

NOVEMBER 11

Time to look forward to something. In our reading on November 18 God will begin taking Ezekiel on field trips, and then things will get exciting because there will be more visions dealing with the end times and the restoration of Israel. For some of us, getting through this heavy reading toward the end of November will be a true cause for thanksgiving. Look for ways to motivate yourself to keep up with your reading in The One Year Bible. All of this is very important Scripture, but honestly, it is hard to wade through. With such a large volume of Scripture showing God's judgment for spurning His existence and His love, it reminds us that this world we live in is doing the same thing. If a vote were held today, God would be voted out of His own creation. To switch analogies, the world is poisoned by sin and it doesn't know it. Yet we have the antidote, and that's why we follow Christ in the harvest.

Ezekiel 23

When Ezekiel gave this message I'm sure the parents ran for their children, this time to cover their ears. The imagery is purely to rebuke Israel for their idolatry as you'll see in v. 49. Notice again the mentions of blood and offering children. We don't see sin as God does. This is how He saw the actions of Israel. He is the spurned husband having to witness His wives' appalling, sick and humiliating whoring. And they do it with all He's given them, in every place He's built for them, right in front of Him. And the judgment is appropriate and harsh. It is amazing that He was as patient and gracious and guiding as long as He was.

Vs. 1-4 Both sisters are Israel and their whoredom began in Egypt. This has been a long history. One sister represents the northern kingdom of Israel and the city of Samaria. The other sister represents the southern kingdom, Judah, and the city of Jerusalem. One other note: Jerusalem looked with scorn upon Samaria. After all, Samaria didn't have the temple or the city of God and they worshiped stupid stuff. Yet according to God, Jerusalem was worse. The name *Oholah* means "tent," suggesting that Samaria made their own sanctuary of worship. But *Oholibah* means "my tent," suggesting that Jerusalem was the place of God's sanctuary.

Some of this language, in the Hebrew, would be very offensive in our ears.

Vs. 5-10 Interestingly, little is written about Samaria. They never had a godly king, and Elijah and Elisha prophesied long and hard trying to stem the tide of ungodliness in that country. Although Samaria had a fling with Syria, their main attraction was for Assyria. Samaria was always totally idolatrous.

Vs. 11-21 By the sheer volume of text directed against Judah and Jerusalem, you can see this is really God's point. The fact that God had a very special relationship with the Davidic kings, and that Judah did have some very godly kings, made their sin exponentially worse than what happened in spiritually ignorant Samaria.

Vs. 22-27 So here is the punishment on Judah and Jerusalem, and it is graphic and much worse than Samaria. Notice v. 25. This was how you maimed prostitutes to make them utterly unattractive.

Vs. 28-35 Jerusalem's pride in being better and godlier than Samaria will be used to humble Jerusalem.

Vs. 36-42 Lest we think that God was being too severe, we see what was really the reason behind God's actions. This was a culture which was perverse and lost every day. The worship of Baal was every day. The people gave birth to kids as a result. They sacrificed those kids to Molech. Then they also went to the temple to worship, and they couldn't and wouldn't see anything wrong with that.

Vs. 43-45 These righteous men were the prophets and godly men God sent to warn the people.

Vs. 46-49 Oddly, there is a ray of hope here. The people receiving this prophecy were in Babylon listening to Ezekiel. They would be spared the destruction of Jerusalem, and eventually their children would be cleansed of idol worship and come under the influence of a godly community that would grow in Babylon. Verse 49 seems to be a promise that through all of the punishment, the people will come to know God.

Working in the harvest, the lost we work among are at best ignorant of God and at worst they really don't care, but everyone lost is under Satan's power. It is amazing to see what people get tangled up with. We don't have to judge or be appalled. God does that for us. We extend His truth and forgiveness. *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.* (Eph. 5:12-13) We bring the light. Especially reading what we're reading here, we know that God forgives. Knowing our own lives and what Jesus has done for us, we know He forgives and is strong enough to reclaim and heal us. This is what we bring to the harvest as we reach out to the lost and make disciples, who make disciples. Sin is devastating, but He is stronger.

Hebrews 10:18-39

This is the part of Hebrews that will transition from the proofs of Christ's superiority and the warnings against turning their backs on Him, to the practical exhortations to endure and follow Him.

V. 18 This should have been included in yesterday's reading.

Vs. 19-25 Notice the structure here. There are two uses of *since* followed by three exhortations marked by *let us*.

V. 20 Jesus' body was the "veil" that separated us from the holy place of receiving forgiveness and mercy. Remember that when Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn. Because Jesus' body was "torn," we are able to enter into God's presence.

V. 21 Jesus is living to intercede for us.

V. 22 Drawing near to God with a clean conscience is only possible because of Christ's payment for our sin.

V. 23 Publicly enduring and holding fast is based on Jesus, who He is and what He has done.

Vs. 24-25 *Encouraging one another* and hanging tight together is another way to obey Jesus' commandment to love one another.

Vs. 26-31 This is a very strong warning that is really a summary of everything that has been said in Hebrews up to this point.

Vs. 26-27 This is written to a Christian who strongly and resolutely turns his back on Christ through actions or attitudes and continues in this defection. The question then is, "what more can God do to awaken this person since Christ will not die for him again?"

As for the judgment of believers, you only have to look at Acts 5, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:30 to find that there is judgment for the saved. Jesus Himself exhorted and warned His disciples to endure. There is a sense of loss now on earth when we cave in and give up. Look at Matthew 10:22 and James 1:12.

Vs. 28-29 You see the connection between these verses. Just as the law promised judgment when violated, so also the new covenant requires punishment for those who disregard Christ. These people are definitely Christians and are saved. Look again at the wording of 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, to see that this is possible for believers. Look at 1 Corinthians 10 to see more of this. Those believers in 1 Corinthians were dabbling with worshipping demons. These are just a few examples of born again, eternally secure believers, defaming Christ through their lifestyle and decisions.

Vs. 30-31 Would we think that somehow God would not punish His own children if they willfully walk away from Him? The point of God doing this is restoration of the person, and salvation of the lost by not allowing His children to defame Christ's name. Look at 1 Peter 4:17 or John 15:6.

Vs. 32-34 Now we can see the situation of these believers in a slightly fuller perspective. When they first came to Christ, in the reality of their salvation and the power of that first love, they were alive, courageous and sacrificial. But now, after these years of routine belief and becoming comfortable, quietly allowing the flames to die out, they were not willing or able to face persecution and the loss of their lifestyle and the things that gave them comfort and meaning. Now it seemed better for them to be quiet, to blend in and to compromise their faith in Christ by returning to the law and Jewish custom. God wasn't asking them to become political or social activists. They could still live a quiet life, godly and respectful in every way; but they needed to keep their lamps burning and to be salt. They had to follow Christ with the cross on their shoulders, ready to share what He had done for them.

Vs. 35-39 These people were saved and had had great confidence in Christ. If they didn't endure the present threat and if they compromised their faith, they would lose what it meant to live in Christ. If they shrunk back from Christ to help themselves, Christ would shrink back from them and not send them the strengthening help that He would gladly send to them. The destruction that would come would not be loss of salvation, but damage on earth of their faith, their hearts and their lives.

Psalm 109

As you read this you can imagine David in the middle of his years of running from Saul. He is hunted without having done wrong and his name is constantly lied about to gain the sympathy of the people for Saul. The hope was that these lies would set the people against David. In the meantime, David heard of what Saul and his nobles are doing to the people, how they are neglecting them, twisting justice, using everything for their advantage while people suffered.

Now this is a very negative psalm. How could God inspire something so negative and vindictive? Good question. Many times what David felt and experienced was meant to show what Jesus would live through. Oddly enough, there are several allusions to Jesus' crucifixion and rejection by that generation of Israel. God did promise a special punishment for those people who demanded Jesus' death. That judgment came in 70 A.D., and I'm sure the judgments pronounced here came upon those people.

Vs. 1-5 If you read about what Jesus had to put up with as He hung on the cross, you understand this. Verse 3 sounds like John 15:25.

V. 4 This is something David learned and that Jesus commanded to His disciples.

Vs. 6-15 This section may apply to the people who said to Pilate in Matthew 27:25, *And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"*

V. 8 It may be that this section also is a judgment pronounced on Judas. Acts 1:20, *"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it"; and "Let another take his office."*

Vs. 16-20 When I read this I thought of what Jesus said about the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 20:47, *who devour widows' houses.*

Vs. 21-29 This is the hallmark of David's life, knowing the *steadfast love* of the Lord. This is a hard way to learn God's steadfast love, but this is how we all must learn.

V. 25 Matthew 27:39 - *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads.*

Vs. 30-31 And this is the response of David to God's deliverance and knowing God's steadfast love. He always gave praise to God to the entire congregation.

And when God takes us through trials as we follow our Lord in the harvest, He teaches us all of this so that we will gain amazing faith and confidence in Him and praise His name.

Proverbs 27:13

The word *adulteress* is not necessarily here. "Foreigner" might work better. The idea is one we've seen before. God is telling us not to make ourselves responsible for those for whom we should not be closely associated. In other words, we are not to be yoked to unbelievers and we should not make ourselves liable for the foolish.