

Week of September 5 – 11

It is difficult to find in Scripture (or in this world) anyone who was under such absolute, 24-hour per day control of God's Spirit than Ezekiel. Yet his message never penetrated the hard hearts of his listeners. But he did his job just the same.

When Jerusalem finally fell in 586 BC, the only nations still resisting the Babylonians were Egypt and Tyre. It's not coincidental, then, that they were singled out for their enmity with Israel.

Ezekiel 27 A funeral dirge for Tyre

Ezekiel was commanded to sing a dirge for Tyre that took the form of a great ship beautifully adorned but ultimately shipwrecked by the Lord. He would set Himself against Tyre and bring nations against her, like waves against her shore since both parts of Tyre were on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Tyre had taken great pride and conceit in itself, another cause of its judgment by God. Like Jerusalem, it considered itself perfect in beauty. You say, "I am perfect in beauty."

Her businesses were far-reaching, and her wise men directed them. Judah and Israel had even traded with her. It is a remarkable description of enormous business successfully carried on until Tyre rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem.

She never again regained any importance. God was faithful to bring 'many nations' against Tyre in successive 'waves' of conquest." The fall of Tyre was so terrible that the men of the surrounding nations gazed at her destruction and lamented that Tyre had perished forever.

The Babylonian siege lasted 13 years.

Tyre's message for our age is that riches without God cannot satisfy a man's heart and often keeps him independence of God.

Ezekiel 28 The prince and king of Tyre judged for their pride

Singling out the king of Tyre as representative of the city, the Lord announced that this proud ruler and his city would be humiliated. Because of the city's great success and wealth, the king thought of himself as a god. When the day of judgment arrived, the king would stand humiliated before his executioners, his visions of grandeur replaced by the reality of his death.

Ezekiel pronounced a lament against him, comparing him to a wise, beautiful, and richly adorned angel who once lived in the garden of Eden. This "angel" eventually lost his power because of his arrogance and oppressive economic practices. The Lord threw him down from the sacred mountain and destroyed him with fire in the sight of the nations.

The chapter appears to refer to the garden of Eden, but the only cherubim mentioned in the Genesis account are those placed as guardians at the gate of the garden. It is more likely that the human king was cherub-like in that God had allowed him to reign and he acted as the guardian over his city-state.

Sidon, another prominent Phoenician city, would also experience divine judgment. Like Tyre, it had treated God's people with hostility. The Lord would destroy the Sidonians with plague and sword.

The Lord would someday restore His people to their land, where they would live in peace, free from the threats of hostile neighbors.

Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Ezekiel 29 Judgment against Pharaoh and Egypt

Egypt had been the primary enemy of the Israelites. Again, Ezekiel continually insisted that the purpose of the Lord's judgment was to make Him known.

The first prophecy was against the Pharaoh and all of Egypt. Pharaoh claimed the river was his own creation. This description portrays Pharaoh as a great dragon living in the river. Ezekiel then prophesied this monster would be taken from the river and left on dry land where his flesh would become meat for the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the sky. Ezekiel then proceeded to describe the judgment with a sword coming against the land of Egypt and scattering its people among the nations. After forty years he prophesied the Lord would gather them again to their land and make them an unimportant, minor kingdom, no more to rule over nations.

The second prophecy was brief, telling that Nebuchadnezzar would capture Egypt and carry off all its wealth as soldiers' wages for the defeat of Tyre.

Ezekiel 30 The destruction of Egypt and its allies

The third prophecy described how Nebuchadnezzar would accomplish the destruction of Egypt. Ezekiel prophesies that the day of the Lord was near and the suffering that would fall on the Egyptians and that all who had helped her would be made desolate. The Egyptian rivers would dry up, and its idols and images would be smashed. Lastly, the great cities of Egypt would lie in ruin.

The fourth prophecy was directed against the Pharaoh. His arm would be broken and never healed. He would have no power to hold the sword again. This would be accomplished by the king of Babylon whose arms would be strengthened, so he might hold the sword and execute His judgment on the land of Egypt. Thus, the Egyptians would be scattered among the nations and spread through the countries. Again, each of these prophecies concludes with the clear statement of purpose, "They shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 31 Egypt's fall is compared to Assyria's fall

The fifth prophecy was directed against Pharaoh's pride and arrogance. Ezekiel addressed the Pharaoh and his nation, describing his greatness. He first asked, "Whom are you like in your greatness?" The Lord replied by describing the greatness of the Assyrians, who were also great. Assyria's greatness was like a stately tree in Lebanon, higher than all the rest, nourished by waters that ran by its roots, so great that all the birds took refuge in its branches and the wild animals lay beneath its shadow, so beautiful that all the trees of Eden envied him.

The prophet then prophesied the destruction of the Pharaoh's greatness by the Babylonians and the descent of Pharaoh into Sheol. The fallen tree would have its branches broken so that the birds lived in its ruins and the beasts laid down on its branches. So great had the power of Egypt been that when Pharaoh and his allies descended to the underworld, all nature was moved. The oceans mourned and their tides were restrained. Even Lebanon mourned, but the trees of Eden were comforted that Pharaoh was in the underworld, too.

Ezekiel 32 A funeral dirge for Egypt

The sixth prophecy followed two years later. It consisted of a lamentation for Pharaoh whose doom was described as catching a dragon in the seas in a net and casting him on the ground to die. The effect would be widespread, bringing destruction to Pharaoh's land and making men everywhere tremble in the presence of the judgment of the Lord.

This prophecy was delivered almost immediately after the fall of Jerusalem when some of the Israelites were turning their faces toward Egypt hoping for help.

The seventh and final prophecy against Egypt followed about two weeks after the sixth and consisted of a cry for the Egyptians as they were cast into the underworld. All the dead from among the nations were represented as companions of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the underworld. This was a terrible and overwhelming message, similar to a funeral song in which Ezekiel watched Pharaoh and the Egyptians descent to the underworld. As he passes into the dark and awful underworld, he finds himself in the company of multitudes from Asshur, and Elam, of Meshech and Tubal, of Edom and Sidon.

The prophet's statement that "Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted," is appalling, as it reveals that the only comfort that can come to him is the deep sense of infinite justice as all are punished, himself included, who have been guilty of the sins which brought the judgment of the Lord.

His message now turns to restoration and renewal.

Ezekiel 33 A warning to listen to the watchman

Ezekiel next delivered a series of messages concerning Israel. When danger came, a watchman was appointed to announce the approach of an enemy. If he did his duty and his warning was not heeded, the blood of the slain would be on their heads. If he failed to give a warning and people were slain, their blood would be on his head. Sent by the Lord as a watchman for Israel, his duty was to hear the word of the Lord and deliver it to the people. If he did so, and the wicked persisted in wickedness, the prophet's soul would be delivered.

He declared to the people that the Lord had no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked should turn from his ways and live. Past acts of righteousness would not atone for present sin. Past sin would be pardoned if the sinner turned to the Lord.

Immediately after the delivery of this message, fugitives from Jerusalem came to the prophet. Ezekiel had been instructed that when they came, his mouth would be opened, and he would be able to speak. He opened his mouth after a three-year silence and prophesied that desolation of the land was still to occur and that even those left in the wastelands would be destroyed.

This prophecy closed with a rebuke to the people, who, interested in his messages, listened to them as one who listened to a beautiful song and a pleasant voice and playing on an instrument. Their interest was sensual rather than spiritual. Sensuality hears and does nothing. Spirituality hears and obeys.

It wasn't their exile, God's neglect, or distance from Jerusalem that was sapping their life's energy, but it was sin.

Ezekiel 34 Accusations against Israel's false leaders

People enjoy a good sermon and will say it came from the Lord, go to church, talk the talk of faith, but to many, it's just entertainment, making no difference in their lives. Verses 1-10 show how we do the same.

The next prophecy opened with an indictment against the leaders who had ministered to themselves. Feeding themselves and clothing themselves, they had not fed the sheep, neither had they ministered to the diseased and the sick and the broken and the needy. The result was that the people were scattered and had become prey to wild animals. Therefore, the Lord was against the shepherds and would deliver the sheep.

That deliverance the prophet described is full of beauty. The Lord said, "I, I Myself, will search . . . and seek . . . and rescue them . . . and bring them out . . . and gather them . . . bring them in . . . and feed them . . . and cause them to lie down . . . and bind up . . . and strengthen them.

The prophet declared that the action of the Lord would be not merely delivering, but also governing. The last statement was, "I will feed them in judgment." The discrimination and administration of the Lord are

obvious, in that He judges between sheep and sheep, rams and goats, and prevents the strong from destroying the pasture to the injury of the weak.

Finally, there was the promise of the one Shepherd who would protect them and make them a blessing. There would be showers of blessing with fruit trees yielding bumper crops and everyone living in safety. Then they shall know that the Lord is with them and that they are His people.

Ezekiel 35 God condemns Mount Seir (Edom)

Ezekiel announced that Mount Seir would become utterly destroyed because it had been an enemy of the Israelites, even in the time of their punishment by the Lord. Therefore, its judgment would be perpetual desolation. Mount Seir had lusted for the lands of Israel and Judah. Because you rejoiced in Israel's fate, judgment would fall on them, and their lands would be taken from them, and they would be made desolate.

There is no trace of the Edomites today, although their desolate cities can still be identified, as predicted by Obadiah and Jeremiah

Ezekiel 36 The Lord will restore His Holy name

Ezekiel now prophesied to the mountains of Israel, announcing that Israel's enemies would be brought to shame. Israel had been disrespected and abused by its enemies who had made it desolate. Therefore, the Lord would punish its enemies and free Israel from its oppression. The whole land, its mountains and its hills, its rivers, and its valleys would become fruitful. Men would be fruitful and multiply, the cities inhabited, and the ruined cities rebuilt.

Ezekiel then proclaimed: "Behold, I am for you." He explained that restoration would come even though their sin had caused their suffering. The reason for their restoration was that the Lord had concern for His holy name. The Lord would bring His people back from all countries, and they would be cleansed and be able to do right by being in fellowship with Him. This covenant included at least three specific parts: restoration to the land, forgiveness of sin, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.