19:5-9). King Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon, where he was imprisoned for thirty-seven years.

The remainder of the analogy is a lament for Israel's/Judah's downfall. It had grown strong and vibrant but was stripped of its fruit and planted in spiritually dry places in the wilderness (Assyria and Babylon).

INSIGHT

I'm reminded of the maxim "God has no grandchildren." That means God can only have a direct relationship with each person on earth and has no provision for a person to "ride on the coattails" of another person into eternal life. We're each responsible for accepting or rejecting God's salvation plan through Jesus. This ties into Ezekiel's words in chapter 18 on personal responsibility. A godly saved father can have an ungodly unsaved child, and the father's salvation will not save his child. A wicked unsaved father can have a godly saved child, and the father's unsaved condition will not affect the child's salvation.

But the best news is that a godly family member can tremendously influence an unsaved family member, and the Lord often uses that influence. Thank God He only holds us accountable for our own sins and offers each one of us a way of forgiveness and cleansing. No one is left out, and no one is dragged down by another person. We're all free to enter into Jesus' salvation.

September 4 : Scriptures Ezekiel 20-22

SUMMARY

About 11 months after Ezekiel's vision of the detestable practices in the Temple in Jerusalem, elders-in-exile come to the prophet to see what the Lord has to say. Well, they're going to get it straight. Chapter 20 is the Lord's "in your face" indictment of Israel's history of rampant unfaithfulness to their covenant King.

First, we must understand that Israel was bonded to God through His one-sided covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). God will *never* renege on His covenant with Abraham's physical descendants because it doesn't depend on their faithfulness but on God's, which is unbreakable. Yes, that means God's commitment to the Jewish people and all of Abraham's physical descendants will not end in this age. Even if His people fail and fall short, Yehovah will continue to work on them until His people, Israel, reach absolute trust and faithfulness in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

There's a lot of repetition, but it breaks down like this:

Israel's situation: In Egypt (20:5). Yehovah will deliver them.

God's demand: Throw away your Egyptian idols (20:7).

Israel's response: Rebellion (20:8).

God's response: I was going to unleash my wrath, but I chose not to for my name's sake (i.e., reputation). So, I spared them and fulfilled My promise by leading them out of Egypt for My name's sake (20:8-9).

Now, why is this "name's sake"/reputation thing such a big deal? Because Israel was God's starting point to bring salvation to the world, and He wanted a nation/people to trust Him as an example to the other nations/peoples of the world that He's worthy of their commitment as well. Through Moses and divine miracles, Yehovah declared Himself as Israel's God and gave them great promises like delivering Israel from Egypt, bringing them into the promised land, defeating the Canaanites, and preserving His people as a nation.

If He destroyed His people for their sins, His reputation and credibility would take a hit even though it wasn't Yehovah's fault but His people's fault for the rocky relationship. The world nations wouldn't mock Israel. They would mock Israel's God for being unable to protect His people, fulfilling His promises, or keep His word. Yehovah would be seen as just another demanding, vindictive, and destructive god with which the rest of the world was dealing.

So even though Israel repeatedly and stubbornly rebelled throughout their history with God, He maintained covenant faithfulness to them despite their betrayal. Why? For His reputation's sake in the eyes of the world's nations. Would that prevent Him from punishing His people for their betrayal? No. Covenant punishment was part of the package, and that punishment was also a testimony to God's covenant commitment to Israel. Even amid horrible chastisement, the nations would know and declare that it wasn't God's fault but Israel's fault for rebelling against their God.

"All the nations will ask, 'Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this intense outburst of anger?' Then people will answer, 'It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he had made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. They began to serve other gods, bowing in worship to gods they had not known—gods that the Lord had not permitted them to worship. Therefore the Lord's anger burned against this land, and he brought every curse written in this book on it.'" (Deuteronomy 26:24-27, italics author). God's reputation would remain intact despite harshly judging His people. Let's continue with the chapter as the exiled leaders listen to Ezekiel rehearse their nation's ingrained rebellion against God.

Israel's situation: In Egypt (20:5). "I swear as your God that I'll bring you out of Egypt" (20:5-6).

God's demand: Throw away your Egyptian idols (20:7).

Israel's response: Rebellion (20:8).

God's response: I was going to unleash my wrath and wipe them out, but I chose not to for my name's sake (i.e., reputation). So, I spared them and fulfilled My promise by leading them out of Egypt for My name's sake (20:8-9).

Israel's situation: In the Wilderness (20:10). Yehovah will lead them to Canaan.

God's demand: Follow My laws, and observe the Sabbath (20:11-12).

Israel's response: Rebellion (20:13).

God's response: I was going to unleash my wrath and wipe them out, but I chose not to for my name's sake (i.e., reputation) (20:13-14). However, I kept them in the Wilderness and refused to allow some to enter the land (20:15-17).

Israel's situation: In the Wilderness (20:18).

God's demand: When you get into the land, keep Me as your only God, follow My laws, and observe My Sabbath (20:18-20). If you don't, I'll "disperse them among the nations and scatter them among the countries" (20:23)

Israel's response: Rebellion (20:21, 24).

God's response: I was going to unleash my wrath and wipe them out, but I chose not to for my name's sake (i.e., reputation). So, I gave them over to their idol worship (20:24-26).

Yehovah's conclusion is this: "This is how your fathers acted, and this is how you've acted. And yet you have the gall to come to Me and ask for a word from the Lord? Forget it!" But God won't leave them in the foreign lands because He knows His people will all too readily embrace the gods of those nations. Rather than risk His prone-to-rebel-and-embrace-idols people's assimilation, Yehovah will do something that seems very harsh. "I will reign over you with a strong hand, an outstretched arm (reminiscent of Israel's deliverance via God's wrath on Egypt), and outpoured wrath (but now it will be on His people, Israel)" (20:33). God's wrath will fall on His people, forcing them to accept His Kingship in the land He has given them. As He recalls His people under duress, Yehovah will use it to purge idolators and idolatry from His people (20:35-38).

And now comes God's word through Ezekiel to the awaiting leaders: "Go ahead and play with your idols here in Babylon if you really want to. But there's coming a time when I'll force you home, and you'll obey Me and reject your idols. There'll be only one "high place" and there you'll serve Me. And when you come home to your covenant land, you will know I'm your God (20:42). When that happens, you'll be appalled at all the things you and your ancestors did, and you will hate yourselves for it" (20:43). (I know that sounds harsh, but it's a good motivation not to do it again!). "Why will I do this? For My reputation's sake. I'm dealing with you for My sake, not what you really deserve."

Ezekiel ends this section with a prophecy against the south. Why the south? Does Yehovah mean Israel's southern desert? Nope. Even though Babylon (where Ezekiel lives) is due east of Israel, the Babylonians entered Israel from their northern border. Therefore, this prophecy against the south is against the land of Israel. The gist is Yehovah is bringing more judgment to Israel, and all the world will know it was by God's hand and not an accident. What a chapter, eh?

Chapter 21 opens with a contradictory word to what we read in chapter 18. Even though God holds each person responsible for their sin and not another's, that doesn't mean the righteous will avoid suffering and even death when the Lord punishes the wicked. The Bible teaches individual and corporate responsibility (see Achan's sin in Joshua 7). We live in a fallen world, and it rains on the just and the unjust, the righteous and the wicked (Matthew 5:45). The sun also shines on the wicked as well as the righteous.

Yehovah reveals through Ezekiel that the righteous won't escape death in God's coming judgment on Jerusalem, as unfair as that seems. However, we know in the grand scheme

of things, God saves those faithful to Him. Under the Mosaic covenant, those who trusted God and obeyed Him were saved by their trust (faith), for “the righteous one will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Under the New Covenant, it’s the same thing – we trust God’s final plan of salvation through faith in what Jesus has done for us (Acts 16:31). But even in the New Covenant era, the righteous often suffer along with the wicked in natural disasters and God’s judgments.

In this case, God will bring the sword against Jerusalem. It will cut down many, even those of King David’s royal line (21:10). But as my Study Bible says, “The scepter symbolized the Lord’s covenant promise to David that his house would have eternal title to the throne of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7). This promise was rooted in the blessing spoken by Jacob which said that the scepter would never pass from Judah (Genesis 49:10). Judah’s hope in the midst of judgment was that the ultimate scepter of Judah, the Messiah, would never be extinguished” (HCSB). Even amid judgment, Yehovah keeps His promises.

In 21:18, the Lord tells Ezekiel to head out and place two directional signs at a crossroads pointing the way to Jerusalem, Judah, and Rabbah, Ammon. King Nebuchadnezzar will use divination to determine which way to go first, and the signs will point to Jerusalem. Those in a covenant treaty with Babylon (Judah) will object, thinking they’re supposed to be safe from such an attack. But this thinking by Judah’s leaders simply reveals their guilt – *that they made an unholy alliance with Babylon, and for that, they’ll be judged*. The turban and the crown refer to Judah’s High Priest and King, and they will be brought down when King Neb arrives. As for Ammon, they’re next on the chopping block (21:28-32).

The Lord next asks Ezekiel if he’ll speak His judgment and the obvious answer is yes. The Lord’s word is brutal as Jerusalem has been brutal. The Lord charges Jerusalem with idolatry and innocent bloodshed by which she’s been defiled (22:3). Jerusalem’s guilt for these two categories of sin has reached its limit and brought Jerusalem’s judgment days and years of punishment (22:4). Jerusalem’s demise will be her disgrace and cause the nations to mock her.

Yehovah’s list of Jerusalem’s egregious sins is based on the Torah, the covenant laws that the people are breaking with impunity. And these aren’t light matters. Frankly, some of them are disgusting and are sins that the Lord has said in other places exceed even the sins of Israel’s pagan neighbors. The people sin boldly, so Yehovah asks them if they’ll have the same courage when He brings their house down on their heads (22:13). Their exile is Yehovah’s way of purging idolatry from them. They profaned the Lord (“profane” = to treat (something sacred) with abuse, irreverence, or contempt: desecrate, defile/ Merriam-Webster Dictionary), so He will profane His people (22:16). When these things

come to pass, then the people will “know the Lord,” i.e., get *experiential, first-hand* knowledge of their covenant God.

The Lord will use the Babylonians to scare the people into Jerusalem (22:19). For what purpose? Ezekiel sees Jerusalem as a furnace that's used for smelting metal. As impure metals are heated with white-hot flames, the dross (worthless, unwanted impurities) separate from the precious, wanted pure metals. The dross is skimmed and discarded while the pure silver or gold is collected. This analogy is God's description of what will happen in Jerusalem as the pressure of the siege, famine, and plague increase. The wicked will be separated from the righteous. The wicked will be discarded via death, and the surviving righteous remnant will be collected for exile. Again, this terrible time will show the people that their covenant God is real and not a God to betray.

The final section is another description of how utterly corrupt Judah has become. Judah's false prophets abuse people and take advantage of them. Judah's rotten priests pervert God's word and profane His holy things – the Temple, its services, holy objects, and the Lord. They refuse to teach the difference between the holy and common, the clean and unclean (22:26, a common theme in Leviticus). Why is this bad? Because the people become unclean, not knowing the difference. Judah's officials are corrupt, “like wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood, and destroying lives in order to make profit dishonestly” (22:27). Every person is corrupt according to the Lord. The population is so defiled and spiritually rotted that the Lord couldn't find one person to intercede for the nation. And so, the fire falls.

INSIGHT

It's stunning to read that the Lord will *force* His people to improve and grow. It seems rather heavy-handed, doesn't it? Well, it takes fire and pounding to forge a sword that's fit for the hand of a great warrior king. I want to point out two things. 1) God is not content to leave us as spiritual babies. Once He has redeemed us, He sets us to work growing up to maturity. Often some aspects of maturity can only be created through difficulties. Patience and long-suffering can only be grown in times of frustration, agitation, and pain. Tough beans, that's just the way it is. So put on your adult pants and cooperate with the Lord. 2) We don't have to do this on our own. God takes the lead to save us and does the same with our maturing process, “he who started a good work in you *will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 1:6). Sometimes, this means He deliberately leads us into terrible situations. Still, He stands alongside us with His love, compassion, and mercy to help us mature.

September 5 : Scriptures Ezekiel 23-26

SUMMARY

The 23rd chapter of Ezekiel is very graphic. Why? Because when the Lord gives revelations to His prophets (and us), often, it's done through real-life situations and examples. These vivid examples stir intense emotions that drive home God's point and how He feels about the problem or good He's addressing. Yehovah uses Ezekiel to rehearse Israel's (the northern kingdom) and Judah's (the southern kingdom) history as an indictment against them and an explanation of what He's done and is about to do.

The situation is a woman (the united nation of Israel) with two daughters (Israel and Judah after the national split) who "married" God and together became His wife/wives. Before they married Yehovah, the two daughters were wildly promiscuous and were introduced to sexual activity as "virgins in Egypt." This reference means Israel was introduced to unholy alliances and idolatry early on while captive in Egypt, before they were freed by their "husband" and married Him at Mount Sinai, pledging themselves exclusively to Yehovah.

The two women are identified as *Oholah* – "My Tent" – Samaria, the capital of Israel and *Oholibah* – "My Tent Is In Her" – Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. The tent reference seems to apply to 1) Israel's wilderness wandering where Israel's husband "tented" among them, and 2) the Tent residing in Jerusalem before the Temple was built.

So this is a story of Israel and Judah's betrayal of God through unholy alliances and idolatry. Promiscuity, adultery, and prostitution are particularly loathsome to God as they all strike at the heart of His design for marriage (Genesis 2:23-24) and covenants. Marriage and covenant betrayals are grave sins to God.

There's no need for me to get into the graphic descriptions God inspires Ezekiel to use but as you read through this section, capture the outrage Yehovah feels over being betrayed and "tossed aside."

Israel succumbed to idolatry much earlier than Judah. Her lover was Assyria. For her betrayal and wanton lust, Yehovah allowed the Assyrians to attack Israel brutally, take all her treasures and the citizens, and kill Israel as a nation (23:5-10). News of Israel's downfall spread.

But this didn't deter Judah. Idolatry took hold, and the threats from various neighbors also pushed Judah to make unholy alliances. She went down the same road as her

disgusting and depraved sister, only worse. At first, Judah flirted with the Assyrians. But when the Babylonians looked like they were going to become the dominant power, Judah's fickle desires turned toward the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Judah "hooked up" with Babylon but later "dumped" them. During this time, Yehovah grew disgusted with His "wife's" behavior and turned from Judah, exposing her to her well-deserved punishment (enemy attack). And yet, even though Judah knew Yehovah had turned from the nation, they continued to pursue their idols and alliances with lustful vigor as the Israelites had done back in their Egyptian captivity (23:11-21).

And so, Yehovah will stir up the Assyrians and the Babylonians to go after Judah. They will "cut off your nose and ears, and the rest of you will fall by the sword" (23:25). The nation will be disfigured by war, and many Judahites will be killed. Assyria and Babylon will strip Judah of their national and Temple treasures ("your clothes and beautiful jewelry"). That will end Judah's spiritual and national "adultery." Judah's jilted husband will turn from His wife and let the nations "have at her" without mercy. Judah will receive the same treatment as Israel (the cup, 23:31). They will not only drink the cup but chew it to pieces and tear at themselves in anguish. Here's the reason why – "Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you must bear the consequences of your indecency and promiscuity" (23:35). It's Judah's idolatry and shedding of blood (23:36-39), and ungodly alliances (23:40-44). So Judah will get a national punishment reserved for adulterers and murderers – execution. So sad. When they finally get their comeuppance, they'll know it was their "husband," their God, that did it.

Chapter 24 begins with an important date. "The word of the Lord came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month. "Son of man, write down today's date, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day" (24:1-2). Yes, it was the precise day King Nebuchadnezzar began his siege (January 588 B.C.). According to my Study Bible, Ezekiel had been prophetically pointing to this moment for four years. And so it begins.

Yehovah revealed to Ezekiel that it was like putting a pot on the fire to bring it to boiling in preparation for a Temple sacrifice, a sacrifice unto God. Meat and bones are placed in the water, and more wood is added to the fire. Jerusalem is not only the sacrificial pot but also corroded inside, symbolizing Jerusalem's corruption. Blood from a killed animal was supposed to be poured out on the ground, recognizing that life belonged to God and should only be taken (animal or human life) according to God's strict guidelines. The people of Jerusalem haven't done so (24:7). This picture of not pouring out blood screams out that the Jerusalemites have taken innocent blood and ruined lives and not repented.

The Lord will do the same for Jerusalem. He will take her life and defile the people by “putting her blood on a bare rock,” thus defiling them and scorning their deaths.

Let's go back to the pot's corrosion. When a pot has a build-up of impurity on the inside, it can be purified by “koshering it” with water or fire. If the pot is clay, it must be broken because the impurities get into the clay wall's pores. If it's made of wood, the container can be washed because it's less porous. If the pot is metal, it must be placed in an intense fire and heated until it's white-hot. That's what the Lord says will happen the His pot, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the pot, the people and the city are the meat and bones, and the Babylonian army is the fuel. First, the people will be “cooked,” and the city will be “charred.” After that, the Lord will continue to stoke the fires until Jerusalem, and the remnant becomes white-hot to burn out any impurity (sin and sinful practices) left behind (24:9-14). Coupled with the previous chapter, do you get the feeling Yehovah isn't kidding around?

In the next section, Ezekiel's wife dies. Did the Lord cause her death, or did He use an existing fatal condition to reveal His word to Ezekiel? Well, God can take a life for His purposes, and he knows everything so that He can orchestrate an event with a situation to illustrate a word to a prophet. In this case, we don't know. What we do know is Ezekiel's wife was a “delight of his eyes” (24:16). God's purpose is to let His prophet experience the emotion of losing something (someone) that's a personal delight. Ezekiel tells the people it's going to happen, and it does. The message is simple when people ask what Ezekiel's wife's death meant. “Yehovah will destroy the Temple in which you so delighted.” There's nothing you can do about it, and you'll have to bear the intense pain of its loss. Remember, Ezekiel was taken from Jerusalem in the first wave of deportees. He's prophesied Judah's judgment from the other side of the Fertile Crescent. They were long-distance declarations. A fugitive will arrive with the news that the Temple has been destroyed on the day it happens. Until that time, God will render Ezekiel mute. In other words, God has nothing more to say about the Temple's impending destruction (24:27). Yehovah's edict is sealed.

The first section of Ezekiel, Israel as God's rebellious nation, is complete. The section from chapters 25-32 contains Ezekiel's prophecies against the nations around Israel. The third and final section from chapters 33-48 addresses Israel's restoration.

Why does Yehovah bring these prophecies against the nations? Because it goes back to His promise to Abraham. “I will bless those who bless you, *I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt*, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3, italics author). Yes, the nations were tools in Yehovah's hands to execute His judgment

upon Israel, but their commission was also the justification for their punishment when God was done with Israel. Our first case is Ammon, who treated Judah with contempt.

Why does Yehovah speak against Ammon (east side of the Dead Sea, across the Jordan River)? Because they gloated when His Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, and the Judahites were exiled (25:3). Yehovah will punish them by bringing the people from the east to do the same thing to them that they were glad happened to Judah.

Moab, a nation south of Moab on the Jordan River's east bank and cousin to Ammon, gets their prophecy next. The Moabites had introduced idolatry to Israel before the Israelites entered Canaan (Numbers 21:1-23, 31:16). During the Babylonian invasion, the Moabite soldiers joined forces with King Nebuchadnezzar against Judah because of Moab's and Judah's long-standing animosity toward each other. Ezekiel prophesies that Moab will get hit with the same invasionary judgment at which Ammon's looking. So sorry, so sad, too bad.

Next up to bat is Edom (Esau), Israel's "brother" nation. Yehovah will "stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off both people and animals from it. I will make it a wasteland" (25:13). According to Ezekiel, Edom's judgment will come from none other than Israel (25:14).

Chapter 25 closes with the prophecy against Philistia. The Philistines came by ship from the Greek islands and settled on the Mediterranean coast in today's Gaza Strip region. As most of us learned in Sunday School, they were no friends of Israel (actually, they were mortal enemies). Yehovah declares His judgment against the Philistines for their "ancient hatred" of Israel and vengeful attacks. The Philistines virtually disappeared from existence about 150 years before Jesus.

What people know today as "Palestine" is a nickname the Romans gave Judea after the 2nd Jewish Revolt to diminish the Jewish connection to the land. The nickname stuck to the area, but so did the Jewish people despite the Roman exile in A.D. 135. There has always been a Jewish presence in what is known as Israel today. From the late 1800s to 1948, many Jews immigrated to their biblical homeland (Gee, kind of like God's prophetic word about His people returning to their land was being fulfilled. Huh!). In those days, there were Jews and Arabs who lived in "Palestine." They were Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs. It was only after Israel became a nation that a separation was made to distinguish the Jews of Israel from the Palestinian Arabs in and around national Israel. Make no mistake. *There was never a nation of Palestine, nor was there a people group called the Palestinians.* Yassar Arafat created that construct in the mid-1960s to establish an identity

for Arabs who wanted to take Israel's land and garner world support for their cause. The ironic thing is that Yassar Arafat was regarded as a Palestinian and the leader of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLO). The truth is Arafat was born in Cairo, Egypt, and *adopted* the Palestinian moniker. See? If you tell a lie long enough, people believe it.

However, there is still a spiritual truth at work. Just as the Philistines proved themselves Israel's enemy, so have the "Palestinian Authorities" and their affiliated terrorist organizations. Could this biblical prophecy against the Philistines still have teeth for the Palestinian terrorists and anti-Israel Palestinian organizations like Hamas?

Onward to chapter 26! The Prophecy against Tyre. This prophecy comes about a year after Ezekiel's chapter 24, siege of Jerusalem prophecy. Why would God speak judgment against Tyre? In Ezekiel's day, Tyre was a great city on the Phoenician coast (modern-day Lebanon) known for its riches gained through a vast trade network. The city was built on an island off the coast and was virtually impossible to conquer. The Assyrians tried it and quit after five years. The Babylonians tried a 13-year siege but also quit. However, Alexander the Great had an Alexander-The-Great idea. He started dumping rocks in the water and built a causeway to the island, thus conquering Tyre per Ezekiel's prophecy. Clever, huh?

Even though relations between Israel and Tyre were good (for the most part), Yehovah's judgment comes upon Tyre for rejoicing over Israel's demise because it meant more business for the city (26:2). God's judgment is that many nations would rise against Tyre to conquer it. Eventually, the city would be taken and demolished to the island upon which it sat (26:4). Great princes will mourn Tyre's downfall because it means trade has been cut off.

INSIGHT

Betrayal is nasty, especially when we entrust ourselves and the most intimate part of our lives with another. We trust the other person to protect the most vulnerable areas of our lives because we can be hurt so deeply if those sensitive and personal areas are shared with a third person. The hurt and outrage of betrayal are often too much to bear. Ask anyone divorced because of unfaithfulness, the betrayal of solemn and sacred marriage vows. Didn't my spouse promise to remain exclusive to me? Why are they sharing themselves with another? We burn with jealous rage, and, to be honest, we wouldn't mind the other person punished severely for their betrayal. Being torn apart by wild horses would be too good for them, right?

Imagine cheating on God. Yes, He's a God of pure love, but He's also a God of perfect holiness and purity. If our feelings toward someone who betrays us are so intense, how much more so are the Lord's feelings when someone betrays their relationship vow to Him? That's why the Lord inspires His prophets to speak to His people in graphic and emotionally intense ways so we can relate to the severity of our sins and our great need for forgiveness.

I'm not going to sugar-coat it. If God dealt so severely with His people, Israel, how will Jesus treat us if we cheat on Him by turning our backs on Him after we've pledged ourselves to Him? There's a time for God's love and mercy and a time for white-hot judgment. Let's not minimize either one. And when well-deserved judgment falls, all we should do is keep our mouths shut and mourn that it had to come to that.

September 6 : Scriptures Ezekiel 27-29

SUMMARY

Since much of Tyre's trade came through maritime business, it makes sense Yehovah would speak to them in terms they would understand. In this prophecy, Tyre is likened to a splendid sea vessel. The HMS Tyre was built from the finest materials and crewed by the finest sailors (27:2-11). As you read through, take a moment to identify Tyre's trading partners to grasp just how extensive her maritime enterprise was. It's astounding! Some of the names (in today's terms) are Spain, Asia Minor, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel, Greece, and northern to mid-Africa. Note the types of goods and materials with which Tyre was loaded. You really get the sense that this ship is so heavily-laden that it rests deep in the water.

But then something happens! An east wind (Babylon) has risen, which will scuttle the ship (27:27). Those who stand far off see the Tyrian ship of state sinking and lament (27:28-36) because their source of prosperity ends and their economies crash.

In chapter 28, Yehovah turns His attention to Tyre's king. There are two ways to look at this chapter. On the surface, God speaks to a man whose wealth has made him immensely proud. Under the surface, many see Yehovah addressing someone else. Let's look at the human King of Tyre first. He's a wise and understanding king who has built an economic powerhouse through his intellect and business acumen. And as we know, the city of Tyre is nearly impregnable. But as scripture says, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). The king of Tyre has grown so proud he thinks of himself as god-like. Now that's really pushing the pride level (28:6)! The funny thing about God is that He countenances no competition. "I am the Lord. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8). To drive home His point, the Lord will allow other people to take down the man-who-would-be-god (28:7-10). Death has a way of telling us we're not all that special. Think of all the celebrities, influencers, corrupt and conniving politicians, and world rulers. To be blunt, their bodies will rot like the rest of ours. Then what will become of their pride? This humiliation is what the king of Tyre faces with the Lord.

And now we move into the section that is either highly poetic or we're seeing something of the "man behind the curtain," the under-the-surface perspective. Which is it? I suspect both. We either see a highly stylized portrayal of a hugely prideful human king or a revelation of a highly exalted non-human being that seeks to be more than he is. Let's look at the description.

28:12 says this is about a human king or Tyre. If taken from a human perspective, the king is likened to Adam in the garden of Eden (28:13). As my Study Bible says, the gemstones listed are nine of the twelve in the High Priest's breastplate. All the highly stylized descriptions could describe how wealthy and majestic the king is. But the narrative is over the top, and I can't see how many of the descriptions can barely apply to a human being, no matter how far we theologically stretch it. And I can't get past 28:14. It refers explicitly to this being as a cherub, which is definitely not human. So now, the alternate interpretation comes to the fore. Rather than describing a human being as a heavenly being, I see it as a spiritual being characterized by human terms.

We know Eden was a place where the physical and spiritual worlds intersected. God, a spiritual being, walked with Adam and Eve. Another was being in the garden, an *elohim*, a member of the spiritual realm, that took a human form to interact with the First Couple. This spiritual being enticed Adam and Eve to sin, and we know it to be Satan. There are no other spiritual beings in Eden of which we know. Therefore, I believe chapter 28 uses the king of Tyre as a jumping-off point to pull back the curtain to reveal humanity's nemesis. And please, do not ignore the man behind the curtain!

So, how does Yehovah describe Satan? Perfect in wisdom and beauty (no horns and spiked tail for him, no sir!) and either covered with gems or shining with multi-colored brilliance from being the Yehovah's presence (28:13). He was a guardian cherub, a spiritual being tasked with protecting the sanctity of God's immediate presence (28:14). If you recall, cherubim escorted and moved God's throne in Ezekiel 1 and 11. Cherubim have direct access to God and His holy presence. Because of that, they *must* be perfect with no impurity in them and without any cause for blame. But something arose in Satan that brought blame to him (Hebrew *avel* – "wrong, evil, sin, injustice, what is morally perverted, warped, and twisted"). He was perfect but not moral, i.e., aligned with God's person or will. This fault is exactly what Satan led Adam and Eve into – defying God's standard of right being (His person) and right decisions (His will). Satan led humanity down the same path he was on. God sees the king of Tyre doing the same thing and indicts him for it.

So Yehovah expelled Satan from His holy mountain, a term often used for God's dwelling place, just He later expelled Adam and Eve from Eden (God's dwelling place with humans) for the same crime (28:16). As Rabbi Steinsaltz puts 28:17, "Your splendor led to your pride, and your pride destroyed your wisdom." Therefore, God threw down Satan so humanity would learn what comes from pride – foolishness, and destruction.

28:19 has a double application. For the king of Tyre – his great wealth ruined him by making him think he was above all else (god-like). Satan's great pride ruined him by making him believe he was above all else, including being able to defy and oppose God. Hence, Satan's name in Hebrew means "the Adversary." When Satan's time comes, he'll be the lowest and most despised creature in eternal fiery existence (Revelation 20:10).

(Okay, take a breath.)

Chapter 28 ends with Yehovah's prophecy against Sidon – "I will display my glory within you. They will know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments against her and demonstrate my holiness through her" (28:22) via plague and war. Why so hard on Sidon? Evidently, because Sidon has been like the other nations around Israel who treated the nation with contempt (28:24). While Yehovah judges the nations around Israel, He'll regather His people and bless them.

Chapter 29 declares Egypt's judgment. This prophecy came to Ezekiel about a year after the Jerusalem siege prophecy. Pharaoh is depicted as a crocodile lying in the Nile River, smug and content that he owns it all! He is a predatory creature that eats the fish (nations and peoples) around him. My Study Bible points out that the Hebrew word for "monster" is *tanin* (tah-noon'), a mythical god of chaos known as *Rahab* and *Leviathan*. In this vision, the Lord will hook the Pharaoh (Hophra), pull him out of the Nile (draw him from Egypt into battle against Babylon), kill him, and leave his army rotting on the ground. All the birds will feast on his and his army's corpses. When that comes to pass, Egypt will know Yehovah is the only God because His prophecies come true. This alliance affected Israel because Israel relied on Egypt against Babylon, which King Nebuchadnezzar didn't take kindly. Israel relied on Egypt, and Egypt splintered in battle, "tearing all their shoulders" (29:7). Israel chose poorly.

So what will become of Egypt when Babylon comes against the nation? Egypt will be made a desolate ruin (29:9), uninhabited for forty years (29:11), and the Egyptians will be exiled among the countries that Babylon controls. However, after forty years, Yehovah will bring the Egyptians home and reestablish them, although not to their previous glory. This restoration happened when Persian King Cyrus defeated Babylon, released Babylon's exiles, and encouraged them to go to their national homes.

Finally, in the 27th year of Ezekiel's exile (c. 570 B.C.) Yehovah reveals that He will compensate Babylon for their 13-year fruitless siege of Tyre. The Lord will give him the land of Egypt to conquer, which is the prophecy we just read. Interestingly, the Lord

called Babylon against Judah, compensated Babylon for being His instrument, and yet, judged Babylon for how they executed God's plan against Judah. Something to ponder.

INSIGHT

Stay with me on this, okay? We just read about Egypt and its defeat on the battlefield, and God calls the birds to come feast on the dead bodies. Egypt's nickname is Leviathan. Therefore, the prophecy about Egypt's fall and avian consumption is called The Feast Of Leviathan. To be eaten by birds and wild animals symbolizes humiliation, degradation, and the lowest form of judgment (Jeremiah 15:3, 16:4, et al.).

There are a couple of prophecies in scripture where this same scenario plays out. It's about a foreign army that the Lord defeats and leaves for the birds:

Israel's End Time battle with Gog (Ezekiel 38-39). The Lord will put hooks in Gog's mouth and draw him and his army to the battlefield for judgment.

"You, all your troops, and the peoples who are with you will fall on the mountains of Israel. *I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and to the wild animals*" (39:4).

"Son of man, this is what the Lord God says: *Tell every kind of bird and all the wild animals, 'Assemble and come! Gather from all around to my sacrificial feast that I am slaughtering for you, a great feast on the mountains of Israel; you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the earth's princes: rams, lambs, male goats, and all the fattened bulls of Bashan. You will eat fat until you are satisfied and drink blood until you are drunk, at my sacrificial feast that I have prepared for you. At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, of mighty men and all the warriors. This is the declaration of the Lord God'*" (39:17-20, italics author).

Revelation 19:17-21 – Jesus returns and defeats the Beast's (Antichrist's) army.

"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called out in a loud voice, *saying to all the birds flying high overhead, 'Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of military commanders, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the flesh of everyone, both free and slave, small and great.'* Then I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and against his army. But the beast was taken prisoner, along with it the false prophet, who had performed the signs in its presence. He deceived those who accepted the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image with these signs. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with

sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse, *and all the birds ate their fill of their flesh.*"

The final battle is referred to as the Feast of Leviathan and is hinted at in Ezekiel's prophecy to Egypt (Ezekiel 29, 32), where Pharaoh = Leviathan.

The final battle as the Feast of Levithan – a prophecy about the Antichrist's defeat (Ezekiel 38-39' Revelation 19), where Antichrist = a type of Pharaoh = Leviathan.

Who is Leviathan? In Job 41, Leviathan is a dragon who "surveys everything that is haughty; he is king over all the proud beasts" (Job 41:34).

Leviathan = Satan = who pushed Pharaoh to extinguish the children of Israel = the Antichrist, the man indwelt and empowered by Satan to be Jesus' Adversary.

"And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him." (*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, verse 3)

September 7 : Scriptures Ezekiel 30-32

SUMMARY

We begin our reading with a continuation of Ezekiel's prophecy against Egypt. A "day of the Lord" is coming! As a refresher, when the Lord uses the phrase the day of the Lord, it refers to a time Yehovah has set aside to break into our world to accomplish something specific. In a generic sense, this could be when he acted against Egypt or another nation in judgment. In the unique sense, the Day of the Lord, identified with a capital D or the context, refers to the end of human history when God breaks into our world in a whole new way, i.e., Jesus returns to set up His messianic kingdom and puts an end to human dominion forever. Generally speaking, the day of the Lord theme appears throughout the Bible in various ways. What's fascinating is that it could refer to an immediate day of the Lord and the future and final Day of the Lord because prophecies can have multiple fulfillments.

The prophecy in this chapter is a specific time when the Lord will execute judgment on Egypt and its partner, Cush/Ethiopia. Mizraim (Egypt) and Cush (Ethiopia) were brothers (Genesis 10:6, "Ham's sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put (Lybia), and Canaan"), so naturally, they would ally with one another and thus fall under God's rebuke together. The upshot of the prophecy is that God will send King Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt (30:10-12). When Egypt falls, Cush will tremble for fear of being next (30:6-9). The Lord will take down Egypt's idols and end their false gods, and as usual, God's judgments will make the people know that he alone is the Lord (30:19).

According to the date in verse 20, this announcement to Ezekiel comes just before the fall of Jerusalem. It likely refers to Pharaoh Hophra's defeat at Babylon's hands as he tried to help Judah (30:20-21). This event is just a precursor of King Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Egypt and the Egyptian people's coming exile (30:22-26).

Two months later (chapter 31), Ezekiel receives another Egypt prophecy using Assyria's rise and fall by God's sovereign power as a lesson to Egypt. Most of the chapter describes Assyria's extraordinary rise. Although it was a brutal empire, the picture presented here shows its significant influence and how the Assyrian empire drew many nations under its power. And yet, God easily cut the tree down at will. Yehovah used the surrounding nations, primarily Babylon, to fell the tree of Assyria, leaving it to rot on the ground (31:16-17). The Lord then turns to Egypt and speaks ominously, "Who then are you like in glory and greatness among Eden's trees? You also will be brought down to the underworld to be with the trees of Eden" (30:18). (Cue the scary music! I can almost hear

the theme from *Jaws*: *Dah-dunt. Dah-dunt. Dunt, dunt, dunt, dunt, dunt, dunt, dunt, dunt...*)

And now we have even more for Pharaoh from Yehovah. This prophecy comes to Pharaoh one and a half years later than the last. Pharaoh thinks he's a lion among the nations. Still, to Yehovah, he's just a monstrous swamp creature thrashing about among the nations (32:2). Again, this is Yehovah declaring His sovereignty over any foe, be it Assyria or any other kingdom or empire on earth. As I wrote before, this prophecy is known as the Feast of Leviathan and portends a future event toward the final Day of the Lord. God will use Babylon and its allies to seize Pharaoh/Egypt and metaphorically haul them out of the Nile and drop them in the dirt to die and for the birds of the air to feast on their corpses (32:5). Nummy, huh?

Yup, Yehovah is going to snuff out Egypt (32:7). But in line with the rest of the Egyptian prophecies in the Bible, after the Lord chastises and punishes Egypt, He'll restore them and Assyria (Syria), and they'll live peaceably with Israel (Isaiah 19). Egypt's fall will astound and trouble other nations because "Who'd a thunk that Egypt would be conquered?" (32:9-10). Egypt's fall would be on the level of the Lord allowing the nations of the world, like Russia or China, to conquer and squash the United States. Talk about putting the fear of God in the global heart! Yehovah will use Babylon to take down Egypt and leave it desolate (32:11-15).

Two weeks later, Ezekiel gets an addendum to his previous Egypt prophecy, and this time it depicts Egypt falling into Sheol, the place of the dead (32:20-21). There Egypt meets the rest of the uncircumcised nations (Gentiles, those not in covenant with God) and those who are circumcised (Edom) who've aligned themselves with the Gentiles against Israel and Israel's God:

- *Assyria* (Syria today),
- *Elam* (Persia/Iran today),
- *Meshech and Tubal* (Asia Minor/Turkey today),
- *Edom* (southeast of Israel/parts of Saudi Arabia, Jordan today),
- *Sidonians* (Lebanon today).

No matter how strong or extensive these nations or empires were, when the Lord exercises His sovereign power, no one can prevail against Him. When He pronounces a blessing or a curse, it'll happen in its time, and no one can stop it.

INSIGHT

As United States citizens, there's no doubt that many of us believe that our nation is invincible. We know our country was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, and we have the attitude, "Surely our Heavenly Father wouldn't allow enemies to conquer us or let us fail as a nation." Spoiler alert! Israel is the "apple of God's eye and the center of the nations, not the U.S. (Deuteronomy 32:10; Zechariah 2:8; Ezekiel 5:5). What makes us think the Lord won't fell our mighty nation as easily as He felled the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, and every other "invincible" kingdom.

Let's humble ourselves before the Lord humbles us. Let's bless Him by standing with Him and not oppose Him. Let's honor the Lord and thank Him for all the blessings He's bestowed on us and the troubles He's helped our nation survive. Let's learn *what not to do* from Yehovah's prophecies against the nations and what He wants from His children.

May the name "United States of America" never be inscribed on the tombstone of the world's empires because of sinning against Him.