

NOVEMBER 17

Ezekiel 35-36

Ezekiel 35

In restoring Israel and bringing them to a place of blessing, God will take away their reproach and their enemies. Of all Jerusalem's neighbors, no one showed the level of hatred that Edom did. To see that this peace was hoped for and connected with the Messiah, look at Luke 1:72-74.

Vs. 1-9 Until we get to v. 5 we don't understand the reason for this judgment, but even so, we won't understand it fully until we get to the prophet Obadiah. The Edomites allowed their hatred and hostility to get the better of them. And then they mocked God. The judgment in Malachi 1:4 shows that God was mad.

Vs. 5-6 Notice the word *because* in both of these verses. This is one of the reasons God is not happy. There is one more reason in a few verses, also introduced by *because*.

V. 9 Notice how often God says, *you will know that I am the Lord*.

Vs. 10-15 Not only did they use their mouths against the Lord, in Obadiah we'll see they were on the temple ruins drinking themselves silly.

Ezekiel 36

Vs. 1-7 You may remember that God had Ezekiel speak to the mountains in chapter 6. For the renewed people of Israel, the mountains will be a place of blessing instead of judgment. God will humble the nations that reviled and reproached Israel.

V. 5 Notice how God refers back to the past chapter in explaining why His judgment is so hot.

Vs. 8-15 Notice v. 11. This section is hinting at a change of heart that God will give Israel. The nations will no longer be able to ridicule Israel for devouring its own people. God will bless them and change them.

Vs. 16-32 In this second part of the message, God declares why He will bless them. If you underline the word *name*, you'll figure this out. Romans 2:24 mentions this. Also, in Daniel 9, Daniel utters one of the best prayers in the Bible, absolutely stellar (and probably what he was praying in chapter 6 of Daniel). God's concern here was also Daniel's concern there.

Vs. 16-21 The name of God was blasphemed among the nations because of Israel. See Romans 2:24.

Vs. 22-32 This is clearly millennial blessing. Notice the steps in this. First, the Lord will gather them from all nations. Some think this will happen during the first three years of the Tribulation, when the nation of Israel will be at peace. It will definitely happen at the end of the Tribulation when the Lord returns. Verse 26 is the second step. There was a partial fulfillment of this on the day of Pentecost. Peter mentioned that the prophecy in Joel was fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit, but there, like here, it is only a partial fulfillment of what will happen to the entire nation. Apparently there will be some blast of recognition at the beginning of the Tribulation so that the nation (the majority of the people) will understand that Jesus is the Messiah. They will need that to begin to fulfill their destiny during the Tribulation. Verse 28 will be fulfilled after the Tribulation, with Jesus ruling the world from Jerusalem.

Vs. 33-38 This promise of blessing ties the two parts of the chapter together. What an amazing blessing, and it will be the hope of every believing Jew during the Tribulation. I think that as disciples, this promise for them gives us hope and perspective too. After all, we have been blessed with the firstfruits of that blessing: salvation and the Holy Spirit.

James 1:1-18

"Everybody loves Romans. Nobody loves James." At least that was sort of the motto during the Reformation. This letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus, who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It is very likely that James is the very first letter written. It went out to the Christian Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, but some think, particularly to the east of Israel. Why to Jewish Christians? During the birth of the church at Pentecost, the city was full of Jewish pilgrims from all nations. During those days and weeks, the city swelled from the few thousand who lived there, to over 25,000 people. During that time there was a great harvest in the city. The numbers mentioned in Acts 2 and Acts 4 suggest that 8,000 men came to faith, besides women, and more people were being added to the church every day. When these people left Jerusalem, there was a need for teaching and follow up. We know of what happened north and west of Israel thanks to Acts, but many of these people returned to their homes in the east, toward Persia and Babylon. It is thought that some of the apostles went east to work with these people, some as far as India. The ministry to Jewish converts everywhere, and to those in the eastern lands of the Roman Empire, was the focus of James' letter.

Vs. 1-4 It is interesting to me that the benefits of *trials* are mentioned right at the beginning. Paul waits until chapter 5 in Romans. A new view of trials is inherent to a new view of life on this planet once we've been born in Christ. These new believers would face persecution when they returned home to their Jewish communities. Notice that trials are to make believers steadfast and able to endure.

Vs. 5-8 This is best seen in the context of the trials. The *double-minded man* is what we've just seen in Hebrews. Either God has spoken in Jesus or He hasn't. If a man straddles a fence he gets hurt. It's that simple. Certainly some of these converts under persecution would be brought to the point of doubt. Jesus spoke often about the reward of endurance.

Vs. 9-11 Position in life might be one of those things that makes trials hard to bear. The poor need to rejoice that the message of the gospel was meant for them. The rich are not better off spiritually because they have resources. They also have a lot to lose. You could imagine that there would be financial repercussions for those who had zealous Jewish employers who didn't think Jesus was cool.

V. 12 This is a summary declaration of the benefit of enduring trials. Notice again the word *steadfast*. This is what David learned from God as a result of running from Saul for ten years.

Vs. 13-15 When a person falls in times of trial and trouble, it is not God who lured them into a fall. The mechanism is already within us. God allows trials to test us and reveal what is within, but He doesn't lure us in to sinning. Hard times do funny things to all of us. In Luke 8:13, the seed that sprang up quickly fell away in time of persecution when temptation overcame it. The next seed was overcome by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. Persecution can also affect our jobs, our possessions and our comfort.

Vs. 16-18 In trials, as new creatures in Christ, as the firstfruits of His salvation, we look for blessings, not on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, but from the Father, who never varies in His love and approval of us as He sees us in Christ. Trials have a way of making us think we are under punishment from God. It is in those times of trial that we are able to appreciate the very subtle and quiet gifts He gives us that become more meaningful than stuff.

Following Christ in the harvest, we learn, like so many other disciples who have come before us, that God's love is steadfast and faithful.

Psalm 116

This is a beautiful psalm/song of being delivered. In Ezekiel 36:16-32, the *name* of the Lord was very important. Underline *name* here also. It is the key to understanding this psalm and living as a disciple in hard times.

Vs. 1-4 This kind of sounds like the effect of obeying James 1:2-4. How else do you experience this? Notice when David learned to seek help.

Vs. 5-7 How does your soul learn true rest and peace? The psalmist made God his hope. He cried out; he endured and he was never the same.

Vs. 8-9 Apparently the writer was in deep despair. This definitely sounds like David in Psalm 27.

Vs. 10-11 This is the bitterness of feeling helpless and having powerful enemies like David did. Notice that God didn't take David out of this. He led him through it.

Vs. 12-14 If this is David, it is his constant refrain that as a result of God's mercy, he would praise God before all the people and all the nations. Calling *on the name of the Lord* here is the result of calling *on the name of the Lord* in v. 4. There, it was out of desperation. Here, it is out of praise for deliverance.

Vs. 15-19 The psalmist wasn't killed and was able to praise God in the tabernacle or temple in Jerusalem. Even when God allows His saints to be killed, they are still precious. When we get to Revelation, we'll see that the slain saints were very precious to God. They not only defeated Satan, but they revealed the righteousness of God's judgment against the peoples of the earth. Their secret was that they called *on the name of the Lord*.

Proverbs 27:23-27

Vs. 23-27 Especially here in the west, we are unconsciously ruled by our resources and our wealth. Even as believers we still weigh our stuff and our needs above the need to give everything to the Lord and work in the harvest. How different are Jesus' words to the disciples, *pray....give us this day our daily bread*. The Lord has put what we need before us and if we maintain and "honor" Him in it, we will never lack what we need, spiritually, physically or emotionally. According to Jesus, what makes us fruitless and needy is desiring too much for ourselves. See Luke 8:14. If we take care of the things that are important to Him, we will be taken care of by the things He has produced in and around us as we have labored for Him.

V. 23 This is the key and leading thought of the proverb. Tend the flock and all will be well. As disciples, we need to tend the flock first, making disciples who are stable, growing in the Word and obeying our Lord by following Him in the harvest. He will take care of us if we follow Him first and obey. Being anxious to meet our needs first leads to fruitlessness and fear of loss. Notice Jesus' words to Peter in John 21:15-19. This "fisher of men" was to begin by feeding lambs and tending and feeding sheep. The entire church is to be a disciple-making community and the disciples who comprise it need to be tended and fed.

V. 24 The NIV has a better translation here, *crown is not secure for all generations*. The German translation implies that the crown doesn't protect forever.

Vs. 25-27 Even if it is not stuff that the Lord provides through our service, realizing that our time on earth has mattered for Christ will keep us clothed and nourished. Knowing that there are people who have been brought closer to Christ as disciples and are going beyond us, making disciples, who make disciples, will give us something that few people on earth possess. And, it will be a heritage and a help to those closest to us.

Luke 12:31 *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be added to you.* 32 *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*