

NOVEMBER 9

So, you ask, what is the purpose of all we've read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and are now wading through in Ezekiel? In as much as the Lord revealed Himself to Israel and is using them as a visual lesson to mankind, why do you think we have all of this text? The weight of this lesson, I think, is that without a new spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ, mankind is completely without hope. No amount of God's revealing Himself to humans will overcome the sin within us that rebels against Him. If kindness and help and signs and wonders could have saved people and brought them to God, these people would have been a testimony to the world. But they rejected God and they and their culture became hopelessly perverse. I'm sure they were nice religious people, but they were anti-God and anti-truth. So now we see judgment coming upon them.

Our world stands under this same judgment every day. The harvest is now and the gospel of Christ is the only hope for mankind. Unless there is forgiveness and a spiritual rebirth in Christ, there is no acceptance before God and there is no change. Our job in the harvest following our Lord is not to transform society, but to reach one person at a time with the message of our Savior. The fields are white for harvest. We need to go and make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples while there is still time for us to work.

Ezekiel 20

In God preparing the people to return to the land, there is a lot of immediate and extensive surgery going on here. The climactic act that will humble these people will be the fall of Jerusalem, still a few years off.

V. 1 This is now two years since Ezekiel began to prophesy. Again the elders are sitting before him. Ezekiel has been incredibly active and has become a phenomenon in the community of the exiles.

Vs. 2-31 Having gone through Psalm 105 and 106, this is going to sound very familiar to you. God recounts their history to them. Go slowly through this section and look for how often God mentions holding back His judgment.

In this section look for repetitions of words. Some of these words are *wilderness*, *Sabbath*, *for the sake of my name*. There is a lot in this section. For example, *moreover* is repeated four times. The first one is good, and the next three are bad. The last one signifies God giving them up to their sin. Notice that God is dealing with them regarding their idolatry. Notice that v. 31 refers back to the elders coming to inquire of Ezekiel.

Is there idolatry in our culture? More so than we realize. Are believers neutralized by idolatry? *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.* (Luke 8:14) To me, this sounds like us - hearing the Word, enjoying church, living a clean life, sleeping in the light and bearing no fruit that comes to maturity. It looks like fruit, and that makes us feel good, but it is stilted by our true desires for our own safety, needs, comfort and urgings to have more.

Vs. 2-4 The reason God wouldn't be inquired of by them was that these men, and all the exiles, hadn't fully given up their allegiance to idols. We'll see that this was also true of the people who came out of Egypt.

Vs. 5-8 This is kind of mind numbing to think of, that the people in the Exodus brought idols with them. We remember from the story that they were very quick to make a golden calf once Moses was out of sight.

V. 9 This will be repeated. God didn't want His name reproached, because it has always been His desire to save mankind. Israel was then, and still is, the nation through which He planned to reach

the nations. An interesting verse to put together with this is Isaiah 55:13, *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.* God makes His name known through His people, and that includes us.

Vs. 10-17 This is the generation of people who rebelled at Kadesh-barnea.

V. 12 The Sabbath was to have been a blessing to them, but only through faith. The Sabbath will be mentioned several times. In order to enjoy the Sabbath you had to trust God and not be consumed by needs and desires. You had to have faith and He had to be your only desire. Then, obedience was easy and didn't seem like duty.

V. 15 This sounds like what we've read in Hebrews about the people not entering into God's rest in the land. Only faith in Him could give them rest as it was promised.

Vs. 18-24 This is probably not the generation that went into the land with Joshua, but their children who we read about in Judges. The judgment in the wilderness cleansed the generation that entered the land. The generation after Joshua and Caleb flowed straight into sin. God gave them over to their enemies because they didn't obey.

Vs. 25-26 This is similar to Romans 1:24, 26 & 28. God gave them over to their desires. He allowed sin to have its way with them and become statutes to them. The flip side of this is that if we will fight against sin, God will help us to defeat it.

Vs. 27-29 When we read Judges it was amazing to see how quickly and completely the majority of the people became idolatrous and ignorant of God's Word. This generation of Israel in Ezekiel's day was like their idol-following "fathers." You realize what they were really following was the sin and desires of their own hearts.

Vs. 30-31 It appears that these people had blood on their hands. We'll see this in chapters 22-24. Righteous people had died in Jerusalem when they had stood in the way of "progress." And the people had been for, or were OK with, the idolatry they had left in Jerusalem; that is, Baal worship that resulted in children, who were then sacrificed to Molech. These people had innocent blood on them. With hearts still like this, God found nothing sincere in their request to hear His Word.

V. 32 This is a very strong verse. God was and is determined to save Israel. For the sake of His promise to Abraham, God will save and bless Israel whether they like it or not. *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.* (Rom. 15:8)

Vs. 33-38 Notice the wildernesses here. As God chastened and cleansed Israel in the *wilderness of the land of Egypt*, He will now do the same to them in the *wilderness of the peoples*.

V. 39 Another very strong verse. Thankfully there were many who heeded this challenge. Have you been underlining the mentions of God's name? It is interesting to wonder why the people wanted to be called by God's name at all if they would not obey or follow Him. Why not just move to Moab and be free?

Vs. 40-44 This is the promise of physical and spiritual millennial blessing, but notice v. 43. There is acknowledgement of sin and repentance by Israel. Everyone who enters into God's blessing will enter it humbly, knowing they were saved by grace.

History is important to God as a way for people to trust Him and understand His plan and His love. Just as our faith is to be built upon what God has done in the past in the Bible, it is also to be built on our personal/family history with the Lord. God didn't just expect these people to know this history; He expected them to know and trust Him because of this history. For us as disciples in the harvest, faith is never easy; but being in the Word daily helps us see again Whom

it is we follow and how wise and loving He is. Those things that He has done and is doing for us are more than events in our lives. He expects us to remember them and be strengthened in our faith by them as we wait on Him.

Vs. 45-49 I think this should have belonged to the next chapter. Actually, v. 45 is the first verse of the next chapter in the Hebrew Bible. God directed Ezekiel to begin pronouncing judgment on the land of Israel. The image is that of a fire sweeping over the entire land.

V. 49 Ezekiel informed God that the people were ridiculing him, saying this man was a *maker of parables*. They didn't get what God was saying through the prophet, so they were disregarding what Ezekiel said. In chapter 21 God will become very clear.

Again, for us in the harvest, these things are written to remind us that there is a fire coming. God will judge and our Master will return. Our work is now. People need to hear the message, and at the same time, we need to live in the daily expectation that our Lord could come.

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (Luke 12:43)

Hebrews 9:11-28

Vs. 11-14 How could they go back to the law, or how could anyone dismiss Jesus since He entered the presence of God with Himself and His life and His blood as a sacrifice for our sins? The *dead works* are those acts of the law that cannot make us right before God. Our acceptance is wholly in Jesus, not in anything we can do.

V. 14 *Purify our conscience*. Paul makes a big deal about conscience. In the sense of being acceptable to God, a person could have a bad conscience with regard to wondering if they had done enough. But in Christ, "it is finished." There was never anything for us to do, but accept the gift. We can have a guilty conscience because of unconfessed sin, but never because of wondering if we're good enough or have done enough. This is the same thought as in Romans 8:31-34.

V. 15 Jesus sealed this covenant with His own blood. Again, this covenant doesn't have two parties, just one, Jesus Himself. This means that we enter in by faith in **His work**, not by doing works of our own.

Vs. 16-17 The covenant by Jesus is likened to a will. Jesus set the terms of it, and at His death the benefits come to those to whom He willed them. The beneficiaries of the will don't have to work; they only have to accept.

Vs. 18-23 The old covenant, even though inferior, temporary and looking ahead, still had to be ratified in blood. Verse 22 is pretty important. Blood showed that our sin brought us under the judgment of death.

Vs. 24-28 So the Lord died once for all. One question on v. 28 has to do with those who are waiting for Him eagerly. Jesus bore the sin of many, but could it be that the circle of those who wait expectantly for Him is smaller. If you look at Hebrews 3:14 and think of the rewards offered for those who endure and hold fast, you get the idea that waiting expectantly for the Lord is one of those things that gives endurance and opens the door to a closer relationship with Him here on earth.

Psalm 107

This is a good psalm to look for recurring words. Finding the word *some* will help put structure into what the author is saying. It is hard to know when this was written or if any particular OT history is being referred to. For example, vs. 23-32 talk about a sea voyage. We don't know of anyone but Jonah who was at sea, and I'm not sure this section reflects what happened in that story. It is enough to say that these are all experiences that stretched people the psalmist knew. It

could be that these stories were from those who had been taken into exile and they were describing their return to Israel.

Vs. 1-3 This sets the tone for this psalm. Thanking and giving public praise to God will be repeated. God's *steadfast love* will be mentioned often in connection with people being *redeemed* and saved *from trouble*.

Vs. 4-9 Notice how this section begins with the word *some*. This describes the danger they faced. Notice v. 8 and then in v. 9, the *for* shows what God should be praised for. This is the basic pattern of all these sections.

Vs. 10-16 These people were in prison.

Vs. 17-22 These people got themselves in trouble by their own foolishness. Notice that here, in their case, God sent His Word to heal their foolishness. This only works if people are broken and crying out in humility.

Vs. 23-32 These people were on the seas.

Vs. 33-38 This is how God cared for everyone, not only in their danger, but in helping them establish themselves.

Vs. 39-42 God exalts the humble, but puts down the proud.

V. 43 says it all.

Proverbs 27:11

Apparently one of the ways to reproach a father was through the conduct of his son. That made me immediately think of our conduct and our Father's name. In 1 Timothy Paul mentions different groups of people living without reproach or defaming the name of God. *Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.* (1 Tim. 6:1)

To me, it is interesting how this fits with the reading in Ezekiel. We should all be wise sons and daughters, hallowing (honoring) our Father's name.