

NOVEMBER 16

Ezekiel 33-34

Chapters 33-38 are a major section of Ezekiel dealing with God's blessing on Israel. What is interesting is that this section begins with a re-commissioning of Ezekiel. You can imagine that Ezekiel was tired and felt used up. There is nothing more thankless than working with stubborn people who blame God for all their problems, seeing themselves as honest victims. Not only had these been a very intense seven years, but he had lost his wife, God using her death as a symbol to the people. Sure, Ezekiel was a great man and had a book of the Bible named after him, but what a price. I don't think Ezekiel had any problem with the proverb for today as it applied to the people, but I'll bet he had his days when he himself felt crushed.

Ezekiel 33

Vs. 1-16 I wonder if Ezekiel knew why his mission to the people as a watchman was being renewed? God spoke to Ezekiel at the beginning of his ministry, making him a watchman in 3:17. As you read this, without departing on a guilt trip, this commissioning is also a part of our commissioning as disciples in the harvest. Even when Jesus' disciples were rejected, they were still to shake the dust off of their feet and warn the people of their coming judgment. Sometimes people respond better to a warning than to flowery words of having a good life, being empowered and receiving heavenly love. In the West, even unbelievers think God loves them and they're going to heaven. As the atheist Penn Jillette, of Penn and Teller, has said, how much do you have to hate a person not to tell them about God's judgment if you really believe that. The simple gospel that Jesus gave His disciples was that the kingdom was coming and that people needed to turn from their sins to God. This message of warning is in that simple presentation of the good news.

V. 11 Notice the grace in this to the people. This section is beginning to set the foundation for the blessing of God to the nation. There is hope for anyone who turns to God. God's heart is inclined to them.

Vs. 17-20 This is all very ironic. The people should have known the Lord but didn't. Now they felt they could judge Him. This is the kind of bitterness and rationalizing that keeps people from turning to the Lord. They are lost and blind and they blame God. That is still true today. Everyone blames God for the mess in the world and sometimes for the mess in their lives. What is interesting in the first verses of Daniel is that these teens knew that it was God who had acted against Judah and Jerusalem, and they understood why.

Vs. 21-22 Jerusalem fell on 11.4.9 (the eleventh year in the fourth month on the ninth day) of Zedekiah's reign. This was a year later. (The German says the eleventh year and 10th month, or six months later.) Notice that Ezekiel says it was the 12th year of their exile. Ezekiel's deportation and Zedekiah's reign began at the same time. It was a long way to walk from Jerusalem to Babylon and took over four months. And, I'm sure the army didn't begin to bring people back the next day after they broke into the city. The Babylonians had to tear down Jerusalem and set up a provisional government. With the travel time, all this probably took six months to a year. And remember, back then, cell phone reception was spotty at best.

The news finally reached Ezekiel and the exiles in Babylon. It had been seven or eight years since God had struck Ezekiel with this muteness. Now judgment had struck Jerusalem. This weary prophet was vindicated, but neither he nor the people had anything to celebrate. It was time for Ezekiel to stand again, and, as a watchman, begin to point the people to the future as God directed him. But in directing the people to God's blessing, there would still be judgments to pronounce and attitudes to correct. I wonder if the false prophets were suddenly (and finally) out of business.

Vs. 23-29 This is addressed to the remnant with Gedaliah in Jerusalem. We've read about them in Jeremiah 42. God was going to cleanse Israel down to the last person. The fact that there was still a remnant of people didn't mean God would rebuild with them. Their analogy with Abraham was silly. He was righteous and they were very unrighteous. Abraham followed God. They didn't know God at all. In fact, we saw in Jeremiah how this remnant asked Jeremiah to inquire of God for them and then accused Jeremiah of lying when he brought them the Lord's word.

Vs. 30-33 The work of rebuilding the nation would begin with the people in exile. Ezekiel had become a rock star to them. He was a famous man. That was step one in God's plan. But they hadn't really turned their hearts toward God. That would come and they would really understand that a *real* prophet was among them.

Ezekiel 34

In blessing Israel, God will give them a great Good Shepherd and a pretty good under shepherd.

Vs. 1-10 God declares His judgment on the leaders of the people. If you read John 10:1-18, it seems that Jesus must have had this section in Ezekiel in mind when He spoke those words and declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd. What is also apparent by Jesus' words is that God's word through Ezekiel hasn't been fulfilled and is still future. Jesus said that all who came before Him were thieves and robbers and that the sheep did not heed them. Even with exceptional men like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, the normal leaders were still a disaster. Remember when Nehemiah left and returned, how he found everything in disarray. Then read the final book of the OT, Malachi, and notice how God takes the leaders to task for their lack of leadership and devotion to God.

Vs. 11-22 Jesus Himself will be the Shepherd. What a great future promise for Israel. In this too, Jesus will judge between the sheep. Still, if Jesus is King over all the nations, who will do the day-to-day over the nation of Israel?

Vs. 23-24 How about the resurrected shepherd of Israel, David? Obviously this is in the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 25-31 I'll bet this was easier for Ezekiel to preach. I'll bet he felt great walking home. I'll bet the reality of the present hit him like a hammer when he walked into that empty house. This would have been the same for all the people hearing that message. What a great hope for the future, but what an awful, present situation.

In the harvest, this is the same for us. We live in many present distresses, yet it is the truth of God and the life of His Spirit in us that keeps us strong as we walk in faith. This is why our joy has to be in the Lord, and our hope has to be in Him and His appearing. This world is not our home, and for many, it isn't a place of comfort. But, the Shepherd is coming and that should give us joy.

Hebrews 13

The author of Hebrews is being pastoral, or apostolic, in giving guiding exhortations to the people. This is a great closing.

Vs. 1-6 There is a lot going on in these very general exhortations.

Vs. 1-2 This sure sounds like Romans 12, vs. 9-10 in particular.

V. 3 More and more Christians were adorning the inside of prisons. Paul told Timothy of the bravery of Onesiphorus, finding and visiting him in a Roman prison. It's hard to be brave in visiting someone if you know they might throw you in jail too. The focus is on encouraging those suffering for Christ.

V. 4 Marriage is the proper place to express sexuality. God takes all sexual deviation, including your "run of the mill" adultery and immorality, very seriously.

Vs. 5-6 These verses go together. God will take care of us. The more I read Jesus' words, the better I understand that our seeking of comfort works against our trust in the Lord. Some of the wording here seems like it might have come out of Psalm 27.

Vs. 7-17 This section is bracketed by the exhortation to remember and obey the leaders. When you read this you get a picture of what leaders were to do for the group and why the people were to follow these leaders during such hard times. The people were to follow the leaders in resisting false teaching and in holding firm in faith through the tough times. Most of all, the leaders were to direct people to Christ as in v. 15.

Vs. 18-19 This sounds a little like Paul in Ephesians 6:18-19.

Vs. 20-21 What a great benediction. This sounds like work in the harvest to me.

Vs. 22-25 This is a great ending, though vague in detail. It sounds like Paul in Philippians 2:19-23, only that here, Timothy had been a prisoner and released. Obviously the writer of Hebrews couldn't have been Timothy. So much for that theory.

V. 24 Were the readers located in Rome, so that those who had been from Italy were sending greetings? Or, was the writer in Rome, and were the believers in Italy sending greetings to the readers in some other place?

What do you get from this entire letter to strengthen you in your work in the harvest? What speaks to me is that now, God has spoken through His Son, so don't give up or give in.

Psalm 115

V. 1 This declaration to give glory to God has David's favorite formula. The *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* of God stand together.

Vs. 2-3 This is almost like Psalm 2 where the nations rage. Here, at least in David's reign, as the nations visited the new and improved Israel they didn't see idols all over the landscape. Therefore the nations asked where Israel's god was. Well, He is a living God, with a big "G" and He occupies the heavens.

Vs. 4-8 This section works its way to v. 8 where you become what you make.

Vs. 9-11 How hard it is to have a heart of faith and seek your help in a living, invisible God. It proves one's faith.

Vs. 12-13 God's remembrance is keyed to many things, but particularly to the promise to Abraham. (Luke 1:54-55)

Vs. 14-15 God is the One who gives increase and blessing, because He is the living Creator.

Vs. 16-18 This declaration seems like an oath to obey, to bless and to praise the Lord. It is interesting that he mentions that the earth was given to mankind. That earth and plan were ruined, but God will renew everything and then we can begin anew with the Lord.

Proverbs 27:21-22

V. 21 Both the crucible and the furnace show what is in the metals. If they are pure, this testing shows it. If there is impurity in either, the heat brings it to the surface. I guess this is what the praise of others does to us. It reveals the truth of our hearts and what is in us. That puts a different perspective on God allowing us to be well thought of. It makes me think of how important those 25 years were for Abraham, or those 40 years for Moses, or those 10 years for David, or those 14 years for Paul (although he also needed a thorn), to keep them humble in the testing flame of the praise of others. It is good to be humbled, and through that humbling finally and deeply to understand it is the Lord, not we, who accomplishes things.

V. 22 The foolishness in a fool is through every molecule. Or as C.S. Lewis said in The Magician's Nephew, "Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did." And so do we, and sometimes it pickles every molecule of us.