

NOVEMBER 3

Ezekiel 7-9

Ezekiel is a very orderly and chronological kind of guy. Everything we are reading follows the last event in a way we can understand. What we see today will really conclude in chapter 11, but it all makes sense.

Ezekiel 7

This is another public proclamation Ezekiel made during the time he was lying on his side. When he walked and spoke, Ezekiel, the paralyzed and mute guy, was a sort of living disturbance. The hardness of this message would have gotten everyone's notice. I have a feeling this *word of the Lord* came toward the end of his daily enactment of the siege on Jerusalem. The elders of the Jews were probably standing in a group on the corner of their new home in exile singing, "What do you do with a problem like Ezekiel?" They were now sure that this very strange man was actually being controlled and used of God. The reason for the hardness of this prophecy will be explained in the next chapter. God will give Ezekiel, the elders, and us a look at the people in Jerusalem.

One interesting note: It says three times in this chapter, *Then you will know that I am the Lord*. The word used in my German Bible is not "know," but "experience." That adds a twist to the meaning. There is a sense in which these people will find out and experience that He is the Lord.

Vs. 1-4 Notice the repetition of *the end*. Finally all that the prophets had been saying, especially Jeremiah, would come. Notice how this section ends.

Vs. 5-9 Notice the different words repeated here. Although the Lord is giving prophecy to the exiles in Babylon, it applies to the people still in Jerusalem. Now, some of the exiles were probably thinking, "You know, Babylon isn't so bad after all." Notice how this section ends. This was for all the people, but the only people who would benefit would be the survivors who were in exile in Babylon.

Vs. 10-13 You notice again that words are repeated. Life as they knew it would end in Jerusalem. As of this time, King Zedekiah hadn't yet rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. In Jerusalem there was a certain amount of calm and prosperity. Everyone was telling "Jeremiah" jokes. But God knew that the sin in Jerusalem would take the upper hand and that they would rebel against Babylon. Then, destruction would come.

Vs. 14-22 What had been of value would be worthless. If you're starving, a slice of bread is worth more than ten bags of gold. All they had lived for would be lost. They hadn't become rich toward God. In v. 22 God said He would also allow the temple to be ruined and profaned. In God's eyes, that had already happened.

Vs. 23-27 The people were in bondage to everything, sin and other kings. This was the last time until 1948 that Israel would be a sovereign state. They are still not free from bondage to sin. That will come. Notice how this section ends.

Remember that what is happening to Israel is a small model of what is happening every day to humanity. There is tragedy, loss and bondage every day. There is rebellion, sin and ruin. In the harvest, we are following our Lord reaching out to seek and to save the lost and to make disciples, who make disciples. The things we are reading are meant to give us a heart of compassion as we work. Humanly speaking, there is only danger and ruin and judgment, but with the Lord the salvation He offers is incredible and the hope is forever.

Ezekiel 8

V. 1 So the elders come to Ezekiel and sit before him at his house. Notice the time designation. This is almost exactly 430 days from the time God first spoke to Ezekiel. That means he was either finished with the siege enactment (with the gross lunch thing he did) or that enactment was almost finished. Also, since the sixth year was marked from the time that Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, that means it was also the sixth year of Zedekiah's kingship. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in his ninth year and Jerusalem fell in his eleventh year. This vision would show why all of the judgment spoken against Judah and Jerusalem was justified. It would show how the sin of the people drove the presence of the Lord out of His temple and out of the land. The fact that Ezekiel is working, along with Daniel & Co. and Jeremiah, shows that God hadn't abandoned His people.

V. 2 As they were sitting there looking at him, Ezekiel went into a trance. Talk about freaky. This could have taken a minute or an hour, but the elders stayed for the entire show; and in 11:24 it says Ezekiel explained the entire vision. They apparently stuck around.

Vs. 3-4 This doesn't sound like the best way to travel, but it's not like he had a choice. Seeing the glory of the Lord at the end probably made it worth it.

Vs. 5-6 You understand here, that the point of the vision is to show Ezekiel what is driving God from His temple and from the city. What we see here will justify the hardness of God's judgment in chapter 7.

In Solomon's temple the main entrance into the inner court was on the east side, but there were also entrances on the north and south sides. This north entrance is where Ezekiel is brought. As he stands next to the glory of the Lord, looking into the inner court, there, next to the entrance, is an idol, probably an Asherah pole, a statue of sorts. Asherah was a goddess of fertility, the wife of Baal, and usually depicted as very well endowed. Imagine that they had something like this at the entrance into the court where the sacrifices were offered to the Lord.

Vs. 7-13 This chamber, where 70 men could have been together, might have been the "Holy Place," where the lampstand, the bread of the Presence and the altar of incense were. The temple was already defiled. These were the priests and leaders of Israel.

Vs. 14-15 Tammuz was another fertility god who died in the winter. The women cried for him and in the spring he would come alive again (if they cried enough) and bring rains.

Vs. 16-18 Now in the inner court, between the altar and the Holy Place, you have these 25 guys with their backs to the Holy Place and Holy of Holies and the mercy seat (and God Himself); and they are worshipping the sun as it rises.

God says there is nothing here to move Him to pity.

Ezekiel 9

Vs. 1-7 Notice that there is some mercy in this. The marking on the foreheads of the ones who were righteous looks very much like Revelation 7:3-4, where the 144,000 are marked or sealed on their foreheads to be saved out of the judgment of the Tribulation to serve God.

Vs. 8-11 In this judgment there was mercy.

So let me ask, what impact does all of this Scripture dealing with judgment and mercy have on your thinking? Today in the harvest it all seems so slow and fuzzy. Will the Lord really come? Will the Lord really judge the unbelieving? It seems so slow and foggy and unreal that we don't feel any urgency or emotion toward it. Yet the reality of judgment appears throughout Scripture and Jesus mentions it quite a bit. As disciples, following Christ in the harvest, we need to keep alert to the reality of life. Books like Jeremiah and Ezekiel help, and I think that's why God put them here.

Hebrews 5

The discussion of Jesus' priesthood will go from here to chapter 10. At the outset, you might want to muse why the writer thinks this is so important. Obviously, for these Jewish Christians thinking of slipping back into Judaism, it is important for them to know that Jesus is the better priest and His sacrifice is the final and ultimate sacrifice. But along with this thought of the priest, there is a very present help for them and for us. Those who rely on their mediator/priest will be blessed and helped. Those who rely, in this life, on other things will not experience the help and closeness to their Lord. It only makes sense. The saved will all be saved. Some of the saved will grow close to the Lord by following Him in the harvest, but some of the saved will have their wood, hay and stubble burned away and will regret what they missed by not following their Savior on this planet.

Vs. 1-6 The *for* refers back to the final verses of chapter 4, introducing Jesus as the priest who can identify with our weakness.

So how did Jesus become a priest?

V. 5 His Father appointed Him to be a priest. But I thought only those descended from Aaron could be priests.

V. 6 God made Him a priest pre-dating the law, going back to Genesis 14:18. Notice that the author is quoting from Psalm 110:4. What is interesting is that Abraham was ministered to by this priest. Jesus then is that kind of great priest. In chapter 7 the writer will enlarge on this connection to Melchizedek.

Vs. 7-10 This is how Jesus was prepared for His priestly responsibility and how He served on earth as a priest. And, Jesus is still making intercession for us. The *order of Melchizedek* would make Him greater than the priests of the Law of Moses. The point for the people reading this letter was clear. Going back to the law was rejecting Jesus' priesthood.

Vs. 11-14 Because of fears and cares these believers had stopped growing. They had been choked like the seed sown among thorns. Where they should have been was probably closer to Philippians 3:7-21.

Thinking of these last words, it reminds me that God allows things to enter our lives to test/strengthen our faith and our resolve to follow in the harvest. Almost everyone begins well. We'll see later that the people in Hebrews began very well, but they settled into having treasure on earth. Now, in danger of losing that treasure, they are finding it almost impossible to live with that early sense of sacrifice and willingness to follow Christ. God is showing them that other things have become more important for them than denying themselves and taking up their death daily and following Jesus. We need to be careful, too, that this place doesn't become our home and that things don't shine brighter than Jesus. We're here to follow Christ, sharing His love with a dying world, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

We are in the process of moving, cleaning out and letting stuff go. Spiritually, we all need to do the same thing. We need to minimize, until Jesus is everything, and knowing Him is enough for this life. Then we find rest and direction and purpose in following Him. We find strength and fearlessness, because nothing can separate us from Him or His love. We have a truth that breaks the pretense of this life and becomes a rock of security for those who find it. That truth is God as revealed in the Word and in the Son. It isn't so much a matter of getting rid of stuff as much as it is a matter of us being consumed in Him.

Psalm 105:1-15

We'll be in this psalm for three days.

Although the events mentioned here have to do with God freeing Israel from Egypt, it is written in a way that it could have been meant as an encouragement to those in exile in Babylon. Israel was never to have forgotten the glory and power of God leading them out of the house of

bondage in Egypt. That salvation experience was to have been a constant source of hope and encouragement.

Vs. 1-6 Notice the thanks and call to make God known among all the nations. This was exactly what was supposed to have happened. It is a blessing just to look at the verbs of command: *give thanks, make known, sing to him, tell, glory in his holy name*, etc. This is a very rich little section of Scripture.

Vs. 7-11 Israel's blessing was based on God's promise to Abraham. That promise had more to do with the salvation of man than the mere creation of a nation. That nation was made to be a blessing to all other nations in testimony to God.

Vs. 12-15 It never depended on the size of the people, just the size of their God. And He was fully faithful to His promise. Verses 14-15 probably refer to Pharaoh, the kings of Moab, and the kings in Canaan; but after we've read Daniel, it could also refer to Nebuchadnezzar and the kings who followed him.

Proverbs 26:28

This is the truth, although people often think that *lying* and *flattering* have a good purpose.