

Week of August 29 - September 4

Once again, the Lord warns Jerusalem to repent. Why bother? Was anyone listening? Though none listen, the truth must be told. Mention continues to be made of a faithful few to receive care and protection.

Ezekiel 17 The Israelites were unfaithful and worthy of divine judgment

The Lord tells Ezekiel to give a riddle to the Israelites: A great eagle came to Lebanon and plucked off the top of a cedar and then planted it in fertile soil by a river in a city filled with merchants. There it became a spreading vine. Then the vine sent its roots and branches toward another eagle which transplanted it in good soil near water. Then the Lord declared judgment against the vine that He would pull it, cut off its branches and let it die as the east wind blows.

Then the Lord explained the riddle: The first eagle was the king of Babylon who took away the king of Jerusalem and her princes, the topmost buds and shoots and brought them to Babylon to be planted in fertile ground near water. The second eagle was the king of Egypt whose help Zedekiah sought. Zedekiah would die at the hands of the king of Babylon because of his disloyalty. The riddle ends with the Lord's promise to again plant a cedar on top of Israel's highest mountain so everyone would know that it was He who cuts down the high trees and exalts the low. This shows how remarkably the Lord controls all nations.

Ezekiel 18 Everyone is judged according to his actions

The exiled people were using the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," meaning they intended to lay the blame for their suffering on their fathers. But the Lord says that all souls are his to judge. The righteous man lives. The wicked son of a righteous man dies. The righteous son of a wicked man lives. Ezekiel then deliberately declared that the son does not bear the iniquity of the father, nor the father that of the son. The Lord's justice deals with individuals who are directly accountable to Him for the lives they lead.

Ezekiel then shows how gracious the Lord is. If the wicked man turns from wickedness to righteousness, his sins are forgiven, and he will live, because the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. On the other hand, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness to sin, his past righteousness will be forgotten, and he will die. Israel called the Lord "unfair," but He said they were unfair and would be judged according to each one's actions. Lastly, he pleads with Israel to repent of their sins, to turn to Him and live.

Deut 5:9-10 I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Chapters 18 contains some of the most thorough, carefully expressed, and absolutely clear discourses on the topic of the responsibility of the individual for his or her sins found anywhere in the Bible.

Ezekiel 19 The complete decay of David's kingdom

The leaders of Israel were told to sing a dirge: "What a woman your mother was - like a lioness! One of her cubs [King Jehohaz] grew into a strong young lion catching its prey. Then the nations trapped him in a pit and brought him in chains to Egypt.

"When Israel, the mother lion, saw her hopes for him were gone, she took another cub [King Jehoiachin] and taught him to be 'king of the beasts.' He became a leader and learned to catch prey,

attacking the surrounding nations and cities. Then the armies of the nations came from every side and trapped him in a pit and captured him. They prodded him into a cage and brought him before the king of Babylon where he was held in captivity.

Then the Lord explains that the mother was like a green, lush vine beside an irrigation ditch. Its strongest branch became a ruler, and it was very great, noticed from far away. But the vine was uprooted and thrown to the ground. Its branches were withered by a strong wind from the east, and the fruit was destroyed by fire. Now the vine is planted in the wilderness on hard and dry ground where it is decaying from within.

Ezekiel 20 The history of Israel's rebellion and God's grace

Four years before the fall of Jerusalem, some of the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord.

God responds that He would not respond to them, but that Ezekiel was charged to tell them of the judgment falling on them. This he did by reviewing the history of Israel, from its deliverance from Egypt where they were charged to put away all their sin. But they had rebelled and had been punished. In the wilderness He gave them His laws and showed them His judgments. But they rebelled against Him again, and He brought punishment on them. They were spared in the wilderness and warned to walk in His statutes. Again, the children rebelled against Him, and He punished them. All this He did to protect the honor of His name among the nations.

Ezekiel explained how their fathers had sinned by turning to idols and how these sins had been repeated by their sons. Therefore, the Lord would not answer them.

The Lord would establish His Kingship over them by gathering them to the wilderness where they would pass under the rod, a process of purging those who were rebelling against Him. The result of this process would be ultimately the restoration of Israel. Israel would have a new understanding of the Lord and recognize that everything He did was for the glory of His name.

Then Ezekiel was told to face Jerusalem and the forests of the south and prophesy against them. The message was that an unquenchable fire, kindled by the Lord, would destroy them. Ezekiel was perplexed and complained that the people would say he only talked in riddles.

Ezekiel 21 The Lord's judgment against Jerusalem and Ammon

Ezekiel was to face Jerusalem and declare that the Lord would proceed in His ultimate judgment against the Israelites. He was to display anguish, grief, and a broken heart over what was to come.

He prepared the song of the sword, describing it as sharpened and ready for use. The interpretation was that the king of Babylon would come to a place where the road split, one way leading to Rabbah, the other to Jerusalem. There he used divination with arrows and consulted the teraphim. The lot fell on Jerusalem. He proceeded toward Jerusalem with all the instruments of war.

Then Zedekiah, king of Israel, was addressed. His judgment was announced, and that the Lord would continue to overturn the kingdom until the coming of the rightful King. Next, He draws a sword toward Ammon to satisfy His vengeance against them since they had attacked Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 22 Jerusalem's sin recounted, and destruction is to come

The Lord describes the utter evil in Jerusalem. Its sins of bloodshed and idolatry were named and denounced, and the evils described. The people were oppressed by the leaders who despised holy

things, profaned the Sabbath, brought terrible and widespread impurity, and were full of greed. Therefore, the Lord's judgment would be terrible. The people were asked if they could endure the Lord's dealing with them. He would refine them like metals in a furnace.

Again, Ezekiel described the corruption of the Israelites who were like a land that is not clean or rained upon, having no teaching, and like polluted springs, having no prophets. He then charged the priests, princes, prophets, and people. The priests had failed to distinguish between unclean and clean things. The princes had cruelly oppressed for selfish ends. The prophets had spoken false words of hope. The people had been guilty of oppressing the poor, the needy, and the stranger. There was no man to stand in the gap. Therefore, the fire of the Lord's wrath would.

Ezekiel 23 The parable of the two sisters

The next prophecy deals with the sins of Samaria and Jerusalem under the figures of two women, Oholah and Oholibah. Samaria was charged with unfaithfulness to the Lord and allowed herself to be seduced by the Assyrian's wealth and strength. He also reminded her of her former relationship with Judah. In consequence of this double sin, she was handed over to the Assyrians who overcame and oppressed her.

The sin of Jerusalem was even more heinous than that of Samaria even though it had seen the judgment falling on Samaria. She also made an alliance with Assyria and with Egypt. She had violated her covenant with the Lord. Therefore, the Lord raised those with whom she had been in an unholy alliance and brought them against her, allowing them to plunder and strip her.

Now the Lord announces judgment on Oholah and Oholibah. He described the wickedness of the alliances formed between these two cities and the surrounding nations. Righteous men would judge them for their adultery. Using stoning as the Hebrew method of dealing with the sin of adultery, Ezekiel said the Lord would bring an army against these cities to carry out judgment and to destroy the people. Again, the purpose was to end lewdness and idolatry in the land, all to defend the honor of the Lord.

Ezekiel 24 The parable of the cooking pot

There was no television or satellite to communicate his message. At this very moment, Nebuchadnezzar was breaking down the walls of Jerusalem.

This prophecy describes the destruction of the city, comparing it to a pot set on a fire, filled with water, and made to boil. Ezekiel declared that Jerusalem was a cauldron and everything in it would be destroyed.

The Lord then told Ezekiel his wife would suddenly die, and he was to show no external grief. He obeyed the command, and the people asked what he meant. He answered that the Lord was about to visit them with calamity so dire that they would not be able to find relief in mourning or weeping.

The prophet was then told that the news of the fall of the city would be carried to him and that in that day his mouth would be opened, and he would be able to speak with assurance the messages of the Lord.

Ezekiel 25 Prophecies against Israel's enemies

Ammon was a nomad race descended from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter.

Now we deal with the ultimate restoration of Israel, but first, the judgment against her enemies.

Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia were doomed. The children of Ammon had rejoiced over the destruction of the Temple and mocked Israel and Judah as they were being deported. Therefore, Ammon was to be overcome by the children of the East. Moab and Seir had witnessed the destruction of Judah and rejoiced over it, and judgment was coming to them. Edom had been brutal in her treatment of Judah, taking vengeance on her. Therefore, the land of Edom was to become desolate and her people cut off. Philistia had acted against Judah out of revenge, and therefore the Lord's revenge was against her.

It is to be especially and particularly noticed that each of these dooms ends with the same thought: By the Lord's judgment on people who fail to recognize Him. He will make them know that He is the Lord.

Ezekiel 26

Tyre and Sidon are to be dealt with doom, but principally Tyre. Ezekiel made a general statement describing her sin and the judgment against her, pronouncing that the purpose was that she also would know the Lord. The sin of Tyre was in her rejoicing over the downfall of Jerusalem and her expectation to be enriched as a result. Ezekiel declared that the Lord was against Tyre and that He would so destroy her that she would be a bare rock on which fishermen would spread their nets.

Nebuchadnezzar would come with his armies and completely overthrow the city, making spoil of her riches and laying all her glory in the dust. So terrible would be her downfall that all the leaders of the sea nations would be filled with fear and astonishment, and lament over her.

The historical account of the downfall of Tyre is a remarkable reading in the light of Ezekiel's prophecy. The Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered the city in 539 BC and kept it under its rule until 332 BC.

After his conquest of Persia, Alexander the Great moved his armies south towards Lebanon, eventually sieging and sacking the City of Tyre.

Alexander the Great connected the island to the mainland by constructing a causeway during his siege of the city in 332 BC, demolishing the old city to reuse its cut stone. In 315 BC, Alexander's former general Antigonus began his siege of Tyre, taking the city a year later.